



## What Makes This TEAM Reflection Paper Successful?

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

Module 1: Classroom Environment

Grade: 4

Subject: Reading

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

How the teacher developed new learning:

- Discussions with mentor, a colleague, and the school psychologist
- Read *Classroom Management that Works* and *What Works in Schools* by Robert Marzano and *Constructing Meaning* by Nancy Boyles

What the teacher learned:

- “I recognized that providing clear purpose and guidance for students both academically and behaviorally would have a noticeable impact on achievement.”
- “My mentor helped me understand the importance of providing feedback, validating student responses and providing reinforcement by attributing ownership of ideas to the students themselves.”
- “I realized that my focus on appropriate student behavior related more to my asking them to take responsibility for their behavior than my purposeful use of strategies to help them do that.”
- “With the help of the school psychologist, I am now more aware of how similar student behavior may have very different causes. Andy’s interruptions are often the result of misunderstanding how to complete a task or having to follow multi-step directions, while Gabrielle is insecure and needs continuous reinforcement.”

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

- “Together we developed a class *Bill of Rights and Responsibilities* ... when I observed a problem with behavior I would stop and ask students if a particular behavior was consistent with the rules, why or why not, and what they needed to do differently ... I put the responsibility for solving problem behavior on the students and not on me.”
- “I had groups of students create posters to illustrate each of the different rights and responsibilities with a clear example of what that might look like in our classroom.”
- “... last week I shared with the class that ‘I was listening to Zach’s group and he said something interesting. He said that the main character really didn’t have a choice. What do you think?’ By using this strategy, I am now reinforcing the student’s engagement rather than his interruptions.”

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

- “More students are staying focused on tasks rather than interrupting instruction. I am now recording 7 interruptions in 30 minutes versus 28 interruptions in 30 minutes.”
- “By explicitly modeling the process of asking how behavior is or isn’t consistent with the classroom Rights and Responsibilities and what they might do differently, they have learned how to use this process with peers. When I saw a student point to the poster and say, ‘Josh, you need to let her talk and you listen,’ I knew that my students were beginning to understand the connection between behavior and success in the classroom.”
- “I found that a number of students were more likely to stay involved in small group discussions when given specific strategies and prompts such as ... wondering aloud by sharing text-related questions that pop into their heads. As a result, students are creating and responding to their own questions. This was particularly helpful with Tiffany, who was previously passive and didn’t regularly contribute to group discussions and Gabrielle who began to interrupt less often.”

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

**Goal:**

I will learn about and apply strategies for fostering appropriate student behavior, and as a result, students will interrupt less and be more actively engaged during reading instruction.

**Initial Summary:**

My students find it difficult to stay on task and often interrupt me or their classmates during instruction, especially if I am not directly working with them. I wrote and posted classroom rules at the beginning of the year, and I continually refer to them, but they are not consistently followed. I am frustrated because I have to constantly remind students about the rules. Several students will participate in group discussions but this is more likely if I am leading a whole class activity. When students are doing individual or small group work they are likely to be off task, frequently interrupting me (28 interruptions in 30 minutes) and needing consistent reminders to complete activities. I instituted a group reward system using marbles in a jar that works for most of the students but only for a few weeks. Two students, Andy and Gabrielle (*not students' real names*) are particularly disruptive and off task during group work, distracting other students by talking, playing with their pencils and fooling around. In addition to this, I do not always feel as prepared for the lessons in reading as I am in other content areas.

**Reflection Paper:**

My learning began when my mentor and I talked about what I want the classroom environment to be and why. Even though I had initially talked about needing the students to be quiet and engaged in their work, I didn't really want a quiet classroom. In fact, I think that learning is often noisy, but I did want the students to learn how to take more responsibility for their own learning and, therefore, minimize interruptions to get reinforcement or attention.

