**Scenario One - A student completes a job while you are with them**

Instead of saying:

"Good job" "Good girl" “Clever boy” "Perfect" "That's great"

Teacher says:

Nothing (child is already likely to be proud), smile if the child smiles at you.

Alternatively teacher uses descriptive praise:

“You look really proud of yourself”

“Wow, that’s the first time you’ve completed the trinomial cube by yourself”

Comments such as "Good job" "Good girl" “Clever boy” "Perfect" "That's great" seem harmless but they can have a detrimental effect to a child's self-esteem and sense of empowerment.  Especially when said with a big smile. Most people in Western society are not aware of this and they are very commonly used. These are statements that tell students how to feel and do not facilitate self-motivation. Instead saying “you look really proud of yourself” if they do, “Wow, that’s the first time you’ve completed the trinomial cube by yourself” are specific messages and behaviour orientated.  They are statements that describe what can be seen.

The earlier statements unfortunately help the student identify with the mistaken need to be clever as an entire person all the time. They may believe that they will make you happy if they are clever all the time which is of course impossible. They may feel like they are falling short if they make a mistake in their behaviour as they cannot fulfil this expectation for you.

Descriptive praise takes time to learn.  Simply saying nothing is another technique one may employ.  Smile and make eye contact if they make eye contact.   They’ll be proud of themselves already. It's got very little to do with us.

*The child, who up to that moment has been very difficult, finally concentrates on a piece of work... Praise, help, or even a look, may be enough to interrupt him, or destroy the activity - Dr Montessori.*

**Scenario Two - A student hesitates saying goodbye to their parent/carer**

Instead of trying to build a relationship with comments about the student’s look:

“Jo, I like the flowers on your shorts”

Teacher finds: parallels between the student and themselves to draw the student close for a moment

“Jo, I’ve noticed your backpack. I remember Kermit from when I was a child”

“Jo, I remember my now big daughter having that same toy. I have a photo of her. I think she was about your age”

Or teacher offers the students a choice between two things they are happy with.

“Would you like to take your fruit out of your bag first or put your drink bottle in the box?”

One of the simplest and quickest way to empowera student is to occasionally upon greeting them or when they hesitate at the door notice something about the student and find a sincere parallel between them and their life and you and your life. "Ooh Jo you're wearing my favourite colour today", Ooh Louise what a pretty hair bow.  That reminds me of the bows I used to wear when I was 6.  Thankyou." "Piper, I saw you riding your scooter this morning.  The smile on your face reminded me of how I felt riding my bike at your age."

The focus is to draw them close to you for a moment so they are filled up with connection (Rose, Solter) and only then do I believe can they be truly independent of you. The trick I employ in multiple scenarios presented in this article (including this one) is connection with the student before requesting any action.

Here is a simple technique and you are probably using some of this process already.  Members of our society often comment on children's clothing or something about their person. "Ooh I like the flowers on your shorts". I believe that without the second part, which draws similarities between the adult and the child, it just shows children what they wear is important and to be strongly focused on. I have never commented on my daughters clothes past how warm, comfortable and easy to put on they are.  She shows very little interest in what she wears past these. The value of 'it doesn't matter what you look like' is important in our family. This value is not for everyone but I believe it is important that my values match my actions. I like to be clear. The most important values that I compare everything back to when teaching are. Honesty, awareness and responsibility. Nearly every aspect of my teaching and parenting I see relate to these. What are your top three values?

A student who hesitates at the classroom door may be reassured by being given choices such as, "would you like to put your inside shoes on first or get out your fruit/ snack?" "Would you like to start by shaking hands first or trying eye contact with me?" Laugh when you playfully do the opposite.  Ooops. Smile

*Everyone knows that a lively teacher attracts more than a dull one, and we can all be lively if we try - Dr Montessori*

**Scenario Three - A student is entering the classroom**

Instead of saying:

“Are you ready to come in now?” – Unless you’re willing for them to say no.

Teacher makes eye contact, smiles, and crouches down (if your body will allow it) and hand gestures and says:

“Let’s go in now” or

Teacher offers playful choice:

“Would you like to shake hands or do a hi-five as we go in?”

