Classroom Management Plan

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**Classroom Management Beliefs**

At the heart of this Classroom Management Plan are the following core principles of my teaching philosophy:

- Engagement
- Shared Control
- Student-Centered Environment/Ownership
- Positive Community/Teamwork

**My philosophy of classroom management:**

My job as a teacher is exactly how it sounds: to teach. There is so much for kids to learn in their thirteen years of required education, and teachers are the ones who find ways to make that content meaningful enough for students to apply in their adult lives. This education system is how America has maintained a productive society throughout the course of its existence, but none of it would be possible if it weren’t for classroom management. Without classroom management none of the content or standards would be meaningful or effective because they could not be communicated.

Countless educators of the past have spent endless amounts of energy creating classroom management plans so that teachers and students can focus more of their energy on learning. Even so, schools have yet to adopt a universal system that will work for all of their teachers and students. With so many research efforts being poured into this topic, why haven’t we yet found a one-size-fits-all approach?
In my opinion, there are only two requirements for a perfect classroom management plan:

1. First and foremost; the perfect classroom management plan must meet the needs of the students. This incorporates differences in culture, learning needs, individual backgrounds, grade level, school district, and more.

2. Secondly, the chosen system must be one that fits with the teacher’s personality and makes him/her feel comfortable.

My personal classroom management plan aims to tie together the many management systems of the past to create one that works for me, and which can be easily adapted to the variety of environments I might teach in.

The reason I listed meeting the needs of students as the top priority of my classroom management plan is because I have found that often times I need to step out of my own comfort zone that is filled with control to allow students to explore and conduct activities that are most beneficial for them—which they usually know better than I do. Debora Wisneski compares her students to hatching butterflies in *Hatching Butterflies and Other Mysteries: A Story of a Teacher Learning to “Let Go,”* saying, "Our fears of hurting the butterflies held us back from letting them go and our actions or inactions caused them harm...the more firmly you hold (the butterflies), the more likely you are to kill (them). And why catch (them) at all?" (p.29, 2000).

Making the teacher comfortable came second because forcing students to comply with what the teacher likes best is rarely what is best for the students
(Brophy 2010). For me, having a student-centered environment is at the core of my management plan because it allows my system to adapt and change from year to year and class to class, based on what a particular group of students needs most.

As previously mentioned, I have four core principles underlying the management portion of my teaching philosophy. Many of them have already surfaced and will continue to surface amongst discussion of one another. Therefore, I feel that it is important to address each of them before going any further.

Engagement

In my experiences, school is much more enjoyable for teachers and students when the activity is engaging. It might sound like I’m dragging you back to your Teaching 101 class, but I think that keeping engagement as a top priority throughout the school day is much easier said than done. However, it’s well worth the effort. In today’s society, children’s brains are constantly being stimulated with TV, video games, computers, smart phones, tablets, and the list goes on. Those of us belonging to an older generation can look at this one of two ways: We can complain about it, or we can embrace it. I am not recommending that we plop our students in front of a computer all day and have it do the work for us, but rather am suggesting that we use the technology that kids are so infatuated with to spark their interest in a wide range of topics. Not only can teachers engage students with the use of technology, but they can also utilize other technologies to find creative learning activities that take students to the next level in their learning process.
Engagement comes in many forms, whether it is through technology or an exciting hands-on activity. It can also simply be a matter of how the teacher sets the tone of the classroom. Enthusiasm is contagious, and I’ve found that when I am able to genuinely convince my students of my excitement they too become excited about learning. When students are engaged they become passionate about their learning, and that passion is what fuels the ownership kids take in their work and inspires them to dive deeper into their learning. The more engaged students are in their learning, the less likely they are to have issues with misbehavior or boredom and laziness. Alfie Kohn advises, “When students are ‘off task,’ our first response should be to ask, ‘What’s the task?’” (p.19, 2006).

