Are You REALLY Listening?

Listen up!

Teaching is all about communicating, and communicating includes listening as well as speaking and writing. You are probably aware that one of the most important things in any healthy relationship is communication. Not only should both parties be able to verbalize their thoughts, questions, and ideas; but they should both be willing to really work at LISTENING to each other. Effective teachers really work at listening, understanding and responding to their students.

Not everyone has good listening skill and this includes teachers. However, there are certain things that can be done to improve listening skills. The concepts below may help you to become a better listener and help you to model these skills to your students in the classroom. The key concept is that successful communication involves being an active listener.

How to be an active listener

- Be attentive.
  - Use your face, voice, and body to show that you are truly interested in what the other person is saying.
  - Listen with an accepting attitude.
- Ask some questions to demonstrate that you are sincerely interested.
- Use reflections and restatements frequently to try to communicate to the person what you think they are saying and test for understanding.
- Use encouraging words to show you are listening.
  - "Mmm, hmm"
  - "I see."
  - "Right."
  - "Uh, huh."
- Use nonverbal actions to show you are listening.
  - relaxed posture
  - head-nodding
  - facial expression
  - relaxed body expression
  - eye contact
- Use encouraging words that will invite them to continue on.
  - "Tell me more."
  - "Sounds like you have some ideas on this."
  - "I'm interested in what you have to say."
  - "Let's talk about it."

Things to avoid while being an active listener

- Do not interrupt.
- Do not interrogate. Limit the number of questions you ask so that you are "drilling" them.
- Do not try to think of your response in your own head while you are listening.
- Do not change the subject.
- Avoid phrases like:
  - "Are you sure."
  - "You shouldn't feel that way."
  - "It's not that bad."
  - "You're making something out of nothing."
  - "Sleep on it. You'll feel better tomorrow."
  - "That's a dumb question."
- Do not be judgmental, which will allow students to feel that they can communicate questions and ideas.

References:
