



How to Catch Them Doing Something Right: Tips for Teachers

Catching students doing something right boosts their motivation and engagement by celebrating their experiences and successes, making them feel good, boosting their confidence and strengthening teacher-student relationships.

It's not just about observing and recognizing them. It takes work on your part to develop a classroom culture that will showcase your students' strengths — giving them every opportunity to get recognized.

Step 1: Create the “Right” Environment

- Tap your own strengths. Modeling the behavior you want to see is valuable, but you can also model the ways you learn and grow by drawing on your own strengths. Don't be afraid to talk to students about how you use your strengths to overcome challenges you face.
- Share stories of strengths. Describe your own experiences that illustrate the strengths in yourself, your family, your culture and your community that you tap when you need them. Encourage students to do the same.

Step 2: Plan Lessons to Encourage “Right” Behavior

- Encourage students to reflect on how they use their own strengths. When evaluating assignments, ask students how their strengths helped them with the assignment. At the end of the semester, ask students to describe how knowing and applying their strengths helped them learn.
- Give choices in assignments. Encourage them to design projects that explore and build on their personal, family and cultural values and interests in completing the work and giving them a voice in their education.
- Have students with complementary strengths work together. Be transparent about your approach so students learn that different people have different strengths, and that it's important to recognize and make the best use of others' strengths.

Step 3: Recognize Thoughtfully

- Look beyond the obvious students. Catching them doing something right is most powerful for students who are often overlooked or who receive little positive feedback.
- Give feedback as soon as possible. It's more motivating when it's immediate.
- Be as specific as possible with feedback. Note what they did well and what you appreciated about it. If they are showing improvement from past behavior, be sure to recognize that growth as well.
- Be intentional about public vs. private feedback. Sometimes saying something publicly will embarrass a shy student. It can also be embarrassing if what the student did well is something other students have mastered. In these cases, private praise may be most effective and respectful.
- Be spontaneous, not predictable. Catching students doing something right can become a regular part of classroom practice, but don't schedule it for specific days or times — that can make it seem less authentic, meaningful and connected to the students' actions.