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The Effects of Giving Effective Feedback Strategies in Reading with  
Elementary Students

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in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this action research project is to see the effects of goal setting, giving effective feedback, and student reflection time on self-selected goals in reading. This research setting was conducted with 23 students in a suburban area of the Twin Cities in Minnesota. A pre-survey was given to students before the action research was conducted, with a post-survey given to compare the data. As part of the intervention, students made self-selected reading goals. Then students were given teacher feedback using effective feedback strategies. In addition to feedback, students were given time to reflect on their feedback and goals. Findings indicate that giving students reflection time on their goals and feedback increases their understanding of the teacher feedback they received and helps them use that feedback in useful ways.

*Keywords:* effective, feedback, strategies, goal setting, reflection

Teacher feedback is information given to students. This information should give students ideas on how they can improve. Providing feedback to students is important. Giving effective feedback is even more crucial, and how students view this will impact how they use this feedback for successful academic growth (Yuan & Kim, 2015). Common effective feedback strategies include being timely, giving specific comments for suggestions for growth, being encouraging, and allowing students to be reflective. In addition to effective feedback, what students think about feedback is just as important. If students don't find feedback meaningful, it won't help them with their academic growth and achievement. The importance of combining effective feedback with goal setting are vital components of giving students meaningful feedback.

Giving students effective feedback, making it meaningful, and giving students time to goal set with reflection is important because students need to get valuable feedback to use for improvement and growth. If students do not get effective feedback, they could miss out on feedback that is given to use for improvements with academics. Teachers know that giving feedback to students is important, but some educators don't know how to provide effective and meaningful feedback to their students. Students also report that they feel they are not getting feedback. Giving specific preparation to students to receive feedback, providing meaningful feedback, allowing students time for reflection on their goal setting and feedback is important for academic achievements. The purpose of this action research project is to see the effects of goal setting, giving effective feedback, and student reflection time on self-selected goals in reading.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the course of this project, instructional scaffolding played an important role that was provided to students. Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist and social constructivist, developed the concept of the zone of proximal development. This refers to the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can achieve with guidance and encouragement from a skilled partner (McLeod, S. 2019). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) has been defined as: "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This theory is important in my research because as a teacher confers with students, differentiating skill work will help scaffold instruction for the students so they can grow and become more independent.

Jerome Bruner, an American Psychologist, believed that when children start to learn new concepts, they need help from teachers and other adults in the form of active support (Wheeler, 2017). Children are initially dependent on adult support, but as they become more independent in their thinking and acquire new skills and knowledge, the support can be gradually diminished. This form of structured interaction between the child and the adult is reminiscent of the scaffolding that supports the construction of a building. It is gradually dismantled as the work is completed (Wheeler, 2017).

Both Bruner and Vygotsky emphasize a child's environment, especially the social environment. They agree that adults should play an active role in assisting the child's

learning (McLeod, 2018). Bruner and Vygotsky, emphasized the social nature of learning, citing that other people should help a child develop skills through the process of scaffolding. (Wood, Bruner, & Ross 1976). This is critical as a teacher plans instruction.

Using the scaffolding theory, students were able to get effective feedback from the teacher during this action research. Students self-selected a goal using their reading learning progressions to choose a reading skill they wanted to improve. Through the use of formative feedback from the teacher, students were provided supports to scaffold in the appropriate level of help they needed to meet their goal with reading skill work.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Effective Feedback Strategies**

Four common strategies are identified across the literature on effective feedback: Feedback should be timely, provide specific suggestions, offer encouragement, and support student reflection (Downer, Stuhlman, Schweig, Martinez, & Ruzek, 2015; Russo, 2014; Gigante, Dell, & Sharkey, 2011).

**Timely.** Timeliness of feedback is important when considering how effective teacher feedback will impact students. Providing immediate feedback supports cognitive development and is linked to academic achievement (Downer, Stuhlman, Schweig, Martinez, & Ruzek, 2015). Students generally prefer immediate feedback. They tend to lose interest in delayed feedback because they have already moved their attention and focus onto working with newer content (Yuan & Kim, 2015).

