

## NOTHING MOTIVATES LIKE SUCCESS

I would like to share something that is off the topic of TPR Storytelling but ON topic for teaching in general. One statement that has made me a better teacher (even before TPR Storytelling) is this: NOTHING MOTIVATES LIKE SUCCESS.

One reason I was drawn to TPR Storytelling was that it gave students a chance to demonstrate that they are successful every single day. When I first began TPR Storytelling, I was blown away at the eager speech and fluent language usage of my students. Their speaking and their comprehension and their writing were so dramatically better than anything that I had ever experienced that I praised the kids to the heavens every day. I couldn't believe how GOOD they were!

I had extremely eager students during those years. My students were so confident that they spoke French all of the time. After high school teachers and college teachers observed my classes and told me how wonderful my students were, I told them that they were as good as high school students and college students. My students were excited and proud of their French.

Now (after several years of TPR Storytelling) I expect so much that I am disappointed half of the time. Kids are EXPERTS at reading the minds of adults and they can sense that I am just ho-hum about their performance. To tell the truth, they probably speak, read, understand and write even better than the “early years” kids, but I just expect it. I know what they are capable of so I am no longer surprised. The effect is subtle. Even though my students are extremely good in French by anybody’s standards, they are not brimming over with pride and enthusiasm.

So this week when we went back to school after winter break, I tried to focus on their incredible progress. Boy, do they respond to compliments. What a natural human trait that is; how could I have forgotten? A student in 8th period came up to me right in the middle of class and said, "You are a really cute teacher!" I have no idea what that meant exactly (I am 54 years old, so NOT CUTE to a 13-yr old girl) but I do know it was a compliment.

But I digress. ;-)

Be aware that in order to be effective, praise must be honest, specific and sincere. Saying, “You guys are so good.” is not praise. It is not specific so it sounds hollow. The way to get a product from your praise is to make it specific. “I have visited high school French II classes where nobody could retell a story like you just did.” This is an example of specific praise. When kids hear that kind of praise, they know exactly what they are good at and they feel pride.

OK, so I want kids to pay attention. My 2nd period 7<sup>th</sup> grade kids are slow and dull. I went around the room asking each kid a different question (name, age, date, weather, days, months, numbers, rote stuff like that) At the end, I complimented them. It went

something like this:

"You guys are amazing. I know full well that when I call on one kid the rest of you can easily just daydream or write notes or fiddle with a pencil. Do you know what top-notch students do during class? They mentally answer every single question. While another kid is answering, the top-notch kid is sending the answer by ESP! At the end of class, the top-notch kid is exhausted because it feels like I taught only **him** and made **him** carry the burden of the whole class. The top-notch kid walks out of class thinking 'I wish that woman would give me a break!' when in actuality I may never have called on him all period. When you guys came in last fall from elementary school, you did not have the maturity for that kind of concentration for a full class period. Most of you did it today. I want you to know that even high school kids find it difficult to control themselves that perfectly. You guys are gonna be the best students in the world if you keep this up. I am so proud of you."

During the second semester I explained how to pay attention, what body posture produces the best learning, how to listen with 50%, 75% and 100% of their attention, how to be a good teacher for their partners, why I loved it when they showed enthusiasm, what they did that helped me be a more effective teacher. Each of these lessons was delivered with sincere, honest, SPECIFIC compliments to one, two, or a group of the students in that class.

The discipline in that class improved. Their behavior improved. Their belief in themselves was something to watch for the rest of that school year. I retired in May of that year and the second period kids were as good as the other periods by the end of the year. I know for sure that my encouragement made the difference.

Most students don't even know what they should do with their minds. They don't know what "pay attention" means. They don't understand the significance of posture in learning. It is my experience that they appreciate learning how to learn, learning how to pay attention, learning WHAT to listen for, learning about meta-cognitive skills. They can't just guess or figure out why "paying attention" is important. Neither can they guess or figure out HOW to do this thing called "paying attention." We have to tell them how to do it.

And if we tell them with a compliment, well, nothing **motivates like success!**

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