

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

Part A: Promotion & Prevention Plan

What I think is important to promote and prevent, and why

In any good learning community, students and teachers have worked to co-construct classroom environments in which asking questions and collaboration are two routinely-practiced behaviors. These behaviors are vital because learning is enhanced when done cooperatively and interactively. Students, as well as teachers, are relational learners who depend on each another in order to not only internalize the material, but also to engage and externalize what is taught. Because knowledge is built rather than absorbed (Toshalis, 2015, p. 64), students benefit from classrooms that give students the opportunity to talk about the content and struggle through the difficulties with one another. Inherent in this idea is a classroom culture that is safe enough for students to take educational risks; these risks usually come in the form of asking questions. Questions—good, bad, and ugly—come up when students are actively engaged in the content of a class and when they are “struggling” to grasp the ideas being presented. When students work to collaboratively engage the content, these questions and struggles are powerful learning tools because “authentic, complex, deep, and long-lasting learning seldom occurs without struggle” (Toshalis, 2015, p. 67).

Students begin to take responsibility for one another’s educational success when they collaborate in the classroom. In addition, when asked why kids love school, their response is overwhelmingly because they are around people who care about them and because they trust their classmates and teachers (Freiberg & Lamb, 200, p. 101). Teachers, therefore, have to work to build the learning community so that students can trust one another and have the opportunity to create knowledge together. This is as much about teachers collaborating with students to build content knowledge as it is about students learning from one another. When a teacher is effective

in creating a “safer” space for student learning and the co-construction of knowledge, kids often show greater intellectual curiosity, demonstrate creativity, and display higher-level thinking (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009, p. 103).

In order to promote this level of engagement and intellectual risk-taking, the teacher must work hard to prevent ridicule in the class. Neurologist and teacher Judy Willis (2010) writes that “[t]he most brain-friendly environment is one that encourages participation and corrects the assumption that making errors means you are not smart” (p. 68). This means that students must be in environments where they will not be made fun of because of incorrect ideas in order for them to experience the intellectual challenge and risk-taking that are conducive to learning gains. Put plainly, students need to make mistakes without fear of derision. In a society that values performance-oriented goals, teachers can create environments where mistakes are valued by shifting their classroom cultures to focus on developing competency instead of demonstrating it (Toshalis, 2015, p. 128). In such classrooms, students can experience the freedom and joy of making mistakes because they know that mistakes are necessary for developing a robust understanding of the content.

Besides ridicule, the use of phones in the classroom is another behavior that limits the amount of learning that can take place. Allowing the non-educational use of phones in the classroom is toxic to positive learning environments because teachers broadcast that the content isn’t worthy of the students’ undivided attention. As Toshalis (2015) writes, the human brain cannot “focus on multiple tasks at one time, particularly when those tasks require higher brain function.” He goes on to write that the partial engagement that happens when students check their text messages or converse with classmates during lectures builds neural networks in their brains that makes it difficult for them to focus on classroom material for a prolonged period of

time (p 137). Furthermore, allowing students to disengage in this way takes away from the collaborative work that is possible in a rigorous and engaging learning environment. When one student is checked out during a group project, all the students suffer. The use of phones in this cooperative context forces groups to work at less-than-full mental capacity, and unless corrected, all students miss out on the opportunity to learn deeply and relationally.

What I will do to promote and prevent the behaviors above

As we discussed in class, teachers desire a disciplined learning environment in which clear and consistent expectations are set in a firm but adaptable manner. Rigor, not remediation, is the goal of a healthy classroom. The disciplined class is a combination of structure and engagement and their establishment are largely dependent on the teacher's ability to lead the class. While students play a role in following norms and routines, holding one another accountable for meeting class expectations, and collaborating with one another, it is the teacher who ultimately sets up this culture within the classroom and allows students to become a part of it. Without the teacher's leadership in this regard, classrooms can become either chaotic or highly permissive of anything and everything that goes on. However, without any collaboration and flexibility between the teacher and the students, classrooms will tend to become repressive spaces where students are forced into docility and compliance.

