

Rewards Over Punishment - How an Incentive-Based Classroom Rewards System Targeted at *All* Students can Increase Student Motivation and Behaviour.

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Abstract

This Capstone paper is set in the context of my experience as a classroom teacher as well as the theoretical background learned through my Master of Education degree. Through my experience as a teacher thus far at an inner-city school, I have witnessed the importance of children feeling valued and a part of their own learning, and the impact this has on their success and motivation. Teachers have the responsibility to make children feel safe and important in their classroom, and this can be increased by encouraging intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The paper will examine how a classroom rewards system can positively impact motivation and behaviour in a classroom setting. Teachers have the ability to motivate their students through the use of classroom rewards, but this should be done together as a class, rather than only for specific students who need behaviour intervention. If students are given the opportunity to come up with the incentives for themselves, they will feel important and a part of the process. This creates a sense of accountability for them and a desire to follow through, as well as a sense of classroom community, as the rewards are designed to benefit everyone, not just a select few. I will draw on current research and my years of experience in the classroom to show how a classroom rewards system can have a positive effect on students' motivation, behaviour, accountability, sense of pride, and sense of community in the classroom. The implications for this capstone are to examine how student involvement in their learning and the creation of incentives can help

improve their motivation, behaviour, and confidence. It will also provide guidance for teachers on an effective method of behaviour management in the classroom.

Keywords: classroom rewards, motivation, collaboration, incentives, classroom management, praise.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My Journey as a Teacher

My teaching journey began roughly six years ago when I entered the Professional Development Program at Simon Fraser University. Unlike some educators who knew they wanted to be a teacher as a child, I did not come to this conclusion until the second year of my undergraduate degree. I received my Bachelor of Arts in Archaeology and originally wanted to do something in that field; however, around my second year, I realized I would be happier in a career with children rather than just adults.

After I finished my archaeology degree, I entered the PDP program at SFU. Much to my shock and (at the time) horror, I was placed in a Grade 7 classroom at an inner-city school in Surrey. I was initially very upset and emotional, as I had wanted a primary grade and I had many misconceptions about inner-city schools. However, little did I know at the time, this event would be the main catalyst for my career path. I ended up loving my time at this school, and I gained so much more confidence in myself and my understanding of what it means to help others. When I finished the program, I knew my heart was set on finding another inner-city school to begin my career. Fast forward five years, and I have now been working at another inner-city school for my career so far having taught Grade 4 or 5. I have realized so much about

the teaching profession and feel like I am making a difference for underprivileged students.

M.Ed. Context.

As mentioned in the past chapter, I have been lucky enough to work at the same inner-city school for the past four years, and I have learned the important role that an administrator can play. It was my realization of the importance of this that drove me to apply for my M.Ed. at TRU. Alongside my colleagues, I learned the important role that teachers can play when their opinions are valued, and how schools need leaders who listen to the voices of teachers. I was and still am so lucky to have wonderful colleagues who work together, and I was able to get a glimpse of how successful our school could be if we had the leadership we needed, and the opportunity for all members of the school to be heard.

The courses I took on Educational Management, Leadership, and Conflict Management demonstrated the importance of collaboration and had the greatest impact on my teaching and future endeavours.

Developing an Interest in Classroom Rewards

Classroom management is a concept all teachers strive to improve on and there are countless techniques to try. A classroom rewards system is one such technique that may make some teachers wary, as they are unsure how to use it effectively and fairly.

This paper will address those issues and be very relevant for all educators, regardless of their experience.

Since I began teaching, I have had an interest in making learning fun and having rewards for students in an attempt at motivating them. However, as Kowalski and Froiland (2020) note in their study, there is often a negative connotation surrounding rewards systems, as both students and parents assume only certain children will be rewarded while others will be left out. This is completely valid, as many reward systems are targeted at certain students, most often those who are performing a behaviour deemed “wrong” and in need of change. This is evident in the article by Shiller and O’Flynn (2008), as although they are showing the positive impact of reward systems, they do mention how they should be tailored to individual students. Although this may be beneficial for that student, the issue is how it may be perceived as unfair by other students.

The above concepts were at the forefront of my mind as I developed my teaching style over the last few years, as I have had many “behaviour” students who are so unmotivated and unhappy, they see no reason to change their behaviour. In the classroom, many teachers define a behaviour student as one who acts out, is unmotivated, has a designation, takes up extra teacher time, or is reluctant to try new tasks. Sure, giving them a small reward like a treat or a pencil may temporarily improve their behaviour, but as Rusz et al., (2020) note, students may begin associating their

behaviour with this specific treat or reward, therefore only adapting the behaviour so they can get said reward, rather than because they want to change.