Immediate feedback enhances student motivation and engagement to practice skills. Delayed feedback can allow students to continue to misuse incorrect strategies or feel confused and unsuccessful (Fyfe & Rittle-Johnson, 2016). Feedback should be timely and offered immediately after an observed behavior. The learner may forget the context or may not have the opportunity to practice and show improvements if feedback is delayed (Gigante, Dell, & Sharkey, 2011). Providing prompt feedback allows students to have the opportunity to use it and improve their work. Students can reflect and revise when feedback is given or returned quickly (Russo, 2014).

**Specific with Suggestions.** A second common effective strategy is providing suggestions for growth and being specific when doing so. Being specific helps students understand the feedback. Feedback should be based on specific observed actions and behaviors. Providing clear, concrete examples of what the learner has done well and what the learner can improve will help the development of the learner (Gigante et al., 2011). Feedback should include specific information about a student's observed performance with the intent to improve that performance. By providing learning goals and specific measures on how the student's current performance levels relate to these goals is important. When teachers want to improve their feedback, it is vital that they set clear learning goals, communicate these goals to the students, and provide feedback that specifically relates to these goals (Van den Bergh, Ros, & Beijaard, 2014). Providing specific feedback can help students link new information to existing knowledge and real-world examples which supports academic achievement (Downer et al., 2015).

Yuan and Kim, (2015), “Feedback is effective when it is content specific. It should include information to answer the following information: “where am I going?”, “how am I going?”, and “where to next?” (p. 3).

**Encouraging.** Next, feedback should be encouraging. The type of language a teacher uses can influence the experience students have in how they learn. Changing directive instructions such as “you must” or “you have to” to more encouraging language like “you can” or “you might” can positively affect learning (Van den Bergh et al., 2014). Encouragement is supportive, and feedback should provide reassurance about achieved competency and reinforce positive actions (Gigante et al., 2011). A study on identifying principles of effective feedback was done. One of the principles was to provide positive comments in addition to corrections. Positive comments appear to have a positive impact on student motivation, attitude, and the learning experience.

Comments about student work that are motivational with praise and encouragement positively affect learners. A negative response can deter the student to make revisions. The comments should tell the learner what was lacking without making any judgment and note positive areas that were done well (Russo, 2014).

**Time for Reflection.** Lastly, a fourth common component of effective feedback is providing time for students to be reflective and to use the feedback. A guideline for giving effective feedback is developing a plan for improvement. The learner should have the opportunity to comment on the feedback and make his or her own suggestions for improvement. This time allows for reflection of learners to use the feedback for future

performance (Gigante et al., 2011). Students can be reflective when they receive feedback during active learning time. They can use the feedback by learning from it and using it for improvements (Fyfe & Rittle-Johnson, 2016). Emphasis on student follow-up with additional communication around the feedback they receive should be given. They need to understand the feedback in order to use it. Teachers should provide discussion with students to ensure that they understand the comments. When involved in the dialogue about the feedback, students can reflect and verify their understanding. They can also ask questions or link feedback about their prior and current knowledge and experiences. When given this opportunity, students can become reflective learners and be more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and find ways to improve their work. Students can also feel more connected to the learning process by taking this active role in analyzing their work (Yuan & Kim, 2015).

### **What Students Find as Meaningful Feedback**

Students must feel that the feedback is important and useful to use for improvement. Feedback that students do not reflect on or respond to will not impact student learning. Even with feedback crafted based on the above criteria, it is ineffective unless students act upon it and use it (Yuan & Kim, 2015).

**Clear Feedback.** In a study done by Sommers (1982), it recognized that students responded that they wanted teachers to give more clear feedback (Russo, 2014). If feedback is confusing, students find it unhelpful because it lacks detail or is unclear (Russo, 2014). Students need to understand feedback to use it. If students perceive feedback to be confusing, it cannot be effective (Yuan & Kim, 2015). Feedback will not

advance learning if students are not able to make sense of the feedback (Rae & Cochrane, 2008). In a study of college students, they revealed that when teachers ask students to write down questions they have about their own work or reflect on the feedback they received, and then have interaction about it, it helped them understand the intent of the feedback (Yuan & Kim, 2015).

