

Positive Behavior Supports:
Using Class Dojo as a Token Economy Point System to
Encourage and Maintain Good Behaviors

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Abstract:

The use of positive reinforcement sometimes gets lost in translation because educators forget the importance of acknowledging good behaviors. We instinctively tend to punish and give consequences because we often forget the importance of preventing undesired behaviors from occurring in the first place. More efforts should be spent on maintaining and increasing desired behaviors. Through the use of Class Dojo, we have seen a significant rise in positive student behaviors. This article will address the role of positive reinforcement and the rewards linked with using positive reinforcements in the classroom in order to maintain/increase desired behaviors, thus diminishing undesirable behaviors.

The Importance of Classroom Management through Positive Reinforcement

Classrooms today are small communities in progress. Just like other communities, a set of rules must coexist with the sum of its parts; otherwise, chaos will reign in the classroom environment. In an early elementary school classroom, setting and following rules lays the foundation for students to achieve a better education in the future. Teaching students healthy and positive habits early on will not only allow them to learn in a safer classroom atmosphere, but it will also build strong and lasting learning habits within the students. Educators have to focus on making clear and specific expectations for students. Sometimes, teachers will automatically punish a student for misbehaviors displayed in the classroom, forgetting to put emphasis on maintaining and praising positive behaviors in order to prevent unwanted behaviors in the first place. *With an education edifice in desperate need of structure and organization, educators should use behavior managements systems that can help them prevent undesired behaviors by maintaining and complimenting desired behaviors in a positive and effective way.*

Introduction (Teacher Background Information)

Having taught for over a decade, one can say that my classroom management is strict but effective. Because of this, I always get the students whose behaviors are challenging and troublesome. I get the students with the 'behavior problems'; however, by the end of the year those students are no longer considered 'behavior problems'. My strong classroom management has always seemed to work, that is, until last year when I met *Erick. Everything changed with Erick. He did not like following the rules and it was difficult for him to stay on task and do as I asked. I was stressing so much trying to get him to stay on task that I was losing my focus with the rest of my class. I felt like my students were learning nothing and I was going home in tears every day. I felt like my hands were tied and I did not know what else to do. I asked everyone

for suggestions and I even met with his parents and the school counselor but nothing changed. One day, I came across an app called Class Dojo. Of all of the apps that exist out there, I was so excited to learn that there is an app to assist with classroom management!

What is Class Dojo and how does it work?

Class Dojo is an online classroom-management system that helps teachers record and track their students' behaviors in real time, while also giving the students and their parent's instant feedback. The app is designed to help individual students, as well as entire classes, identify areas for improved behavior and set related goals. With the Class Dojo app, I was able to consistently accomplish several goals at the same time and they include, but are not limited to:

1. Improve Behavior
2. Share the Data
3. Save time.

No data entry is required to track behavior. The data is saved and tracked automatically and you can pull up a class progress on a weekly or monthly basis. You can add points easily and effortlessly, and the students are engaged because they each have a cute cartoon character assigned to their name. Since the app gives the students real-time feedback, they naturally strive to better themselves and gain more and more points. Parents are quickly notified, and due to the fact that the students can track their own progress at home, this boosts their engagement in wanting to succeed. One of the most useful and important features is that teachers can also send messages to student's parents to notify them of any information or to update them on what is going in school. Likewise, parents can keep in contact with their child's teacher through the app as well. With the Class Dojo app, educators help students succeed by increasing communication and understanding between the classroom and the home. Class Dojo is an app that can be downloaded to any smart phone and it is free, consequently saving teachers time by being able to award points on the go. Wherever the teacher and students are; whether it is in the hallway, on a field trip, in the cafeteria, or at

assemblies and anywhere else, the app is easily and readily accessible. Teachers do not need to carry around clipboards or take too much time away from teaching in order to use its functions.

Data and Positive Results through the use of Class Dojo

The Class Dojo app encouraged my students to improve their behaviors through the use of accruing points. It functions as a system where the students can earn points for desired behaviors, and points can be taken away for undesired behaviors, just like a token economy system. Students are instantly drawn to this management system because it provides a visual and fun tracking system that students can see. The graphics are attractive, and children are naturally fascinated with accumulating points so they can earn the rewards tied to the points. In order for the point system to work, they need to have tangible values set by the educator that can be traded for activities desired by the students such as: items from a treasure box, or extra recess time. The students constantly want to acquire Dojo points, and they pay more attention to the teacher's expectations to be able to do so. After I started using the Class Dojo app, I noticed an immediate change in the behavior of my class, including my challenging student Erick. I was very excited to see instant and positive results from using this point system and Erick responded in a surprisingly positive manner, because he wanted to earn a lot of points to get special rewards and privileges.

Why this App works well for Primary Grade Level Students

Positive reinforcement through the use of a token economy system targets the universal Tier (Tier 1). The majority of students in the primary grades want to do well and naturally want to please. Students gravitate and respond well to kindness and rewards. If someone were to walk into a room and ask students to raise hands if they prefer to get a reward or to be punished, it is safe to say that the students would prefer the former and not the latter. The use of positive

reinforcement relies heavily on the assumption that students enjoy reaping rewards and will continue those desired behaviors in order to keep earning rewards. Students want to earn the maximum amount of points, therefore utilizing positive reinforcement first in the classroom is proven to be the most effective. Class Dojo encourages the students to unite and work together as a team. The app rewards points to the students individually, but the teacher can also create groups and set class goals as well. Students who are labeled emotionally disturbed or severely ADHD may need more intense and targeted behavior plans; therefore, they may not respond to this positive reinforcement point system. However, the majority of elementary aged students have responded well to the use of Class Dojo.

Positive Reinforcement Behavior Principles

There are many other behavior principles in existence, such as: negative reinforcement, extinction and punishment to name a few. As educators, we can become so engrossed in addressing problem behaviors and problematic students, that we forget to reward the students that *are* behaving. The students who display problem behaviors usually demand most of our attention and our attention towards the students that are behaving eventually dissipates. Why else do educators tend to always remember the names of the students who had the roughest behavior but forget the names of the students who were well-behaved? This is a dangerous and slippery slope because in forgetting to reward those students who are behaving, we may cause those students to stop doing those good behaviors! Research shows that “behavior is strengthened or maintained by reinforcement” (Kerr and Nelson, 2010, p. 74). This is not to say that negative reinforcement, punishment, or consequences are not effective means of discipline; but positive reinforcement can prevent teachers from having to use those methods if the negative behavior can be prevented. Class Dojo is not a by any means a fix-all for behavior problems, but it can

serve as a great way to remind those students who are intrinsically good to continue behaving, and to let them know that their good behaviors do not go unnoticed.

Conclusion

As educators, it is important to remember to use the best and most positive practices in dealing with student behaviors. We should not fall into the dangerous habit of instinctively punishing students when they misbehave. In order to prevent these unwanted behaviors from happening, we need to always have an organized behavior management system in place. Keeping students safe and happy are key to having a classroom run smoothly. Conflict and misbehaviors create an atmosphere of negativity and chaos, but through teaching and encouraging positive behavior habits with positive reinforcement; only then can the optimum amount of learning take place.

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