In my first year of teaching, I started out buying dollar store prizes with my own money, which I quickly realized to be unsustainable. Students were excited for a few minutes, but prizes were going much quicker than I could keep up with and it did not really seem to change their behaviour long-term. As Rusz et al., (2020) note, it seemed like they were only behaving this way to get the materialistic prize.

The past two years, mostly due to the information I have learned from my M.Ed. this far, I have tested out new techniques for the classroom rewards system and adjusted based on my observations. Specifically, I took into account the importance of collaboration and good leadership as a keystone for effective relationship building. One thing I still remember from my Educational Leadership and Conflict Management courses is that a good leader is one who earns their employees respect, rather than forcing it through the use of authority or fear of reprimand. This is what I strive for with my students, teaching them the importance of respect and kindness and motivating them to *want* to behave positively rather than doing it because they think they have to. In the next section, I will highlight how my work on this new rewards system is significant to the literature on the topic.

The Significance

Although classroom rewards are not a new concept, the use of them as a whole-class incentive for positive behaviour and the use of student involvement in designing the rewards system, are areas where I have found that research is lacking. Specifically, I am interested in how rewards and points can be equally accessible to all students. This question lends to the concept of equity versus equality within a rewards system. As a teacher, I have asked myself, how can I make it so that everyone has an equal opportunity to earn points while knowing that not all individuals can achieve the same things at the same pace? What are some reward incentives that could fairly be achieved by everyone?

When considering these questions, I realized that academic rewards would not work well and would not account for the equity needed in the classroom. To earn points fairly, the incentives would have to be equally doable for all students. If constructed in a way that includes students in the decision-making process, students will be excited and eager. If students are motivated in this way, by being a part of the design of the rewards system, you are already halfway there to making sure the rewards system is effective.

Presenting the Argument

In this article, I argue that the use of a classroom rewards system targeted at *all* students can be beneficial, increasing their motivation as well as their confidence,

satisfaction, and the sense of classroom community. Classroom rewards systems often have a negative connotation as they are viewed as a form of punishment, however, parents and students are more likely to view them positively if they trust the teacher (Kowalski & Froiland, 2020). Therefore, this paper will show that there are many positive aspects associated with classroom rewards, if they are used effectively. Payne (2015) summarizes that students felt the most motivated when the class earned a reward together for positive behaviour, and that incentives rather than punishments was more effective at motivation. Shiller & O'Flynn (2008) demonstrate that reward systems work best if personalized to student interests and used as a form of positive reinforcement, rather than as a form of punishment. Furthermore, Molina Leal & Pena-Ceron (2020) report that students feel a sense of satisfaction and better motivation when they are working together with their peers. In addition, Receiving equal rewards as a class and knowing what behaviours can earn points or rewards makes students feel more connected and less singled out.

The next chapter will provide an in-depth review of the current literature on rewards systems, as well as where it is lacking. To follow, the third chapter will detail my experience in the classroom and the specifics of how I developed an effective rewards system. To conclude, the last chapter will discuss the findings of this paper as well as the implications of this paper for the educational community.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Rewards: Increasing motivation in students

As my argument states, classroom rewards, when used as a whole-group incentive, can increase motivation in students. When it comes to motivation, we are most often familiar with two types: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to our ability to seek out new situations to learn in, which is something humans naturally lean towards, it is necessary for environmental constructs to support and enhance these intrinsic tendencies (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In contrast, extrinsic motivation focuses on doing an activity for a known outcome, rather than just for the enjoyment of the activity itself (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 69). The following sections will highlight how extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are viewed in the literature in regard to classroom rewards. Following this, the paper will discuss ways to motivate students through positive reinforcement and incentives, concluded by the importance of working together.

Intrinsic Motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is what teachers all want but may have trouble fostering in the classroom; Rusz et al (2020) note that individuals become reliant on rewards when they are no longer needed for a specific situation. Pierce et al., (2003) pose the concept of how changing the standard for the reward is beneficial. They pose two reward related scenarios; a constant reward group, where the criteria for achieving the

reward does not change, and a progressive reward group, where the standards for achieving the reward are ever-changing. They reason that a progressive rewards system would increase feelings of competence and capability, which makes individual's feel like they are the cause of their own success, thus increasing their intrinsic motivation (Pierce et al., 2003, p.564).

With that being said, the researchers also note that becoming accustomed to receiving rewards based on performance can cause initially intrinsic motivation to transition to extrinsic motivation, as they now expect the reward. However, Lepper et al., (1996) note that there are many positives associated with rewards. They emphasize that in order for a rewards system to yield positive results, the rewards must be given for positive behaviour.

In order to encourage motivation on high-level thinking activities, rewards should be given for these types of activities only, rather than low-level thinking activities. Cameron et al., (2001) also encourage mixing up and changing the standards for rewards so that they do not become expected by individuals, and also that increasing the standards for rewards allows individuals to believe themselves to have increasing capability for success.

