



What Makes This TEAM Reflection Paper Successful?

Some specific examples/evidence that contributed to the success of this paper are provided below.

Module 1: Classroom Environment

Grade: 9-10

Subject: Mathematics

Criteria I: Development of New Learning (*How the teacher developed new learning and what was learned*)

How the teacher developed new learning:

- Discussions with mentor and colleagues
- Read *Middle and Secondary Classroom Management* by Carol Simon Weinstein and *Teaching in Secondary Schools*, by Baldwin, Keating and Bachman
- Reviewed educational websites: NEA, Edutopia and AFT

What the teacher learned:

- “From my mentor and fellow teachers, I was able to get a sense of how students continually test teachers, how important it is to be clear about behavioral expectations and that in addition to setting rules and consequences, it is imperative to do as much as possible to preempt challenges to those rules.”
- “Another teacher I spoke with gives daily class participation grades which encompass coming to class on time and prepared, being on task, completing work, as well as checks on how often students are reminded of class rules. She ensures that students are reminded when they are losing points because they are not meeting class behavior expectations.”
- “I gathered ideas from Edutopia, NEA and AFT, about how to make sure consequences were appropriate to the rule violation. An escalating consequence scheme ranging from non-verbal cues to verbal warnings, specific directives, private conferences and calls to parents was recommended.”

Criteria II: Impact on Practice (*How the teacher’s practice is different*)

- “With input from students, the list of five rules was pared down to three: Respect Yourself, Respect Each Other and Respect the School. I created posters with the rules on them and put them up in the two rooms that I share for teaching. I took time with each class to go over the revised rules and we discussed the meaning of the word ‘respect.’”
- “... created a consequence plan that included scaffolding. Minor offenses like not paying attention or doing something other than what was assigned, would warrant eye contact or as Weinstein calls it ‘the teacher look.’ Students engaged in a conversation or the ones I could not make eye contact with, would be re-engaged by having them put examples on the board or explain the next math problem. Those that caused disruptions were verbally reminded they would be held after class and reported to the school disciplinary committee.”
- “... I instituted a daily participation grade. It had a real impact on classroom behavior when progress reports came out and students saw the effect of being off task every day had on their grade.”

Criteria III: Impact on Students (*How student performance/learning has improved as a result of changes in the teacher’s practice*)

- “For three or four students who continue to disrupt or ignore standards of behavior, parental intervention has worked to get them back on track during instruction and class work time. Parent calls have resulted in students being more focused and engaged during math class.”
- “After the change in seating and use of non-verbal cues, he [student] was able to keep himself on task more than 75% of the time or 55 minutes.”
- “Handing out a mathematic warm-up exercise as students entered the class, cut down on the time students spent milling around as they got their journals and calculators ... The first week I instituted this only 50% of the exercises were done. By the second week, the completion rate went up to 70%. Now students start the warm-up within 1-2 minutes of coming into class as opposed to 5 minutes.”

Indicator: 4. Teachers promote student engagement, independence and interdependence in learning by facilitating a positive learning community by: *Fostering appropriate standards of behavior that support a productive learning environment for all students*

Goal:

I will learn strategies to establish and enforce a set of classroom behavioral standards and expectations with clear consequences and as a result, a safe environment will be created where all students are expected and encouraged to be active learners.

Initial Summary:

I have three classes of mostly freshmen, one class of sophomores and one class which is a balanced mix of freshmen and sophomores. Initially, students were mindful of the rules with the exception of six students in the freshman classes who disrupted constantly. As students have become more comfortable in school, with new classmates and with me, they have begun to challenge the rules. Students object when rules are enforced and often challenge the reason for the rule. This has led to classes where too much time is spent trying to bring students back on task.

Reflection Paper:

My professional growth plan for this Classroom Management module included reading literature found on educational websites of the NEA, Edutopia and AFT, studying relevant parts of classroom management books such as *Middle and Secondary Classroom Management* by Carol Simon Weinstein as well as talking to colleagues in school, friends who are teachers and my mentor teacher. My goal was to uncover as many elements as possible that impact classroom management. In conversations with my mentor and other colleagues, we talked about rules I had set at the start of school, the number, whether or not they were posted, how often I referred to them and if the students were aware of the consequences for breaking rules. From my mentor and fellow teachers, I was able to get a sense of how students continually test teachers, how important it is to be clear about behavioral expectations and that in addition to setting rules and consequences it is imperative to do as much as possible to preempt challenges to those rules.