**Advice Over Praise and Criticism.** Praise is thought to provide encouragement to students, help build self-esteem and a close teacher-student relationship. It can support student progress and effort in building achievement (Russo, 2014). However, students preferred receiving advice. In a student survey using 33 grade four students by Silver and Lee (2007), results found that students ranked receiving advice as their most preferred type of feedback over receiving praise or criticism. Some of the reasons included student responses of helping them improve their work, makes them want to give it their best shot, feel they learn better from the advice, and helps them correct their mistakes (Russo, 2014).

**Preparing the Student for Feedback.** One barrier of effective feedback is that learners may not recognize feedback when it is offered. Learners are often stating that they receive little feedback whereas educators report consistently giving feedback. (Gigante et al., 2011). A guideline strategy to offset this barrier and to bridge this gap is to prepare the learner to receive feedback by stating often, "I am giving you feedback." Specifically using the word feedback will help the learner recognize the intent (Gigante et al., 2011).

### **Goal Setting With Students**

Teachers should relate feedback of student performance to their original learning goals. Providing goal-directed actions can promote student commitment (Van den Bergh

et al., 2014). A clear goal setting component should be part of effective feedback. Goals need to be purposeful and meaningful to students. Goals that are assigned without explanation resulted in lower goal commitment (Koenig et al., 2016).

**Goal Setting.** Goal setting with students shows improvements with individual performance (Punnett, 1986). A clear-goal setting component should be part of effective feedback (Koenig et al., 2016). Goal setting with feedback is more effective than goals by themselves (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). If goal setting is to be effective, students must receive feedback on how they are doing with achievement towards their goal (Johnson & Gramm, 1990). Goal setting increases motivation and engagement (Cabral-Marquez, 2015). Students set personal goals and reflect on their achievement to help with self-regulated learning (Forster & Souvignier, 2013). Students benefit when they are participants of the goal- setting process so that they feel a greater level of commitment towards achieving goals due to their perception of ownership (Johnson & Gramm, 1990). Goal setting with elementary students showed an impact on reading growth (Dotson, 2016). According to a study with fifth grade students by Dotson (2016), data revealed significant increase in showing adequate growth in reading after the implementation of the goal setting process was used.

**Successful Goal Setting.** Properties of strong goal setting include specificity, difficulty, and proximity (Johnson & Gramm, 1990). Goals should provide a specific and clear standard of achievement. Goals should be challenging to lead to better performance than goals that are easy. Proximal goals lead to higher levels of performance than distal goals (Johnson & Gramm, 1990).

According to Rader (2005), six steps can be used for success in goal setting. The first step is choosing goals, in which students write down a specific goal. Second, students need to set a time for achievement with a realistic date. Third, students need to develop a plan to achieve their goal. Here is where students should also identify obstacles that could get in the way and what they can do to remove these obstacles. Fourth, students should visualize accomplishment. They can do this through drawing pictures or cutting pictures from magazines. The fifth step is for teachers to emphasize working hard and never giving up. The last step is for students to self-evaluate through reflection. Students can observe their actions, assess their progress, and propose alternative models to help them achieve their goals (Rader, 2005, p. 124 & 125).

### **Methodology**

In this action research study, the data types used were inquiry data, observational data, and artifacts. The tools that were used were Google Forms, journal reflections from both the teacher and students, and goal setting sheets that students filled out. Using these tools provided the opportunity for students to be a part of their learning through the use of self-selected goal setting, getting timely teacher feedback, and having time to reflect on the use of their feedback for goal achievement.

Inquiry data was used in the form of pre and post Google Form student data questions to measure student perception of the quality of feedback they received from the teacher. Questions such as: What does feedback mean to you? How will you use the feedback? Students also rated how they felt with other prompts such as “I understand feedback I get from the teacher” and “I can use the feedback I get from the teacher.”