In the study by Pierce et al., (2003), they note that no studies to date have focused on increasingly higher standards for rewards. Although this study is now eighteen years old, they highlight an important point, which is that there are limited

studies done revolving around changing up rewards and incentives. In particular, there is very little research on rewards for leadership, behavioural, respect, and collaborative related incentives, rather than the focus being on academics.

Hendijani et al., (2016) point out that motivation and performance will depend on several factors, such as the person's interest in the topic, the reward being given for quality or quantity, and individuality. It is also possible for external rewards and intrinsic motivation to be complimentary to one another (p. 252). This concept relates heavily to the significance of my capstone paper, as I find that rewards systems have a negative connotation of preventing intrinsic motivation. However, the key is balancing the rewards with appropriate tasks that focus on numerous skill-building areas such as collaboration, respect, kindness, and individual improvement rather than being academically driven.

Furthermore, rewards must focus on positive behaviour to target intrinsic motivation and a sense of accomplishment, as focusing too much on negative behaviour will emphasize the "control" aspect associated with tangible rewards (Ryan and Desi, 2000; Ruzs et al., 2020; Garaus et al., 2016). If rewards are expected, they are more likely to be viewed as controlling someone's behaviour and undermining their intrinsic motivation, whereas if the reward is a surprise and unexpected for that task, it does not affect intrinsic motivation and positively impacts the person (Sansone and Harackiewicz, 2000).

This capstone paper will dive further into the use of rewards and incentives for behaviour management in the next section.

Extrinsic motivation.

As mentioned, extrinsic motivation revolves around individuals completing a task to earn a reward or intended outcome, rather than from the joy they get completing the task. Ryan and Deci (2000) note that any tangible rewards associated with task performance will undermine intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, Garaus et al., (2016) conclude that a behaviour may initially be intrinsically motivated, however, if it is rewarded, this may lead individuals to continuing performing it for the reward, rather than for personal enjoyment (Garaus et al., 2016, p. 5). They further explain that every reward has two aspects; informational and controlling. The informational aspect revolves around the individual's ability to make autonomous decisions, whereas the controlling aspect focuses on the "perceived locus of causality (PLOC)", which is the degree individuals view their actions as stemming from an internal or external cause (Garaus et al., 2016, p. 4). Rewards are often perceived as negatively affecting motivation, as it trains those receiving it to only perform the action so that they get the reward (Rusz et al., 2020; Garaus et al., 2016).

However, this is more often associated with a tangible reward, as individuals become accustomed to the 'control' aspect of knowing a certain behaviour will give you a reward, thus activating their external motivation. One example is if a student has

been getting free time each week if they complete their homework on time. The student may no longer have trouble completing their work on time without a reward, and could really have it done before required, however, they may continue to follow the original plan so that they can continue to receive the free time.

This brings to light the problem that children may continue to behave a certain way to earn the reward, even when it is no longer appropriate or effective (Rusz et al., 2020). It also highlights that if specific behaviours earn rewards, such as participation, if a student does the behaviour and does not receive the reward, they may behave negatively because they have learned to expect the reward (Molina-Leal and Peña-Cerón, 2020).

In contrast, praise or symbolic rewards are more likely to activate intrinsic motivation, as the individual performs the activity for their own enjoyment or satisfaction (Garaus et al, 2016). This concept of how rewards can better activate intrinsic motivation, and how intrinsic motivation is encouraged, will be discussed in the next section.

Rewards: Encouraging Positive Behaviour

Behaviour management

Behaviour management is a broad term that can have many different meanings in an educational setting. In a classroom, this usually refers to the ability for the classroom to function efficiently with minimal disruption from students and measures

taken if a student is to misbehave. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of behaviour management is student respect for the teacher and a positive relationship between student and teacher (Bear et al., 2016). However, it is just as important for the teacher to show respect for the student, as long-term respect must be reciprocated by both parties. Bear et al., (2016) use the example that in certain cultures, such as in Japan and China, the concept of respect and self-discipline is engrained at a young age, but this is not always the case. In other areas, relationship building is key, and respect needs to be earned. This is an important concept to consider, as people may be polite and do what is expected from them out of habit or because they are scared to do otherwise. However, it is much more rewarding to consider that a person is acting positively because they *want* to and respect you.

On this note, the most effective way build a relationship based on respect is through positive reinforcement. One of the first steps in improving behaviour is first determining why the student is behaving that way. Do they need the attention? Is it a need for control? Do they lack self-awareness or understanding? (Rogers, 2018). If the issue focuses on them avoiding work, it is important for teachers to get to the bottom of why they are doing this. Is the work too hard, or are they just lazy? What subject or activities *do* they enjoy? Are there certain ones they tend to avoid more? (Rogers, 2018). Although the incentive focus should not be specifically focused to achieving a certain academic standing, as that makes it unfair for those who struggle academically,

work habits is an appropriate behaviour for all students to work on. After acknowledging what behaviours are the problem in your classroom, you can then begin positive reinforcement.