On this latter point, I gathered examples of preventative measures that teachers found successful and why. One teacher shared that she used a daily behavioral check list. Weinstein talks about this in her book, *Middle and Secondary Classroom Management* and highlighted it as a way to make students more self-aware. The student completes the checklist and hands it in at the end of class for the teacher to review giving both student and teacher a common assessment point. Another teacher I spoke with gives daily class participation grades which encompass coming to class on time and prepared, being on task, completing work, as well as checks on how often students are reminded of class rules. She ensures that students are reminded when they are losing points because they are not meeting class behavior expectations. Among the items that were identified as being key to helping prevent inappropriate behavior was the physical classroom setup and student seat assignment. I talked about this with other teachers as well as with my mentor teacher. It is also a topic discussed in

both Weinstein's book and in *Teaching in Secondary Schools* by Baldwin, Keating and Bachman. I learned how classrooms were set up and the affect it had on students and their behavior. This was put high on my list of items to monitor in my classroom practice during this module.

On the other side of the classroom behavior equation I got ideas on how to use rules and consequences effectively during class. Many teachers emphasized that rules should be kept simple so that students would not be confused about what was expected of them. I gathered ideas from Edutopia, NEA and AFT, about how to make sure consequences were appropriate to the rule violation. An escalating consequence scheme ranging from non-verbal cues to verbal warnings, specific directives, private conferences and calls to parents was recommended. I learned from colleagues that administering consequences must be done consistently, that it takes practice and reflection to ensure that the appropriate behaviors are being reinforced. During this initial exploration of Module 1, I discovered that classroom management is a craft that has no one set of rules that work in all circumstances. From my readings and consultations with colleagues, I found that I had a great many things I might focus on; the ones I thought would make a significant difference in establishing a productive learning environment in my classroom were: 1) reevaluation and simplification of rules and consequences and 2) physical desk arrangement and seat assignment.

The first thing I examined in my practice was the set of classroom rules. The expectations had been developed at the beginning of the school year and had been reiterated at least once, to two of my freshman classes. With input from students, the list of five rules was pared down to three: Respect Yourself, Respect Each Other and Respect the School. I created posters with the rules on them and put them up in the two rooms that I share for teaching. I took time with each class to go over the revised rules and we discussed the meaning of the word "respect." Respecting each other and themselves meant that they were to be in class, be seated with homework on their desk and working on the warm-up. We discussed the fact that being prepared meant having something to write on and something to write with and that having to spend time getting prepared while in class cut down on the instruction time of others. Respect for peers and the teacher by not disrupting the learning process was another aspect we discussed. The conversation was a good one and set the stage for further changes that I was going to make.

I reviewed what I had been doing to help reinforce rules with my mentor and we created a consequence plan that included scaffolding. Minor offenses like not paying attention or doing something other than what was assigned, would warrant eye contact or as Weinstein calls it "the teacher look." Students engaged in a conversation or the ones I could not make eye contact with, would be re-engaged by having them put examples on the board or explain the next math problem. Those that caused disruptions were verbally reminded they would be held after class and reported to the school disciplinary committee. Failure to modify behavior after a verbal warning would warrant a call to parents. In my freshman/sophomore mixed class I had one group of students in the back (five boys) who were on task as the lesson started, but began to converse during instruction. I found that warning them of the consequences and by putting examples on the board, worked to not only get them back on track but after three classes of being called on, they began to stay on track during instruction and review. In my freshman classes, looks and warnings had no lasting effect. In two of my classes there are two groups of

four girls who manage to stay on task only during the first 10 minutes of instruction. Looks and verbal warnings may get them back on task for a minute or two but as soon as my attention is drawn elsewhere, they are off track again. In these cases I have found that talking to them individually after class has a short term effect. At the suggestion of another teacher, I instituted a daily participation grade. It had a real impact on classroom behavior when progress reports came out and students saw the effect of being off task every day had on their grade. This realization caused most students to improve their behavior; they were on time, paid attention during instruction and completed class work.

For three or four students who continue to disrupt or ignore standards of behavior, parental intervention has worked to get them back on track during instruction and classwork time. Parent calls have resulted in students being more focused and engaged during math class.