As my mentor and I went through the performance profile, it gave me a better idea of where my current knowledge and skills were in relationship to the standards. I found that I was becoming aware of student differences but I wasn't using that knowledge to improve student behavior and engagement. As we talked, I realized that my focus on appropriate student behavior related more to my asking them to take responsibility for their behavior than my purposeful use of strategies to help them do that. As a result of our conversation, I got some specific ideas about things that I could do differently and what the outcomes might be for my students. For example, after talking with my mentor about my current classroom rules, I decided that I would like to have students participate in establishing rules and norms for the classroom so they might begin to monitor their own behavior and learning.

A major source of new learning for me was reading, discussing and attempting to apply some of the strategies that Robert Marzano presents in *Classroom Management that Works* and *What Works in Schools*. Marzano talks about a teacher having an appropriate level of dominance. "The right combination of moderate dominance and moderate cooperation provides the optimal teacher and student relationship for learning" (Marzano, 2003). Marzano illustrates seven action steps to address four aspects of classroom management; rules and procedures, disciplinary interventions, teacher/student relationships and appropriate mental set for management. "Only when effective

practices in these four areas are employed and working in concert is a classroom effectively managed" (Marzano, 2003). Reading through the seven steps, I came to understand the importance of creating and maintaining a learning environment conducive to successful instruction. I recognized that providing clear purpose and guidance for students both academically and behaviorally would have a noticeable impact on achievement. Additionally, I learned that effective teachers do not treat all students exactly the same way, especially when dealing with challenging behaviors. Some students need encouragement, others need a gentle reminder and some need a consistent structured response. I also learned that I need to recognize my own frustrations and remain more "emotionally objective" if I am going to implement rules, take disciplinary action as needed and truly establish relationships.

In addition to my reading, I also observed and talked with another teacher who was a good role model for establishing a safe and productive classroom environment. I noticed that one of his students facilitated their class meeting and that was impressive. We discussed specific strategies and procedures that he had successfully developed over time and scheduled another observation. Based on my readings, observations and ongoing conversations with the teacher and my mentor, I decided to implement several new ideas.

I had a class meeting with my students and talked about the classroom environment and what we all wanted from the year. My students understand that they need to be ready for intermediate school, but they also want to have fun this last year in elementary school. Together we developed a class *Bill of Rights and Responsibilities* and agreed that we would review them daily and hold each other accountable to them. Originally, I had class rules posted at the start of the year and we discussed them, but the students didn't use them. I would point out that they were violating rules but there were few consistent consequences. This time I had groups of students create posters to illustrate each of the different rights and responsibilities with a clear example of what that might look like in our classroom. I was hoping their involvement would translate into more ownership/investment in effective classroom practices.

At first the new *Bill of Rights and Responsibilities* didn't seem to change behavior in the classroom. So when I observed a problem with behavior, I would stop and ask the students if a particular behavior was consistent with the rules, why or why not, and what they needed to do differently. Sometimes I addressed the questions to particular students and other times it seemed more appropriate to address the class as a whole. In both cases, I put the responsibility for solving problem behavior on the students and not on me.

In addition to minimizing interruptions, I also wanted to get more students involved in sharing and responding during class. My mentor and I talked about wait time, providing feedback, validating student responses and providing reinforcement by attributing ownership of ideas to the students themselves. While I've worked on all of these strategies with some degree of success, I've noticed that they really like hearing their names credited for ideas. For example, last week I shared with the class that, "I was listening to Zach's group and he said something interesting. He said that the main character really didn't have a choice. What do you think?" By using this strategy, I am now reinforcing the student's engagement rather than his interruptions."

While focusing on student behavior and positive outcomes, I also made some personal observations about my own behavior, preparation for class and the messages I might be sending to my students. I made a commitment to myself to always be prepared for reading which is the first block of the day. That meant that I would have all materials organized, know my goals for whole class activities and



small group activities, and keep a “status of the class” related to individual progress so I could glance at it before calling specific students to read with me.

As I carried thorough on this commitment, I found that better preparation and organization on my part had several outcomes; some I expected and some I didn’t expect. When the students see that I am focused and ready, rather than pulling things together at the last minute, it sends an important message about my leadership (related to dominance) and expectations for student engagement and learning. It also gives us a few more minutes for instruction. We’re working toward a more cooperative relationship, as discussed by Marzano. I found that being better prepared allowed time for me to talk with the students before class. As I get to know them and ask about their activities (Andy’s football games, Frieda’s new sister, etc.) I actually connect with them better and it makes a nod, smile or concerned look from me more effective feedback than before. This doesn’t always happen...but it does happen more often.

