

Praising Effort

Praising effort rather than ability is a good way to motivate students of all ages. This post is for any teacher in any class, or any Education student who has to do well in a practicum.

How do you praise *effort* in your classroom, rather than talent?

Many students believe that being good at a subject means they're smart; conversely, they think that if they're not good at academic subjects they're not smart, and can never do well.

Of course this is not true. In my own experience at the Sr. High level, I've known more than one student who was incredibly smart, but for one reason or another could not do math.

Students who are afraid of answering questions or of getting involved in the lesson for fear of 'looking stupid' need to learn that effort, engagement, perseverance and improvement are what the teacher wants.

So how can you help your students to learn this?

You need to use 'Process Praise' ... praise for students who work hard, take risks, are engaged, and who show improvement as a result.

Here are some typical examples of 'process praise' taken from various levels in a K-12 school:

- *"Janice, you really studied for your Social Studies test, and your improvement shows it. You really worked hard. Good job!"*
- *"Peter, I like how you tried several different ways to solve that math problem. Good work!"*
- *"Jenny, that was a long assignment, but I like how you stuck with it and didn't give up!"*
- *"Laurie, you chose a really challenging project for your science assignment. I'm pleased that you're prepared to do the research, and I'm happy to see that you've made a good start. You'll learn a lot of interesting things."*
- *"Good work, Kelly. You really worked hard on that problem!"*

- “Thank you for trying so hard on that assignment, Melissa. You stayed in your desk and concentrated on the work.”
- “I like the effort you put in on this, Kenny. Let’s work together to figure out what you still don’t understand.”
- “You did a great job on the homework, Sam. I know you found it easy. Let’s try something more challenging that you can learn from.”

Notice that the praise is for the effort that was put in by the student, not the result. Even students who find the work hard, or don’t do well, can still be encouraged to continue to do their best. That’s all the teacher wants.