Teachers says:

“I love having you in my class” “I can’t wait to see what you do today”

To start with a consistent greeting at the classroom door of "let's go in now" or if you are a playful person occasionally say "would you like to shake hands or do a hi-five as we go in" helps the young student feel at ease (Rose, Solter).  If they are well attached and respect you they are likely to choose the option you prefer.

Asking the student if they are "ready to come in now?" disempowers them if your expectation is for them to say yes.  If the question is sincere and they can take as long as they want to come into the classroom with no encouragement by adults then using this question is fine.  Students are often trained to do what adults want even when they are asked open questions to which they are not allowed to choose. If the student has never be allowed to make a choice in the face of such a question they will respond in the way you want.  I see the cost of this being great as it will lead them to using the same responses on others, limiting others right for choice later in life and limit the student emotionally in the meantime.  It disempowers them.

There is one very simply strategy to empower students in your class and help them absorb the value of kindness. It is to tell them how wonderful they are as often as you can. Ideally within the first ten minutes of class. If you do this regularly to every student, students will start saying to each other and I can almost guarantee there will be exorbitant amounts of kindness in your class. You could say something like “I love having you in my class”, “I noticed you helping Darcy with her bag, thank you for making my job easier”, “I can’t wait to see what you do today”. “I wish I had enough time to be with you the whole day”. Whatever you will be able say sincerely about each student. The smallest sincere compliment by a teacher can be remembered for a lifetime.

**Scenario Four - A student looks like they need to use the toilet**

Instead of saying:

“Do you want to use the toilet?”

“Don’t forget to use the toilet?”

Teacher says what is about to change for the student, offers a solution for now or later:

“Let’s go to the toilet” – If the child is small

“You are going outside to play for an hour. If you do not use the toilet now, remember Mary’s room has a toilet for you to use.” – If the child is over 3.

I try to never ask questions that may get a no if I don't want one. Say to smaller students “let's go to the toilet?" rather than "do you want to go to the toilet?" if you see they really need to go.  Another side thought is not to ask a child if they need to go as a preventative measure as I think it can stop them from trusting their bodies and their ability to hold in the future.  Especially girls. I would rather say "you are going outside to play for an hour and if you do not need to go now remember Mary’s room has a toilet."  This still opens the door for them to go now and also gives them full information for if they need to go later."

Not always practical but this technique can be used in many circumstances, for example, sunscreen application, jumpers, hats, umbrellas, shoes, raincoats. I tend to say "Let's put this jumper in this basket in case you decide you are feeling cold later". Rather than "let's put on your jumper as I think you’re cold" on every occasion.  Putting on hats once a child is already in the sun so they can see the reason for it has worked for me.  Sincere absorption of values rather than habit or obeying is my focus.

**Scenario Five - A student tries to combine two jobs or is not the following classroom routine**

Instead of saying:

“Stop that please”

“We don’t rip books in this class”

Teacher says the rule, says the impact of breaking the rule and offers choice:

“Combining jobs does not match with our classroom values. It makes it harder for me to pack up at the end of the day. You can either…..” Then offer two choices you’re happy with.

Another example of where choice can be used is when a child tries to combine jobsor is not following other classroom rules. If any behaviour does not match with the classroom rules and routine it is important to say so if you can.   Tell them "combining jobs (materials) does not match with our classroom rules" "it makes it harder for others to do these jobs later and makes it harder for me to pack up at the end of the day".  Saying whatever their impact will be on you and others is very important for the students’ understanding and empathy development.  Then offer them two choices that you are happy with (Rose, Solter).  Tell them "these jobs will both require similar skills as what you were doing. Which one would you like to choose?"

If they are older they can hold more options in their heads (Solter)..."Do you want to do one of them or choose something else". Or another option "you can choose this job or this job but you cannot combine both". It's obviously all in the choice of language.  In my eyes humans aren't often thinking about the true reasoning why they want people to act differently, they just ask them to stop. I believe children deserve a full explanation every time we can manage it.

