

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

How to Build a Positive Classroom Environment

P.S. 269 Nostrand, New York • May 2009

Topic: Reducing Behavior Problems

Practice: Modify Environment

Highlights

- Rachel Moran, fourth-grade collaborative team teacher at P.S. 269, describes the steps to build a positive classroom environment.
- The team of teachers who built the positive environment uses various strategies, materials, and hand signals to maintain a positive classroom. Ms. Moran explains that her classroom is welcoming and inviting, with many work sections for students to quietly read and reflect on their behavior.
- Ms. Moran details the organization of her class and the important facets of a positive classroom environment (e.g., daily behavior chart, group activity chart, and classroom norms and expectations).

About the Site

P.S. 269 Nostrand

Brooklyn, NY

Demographics

90% Black

6% Hispanic

2% Asian

1% White

93% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

10% English Language Learners

P.S. 269 has established schoolwide practices and routines to create and maintain a supportive and caring school climate. Key features include:

- Explicitly teaching and reinforcing rules and routines,
- Collecting data about student behavior and the conditions that prompt and reinforce it, and
- Conducting community events to promote peaceful relationships between the school and the community.

Full Transcript

My name is Rachel Moran. I am a fourth-grade collaborative team teacher at P.S. 269 in Brooklyn, New York. A positive classroom environment is one that's welcoming and inviting. When you first walk into the classroom, you'll see a round table, which we use as our writing center, and we have a lamp towards the end of the table. We have it on throughout the day, so it creates this cozy, welcoming atmosphere for the children. In a positive classroom environment, you would want the child to feel safe and secure.

Moran to class: Good morning, boys and girls.

Students reply: Good morning, Ms. Wright and Ms. Moran.

Moran: Before any children walk into the classroom, we greet them as a whole outside of the class, and we take this opportunity to take a look at their facial expression. I believe a facial expression is a great predictor for the day's events. In some cases, we have children who may look a little sad or under the weather, and it's just because they didn't have breakfast, or they just need some encouraging words to start their day off.

Moran to student: You may not win, but you did play really well.

Moran: There are many different strategies we use in our classroom to reduce behavior problems. We have a behavior chart that we tape to individuals' desks, and each behavior chart is tailored to meet their individual needs. For example, if there is one child in our class who we're working on to give more put ups to other classmates of hers, to see her use encouraging words or be kind to others. So, I have a chart stating what we like her to work on with a smiley face, and either she'll color in the face to see how she is doing throughout the day or we will place a sticker on it.

In another case we have a daily chart. This might be for the child who needs a little more of a push to begin his or her school day and see their progress academically, if they are completing their assignments in a timely fashion. And this will just be labeled period zero, period one, period two and it's a simple remark or sentence. Each behavior contract has an incentive. The children are able to come to their treasure chest to receive a sweet treat or school supplies.

Positive behavior is recognized in our classroom through group charts as well as individual charts. We named each group in our classroom by the continents. We try to incorporate the academics into our daily activities. Children love to see their progress visually, and it shows on the chart what we expect the children to do—in groups or co-operatively respect each other.

Moran to class: Compliment to Asia.

Moran: And as we see this going on in the class, we give them a tally mark, and the children know that if they have five tally marks, there is a reward at the end of the day. And their progress is shown monthly.

Moran to class: Any other concerns that you want to address?

Moran: In the beginning of the school year, we brainstorm with the children our classroom norms and expectations, also the rewards and consequences if the classroom norms aren't followed. The children brainstorm in their groups and then we have a share out. We jot down their ideas, and we confer with them and ask them if they are in agreement with it. Then, we'll type up their classroom norms, expectations, rewards, and consequences, and we'll present it the following day to the children and ask them to sign it. They're aware signing something is a contract, and we expect you to follow it. We refer to it throughout the school year.

Behavior is managed and controlled using different various techniques in our classroom. For example, we have a clap pattern [clapping], and we use this technique when the children are working in groups and we want them to draw their attention back on the teacher, so then we can move into the next activity. Also, if the children need to use the bathroom, they sign the word bathroom, simply like this, and they know to wiggle their hand a little bit and wait for a head nod from either teacher in the class to permit them to use the bathroom, and then they go ahead. And these different hand gestures we use in the class minimizes other children from being distracted.

Moran to class: Each one of you did an excellent, excellent job expressing yourselves, how you're feeling today.

Moran: Building up positive classroom environment has impacted our students in an enormous way. Children are able to communicate with one another and use appropriate behaviors and make healthier choices. I strongly believe that a positive classroom environment is a foundation for growth, for cooperation, affirmation and expression within our community.