My first job in promoting and preventing the behaviors I described above begins with my ability to know and understand the needs of my students. Classroom management begins and ends with the teacher-student relationship (Jones & Jones, 2015, p. 52). In addition to having students fill out information sheets that describe themselves, it will be important for me to know about their background in my content area through a "Mathography" assignment (see Appendix).

This will give me an early look at their previous experiences in math, as well as any struggles and successes they have had.

Though I want to reserve the first day of class for math and introductory activities, discussing and creating classroom norms with students will need to happen within the first week of school. Developing and discussing these norms with students is important so that they have a voice in how the classroom is run. To facilitate this, I will ask students to discuss three questions, one at a time, in their groups:

- What are your goals for this class?
- What do you need from me?
- What do you need from each other?

As the students generate ideas, my job will be to transcribe those ideas and place them somewhere the entire class can see. From this list, students will have the opportunity to develop a list of norms that will be in place for the entire year, though opportunities for revision will certainly be given. After each class period is able to generate and agree on a list of norms, there must be a commitment from the students to observe and follow the standards set. This can be obtained through a signature or a simple affirmation from everyone in class. Note that it is important to recognize the influence of peer pressure in this situation, and so I would give students the option of anonymously letting me know if they have a problem with the norms established. These are things that need to be decided upon as a group, and students need to be engaged with this process or there will be no buy-in or commitment. Creating this list of norms as a class involves students working together, and this activity will give students an idea of the amount of teamwork I will expect from them in the class.

To further promote these collaborative behaviors throughout the year, my classroom will be arranged in such a way that will allow them to easily work with one another. If there are desks, I plan on moving them together in groups of four so that students can easily connect with each other on the content (see Appendix). In addition, this collaboration and cooperation will work better if students have easy access to white and chalk boards in the classroom so that they can get up and look at a problem together. In these cases, each student is able to write on and add to the work being done with ease.

As a classroom routine, students will be expected to turn to each other when they are struggling with a concept in an activity as a way to foster greater cooperative learning. Because I have seen many students who become dependent on the teacher as the authority figure in their respective content area, it will be crucial for students to begin viewing each other as authority figures as well. Then, students will not only be less dependent on the teacher to tell them whether or not they are correct, but they will also develop the interpersonal and collaborative skills that I want to promote in my classroom. However, much of this is dependent on my ability to prepare activities that generate interest and inspire students to work together in a creative fashion. Unfortunately, much of the curriculum and teaching that students experience “crush creativity and exacerbate [student] resistance...[There is no] room for imagination, no expectation of curiosity, no need for creativity” (Toshalis, 2015, pp. 79-80). Because questions are crucial to fostering creativity, imagination, and curiosity, these must be celebrated when they appear in the classroom environment. Not a day should go by without me exclaiming to the entire class, “That’s a great question!” or “I love that mistake!” This, in conjunction with addressing any derision from students about wrong answers, will help students feel more comfortable taking the intellectual risks that are necessary for deep learning to take place.

When thinking about preventing such behaviors as “improper” cell phone use and disparaging remarks, I must consider what these behaviors say about the experiences of the students because teachers often misread students’ resistance and disengagement. It will, therefore, be important to establish the routine of addressing any such comments or behaviors that arise in my classroom and engage them in a way that doesn’t shame the student, but rather accepts them back into the learning environment. Speaking to students privately in these cases not only preserves their dignity but also lets them know the seriousness of the situation. In addition, these private discussions should not be accusatory but rather inquisitive about the offending student’s perspective on the situation at hand. As Jones and Jones (2015) describe, these problems provide teachers and students with the opportunity to have open discussions about classroom norms and any exceptions that ought to be made. This also allows students and teachers to compromise—without bargaining—so that the needs of both are met (pp. 187-188).

