



Word Power!

How the words we use affect our students' behavior and learning

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What's the Message? Teacher Language as a Teaching Tool



- Language itself is far more than the words!
- According to Vygotsky, language shapes experiences, feelings, and thoughts.
- Language influences the character of our relationships with others.
- Language helps form our sense of who we are.
- Language supports metacognition. Words help us understand how we work, think, and play.

From *The Power of Our Words* by Dr. Paula Denton, c. 2014

Teacher Language

- **Teacher language is based on a deep & steadfast belief in the goodness of children and their inherent desire to learn.**
- **Teacher Language refers to the use of words, phrases, pace, and tone of voice:**
 - To engage students in interactive learning,
 - To enable students to participate actively in a learning community, and
 - To enable students to develop positive behaviors.

From *The Power of Our Words* by Dr. Paula Denton, c. 2014

Teacher Language as a Teaching Tool

- Builds trust with students
- Supports students' relationships & interactions with one another
 - Facilitates respect for one another
 - Promotes value of fellow learners
 - Helps students learn from each other.



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Guidelines for Teacher Language

1. Be direct & genuine.
2. Convey faith in children's abilities and intentions.
3. Focus on action.
4. Keep it brief.
5. Know when to be silent.

Guideline 1: Be direct & genuine.

- Give directions clearly and directly.
- Use statements rather than questions.
- Use an even, matter-of-fact tone of voice.
- Follow through on our words.
- Check body language- make sure it matches with verbal language.



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Guideline 2: Convey faith in children's abilities and intentions.

- Take time to notice the positives.
- Avoid baby talk, including the “royal we”.
- Avoid language patterns that treat boys and girls differently.



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Guideline 3: Focus on action.

- Connect abstract terms with concrete behaviors.
- Help children translate abstract terms into concrete actions—How does it look? Sound?
- Describe behavior—not character or attitude.
- Use straightforward, matter-of-fact and non-judgmental language.



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Guideline 4: Keep it brief.

- Avoid long explanations.
- Leave out the warnings. (No hidden threats.)



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Guideline 5: Know when to be silent.

- Use silence with skill.
- Provide wait time.
- Model pausing before responding.
- Use a signal “ready for responses.”
- Slow down speaking pace.
- Help children remember directions themselves.



Open-Ended Questions to Stretch Academic & Social Learning

- Supports the natural way children learn (Dewey & Piaget)
- Promotes children's engagement
- Encourages self-awareness
- Nurtures a sense of community

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When to Use Open-Ended Questions

1. To increase children's awareness of what they know about a topic or process
2. To generate interest in a topic or activity
3. To encourage children to make individual and personal connections to content they are learning
4. To let children hear others' ideas and explore different perspectives

When to Use Open-Ended Questions

5. To help identify any problems that may come up or clarify what the problem is when a child struggles
6. To generate possible solutions to a problem
7. To help plan the next steps in a process or project
8. To help children evaluate their plan or process

More Opportunities to Use Open-Ended Questions...

- To clarify exactly what you are looking for
- To articulate boundaries
- To use words that encourage cooperation, not competition

i.e. “How could you use these colored pencils to show what we’ve learned about different kinds of transportation?”

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Activity: Encouraging Cooperation, not Competition When Asking Questions

Instead of:

Who knows a good way to use the play dough?

Whose drawing do you think is best?

Who has a better idea?

Try:

Let's generate some ideas of different ways to ask these questions.

Activity: Encouraging Cooperation, not Competition When Asking Questions

Instead of:

Who knows a good way to use the play dough?

Whose drawing do you think is best?

Who has a better idea?

Try:

What are some different ways we might use the play dough?

What good ideas do you see in the different ways people did their drawings?

Who has a different idea?