



STEPS OR REPS

A Positive Whole Class Management Tool



The Positive Engagement Project
THE POSITIVE ENGAGEMENT PROJECT
Making a difference...not a dollar.

STEPS^{OR}REPS

The logo features the words 'STEPS' in blue and 'REPS' in green, with 'OR' in a smaller font between them. Below the text are several black footprints arranged in a path that suggests movement or steps.

As educators, it is our job and moral obligation to provide an environment in which every child has the opportunity to learn. The Positive Engagement Project believes that a classroom should be a place where students feel emotionally and physically safe; a place where students feel encouraged about what they can do and not be lowered by what they cannot. Each teacher has a major influence within the four walls of their classroom. It doesn't matter what grade or subject you teach, you have a certain amount of minutes per day to inspire the students who pass through your door. Once they enter your room, your classroom becomes a place where you can make a difference.

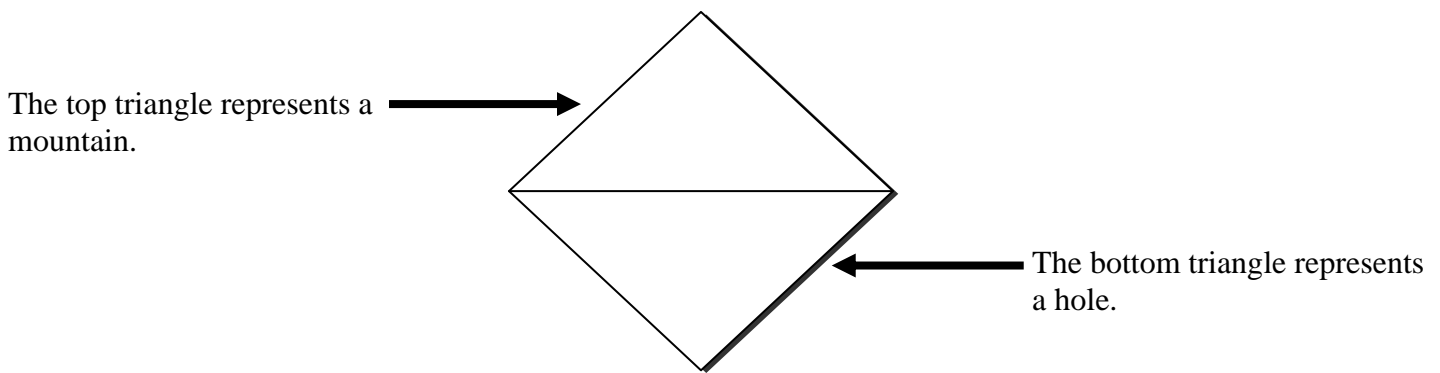
Students excel, both socially and academically, when they feel better about themselves. The most powerful motivation for a child, or an adult for that matter, is encouragement. When a person feels encouraged, they feel as if they can do just about anything. It isn't the obstacles, mistakes, or shortcomings people experience that will ultimately define them. It's the way in which they respond to these challenges and the most essential factors are the attitudes and skills they have learned through encouragement. Praise and encouragement are not the same things; in fact, they are quite different. Praise is given to those who succeed in something. On the other hand, encouragement is unconditional because it accepts and supports a person whatever the outcome of their efforts.

Steps or Reps is a classroom management tool designed to encourage students to perform at their highest possible level and at the same time, supports them when they don't quite make it. As teachers, it's usually easy to encourage efforts that lead to an accomplishment (for example, getting more steps on the diamond). It is also possible to respond encouragingly when an effort has produced less than stellar results (for example, getting more reps on the diamond, thus necessitating some rehearsal time).

Many classroom management tools attempt to motivate change or behavior through a punishment and reward system. Positive results are temporary and usually involve a heavy dose of discouragement. Children may do better to avoid the punishment or to gain the reward, but the price many pay is the loss of self confidence. *Steps or Reps* is a tool that encourages students to perform to their highest level and notes when some more practice may be needed to get the class the skills they need to cooperatively achieve those goals.

Classroom management systems that are set up as a competition between you and the class have a win-lose or lose-lose result. Bottom line, someone will always feel as if they were the reason for not winning. Why promote a system that fosters discouragement and failure for our children? *Steps or Reps* creates a win-win environment; it is not a competition between you and the students or groups of students versus other students, but rather a way to record the strengths of the class and the areas they need a bit more practice. The focus is *encouragement* rather than *discouragement*.

