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EDTEP 562 A- Adolescent Development
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Case Study #2- Classroom Management Plan
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What a Wonderful World. It Could Be.

Disclaimer: Any and all names of people mentioned in this case study have been changed in order to protect the privacy and anonymity of those involved.

In the classroom I teach in, students enter the room and are met with smiles and friendly greeting from me and from fellow classmates. Every student receives a welcome greeting, or comment, from someone in the class. An overarching spirit of community and open and friendly conversation pervades the classroom. All students arrive prepared and eager to contribute to the ongoing dialogue of the class, all are eager to add their insight and experiences toward the common goal of learning for all. Respectfully students listen to the teacher and to each other as they engage in the purposeful and relevant activities of the classroom. Respect for the different ideas, opinions, and experiences of every person are made evident in the thoughtful way people listen and respond to each other. This is a place where mistakes can be made without fear, where these mistakes are welcomed and valued as an important part of learning. The concerns, problems, and issues of individuals are heard and the teacher and/or class members work together to find solutions to such issues. This is a place where students feel compelled, safe, and welcome to engage in learning. This is a place that not only fosters strong learning but also, respect, social responsibility, teamwork, leadership, friendship, good humor, and fun. The classroom I teach is one part of a larger school community which fosters these same ideals. My classroom is a place where students have the opportunity to become their best selves, the people they most want to become. My classroom is a place and a community every person wants to be a part of.

In a discussion of William Glasser's "Control Theory," Froyen and Iverson talk about the discrepancies between the ideal images in a persons mind and the realities of the situations they find themselves in (1999). That is, we often have images of how we want our lives to be that do not fit within the confines of our reality. For example: yes, I would like to look like Harrison Ford and no, I most likely never will. A similar "reality check" can be applied to the above statements concerning my ideal classroom. Yes, I do, and will continue to strive to make the classroom I teach in like the one I have described. However, it is necessary for me to realize that even in the very best of circumstances there will be divergent factors that very well may hinder realization of the ideal. For

example, students in my classes may not bring with them similar pictures of what a classroom, teacher, and student should look like. Considering the vast number of students I will have in my classroom on a daily basis, the potential for divergent pictures is enormous. This does not mean that I need to give up on my ideals, goals, and aspirations for creating the class I envision. What it does mean is that I need to alter and adapt the ideal picture I have in my head and balance it with the changeable picture of reality operating in the class. This entails shifting both pictures (the ideal and the reality) to a level where the essence of the ideal becomes part the real world classroom (1999).

At the very heart of my ideal image lie three basic principles of what I believe constitutes a good classroom: positive personal connections with students, a strong and supportive- socially based network of individuals geared toward cooperative learning, and instructional methods and activities that not only support these first two ideals, but in addition are steeped in the study of core concepts and inquiry methods of a language arts discipline. In accordance with these principles, Jacquelynne Eccles and associates report that adolescents' involvement in school often lacks essential and supportive adult contact, incorporates few opportunities for meaningful peer interaction in the classroom, and notes a general lack of appropriate intellectual challenges provided in classroom instruction and activities (1993). My approach to management attempts to incorporate these vital elements at a time when they will be consequential factors in aiding student's positive intellectual, emotional, and broader social development.

In addition to students development this plan fits within my beliefs concerning the natural core (structure) of the subject I teach. Language is a communicative art concerning human interactions, face to face, across distances, through time, even across

the barriers of life and death. The study of language is the study of the core interactions between people, and between people and the worlds they live in. It is the art of preserving thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and relationships. It is the inquiry into the figurative realm of human capacities. The study of language arts is naturally social it is after all about one person communicating with others. It required a certain amount of respect and trust in order to both teach and learn in this discipline, due to the close proximity of peoples' words to their hearts. Discovering and mastering the core concepts and skills involved in this subject takes careful thought, work, and determination. These are the connections between this approach to classroom management and what it is intended to help teach.

Although these principles do not deal directly with the everyday management of the behavioral issues in the classroom, they do act as strong preventative measures for avoiding problems. Specific examples of how these principles work in my classroom are incorporated in the following sections of this case study.