Incentives for positive behaviour.

Positive reinforcement is a key concept to learn about in order to increase student motivation and behaviour. It is an umbrella term for a variety of techniques for encouraging certain behaviours; the main point is that positive reinforcement should immediately follow the desired behaviour so that it reinforces the student to do it again in the future (Woolfolk and Weinstein, 2006). The incentive itself can be a number of things, from a tangible reward like a sticker, preferred activity, like free time, or a social gesture, like praise in front of the class (Woolfolk and Weinstein, 2006, p. 48). In general, social gestures and praise for students behaving in a desired way is a good way to encourage that behaviour to happen again. The key is to focus on the positive behaviour, rather than the negative.

For example, if Billy is working well on his project the teacher could compliment Billy in front of everyone, being specific to *what* he is doing correctly. Saying he focused and quiet gives students a visual of what you are looking for. If at the same time Ashley is off task, scolding Ashley for her behaviour in front of everyone is *not* the ideal response. As Payne (2015) notes in his study, students do not feel motivated to improve when called out for poor behaviour in front of their peers. Therefore,

complimenting the student behaving well and saying nothing about the student who is off task is more likely to encourage that student to work towards the desired behaviour, so that the teacher praises them in front of their classmates.

Another term that may initially be misunderstood but is a great incentive is negative reinforcement. Although it sounds like it revolves around negative behaviour, it actually focuses on removing something students do not enjoy, or find negative, if they complete a certain positive task (Woolfolk and Weinstein, 2006). For example, a teacher may propose that if students are focused and quiet for half an hour, they can do three homework problems instead of three that day. Or, if they read quietly for silent reading in the morning, then they can have a free choice block instead of reading in the afternoon.

A third term associated with behaviour reinforcement is “response cost punishment”. This is when a previously earned incentive is taken away if the desired behaviour is not met. For example, if a group of students earn points for working quietly, they might lose the points if they start to become loud and off task (Woolfolk and Weinstein, 2006).

Positive Reinforcement: A Points System.

In all three of these circumstances, the incentive does not have to be a social gesture, but can in fact be a tangible object or a desired activity. One management technique to help encourage desired behaviour is through a points system. The key to

developing a points system is understanding what behaviours disrupt *your* classroom learning environment, as they may not be the same from teacher to teacher. Next, it is important to consider what behaviours are expected, and what are behaviours students need to work towards. For example, coming into school and washing your hands may be expected, whereas working quietly may be desired (Xenos, 2012). In this study, the researcher also emphasizes the importance of determining incentives together as a class. By working together, students can be aware of what behaviour is expected and what behaviour is not expected. It is also important to determine the numerical value of certain behaviours; for example, staying on task may be worth two points (Xenos, 2012). This concept is important, however, having specific activities that *always* earn points could lead to students seeing points as an extrinsic motivator. If they know that cleaning their table will earn them five points, they may expect the points, rather than doing it for their own satisfaction of having a clean workspace (Garaus et al., 2016). In this sense, coming up with desired behaviours that *could* earn points but is not guaranteed to is more likely to encourage students to do the behaviour because they want to and gain satisfaction from it. Therefore, if they do earn points, it is a pleasant surprise, rather than an expected reward.

The concept of working together as a class to determine behaviour that earn points is a really good one, and it could also be extended to coming up with things that the points can be used for. Xenos (2012) provides an excellent breakdown of how

the teacher and students can decide together on what sort of rewards they can earn with points. These might include a homework pass or a free-time pass. In Xenos's (2012) case, he had a point system for each individual student to earn rewards, whereas in my approach (see Chapter 3), I will be discussing working in groups to earn points. The important of working together will be discussed in the next section.

Rewards: Working together to earn rewards.

An important concept of my approach is working together in groups to earn points and rewards. This means that rewards are earned for the entire table, rather than each individual student. As Jacquett et al., (2020) note, there is the potential for this to be problematic, as students might know what classmate lost them points or rewards and place blame. They also suggest that although rewards for behaviour may improve that behavior, it may not always improve academic progress. However, they do go on to note that an improvement in behaviour can be associated with an increase in academic performance (Jacquet et al., 2020). When students are rewarded with on-task behaviour, they are more likely to do it again.

The researchers also note that group contingencies that provide *additional* bonus rewards, such as extra recess time, are more beneficial than taking away things when negative behaviour occurs (p.3). Furthermore, focusing on students who are behaving in the desired manner and giving them points will encourage other groups who are misbehaving to act that way as well. In contrast, if a teacher calls out a group

for negative behaviour and takes points away from them only, there is a chance they will be singled out and teased by their peers (McKissick et al., 2010).

