Answers to Exercise 5.2

Using Effective Verbal Feedback

1. Ms. Redmond is walking around the gym as her physical education students are playing three different games of volleyball. She calls out to different students according to what she sees. Arnold is a student who has struggled with sports in the past. She notices that he is putting in more effort than usual today, but that his performance is not much better. When he is taking a time-out, she approaches him and says, “You’re really getting into it today, Arnold.” After acknowledging his effort, she gives him a few pointers. “When you serve, try watching the ball throughout your underhand swing; watch it until it crosses the net. You can get a good idea of how much power you need in your swing that way.”

This is an example of a teacher giving appropriate and specific feedback to a student on a task that was done poorly. Ms. Redmond begins her discussion with Arnold by commenting positively on his level of effort. However, she also gives him some very specific feedback on an element of his performance that was lacking. This feedback was given appropriately, increasing the likelihood that Arnold will want to try his serve again as opposed to decreasing his level of effort.

2. Ms. Bowles’s art history class has been studying the work of Jackson Pollock and its influence on abstract expressionism. The class is discussing the role of chaos in his work. Brandon says, “Ms. Bowles, I just don’t get it. I mean, it’s just splatter. Couldn’t I spill something on the floor and call it chaos?” Ms. Bowles has encountered comments like this from Brandon before. In her mind, he never seems to appreciate anything the class studies. She says, “No, Brandon, you couldn’t. I guess you just don’t have an appreciation of abstract art.”

This is an example of inappropriate verbal feedback. Ms. Bowles’s frustration with Brandon might be quite understandable, but her feedback was not effective. In fact, she was promoting the fixed theory of intelligence by making reference to “an appreciation for abstract art.” This statement implies that Brandon either has an appreciation or does not.

3. Mr. Norris’s science class is learning about human anatomy. He administered a pretest to get a feel for what his students knew at the beginning of the unit, and he is now looking at the first official test of the unit. He notices that Felicia started off with very little knowledge, less than most of the students in the class, but that her score on the first test is very high. During a private meeting
with her, he says, “You really did well on this test. You answered every question about the skeletal system correctly. It looks like you really prepared for this. You learned a lot too.” He shows her the pretest score so that she can see how much she has learned.

This is an example of appropriate praise and verbal feedback for a task that was done well. Mr. Norris pointed out what was done well about the test, and pointed out how much knowledge Felicia had gained. He also commented on apparent effort and preparation.