

Noticing Kids: Can You See Me? Can You Hear Me?

Building and maintaining a positive learning community is a complicated process, to say the least. One of the ways we can help kids feel connected to and cared about at school is to notice them. It seems so simple, but it's easy to forget. In years past, I have actually posted notes to remind myself to notice kids in general or even a specific student I was concerned about. I've taped up a note card that simply said "Notice" so I would remember that touching base with kids is important.

I made a point of noticing every student each morning. As I picked them up at the school entrance and we walked to our classroom, I would say something to all the kids, and more to some than others. This was a very quick acknowledgment. As we all know, some kids have a difficult time engaging in conversation, so I would make sure to notice certain students in a neutral way. I'd make a comment about their shirt or hat or the basketball game last night, something they didn't necessarily need to respond to. But at the very least, I let them know that I saw them and that I was glad they were at school.

From my experience, sometimes the toughest kids need us to notice them the most. And frequently, it's best to notice them in a neutral fashion. For example, instead of asking, "How's it going?" I'd simply say, "I like your shirt." It may seem like a small difference, but the first comment calls for a response, and for some of our toughest kids, who may have a different cultural perspective, responding to a teacher may not be in their playbook. Noticing them in a neutral manner says, "I see you and I know you're here, but I'm not necessarily expecting a response." In my experience, many kids find this type of comment less stressful to receive.

Teachers know their own students and will determine the best way to notice them. I believe that noticing kids every day at the beginning of class might just add a little pep to their step. We want them to know we see them and we hear them.

I contend that this step becomes more important in the context of secondary school, where the sheer number of kids can be overwhelming.

Here are some examples of things you can say:

- I like your shirt.
- Those are nice glasses.
- Wow, it seems like you really enjoy comics.
- What did you have for breakfast?
- Give me a high-five.
- Let me tell you a joke I heard.
- You look frustrated.
- Did you see the Seahawks game yesterday?
- How's your jump shot?
- You sure are into that book.
- I like your haircut.
- I saw your brother the other day.
- Have you seen the latest Harry Potter movie?
- What color are your shoes?

It's not so much what we notice, but simply the fact that we notice them. I find this approach also makes me feel more connected. I'm not quoting science and I've done no studies, but I can say that when I connect with kids, I feel more energetic and more able to cope with the stresses of a teacher's day. It's simply more fun. In the end, this step translates to a more productive and efficient classroom.