



## AUTISM CLASSROOM RESOURCES PODCAST, EPISODE 3: CLASSROOM VISIONS


URL: <http://autismclassroomresources.com/episode3>

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research-based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

We have been talking about the struggles of working with other adults in the classroom and the struggle is very real. Let's face it, sometimes interacting with adults is harder than interacting with the students. So probably it's because our expectations are a bit different. But the working and the interactions make it a little bit harder to, so we have talked about how to create a positive classroom culture.

And we've talked about building relationships among the staff members. So today we're going to move on to tip three of creating a classroom vision. So let's get started.

Today for tip three, I'm talking about creating a classroom vision. I know it might sound hokey, but having a classroom vision, or a shared value statement with the team is very important in uniting everyone with a similar purpose, you might want to call it a classroom value statement or mission statement. But really, when no matter what you call it, it's so helpful when you need to give feedback to staff, when you want to get everybody on the same page, when you want to get everybody back on track.




And your classroom vision could be short, or it might be longer. And it really just needs to outline what you and your team, see this classroom is being about.

- So for instance, do you value building independence of the students as a primary goal?
- Is communication, something every student should work on every day?
- Perhaps your goal is to make sure that your students attain the highest level of academic excellence.
- Or you want to make sure that your students are prepared for a 21st century technological world.

Whatever your goals are, for your class as a whole, and whatever your philosophy, it can go into your classroom vision.

And your staff is going to participate in developing that, and we'll talk about that in just a moment. But it's important that this become a shared document that they have all participated in, and that it isn't just coming from you

The reason that I call it a vision is because I remember a time that we were working with a school district, and they wanted to create some more self contained classroom for students who need more instruction. But it was very clear in working with the staff that they were very committed to an inclusion program. And we basically were seeing some students that we thought we needed more intensive instruction, and they could get an inclusion but the staff was not seeing it that way. And so it was very interesting, because it was one of those things where the leader of the group came



back in and said, “Well, wait a minute, wait a minute, what happened, like you were supposed to lead them in this direction.” And we looked at him and said, “That’s not their vision. That’s not what they are seeing as being important in your district.” And he looked at us, he said, “Let me share the vision. This is what it’s going to be.”


And I’ve always remembered that because, guess what, that doesn’t work. Sharing the vision and saying this is the vision, it’s my vision, and you’re going to have it is your vision does not work.

The whole point of the value statement or vision is that you are to develop it as a team so that it is everyone’s shared vision. And that does take some work. But it’s really important for developing the kind of classroom that you want to create where everybody is working together.

If you’ve had the opportunity to see Brene’ Brown’s, Netflix talk or her TED Talk, she is amazing. And she is my new obsession. And she just came out with a book called *Dare to Lead*, that she has now developed a classroom version of for teachers. And she makes a great point about teachers being the fundamental leaders in our society.

Those things weren’t published when I started with classroom visions. She calls hers value statements. And that’s probably closer to really what I’m going to describe. But I like the vision because to me, you can’t just share the vision, you have to create the vision as a group.

She does a great job of talking about the need to live our values, not just write them out, as well. And I’ll probably do a whole podcast about her Classroom Leadership Program at some point, because I think it’s phenomenal. But in the meantime, I’ll add some links in the show notes to her tools for creating value statements in organizations.




But creating a value statement for the classroom, like most things, is unique. Just like working side by side with people that you supervise that you're not the boss of is also unique. It's not a company or an organization that you put together, it's not a team that you chose or you developed, it's a team that's been assigned to work together.

They often don't have the same training, they often don't have the same background as you do. And so that makes it particularly thorny at times. So here's some specific tips I have for creating your own classroom value statement or your vision for your team.

Number one, the biggest one, I think, is do it together, collaborate with the staff. You may have a framework in your head that you can share, and you can share that framework with them. But if you don't include them in developing the vision, then you're not going to have a shared vision. And if it's not a shared vision, it's not going to move you forward.

And going in the same direction. I don't mean to let me share the vision kind of way. I mean, share it as here's some things I was thinking about, tell me what you're thinking about. So it's more, hey, these are things that were on my mind that I thought are important in the classroom. But I want to hear from you.

And again, just like I said, in Episode 2, where we talked about building the culture, listening is going to be really key. So you want to make sure that you're building something that everybody buys into, because that makes it much more likely that there's going to be a success. And I'll talk for a minute about what happens when you're not on the same page and how you can try to move people in the same page.




But first, number two, I want to talk about what happens when you don't have time for a meeting to create it. Because as we've talked about, we don't have a lot of meeting time. This is not an organization that runs on meetings. And it's not an organization that runs on a lot of overlapping time between you and your parents either. So what do you do when you don't have time for a meeting to create the vision; you don't have staff that's with you during the day, when the students aren't there. Here's some ideas.

Put up a blank page that says classroom vision at the top, give everyone a post it note and ask them to add at least one or two post-its with their thoughts about a classroom vision to that piece of paper before they leave that day. So see if you can get them to kind of write them down.

You could also have them email them to you, I just think the visual of putting it, I put it by the classroom door, the visual of being able to see it is a good reminder that you need it from them. You can choose whether to give them different color post-it so you know whose ideas or what or you could choose to give them all the same post it color, so they can't see who posted what that may make them feel more comfortable as well.

