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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Removing Labels, Grades K-12*, by Dominique Smith, Douglas Fisher, and Nancy Frey. Technique 5 explains the what, why, and how of using affective statements.

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TECHNIQUE 5

Affective Statements

What: Affective statements are used to shift the language of adults when there is conflict in order to open up dialogue with a student. These are sometimes called “I” statements and are intended to label the feelings and emotions of the speaker, rather than to assign motivation and blame to the student. “You” statements often devolve into an accusatory tone and can shut down the interaction before it has even begun. Carl Rogers, who pioneered nondirective therapy, believed that power was often used to shut down conversations. Thomas Gordon, a student of Dr. Rogers, developed “I” messages to build empathetic listening and reflective thinking. Gordon (2003) incorporated these into a teacher effectiveness training program as a means for educators to interact constructively with students. Affective statements further move students forward by linking these “I” messages to needs and requests.

Why: Affective statements are a cornerstone of restorative practices, an alternative approach to classroom and school discipline that encourages students to form emotional bonds with adults and one another while minimizing negative interactions (Costello et al., 2009). These statements draw on affect theory, which seeks to link actions to the emotions that drive them.

Well-being and satisfaction result when emotions are positive or neutral, while anger, distress, or shame result from negative emotions (Tomkins, 1962). Affective statements are used to reduce negative emotions and restore positive and neutral emotions so that the student can reintegrate into the classroom flow. Affective statements provide a way for you to share with the student that you are frustrated not with them as a person but with the actions they have taken. This allows for the separation of the deed and the doer. Students will often respond with an apology or by saying, “I didn’t mean for you to feel that way.” In addition, this provides space for the student to engage in reflection and positive action, rather than expending their energy on being defensive.

How: We have too many examples of students who are approached with an accusatory tone of blame and anticipated punishment. The student’s immediate response is a wave of negative emotions and defensiveness that can trigger an escalation of the problematic behavior. For example, when a student is not engaged or is off task in class, a conventional response might be to tell the student to “pay attention.” But this does not allow the student to understand how their actions are affecting others or what the reason is for the expected behavior. The student knows only that they have been called out. Affective statements are a tool that teachers can use when minor conflict arises with a student. The original frame for Gordon’s (2003) “I” messages was mostly to formulate a statement that focused on how the teacher was perceiving the conflict:

1. *Give a short description of the problem behavior, without assigning blame.* (“I noticed you weren’t paying much attention to me when I was teaching the last problem.”)
2. *Share the feelings it caused you to experience as a result of the problem behavior.* (“I felt disappointed in myself because I wasn’t successful with you.”)
3. *Name the tangible effects the action had on you.* (“I’m concerned that I’ll have to teach it again when you get stuck trying to do it alone.”)

Affective statements build on these “I” messages by adding two more steps—a statement of need and a plan or request:

4. *Name what you value and need.* (“It’s important to me that we work together.”)
5. *State the plan or request.* (“Can you give me your attention for this next problem so that I can make sure you’re getting the information you need to be successful?”)

The addition of these last two steps shifts the student to a redirection and a path for success, while reducing the negative emotions that might otherwise interfere with getting the student back on track. This simple change can be a step toward building a relationship because you are now talking *with* the student rather than talking *at* them.

An initial challenge is properly labeling one’s own feelings in ways that are developmentally appropriate. Face it—as teachers, we have been receiving on-the-job training since we were 5 years old. We have absorbed the ways our own teachers responded when they had a dust-up with a student. These responses are deeply engrained and not easily changed just by reading about affective statements. We believe that one of the best ways to work through this shift in language is to practice and role-play. For example, the beginning of every professional development session could begin with a scenario for teachers to discuss. For instance:

- A student is not engaged in class. How do you redirect them using an affective statement?
- A student is horsing around with some classmates instead of coming to the reading table. How do you fix the situation using an affective statement?
- A student will not get off their smartphone. How do you use an affective statement so that they will put it away?

Figure 1.5 provides some example sentence starters and responses to these scenarios.

Figure 1.5 Affective Statements

Situation	Sentence Starters	Example Statements
<p>A student is not engaged in class. How do you redirect them using an affective statement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am so sorry that . . . • I am concerned that . . . • I am feeling frustrated about/by/to see/to hear . . . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am so sorry that this lesson is not capturing your attention right now. Is there anything that I should know? • I am concerned that you are going to miss some important information. How will I know that you are comfortable with the information? • I am feeling frustrated to see you check out. I tried to make a really interesting lesson. I worked on it last night.
<p>A student is horsing around with some classmates instead of coming to the reading table. How do you fix the situation using an affective statement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am having a hard time understanding . . . • I am so pleased by/to see/to hear . . . • I am uncomfortable when I see/hear . . . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am having a hard time understanding what happened. I was worried about you. • I am so pleased to see that you are ready to join our group. We missed you. I am also pleased by your understanding that you missed some time with us and that you apologized to the others in our group. • I am uncomfortable when I see you playing like that because I worry that you will get hurt. I know you like to play with friends, but I like it better when that is outside because it makes me less worried.
<p>A student will not get off their smartphone. How do you use an affective statement so that they will put it away?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am uneasy about . . . • I am concerned about . . . • I am so thankful that/for . . . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am uneasy about your time on the phone. I am worried that there is something wrong because that is not the norm for you. • I am concerned about your phone use. I see that it's increasing, and I worry that you won't remember all of the information from the class. How can I help? • I am so thankful that you have finished with your phone. I appreciate your response when I reminded you.