

Teaching Tip: Feedback

Feedback is not the irritating sound from the amplifier, but the other cornerstone of the testing model. In fact, in teacher jargon, the model is called Test Teach. If you read and reflected on the last Teaching Tidbit, you may be asking: “if students can come up with all the answers themselves, why am I teaching them? What if students come up with *wrong* answers, or even worse *no* answers at all?! Aren’t you abdicating your responsibility as a teacher?!” You are on the right track. The Test Teach model only works because of a little thing called feedback.

Assume that you have set a task with the youth group, say number 2 from the previous Tidbit: find 6 examples of admirable leadership in the Old Testament. There are a few possible outcomes. Perhaps your all-star students came up with perfect lists and are ready to move on to deeper analysis. Wonderful – your students are very bright and need to be challenged more. Perhaps your students were partially able to provide names. Some were correct and some were suspect, and they didn’t quite make it to five. Wonderful – now you know that your students have some literacy in this topic, but they need more help. And perhaps the students *failed* the task altogether. Wonderful – now you know that your students need a lot of clarifying and correcting.

In school, errors and failure usually reflect badly on the student’s ability. With Test Teach, errors reveal areas where clarification and correction are most needed. Tests save the teacher from guess work and they save the students from being under- or over-challenged. But where there is Test, there must be Teach! Good feedback allows a teacher to guide her students from lack of clarity towards clarity *when it is needed*. Make sure you don’t abdicate responsibility; make sure you guide them to fuller understanding. Many of us were raised in a Teach Test model that limited our involvement and pressured us with perfection. Try the opposite: test first, teach later.