In addition, using student reflections for inquiry data was also used to provide measurement with how students felt with more reflection time given from their goal setting. An example of a reflection prompt was students responding to questions about whether having time every week to reflect on goals helped them work towards their goal better. Students were given these reflection prompts using Google Forms.

Observational data was used by the teacher using a journal to record notes on how students reacted with more reflection time given. Data was recorded in regards to observations with student engagement and if students appeared to be using the feedback they received. Observations were recorded using a 1-5 scale.

Artifacts were collected using folders to keep student reflection journal responses. Journals were used to see how students felt about using teacher feedback and show how they felt about their progression towards their goals. Students were to also journal using reflection prompts such as: I have worked really hard on my goal by... I still need to work on my goal. I plan to continue..., The problem of \_\_\_\_\_ is getting in the way of me reaching my goal. I would like to start \_\_\_\_\_ to see if it will help.

This research setting was conducted with 23 students in a suburban area of the Twin Cities in Minnesota. The sample included 22 third grade students and 1 second grade student in a two hour per day of a reading block of time within our multi-age elementary school setting. Within this class, 13 of the students were male and 10 students were female.

For this action research project, the process was started by having students fill out questions that were given questions through Google Forms as a pre student data gathering

tool to gauge their perception of feedback from the teacher. This helped determine a baseline for how students felt about the feedback they were given before this action research project was conducted. Then students were given folders to keep their goal setting sheet, feedback, and reflections together in one place for organization. Using a goal setting sheet, students recorded their reading goals. Students would meet with the teacher for individual conferring to get feedback and identify areas and skills students could work on to reach their goal. Students received feedback either verbally or written to keep in their folders. Students were given time at least once every two weeks to reflect on their goals and how they were using the feedback. The study ended with using the same Google Forms questions in the pre student data gathering as the post student data gathering tool.

### **Analysis of Data**

The quantitative data of this action research study was analyzed using sorting, finding trends and patterns, and comparing pre and post percentage data from survey questions given to students.

The pre and post student questions were analyzed by comparing percentage data with bar graphs and pie charts when students were asked: “Do you get feedback from the teacher?”, “Do you understand the feedback?”, “Do you use the feedback?”

A teacher journal was used with a scale of 1-5. Three reflection questions were used each week to observe the class in regards to how students reacted with reflection time given and the feedback they received. The observations were based on the following recordings: “Students seemed engaged during the time given for reflection.”, “Students appeared receptive to feedback that was given.”, and “Students used the feedback given to

them.” Analysis included comparing data week to week and looking for trends and patterns with student engagement.

The student journals were examined to find patterns and trends to their responses in regards to reflecting on their work to reach their reading goals. Examples of patterns and trends included whether or not they specifically stated that reflection time was helpful and their general attitude towards reflecting each week. Responses were sorted using categories of positive attitude, neutral attitude, and negative attitude towards reflection time.

Student reflection questions were asked in a survey using Google Forms. Two questions used a 1-5 scale. That data was analyzed using bar graphs with percentage data. Another question required short answer responses to finish the prompt “Meeting with the teacher helped me to understand\_\_\_\_\_.” The responses helped me to examine how the students perceived their feedback. I looked for patterns of understanding with specific examples they used to respond.

The purpose of this action research project was to examine the effects of giving effective feedback and student reflection time with their self-selected reading goals. The overarching question: “What effects happen when 2nd and 3rd graders are given effective feedback and time to reflect on teacher feedback on their reading?” guided this research.

