Ways to Give Feedback to Students with Special Needs

Giving students specific feedback regarding their progress is an essential component of education in general. According to my Resource Specialist Mentor, Ms. Garner, students with special needs benefit significantly if that feedback is given soon after the learning event and if it is very explicit and specific. Here are a few ways in which teachers can provide these students feedback regarding their learning and behavior.

1. Feedback from Fluency Tests and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Assessment:

a. Showing Students Charts and Graphs or Having Students Participate in the Construction of Graphs

Ms. Garner uses the DIBELS Assessment to test fluency. As she tracks student progress, she immediately informs students about how they are doing. Firstly, the DIBELS scores are entered online, and then she is then able to show the student a graph that depicts how they are progressing in their fluency. For other fluency tests, Ms. Garner has the students themselves create a graph on grid paper. The organization of the paper is that every other column represents a test date. The coordinates along the left indicate scores. When a student gets a certain score, she shows them how to color in their score. After one and more of these sorts of tests, students can visually see their progression. This assists Ms. Garner in her post-testing discussions designed to inform students about how well they did that day and what their next steps should be. For example, if a student reads 60 correct words today, but the grade level benchmark is 70, then she will explain that she wants the student to practice in order to increase their score by 10 points. Ms. Garner feels that students perform much better if they hear explicit feedback and if the new goals seem understandable and achievable.

b. Remediation Between Fluency Tests:

Ms. Garner explained that in between administering the fluency tests, she has the students practice reading in three ways: First, they cold-read a text to her. Second, she specifies which area of reading the student should focus on. Third, she pairs students together so that they can have opportunities to choral read and practice. With this sort of repeated practice throughout the week, she will then again administer another fluency test. As a result of that new test, she will again discuss current progress and set up new goals for the upcoming period.
Ways to Give Feedback to Students with Special Needs

c. Communicating Through Student-Generated Rubrics and Checklists

CSTP 5.5:
“Implements structures for students to self-assess and set learning goals related to content, academic language and individual skills.”
“Guides students to monitor and reflect on progress on a regular basis,” plus “Integrates student self-assessment, goal setting, and monitoring progress across the curriculum.”

My CSTP goals this Inquiry involves assisting diverse learners to compose rubrics from mentor texts and to have them self-assess their progress using the rubrics they devised. I think that this is an important way to communicate with all learners, especially students with special needs. If students can create a rubric (or checklist if reading a rubric is too much of a cognitive load), then they are more likely to create one that fits in with their strengths and abilities. In this was, as a teacher engaging in Writer’s Workshop with students, I can start the conversation off with positive reinforcement that addresses their strengths. Then, once they have mastered the achievements referenced on the rubrics, I can encourage them to increase the complexity by choosing a new mentor text that would introduce that new complexity to the student, i.e. including figurative language as a descriptive strategy.

d. Reminder: Be Specific: This is documented in full in the Guidelines for Communication Section of My Website; though it is worth repeating that being specific is always very important in communicating with all students, especially students with learning differences.

2. Giving Behavioral Feedback to Students

a. Token Economies and Rewards, Immediate Feedback is Ideal

I explained Token Economies in the Tracking Progress Section of this website. In this section, though, I thought that I should mention that token rewards in Special Education should usually happen daily or once a week. According to Ms. Garner, students will special needs need feedback that is immediate or at least very recent to the event that is being rewarded in order for the feedback to be effective. Moreover, she recommends that the progression of achievement through these award systems should be documented by the student on graph paper along with a discussion in order for the student to feel the sense of success and achievement.
b. Giving Behavioral Feedback Using Technology to Communicate to Students

Class Dojo. In the Tracking Student Progress section of this website, I go into detail about the benefits of the Class Dojo program or app. In this section, I will mention how students can use this app to track their own progress and to feel empowered as they improve. Firstly, I will direct you to the YouTube video, Introduce Students to Class Dojo; it is an introductory film that informs students of how this app can be used to give positive reinforcement for on-task and high quality work. One aspect I like about this video is that it asks the students, “What skills do you want to recognize in your classroom?” This is a wonderful conversation-starter that will lead teachers and students to create a management system that respects all learners, in a co-constructed way. This co-construction from the start should help students to feel invested in the maintenance of the classroom environment that was aspired to at the Dojo set-up.

c. Scheduling Time to Weekly Evaluate Progress

As I was reading about how ADHD students need time to daily and weekly clean up their paperwork and desks in order to prevent a barrage of wrinkled papers, I realized that some students will need to have their weekly feedback scheduled at a certain time so that I, as the teacher, and they, as students, don’t forget to assess where we are in the progress of both behavior and academics. Hence, I decided to put this on the list: Some students with special needs will need a specific time in which we can identify what has been achieved and determine if new goals need to be set.

Works Cited