**Shared Control/Communication**

One might assume that shared control and creating a student-centered environment go hand in hand. While that may be true to a certain extent, I kept these two core principles separate on purpose. There is a very fine line for teachers to balance regarding the topic of shared control. It is our job to be able to release control without losing control. It takes courage to allow others to run your classroom—but the first step towards addressing this issue is giving up the notion that the classroom is yours. The classroom belongs to the students. “Control is not our safety net. Being in control does not equal being a good teacher, a fair teacher, or a kind teacher. It might mean your classroom is run as precisely and orderly as boot camp—but is that what an eight year old deserves?” (Ullucci 2005).
I am a firm believer that students should take control of their own learning, but this task would be impossible without teacher guidance. The ultimate responsibility of student learning falls into the hands of the teacher. Therefore, the teacher must find a way to convince students that they are the ones in charge by trusting them to make choices and decisions bigger than which color crayon they want to use that day. Students will still complete the learning targets that the teacher has laid out for them, but will have enough freedom to reach them on their own terms with enough teacher guidance.

However, this vision would not be possible without a safe environment that allows for open communication. Students, parents, and teachers should feel comfortable communicating their wants and needs without worry. It is essential for me to clearly communicate my expectations with my students, but more importantly, to communicate why they are set. Keeping my students in the know and treating them like competent individuals makes them feel much more comfortable, thus, more likely to constructively run the classroom (Fay and Funk 1995). This is a key factor in building relationships—which are critical to maintain in order to continue productivity in the classroom.

**Student-Centered Environment/Ownership**

In order for a classroom to function smoothly, students must take ownership of their learning and behavior. As soon as we lose ownership of our learning, “it becomes less worth while to pursue” (Fay and Funk 1995). As I guide students through this process, my job will be to hold them accountable for their actions until
they have a thorough understanding of how to make their learning and behavior appropriate and beneficial. Modeling is one of the most effective forms of teaching both content and behavior. That is why it is so important for teachers to embrace our job as role models and show students how it looks to treat others with respect so that they can experience how it feels to be treated respectfully. Students must understand the reasoning behind rules and expectations and choose to act in accordance in order for them to be meaningful.

In an effort to encourage intrinsic motivation in students, the theme of ownership will surface in student-centered learning as well. In order to create productive members of society, we cannot simply spoon-feed students answers all day. That might be one way to get information across, but it does not teach kids how to learn. I think learning is so much more powerful when students’ make discoveries on their own and experience the sense of pride that accompanies gaining knowledge. This sense of pride sparks enthusiasm and passion—both of which are necessary to keep students engaged at school. My hope is that the enthusiasm and curiosity sparked within my students will push them to venture into places where failure and the unknown are prevalent, but in order for them to be brave enough to do so, they must be provided with a safe environment and positive community.

**Positive Community/Teamwork**

Developing a positive community is imperative to my classroom management because it is the building block that supports every other core principle of my philosophy. The absence of a positive community will hinder
students from inquiry learning and make engagement a much more difficult task. School is a place for social interactions as much as it is a place for learning, and if children are overly anxious about interactions with their peers, they will not be as involved with their learning. “It is highly appropriate, even necessary, for schools to politically educate and socialize students along democratic, pluralistic lines, and teachers cannot avoid doing this if they develop a truly negotiated form of control with students” (Leriche 1992). Building a positive community takes a conscious effort and lots of practice. The Golden Rule will be highly emphasized in my classroom as students develop the understanding that you must be a friend to have friends. That being said, my students can always expect to be treated kindly and fairly by their teacher. Being a positive role model is such an effective teaching method, and does not require taking any extra time out of the school day.

Another way I promote positive community is by functioning my classroom as a team, which requires many different players to implement their individual skill sets towards the success of the entire group. Grouping students based on their academic and social skill sets allows one student’s strength to support another student’s weakness, which instills a sense of importance and self-worth in children, creating a well-rounded team of individuals. This team-mentality also helps students to build relationships with each other and promotes acceptance and celebration of diversity in the classroom.
**My goals of classroom management:**

My number one goal of classroom management is to provide an environment in which students can feel that they are at home away from home so that they can feel free to explore and learn however suits them best. My top priority as a teacher is to make school an enjoyable experience for all students, so that many of the rigorous requirements that accompany the schooling process come much more effortly them. In *Picking Battles, Finding Joy: Creating Community in the “Uncontrolled” Classroom*, Kathleen Ullucci states, “Order (is) not maintained through fear or obedience, but through a real sense of obligation, affinity and respect for each other” (Ullucci 2005). Additionally, Bondy and Smith advise that, "If students do express their unhappiness, the teacher should listen to the student’s point of view and avoid getting into a power struggle," in *Creating Environments of Success and Resilience: Culturally Responsive Classroom Management and More* (p.155, 2007).

