FROM REWARDS TO RELATIONSHIPS: BUILDING POSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

This resource page provides educators with practical guidance on implementing effective classroom reward systems that align with the CLASS® framework. By following these strategies, educators can create supportive environments that foster positive behavior and social-emotional growth.

Understanding Classroom Reward Systems: A Balanced Perspective

Let's be honest—many of us feel conflicted about classroom reward systems. The idea of names on the board or stoplights with clothespins can evoke a knee-jerk reaction, making us question their effectiveness. Ideally, we want classrooms where positive behavior naturally unfolds, and behavior challenges are nonexistent. But reality tells us that managing a classroom and teaching self-regulation is complex, and sometimes, additional tools like reward systems are necessary.

Do Classroom Reward Systems Work?

Research indicates that engaging classrooms where educators model self-regulation are more likely to foster positive behavior and enhance learning. Yet, helping children learn to follow classroom expectations remains a tough task. Developing self-regulation is a lifelong journey, and children are only just beginning. Educators need systems, support, and strategies to navigate this challenge.

Surprisingly, classroom reward systems can be effective in improving behavior without negatively impacting intrinsic motivation. However, these systems don't work in isolation. Just like interesting materials or evidence-based curricula don't automatically yield better learning outcomes, reward systems need to be thoughtfully implemented to be successful.

When Behavior Systems Can Go Wrong

It's crucial to recognize that not all reward systems are created equal. When implemented punitively or used as crowd control, these systems can backfire, leading to negative outcomes like resentment, bullying, and a divide between "good" and "bad" kids.

How to Implement Supportive Classroom Reward Systems

1. Build Relationships First

- **CLASS Connection:** Positive Climate
- Relationships are key to changing behavior, teaching skills, and modeling desired outcomes. When children feel safe and respected, they are more likely to see reward systems as supportive rather than punitive.

2. Make Behavior Systems Both Community-Oriented and Individualized

- **CLASS Connection:** Positive Climate and Educator Sensitivity
- Balancing the needs of the whole class with individual support is essential. Tailoring rewards to individual children while also working towards a collective classroom goal can foster a sense of community and accountability.

Continue

FROM REWARDS TO RELATIONSHIPS: BUILDING POSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

3. Acknowledge the Need Behind the Behavior

- **CLASS Connection:** Educator Sensitivity
- Behavior is communication. Understanding the underlying needs or emotions driving a child's behavior allows educators to address those needs and guide children toward more positive behaviors.

4. Involve Children in Creating the System

- **CLASS Connection:** Regard for Child Perspective
- Giving children a say in the reward system increases their buy-in and relevance. Whether it's voting on group rewards or choosing individual incentives, involving children helps them feel invested in the process.

5. Include Specific Feedback in a Positive Way

- **CLASS Connection:** Educator Sensitivity
- Behavior is communication. Understanding the underlying needs or emotions driving a child's behavior allows educators to address those needs and guide children toward more positive behaviors.

6. Combine Redirection and Rewards

- **CLASS Connection:** Behavior Management
- Reward systems shouldn't be all or nothing. Effective redirection, followed by rewards when children adjust their behavior, can help reinforce positive actions.

7. Connect It to Broader Social-Emotional Learning

- **CLASS Connection:** Behavior Management and Concept Development
- Reward systems should support the development of life-long self-regulation skills. By tying rewards to broader social-emotional learning goals, educators can emphasize the importance of these behaviors beyond the classroom.

In Summary

The key takeaway is that the success of a reward system hinges on how it is implemented. Grounding these systems in effective interactions, as outlined in the CLASS framework, can make them more impactful.

TEACHING with CLASS

CLASS LEARNING COMMUNITY

TEACH STONE®