



I'm shorry.

Have you ever had somebody deliver you a fake apology? You might need to hark back to those days of old where your parents forced a fractious sibling to "apologise to your brother/sister – now!", but if you dig hard enough into the memory banks, it's there. The fake apology has a few key components:

- It must comprise a maximum of two words. Those being "I'm" and "sorry".
- It must be delivered with a sneer of contempt and made to seem as insincere as possible.
- It may contain no commitment to a change in behaviour.
- It must be punctuation, a full stop, on this situation so that I can get back to doing what I'd rather be doing.
- It must require a complete minimum of personal effort and responsibility.

real
schools

"Sorry, always sorry. What in the world can you buy with an apology?"

-- Marie Lu

THE CHEAT SHEET

Don't have time to absorb the whole article today? Here's the big points ...

1. Unlearn the word sorry from your class vocabulary.
2. Support students with ways to demonstrate remorse.
3. Ensure that actions require both time and effort.
4. Be creative and contextual.
5. Declare the death of the fake apology.

AITSL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS
... and you addressed them by reading!

The Big One

4.1 Support student participation.

But also ...

- 1.1 Physical, social & intellectual development & characteristics of students.
- 3.5 Use effective classroom communication.
- 4.3 Manage challenging behaviour.

As a result, the fake apology is of little use to the person harmed by the person delivering the apology. It's just a convention of language that we must pass through in order to complete the involvement of the intervening authority figure. Of course, this is followed with another language convention such as "That's ok" or the more scripted "I accept your apology but please don't do it again". Both the apology and the response are largely ineffective and the example you drew in your mind of one such situation from your past probably illustrates that quite effectively.

When I was a Teacher and Principal in the Northern Territory, we came to notice the futility of asking, encouraging or coercing students into such banal apologies. So we stopped accepting them. It took some explicit intent because the conventions towards apologies as punctuation for conflict in us were just as strong as they were in our students. But we made a purposeful intention of following any student suggestion of "I need to apologise" with "Well, that'd be a start but what could you do it SHOW that you're sorry".

Given Darwin's climate, these apologies became known in our school as sweaty apologies given the apology now incorporates two new elements that encourage a higher level of sincerity:

- Effort
- Time

.... and our students began to understand that actions really do speak louder than words. It was a worthy outcome.

Recently, I was working in class with a fabulous Primary School Teacher in one of our Partner schools in rural Victoria who was enamoured with the concept of sweaty apologies but, as she put it, was "climatically challenged" in terms of implementing it. I asked how she got around the problem.

I was walked over to a laminated poster (don't we Teachers love to laminate stuff?!) on the classroom wall with the heading "I'm Shorry" at the top. I immediately thought that perhaps a student had been asked to complete the poster and had succumbed to a typo or some kind of autocorrect malfunction. I was wrong. This class had discussed that saying sorry was ALWAYS insufficient and had collectively agreed to discard the word from their vocabulary. In this class you must show that you are sorry – and thus the word shorry was invented.

Beneath the heading on this list were 15 different ways that the class had brainstormed together as reasonable ways to demonstrate remorse and responsibility for the harm of wrongdoing. They included:

- Having a supervised lunch date with the person you harmed.
- Making the other person a card or picture.
- Recording a video message for the other person and their parents.
- Playing a board game or completing a puzzle with them in free time.
- Inviting the other person into one of your usual lunchtime activities.
- Send the other person an email or Moodle message of no less than 100 words.

I think the shorry that made me laugh the most was perhaps both the most bizarre and the most contextual. It was to invite the other person to play a game of Fortnite online with them when they got home from school that afternoon! Kids these days! In each case the shorry receiver has the right to say "I appreciate that shorry, but I'd prefer this one if that's ok." Shorry is working for this class.

What I love most about the shorry concept is that the list on the wall isn't seen as a punitive measure and nor is it seen as exhaustive. Just like a poster of commonly used words or letter blends on the wall of a classroom, this is a supportive tool. If a student isn't sure just how to demonstrate how shorry they are, that's ok – we have a list to inspire your thinking. But rest assured, the students in this class think and then act. I'd also suggest that they learn a powerful lesson about responsibility.