I also realized after looking back at the Performance Profile how working on one indicator can have positive outcomes in others. For example, I tried some of Nancy Boyles’ strategies from *Constructing Meaning* and found that a number of students were more likely to stay involved in small group discussions, as opposed to interrupting or distracting other students, when given specific strategies and prompts such as asking students to find something in the text that is connected to their life, to another book or to the world or to visualize by closing their eyes and sharing what they see, hear, feel, smell, etc. One particularly effective strategy that I implemented was having them wonder aloud by sharing text related questions that pop into their heads. As a result, students are now creating and responding to their own questions. This is particularly helpful with Tiffany, who was previously passive and didn’t regularly contribute to group discussions and Gabrielle who began to interrupt less often.

Frequently, there are students who just want to tell stories that do not connect with the text. I am working on developing procedures that will encourage students to hold one another responsible for the “accountable talk” strategies that we have practiced, for referencing our *Bill of Rights and Responsibilities*, and using the comprehension strategy charts we created in our guided reading groups. There have been several occasions in the last week when students did refer to our posters and charts. Although some students are less patient with the additional time it takes to recall, re-state, and re-think, I have seen two instances when students did this and hope to see more. Ironically, one student didn’t like this approach because she was used to having all of the answers and didn’t have patience with her classmates’ questions. We’re working on her ability to be a leader by helping her to be a facilitator for other students’ learning.

In general, I have learned how important it is to know my students. Teaching 4th grade means that I have to learn new content every day and some of it, particularly math and science, is not easy. Taking time to talk to and observe my students is a challenge, but it has helped me to understand how my interactions may be appropriate for one but escalate a problem for another. For example, I can confront Jared by asking, “What were you thinking?” but that same question could be perceived as a challenge by Andy and lead to unnecessary confrontation.

With the help of the school psychologist, I am now more aware of how similar student behavior may have very different causes. Andy’s interruptions are often the result of misunderstanding how to complete a task or having to follow multi-step directions, while Gabrielle is insecure and needs continuous reinforcement. I’ve been able to use Gabrielle’s desire to talk by pairing her with a newer student with limited English proficiency. The ELL teacher did some activities with them both and Gabrielle can work with Matt at the end of the day if her work is completed. Gabrielle is interrupting



less; Andy remains a challenge. I have concerns about Andy, both academic and personal, and I need to continue to make an effort to get to know him, build trust and respond to him in a calm manner. I continue to make an effort to show him that I care and lead him back to our established *Rights and Responsibilities*.

As I look back over the last two months, I see positive changes in my students' behavior and improved classroom practices. More students are staying focused on tasks rather than interrupting instruction, I am now recording 7 interruptions in 30 minutes versus 28 interruptions in 30 minutes. I don't think that's the result of any one strategy that I have tried but is a combination of a number of strategies. As I got to know my students, I was better at treating them as individuals. Andy and Gabrielle interrupted for very different reasons and continue to need different strategies to help them stay engaged. I saw the connection between instruction and engagement when I used Boyles' strategies and was able to get reluctant talkers to participate in small group activities.

During this module, I focused on fostering appropriate student behavior and I then created the conditions to support that goal. Students have become more invested in the classroom community since they have created their *Rights and Responsibilities* document. Some students have smaller versions of the *Rights and Responsibilities* on their desktop for easier reference. I explicitly modeled the process of asking how behavior is or isn't consistent with rules and what they might do differently, and now they use this process with peers. When I saw a student point to the poster and say, 'Josh, you need to let her talk and you listen,' I knew that my students were beginning to understand the connection between behavior and success in the classroom." I still need to redirect behavior, but there are times when they do this on their own within small groups or in response to another student. And, finally, students are more engaged and there are fewer interruptions/behavior problems as they use "accountable talk" during reading groups.