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Hey everyone, this is Katie Novak and you're listening to the Education Table, a micro podcast where I answer your questions about inclusive education in 10 minutes or less. Today, we're diving into feedback. What it is, why it matters, and how to do it well. We'll kick things off with a personal story about how unchecked praise led to months of questionable dinners in my house. And then break down the three types of feedback and then we'll wrap up with three concrete strategies for making your feedback more action oriented and effective. So let's get started. When I was in elementary school, I decided to take charge of dinner one night and made what at the time I thought was a culinary masterpiece, spaghetti pizza. Now let me paint a picture for you.

00:53

It was a pile of coagulated hardened pasta with butter cheese, topped with my homemade meat sauce, peppers and more cheese, and then baked into a solid mass of well, something. And the first time I made it, my parents were so thrilled that I made dinner, so they heap on the praise. This is amazing. Oh my goodness, we love it. Thank you for making dinner. So naturally I took this as a sign that I cracked the code on family meals. So I literally made spaghetti pizza at least twice a week for months. And it wasn't until much later where my parents wised up and they realized that all the praise they were giving me led to zero improvement in my cooking skills. So eventually they started giving me real feedback, like oh my gosh, it's so great that you're cooking.

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We should try to make some different meals and mix it up. And I remember clearly my mom taking me to the library to check out some kids cookbooks. And at that point my skills actually started to improve. So this, dear friends, is why we need action oriented feedback, especially in education. Teachers need it from leaders need it from teachers, students need it from teachers. It goes in all of these different directions. If we only evaluate or praise performance, we're not really helping anyone improve. So we need action oriented feedback to drive growth and build systems of excellence. So let's get into the research. Extensive research has been conducted on the impact of different types of feedback in learning environments.

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Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen, experts in difficult conversations and negotiation from the Harvard Negotiation Project, have synthesized decades of research on feedback in their book thanks for the Feedback, where they outline the three different types and the purposes they serve. The first is evaluation, which is really great for self awareness. This tells someone where they stand compared to expectations or benchmarks or peers. So think a TripAdvisor rating 4 out of 5 you're evaluating a place that you stayed. There's praise, which is really great for appreciation and replication. This reinforces what's working well and it builds confidence and motivation. But it's also going to replicate exactly what's happening. Because if someone's praising something like your spaghetti pizza, you're not going to change the recipe. The last is coaching. And this is really for action oriented improvement.

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And this is when you provide actionable guidance for growth to help refine and improve skills. So all three types of feedback have value. But if we only focus one of them, like if we only focus on evaluation like grades or performance review, with no real actual constructive or action oriented feedback or praise, or if we only focus on praise so people feel good, we miss a really important piece and that's that coaching where the real improvement happens. Think about a student who consistently struggles with writing. If they only ever get a grade like a 70, they may not know how to improve. And if they only hear oh you're doing great, then they probably won't even think about improving. If they never receive specific strategies on how to improve organization or strengthen arguments, their writing is probably not going to improve very much.

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The same applies to teachers. If an administrator simply says great lesson today, but doesn't offer targeted coaching, teachers don't really know exactly what to refine and they may not have the opportunity to become the very best educator they can be. So how do we make sure that feedback is action oriented and actually helps people improve? Let's get into three concrete strategies. The first strategy is be specific and targeted. Whether you're an administrator giving feedback to teachers or a teacher giving feedback to students, the key is to be precise and actionable. So instead of saying good job on student engagement today, try something really specific. Like, I noticed that you provided students with multiple ways to process their thoughts before responding. That really helped ensure all voices were included in the discussion. How might you extend that approach into small group instruction?

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Or if you're a teacher providing feedback to a student instead of great job on that essay, say your introduction really grabs the reader's attention. I love the hook. Now let's look at how we can make your conclusion just as strong. The more precise the feedback, the easier it is for someone to take action and grow. The second strategy is to ensure two way feedback loops. Feedback should never be a one way street. If teachers only hear from administrators and students only hear from teachers, we're missing incredible opportunities for growth. So leaders, before sharing feedback, ask teachers what is the most valuable way for me to give you feedback or what do you need in terms of support so you feel more prepared to implement this strategy? Teachers, you can do the same for students.

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Instead of handing them feedback, create a space for self reflection. You might ask what type of feedback would help you to improve the most or do you feel confident applying this feedback? If so, like, talk to me about your strategies and if not, what can I do to help? When feedback is a conversation, it becomes much more meaningful. It's no longer something that's happening to us. It's an opportunity for learning, ownership and agency. And the last strategy is tie the feedback to a clear goal or expectation. So for example, if teachers are expected to implement udl, feedback should align with that goal. If students are working on narrative writing, feedback should also focus on that as a specific learning target.

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So school leaders, instead of saying that lesson was really engaging, you can offer something really targeted like I noticed you designed multiple ways for students to interact with the content that aligns really well with the udl. Look for flexible methods. Next time, let's explore how students can also have multiple ways to express what they've learned in flexible assessments. For teachers, instead of saying great effort on that science lab report, you could say something like your data analysis is really strong. Let's look at the rubric together and identify a single area where you can strengthen your reasoning. So no matter your role, whether you're leading a school or leading a classroom, great feedback is more than just evaluation and praise. It really is an opportunity to coach, support and empower really significant growth.

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When we make feedback specific two way and clearly tied to goals and expectations, we can create an environment where everyone, educators and students have the chance to improve and thrive. And as I shared in the introduction to this episode, my parents eventually figured out that with spaghetti pizza and we as educators really need to embrace it too. We need praise to reinforce what's working. We need evaluation to measure progress and we need that coaching to push each other towards excellence. So take a moment this week to reflect. Are you giving feedback that leads to real improvement? How do you know? Are you receiving feedback that helps you to grow? And if not, how can you ask for more coaching instead of just evaluation? Thanks for tuning in to the education table.

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Don't forget to check the show notes for bonus resources like the UDL Look-For a resource which is a tool that can be used by teachers, coaches and evaluators to observe and set goals for more universally designed learning opportunities and for video examples of action oriented feedback. And as always, onward.