My plans for dealing with overt behavioral issues draw upon two sources, both of which are closely aligned. I had the opportunity growing up to work with my mother, a special education teacher, in a daycare setting. Whenever a child (or parent for that matter) would act up my mom would start to lower her own voice and speak very gently and directly in an effort to diffuse the situation. This method usually caused the other person to do the same. When dealing with a child she would offer them some space to cool down and once the child was ready she would then discuss the problem with the child and help them find a workable solution. I discovered through this course that my mother is a William Glasser disciple (way to go mom). Glasser similarly call for

disruptive students to be approached and the situation defused immediately. After the student has had time to return to a calmer state, then the teacher discusses with the student to discover what happened and helps the student work toward a solution (1990.)

The subsequent sections will further detail how each of the principles I have outlined played out in my classroom.

Building Personal Connections

When, during the winter quarter field experience, I observed my cooperating teacher's AP American English courses, I was deeply heartened to find that positive connections between the teacher and students was already an integral part of the environment. It was apparent from the friendly conversational nature of interactions I witnessed that the students respected and felt comfortable with her wit, intellect, and ability to teach and she them, for the various ideas, questions, and humor they brought to discussions and to the class in general. This meant that I would simply need to find a way to incorporate myself into this already established environment.

In his book, The Quality School: Managing Students without Coercion, William Glasser notes that one of the most effective methods a teacher can employ in the service of classroom management, is to create an on going dialogue with students. Doing so established the teacher into a friendly rather than adversarial role (1990, p. 129). Eager to incorporate myself into the lives of my students, I first decided that I would need to show interest in their lives. To aid the process, I started my unit by having students create name tents, so that I would be able to learn all their names. In addition, I asked students to write answers, on the inside of their tents, to a few non threatening personal questions.

The questions concerned personal likes (books, movies, music) and activities or hobbies they participated both in and out of school. I collected the name cards and wrote comments on the inside of cards, noting similar likes between myself and students and wrote questions showing interest in their activities. This was the beginning of dialogue between me and many of the students. Several students wrote additional responses to my comments/questions or they approached me with the information. Before the beginning of each period I would distribute the name tents to students, using this as a way to make contact with each as they entered the classroom. My university supervisor commented on this procedure noting that it was a, “perfect way to connect with students as they enter the class.” This preventative strategy established my interest in students beyond their capacity as members of my classroom and helped to build the type of environment I want to create.

I was also able to use positive connections with students to help deal with some of the very minor behavioral issues that sprung up in class. Ray, for example, was often engaged in sidebar conversations with two other students during times when I was giving directions or information to the class. Rather than directly confront Ray about the conversations, partly because I had had little contact with him and didn’t want to start off our relationship with contention, I simple asked him if he was on the baseball team. I had heard him mention it earlier in the week. We struck up a short conversation in which I showed interest in what position he played (a left handed pitcher) and how he thought the team would fair in the rest of the season. The following day, Ray actually became an advocate for me when I was giving directions. He continually kept the other at his table

from talking while I was talking. This was an excellent reminder of what a little conversation can do.

Respect for All

In addition to establishing myself as interested in students as individuals I also made efforts to initiate myself as respectful of their thinking, ideas, opinions, experiences, and feedback. There are several examples from my unit that help to highlight my efforts.

I asked students to keep a journal which would incorporate various responses to prompts I would give them in class. One such prompt asked students to make personal connections between the metaphorical title of the play we were studying and similar situations in their own lives. Having students respond personally to the text shows an interest on my part on their personal thoughts, emotions, and ideas. In addition I responded to the students in writing, making sure to be supportive and to show interest in what they had to say. Students really appreciated this opportunity, according to the feedback I received from them. My CT also noted that given the length required for the entries (1 page) versus the average response (2 and 3 pages) that students had really connected with the assignment.

Later in the unit I had students engage in a fishbowl style discussion in order to flesh out the major themes of the play we read in class. The goal for this discussion was to have every student to contribute and I set it up so that each student would have the opportunity to add meaningfully to the discussion (and fortunately, each student did). Students were given time to prepare answers to the questions beforehand, allowing them the chance to formulate sophisticated responses to the questions asked. A response was

modeled for the students so they would know what was expected. We discussed ways in which students could respond respectfully to each others ideas before the discussion as well as setting up clear guidelines. Finally, I asked students to give me both written (anonymously if they chose) and oral feedback on how they though the discussion went as well as ways I could improve.