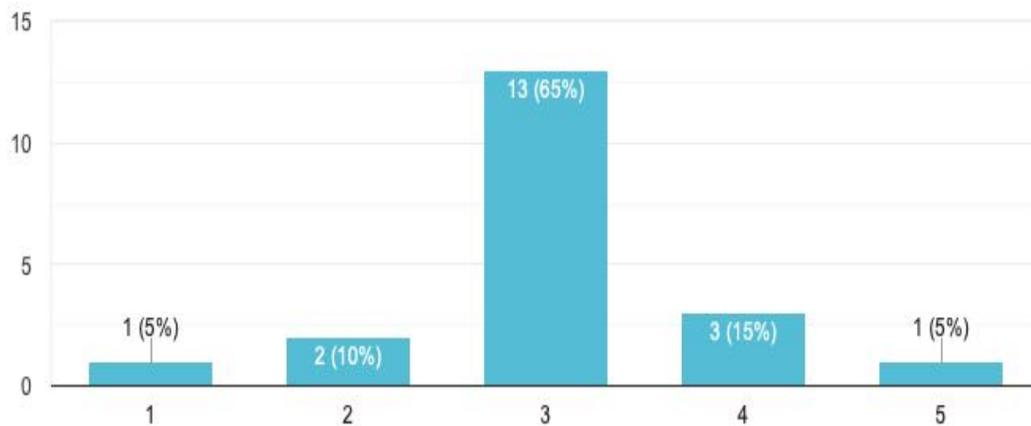
### **Effects of Effective Feedback**

The first research question that this action research project addressed was “What effects happen when students receive effective teacher feedback?” To answer this question

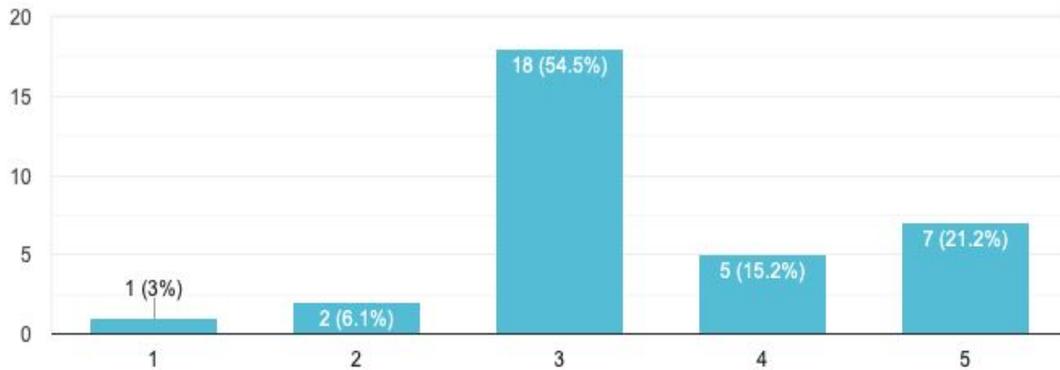
a pre and post survey was given to students. Student responses to their perception of getting feedback, understanding feedback, and using feedback was analyzed.

Looking at the first pre and post survey question (see Figure 1) for student perception of receiving teacher feedback, a score of 4 or 5 was considered adequate feedback in the data findings. Results showed that 20% of the class felt they got adequate feedback compared to the post survey indicating 36.4% of the class felt they received adequate feedback.

