



## FROM CHAOS TO CALM

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How do you bring the calm to the chaos and bring the calm to your classroom?

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### **The Power of Language**

The power of language and how you use it can prevent and de-escalate challenging situations. Understanding what you communicate and how you can manage your language to bring calm to the chaos is incredibly valuable. Everything from your body language, tone, word choice, and volume can prevent or bring chaos. Learning about yourself, your students, and the power of your language can help you to bring the “calm”.

### **Non-verbal Communication**

The concept of nonverbal communication and its importance in communication is widely accepted, with much of the earlier research looking at a ratio of just how much is communicated through non-verbal means. It was two research studies (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967 and Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967) combined that resulted in the 55/38/7 formula, nonverbal, tone, and language. However, that ratio applied when the message being communicated by nonverbal, and tone was incongruent with words. Why is this important for educators? As educators we make thousands of decisions a day. According to data from [busyteacher.org](http://busyteacher.org), teachers make an average of at least 1,500 educational decisions each school day. This means that in a six-hour day, teachers make four educational decisions every minute. Educators are “on” or “communicating” much of the school day. “How” we do that - our posture, facial expressions, tone, volume, cadence, and words - determine “what” we communicate, or the message we send to our students. Being aware of our nonverbal communication, keeping it consistent and congruent with our words is no small task, but one that supports students’ safety and security in our classroom and learning community.

### **Positive Ratio 5:1**



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Another ratio that we apply, coming from outside of the education field originally, is that of the 5:1 positive ratio. This theory comes from a [research study](#) around happy marriage. Researchers asked married couples to solve a conflict in 15 minutes and from that could predict with 90% accuracy, which couples would later get a divorce. While the classroom is not a

marriage, it is a relationship that we foster and build for learning to happen. [Research](#) has since shown the validity of using the 5 positives to every 1 correction as a valid tool in the classroom. The purpose is to improve academic engagement and decrease disruption as a result of a more positive classroom climate. What does it look like? Take a look at these video examples from the San Bernardino City Unified School District:

[Here is a video example in a high school classroom.](#)

[Here is a video example in a middle school classroom.](#)

### **Behavior Specific Praise**

General positive praise is effective, but behavior specific praise is an even more powerful tool for classroom management and creating a supportive classroom community. Behavior specific praise is a non-intrusive way to identify and praise specific desired behavior from specific students. How do we implement behavior specific praise as educators? We use the student's name, we identify the specific behavior we want to see and reinforce, and we deliver immediate and positive feedback. What does it look like? Here are some examples at various levels:

*Ana, thank you for lining up with your friends and keeping hands and feet to yourself!*

*John, I really appreciate how you used the sentence stems to work with your group and discuss the problem.*

*Sam, I like how you are sharing the materials with your friends.*

Here are some great resources for learning how to implement behavior specific praise in your classroom.

<https://www.panoramaed.com/blog/guide-to-behavior-specific-praise-in-the-classroom>

[IRIS Center Video](#): Behavior-Specific Praise: Elementary School Example & Non-Example

[Research Minutes \(CPRE Research\) Video](#): Building Connections w/ Behavior Specific Praise



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### Providing Corrections

Teach Like a Champion 3.0 by Doug Lemov includes a framework for thinking about how we deliver corrections in the classroom. The book outlines 6 levels of intervention and encourages educators to start with the least invasive intervention first. Those six levels are; 1) Nonverbal interventions 2) Positive Group Correction, 3) Anonymous Individual Corrections 4) Private Individual Corrections (Balanced with Private Individual Precise Praise) 5) Lightning-Quick Public Correction, and finally 6) Consequence. The point that we need to take away as educators is that we should start at the least invasive and least disruptive interventions for our whole classroom. Start with a nonverbal prompt that does not take time away from instruction, nor does it give attention to any one student, such as putting your finger to your lips for the whole class or pointing to the book or to the directions on the board. Next is the intervention of whole group corrections, such as "Remember, we are all on page 1 in our books and reading silently." This intervention does not single any one student out, it restates the expectation and can be done without disrupting instruction. The next level if we still have off task behavior, might be to do a correction, but not with a student name. For example, "I see that most of you are on the right page and reading silently, I am waiting for a few more to join us." This intervention level lets students know that the expectations are not being met by everyone, but again does not single anyone out and gives students an opportunity to correct. This also provides a way to correct without getting into power struggles or distractions that take the teacher and students away from learning. Even if we need to go further, we have provided prompts and restated expectations without singling any one student out thus far. How you choose to deliver corrections to students in your classroom can say a lot to students about whether they belong.

### Empathic Listening

We know that adult responses that model calm and practice empathy are more likely to de-escalate or even prevent behavior. Practicing empathy allows you to build trust. What does empathy look like? It is us as teachers, getting to the students' eye level, in respectful proximity and with body language that communicates respect and provides felt safety. It is using language that is responsive, validating, and affirming of the students' feelings if not their behavior. Here is a [great resource](#) for modeling empathy and providing sentence stems to clarify, actively listen, and affirm or validate a student.



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Remember that you are the adult in the room and that you can choose to bring calm, or you can add to the chaos. It is our behavior and our actions that can make all the difference for students. Take the time to self-reflect, to get to know your students, and to build your skill set so that you can communicate the messages that create a supportive learning environment.