Asking for feedback/ advice from students, according to Glasser, is a strong method for establishing students' voices as well as indicating your respect for them. Doing so gives students a sense of ownership of classroom activities and confirms that they are indeed an important part of the class (1990, p.129). The feedback I got from students was largely positive, even when given anonymously. Those students who felt the discussion was not as successful mentioned that they would have preferred to speak more often or have a debate instead. In the future I will try to vary discussion methods more in order to accommodate students who are motivated competitively. The respectful way students responded to one another during the discussion in part demonstrates that they were making efforts to recognize the contributions of their peers. Setting up clear expectations for this respect demonstrates that it is of importance to me that each of the students is respected. In addition, by asking to hear from each student, and by allowing them time to think out responses to the questions, I showed my belief in their ability to contribute meaningfully to the class and also respect for the ideas, questions, and comments they brought to the table. Both my CT and university supervisor commented on the success of the discussion. My CT indicated that I had a "positive rapport with students" and that they "respect [me] as their teacher." The US noted that the discussion had students "owning" the learning they were doing and that they felt very comfortable

while doing so. Her comment suggests to me that my efforts in establishing a feeling of respect for students were largely successful.

Students Engaged in Meaningful Learning

In the advancing stages of adolescence there is marked growth in a person's ability to think in more complex theoretical and abstract ways than he/she was able to as a young child. This development in cognitive ability is a key source for teachers to tap into and enhance by incorporating opportunities for students to apply and hone these skills in the classroom (Steinburg, L. 1991). In order to promote the higher order thinking I want students to engage in as well as to make this learning meaningful to students I felt it best to incorporate materials, instruction, and activities that stem from the work which adults within the Language Arts disciplines are involved in. By making the learning meaningful and challenging for students I hoped to avoid behavioral issues stemming from boredom, or lack of personal relevance.

Since the unit I was teaching centered on the study of a dramatic work of literature, I asked students to engage in the work of those involved within the discipline. Firstly, I wanted students learn to look at a script from the point of view of a Director: analyzing the script for the central themes and motifs, evaluating and tracking the central conflicts between characters and how these play into the major themes, and discover and evaluate the plot structure of the play. I also created lessons in which students engaged in the work of actors: interpreting the characters, lines, and stage directions of the play, and using those interpretations to act out the play in class. Finally, I wanted students to have the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in order to write a dramatic script of their own. This particular piece was a huge success with a majority of the students. They

had been working so hard at preparing for the AP examination, that the chance to do creative writing, and in a new genre for most, was a very rewarding change of pace. The feedback I received from students final reflections indicated also that they felt well supported in accomplishing this task due to the other activities they had engaged in during the unit. One student explained, “when I felt like I was stuck on something, like what a character might say, I just would go back to the character sheet and look at the goals. Reading them helped me remember what the character was trying to do and it made it easy to write the line.”

The fishbowl discussion mentioned earlier is a prime example of a collaborative learning strategy that incorporates supportive social interaction while driving students toward higher level thinking skills and strategies.

Having students work in cooperative learning groups, whether discussing responses in journals, searching for plot elements in the play we read, acting out a scene in front of the class, revising or presenting scripts, is an integral part of my classroom management strategy. This type of approach puts students in the driver’s seat of learning and encourages them to work actively and supportively to seek answers to questions and solutions to presented and discovered problems. In addition it supports students in positive social development.

Management Strategy Choices: Why I did what I did

The approaches I incorporated into classroom management have similar characteristics to those of my cooperating teacher. Her classroom is a place where students’ minds meet academic rigor, with a friendly smile. She incorporates many of the teaching methods and activities I learned in my methods class. Due to these connections,

I felt comfortable and supported in trying out different strategies and would often get additional suggestions from her on how I might be able to make a certain aspect of my lesson more accessible or engaging for students. Although our methods are very similar I did not feel that I would have been constrained to follow her methods if they had been at least moderately different. She was very open and supportive of my testing out my own ideas. One place where we both agreed that I needed to improve was in dealing with those little daily management issues that did arise while I taught.

To exemplify one such issue I will use a lesson observed by Meg, a fellow student teacher. During this lesson students began by discussing the themes in a certain passage they had discovered and written about. After a class debrief of the lists the groups compiled I attempted to segue into a demonstration of Aristotelian plot elements, using clips from the movie JAWS as examples of each. Both my CT and Meg noted that the transition didn't go well due to a lack of wait time on my part. Eventually, I was able to get the class' attention and we proceeded into the demonstration. As this was going on students enjoyed and were engaged in the clips (JAWS blowing up at the climax was their favorite). After the demonstration I again lost the class when transitioning into the next phase of the lesson, because of a lack of wait time. I called out a few students' names and soon had the entire class back with me. The students then were given the task of working together to find and agree upon the various plot elements in the play we were reading. Near the end of the period I called for attention again, and this time waited long enough for all students to come to attention. We discussed a few of the plot elements they had found. The next transition to explaining the homework for the evening I realized that I had cut class off a few minutes short of the bell. My CT noticed this as