Pre-Survey

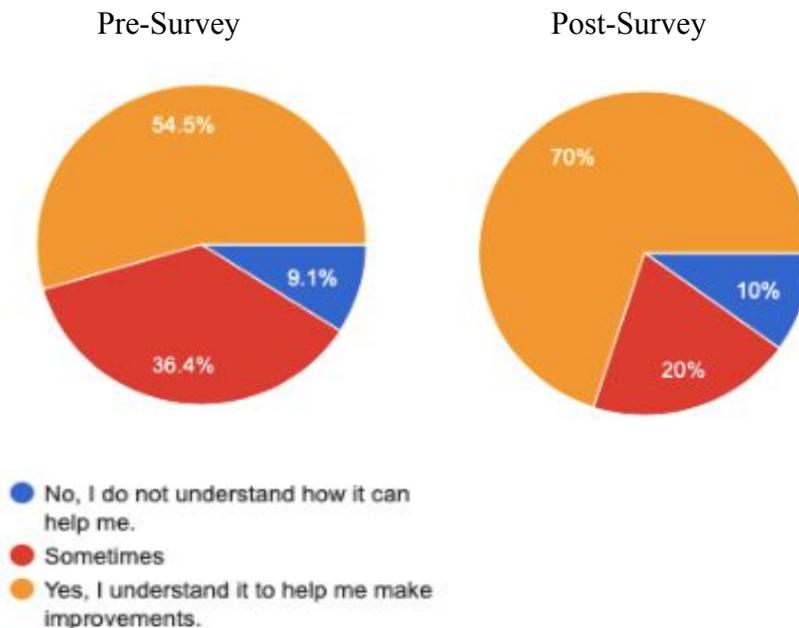


## Post-Survey



*Figure 1.* Pre and Post-Survey Question: I get a lot of feedback from the teacher. (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree).

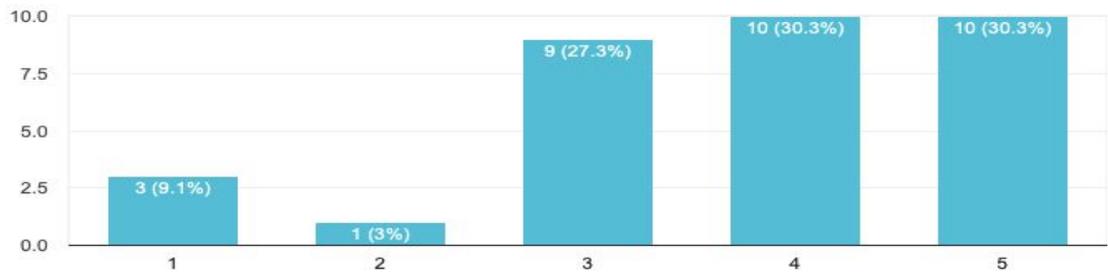
The second survey question (see Figure 2) indicates an increase of 54.5% of the class that understood the feedback compared to the post-survey showing 70%.



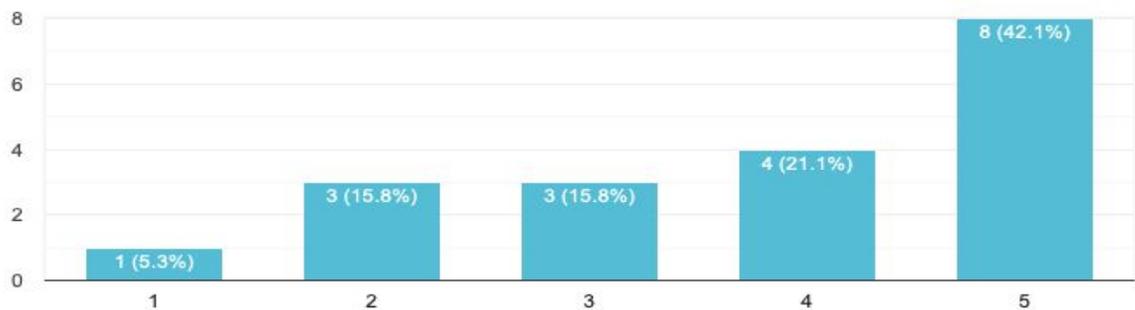
*Figure 2.* Pre and Post Survey Question: I understand the feedback I get from the teacher and how it can help me improve on my work.

The third survey question (see Figure 3) indicates an increase of students using the feedback in useful ways from 60.4% to 63.2%.

#### Pre-Survey



#### Post Survey



*Figure 3.* Pre and Post Survey Questions: I can use the feedback I get from the teacher in a useful way to help me improve my work.

### Effects of Reflection Time

The second research questions that this action research project addressed was “What effects happen when students are given time to reflect on their feedback and

goals?” To answer this question, teacher observation through journaling, student reflection responses through journaling, and a student survey were used to investigate findings.

Using teacher observations through journaling on a 1-5 scale, student engagement was noted each week during student reflection time. (See Table 1). Teacher observations were made and circled on the journal in which 1= students not engaged and 5=students highly engaged. The three items observed in the journal were:

1. Students seemed engaged during the time given for reflection.
2. Students appeared receptive to feedback that was given.
3. Students used feedback given to them.