Telling the child when they are allowed to do the behaviour they are doing can also be effective if they are not following classroom rules.  "I will take you outside to run around at 11.30 (Indicate on a clock). For 15 more minutes it is circle time and here we sit still and practice our listening. Then we'll put on our hats, line up outside and walk to the playground. I look forward to watching you run once we get there. Yay!" Smile.

**Scenario Six - A student is aimlessly wandering around the class disrupting others**

Instead of saying:

“Make your choices”

Teacher says what they notice, offers choice, and says their needs:

“Jo, I notice you wandering around. Would you like to make a choice or stand quietly with me until you are ready? I’ll need to help someone else while you stay with me” Eye contact, smile.

Saying to a Montessori student "make your choices" may not be interpreted as a true choice.  Saying rather "Jo, I notice you wandering around would you like to make a choice from all our jobs or stand quietly with me until you are ready?" “I’ll need to help someone else while you stay with me.” Jo may need a dose of connection from an adult, which she can get while you still get your needs met of taking care of other students.

If a child does not feel like being with you or by themselves doing a job in my eyes they are really asking for you to notice them. They almost desperately need you and this is there way of telling you. So when a child is quite disruptive and won’t move physically when I ask them to I notice when they make a move in the right direction.  Even if it is only a tiny step from them. And make a big deal out of the tiny step. “Ooh I notice you heading towards the reading corner. Big smile. Pause. Connection. I saw you reading there the other day. What book were you reading? Let me come with you and we can find it now. Or you can choose another.”

After this using your body language instead of your words to lead them to where they want to go. Take their hand. The touch will fill them up. Say gently “let me show you what I mean”. Then offer for them to come back and see you after they finish that job or choose another job. The more times you invite them back to you the less they’ll need you.

You may be worried at this point that after implementing my ideas you will have a string of children needing you at once.  If you regularly communicate with children in this way they are more likely to listen to your needs in taking care of others and yourself.  "I hear that you feel you need me but I really need to help Max now. I'll be with you in four minutes". Telling them when you will be with them and keeping your promise builds trust.  It tends to be the children who are not well attached to you that will be longing for you and not listening. All the ideas in this article build attachment.

*If at this stage there is some child who persistently annoys the others, the most practical thing to do is interrupt him...to break the flow of disturbing activity. The interruption may take the form of any kind of exclamation, or in showing a special and affectionate interest in the troublesome child - Dr Montessori*

**Scenario Seven - Two students have an altercation**

Instead of saying:

“We are kind in this classroom”

“I’m going to separate you two if you’re not nice to each other”

Teacher apologises for not getting there sooner, states what they see from the eyes of each child, asks them how we are going to solve the problem, writes down each child’s solutions and asks them to choose one together.

Other students will look on this process with interest and absorb the method. Eventually children will initiate the method themselves. The teacher will no longer be needed. My daughter regularly says to me “how are we going to solve this problem?”

The way one communicates the rules and routine is more important than the rules and routine themselves.  We are asking children to care about the needs of others.  This is the reason for developing rules and routine.  Showing your students that you care about their needs adds to the likelihood that the students will follow the rules and routine for reasons that are sincere. Absorbing them for a lifetime not just to please you in the moment.  Our society has recently worked out that disciplining children through physical pain is an oxymoron.  Asking children to speak nicely to each other when we are not speaking nicely to them is also an oxymoron.  So much of our speech alienates others and we are not aware of it. This becomes especially evident to me when emotions are running high.

For example, to stop two children's altercation I have heard teacher's say "we are kind in this classroom" or families say "we are kind in our family". This type of statement is potentially very alienating for the child(ren). What they will likely hear is that "anyone who isn't kind in our class, and I wasn't kind just now, will be excluded from the class". Attachment and feeling safe is about closeness and especially about showing closeness when children are the least deserving of it. This is how attachment relationships flourish, true independence reached and problems are minimised in the future.