Although I agree that singling students out is not ideal, it does depend on the context. This connects back to positive reinforcement and establishing rewards together as a class (Rogers, 2018; Xenos, 2012). If students have decided with their teacher what behaviours are acceptable and which are not, then the onus is on them if they are not behaving that way. Having an in depth understanding of how the points system works and an understanding of respect within the classroom greatly impacts the effectiveness. This will be discussed in the next chapter, where I will highlight how a class rewards system impacts motivation and learning in my classroom.

Summary

In summation, this chapter has provided insight regarding the current literature on classroom rewards systems. Although great work has been done on the benefits of internal motivation and positive reinforcement, there is a lack of research on specific types of rewards systems, particularly those that include the whole class and encourage student involvement in creating the incentives and desired behaviours. The following Chapter will delve into how a whole-class rewards system can be developed and work effectively.

Chapter Three: Application to my Professional Life

Rewards System in my Classroom

Context

When it comes to creating a rewards system, it is important to understand the types of students you are working with. There is no one size fits all system for rewards, as the success is contingent on how personalized you make it for your students.

Whether students respond to the system will depend on their interests, the type of reward, and they must be given in a way that is not expected by students, but rather an added bonus (Cameron et al., 2001; Hendijani et al., 2016). This rewards system has been created and refined in my Grade 4 and Grade 5 classes over the last four years. Although I believe that rewards systems can work at any grade-level, the concepts discussed in this section have been tailored to the Grade 4 and 5 age level.

Working at an inner-city school

I have worked at the same inner-city school for the entirety of my career, and the past four years I have worked on creating a rewards system that is tailored to the unique needs of the students. At my school, motivation is lacking and there is very little parental support or involvement. This means consequences and punishments are not the right way to go about correcting behaviour, as the child will become resentful or simply choose to no longer come to school.

The context of the school also means that a focus on rewards for academics would be inappropriate and poorly received, as many students are below grade-level, suffering from trauma, a non-English speaker, a refugee, or a combination of all four. Instead, it is important to focus on attainable goals that focus on collaboration, working together, respect, and caring. Arguably, these are traits just as important — if not more so — than being academically driven. Unfortunately, much of the research surrounding rewards systems focuses on rewards for only some students or academic rewards. There have been a lack of studies done on how a rewards system focused on social skills can be beneficial. This gives the idea of a classroom rewards system a bad reputation, as many people associate it with being rewarded for being “smart” or rewards being achievable for only some.

Focusing on what students can do

An important concept to keep in mind when designing a classroom rewards system is student strength and ability. What are the types of behaviours you *want* from your students, and are they attainable? For example – do you want them to be better focussed when you are talking? Be tidier at cleaning up before lunch? Be kinder to their classmates? These are all behaviours that *all* students can learn and improve on. This means, that with practice, all students can be strong in these areas. As I mentioned in the literature review, the concept of equity versus equality must be noted when designing a rewards system (Jacquett et al., 2020). Just because all students are *able* to

obtain the reward, is it actually attainable for everyone? If you focus on positive behaviours such as respect and cleanliness, these are much more available for all types of students.

Regardless, not all students or families have the same rules at home regarding cleaning, acceptable behaviour, and more. It is important not to assume students know how to behave respectfully or that a behaviour I expect is one that is expected at home. Different teachers have different expectations and so do parents, and so it is important to highlight what you expect, as it may be different than what is expected of them in other situations. If you expect any lesson in teaching to go well, it is extremely important to model it. Showing students what the behaviours you are looking for look like is crucial for the success of the system.

In contrast, certain types of behaviours are not attainable for everyone. If your rewards system focuses on academic rewards, such as all students who get at least 20/30 on a test gets points for their group, this is less likely to be successful. For one, it will single out students who were unable to achieve this and may cause resentment among peers (Jacquett et al., 2020; Rogers, 2018). It also does not focus on behaviour or do anything to create a sense of pride and community in the class. In the following sections, I will detail how I created a rewards system in my own classroom that is successful.

How it Works

Table points system.

There are many types of classroom rewards systems, as well as many different types of rewards. Whether these are tangible items, praise, or earned privileges, as well as how they are rewarded (points, randomly, choice) will all impact the way the system works. For the system I have been working on for the last few years, the focal point is the earning of table points. In my classroom, we do a lot of collaborative work and at the beginning of the year, students are placed in table groups. Ideally, they will remain in those same groups for the entire school year. I spend the first week of the school year observing students and seeing who they work well with or gravitate towards. I then ask students to write a list of four people they work well with and if there are any students they do not work well with. I then use this information to create table groups, trying to keep the boy/girl ratio somewhat even and trying my best to make sure everyone is paired with at least one person they work well with. Once groups are created, I go over how the points system will work.

Behaviours that earn points.