Who I will involve in this plan, and how I will involve them

As mentioned above, my students are crucial in determining the norms to be followed throughout the year. Because students desire to have influence and agency in the classroom, they must also be a part of sustaining the adopted behavioral standards over the course of the year. Toward the beginning of the year, that is, soon after the norms have been established, I will need to do quick reminders about what we have agreed upon and check in with students to see if anything needs to be revised. However, the greatest test will come when a student does something to interrupt the classroom culture that has been established. As with any resistance, my job will be to understand and engage the (mis)behavior in order to allow all of us to determine what is best for the classroom community. Any divergence from the norms presents the opportunity to engage the students not only in the necessity of norms, but also whether or not

any of them need to be addressed or modified. These are discussions that students need to be welcomed into because they are necessary parts of any learning community. Though a common dynamic in schools is for adults to have power and students to be passively obedient and “respectful”, including students into the process of creating and maintaining norms allows students to have a voice in the classroom. Routines, on the other hand, are set in place to help the classroom to run effectively and efficiently. These may require re-teaching at certain points in the school year and can also be negotiated at the students’ request, but their purpose is to establish procedural, rather than behavioral, standards to be followed.

In addition to communicating with students about behavioral and procedural expectations, teachers must find ways to communicate with the family or caregivers of the students. Jones and Jones (2015) write that “just as with our students, we want parents to know about and understand the academic and behavioral goals and expectations that are the driving forces behind our instructional and behavioral approaches” (p. 133). Opening up these lines of communication will begin with an introductory letter sent home to students’ families or caregivers, translated in the appropriate language for each of them (see Appendix). While future conferences with parents can give me valuable information about their children’s needs in the class, it is never soon to call home and develop relationships with the family or guardians. Otherwise, our failure to establish early connections with families can hinder us in ensuring students’ academic achievement and well-being (Jones & Jones, 2015, pp. 133-134). The first week of school is a great opportunity for teachers to call home to introduce themselves to parents or caregivers so that positive relationships can be built before students get in trouble. Of course, because teachers routinely have over one hundred students, it would be good to set a goal of calling the parents or caregivers of five to ten students per week.

Part B: Intervention Plan

When asked to work together on an assignment for the class, you notice that some students either work alone or they sit back and don't work at all. When any of the individuals have questions about the assignment, they track you down to ask you instead of their peers. It is still early on in the year, and you aren't sure what kinds of math classrooms the students have experienced in the past.

Because students gain a deep understanding of material when they engage it relationally with their peers, it is necessary to break away from the traditional, lecture-driven teaching that students may have experienced throughout their educational careers. In this vignette, it is safe to say that the students don't yet know how to engage in collaborative work in the subject area. They have been conditioned to passively internalize the material and they need to be taught how to work together and how to ask questions for understanding. As Weinstein (2007) argues, teachers should be cognizant of the need to teach desired behaviors in their students. It is never appropriate to discipline students simply because they don't know how to do math problem, so we shouldn't discipline them when they haven't been taught how to behave and interact collaboratively in the classroom. The assumption we need to work hard to break is that students know how to act a certain way but simply choose not to. One way to teach students this skill is to incorporate sentence frames of possible ways to begin the conversation around the topic you want students to explore and discuss. This is something to plan for when preparing lessons for the class. Basic questions may include:

- “Johnny, what do you think about *(insert content topic)*?”
- “Alexis, I’m having trouble with *(insert content topic)*. Could you help me understand how you got _____?”

Because students may need to be taught how to ask questions and work collaboratively, it may be necessary to stop the class and role play through a basic example of the topic being discussed so that students can see it modeled for them. For class discussions, the teacher can model this

type of question-asking and encourage students to do the same in their discussions with one another. In my class, examples of these questions will be posted around the room so that I am transparent with students about how I am teaching them (see Appendix). These are skills that need to be practiced, and it is unfair for me to expect all students to be experienced in this kind of group work after one week of school. In addition to teaching these skills, I need to set an expectation—and use the student-generated norms to back me up—that students will work together and support one another in their learning.