The first thing I do is apologise for not getting there sooner when I see two children having an altercation. They looks I get from this are priceless if they expect me to start blaming someone. This puts students instantly at ease with me and acknowledges that it’s my job to keep them safe with each other.  If they are crying I support them and empathise in this disappointment/sadness. I get down at their level slightly in between them. Once the sadness is over, I state what I see from the eyes of each child without judgement.  Then I ask the children to come up with a list of ideas of how we can solve this problem. Sometimes I even write down each person's side of what happened verbatim. Showing them I listen and I truly care about both parties.  This process may be construed as initially time consuming, however, I find it leads to life changing student empowerment and less student altercations. Other students will wait for you to go through this process with the altercating students if it is seen as productive. Once all the students know about the method of coming up with multiple way to solve a problem together, you will see they will initiate this this themselves. When my daughter and I disagree, she regularly asks me "how are we going to solve this problem?" She started this aged three.

This is also similar to people labelling children even if it is only in their heads.  Children tend to keep responding to life from this label. If one keeps giving children a chance to impress you with no expectation they will or won’t they will tend to surprise you. If a child feels like they only get your attention when they are being difficult (eg having an altercation with another child) they will continue to do this. Children do not care what type of attention they get as long as they get attention. It is how human children are wired.  They are designed to need people. When their cups are filled up with feelings of love and enough attention they will be ok by themselves.

**Scenario Eight - A student doesn't want to do any jobs**

Instead of saying:

“Let’s find you a job”

“Make your choices”

Teacher says what they hear, offer choices to be with them or without them:

“I hear you do not want to do any jobs yet. Would you like to sit by yourself, watch someone else while they work or sit quietly with me while I help another student?”

Another place choice could be used is if a child doesn't want to do a job.  Saying "I hear you do not want to do a job yet. Would you like to sit by yourself, watch someone or sit quietly with me while I help someone else?" "If you choose to sit with me I need you to do so quietly so I can work with the other student".   As mentioned two choices for three and under more than two choices for older students is acceptable (Solter). It may also be important to add extra information at this time "at 10.30 we'll need to pack up our morning jobs so if there is something you feel you want to do try to do it before then ok." smile.  This is better than at 10.30 saying "oh too late now you ran out of time." Sometimes a child's desire to not go with the flow of the classroom is them having negative feelings inside even though they are not obviously upset.

Giving them the choice of being close to an adult makes them feel safe and you can still get your needs met by having them with you while you help other students. Focusing on the true impact of what we do and say initially takes more thought, but it is likely to help students do as you ask subsequent times and make them sincerely independent of you.  This is instead of them being by themselves but being focused on waiting for you or being needy of your time if they are not feeling safe. The consequences of this aloneness may be internalised or expressed by the child. Either is not ideal. I find it is impossible to always get the words right but it's actually the intention of not disempowering or disconnecting from them that matters most.

**Scenario Nine - Being proactive to allow students to follow the class routine**

Instead of saying once outside:

“I need two straight lines”

“Line up nicely please”

“We’re not going until everyone is lined up nicely”

Teacher instead:

Goes through the steps (at least once a week and while still inside the class) of what needs to happen and says impact on them or the teacher if it doesn’t happen.

“Could someone tell me the steps to get out to the playground please? Why do you we do it this way?”

You can help them….“When you line up nicely it means we get out to the playground faster”

Or tell them the impact on you….“When you line up nicely it means I get to have my lunch faster. I don’t get a snack in class like you. I’m very hungry by lunchtime”

Once outside very importantly, notice the students that are doing the behaviour you want. And mention it and its impact.

“Wow, look at you Max lining up so straight holding the hand of your partner. Thank you Max for making my job of keeping you safe easier.”