After working on rules and consequences, I needed to look at the classroom's physical setting. Discussions with other teachers had garnered advice on how to group students to take advantage of their personalities and natural tendencies: talkers with non-talkers, students who tend to be less focused with those who are extremely focused, students with ADHD seated away from high traffic areas, those who need to focus in front and ensure that quiet students do not get lost in the back of the room. I examined the physical classroom setup and seat assignment to determine how it might be contributing to off task behavior. I share two classrooms with other teachers. In one room, desks are grouped into tables of four or five. I found that 8-10 of my students began to socialize as soon as they came in and sat down, ignoring my directives to take out homework and start working on math warm-up exercises. There were 3-4 other students grouped at tables who communicated little to their seatmates or others in class. In one of my last period Algebra classes I rearranged seating to specifically address the needs of a student who was taking Algebra for the second time. He was easily distracted and distracting to others so I sat him at the front table. In a 90 minute period, the change resulted in his being on task for at least 35 minutes during warm-up, instruction and class work. He still gets caught up at times in idle chatter and other non-math related conversations, but this is an improvement over an on task time of 10 minutes prior to the move. Positive reinforcement of his behavior and performance in class has also contributed to improvement in his behavior.

In one of my last period Algebra classes, I had two students who were off task throughout class. They were constantly disrupting instruction which resulted in completing warm-up exercises, paying attention during instruction or doing class work only 20% of the time. Based on the block schedule with 15 minutes for the warm-up, 25 minutes of instruction and 35 minutes of group/individual work, this was approximately 15 minutes out of 75. During a conversation with one student, I found that he wished to be seated away from classmates to avoid getting caught up in their disruptive behavior. By placing him at a desk by himself and working out non-verbal cues with the student, this helped me to judge his ability to understand the lesson and need for additional

instruction. After the change in seating and use of non-verbal cues, he was able to keep himself on task more than 75% of the time or 55 minutes. The second student, who also requested to move away from his table grouping, increased his on-task percentage from 30 to 40 minutes or roughly 40% to 55%. His behavior is not distracting to others but he is still challenged to steadily keep focused on the work in class. I will continue to work with him on staying engaged.

I continued my examination of physical setting for all of my classes. Three of my classes are held in a room where the teacher clusters desks together. For one of these classes, this arrangement promoted excess socialization, disruption during instruction and disregard for rules. I fell back on Weinstein's suggestion that "teachers need to determine which functions take precedence over others and keep in mind what is possible to achieve as a nomad who must move from room to room, or share space with others." My mentor suggested that the freshmen classes needed more structure and less direct social contact. I moved desks physically into a semi-circle for instruction so that students were sitting side by side, facing me. The change resulted in a reduced number of verbal reminders for students to stay on task, stop talking, or face the board. Of the 15 to 18 students in class, there were 3-4 who continued to push the rules however, the scaffolding of consequences pulled two of the students back on task with calls to their parents. Although moving the desks back into formation for the next teacher's class takes five minutes away from instructional time at the end of class, it has resulted in 15 additional minutes of instruction during class.

Physical changes in student placement and class setup along with positive reinforcement of desired behavior has helped reduce disruptive behavior in class, added to the amount of time students were kept on task and decreased the need to use negative consequences to keep students working productively.

Handing out a mathematic warm-up exercise as students entered the class, cut down on the time students spent milling around as they got their journals and calculators. I gave the students instructions to complete the exercise within 5 minutes and the time it would be collected. The first week I instituted this only 50% of the exercises were done. By the second week, the completion rate went up to 70%. Now students start the warm-up within 1-2 minutes of coming into class as opposed to 5 minutes.

I will continue to adjust my seating arrangements. In my first period Algebra class, I rearranged seats to group students more by ability. This class had 16 students in it and I found that they were off task during the 35 minutes of group/individual work at least half the time. The new groupings kept four higher ability students on track during all of their class work and it enabled me to focus on students who required more individualized instruction. However, two students did not fare as well as expected when put with students of similar abilities in another group. These students were only able to complete five minutes of group work before introducing topics that would draw others off task. I found students relied on higher ability students to help them decipher math examples and word problems they had difficulty reading and understanding. Frustration led to going off task and disruptive behavior. Rearranging seats for these two students, pairing them with a group that would provide "reading support" put both back on task for the 35 minute group/individual work. I continue to monitor the physical room arrangement to ensure that it is giving students the best opportunity to be on task during instruction and guided practice. I reward on-task behavior via the daily participation grade and

ensure that students are aware of the grades, when they are doing what is expected and when they are off-task.

As students grow and mature during the year their needs may change and I need to prepare for those changes. Aligning students with those who can challenge them is an important ingredient to classroom management. I need to continue to incorporate ideas that minimize transition lags, put in place clearer procedures that ensure students know what they are expected to do, how they are expected to do it and what to do when they have questions. I will continue to involve students and parents in making changes that affect their learning environment because I have seen that this can be successful.