Classroom Climate Plan

EDCI 590 – Summer 2007

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Tuesday/Thursday Section

Section 1 – Action Research Plan

Phase 01 – The Problem

I am perplexed by lack of student efficacy in my classroom when students are working on classwork. The students are capable of performing at higher levels than they have exhibited, but there has been a consistent lack of effort on their part to excel towards their potential. As a result of student non-work, I am unable to gauge student interests, development, and understanding of the material as I cover the course. In short, what are effective strategies that will increase student efficacy in the classroom?

Questions outlining the research

- What are the benefits of using student-pair classwork assignments in terms of knowledge growth and completion rate? (Guiding Question)

- What does current research state about improving student work completion rates? (Secondary Question)

- Do students work better with friends they associate with or classmates that they have limited contact with? (Secondary Question)

- How much does culturally relevant teaching impact student efficacy? (Guiding Question)

- Do long term projects aid students in planning out work and in turn, turn more work in? (Guiding Question)

- As I produce lessons and assignments that go deeper in Bloom's Taxonomy, do students find the challenging material more engaging and worth doing? (Guiding Question)

Phase 02 – Plan of action w/timeline

This study will be conducted over a course of two months in three shifts. Each shift will be approximately two weeks long and delve into one of the research questions. The study is begun by analyzing the current state of the class and assessing the situation to provide a benchmark and comparison group. It is expected that this process will take no longer than two days. The current level of efficacy will be measured through informal interviews and analysis of student work. Specifically, I am looking at whether or not students are completing their work and the quality of work they submit.

In the meantime, current research on student efficacy will be researched. In the literature, I am looking for articles accentuating self-esteem, Bloom's Taxonomy, student projects, and culturally relevant material impacting student lives. Additionally, the research I am looking at is targeted at how these methods are currently being implemented by others. There are multitudes of currently existing ideas and lessons which highlight efficient and effective strategies regarding boosting student efficacy; however, I am currently without guidance and do not know many of these methodologies.

The first section of the study will begin by reorganizing students into two groups. One control group will have the participants grouped in pairs by their own preference while the other has their grouping decided by me. Instead of marking the progress and efficiency of the students in the first two days, the students will be allowed time to associate and communicate with each other so that the bias of communicatory barriers will be lowered. The students will be assessed through measurement of how many assignments they complete and turn in, as well as using a short questionnaire measuring student attitude and perceived self-efficacy.

In the second section, the students are presented lessons where there is a thematic unit based on culturally relevant material. Culturally relevant material will theoretically aid in

building connections between understanding of the material and the personal lives of the students. Thus, what is ultimately being measured here is how effective culturally relevant instruction affects student work efficacy. At the end of the two week span, students will be measured on how engaged they are in the material informally, through measurement of student work completion rate, and finally through a questionnaire to assess student mood and interests towards the theme. A measurement of student attitude will take place at the end of the two weeks with the students being measured with both an interview and questionnaire.

The third phase will last a minimum of two weeks and will likely enter the third week, as I am then investigating the effects of long-term projects with students. At the same time that I am testing the projects out, I will be engaging the students in deeper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. This phase is the most convoluted of the cases, as multiple interventions are being employed at the same time. However, since both interventions are highly correlated to one another and a successful long-term assignment infers that the task(s) delve deep into Bloom's Taxonomy. The measurements for this phase will be in parts. The assignment itself will be assessed on accuracy, completion, and effort placed into the task. The other two measurements will be taken in the last two days of class via questionnaires and interviews.

Phase 03 – Data Collection

-   Observation of other teachers – Teachers who have successful and highly engaged students will be observed to gain insight on how they manage students and aid them in developing strong self-efficacy. In general, I am looking for strategies used by the teacher in interacting with students, as well as the physical body language exhibited while class is in session.

- Research existing journals – Research articles focusing on teaching pedagogies and the effect they have on student self-esteem and self-efficacy will be looked up and analyzed. Strategies will be taken from the research and used to develop the interventions that will be used through the course of the study.

