

Recognition not reward



Recognise good behaviour, says Paul Dix, and the boost to children's self-esteem will last a lifetime...



You can't buy children off with material rewards and expect them to sustain good behaviour. Children like money, toys and stuff; but they like pride, self-esteem and a sense of belonging much, much more.

The people who are best placed to reward the children are their parents. Let parents know that things are going well and encourage them to connect rewards at home with effort in class. End your message on a positive postcard or note with, "If you would like to follow up with a reward at home it would be well deserved". Make it clear what you expect from the parents, what their role is and precisely how they can reinforce what you are doing. Give them an excuse to make the weekend special. Encourage them to echo the success to the family. Allow them to reward in the way they feel is appropriate. After all, I know how to reward my own children perfectly. It doesn't even cost me money. But I am just guessing with other people's children. As a teacher my responsibility is to send a clear message and let the parents do their part.

Recognising good behaviour

In classrooms children's poor behaviour is recognised all the time. I can find myself rewarding poor behaviour with instant attention, fuelling it with emotion and encouraging it with low expectations. The thrill of an angry adult, with a 'naughty' badge and no responsibility can be an attractive package to some children. The benefits include admiration from friends and a reputation in the staffroom: recognition, essentially.

Parents, children and teachers have been complaining for years that the children engaged in challenging behaviour get all the rewards, and they are right. It's time to redress the balance, to take away the rewards from poor behaviour. The forgotten children who behave beautifully, work diligently and never demand attention deserve more. It is time to radically change our focus, to routinely recognise those pupils who keep themselves under the radar and go unrecognised. They deserve our

Best behaviour

Paul Dix's award-winning behaviour training is now available as a fantastic self-study online course. His company, Pivotal Education, has a national reputation for designing and delivering training that promotes real change. You can sign up for its free tips service at pivotaleducation.com

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attention, our encouragement and our energy. Spend all of your time chasing the sheep who are trying to escape over the fence and it is easy to lose sight of the flock.

Do a quick audit. How many children in your class come in every day, keep within the rules and work hard? Eighty per cent, 90 per cent? How many positive notes have you given in the last three weeks? How many positive phone calls? What about those children who have had contact with parents because of their poor behaviour? Do you contact home when things are going well? Do you make sure that parents are constantly in the loop, or is contact with home just an emergency measure? If I am not informed as a parent I find it difficult to truly connect reward at home with effort at school. If my child comes home with a prize I don't feel that I need to reinforce any further.

Write it down

The best recognition is when reinforcement is written down – recognition that can be held, re-read, shown to others and displayed at home. A note, certificate, postcard or your written comments at the end of a piece of work. For many the pride of having their work on display has a similar effect. The moment is marked, the routine confirmed and self-esteem lifted. The child is consistently reminded of the behaviour that best represents them, reminded of the behaviour that they can be most proud of.

Money, stuff and material rewards are not the responsibility of the teacher – they have no need to encourage material desires in children. They are better delivered at home. In the classroom they can be divisive and perceived as unfair, especially if the line between reward and bribery can become blurred: "Altaf, I am extremely impressed that you managed to stop throwing missiles at Colette. Have some golden time, gift tokens and an all expenses paid trip for you trouble". We have a duty to develop an understanding of what truly motivates for the long-term. Pride, ambition and a sense of belonging pervade the best classrooms. You can see it on the walls, on the faces of the children and in the relationships that develop.

Children thrive from recognition from more than one source. The children's recognition of the efforts of their peers can be a powerful driver of self-esteem and positive self-image. Children who cannot recognise their own positive attributes, learn by identifying the good in others. In fact all human beings value recognition. Your colleagues respond well to the same strategies. At the end of a training session

a teacher thanks me for the day and puts a sticker on my jumper. A doggy sticker with 'terrific' written underneath. I smile. I brim with pleasure and pride. I keep the sticker, take it home and stick in on the wall next to my desk. I tell people about it. I am telling you now! I am 40 years old and still a small sticker boosts my confidence and tweaks my pride. Now, either I am a uniquely sad individual for whom a doggy sticker means more than anything, or it is not what you give but the way that you give it. This applies to your colleagues as much as your class. A note, a kind word, a positive reference are irresistible.

In the end it is not what you give but the way that you give it. Prizes gleam and then fade in moments. Positive recognition lasts for a lifetime. It's the reward that keeps giving.

Ladder of Recognition

POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR CAN BE RECOGNISED AND CELEBRATED IN NUMEROUS WAYS. TRY FOLLOWING THESE SIMPLE STEPS...

- Positive reinforcement
- Sincere, private verbal praise
- Additional comments on written work
- Peer congratulations
- Work on display in the classroom
- Work on display in public areas/website
- Positive referral to another teacher
- Positive text home
- Positive note home
- Positive phone call home
- 'Mentioned in dispatches' in assembly and in staff meetings
- Extra class responsibility
- Class award certificate
- Year award certificate
- Extra school responsibility
- School honours