In order to accomplish this, building sincere relationships will be of the utmost importance. Building these relationships is not limited to my kids, but extends to their parents and other staff members in the school who share the same goals as I do, and are willing to work as a team to create the best possible environment for all students. An important characteristic of my job is being a people person, which requires keeping an open mind, open eyes, open ears, and an open heart. Although it may take me out of my comfort zone, adjusting my teaching style and personal demeanor in order to connect with all types of people is imperative.
However, there are two conditions that apply to this frame of mind. First, it is important for me to find a way to always hold true to my core set of beliefs. I don’t feel that it would be fair or beneficial for a majority of my students for me to compromise my core principles in the face of adversity. That being said, I must constantly reevaluate the effectiveness of my core principles, as well as ensure these principles are wholeheartedly being reflected in my teaching. The second condition to connecting with others is remaining sincere. Children have a great way of sensing whether or not they are truly cared for, and will follow the mindset of giving the same amount of respect that they receive. There will inevitably be personalities that misalign, but the bottom line is that my students know I will do everything in my power to help them be successful. One of the underlying goals of my classroom management plan is to not only create productive members of society, but altruistic human beings who will go the extra mile for others and make a positive impact on their communities. “Aristotle called for education that considered the training of good and virtuous citizens. In the 17th century, John Locke, believed that learning was secondary to virtue” (Miller & Pedro 2006). Four centuries later, I still hold these beliefs to be true.
Organization of Physical Environment

Classroom Diagram

Sample Visuals

These are examples of how I would incorporate a few different thematic schemes into my classroom.
From left to right: Camping Theme / Winter Wonderland Theme.
Each time the noise level of the classroom gets too high, one letter of NOISE will be removed. If all letters are removed, no talking will be permitted. This is a nonverbal way to grab the students’ attention and keep them on task without having to raise any more voices.

Incorporating bulletin boards with student opinions is a simple way to promote a student-centered classroom. The bulletin board is given an extra personal touch with the use of student pictures, which brings life into learning.
Both of these classroom decorations serve as reminders of how to build a positive community. The bulletin board (left), ties into the core principle of Teamwork by providing a visual of how each player holds an important role that works to form our community.

The bulletin board on the right perfectly aligns with the Teamwork theme of my classroom. It not only reminds students that we are a team, but shows off a more personal side of me, given that I’m a big football fan!
**Room Arrangement Narrative**

The students in my classroom will be placed in groups in an attempt to encourage community and class discussion. The children placed at each table will be dependent on their social and academic skill levels. The strengths of the students in each group should compliment each other for optimal learning. However, I do not anticipate my students sitting at their desks for a large portion of the day. That is why there is lots of open floor space, which allows us to sprawl out, dance, set up activities, or go wherever else our learning takes us. "Active supervision is a key component of classroom management and includes moving around the room to monitor academic and social behavior," so the teacher also needs enough space to easily maneuver through the room to assist student learning. (Allday 2011). There is a couch and designated reading area to promote relaxation, and the entire room will be filled with bright colors and personalized decorations.

My classroom is set up in a way that promotes the four core principles described above. In order to have an engaging and student-centered environment, the room must emit a positive vibe. Safety is a top priority in my classroom, but everything after that must contribute to building an encouraging learning community.

Students will have a say in how their classroom is set up as well, through thematic schemes that will change throughout the year. These schemes and themes will transform our classroom into a whole new world of learning that allows children to truly become a part of their education. The schemes will include holiday themes, learning themes, as well as student interests (i.e. sports, music, places, etc.).
Ideally they will help to build relationships within our community and provide an exciting and engaging variety to a regular routine. Alfie Kohn suggests that often times students act up out of boredom, and therefore require differentiation in their routine to maintain interest (Kohn 2006). Changing the overall look of the classroom is one way I aim to accomplish this variation.