- Questionnaire #1 – Likert scale measurement on peer-peer interaction
    o Given to students at the end of the first phase (after students have had the opportunity to work with others)

- Informal Analysis of Student Work – Measuring student attitudes and work-ethics through visual and interaction clues

- Questionnaire #2 – Likert scale measurement on effects of relevant and cultural themes
    o Given to students at the end of the second phase (after students have had the opportunity to complete the thematic unit on culturally relevant ideas)

- Questionnaire #3 – Likert scale on effects of Bloom's Taxonomy on students
    o Given to students at the end of the third phase, but before the students have been interviewed.

- Interview of students on work ethic/Bloom's Taxonomy
    o The interview will take place after the students have completed the project/event in the third phase of the study.

Phase 04 – Analysis of Data

The initial analysis of the data will revolve around the information gathered from observing other teachers and gathered from academic sources. From the research, two things are to be accomplished. The first is to identify how classrooms with high student self-efficacy are

run. It is necessary to know and understand the background of the desired classrooms before trying to replicate such an environment. Secondly, from the research, teaching pedagogies, strategies of motivation, and teacher-student interaction are also highly desired. The actions taken by other teachers will serve as a guide for creating the three sets of interventions that are to be utilized in the study.

The major problem that exists in the analysis of the essential question is undeniably the fact that the students are subjected to multiple forms of interventions, which are unlikely to be completely independent of one another, especially after the students have been exposed to various pedagogical views and teaching styles. In other words, it is likely that the responses elicited from the final questionnaire not be reflective of the measure of long-term assignments and Bloom's Taxonomy, but rather the combination of having worked in groups, being exposed to culturally relevant materials, and the final intervention of long-term assignments and Bloom's Taxonomy. What this translates to in the data interpretation stage is that the results and responses of the questionnaires must be taken with the understanding that they are not truly valid and reliable measures for the specific intervention. This leaves the interview as the most viable and accurate form of measurement. The interview may be modeled accordingly to how the students are interacting with the questions and are subject to change as the interview progresses. This allows for a somewhat finer and more valid assessment, as the questions I ask may aid to focus in at the exact intervention I am trying to measure.

Phase 05 – Plans for Future Actions

Despite the problems posed by the continuity in the study and lack of well-defined barriers to separate the effects of one intervention onto another, the primary goal is not to single

out a particular case that is clearly more effective than the others. Instead, I am looking for the study to provide me a series of usable plans that compound and have synergetic effects on each other to promote a high self-directed and high-efficacy classroom.

In the academic year that follows this study, it is desired to implement the intervention at the very beginning as to create the desired environment at the commencement rather than having to change and perform a transformation process. A direct approach from the start allows for instruction time to be high and management issues to be low. Furthermore, the implementation of the system of interventions is most affected by the uniqueness of the student population that is being dealt with. For some groups, I anticipate that certain interventions will not be necessary at all; some populations do not need peer-peer group training and others will not need a culturally relevant thematic unit to bring out their creative and motivated sides as to start to do well in the course.

Section 2 – Goals and visions

Every student is entitled to a safe and needs-met environment. The outside world may present the students with every possible detriment to their success in life, but in my classroom, each student is going to feel safe. A safe room allows for students to activate higher levels on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In these higher levels, students interact with others, feel wanted, feel appreciated, and have the opportunity to develop in stronger, intellectually oriented, and open individuals of society.

- I impose a series of checks and balances in dealing with student punctuality

- I use positive reinforcement to foster self-esteem and positive classroom behavior

- I ask students to clarify and explain their ideas

- I create an environment of discussion and reciprocal teaching

- Students understand the rules and policies of the course and the class

- I promote student collaboration on projects and individual work

- I foster self-accountability

- I maintain a safe environment where students do not feel threatened by others

Mission Statement: *I instill in my students the rigor and skills necessary for the modern world. My students are accountable, analytical, confident, self-motivated, and appreciative of math, who work both collaboratively and individually to solve real-world problems.*

Section 3 – Technical Management

In order to gain the full attention of the students, I normally find myself standing in front of the board with my arms folded as I count to ten. I only use this cue when I need to begin a lesson or when I need to grab the attention of all my students. In all other cases, I approach the student or groups of students individually and speak to them as I need to. In doing so, the students know that I whenever I use this cue, I am not using it for trivial purposes of addressing one or two students, but the entire class. This generally provides the students with a sense of this cue being a top priority to adhere to.

Transitions and procedures of the course are outlined in the first few days of the course. During the period of acquainting the students with each other and me with the students, the students are subjected to the rules of the course and practice transitioning. I find this a useful and practical system to engage through because it gives students some idea of what good transitions look like and how the rules of the class work.

