

goal, which is obviously not good; but getting students to aspire to a challenging goal is an important part of a teacher's repertoire. Researchers also tend to point out that performance-avoidance goals, such as not wanting to fail, can lead students to avoid challenge. However, in other cases, performance-avoidance goals can make students prepare diligently for tests, which tends to enhance learning. Finally, it is also worth noting that wanting to avoid getting worse at something, which some researchers confusingly term a mastery-avoidance goal, can lead to worse performance than the other three kinds of goals (see, for example, van Yperen, Elliot, & Anseel, 2009).

Cautions

Be Careful How You Praise

It has long been known that praise, in and of itself, has no simple relationship with student achievement. Indeed, a number of studies find that the most effective teachers praise less than others, but do so in a distinctive way; praise is specific to a task the student has recently completed, is seen as sincere and genuine by the student, and is related to something that is within the student's control (Brophy, 1981). However, most of the research into praise, like that into feedback, has not examined the relationship between the student and the teacher, so it is not particularly helpful.

As Carol Dweck points out, praising a student often sends an additional, negative message, as shown in Table 5.3 (Dweck, 2006).

Table 5.3: Praise Statements and Their Hidden Implications (after Dweck, 2006)

Praise statement	Hidden message
"You learned that so quickly! You're so smart!"	If I don't learn something quickly, I'm not smart.
"Look at that drawing. Martha, is he the next Picasso or what?"	I shouldn't try drawing anything hard or they'll see I'm no Picasso.
"You're so brilliant; you got an A without even studying!"	I'd better quit studying or they won't think I'm brilliant.

Over many studies with hundreds of children, Dweck and her colleagues find that praising children's intelligence harms both their motivation and their performance (Dweck, 2006). For example, four-year-olds given generic praise (e.g., "You are a good drawer") are more likely than those given specific praise (e.g., "You did a good job drawing") to abandon work with mistakes in it rather than attempt to fix the mistakes (Cimpian, Arce, Markman, & Dweck, 2007).