Additionally, it is important to consider that some students may use avoidance or self-handicapping techniques in order to hide their abilities from the teacher and their classmates. Though it will take time to uncover and then address these issues, teachers can begin doing so by incorporating a process-oriented, rather than product-oriented, approach and mindset into the classroom. This allows students to focus more on developing mastery rather than simply demonstrating it, and it raises the value of making mistakes in the classroom context (Toshalis, 2015, p. 128). Toshalis (2015) further explains that “in classrooms where understanding, improvement, and mastery were emphasized, students were significantly less likely to avoid seeking help when they needed it” (p. 130).

It is assumed, however, that the group task in this vignette is worthy enough of being a group task in the first place. Though teachers desire students to cooperate and collaborate on different work in the classroom, some tasks don't force students be dependent on one another to succeed. In order to facilitate effective group work, teachers must plan activities that necessitate inclusion and involvement from all students who participate. Furthermore, establishing group roles and expectations for each member—while also holding them accountable to performing

their roles—is a way to help in the equitable distribution of work in group activities (see Appendix for a list of possible group roles).

During a classroom discussion, you notice that some students are engaged while several others are holding quiet side conversations or furtively texting on their cell phones. It doesn't seem that these students are bothering anyone, so you are unsure if you should address these issues right now. Though you're afraid of breaking the train of thought that is present in the room, you're even more worried that these students are missing out on a deeper level of engagement with the content as a result of being present in the conversation.

This is an experience that teachers routinely face in the classroom. The teacher's first reaction should be to incorporate non-verbal communication as an intervention technique. Proximity, tapping on the desks, and making eye contact with students are all ways to address the issues without interrupting the course of the class. In the case that these methods don't work, including off-task students into the discussion would be a viable way to stop the undesirable behavior. One way of doing this is by stating, "Johnny, Margaret just said _____. How do you feel about that statement?" Though there is a risk of interrupting the ideas taking place in the discussion, addressing the off-topic conversations and phone use—especially if this is against school policy—is necessary in this situation if no other interventions work. After reluctantly halting the ideas in the discussion, the teacher could ask the entire class how they feel about multiple conversations happening at once during an activity. After eliciting responses and different perspectives from students, it would be important to return to the student-created classroom norms from the beginning of the year and ask students if anything in it needed to be revised or reinforced based on the conversation. Because it is useful for students to know how their brains work, a conversation about the difficulties in engaging deeply with the material if students are distracted by something else, whether it is a TV show, a conversation with a friend, a text message, etc., would be appropriate. Even though students may be paying attention and hearing what is being said, the content won't "stick" if their minds are divided by other tasks.

Conversations with friends and using phones are not inherently bad things, but there are appropriate times, places, and manners in which to engage in these activities (*Judicious Discipline*, n.d.).

This issue may also have something to do with how the seating arrangements are made up in the class. Though students desire the freedom to select where they would like to sit in the classroom, teachers must be intentional about placing students in groups that are conducive to their own learning. In my classrooms, I aim to change these seating arrangements every three or four weeks so that students understand that they are expected to work and collaborate with every student in the classroom. Of course, there will be students who push back against this classroom routine, but its establishment and effective and fair implementation will result in an equitable learning environment for all students, barring any cases of bullying that arise.

While working on a problem from the class activity at the board, you are having trouble understanding a student's explanation of their work. After he agrees to step up to the board and do the work himself, he realized a mistake he made. Promptly, a student sitting at the side of the class remarks, "You're stupid, Johnny." You are unsure whether or not all the students in the class heard the statement because some of the groups were busy with the activity. However, you want to address what happened because you've been working hard to create a classroom culture in which students can be free to make mistakes without ridicule.

As mentioned above, teasing and ridicule in the classroom can work to limit students' comfort in taking intellectual risks, even though these risks are necessary for students to experience a deep understanding for the material being covered. When addressing the offending student, it is imperative that the teacher to not cause a disruption greater than the one that just occurred. Because the teacher in this case is unsure of how many students actually heard the comment, a quick, non-verbal gesture would express disapproval of the action and minimize further disruption. This could be easily done with a quick glance and shake of the head. Students

