Giving Feedback That Helps Empower Student Voice

It is important to consider the effect our feedback can have on students. We need to make sure we are not taking control of their papers but, instead, presenting students with options and agency to take their papers in the direction they want them to go. The following examples show how feedback can be used to build student confidence and give students a more active role in the revision process:

Highlight Student Strengths

Whenever possible, try to comment on well done sections of student writing. Even very quick comments like "Great example here!" or "Good word choice!" can help foster student confidence. If you have trouble remembering to be positive or are working within time constraints, try to make a habit of taking just the first few minutes to look for 1-2 things you can give the student praise for.

Describe Their Writing Style

When commenting on student writing, use words that describe their voice and style. This helps give students the vocabulary to talk about their own writing and writing in general. For example, you can highlight a phrase and say, "Great formal language here!" or "This phrase is usually considered slang." You can also make note of any shifts in tone or style you come across. Some specific aspects you can comment on include:

Active vs. Passive

Formal vs. Informal
Precise vs. Vague
Concise vs. Wordy or Repetitive
Specific & Concrete vs. Abstract & Overgeneral
Objective vs. Subjective

Ask Questions

Questions open up space for students to add their own thoughts. Try to think of ways you can turn your comments into questions. For example, instead of saying ,"This sentence is confusing," you might say, "Are you trying to say…?" This allows the student to see how their current phrasing is being interpreted by the reader and clarify what they actually want to say. Other examples of questions you can ask include:

Is this last sentence your thesis statement?
Are you shifting to a new topic here?
Is there a more specific word you can think of?
Are there any good examples that demonstrate this?
Can you think of a counterexample to include?
Can you think of a way to transition into the nextparagraph?

Make Suggestions Instead of Commands

Phrasing comments as suggestions helps to communicate that the choice is ultimately up to the student. For example, instead of saying "Include an example here," you can say, "Consider including an example." Even just adding the word "maybe" or a question mark to your comment can go a long way in shifting the tone of your feedback. Some examples of suggestions you can make include:

Consider adding a transition.
Consider using a different word here.
Maybe cut this since it is repetitive?
Maybe include an example here?
I might start a new paragraph here.
I might split this into two sentences.

Give Students Options

Offering students choices allows them to exert control and practice decision making instead of passively relying on teacher suggestions. Whenever possible, provide the student with more than one option for revision. For example:

Student Sentence
This shows that the method was <u>prosperous</u>.

Student Sentence

The study included two groups of children between the ages of three and five who were currently students at the local elementary school and watched approximately two hours of TV each day and did not have other forms of screen time.