

SUBstantial News

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News and Information Just for Substitute Teachers From

Giving Praising to Students

“Attention is to behavior what profits are to business.” For an educator, this means that whatever behavior you are paying the most attention to is the behavior that is going to prevail in the classroom. The greatest motivator for a student’s behavior is teacher attention. Teachers need to learn to acknowledge a student’s appropriate behavior; one way this can be done is with verbal praise. Three things a teacher should remember when praising students, first, praise needs to be intermittent or given at random, second, praise needs to be descriptive, and third, praise shouldn’t interrupt what the student is doing.

Firstly, educators need to acknowledge appropriate behavior that is consistent with their expectations. This should be done intermittently or at random, several times in an hour. When behavior is praised intermittently it is a powerful motivator for students and will not make them “praise junkies,” as some researchers call it. To prove that the intermittent schedule of reinforcement is a powerful motivator, consider the appeal of gambling. Even though the odds are against winning, people are motivated to participate because there is always a chance of winning, not on a regular basis, but intermittently.

The purpose of praise is to help a student know that the teacher would like that behavior to continue. Behavior is most reinforced when the praise is unexpected and spontaneous. Studies have shown that

families where 30 positive interactions happened per hour from ages birth to 4 years old, inappropriate behavior was almost nonexistent after four years of age.

The best form of praise is descriptive praise. Descriptive praise is when an adult uses a few words to describe what the student did that was so impressive. For example, “*I noticed you cleaned up your area, I bet it’s easier to find your things now.*” Or “*Thank you for reading so quietly, it makes for a better learning environment.*”

If a teacher would like to take this a step further, s/he could add a values statement at the end of the praise. For example, “*Thank you for working so well with your group, you are so cooperative.*” Or “*Nice job on following through on that assignment, you are so dependable.*” Rich language praise happens when teachers add a values statement to the praise. Researchers say that students who could be considered troublemakers don’t have a sense of values, so by incorporating rich language praise, a teacher is teaching values as well.

Thirdly, appropriate behavior should be acknowledged casually and briefly and shouldn’t take more than 3-5 seconds. If there is going to be talk involved, don’t use more than 8-12 words, if there needs to be talk involved. Writing a note, giving a smile, or even just nodding to the student are other examples of praise. Remember, only deliver verbal praise for behavior that is deserved. Students know when they deserve the praise you are giving them. Do not interrupt the behavior or make a big deal of it. Once you make a big deal of something and it brings undue attention to the student, it becomes a negative interaction.

At times, students will give an inappropriate response to your acknowledgment of appropriate behavior, just ignore it. If a teacher says to a student, “*I appreciate how quietly you are writing your short story.*” And the student turns to the teacher and says, “*I hate writing, it’s so boring.*” The teacher can respond, “*You are working so quietly, thank you.*” And walk off. The teacher shouldn’t try to convince the student that they are learning an important skill and writing will benefit him for the rest of his life. Just walk away.

Often teachers think they are pointing out the positive things students do in the classroom when they say things like, “*Nice job on starting the assignment, but you have got a few answers wrong.*” Statements like this are not considered praise. In order to praise a student, the teacher needs to just end the statement before the however clause. For example, “*Nice job on starting the assignment.*”

Teachers should begin *now* to practice praising people. Remember, all people respond better to positive than to negative consequences. A person is increasing the likelihood that appropriate behavior will happen again by praising a spouse, child, peer, or student.

Quick Tip

When erasing a board use vertical strokes; your hips will show less movement. Horizontal strokes make hips shake, which students may find humorous and thus distracting.

Quote of the Month

“You know more than you think you know, just as you know less than you want to know.”

– Oscar Wilde

Name Poetry

Substitute teachers will always be needed, even on the first day of school. Because a substitute could be stepping into a classroom that early in the school year, it will be important to make sure the students feel welcome in their new class. There are several activities a teacher can use to help a student feel important and welcome; one of these activities is a name poem.

A name poem is a fairly simple activity, each student takes each letter of his/her first

name and uses it to tell something about them. For example, if a student's name were Alex, he would write *A – All of my siblings are boys. L – I have a dog named Laredo, etc.*

Name poems are a fun, and an easy way to get to know each student. These poems can be shared with the entire class, in small groups, as partners, or just gathered for the permanent teacher to review so s/he can get to know the students as well.

Remember, there are several ways to alter this one idea so that it can fit many different classes. If teaching in older grades, try making it harder by requiring that the poem should rhyme or the students could use the letters from their first and last names. Teachers can have fun adapting this activity to fit their needs.

Things you need to know!

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