Telling children the exact behaviour you want from them a little bit ahead of time and telling them often can be helpful.  Trying not to expect that they will remember the next time is important. For example, if you are wanting them to line up nicely outside, discuss this with them when they are on the mat in a group still inside, go through the steps to get out to the playground.  Ask the students to tell you the steps.  Asking them why we try to do it this way can help reinforce the ideas. This will lead to less correcting of behaviour once they are excitedly trying to line up outside.  Telling them "it will be faster to get to the playground if everyone follows the steps" can also lead to more compliance or telling them what your needs and feelings are “I feel disappointed when it takes us so long to get out to the playground. I'm hungry by 12 o'clock as I don't get a snack like you guys.  I have my breakfast at 6.30am”.  Warning students of potential hazards that may stop them doing as you like, like mummies (or other kids) mingling at the door is also desirable.  This tells students you understand their needs too as this may impact their desire to do as you want.  If anyone strays from the routine focusing on the children that are not straying can bring the others into line. "Wow look at you Max lining up so straight holding the hands of your partner.  Thank you for making my job of keeping you safe easier."  If the straying child respects you and is attached well they will follow suit. It’s so much nicer to spend the day saying positive rather than negative things. I find it very peaceful. Being playful at this time could also help students concentrate on the task at hand.  Pretend to cry that no one is holding your hand. Do it with a big smile on your face.  Or put your hat on your foot and ask them if this is the right place for it.  A quick laugh and some eye contact may be all the children need to switch on to feeling agreeable to your needs. (Rose, Solter)

*The teacher must...entice the children... The teacher, in this first period, before concentration has shown itself, must be like the flame, which heartens all by its warmth, enlivens and invites - Dr Montessori*

**Scenario 10 – A student is being too loud and distracting others**

Instead of:

Mentioning what you don’t want. Ignoring the behaviour. Removing yourself emotionally or physically from the student.

Teacher:

Stays close with the student, sees the behaviour as a call for emotional connection and invites this connection. With gentle eye contact, touches on the arm leading the student, smiling sincerely then once they are filled up, offering choices.

Attachment and respect can be a tricky balance. If the children are well attached and respect you to you yet you have a very strict temperament then you run the risk of making them feel shame if you correct their behaviour. Students feeling remorse for their mistakes is a better goal. It is easy to see on their faces when a child feels shame.  Most of society doesn't know how to rid children of feelings of powerlessness and they may hold this shame inside them for their lives.  Many adults in therapy mention not following their dreams or believing they were bad at something forever as the teacher inadvertently shamed them.  Being playful/kind yet firm is a way of avoiding shame.  Smiling, gentle eye contact, gentle touches on arms can help children feel connected when they are for example being loud or distracting others physically.

Discussing behaviour not people is important.  Not taking yourself away from them physically or removing your gentle eye contact if they are not doing as you say is especially important.  Removing yourself from a tricky child can also cause feelings of shame, as they feel as though they are not loveable enough to be with.  I believe strongly that when children are displaying their most difficult behaviour is when they need the most from us. Our best opportunity for helping them be agreeable next time is to catch them doing something good and telling them so.  The second best opportunity is to not take ourselves away from them (emotionally or physically) when they are not doing as we ask.

**Scenario 11 - A student is interrupting a group activity**

Instead of:

Trying multiple times half-heartedly to answer them and not being able to stop their questions.

Teacher says to themselves:

“In this moment they really need me and that’s ok”

Then make eye contact, smile, make eye contact, and go back to the book. The key is not expecting them to stop or understand your values (non-resistance).

If student continues to interrupt teacher says:

“We have 15 minutes before lunchtime. I wish I had time to answer all your questions before then and finish the book. But I don’t. I’ll make time for you after lunch you and I can spend time together answering them….”

Some teachers find constant interruptions from children, when reading a book or instructing the whole class in an activity, change the flow of the experience for others.  When people interrupt it is usually the same person or persons asking you to fill their cup up more than once in a session.  To minimise the number of interruptions the goal is to fully give your attention to the interrupting person the first time they do it and believe in yourself that you do not want them to stop and believe they are doing exactly as they need to. Say to yourself. “In this moment they really need me and that is ok”. The key is non-resistance. Make eye contact, repeat back exactly what they say or paraphrase, make eye contact, smile, make eye contact and go back to the book. They will feel seen by you, their needs fulfilled and they no longer need you to see them.

**Scenario 12 – A students is displaying tricky behaviour**

Teacher ask themselves:

Does the student need information to be able to follow the behaviours of our class?

Do they need connection?

Do they need choice?