As the weeks progressed, student engagement increased during reflection time.

Table 1.

	<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Week 5</b>	<b>Week 6</b>	<b>Week 7</b>	<b>Week 8</b>
<b>Student engagement during reflection time</b>	3	3	4	4	5	5	5	5

Student journaling responses were used by students so they could reflect on their work towards their goal. Students could choose from a list of prompts such as: “I have worked really hard on my goal by...”, “I still need to work on my goal. I plan to continue...”, “This week I haven’t worked towards my goal, but I will remember to...”,

and “Reflection time has helped me because...” were used by students to complete their reflections.

The data was analyzed by looking at patterns of responses. Data was sorted by examining if students thought it was specifically helpful and stated that in their responses. Then the general attitude towards reflection time was sorted into a category of positive, neutral, or negative.

The percent of students that specifically stated that reflection time and feedback was helpful was 72.7%. Comments such as “Reflecting this week really helped me.”, “I think the folders are helpful to keep my goals organized.”, and “Time to think about my work is really helping me.”

Positive attitude was represented with 68.2% of the class. Neutral attitude showed 27.3% of the class. Negative attitude towards reflection time was 4.5% of the class.

Using student survey questions related to asking students if reflection time helped them work towards their goals better and if students understood the feedback was used at the end of this study. Figure 4 shows that 57.9% of students thought it was helpful. Figure 5 indicates 94.4% of students adequately understood the feedback they received. In both figures 4 and 5, using a score of 4 or 5 was considered adequate when used to analyze the data.

### 1. Having time every week to reflect on my goal helped me work towards my goal better.



19 responses

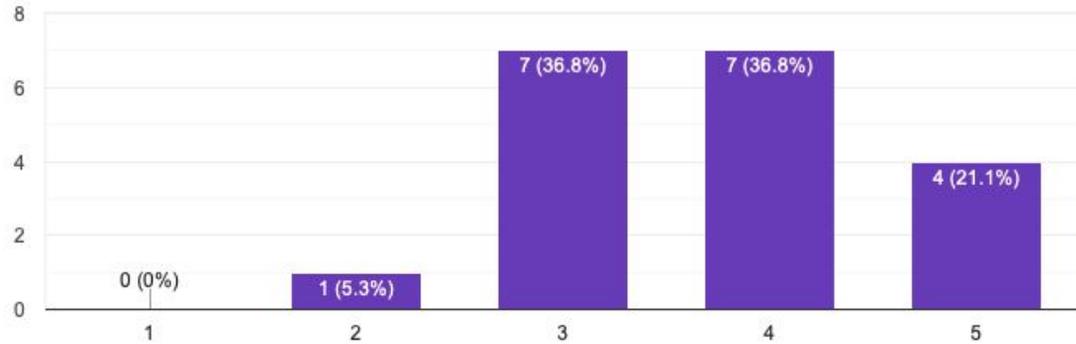


Figure 4. A scale of 1-5 scale with 1=not so much and 5=yes, a lot was used.