**Organization of Social Environment**

**Classroom Rules**

This section will address the following matters in regards to classroom rules:

- Key rules (precepts)
- How precepts will be determined
- How precepts will be communicated

Much of establishing the social environment of my classroom ties in closely with building a positive community. In order to maintain a student-centered environment, every student in my class will participate in creating classroom rules. As the facilitator of this discussion, I think it’s important to keep a positive spin on these expectations, so that students can see why they are necessary and how they will function to create a positive learning environment (Fay and Funk 1995). That is why I prefer to view *rules* more like *precepts* (Palacio 2012). Precepts are general rules intended to regulate behavior or thought. I will explain this idea to my students in order to encompass general themes such as teamwork, curious minds, and other student ideas. This mindset should also support the positive vibe of the
discussion. “Teachers must avoid an overemphasis on rules at all costs because that suggests that institutions are more important than the people in them” (Leriche 1992).

During this conversation, there are two precepts I will be sure to communicate to my students. These include the Golden Rule and a zero tolerance bullying policy. Unfortunately, “students involved as bullies have a high risk of being victimized,” which will be important to watch out for and be mindful of in regards to this policy (Marees and Petermann 2012). As students establish the expectations that will benefit their classroom, I will record them in a simple bulleted list. In order to reinforce these ideas to the class, I will allow students to make posters that will serve as helpful reminders in the classroom. However, “These rules and procedures are not ends in themselves. They are means for organizing the classroom as an environment that supports learning, which is the purpose for which schools were established in the first place” (Brophy 2010).

Finally, to make our discussion as meaningful as possible, I will leave space for students to write these rules in their welcoming parent letter. My hope is that providing students with the opportunity to discuss their classroom environment with their parents right away will allow parents to get on board with me in starting the school year off on the right foot!
**Classroom Procedures**

Structure of Activities and Lessons:

To encompass all types of learners and skill sets, there must be a healthy balance between routine and variation of activities. The basis of all of my lessons involve engagement. In an effort to make learning recreational, my planning will incorporate student interests and needs. The inquiry-based learning that takes place in my class consists of organized chaos with the help of highly structured lessons. I will remain flexible to keep these lessons student-driven, and constantly adjust them in order to meet the wants and needs of the kids. Students will be encouraged to make discoveries together, which requires lots of class discussion that is expected to stay on task.

Homework and Deadlines:

Students will be expected to comply with all deadlines given for homework and other assignments. I remain understanding of circumstances that might interfere with a given deadline, but will hold my students to a high standard nonetheless. All deadlines will be set in stone on a hard copy that they have access to, and verbal reminders will also be given. Keeping an open line of communication with parents through newsletters, a classroom website, and phone calls will also provide me with backup in regards to holding students accountable.
Asking for Help:

Self-sufficiency is highly encouraged in my class, but along with inquiry learning comes lots of questions! This is where it is important for my students to help each other and remain on task with their conversations. I am always circulating the room to assist students with their learning, but will train students to ask at least two friends for help before resorting to the teacher. Grouping students based on their skill level in the classroom set up should also help them to help each other. Questions regarding bathroom use, pencil sharpening, or other basic needs will be addressed through specific hand signals dependent upon the matter. There will also be classroom jobs to promote responsibility and self-sufficiency, and to help make the class run more smoothly.

Attention-Getters and Transition Times:

The attention getters of my classroom will come in the form of silly sayings that will be practiced and posted in the room. For example, when I say “Like a good neighbor...,” students will reply, “State Farm is there!” or “Macaroni and cheese...Everybody freeze!”

Research shows that a “form of ineffective direction is one that is repeated frequently, thereby eliciting a cycle of giving directions and obtaining defiant responses” (Bondy and Smith 2007). That is why having a variety of attention getters will keep students attentive and ready to listen throughout the
school year. In an attempt to respect where students are at with their conversations and workload, I will provide them with a count down to wrap up what they are working on before the transition or new direction.

It is very important to me—and every other teacher for that matter—that transition times run smoothly. There is so much curriculum to cover in a single school year, and it is crucial for my students to understand this. My goal is to instill a sense of urgency in students so that we can do our best to make the most of our time together. This will be established through lots of practice at the beginning of the year, and will continue throughout the year by turning transition times into fun tasks. For example, younger students might be required to stay in their lane of tiles when walking down the hallway so they don't fall into the surrounding 'lava,' while older students will be encouraged to beat their stopwatch time during each transition of the day.

