



Indicator: All teachers verbally praise students. (4431)

Explanation: The evidence review confirms that teachers can enhance academic learning when they employ authentic and sincere verbal praise as students demonstrate content and skill acquisition. Doing so fosters deeper relationships between the teacher and student as well as between students. An increased student sense of efficacy and belonging can result as well.

Questions: How will the Leadership Team know that teachers verbally praise students? Do teachers offer consistent, positive verbal feedback to students? Is the verbal praise that teachers present authentic and sincere? Do teachers routinely supply all students with verbal praise so as to increase all students' sense of academic efficacy and belonging?

Marzano (2011) found that positive relationships between teachers and students are among the most commonly cited variables associated with effective instruction. If the relationship is strong, instructional strategies seem to be more effective, and if the relationship is weak or negative, the benefits of instructional strategies will be muted or even negated. Perhaps the most powerful message from the research is that relationships are a matter of student perception, and have little to do with how a teacher actually feels about students. It's what teachers *do* that dictates how students perceive those relationships. Teacher actions that develop the perception in students that they have a good relationship with the teacher include: showing interest in students' lives, advocating for students, never giving upon students, and acting friendly. These teacher behaviors can, with rare exceptions, make all students feel that they have a positive relationship with their teachers. Teachers should engage in these behaviors daily, especially with their disenfranchised students, who are most in need of this positive support.

Teachers praising their students is one tool that can be a powerful motivator—though research suggests that praise is underused in both general- and special-education classrooms (Brophy, 1981; Hawkins & Heflin, 2011; Kern & Clemens, 2007). Effective teacher praise consists of two elements: (1) a description of noteworthy student academic performance or general behavior, and (2) a signal of teacher approval (Brophy, 1981; Burnett, 2001).

Wright (2014) has some suggestions for shaping praise to increase its effectiveness:

1. *Describe noteworthy student behavior:* Praise statements that lack a specific amount of student behavior in observable terms are compromised as they fail to give students feedback to guide their learning, so a praise statement such as "Good job!" is less effective than a praise statement such as "You got all ten of those math problems correct. Good job!"
2. *Praise effort and accomplishment, not ability:* There is some evidence that praise statements about general ability—such as "You're a really good math student!"—actually reduces a student's appetite for risk-taking, while praise which singles out specific examples of student effort or accomplishment can help students to see the link between their effort and improved performance.

3. *Match the method of praise delivery to student preferences:* When possible, a teacher should determine and abide by a student's preferences for receiving individual praise, whether it be in front of the whole class or work group, in a private conversation, or as written feedback on the student's assignment.

Wright (2014) said teachers in middle and high school may underuse praise because they find it difficult to both deliver effective group instruction and to provide (and keep track of) praise to individual students. His suggestions for informal self-monitoring ideas to help teachers to use praise more frequently and consistently include:

1. **Keep daily score:** After setting a goal for the number of praise statements a teacher would like to deliver during a class period, the teacher keeps a tally and then compares that to the goal.
2. **Select students for praise:** Before each class, the teacher jots down the names of four or five students to single out for praise, and then after the class the teacher places a checkmark next to the names of students who were actually praised at least once.
3. **Make it habit-forming:** By tying praise to specific classroom routines—i.e., for large-group instruction, at least five praise statements to the class or individual students, and for independent seatwork, at least four praise statements to individual students—and then monitoring how close the teacher came to those goals, praise becomes associated with specific activities, and becomes a habit embedded in classroom routine.

Redding (2006) states:

Teacher-student interactions include teacher praise for and reinforcement of positive student behavior and demonstration of learning as well as questioning techniques and discussion methods. Teacher-student interactions are social, instructional, and managerial. Social interaction has been found to be a particularly strong correlate of academic learning (Wang, Haertel, Walberg, 1993), as it facilitates a bond of connection between the teacher and the students and increases each student's sense of belonging to the classroom group. (p. 105)

References and Resources

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