### 2. I understand the feedback I got from Mrs. Rodgers.

18 responses

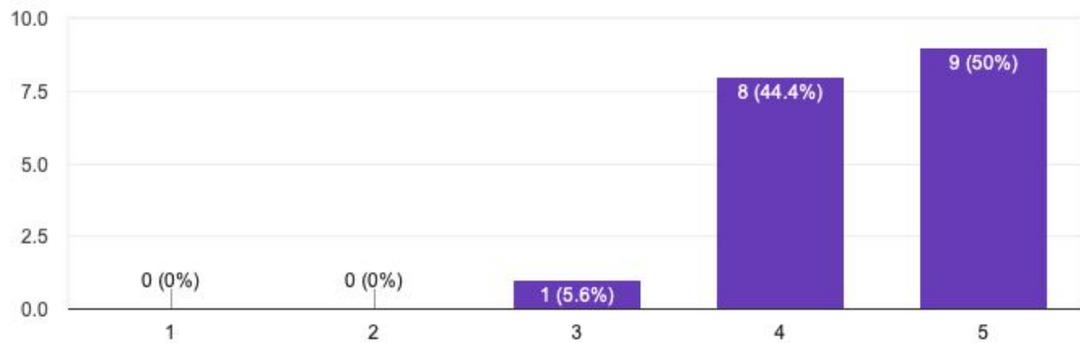


Figure 5. A scale of 1-5 scale with 1=not so much and 5=yes, a lot was used.

During this study, the teacher met with students individually to give feedback on students' self-selected goals. Feedback was used to give students immediate and verbal feedback on reading skills, what was noticed being done well, and what steps students could take to further their skills to achieve their goal. A survey question was asked about

how meeting with the teacher had helped them. Survey responses in Figure 6 show that 100% of the 19 responses indicated that students were able to use the feedback to understand what they needed to work on towards goal achievement.

3. Meeting with the teacher helped me understand

---

How to make more evidence

---

My goal

---

That I should try to challenge myself.

---

Words better

---

What my goal is and how it can help me

---

How to get better at making a new goal.

---

What to work on more.

---

How to orient

---

Think with expression

---

Fluinc

---

How to make goals

---

my goals

---

How to get my work done easier

---

What I know what I should work on and how to do it

---

I need to work harder

---

What was rong

---

It helped me by helping at the right point

---

What to do

---

What pacific thing is I need to work on.

---

*Figure 6.* Individual short answer responses to how meeting with the teacher helped the student.

Overall, there was an increase in students' perception of receiving feedback from the teacher, understanding feedback, and students using feedback in a useful way.

Students found reflection time to be helpful to work towards their reading goals.

**Limitations.** Due to double submissions for pre and post survey data and a lack of tracking absences to see who did not answer the survey, the final data was not accurate.

The total number of students in class was 23. However, student responses were different for the pre and post survey data with 33 student responses for the pre-survey and 20 student responses for post-survey. Next time, I would be sure to set the Google Forms survey to one response only and I would track absences better.

### **Action Plan**

Giving feedback is important, and teachers need to use effective strategies to maximize the benefits of providing feedback for student achievement and growth. Feedback should be timely, content specific, encouraging, allow for student reflection, and provide suggestions for growth (Gigante et al., 2011). Teachers must provide feedback that is purposeful for students to be able to use in order for it to be meaningful (Yuan & Kim, 2015).

Educators need to be sure that students receive effective feedback as they are working so that students have time to be reflective and have time to use the feedback for making changes and improvements to their work (Fyfe & Rittle-Johnson, 2016). Meaningful feedback is stated by students to be clear (Yuan & Kim, 2015) and offer advice to make necessary improvements over just receiving praise or criticism (Russo, 2014). Goal setting with students shows improvements with individual performance (Punnett, 1986). A clear-goal setting component should be part of effective feedback (Koenig et al., 2016).

The purpose of this action research project was to examine the effects of giving effective feedback and student reflection time to second and third graders with their self-selected reading goals. The overarching question: “What effects happen when 2nd and

3rd graders are given effective feedback and time to reflect on teacher feedback on their reading?” guided this research.

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Giving students reflection time on their goals and feedback, increases their understanding of the teacher feedback they received.
- Giving students timely, specific feedback towards their goal, helps them understand how to use the feedback in a useful way.
- Specifically stating to students that they are getting feedback when feedback was provided had minimal change to increase their perception that they were getting feedback.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were drawn:

- Students should be provided timely and specific feedback towards their goal.
- Students should have time to reflect on their goals and teacher feedback.

To carry out these recommendations in a classroom setting, teachers should set aside time weekly for students to reflect on their goals and to think about where they are with their goal attainments. Students can journal or voice record their reflections to help them gain a better understanding of the feedback they received from the teacher. When students have a better understanding, they will use the feedback in a more useful way to further their learning.

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