should continue to remain busy with the activity or be given another task relative to the topic of the class or assignment. This will give the teacher time to speak with the offending student privately. “What’s going on?” is a great first question to ask them. The teacher in this situation should strive to understand the student’s perspective and to make the student feel heard while letting them know that the comment made is not appropriate in the classroom in that manner. Though this may be an acceptable way of joking around with a friend, the culture of the classroom is at stake in that moment. After the student hears and understands the teacher’s perspective, the focus should be turned to addressing the class as a whole, referring back to the norms that were established in the first weeks of school. This may be an awkward situation for the offending student, so it is acceptable to allow a short break to get a drink of water while the discussion is had in the class. In this way, the teacher limits their reaction to the incident, while keeping the student accountable for their actions and reminding students of the established norm of the learning community. In addition, the dignity of both students is preserved (Weinstein, 2007).

Conclusion

A mentor of mine once advised me that successful classroom management requires two things: good planning and good relationships. Though this is an oversimplification of everything we’ve learned from research, the core of his ideas stand out to me. Good planning requires teachers to develop classroom environments that promote positive behaviors and are supportive to all students. Teachers must pay attention to the needs of each student when deciding how to establish behavioral norms and procedural standards in the classroom. By creating a relationship-centered learning environment, students feel comfortable working collaboratively and asking questions because they know that they will not be ridiculed for their ideas or mistakes. This kind

of relationship in the classroom adds another layer to students' achievement motivation and allows their learning to flourish. These two facets of classroom management, effective planning and genuine relationships, are simple ideas, but they are the foundation of a thriving learning community in which teachers challenge students and recognize and address student resistance and disengagement productively. And in the end, isn't this the kind of community that our students deserve?

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Works Cited

Judicious Discipline. (n.d.). Retrieved March 8, 2015, from http://www.dock.net/gathercoal/judicious_discipline.html

Weinstein, C.S. (2007). *Middle and secondary classroom management: Lessons from research and practice* (3rd ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Willis, J. (2010). *Learning to love math: Teaching strategies that change student attitudes and get results*. Alexandria, Va.: ASCD.

APPENDIX

Mathography Assignment:

Your job is to tell your personal history through the lens of mathematics. What are your earliest mathematical memories? What has your relationship been with mathematics over your lifetime? How has that relationship evolved? What role did school and/or teachers play? How would you describe your *mathematical identity* and the factors that have shaped it? Your mathography serves a tool for helping me get to know you as both a student and a teacher. Take time to remember, reflect, and tell your story.

You can tell a story, write a journal, draw a poster, create a movie, etc. Just be creative and be yourself! I want to know about you.

Students' Seating Arrangement (only one group shown in each figure):

The arrows in both figures point in the direction that students would face. Assuming the front of the class is toward the bottom of the arrangement, students in Figure A would be able to easily work together on assignments and discuss ideas with one another when needed:

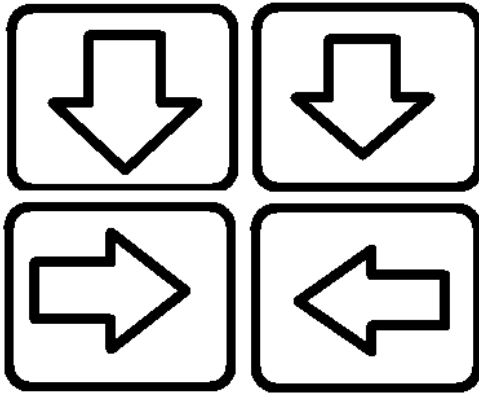


Figure A

A variation of this is to have students face each other as in Figure B. However, this ensure that all the students will have to turn their bodies awkwardly to see the front of the classroom if the teacher lectures:

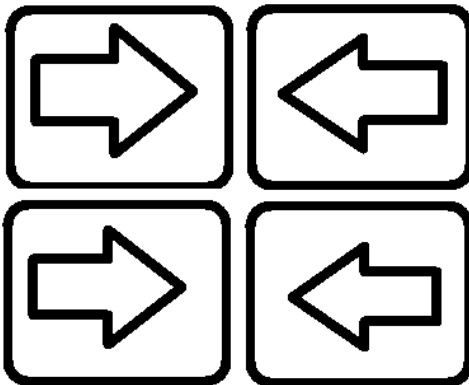


Figure B

Letter to Parents:

Dear Parents,

With school under way, I'd like to take a moment of your time to welcome you and introduce myself. My name is Mr. Andrew Constantinescu and I am a math teacher at Engelbert Humperdinck High School. I completed my undergraduate math degree at Oregon State University and recently received my master's degree from Lewis & Clark College.