**Rules and Procedures Narrative**

One of the most important aspects of the rules and procedures in my classroom is maintaining an open line of communication amongst parents, students, and myself. It is essential that my students understand the importance of their behavior. That is why the expectations in my classroom will be clearly defined and explained. I believe that people of all ages find comfort in knowledge. Therefore, the more we know, the more at ease we feel. Jumping off of a bridge might sound kind of fun to some people, but the reason they don’t do it is because they understand that the end result would not benefit them. Their reasoning goes beyond the fact that
someone told them not to do it, and the same reasoning applies to students in a classroom. “A management system that orients students toward passivity and compliance with rigid rules will undercut the potential effects of an instructional system that is designed to emphasize active learning” (Brophy 2010). School is a world that should revolve around children. Once children know why things are set in place in a certain way, they should feel much more comfortable in the crazy world they have entered. A teacher’s ability to explain his/her research-based rules to others will also ensure that the interest of the students is being placed above the contentment of the teacher.

**Classroom Incentives**

**System for Encouraging Positive Behavior**

Individual and Group Support

Part of my goal in creating productive members of society and altruistic human beings requires students to be intrinsically motivated to make good choices in regards to behavior and academics. Of course this is easier for some students than others based on their backgrounds and personalities. However, in having my class run as a team, certain students strengths in this area will support others weaknesses. My students’ incentive comes in the form of confidence and self-pride rather than materialistic rewards. “Rewards, like punishments, can only manipulate someone’s actions. They do nothing to help a child become a kind or caring person” (Kohn 2006). As the head coach of my classroom team, I will focus more of my attention on positive comments than negative reprimands. I also encourage and
praise players for specific behaviors, with an emphasis on work ethic rather than accomplishments (Musti-Rao & Haydon 2011). This praise occurs during one-on-one interactions so that students can focus on setting and beating personal records, rather than comparing themselves to others.

Being Fair

My students must understand that fair is not always equal because I want each individual to strive to be the best that they can be. This is where it is most crucial for my students to function as a team and know that everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, which is vital to creating a well-rounded team of individuals. However, I will be mindful to balance the amount of positive interactions with the amount of negative interactions I have with each student (Musti-Rao & Haydon 2011). That way I will avoid making students feel targeted as the “bad kid.” Research shows that students tend to live up to the reputation and label given to them by adults, so it is critical to make each individual feel worthy and talented (Ullucci 2005).

Teaching the System to Students

The most important thing to teach students about this system is keeping their focus on being the best that they can be while encouraging others to do the same. This system will develop and strengthen as the school year goes on. The system will contribute to building a positive classroom community and be integrated into morning meetings.
Support System

It is important for me to communicate my incentive philosophy to other staff members and parents so that they can help students to develop a team-player mindset. I think that this system also has the potential to ease the minds of parents, who will no longer have to worry if their child is being treated fairly or how their child is performing in comparison to others.

System Requirements

The only requirement for this system is a positive attitude. This item is free of charge and accessible to everyone.

Classroom Incentive Narrative

A majority of my philosophy on incentives in the classroom is derived from Alfie Kohn and George Bear’s theories. I do not believe that students should be rewarded for something that is expected of them. That is not to say I will not show appreciation for good behavior, but my objective is to foster integrity into my students so that they are willing to go the extra mile even when no one else is watching. During the formation of the American public school system, “Jefferson and other leaders of democracy envisioned that (they) would help children overcome their self-interest or “egoism” by promoting what was perceived at that time to be a moral instinct of care for and duty to others” (Bear 1998). The vision of running my classroom as a team can be compared to a democracy. I will teach my students that hard work pays off in the form of opportunity, so that there is never an end to their
strive for success. With materialistic rewards “Students might question why they should behave...when rewards are no longer offered; ‘good’ students may no longer attribute their behavior internally but to external conditions; and students may learn to exhibit only the minimum behavior required to earn the reward” (Bear 1998).

**Responding to Disruptive Behavior**

**Defining Disruptive Behavior**

Students will take part in defining disruptive behavior at the beginning of each school year as a part of creating the classroom precepts. Students will always know whether or not their behavior is disruptive by referring to the posted question in the room: Am I helping students to learn and the teacher to teach? If the answer is no, then their behavior can be defined as disruptive. I will teach and model this for my students at the beginning of the school year, and as it progresses, students should be able to help hold each other accountable.