Do they need closeness?

Do they have feelings? What feelings do they have?

I use the following checklist:

 i. How can I give them information to know why it is important to do it / not to do it? Then what is really happening for me? Do I need to tell them how it makes me feel?

ii. Are they connection seeking? How can I give them a bit of me to make them feel seen?

iii. Do they need to be given a choice between two things I am happy with? Do they need closeness with an adult? Do they have sad feelings even though they are not obviously upset?

Keep in mind the closer you draw the children to you the less they'll need you.

(This checklist was adapted from Marion Rose).

**Scenario 13 - Listening to the words inside your head and reacting to others words**

Teacher notices when they say the words ‘should’, ‘ought to’, ‘must’ in their heads about themselves or the students.

“Jill should sit still. I’ve asked her so many times. When will she learn?

“I should get around to looking at each child’s reader today.”

Teacher asks what her/his true needs/ values are in that moment.

“I have the need to focus on one student for 4 minutes.”

“I have the need to be thorough in my checklists for readers”

Communicate these needs to others once you’ve allowed them in yourself.

When someone says eg ‘should’ to you. Ask them to articulate what they really want?

I would love to see the words 'should', 'ought to' and 'must' eradicated from the English dictionary. I especially notice how often people say this to themselves inside their heads. These words tend to lead to feelings of guilt when it is simply a clash of values that one is experiencing.  It is easier to identify the need inside you "I have the need to focus on one child for four minutes"  "I have the need to make them feel better" rather than use these guilt producing words in relation to both children and inside you as the teacher.  For more information on this and other unintentionally harsh language refer to any writings on Nonviolent Communication.

If a child mispronounces a word, uses slang, swears or you overhear another child correct correcting language this can be triggering for a teacher.

Many believe children 'should' be able to pronounce words properly and use proper grammar and no slang.  When parents, teachers and other students (who have obviously been spoken to this way) correct the pronunciation of children this can also produce shame and guilt. Some syllables cannot be spoken properly until a child is over eight.

I have realised that children believe that when they say a word it is being said correctly.  No amount of correction will enable them to be ready to hear the differences.  All they hear is that they are being corrected. So simply saying the word back they have mispronounced in a sentence, with no tone of correction in it,  is sufficient to help the child one day be ready to say it correctly on their own.

Sometimes students are just practicing what they have heard from others.  It is all just words and their desire to understanding them. Darcy's slang and other potentially triggering language comes and goes (how are ya? and calling me Emma instead of Mum were the most recent examples - age three). If I let her say these things, without even mentioning them, and I use proper language around her the slang gradually disappears over days, weeks or months.  I talk about what is appropriate for public and private if someone is offended or I am worried they may be.  I let her whisper 'bad' things in my ears and we giggle. Darcy is allowed to say whatever she wants in my company at home. For me the key is again non-resistance.  If she senses a huge emotional shift in me when she swears she is possibly going to do it again the next time she is craving attention/connection from me and it will end up happening more not less or I shame her.  I find inappropriate actions in children will also occur more often if you give them power instead of non-resistance.

*Melbourne Montessori School - Values and Objectives – 1.2.5.1 – Our emotions are complex and powerful and it is important that we learn to feel them fully and without fear….***Scenario 14 - A student is sad or unsure**

Instead of:

Asking the student to be alone while they are still recovering

Teacher says:

“Once you hang your bag, and change your shoes you can either choose a job or come and stand with me while I greet the other children.” Eye contact. Smile.

This process will meet your needs at a teacher of many, their needs so they are not sad and alone and once they are emotionally settled they can help you meet the drop-off needs of others. All the while watching that drop-off is a normal part of the school routine and that others are ok.

