



## Why You Should Eat Lunch With Your Students

No, not every day, and not even every week.

You need your lunch break to get away from teaching, if only for a few minutes. You need the time to take a breather, prep your classroom, or think ahead to the afternoon. You need time to discuss your favorite TV show with a colleague or listen to Pandora in peace.

After all, it's your time, and it should remain that way. But occasionally, maybe once or twice a month, it pays to eat lunch with your students. It pays to go where they go, to sit down in the lunch room right smack dab in their midst.

It pays to surprise your students with the words, "Mind if I join you?"

Here's why.

**It's an effortless way to build rapport.**

**Building rapport** is a key cornerstone of effective classroom management.

It's also an area that is commonly misunderstood. Most teachers are too forward, too familiar, and too forceful in their attempts to build rapport, which weakens rather than strengthens the relationship.

Genuine, behavior-influencing rapport is created organically. It *comes to you*, by student choice, through your warm and friendly personality. Eating

lunch with students can speed up this process because it embeds you in their territory, frames you in a new and different light, and smooths your interactions with a natural, free-of-strings vibe that effortlessly draws students into your realm of influence.

### **It proves that every day is a new day.**

The mere act of showing up for lunch without an agenda is powerful proof that in your classroom **every day is a new day** – that it isn't just lip service, but central to who you are. It proves to your class that, despite your faithful adherence to your classroom management plan, there are *never* any hard feelings.

This is especially important for your most challenging students, who, given their experiences in the past, need extra convincing. It is a message that is essential if you are to make headway in changing their behavior. They must see that misbehavior in no way defines who they are, that it will never soil the positive feelings you have for them – which are unconditional and awash with grace.

### **It connects the less connected.**

Most students, and even some teachers, assume that shy, less popular students choose to be the way they are. But the truth is, self-consciousness and social awkwardness preclude them from taking part in a natural or meaningful way. Deep down, in their sweetest dreams, they would love to be able to banter and joke with classmates appropriately, participate in class unabashedly, and be just one of the girls or boys.

Sound classroom management goes a long way toward creating an atmosphere of acceptance, edification, and social safety. But the moments you spend with your students informally, as you would at lunch, can make the biggest difference. Your modeling of give-and-take conversation, your gentle inclusion of every student, your showcasing of varied and wonderful personalities and interests . . .

With a light touch, your master class on how to generously converse, enjoy one another's company, and appreciate individuality can have a profound affect on their social behavior, friendships, and learning participation.

### **It's About Relationships**

It's important to note that buying your students lunch as a **reward for good behavior** doesn't count and won't in any way improve your relationships – or anything else for that matter. It's manipulative and produces a 'do this and get that' economy which undermines authentic, behavior-influencing rapport.

Plopping down with your students on their turf, on the other hand, with no hidden agenda or expectation of receiving anything in return, is gloriously free of strings or barter – and therein lies its power. It's an in-the-moment experience, with no past and no future. It's just you and them and the conversation you share.

It's where the magic of rapport just . . . happens.

If sharing your lunch period with students feels awkward at first, or if the conversation wanes, that's okay. It will get easier with time. Before long,

you'll begin seeing the ripening fruit of your small sacrifice – which by then you'll no longer see as a sacrifice at all, but something you look forward to, something that does as much for you as it does for them.

It's in your relationships, after all, where the lasting memories of your career are made. It's in the smiles, the laughter, the unquestioned trust, and the good vibrations that hum and judder between you.

When you're retired on on to other things, when your class pictures begin to yellow and curl, it is the one thing that will endure.

The one thing that will never fade away.