I also frequently refer to common sense by crediting students when necessary. Rather than reprimanding students or forming an infinitely long list of what not to do in my classroom, I will teach them how to use their brains. With a simple statement like, “I know that you’re smart enough to know (fill in the blank),” the student is able to infer that he/she is not behaving appropriately and needs to
correct his/her actions. This does not take time away from class or embarrass the student (Fay and Funk 1995).

**Action Steps**

My goal in handling disruptive behavior is to be proactive. By keeping students engaged in their learning and providing plenty of opportunity for discussion and movement, I hope to dodge many discipline problems before they occur. “If students are busily engaged in positive learning experiences, they are less likely to engage in disruptive behavior...Routine tasks tend to lead to low student commitment to the learning activity at hand, that in turn lead to classroom disruption” (Leriche 1992). Proximity control plays a key role in this philosophy and also serves as the first step towards addressing misbehavior (Allday 2011). Eye contact is an important nonverbal signal, and I am a firm believer that every teacher should master his/her own version of the stink eye! This notifies the student that they have been caught doing something inappropriate and need to take corrective actions. Having a signal to remind students to get on task is also a useful tool for teachers. This can be a universal signal such as a headshake or putting on a thinking cap (Fay and Funk 1995). It can even be something developed on an individual basis with students who might need a little extra guidance towards making good decisions.
When nonverbal signals are not enough, I always begin by asking myself four simple questions before taking more drastic measures. The questions are as follows:

1. Should I address the situation...
   a) ...lightly? These situations are minor and can often be addressed with humor.
   b) ...sternly? These situations are more severe and need to be taken seriously.
   c) ...on an individual basis? These situations serve as helpful reminders and aim to avoid embarrassing the child.
   d) ...publicly? These situations are the most severe and call for immediate action.

Once I have answered these questions in my head, I take action accordingly. This method provides me with the time I need to think logically and remain calm. In the situations that do call for immediate action, I try to eliminate my own emotion as a factor that might escalate the situation (Fay and Funk 1995). It is human nature to thrive off of emotion, so I do my best to avoid giving students the negative reaction they might be looking for.

I have also found the power of the name to be very effective. Calling out a student’s name in class quickly captures his/her attention without necessarily putting them through public humiliation. In every class I try to be mindful of individual circumstances. If my management system simply isn’t working for a particular child, I will put forth the effort to make circumstantial adjustments (i.e. behavior plans, daily report cards, etc.) as necessary.

Parent involvement is very important to my classroom management plan. Keeping an open line of communication about student behavior—whether it is
positive or negative—is a crucial part of intrinsically motivating students to make good choices. It is much easier for a student to behave appropriately when expectations are consistent across the board. Life is also made easier for teachers and parents when they are on the same page.

Administrators should definitely be kept informed on what is going on with individual students, but will only intervene in extreme situations. This incorporates my zero tolerance bullying policy, and includes all harmful behaviors that interfere with the physical and emotional safety of others. However, students need to feel welcome in my classroom and know that their teacher has their back. Neither of these can be accomplished if a student is repeatedly being sent away to be dealt with by administration. Defiance should be viewed “as an opportunity to teach students something new...this may require teaching the student a ‘replacement behavior’” (Smith & Bondy 2007). I also believe that all punishments should fit the crime. For example, if a student’s disruptive behavior involves horseplay at the drinking fountain, the consequence should be relevant to the drinking fountain—not staying in for recess or other irrelevant punishments.

In regards to disruptive group behavior, students will be held accountable as a team. In an effort to teach students how to help each other be the best that they can be, positive and negative incentives will be awarded to the group as a whole.

**Student and Teacher Rights**

All students’ maintain the right to learn while teachers’ maintain the right to teach. Teachers’ and students’ alike have the right to feel physically and emotionally
safe and respected at all times. Any action that interferes with any of these rights will not be acceptable in my classroom.

**Disruptive Behavior Response Narrative**

Being proactive in addressing behavior problems is the number one way I will address disruptiveness in my classroom. My students know that I care about them because I make it very obvious. In my experiences, people generally give the same amount of respect as they get from others, so an authoritative or belittling management style is out of the question. When a child is repeatedly reprimanded, he/she “learns that when you don’t like the way someone is acting, you just make something bad happen to that person until he gives in: Do this or here’s what I’m going to do to you” (Kohn 2006). Students need to feel respected and equal, and understand that all consequences they are subjected to are helping to build a better classroom community.

