

## Why Do Words Matter?

Your language in the classroom is a powerful teaching tool! Your words, as well as your tone — both spoken and written — matter.

### Use Your Words to Reinforce Positive Attitudes About Learning and Behavior

**Part I:** In the classroom, reinforcing language is the language you use to acknowledge and promote the positive attributes, behaviors, and efforts you see in your students. Look at the chart below for possible strategies, examples and explanations as to why words matter.

Strategy	Examples	Why Does This Matter?
<i>Highlight What Students Can Do and Emphasize the "WHY"</i>	"I noticed that you were able to _____. This is important because . . ."  "I see that you used a lot of descriptive words in your writing. This shows that . . ."  "When you did _____, it was helpful because . . ."	This places a focus on student strengths and assets rather than deficits. When you give feedback on what students can do, it is important to focus on the effectiveness of an action, rather than your personal approval.
<i>Reinforce Growth Mindset</i>	"I'm not going to give up on you because I believe in you."  "Mistakes are part of the learning process!"  "What was something that felt tricky at first but got easier later on?"	People's beliefs about their own capabilities can greatly affect their learning outcomes. Students need to know that their brains are wired to grow and learn. If a person can change the way they think about themselves, they can change the way they learn.
<i>Encourage Positive Framing or Reframing</i>	Instead of saying: "I can't . . ." <b>Try</b> "I can't . . . yet." <b>OR</b> "What can I do differently?"  Instead of asking: "What did you do?" (this can signal blame) <b>Try</b> "What happened?"	Whether you are responding to a child's negative self-talk or being more aware of your own responses to students, positive framing helps to challenge negative attitudes held toward oneself or beliefs about what others may think.

**Part II:** Think of a student you currently teach or interact with. Use the empathy MAP below, as well as your knowledge of the student, to reflect on their behaviors, attitudes toward self and learning, and overall hopes or fears. Then, complete the reflection questions below with this student in mind.

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

The diagram is a large rectangle divided into four quadrants by two diagonal lines that intersect at a central circle. The quadrants are labeled: 'Says?' (top), 'Does?' (right), 'Thinks?' (bottom), and 'Feels?' (left). The central circle is a simple line drawing of a face with a single eye on the right side and a curved line for a smile. Below the main rectangle, there are two separate boxes. The left box is labeled 'Pain' and contains the text '(What are their fears, frustrations and anxieties?)'. The right box is labeled 'Gain' and contains the text '(What are their wants, needs, hopes and dreams?)'.

**Reflect:**

1. How does your language currently reinforce belief in this student's abilities?
2. What are some next steps you would like to take to ensure that your words acknowledge and promote the positive behaviors, efforts, and abilities of this student?