



Language of Community & Learning

Our approach to Compassion & Assertiveness:

We are intentional about our own behavior. We build trusting relationships with students and consistently model, teach, and practice the skills that we most want them to learn.

- We use compassion to empathize with a student, teach them to identify and manage their emotions, and make choices that are driven by their reasoning state rather than their emotions. (We don't use compassion to "rescue" students from emotional upset.)
- Children practice compassion for one another, which promotes a sense of belonging. Their desire to help one another overpowers attention-seeking behavior.
- We use assertiveness to name what we want to see in children's behavior, and to set respectful limits. Children practice assertiveness to advocate for their needs and resolve conflicts productively.
- During instruction, we use language to intentionally build connections between members of the classroom community and promote learning.

Language of Community & Learning Implementation Guide

We begin with the Language of Safety, to establish and uphold clear expectations to create a physically and psychologically safe environment. We respond to children's emotions with Empathy, to build relational connections with students. Building on that foundation, the Language of Community & Learning contributes to connections between members of the classroom community as well as promoting children's learning.

How to do this well - See additional guidance below

- Prepare yourself to lead instruction
- Create an intellectually safe environment where all ideas are welcome
- Construct discussions thoughtfully
- Provide specific, descriptive, informative feedback to students

Why this works:

- Positioning yourself as a co-learner with students, and students as co-learners with each other, sets the tone for the classroom as a collaborative learning community where every person's ideas have value. In an environment of equals, students are empowered to set meaningful goals, take risks, fail, keep trying, and chart their own course towards learning goals. This leads to a **motivating and self-directed learning environment**, where the teacher trusts the students and students trust themselves and each other.
- Interactive discussions that position students to do the thinking and speaking result in **more learning**. As students do more work and their thinking is more visible, teachers have more opportunities to address misconceptions and ensure true understanding of the content.
- Providing specific, descriptive, informative feedback shows students that you are paying close attention to their work - which is evidence that you care a great deal about them and their learning, *without* developing a dynamic where children depend on your praise for



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validation or self-worth. As children are **developing their self-awareness, reflective capabilities, and inner voice/metacognition**, your outer speech helps form their inner speech. Reflection and metacognition are essential to [agentic action](#).

Additional Guidance

To begin with, prepare yourself to lead instruction.

- Build your own content knowledge. Study how and what children learn in your subject. Explore your curriculum, work with master teachers, and tap into other resources. Some questions to consider:
 - What do your students already know, and what are they expected to learn?
 - How do students acquire knowledge and skills?
 - What are the essential questions of your domain?
 - What key ideas, mysteries, or trivia will draw students in?
- As you are preparing lessons, devote time to pre-thinking about desired responses, solution strategies, and likely student misconceptions.
- Position yourself as a co-learner of the content. Demonstrate genuine curiosity for children's ideas, opinions, and thought processes. Espouse the belief that children can learn from each other, not just from you or the textbook.

Create an intellectually safe environment where all ideas are welcome.

- Lean into other CARE structures, like [Strong Start](#), [Maintaining Composure](#), [Language of Safety](#), and [Language of Empathy](#) to build a safe and trusting classroom community.
- As you begin collaborative structures (partner talk, sharing materials, team projects) discuss what a productive collaborative environment looks like and sounds like. Create norms for the class to follow.
- Model and encourage sharing your work and thought processes. Students will learn from your modeling of openness, honesty, and metacognition.
- Teach habits of discussion, including hand signals for common reactions (agree, disagree, add on).
- Set positive learning identities and expectations for children. Help students see themselves as readers, writers, mathematicians, historians, artists, and scientists by referring to them with these identities and emphasizing that they are doing the work of these professions.

Construct discussions thoughtfully.

- **Ask open-ended questions for analysis and reasoning to develop students' critical thinking.**
 - Open-ended questions beginning with "why" and "how" help students think critically. Develop discussion topics around higher order thinking skills like problem-solving,



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- prediction, experimentation, classification, or comparison. Prompt students to share their thought process to develop metacognition.
- [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) and Webb's Depth of Knowledge are helpful resources for teachers as they are planning lessons and conversations.
 - You can still ask closed questions, but carefully consider when and how to utilize them.
 - **Create space for students to think about their responses, strategically using wait time.**
 - Hold 3-5 seconds of space after asking a question, before calling on a student to respond. Set the expectation that when think time is over, students may raise their hands or you will call on someone.
 - As students are responding, listen to what they are saying. Compare their responses to your pre-thinking about desired responses, solution strategies and possible misconceptions.
 - **Respond to students' ideas, prompting additional reasoning.** Possible questions or approaches include:
 - Asking for students to explain their thinking: How did you get that answer?
 - Why do you think ___?
 - Tell me more...
 - Tell me what you just did.
 - What's your plan for...
 - Where will you go next?
 - Ask the student for clarification: "I heard you say ___; is that what you meant?"
 - Repeat & extend children's responses (especially helpful for younger students and language learners)
 - Clarify the strategy or meta-idea
 - Ask another child to build on what the first one said, or to challenge that idea
 - Use wait time strategically
 - For younger or non-verbal students, use self-talk and parallel talk to model language
 - **Attend to equity in the discussion.**
 - Who is being asked to share their thinking? Who is responding?
 - How can you create routines and procedures to build in equity of voice by default?
 - How are you responding to subgroups of students across identity markers?
 - How are students responding to each other?

In relation to students' work, provide specific, descriptive, informative feedback.

- This type of praise fosters competence and autonomy, rather than operating on emotional manipulation (eg, getting the teacher to like me or be pleased with me/my work).
- Be selective with what you reinforce: Target your feedback to strategies or behaviors that will be most helpful to students.
- Praise effort, not achievement, to reinforce having a growth mindset and seeing mistakes or misconceptions as opportunities for learning and productive struggle.



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- Avoid basing comments on your personal approval ("I like," "I love," "I see") or thanking students for meeting basic expectations.
- Tag with class/school values or general desirable traits (creative, persistent, helpful, etc.), if it would help anchor the feedback for students.
- You may express delight or celebrate with students ("I love your painting!") to build relationships and convey warmth - but consider, are you trying to shape their behavior? If so, use specific feedback.

Examples	Non-Examples
• "You completed all of your math problems. You were really focused during work time." • "You used a diagram to solve this word problem. It looks like that visualizing strategy paid off!" • "Thank you for taking this note to the office for me."	• "I love to see a complete math worksheet!" • "I'm glad to see you used the visualizing strategy I taught you." • "Thank you for following directions."

Sources & More Information

- For further reading: [The Power of Our Words](#), Paula Denton
 - [Summary](#)
- [Cultures of Thinking](#)
 - Printable: [The Language of the Classroom](#)
- [Teachstone CLASS](#)
 - [Language Modeling](#)
 - [Concept Development](#)
 - [Quality of Feedback](#)
- [Project Zero Thinking Routines Toolbox](#)

Video examples

- Courtney Daignault, Pre-K: [Treehouse](#)
- Courtney Daignault, Pre-K: [Painting](#)
- Katie Bell, 4th grade: [Clip 1](#)
- Katie Bell, 4th grade: [Clip 2](#)
- Katie Bell, 4th grade: [Clip 3](#)
- Katie Bell, 4th grade: [Clip 4](#)
- Katie Bell, 4th grade: [Clip 5](#)