Uncommon Impact

Precise Praise Technique Notes-Leader Version

Key Idea: Positive reinforcement is a critical tool, but only if it is used strategically.

- **Reinforce Actions, Not Traits:**
  Reinforce behaviors as specifically as possible and focus on actions that students can *choose* to do. A child can't decide to be "smart" but a child can decide to "work hard and persevere."

- **Differentiate Acknowledgement from Praise:**
  Acknowledge when expectations have been met ("Thank you for being ready on time"; "I see that we're ready on time.") Praise when expectations have been exceeded ("I love that some people going back and revising even though I didn't ask you to.") Praising when expectations have simply been met undercuts those expectations.

- **Modulate and Vary Your Delivery:**
  Generally, privacy is beneficial with critical feedback (as private as possible; as public as necessary). With positives, unpredictability of form can make the feedback memorable and provide "cover" for critical private interactions. Pay attention to volume and degree of privacy and vary your delivery.

- **Use Objective Driven Praise:**
  You can (and should) reinforce not only behavioral and social actions but academic ones as well. ("I see people carefully lining up the decimal place as they work.")

  Note: This implies that positive reinforcement is something you can strategically plan into your lessons and your culture more broadly.

- **Genuine Positives:**
  Students discount insincere praise and often read it as an indication that their work is inferior. Balance positive reinforcement with constructive criticism. Be honest and candid. Introduce variation of delivery (see above) to keep from sounding canned. Talk to students directly (a quiet, "Thanks for being on point, Damani.") as often as you talk 'about' them ("Damani is on point!").