I am very excited to start the new school year with you and am interested in making this a successful year for your child. To ensure this success, I recognize that we must keep the lines of communication open. I respect the fact that you know your child very well and if there is anything I should know to ensure your child's success, please feel free to contact me by email. I will be contacting you throughout the year to keep you informed of any events, exciting projects, your child's progress in my class, or any problems, if they arise.

Very shortly, our school will have its annual back-to-school night. At that time, I will discuss in greater detail what your child will be studying this year, any resources that may help your child succeed, my grading methods, the classroom norms and routines, and my discipline procedures. I encourage you to attend this special evening because it will give you an opportunity to familiarize yourself with the math program here at Englebert Humperdinck and also to ask me any questions you may have. I look forward to meeting you soon and am excited for a wonderful year working together to help your child be successful.

Sincerely,

Mr. Andrew Constantinescu
Andrew_Constantinescu@engelberthumperdinck.k12.or.us
[School Phone #]

(adapted from Jones & Jones, 2015)

Examples of Effective Questions:

Helping students work together to make sense of the mathematics

- “What do others think about what Johnny said?”
- “Do you agree? Disagree?”
- “Does anyone have the same answer but a different way to explain it?”
- “Do you understand what they are saying?”
- “Would you ask the rest of the class that questions?”
- “Can you convince the rest of us that that makes sense?”

Helping students to rely more on themselves to determine whether something is mathematically correct

- “Why do you think that?”
- “Why is that true?”
- “How did you reach that conclusion?”
- “Does that makes sense?”
- “Can you make a model to show that?”

Helping students learn to reason mathematically

- “Does that always work?”
- “Is that true for all cases?”
- “Can you think of a counterexample?”
- “How can you prove that?”
- “What assumptions are you making?”

Helping students learn to conjecture, invent, and solve problems

- “What would happen if...? What if not?”
- “Do you see a pattern?”
- “What are some possibilities here?”
- “Can you predict the next one? What about the last one?”
- “How did you think about the problem?”
- “What decision do you think they should make?”
- “What is alike and what is different about your method of solution and theirs?”

Helping students to connect mathematics, its ideas, and its applications

- “How does this relate to...?”
- “What ideas that we have learned before were useful in solving this problem?”
- “Have we ever solved a problem like this one before?”
- “What uses of mathematics did you find in the newspaper last night?”
- “Can you give me an example of...?”

Professional Standards for Teaching Mathematics, Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1991, p. 3-4.

Possible Group Roles for the Math Classroom:

Resource Manager:

- Get supplies for your team, and make sure your team cleans up.
- Your teacher may call you over to give you extra information.
- Call the teacher over for team questions.

“No one has an idea? Should I call the teacher?”

Facilitator:

- Help your team get started by having someone read the task.

“Who wants to read?”

- Make sure everyone understands what to do.

“Does anyone know how to get started?”

“What does the first question mean?”

“I’m not sure – what are we supposed to do?”

- Make sure everyone understands your team’s answer before you move on.

“Do we all agree?”

“I’m not sure I get it yet – can someone explain?”

Recorder/Reporter:

- Share your team data with the class.
- Make sure your team agrees about how to show your work.

“How can we write this?”

“How can we show it on the diagram?”

Task Manager:

- Make sure no one talks outside your team.
- Help keep your team on-task and talking about math.

“Okay, let’s get back to work!”

“Let’s keep working.”

“What does the next question say?”

- Listen for statements and reasons.

“Explain how you know that.”

“Can you prove that?”

“Explain why!”

(Taken from CPM Educational Program ©2009)