The most important part of this classroom rewards system is explaining to students *how* they can earn points. Although some of the literature discusses specific actions earning points, this tends to cause students to behave a certain way because they anticipate that it will earn them points, rather than doing it because they want to (Garaus et al., 2016). This is where my flexible points system comes into play; although many different behaviours *can* earn points, students should never expect points.

For example: one of the main behaviours that I award points for is tables being ready for the lesson and showing they are listening. This includes having binders out, being focused on me, and not talking. I usually start the year off giving students a reminder, which phrases such as "I am looking for the cleanest and most alert table to give some points to". This encourages students to get ready quickly and not waste time when they come in in the morning. It also emphasizes the use of praise and positive reinforcement, as I do not single tables out that are not ready. Instead, I may say something like "Wow, Table 6, you got ready so fast! I'd like to give you two points". This allows me to give praise to the table that behaved well and also give them a sense of pride, while not negatively singling out any tables that are not ready as quickly. Instead, it focuses on the desired behaviour and encourages other tables to do the same behaviour next time.

As I mentioned earlier, students learn that they should not expect to get points for a certain behaviour. Just because their table is clean and they are listening does not mean they will get two points every morning. The idea is for students to do this behaviour because it is expected and they want to out of respect for me and their classmates, rather than just for points. As an added bonus they may get points for it. This keeps students alert and striving to do their best, as they never know what might earn them a point.

Working together to create the system

Creating behaviour expectations

Once table groups have been established, we have various discussions about what behaviours or events should be eligible to earn points. This is an ongoing discussion throughout the year, as students and I often come up with new point earning behaviours as time goes on. An example of some behaviours students usually come up with can be seen in the following chart:

Figure 1 – Behaviour Chart

Behaviours and Activities to Earn Rewards			
Clean table	Cleaning up a mess without being asked	Not talking when I am talking	Staying focused for a long time
Listening immediately when I ring bell for attention	First ones ready before snack/lunch	End of day jobs completed first	Offering to help me without being asked
Helping a classmate without being asked	Thoughtful gesture to a classmate	Working extra hard	Demonstrating mature behaviour
Raising your hand	Posing an interesting idea	Showing improvement	Working well together

The list could go on, but the above chart shows some behaviours that are centered on kindness and self-improvement rather than academic performance that students in my class and I usually come up with. It is also important to note that students do not always get points for this type of behaviour, and there is no set amount of points per behaviour. Sometimes they may earn one point, whereas other times it could be worth three points. This keeps the system surprising and anticipatory and avoids creating expectations. Furthermore, if students ask for points, such as saying “Ms. Bowra, I just helped Ashley clean up; can I get a point?” the behaviour will not be rewarded. This correlates with the concept of respect for me as the teacher, and the fact that I ultimately decide when and who receives points.

Creating the incentives/rewards.

Another important step in the classroom rewards process is creating the rewards. This is also done as a class after a discussion about what types of rewards are appropriate. For example: tangible rewards such as food, toys, or physical prizes are not encouraged, as that would require me to replenish them. This is something I did my first year of teaching, and it cost me a lot of my own money and did not seem to improve behaviour or intrinsic motivation at all, which is supported in the literature (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Instead, rewards that are not always tangible or do not cost money, and can be replicated continuously, are ideal.

Once students have come up with rewards they would enjoy, we then discuss a fair amount of points that each reward should cost. We often choose point value based on how long the reward will last. For example, will the reward activity be 10 minutes? 30? An hour? Does it take extra time out of my day to plan, or is it easy to fit in? The chart below shows some of the popular rewards and their values my classes have come up with in the past. Furthermore, some of the rewards will be for the entire class, whereas others may be just for the table who purchases them.

Figure 2 – Rewards Chart

Extra Outside Time (whole class) 15 min 15 points 20 min 15 points 25 min 15 points	Skip Spelling Test for the Week (per group) 15 points	Class Movie Day (whole class) 160 points (points can be donated by each group)	Classroom Games Afternoon (whole class) 1 hour 120 points (points can be donated by each group)
Choose PE Activity 10 points	iPad or Laptop Free Time (per group) 30 minutes – 30 points	Choice of Where to Sit for the Week (per group) 25 points	Lunch Monitors for the Week (per group) 20 points

As you can see in the chart above, some rewards are targeted to the whole class whereas others are specific to each table group. For example, if Table 2 buys extra outside time, they are buying it for the entire class. In contrast, if Table 3 buys "Skip Spelling for the Week", that means only their group will be able to skip spelling. A third example is choosing a PE activity; Table 1 might purchase this, which means that group gets to decide on the PE activity for the *whole* class to play. The different types of rewards help create different possibilities for working together and supporting one another, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Working together for rewards.

The most distinguishing feature of our classroom rewards system is that we must work together. Whether you are working together as a table group or a whole class, the concept of collaboration is always present. This helps to create a strong bond between students and also improves their decision-making skills.

Students must all agree on their purchase.