I see that being close to an adult human and the feeling of choice are especially important if a child is unsure or sad (Rose, Solter).  I’ve noticed that the Montessori Method and the MMS Values and Objectives lets children be sad which I think is truly wonderful. However, I have also watched in several classrooms that after the child has been supported to come inside, for example, they are left alone with their feelings as there are other children who are in need of the teachers too.  This is not safe for students as they have not yet ‘learnt to prevent the negative emotions running their lives’. They cannot learn this skill alone. If they have emotions the emotions will likely come out in their behaviour. They will show this in a number of ways; either expressed - by not following classroom routines, being disruptive, not listening; or internalised - staring off into space, not concentrating, not making eye contact. They do not learn the skill of controlling their emotions by practicing it. Like with many parts of the Montessori Method students learn it when they are emotionally ready to learn it.

It is hard to balance the needs of many students. I would like to pose a slightly different scenario when a child is sad or unsure.  When you bring the child into the classroom and ask them to hang their bag, change their shoes etc ideally one would stay with them.  If this is not possible (which is likely) tell the child that after they do these things that they can either choose a job or find one of the teachers to sit with quietly while the teachers help someone else with their job.  This will facilitate an unsure child's need for closeness without changing your need to help the other children.

**Scenario 15 - A student looks like they’ve hurt themselves**

Instead of saying:

“You’ll be ok”, “It’s just a little bump”, “Don’t be silly now”, There’s nothing to be afraid of” “Are you ok?”

Teacher says:

Nothing. The student may be fine and you’ve projected your worry onto them.

If they are crying.

“It’s ok to cry. You hurt yourself” And then be quiet while the child feels sore and maybe tells you about it or cries more. Even if they initiate talking about it teacher focuses on listening not talking. “Hmmm I see” is enough for the student to feel heard.

If the child continues to cry past where you can no longer listen.

Tell them your needs, and that you’ll tell their parents

“I need you to stop crying now, as I have to get everyone ready for cooking, I’ll tell your parents you were sad at school” This is a true reason.

This is instead of telling them they are now ok (which many do) when they aren’t yet ok.

When children have emotions there seems to be a tendency in our society to tell them not to feel that way. "You'll be ok" "It’s just a little bump" "Don't be silly now" "There's nothing to be afraid of".  Or before they react we have already reacted for them. Saying "Are you ok?" as soon as they fall down we interrupt them and stop the child from feeling what they actually feel (Rose, Solter).  They may be fine and we have projected our worry onto them.  Or they may not be fine, they need to cry and get the hurt out, and we've told them that we’re ok so they need to be too. From all my research there is very little that actually needs to be done when a child feels any emotion. This is similar to the Montessori Method of sitting on your hands and letting them do it/ feel it.

If they are crying I feel it is important to let them get the hurt out if you can. They will be much more settled and agreeable if they are allowed to cry as much as they want to, telling them that eg “it’s ok to cry. Ooh you hurt yourself” and then being quiet (Rose, Solter). If the child continues to cry past a time that you feel comfortable with, telling them that you “need them to stop crying now, as I have to get everyone ready for cooking, and that you’ll tell their parents they were sad at School” gives the children concrete reasoning to why they need to stop crying.  Instead of telling them they are now ok when they are in fact hurt.

**Scenario 16 - A student tells you they feel scared or they hate something**

Teacher says:

“Ooh you say you are feeling scared” “Ooh I hear you say you hate sport”

This may be enough for the student to feel heard.

“Will you tell me about it?”

“Is there something I can do to help you not feel scared?”

“I have two suggestions. May I share them with you?”

If a child tells you they are scared, repeating back "Ooh you feel scared" while making eye contact may be all they need to make them feel heard. If a child is not satisfied with this they will ask for more by repeating it or telling you more. You could ask "is there something I can do to help you not feel scared"?  Or say "I have a two suggestions may I share them with you?" If they don't label the emotion themselves rather than saying "you seem scared" asking them "what are you feeling?" or "are you scared?" gives the child the choice to tell you how they are feeling.

Student says:

“I hate cooking” or “I don't want to do cooking”

I hear:

There is possibly something that happened at cooking that she didn't like. There is possibly something unknown about cooking that is making her nervous.

I say:

“Do you want to tell me about it?” If she starts to cry I let her cry and not encourage her to speak.

The child leads the emotional release and the conversation that will be easier to have and clearer for all after they cry. Don’t try to ask a child what is wrong while they are crying or encourage them to talk why they are crying.