well and asked a question to students regarding an assignment given to support students in coming up with a theme for their own scripts. I followed through on the answers they gave and as the bell rang I thanked students. Meg noted each of my blunders, but also said that she was impressed with the structure of the lesson concerning plot and also how much the students seemed to enjoy the demonstration. In addition she commented on the supportive and friendly way I listened to students and asked questions as I was observing them work in groups.

Meg's comments were mirrored at various times by both my CT and US and I became very frustrated at hearing the words "wait time." What I discovered, after much mental effort, was that it was a problem not with the time I waited, but on how I waited and what I was waiting for. I had been waiting for silence before continuing to speak and in so doing I did not adequately scan to make certain each student was truly paying attention. It seems ridiculous to me now that I would have made such an error, but I imagine that I will continue to learn from mistakes in the future.

Another place where my goals based on ideals drooped (literally) was simply that I would forget to smile. This seems like a relatively small issue but it can have huge implications for how students react to me in the classroom. I would concentrate so hard on making sure I was prepared for the next question the next transition, on what students were saying, or on what students were doing that I would put on my concentration face. Normally, my concentration face is seen in two ways by other people: either something horribly wrong has happened, or I am really angry. This concentration face has no place in my classroom. If I am to foster and maintain the personal relationships I worked to build with students, I must make sure that they see that I am calm, friendly, and

approachable. I have since worked on a different sort of face to put on, as was suggested by a professor of mine. It's a sort of half smile half pondering look that hopefully communicates to students that I am listening and thinking. I have not received any feedback as of yet.

Evaluation of the Plan

In reflecting on the success of my plan to move my ideal classroom into the real classroom I teach in I thought I was successful in catching a glimpse of the ideal classroom as I watched student reading the scripts they had created out loud. The smiles and laughs and admiration of a well phrased joke or the supportive groans that accompanied a "terrible" pun. I caught a glimmer of it when the last student to speak, during the fishbowl discussion, raised a thought provoking question that caused the whole class (and myself) do a double take. It was there, fleetingly, as those students whom had been some of the more silent students in class raised their hands, wanting to be heard. I caught a flash of it as students worked diligently and silently to help revise the scripts of their peers. And I know it was calling to me at the students disappointment when they discovered that I would be leaving (I also received a really good piece of carrot cake from Eva).

Do I think my management plan was successful? Yes-and no. Yes, I reached toward those ideal goals of having a classroom that every person wants to be a part of. Yes, parts of my plan were largely successful in fostering respect, productive and supportive social interactions, and were largely intellectually challenging and meaningful to students. And no, it fell short in places. I did not make a strong personal connection with all my students. At least one student's reflection revealed that she found no value in

reading the play (but a lot of value in other parts of the unit). I fell short in developing and utilizing those daily management techniques. Those things that did not go well I learned from, and I will make the changes necessary to bring them online. However, the important things, the monumental things, are those shining moment when I saw reflections of my idea classroom in a more tangible reality. That's the curse and the blessing of having ideals- you never quite get there, but where you do end up can be a wonderful place as well, especially for your first try.

Future Management Plans- The Shifting Ideal and the Shifting Reality

My future plans for management are in support of the strategies I have in progress with some modifications. To begin with, I will smile and/or use the thoughtful look I am working on, when interacting in my classroom. This is vitally important. Secondly, I will plan my lessons so that I know what to cut out when in danger of going over time. Keep what is essential for student to get and junk the rest. I will use my "wait time" effectively. I will rename it "scan time." I will incorporate students in many more aspects of the classroom. This includes students in the process of setting up the expectations and guidelines for the class environment (Glasser, 1990), of helping to monitor and maintain our environment. Students need to be more included in the process of giving directions, giving instruction, and in the process of planning the curriculum (when appropriate, like in literature circles for example). I will continue to work with colleagues and students to adjust these plans over the course of my teaching career. I will never be satisfied with the plan as long as it is failing to meet the needs of students. I will strive to continue to learn grow and continue to move the ideal (imagined) and real

(tangible) classrooms so that they can both exist in the same room with me and my students.

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