An extremely important concept in this rewards system is that table groups must discuss every purchase they make. When students decide to buy a reward, I will always ask each individual member of the group if they have been consulted on the decision. For example, if one student from Table 6 asks to buy gym, I will remind them to discuss this with his entire table group and if they all agree, to let me know. This ensures that all students feel included in the decision-making process and have their voices heard. If a

table group is unable to all agree, then they must come up with their own solution. This is another great example of encouraging problem-solving skills.

A common solution students come up with is if two members want to purchase PE and the other two do not, then the two who do not want to get to pick the reward they buy next time. Or, the whole group may decide to keep saving their points until they can purchase *both* the rewards they are having trouble deciding between. A third option if the whole group cannot decide between Doctor Dodgeball or Soccer for PE is to do half and half so that all group members are satisfied.

"Buying" rewards for the whole class.

Another important learning experience for students is when they buy a "whole class" reward. This is a great way for students to work together and take turns so that all classmates can benefit. I have been constantly amazed by how kind and willing students are to buy a reward that is for the whole class. A common example is buying outside time for the whole class. This involves one table group using their personal earned points to buy outside time for the whole class. I initially thought this reward would not go over well, as it meant that a table was using up their points whereas other groups spent nothing and still got the same reward. However, I was pleasantly surprised how willing students were to use their own points for the benefit of the whole class. I heard many heartwarming comments such as "You guys buy outside time today and we can buy it tomorrow", or "If you buy it this week, we can do it next week?".

When students are thoughtful like this, I always make sure to give them praise and highlight how kind and thoughtful they are in front of the whole class. For example, if Table 2 offers to buy outside time for the whole class, I might say "Everyone, it's our lucky day! Table 2 is so awesome and has purchased outside time for the whole class!" This usually leads to shouts of excitement and exclamations like "Thanks Table 2!" or "You guys are awesome!" I can always see visible pride from the table who bought the reward for the class, as they clearly feel happy to be recognized for their kind act. As Garaus et al., (2016) note, praise is much more likely to intrinsically motivate students in the future to perform the same way. This is definitely what I have noticed, as other groups want to be the next one to do something thoughtful for the class.

Collaborative Decision-Making and Working Together

Another collaborative concept that has been so rewarding to experience is when table groups work together for a whole class reward such as a movie or free time afternoon. I will usually say something along the lines of "I think it would be great if we have a Movie Day next week! Is anyone willing to donate some points?" This usually leads to lots of hands being raised, as students enjoy working together and getting the recognition for helping work towards a common goal. I then have table groups discuss how much they each feel comfortable donating; although I could divide the total points needed equally amongst the table groups, it is much more beneficial to see what each group is willing to give.

For example, some groups may have 60 points whereas another group may only have 5. It is extremely rewarding to see students recognize this and acknowledge that since they have more points, it might be nice for them to donate more than their table mates. Once they have a chance to decide amongst their group, we start a tally on the board. Often, groups are overly generous and we get more points than needed before we even reach the last group. Other times if we are a bit short, students will raise their hand to contribute more points. It is a very heart-warming experience and I am constantly amazed at how generous kids can be.

Summary

To recap this chapter, I have discussed how the classroom rewards system works in my Grade 4 or 5 classrooms. As I work at an inner-city school, I have chosen to focus the rewards on behaviour related incentives, rather than academic motivators. With that being said, I believe that my experience and the literature reflect the importance of including some behavioural motivators in any rewards system, as it helps foster a sense of community and pride amongst students.

Furthermore, my personal experience has shown how important it is to work together as a class to determine the behaviours that should earn points and the behaviours that should not. With that being said, it is crucial to establish that students should not expect to get a point every time they perform a certain behaviour. This is an added bonus that is at my discretion and may occur at random.

When it comes to developing the rewards, this should also be done collaboratively as a class (Rogers, 2018; Xenos, 2012). Having a selection of whole class versus single group rewards also allows for students to have some personalized choice. They also learn the importance of coming to a decision together in order to purchase a reward, as well as the pride and sense of accomplishment that comes from purchasing a reward that benefits their classmates. Since students are given a lot of choice in this rewards system, it allows them to learn the value of working together and kind gestures and how good it makes you feel to do something kind for another person.

Relevance to M.Ed Program

Although much of the Rewards System was developed in my own classroom, my experience in this M.Ed program aided in the system focusing on collaboration. In my first years of teaching, the system focused more on rewards and behaviours that I decided I wanted to see. However, some of my favourite courses in this degree taught me the importance and value of collaboration. For example, two of the courses I enjoyed the most were Educational Leadership and the Principles and Processes of Educational Management. In these courses, I learned so much about how collaboration can aid in respect for the leader/teacher and a sense of being valued from subordinates/students.