How to Use *Steps or Reps* with Your Class: Throughout the day the class is taking steps, either up the mountain or down into the hole. To represent these steps, start off by gridding off a large diamond on your whiteboard, creating two triangles by making a horizontal line going across the middle (electrical tape works very well and doesn't damage most whiteboards). Explain to your kids that the top half of the diamond represents a mountain while the bottom half represents a hole. This diamond is a management graphic to visually indicate to your students how their day as a class is going.



The tool itself is very simple. Each time the class follows procedures properly, give them a step on the top triangle to represent climbing up the mountain. The goal for the class is to climb as high up the mountain as possible. Every time the students follow procedures to the class set expectations, they are performing together at a high level.

Each time the class doesn't follow procedures properly, give them a step on the bottom triangle to represent stepping on a shovel and digging a hole. These are also referred to as **REPS** to represent the need for more repetition and practice with classroom procedures. There is no punishment here, just showing the class that they are not following procedures to the class set expectations and there are things that need to be worked on.

When to Give Steps: This is a classroom management tool used for the entire class, not one or two students. There are no gimmicks involved or rules on how many steps can be given to either triangle. The key is to be well defined with your procedures and be consistent when you give steps.

A few procedures you could use the diamond with are: transitions from subject to subject, passing out/turning in papers, lining up, entering/exiting the classroom, responding to teacher attention cues, working on a task cooperatively as a group, following class expectations (see the B7P packet), and the list goes on.

How to Respond When Giving Steps in Either Direction: The key to *Steps or Reps* is how you and the students respond to the actual steps being given. Never make it feel like a reward or punishment, rather positively encourage them to continue their hard work.

For each step you give on the mountain triangle, have the class respond with a quick, “Good job!” to their neighbor. If you wish you can infuse a little humor in here as well and have them give high fives, thumbs up, or knuckle bumps to each other.

As for steps on the digging a hole triangle, have the class respond with a quick encouraging “We can do it!” to their neighbor. It is important to point out to your students that *Steps or Reps* is for the entire class and we are all in this together.

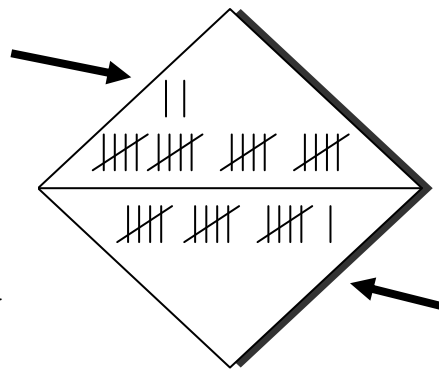
Whether the students or saying, “Good job!” or “We can do it!” (or any other phrases you come up with), the response should be very quick and take no longer than one to two seconds. If time is wasted, the class is no longer following proper procedures.

The quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson says it best: “Who came up with the idea to make someone do better we have to make them feel worse?”

Sample *Steps or Reps* Diamond: Below is an example of what a completed *Steps or Reps* graphic could look like at the end of the day. If the class receives more steps up the mountain, then it was a day in which they followed classroom procedures very well. If the class receives more steps on the shovel digging a hole, then it was a day in which the class needs a bit more encouragement and practice.

STEPS: If your students are following the class expectations well, give steps in the **mountain** section. Start at the base and work your way UP towards the top, or peak, of the mountain. Take as many steps up the mountain as possible. The goal is to always have more **STEPS** than **REPS**.

The class is always striving to climb to the top of the mountain.



REPS: If your students are not following the class expectations well, give steps (or reps) in the **hole** section. Start at the top of the lower triangle and work your way DOWN towards the bottom, like digging a hole; the more practice that is needed, the deeper the hole. The goal is to never have more **REPS** than **STEPS**.

