

Positive Language

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Reinforcing Language

Because students build on their strengths, it's vital for teachers to see and name what students are doing well. Reinforcing language highlights students' skills, positive efforts and attitudes, and quality work so that they know what to stand on as they reach for the next higher rung in their learning.

Keys to Effective Reinforcing Language

❖ Name concrete and specific behaviors.

Rather than saying a global "Good job!" or "Nice work," tell students specifically what they did well so they know what to keep doing.

Instead of... "Great job today!"

Try ... "You stayed focused and kept working on this even when you didn't know the answer right away."

❖ De-emphasize personal approval.

Instead, emphasize what the student did. Otherwise, students may focus more on pleasing you than on improving their skills.

Instead of... "I like the way you added all those details."

Try ... "You added key details to your main point. That helps your audience understand and be persuaded."

❖ Avoid holding one student up as an example for others.

The student held up may feel triumphant, but possibly embarrassed, and the others are likely to feel devalued or criticized.

Instead of... "Notice how DeShawn used four sources for his research project. Let's see all of you do that."

Try... To DeShawn privately: "You used at least three sources, just like we learned. That makes your research credible."

❖ **Find positives to reinforce in all students.**

Over time, every student should feel that we see and appreciate their positive actions and attitudes.

Instead of ... Using reinforcing language with only the students who do proficient work, are the first to get organized, or are otherwise the "best" ...

Try... Saying to a student who struggles but made a strong effort: "You read three pages during readers' workshop today. What helped you concentrate?"

Reminding Language

Reminding Language Reminding language helps students stay on track. Use reminding language before a possibly challenging task, or right when students start to go off track. Before using reminders, be sure to teach how to meet expectations, as students can only be reminded of what they already know.

Keys to Effective Reminding Language:

❖ **Prompt students to remember for themselves what they should be doing.**

This shows faith in their competence and builds their autonomy.

Instead of ... "Think about what you can do to help yourself concentrate."

Try ... "Put away everything you don't need. If your mind wanders, take a few deep breaths and tell your mind to come back to your reading."

Use a neutral tone and body language. This shows respect for the student and helps her focus on what she needs to do rather than on what you think of her.

Instead of... "What did we say is the next step in making these kinds of graphs?"—said with a singsong voice and rolling eyes, implying the student isn't very smart.

Try ... "What did we say is the next step in making these kinds of graphs?"—said in a matter-of-fact voice with neutral body language, implying the student can remember and direct his attention to doing so.

Be brief. Students tend to tune out long strings of words.

Instead of... "I'm hearing disrespectful conversations. "What did we learn about disagreeing Everyone, remember to say 'I hear your honestly and respectfully?" point, but I have a different idea' the way we learned. If we interrupt and say 'No, that's not true,' or 'You're wrong,' we'll shut down discussion."

Try ... Watch for follow-through. Take a moment to see if the student acts on the reminder.

Instead of ... Try ...

Instead of... Try ... Giving a reminder and then turning Acknowledging actions with a nod or away... a smile—no words are needed.

Redirecting Language

When students are doing something harmful to themselves or others, are too far into a mistake to correct themselves, or are too emotional to remember what they're supposed to be doing, teachers need to redirect them with clear words. As with reminding language, it's important to be brief and to use a neutral tone and neutral body language when giving a redirection.

Keys to Effective Redirecting Language:

Be direct and specific. When students are far enough into a mistake to need a redirection, they need to hear exactly what you want them to do differently.

Instead of... "Casey, you need to work harder."

Try... "Casey, put your watch away and continue with your assignment right now."

Say what to do, instead of what not to do. When you say what not to do, students might feel chastised and they might not understand what you want them to do instead. Naming the desired behavior is clear and respectful of students.

Instead of... "Class, stop wasting everyone's time."

Try... "Freeze. Everyone return to your seat with your folder."

Phrase a redirection as a statement, not a question. A question gives the illusion of choice and can confuse students. It's more effective to calmly tell students exactly what you want them to do.

Instead of ... "Anna, could you refocus on your math?"

Try... "Anna, focus on your math."

Watch to see if the student follows your redirection. If not, give a clearer redirection or take action that helps her return to positive behavior.

Instead of... Redirecting a student ("Focus on your math") and then turning away immediately...

Try ... Directing the student to move to a seat close to you (if sitting near classmates seemed to be pulling her off task).