On a more personal note, I try to never take behavior problems personally. Keeping a sense of humor and staying educated and respectful of the cultures and backstories my students’ possess is one way I avoid this. According to Richard Milner in *Losing the color-blind mind in the urban classroom*, “teachers cannot afford to embrace color blindness in their practices with students because teachers and their students’ identities, experiences, worldviews, and consequently behaviors are intricately shaped by race” (p. 870, 2012). Remaining educated on the cultures of my students’ allows me to keep my mindset at ease so that it does not negatively interfere with my teaching or interactions with other students. It is in this regard
that it is especially crucial to be mindful of maintaining a student-centered classroom. Classroom management is never as simple as forcing students to comply with a list of demands. It is important to remember; “Until (students) words or actions communicate otherwise, we should assume that student contributions do not originate from impertinence, but honesty; not off-handed carelessness, but open hearted carefulness” (Shadiow 2009).

**Building Community**

**Building and Defining Community**

Building a positive classroom community involves combining all of the other components previously described in this paper, and making a conscious effort to apply them in the most beneficial manner possible. Perhaps the most important aspect that comes into play in building a positive classroom community is the concept of teamwork. My classroom is run as a team, making each and every one of us teammates—each with our own valuable set of skills. My students understand that as a team we win and lose together. In order to be successful we need to have each other’s backs. We must help each other in order to help ourselves.

**Student/Parent Role in the Community**

The team mentality of my classroom requires many different players to implement their individual skill sets towards the success of the entire group. This includes the parents of students who I encourage to join our community by getting involved whenever possible. As the head coach, my main job is to be a positive role
model and help my students learn to embrace their own strengths, while encouraging and supporting them to develop whatever new skill sets they desire.

Building relationships is a critical piece in defining and assigning community roles. It is necessary in order for me to teach effectively and create a healthy environment for students to learn and grow. Building relationships with my students empowers me to discover each player’s unique skills, and use their strengths while improving their weaknesses to benefit the team. Grouping students based on their academic and social skill sets allows one student’s strength to support another student’s weakness, which instills a sense of importance and self-worth in children, creating a well-rounded team of individuals. This also helps students to build relationships with each other and promotes acceptance and celebration of diversity in the classroom. Students learn things about cultures through the absence of information because “those from other racial and ethnic backgrounds miss opportunities to deepen their knowledge about other groups” (Milner 2012). Consistent communication and interaction amongst classmates helps students to expand their views outside of the world that they know, and bring global awareness into the classroom.

**Communicating Community**

By utilizing morning meetings, students will be consistently told and reminded of how their behavior affects their classroom community. It is during these meetings that we will discuss the positive parts of our lives, and the zero tolerance bullying policy will be communicated through verbal discussion. My
students are also required to give twice the amount of put-ups as put-downs they give. This means that if one child puts down another, the perpetrator will be required to give to sincere compliments to the same student. Morning meetings provide us with the opportunity to discuss the meaning of a sincere compliment—which goes beyond superficial statements.

**Building Community Narrative**

In order to have the most effective classroom community, everyone needs to be treated like a person. Each individual has their own story, and each story needs to be acknowledged by everyone in the community. Much of what happens outside of school effects our lives in school. That is why I also feel it is beneficial for teachers to share the human side of themselves to their class. Allowing my kids to see that I have a life outside of school and play more roles than teaching opens doors to building relationships and making students feel like more of a part of the community.

According to Bear, “school discipline in America has changed little since the time of Jefferson. The ideal that educators should focus on developing self-discipline and social responsibility in children is ideal, with reality dictating that educators focus on the more pressing and short-term goal of managing and controlling behavior problems.” I aim to run my classroom like the ideal version of the democracy that we live in. The ‘American Dream’ starts in the public school system, where learners are lead into successful lives by receiving equal opportunities under all types of circumstances. Teachers are not dictators and should never abuse their position of power. As the leader of my classroom I will provide a sense of freedom
and independence to children within a safe environment where they can grow into prosperous human beings. Like any form of government, there will be times when things do not run as smoothly as we envision it on paper, but so long as everyone feels respected and I remain flexible, my hope is that my classroom community will foster success to all.
References/Resources


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