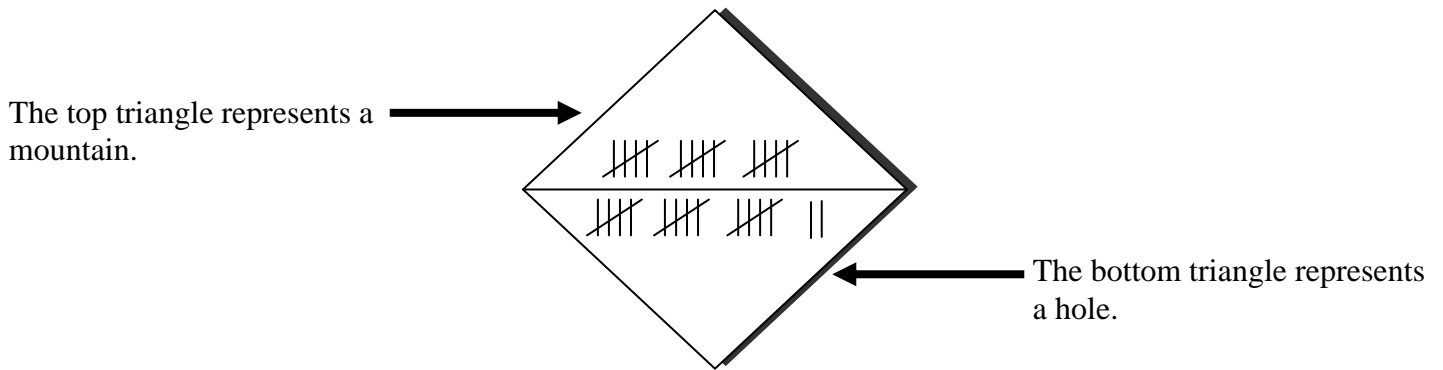
The class is always striving not to dig a hole too deep.

It is important that the class understands that the two triangles represent their day and they earned every step, either up the mountain or digging the hole. The teacher merely records the steps that they take.

Though it is not needed, at the end of the day, you can use the margin of difference as the indicator for any one of the following items.

1. **Class Performance Time:** Using the example above, the class had twenty two steps up the mountain and sixteen steps on the shovel. The difference of points between the two triangles is six. The class worked cooperatively together and created six minutes of performance time at the end of the day. That time can be used to play a class game or any number of learning games (see the free download section at www.PEPnonprofit.org for educational games, such as Math and Field, Acing Math, Prime and Composite Lines, etc...).
2. **Banking Performance Time:** Instead of giving kids their earned performance time every single day, you can bank the minutes for each day and give them a greater amount of time on a different day. Be sure to maintain a running total of the steps and keep that time at an amount you feel comfortable giving. Obviously, you don't want the performance time to reach high double digits; if that's the case, you may want to use option one.

Sample Steps or Reps Diamond With More Reps: In the case that your class has more steps in the lower triangle, use the margin of difference to help them practice the skill or skills needed to perform the procedures at the class set expectation. Let's use the sample below.



In this example, the class had fifteen steps up the mountain, but seventeen steps on the shovel. The difference of the two triangles is two, which means the class will practice **(REPS)** for two minutes on one of the procedures that they are lacking proficiency. This is where it is important to involve the students by using encouraging words and open-ended questions like, “What have you learned even though the day didn’t turn out the way you hoped?” Let the kids come up with the procedure(s) they need to work on and then provide them a chance to practice that procedure. For example, if the students say they got a lot of steps on the lower triangle because they didn’t do transitions from subject to subject very well, have them practice, as a class, putting away a math book and getting out a social studies book the way that is needed to get steps up the mountain.

As Harry Wong stated in his best selling book, *The First Days of School*, “The number one problem in the classroom is not discipline: it is the lack of procedures and routines.” He goes on to explain that procedures are how things are done in the classroom and should warrant no penalty when done incorrectly. These procedures are defined, modeled and practiced until they are done automatically by the students and the teacher.

Here is Harry Wong's *Three Step Approach for Teaching Procedures*:

- **Explain**: State, explain, model, and demonstrate the procedure.
- **Rehearse**: Rehearse and practice the procedure under your supervision.
- **Reinforce**: Reteach, rehearse, practice, and reinforce the classroom procedure until it becomes a student habit or routine.

Establishing set routines and procedures for every aspect of the classroom is the key to establishing a positive, safe learning environment for our students. From the moment the students line up to enter the classroom to the teacher's dismissal, having structure based on encouraging words, clear expectations and appropriate ways to help students perform those expectations are the basis for creating a safe learning environment.