All students know the importance of homework and being accountable for their own work. I walk by each student each day to collect homework and talk to each student regarding how important it is to do homework to gain the skills and practice which class does not provide. Walking by each student and talking to each one lets them know that I have a clear understanding of who is doing their homework and who is not. They gain a clear understanding of that they cannot get away without doing homework and feeling that the teacher will never know if they are not doing the homework or not.

Finally, the rules and consequences of the course are clearly labeled and given to all students as part of their student accountability contract. Stating the rules again and again is not enough, as most students do forget them and feel that they will never be enforced. The act of

giving the students a contract to read through and sign, they fall into a zone of obligation and

accountability. Students with self-efficacy realize the constraints and reminders given to them

represent guidelines that drive them to succeed. They understand that rules exist not to constrain

them, but to provide a safety net for practice and expansion their minds; other students are not

allowed to cause harm to this environment and suffer the consequences for attempting to do so.

Section 4 – Motivation

I rarely believe in using external motivation to drive students to perform and accomplish tasks. Allowing for students to develop a strong sense of self-dependency and automation creates an environment of "I'll do it because I can" rather than "I'll do it because it's worth points." Students succeed when they can place the burden and task of learning in their own hands. Placing extrinsic motivators near students distracts the students from the task at hand; it instead promotes the goal of obtaining that motivator only. Thus, motivation is internalized in my class through the environment I create and the various teaching nuances I employ.

The primary strategy in aiding students to be intrinsically motivated in my class is to provide an environment where they feel their needs are met. Such an environment is firstly, safe. The students may speak their minds without fearing that their opinion will be silenced by others. The students may enter and engage with others knowing that their physical selves are not in danger. Secondly, the classroom is full of belongingness. An environment which invites the students into it is telling the students that they have a place that welcomes them. Once a student knows that they are accepted, teaching and learning become easier to accomplish.

Additionally, a needs-met environment requires a sense of direction. Often, a class is safe and the students feel a strong sense of identity in the room. However, without guidance, the students just run amok in the room because they have no idea of where to direct themselves in order to advance. A room with a purpose and direction refocuses the students at a task and targets their need to grow intellectually.

The secondary strategy is the use of group assignment to promote a sense of group identity as well as social responsibility. In what appears to be backwards and reverse psychology, students are encouraged (forced, actually) to bond during the first few days of school. Each

student starts off the semester by getting up off their seats, and must spend time with other students to bond. The logic behind this process here is to have students realize that there are other people in the classroom who they can form friendships and relationships with. Effectively, students begin to see at an earlier time in the semester that they are part of a group; students understand that they are part of something that is greater than their own individuality and that it is the structure of the group that brings about success and failure.

In the tertiary position, all classes are entitled to best and relevant instruction they can receive. I speak to the students as I facilitate instruction. They do not get a pre-scripted, voice recorded version of my lesson. Each student population and period is unique; each requires different examples to bring their cognitive juices flowing about. It is my responsibility to say things to students and to craft my words such that students find meaning in them. Doing this allows students to also feel as if they are part of the learning experience, proving further purpose for students to continue in the learning process.

All assignments I assign students work in a bottom-up manner. Students always begin with easy problems that they can easily accomplish in the first few attempts and slowly, scaffolds are moved such that the examples and problems expand. By assigning work to students that grows in difficulty, the students are able to expand their scope of understanding from something basic and concrete to an abstract. Students cannot be given an abstracted example in the very beginning because it may just be out of their development area. Pulling back a little bit, the students are acclimated to the learning curve and then brought into the problem. Even in the case that the student is unable to finish up the end examples, the student realizes that he/she has gone quite a bit and has attempted something earlier that he/she was capable of doing, thus enforcing a positive self-ego.

The students understand that everyone in the class eventually needs to work with all others. They also must understand that they are part of a community whose goal is to advance forward intellectually. There is success because everyone respects the fact that there are others in the class. Whether or not they may like or adore one another is a different issue. Rather, tolerance is the goal. I cannot force all my students to all like and feel a strong sense of sympathy towards one another; that is unrealistic and utopian. Reality tells me that empathy and the will to understand others creates stronger students not just in the classroom, but also when they step outside into the real world. My students realize success in the world is guaranteed through cooperation and collaboration, not dislike and disdain.