I realized how much more valued I felt when I had a principal who actually cared about staff opinion and encouraged their ideas, versus one who made all the decisions and expected teachers to follow because she was "in charge". I realized that I could

apply this way of thinking to my own classroom, so that students did not feel like they had to listen because I was their teacher, but rather, because they had come up with the guidelines themselves and *wanted* to complete the desired behaviour because it led to outcomes that benefited them and their classmates. Once I implemented a more collaborative approach to my classroom rewards system, I was shocked to see how much better it was received by students and how well it worked.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

This final section will address how my argument was proven in this paper, how it relates to the literature, its application in real life, and the implications of how it can impact education going forward.

Summary

In the education system, behaviour management is a focal point in any classroom. Throughout your teaching career, you will likely read about endless tactics to encourage positive behaviour in the classroom. When it comes to a classroom rewards system, many believe this focus on rewards for certain students and an unfair advantage for those who are academically higher than others.

The purpose of this capstone is to challenge this perception that classroom rewards systems can negatively impact students. I argue that through a thoughtfully designed rewards system that has student choice as its focus, as well as an emphasis on positive behaviour, students can become intrinsically motivated and to succeed. Furthermore, focusing on a *whole* class rewards system with an emphasis on positive behaviour rather than academic achievement provides equal opportunities for all students, giving them a chance to feel important and successful (Lepper et al.,1996). In response to this, students will feel intrinsically motivated to do better and work harder to achieve goals in all areas, as they have been given opportunities to see what they are capable of.

When it comes to the literature, there is a vast array of research on classroom rewards systems. Many researchers have measured the effectiveness of classroom rewards and how they impact student learning. They have also looked into how punishment or being left out of a reward can negatively affect students' mindsets, and how working together to achieve a reward can give students a sense of pride (Pierce et al., 2003). Furthermore, the literature shows that it is important to switch up rewards and create new ones so that students are constantly aiming to achieve more, rather than remaining at a standstill once they are able to do that desired behaviour (Cameron et al., 2001; Garaus et al., 2016; Molina-Leal and Peña-Cerón, 2020 Rusz et al., 2020).

However, where the research is lacking is in the application of a whole-class rewards system. Although we can see in the literature that praise, incentives, and recognition can positively impact student motivation and confidence in themselves, the research on rewards is largely focused on academic goals (Bear et al., 2016; Garaus et al., 2016).

In the application section, I outlined how a rewards system can be a whole-class initiative, and provide equal opportunity for all, while taking into account the importance of equity. Students should be a part of the entire rewards process, from creating rewards to deciding what behaviour should be rewarded with table points. In my classroom, points were an *added* incentive, meaning there was no punishment for not receiving

points (Jacquet et al., 2020). The focus was on bonus incentives, such as extra outside time or choosing the PE activity.

Furthermore, redeeming rewards was taught to be a whole-group initiative, teaching the importance of teamwork and group decision-making. By coming up with the desired behaviours and rewards together as a class, students know what to expect and they are to be held accountable for their own behaviour. Behaviours that earn points focus on kindness and respect, rather than academic ability, and students understand that they are never owed a point, but rather it is at my discretion. This encourages students to perform the desired behaviours because they want to, rather than because they know it will earn them a point (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

A classroom rewards system is complex, and the one I have discussed in this paper took several years to perfect. The M.Ed program taught me the importance of collaboration and group-decision making, which led to me incorporating a larger degree of student choice and involvement in the creation of the rewards system.

Implications

This paper has demonstrated that a classroom rewards system is an effective method of behaviour management and intrinsic motivation. Although the idea of a rewards system is often met by apprehension, this paper has shown that the reason for that lies in a lack of literature and research on rewards systems that function at a whole-class level. This paper has shown the importance of involving students in their learning

by incorporating their opinions and ideas. This is an entirely new way of looking at a rewards system, as it emphasizes the importance of working together to achieve rewards. In contrast to many rewards systems discussed in the literature, this one is not designed for specifically “high needs” students or as an individual student plan. Instead, it is designed for the entire class so that all students have equal opportunities for rewards.

The significance of this paper is extreme, as it provides an important new insight regarding classroom management and motivation in students. Teachers of all levels of experience could benefit from this information, as we are always trying out new behaviour management techniques. It is also relevant to all grade-levels, as the main component of this system is positive behaviour and kindness towards others. By making the goals easy to achieve and points not expected by students, it helps foster a sense of community and desire to be kind and helpful because it makes students feel good.

To conclude this paper, I will note that students have a desire to feel important and capable, and it is our job as teachers to make them feel that they are able to improve. Although not all students are capable of the same things, this paper has demonstrated that a focus on positive behaviours such as respect and kindness towards others has the potential to encourage and motivate students to improve in other facets of their life as well. Furthermore, giving students the opportunity to work together towards a goal that they are able to achieve is an important lesson on communication and collaboration, which will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

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