Modeling Language to Support Inventiveness

Use this tool when you hear children using
language that is not supportive of inventiveness.

Step 1

Pay attention to the ways children use language to frame their experiences.

Step 2

Consider whether this language is supportive of invention and inventiveness. When you hear children use language that is defeating, unproductive, or signaling a fixed mindset — which might indicate a lack of confidence in their sense of agency or their capacity for growth and change — encourage them to consider the same situation in a more productive way.

Step 3

Practice reframing the children's responses by modeling alternatives (see below). This typically begins by sharing what you noticed or heard, often about how the child is feeling (*"It sounds like ____ ," "I noticed that ____ "*), followed by some form of validation and/or a question. Encourage children to seek support from their peers, or to ask their peers what they are thinking or how they are feeling. Teachers best support this process when they are inquiry mode, expressing curiosity to children rather than judgement.

Examples

Child: *You're copying me!*

Teacher: *Wow. It sounds like your friend was really inspired by your idea! Did you know that inventors rely on inspiration from other people to come up with their ideas? How exciting that you were able to inspire someone else!*

Child: *This is too hard. I'll never figure it out. I quit.*

Teacher: *Sounds like you are feeling frustrated. Frustration is a big part of invention! Creating new ideas is hard work and it doesn't always work out. What's the problem you are having? After you take a break, whom might you ask for support?*

Child: *You are wrong. That's a bad idea.*

Teacher: *Hmm. I hear you have some strong opinions about that. Can you tell me more? Why don't we ask your friend some questions about what she was thinking so we can get a little more information. Maybe she is thinking something we haven't considered yet.*

Children benefit when teachers model language that supports the invention process.

The language we use both reflects and frames the world we experience; it has a powerful influence on our mindset for learning, and on the way we see ourselves as learners and community members. Adults who pay attention to the language children use can support cognitive shifts towards openness, imagination, possibility, hope, and resilience. Inventors use and create cognitive strategies to get perspective, disrupt patterns, find gaps, and continue learning. Through modeling and offering another perspective, teachers can help children frame their experiences with language conducive to inventiveness, creativity, and collaboration. When teachers demonstrate how to move past potential conflict by leaning into inquiry and modeling language guided by curiosity, they help children learn ways of thinking and communicating that can work for everyone.

Suggested Time Frame

These re-frames generally take no more than a minute or two.

When and How

Use this tool when you notice children saying things like, *"She copied me," "He stole my idea," "I can't ____,"or "I don't want to work on this anymore."*

Tips and Variations

- Post children's words in the classroom whenever they use language that inspires or sustains inventiveness, e.g., comments about staying engaged, hopeful, curious, and resilient. For example, when Ella was in third grade, she was part of a group dialogue in which she said, *"It's confusing, but conflict makes you stronger. It makes a stronger friendship."* Ella's quote was printed on large banner paper and hung in her classrooms over the next two years. It became an idea that all of her classmates, teachers, and Ella herself, reflected on regularly.
- Rather than intervening on an individual level, bring a problem to the whole class to discuss. This practice generates interest in—and normalizes—the process of reframing, which contributes to building a shared culture of collaboration and inventiveness.
- Teach children what it means to have a fixed versus a growth mindset. (In brief, a fixed mindset refers to the belief that intelligence is fixed or static, whereas a growth mindset refers to the belief that intelligence is something that can be developed [Dweck, 2006].) Share information that is age-appropriate with children about the research on these learning mindsets. Children love to learn about how their brains work!

For video examples and reflections on practices that inspire inventiveness, become an Opal School Online Sustaining Member at learning.opalschool.org.