So you just want them to ask to share their thoughts. You might give them a cheat sheet like the free one that I have waiting for you on [the blog](#). Or you may give them some examples of vision statements just to give them something that they can work from. So they kind of get an idea about what you're looking for.

Put your own post it notes up there as well. So they can kind of see those. And then take those posts and make a draft and share it again. And then ask them to put up post it notes with feedback on that draft.



So you're going to take all their post it and you're going to go through them and include them in some way into the documents so that they can see that they have had an input into it, and then get their feedback again. And, they do that a couple times before you all are on the same page.


Number three is what do you do with that feedback on those posts, or the suggestions that you get verbally that don't really align with what you think the classroom should be as the instructor. So first, consider whether you can add those things in and whether you might reconsider their importance.

They may say that it's very important in my value is that these kids feel loved. Okay, there's nothing wrong with that. That's a perfectly appropriate type of value. And that could be incorporated. That's very different than, "I just want to do everything for this student." Well, that I probably wouldn't include in exactly that way.

So if it can't be added, if it's really off base, like "I just feel like we need to do everything for the students, he just needs a babysitter." If that's where they're coming from, first of all better to know, not know, because otherwise, we get into that festering thing.

But if it's really off base figure, if you figure out if you can reframe it for the person in some way, rather than saying, well, I threw this post it out, because this does not apply to our classroom. Rather than shooting it down, try saying, "I'm concerned that it might take us away from our other values as a class. You know, other people are feeling that we really need to be independent, have our students being independent, and if we're doing everything for them, we're not really giving them that opportunity."






Or “I think we need to have higher expectations for our students, I think they can do more, maybe that’s not been your experience. Maybe you haven’t been in a classroom, where you saw what we can do with the students, I think with some structure, we can go beyond that, would that be okay with you?”

And obviously, it’s somewhat of what the staff wanted to add, but you don’t want to just shoot it down, because then you’ve killed morale in your class. And you’ve made it very clear, this is not their vision, they also won’t feel comfortable sharing in the future. And then it just becomes that thing under the surface that festers and makes your classroom miserable.

So really think about how you can reframe it. The nice thing about doing it in a format of everybody puts on post it notes, and then you put it together, is that you could actually go back and ask somebody, “I don’t even know how to include this in here.” And somebody who’s not in the middle of the situation might be able to help you figure out how to reframe it. And that may make it easier for you to give that feedback. But don’t just say, as my old advisor used to tell us to deal with questions when we did presentations at conferences, he would say, “Well, you just look at them, you say that’s a very good question, then you answer the question you want to answer and not theirs. I’m like, that’s what a politician does. That’s not what you want. You don’t want to give them lip service, that you’re listening to them and then discounting everything they say.

So you need to make sure that you have incorporated what they’ve said, into your document. And finally, once you get a vision outlined, post that final document in your classroom, and it really serves two purposes. One is, it lets the visitors like family or administration know that these are the values or the goals that your classroom strives to achieve.



And second, it's a reminder to all the staff, including you, about what those goals and the end values are. And that's really where you get into the live your values type of thing that Brene' Brown talks about; it's not enough to write it down, we have to actually live that.

And so it gives you an opportunity to say to your staff, we're going to hold each other accountable for this. If you see me not doing something that is part of our shared values, I need you to tell me, I need you to give me that feedback.


Remember, I talked about the fact that you've got to open yourself up to feedback when we talked about relationships. So you've got to be willing to say, "Hey, I'm not perfect, and I'm not going to do everything, right. So when you see me screwing up, you need to let me know." It's a two way street.

So second, it's also a reminder that when you're giving staff feedback you can point to. So you can say, "Remember, in our vision, this is why this is important."

This is why I'm sharing this with you, the fact that it's a two way street, the fact that it's coming back to a common document that we all participated in, make it more likely that that person is going to come on board.

So I'll be sure to put the link to the blog post for this podcast in the show notes, and you can see an example of the classroom vision there. And I also have a template that you can use. And on that page, I will also have a freebie of things to consider when making your own classroom vision. It's kind of a cheat sheet of sorts about what kinds of values might go into your vision statement. And I'll make sure to drop Brene' Brown's links as well.





So let's just recap. You want to make sure that you're developing your vision statement or your value statement together as a group and that it is truly collaborative. Number two, you don't have time to sit down and have a conversation about it. Use the post it note idea as a way to do it on the run number. But again, make sure you're incorporating their feedback into it. Number three, when you get feedback or suggestions that don't align with what you, align with what you think the classroom should be, consider if you you can add it. And, if not, consider how you can incorporate it or reframe it in some way. And number four, post it and live those values and get everybody in the classroom focused on sharing when they see someone living those values and when they don't.

Finally, if you need some more ideas about ways to create classroom visions, or you want some different templates, or some more examples, check out my building classroom teams and staff zoning plans toolkit. I will put a link to that in the show notes.

It includes a whole section on writing classroom visions with templates, and it has some useful tips for bringing the staff together in defining the values of the classroom and reframing some of those ideas that might seem off the wall and also has some suggestions for building relationships, and some ideas for creating that meeting time.

I'll be back in the next episode with another tip in classroom management with staff. I am so glad that you've joined us for the series. Thank you so much for taking the time to listen to this episode. Make sure you go and subscribe on whatever podcast format you use the most and I hope that we'll see you in the next episode.

*Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>*