

LANGUAGE FOR LEARNING POLICY

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Signed by the Chair of the Local Advisory Board:	Matthew Arrowsmith-Brown

Building Curious Minds

“People’s beliefs, attitudes, values and dispositions are contagious. Students pick up on them unwittingly from everyone around them, especially those they trust or admire” - Guy Claxton and Graham Powell

‘Every word and action can send a message. It tells students how to think about themselves. It can be a fixed-mindset message that says: “You have permanent traits and I am judging them”. Or it can be a growth-mindset message that says: “You are a developing person and I am interested in your development.” It is remarkable how sensitive children are to these messages.’ - Carol Dweck

At Acl Academy staff will consciously aim to make small shifts to use of language to encourage a growth mindset in our learners and foster the learning habit of curiosity. Research from Carol Dweck shows that the language we use to talk about education and learning deeply affects how individuals see themselves as learners.

Modelling the learning process

As staff we emphasise in our language and behaviour that making mistakes is a natural and important part of the learning process: learning from mistakes is what learning is all about. It is important that as adults we talk about our learning mistakes and how we put them right. Evidence shows that the students of adults who preach and practise a growth mindset perform considerably better than those taught by adults who believe in fixed intelligence.

As teachers and staff we are not omniscient and infallible. Teachers are knowledgeable and passionate about their subject but will also share when they have made a mistake or do not know the answer to a question. Staff will model the learning process by researching, exploring or experimenting to help children learn that making mistakes and ‘not knowing’ is all part of the learning process. Teachers and staff will model the behaviour of being inquisitive and curious rather than deflecting or disguising their own lack of knowledge on a specific question or task.

Ability and Prior Attainment

The language of ability and labelling students as high or low ability, top set or bottom set, or gifted or talented goes against the concept of growth mindset as developed by Carol Dweck. At Acl Academy, we talk in terms of prior attainment and current performance rather than ability, in the belief that everyone can improve on their scores and has the potential to grow their mind and that human qualities (including intellectual skills) can be cultivated by effort and application. At Acl Academy we avoid language that labels certain students or groups. So, we talk about ‘students with SEND’ rather than ‘SEND students’ and ‘Students with EAL’ rather than ‘EAL students’. This subtle difference can have a huge impact.

Praise and Feedback

At Acle Academy we are aware that the right kind of praise can be motivational and affirming but the wrong kind can have negative effects. For example, effusive praise of a student who gives the correct answer to a question can suggest that the teacher is surprised that the student knew the answer. Praise can be diluted by overuse.

'The wrong kind of praise leads students down the path of entitlement, dependence and fragility. The right kind of praise can lead them down the path of hard work and greater hardiness. With the right kind of feedback students can be motivated to choose challenging tasks and confront their mistakes.' - Carol Dweck.

Feedback should avoid praising 'ability' and should focus on the learning process rather than the result. Research shows that if students are told, "That's a really good score. You are really smart at this," "You're really talented," or "You're a natural" they love it and it gives them a boost – but only for the moment. The minute they hit a snag, their confidence goes and their motivation sinks. Such praise reinforces a fixed mindset and leads to all the negative fragilities of fixed mindset learners.

Process praise rather than product praise

At Acle Academy we will aim to praise the learning process rather than the product of the learning. Praise will focus on the effort and specific learning skills used to help students understand that the learning process is more important than the finished product.

When students receive feedback acknowledging their effort and the resultant improved score (e.g. "You really studied for that test and look at how it is reflected in your improved grade" or "You tested yourself and prepared thoroughly and see how it paid off" or "I like the way you tried some new strategies until you finally understood that!"), it makes them far more willing to push themselves further and take on new learning challenges. As Doug Lemov states, "Great teachers praise students for their effort but never confuse effort with mastery."

Acle Academy staff will aim to use simple, positive language to acknowledge what the student has achieved and where appropriate show their expectation that they can go further to improve on their response: "I like what you have done. Can you take it further?" or "You're almost there but there's a bit more..." or "I like most of that."

Language to promote aspiration

Language of aspiration expectations are powerfully communicated and aspirations can be raised by the language that we use as adults. At Acle Academy staff talk about who the students are becoming and where they are heading without limiting language. In response to a high-quality discussion, a teacher might say, "You sounded like a university seminar group" or a science teacher might use phrases like, "This is what professional scientists do". Staff will take active steps to signpost aspiration wherever possible.

In addition, staff will encourage the use of subject specific tier three vocabulary to raise aspirations. Tier three vocabulary are words that are used within subject specialisms and are central to understanding concepts within various academic subjects.

Language used in the classroom

Subtle shifts in language	Impact
Replacing 'is' with 'could'	The phrase 'could be' promotes deeper thought and hypothesis generation, whilst the word 'is' suggests there is only one solution or that the thinking process has already been done for them. 'Could be' invites students to offer a range of solutions and to engage in problem solving for themselves. Students will question and solve problems more readily if knowledge is presented to them as being provisional
'Learning' rather than 'work'	The word work is often associated with a task that needs to be completed or a finished product. By replacing the word 'learning' rather than 'work' (where appropriate), we encourage students to think about the learning process as thinking, wondering, experimenting and discovering.
Embracing the power of 'yet'	The word 'yet' raises not just the possibility that a child will be able to eventually accomplish something but the expectation that they can and will.
'Improve' rather than 'correct'	Learning is all about improving so rather than asking students to correct mistakes we will encourage them to improve their learning or finished work. Using language such as 'improving your ability to' or 'getting better at' is a more positive and encouraging recognition of the improving and revising process.
Avoidance of using 'always' and 'never' in relation to student behaviour or approach to learning.	<p>'Always' and 'never' are limiting statements and do not reflect the capacity or expectation for a learner to grow.</p> <p>If a student says, "I can never understand this type of problem" or "Maths is always too hard for me", this displays a lack of optimism and grit. Likewise, if a teacher says, "You are always distracted" or "You never complete your homework", it implies a lack of faith in the student to grow as a learner.</p>

Questioning to promote deeper thinking

QUESTION	LEARNING EFFECT
How did you do that?	Allows students to slow down, notice and appraise strategies and steps.
How else could you have done that?	Encourages students to stop skipping quickly on to the 'right answer'.
Who did that in a different way?	Encourages learning from others. Encourages students to compare their learning.

Which are the tricky bits? What is tricky about them?	Encourages learners to become more reflective and thoughtful.
What could you do when you are stuck on that?	Encourages independence.
What would have made that easier for you?	Allows students to look for alternative ways of proceeding.
What else do you know that might help you?	Students develop the habit of thinking for themselves.
How could you help someone else do that?	Students become more interested in difficulty itself.
How could I have taught it better?	Encourages students to think about the process of learning.
Where else could you use that?	Encourages flexible thinking - knowing which skills to use when.
How could you make that harder for yourself?	Encourages students to consider how they might regulate the difficulty of tasks themselves.

Through our Language for Learning Policy we aim to not only engage our students in the process of learning by consuming knowledge but we will encourage them to be critics and makers of knowledge. We will encourage students to talk as if the subject matter we are discussing is provisional and contestable; therefore promoting 'possibility' thinking.