I have often seen teachers put a sad child into the care of another child. This is fine if it is initiated by the children but I would still stay close at this time regardless. I believe when a child is sad they need an adult. Children’s relationships are often fickle and changeable. Asking them to emotionally support each other may lead them to become overly peer dependent. On a long-term basis if a child is getting their emotional support and values from another child they may stop listening to the teachers and parents. It is not possible for students to listen to conflicting values in attachment figures. For more information on this read Hold onto Your Kids, Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate.

**Scenario 17 - A student does not use polite language yet**

Instead of:

Asking children to parrot back thank you, please, sorry.

Teacher see lots of ways children say these things with their body instead of their words.

If the student initiates polite language themselves, tell the student their impact.

“I feel special when you say thank you to me” Eye contact. Smile. Other students will hear you say this and likely copy.

“Look at the smile you just put on his face. I believe you caused that smile when you shared with him.”

Asking children to parrot back ‘thankyou’ is not developing a care for other humans or sincerity.  It may be interpreted as punishment or being shamed for getting it wrong.  Instead if you focus on respecting the children in how they are ready to communicate to you and also realise there are lots of ways of saying thank you.  A big smile or being totally engrossed in whatever you have done for them are both ways to say thank you.  As the children reach the sensitive spot for polite behaviour, realising that others have needs too, they will often do what you want naturally.  In the meantime, finding children doing the behaviour you want and then tell them how it makes you feel is an alternative to parroting. “I feel special when you say thank you to me”  “Look at the smile you just put on his face.  I believe you caused that smile when you shared with him.” These can also be used on the occasions that children are not doing what you like also.  “Look at his face.  I think he looks sad now.  Do you think that may have been caused by you taking his job? What shall we do next?”

*Dr. Montessori gave a series of lectures about freedom of choice. She makes a powerful argument that the roots of tyranny are in adults forcing children to obey their commands.*

**Conclusion**

If you carefully and consciously communicate with intention with each student (with any or all of this list of 17 techniques) you will make your students feel important, listened to, safe, giving them a sense of belonging and helping them fit into the class routine.

The focus becomes subtly changing your language use, closely identifying and living your values, identifying your own feelings, talking less, listening more, showing true empathy and providing even more choices.  These things all empower students (and teachers) which leads to having a calmer classroom for all.  They also provide children with highly proficient skills, such as listening, empathy, motivation, empowerment and care for others and themselves.

The more you do this the more you'll find you spend your day speaking positively with less and less need for behaviour correction in your students.

Initially any changes you choose may feel time consuming, however, in the long run it will be the opposite.  After 21 days of practice behavioural changes are solidified.  I imagine you feeling enthused and highly rewarded as you see your positive impact.  Choosing one of your behaviours every week or every month and then test the change, is an easy starting point.

I have written this article for you in the hope that it will make your teaching practice even more fulfilling and so the students you’ve been entrusted with can have the opportunity to be as emotionally open as possible, leading them into feelings of empowerment, inspiration, trust and safety.  Thus making them amazing workers, friends, community members and family members for a lifetime.

References

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*If you enjoy or see the relevance of any parts of this article and would like to practice these skills in a fun, laughter filled group. Or if you have ideas you’d like to share with others. Or if you have specific scenarios you would like further strategies for please tell your principal and I’m happy to come and workshop with you individually or as a group.*

I am sorry if I misinterpreted or took out of context any of Dr Montessori’s words. I’m not yet Montessori trained past reading several of her books. I did the best job I could aligning her values with mine to aid you with any changes you choose to make.

I would like to pose that in Dr Montessori’s time parental attachment worked more effectively and differently to 2015. For many reasons, for example, extensive and prolonged child-care and busier lives, children are often not well attached to their parents now. (Neufeld and Mate) You may have noticed differences in student behaviour over the years. I believe this is the primary cause. This makes the job of teachers harder. As attachment doesn’t naturally flow from the parent to teacher. Hence I believe the need for the new attachment techniques presented here.

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In service,

Emma ROGERS DUMAS

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