**Effective Ways to Acknowledge and Praise Students**

* **Focus on providing feedback, rather than controlling student behavior (note: control is fine, however, when compliance IS lacking)**
  + Emphasize the informative rather than controlling function of praise and rewards
  + Do *not* say:
    - “I will give you a sticker if you finish your work.”
    - “If you behave, you will get a \_\_\_\_.”
    - “You get a token because I caught you being good.”
  + Instead, say:
    - “I’m going to call your parents and let them know how much your behavior has improved. You completed all assignments this week, and without arguing.”
    - “Wow, because 100% of you turned in homework al week, there’s no homework tonight!”
* **Avoid teaching students that the most important reason to act responsibly is to earn rewards or to be praised (or to avoid punishment). Link the behaviors to others underlying thoughts, emotions, and dispositions that support prosocial behavior.**
  + Try to avoid encouraging the lowest developmental level of social and moral reasoning by praising it (see examples above of what *no*t to say).
  + Instead, try to reinforce thoughts, emotions, and dispositions that underlie prosocial behavior. Such as feelings of pride, empathy, autonomy, responsibility, caring, kindness, trustworthiness, etc.
  + For example, avoid saying: “You get a ticket for not teasing or hitting Jackie, especially after she called you a name.” Instead, say: “I noticed that you’re able to control your anger, and that you care about not hurting others. You should feel good about yourself. Thanks for being a kind person.”
  + Other good examples:
    - “Great! You should feel really proud of yourself for working so hard.”
    - “Nice job thinking about others. The class really appreciates what you did.”
    - “I’m sure you would want others to do the same for you.”
    - “I’m giving you a reward, but I know that you would help Carrie even if you didn’t receive a reward because you care about others.”
    - “I’m giving the class 15 minutes of free time because you demonstrated responsibility yesterday by being so well behaved when a substitute was here.”
* **Highlight the student’s specific achievement or the skills and effort demonstrated toward the achievement.**
  + Instead of saying “Your sentences look great.”
  + It would be better to be more specific, and to include praise for effort: “Wow, you worked really hard and improved your grade by 20 points! I loved how you didn’t forget to capitalize the first letter of each sentence and how you used commas.”
  + “Because you have gone all week without saying anything unkind towards others, I’m going to give your mother a call and tell her how you’re thinking about not hurting the feelings of others.”
* **Highlight the future value or usefulness of the behavior (as well as related thoughts and emotions)**
  + “That’s terrific that you were able to control your anger when teased by Jerome. That’s an important skill that will help you keep friends (and avoid being sent to the office).”
  + “Great! You must have stopped and thought about how your behavior might affect others.”
* **In general, try to provide praise or acknowledgment shortly after the desired behavior (or effort toward the behavior) has occurred.**
  + Although important at all ages, this is especially important with younger children, for whom more immediate and frequent praise is developmentally appropriate.
* **Recognize and be sensitive to developmental, cultural, and individual differences.**
  + Many students, especially adolescents, dislike public praise and acknowledgements, and prefer that they be given privately.
  + Announcing in class that “Marcus gets a bonus for completing his homework” could be more punishing than reinforcing for a socially conscious adolescent.
  + Recognize that public praise and rewards are discouraged in many Asian cultures, as well as in many non-Asian families where being modest and humble are highly valued.
* **Encourage students to self-evaluate and self-reinforce their prosocial behavior and to take pride in their own behavior.**
  + For example, you might say “If I were right now, I would be thinking ‘Great job, Marcus, you should feel proud of yourself!’”
* **Encourage students to praise others!**
  + In lower elementary grades, encourage “tootling” instead of tattling.
  + In all grades, praising students for praising others.
* **Always be sincere and credible!** 
  + Faint praise can be damning.
  + Occasional praise from someone who is highly respected is always much more effective than frequent praise from some not respected.
* **Use variety and novelty!** 
  + Mix it up! There are many different ways to say “good job.”
  + Often, a written note is much more powerful than a verbal comment.