Section 5 – Whole Class

My classes are acclimated to being a semi-democracy. Each class is allowed to create three rules that are unique to that class alone. With a semi-democratic system, social and communal bonds are developed with me as the facilitator. The students have a set of rules that they can say that they helped developed. They have invested interest in the system. As a group, they are working together to set up the rules. Afterwards, they must agree upon on certain rules that will govern them for the rest of the term. During the deliberation and deciding process, my job is merely to sit back and facilitate their discussion. I may have to lead and start the discussion, but that is all I do during the entire process. Through this, the students know that they have an impact in their small community. They understand that their immediate world is shaped by themselves, not just me. Finally, they know that they are accountable to each other, having worked with everyone else to create the rules of the course.

Most of the time, I direct the students towards a general idea of what to do. Whether it is a class project or a small problem, the students know that they have some level of control and autonomy. The class does not have to be working in a quiet manner; I find that rather disturbing and proof that the students are not working with each other. They are allowed to be loud, inquisitive, all-over the place, but still, they are being productive and working with each other without disturbing the harmony of the course.

I dislike setting consequences because I feel that I am not exactly the most consistent in the world with them. Yet, I do have a small set of consequences for the students to follow. The consequences are generally neutral and are eventually directed to having lengthy conferences with students to figure out the problem and to create solutions. Generally, the problem can and will alleviate itself in the first two or three occurrences. However, as the problem continues to

pose itself as something that is negatively affecting either the student's progress in class and/or the class' progress, then solutions will need to be devised and implemented to help the student out.

Problem	**Consequence**
Punctuality	First 3 offenses – Student must make up the warm-up and work from peers
	4th offense – Discussion with the student regarding being tardy
	5th and subsequent offenses – Further discussion with student and creation of ideas to extinguish tardiness.
Disruption of Class	1st Offense – Warning
	2nd Offense – Student moved to another seat – discussion later
	3rd Offense – Student moved outside of the room – discussion later
	4th Offense – Student immediately moved outside of room and immediate discussion
Cheating	Dean's Office + Suspension +/or OT – To be discussed between the Dean, the parents, and myself – The only case where consequences do not exist and go straight to punishment
Missing Homework	First 2 offenses – Homework must be made up in class
	3rd offense – Discussion with students about the importance of homework
	4th and subsequent offenses – Homework cannot be made up
Not doing CW	Same as HW
Leaving Trash	1st offense – Students pick up their trash
	2nd offense – Students help pick up the trash for the entire room
	3rd and subsequent offenses – Discussion of what happens to trash when

it's left everywhere

Missing Materials   1st offense – Borrow materials from me

2nd offense – Discussion of what happens when people need to do things

but are without materials

3rd offense – Students must procure materials from others or be unable to

interact in the classroom activity.

For the students who provide the bulk of the problems in the classroom, the immediate action I take is to isolate them on the side and then handle the issue later in the class period. The actions start off with as much student input as possible and as the student persists with the problems, the student input is slowly removed and I start bringing in others to produce a solution. In the event that the solutions we have created have ill-effect on the problem, then I will refer the student to either his/her parents and/or administrators for further support.

- Talk over the situation with the students and discuss the situation that has occurred.

- Discuss with the student things that he/she may perform to limit and extinguish the problems.

- Create a contract for the student with well-defined rules that go above the general rules of the course. The student has input in the decision process.

- Create a role for the student in the course. The rationality for this role is to make the student feel accepted and necessary for the class to function. The student is given a responsibility and through this, a stronger reason to behave positively and interact in the correct mindset.

- Bring in the student and small panel of peers to discuss and deliberate on the situation and how much it has escalated.

- Refer the student to the parent and other teachers/administrators, as I have exhausted my set of checks and balances.

Section 6 – Implementation Timeline

In the first weeks of the year, the class is to engage in the community bonding/formation activities. Students bond and will continue to bond for the first few days as they become more familiar with each other at irregular intervals. Towards the closing of this period, the students need to develop the set of class rules that they can agree upon. The timing of this activity is pivotal, as the students have begun to form their bonds, but have not finalized them yet. This activity solidifies the student relations with one another; culminating in a set of rules that symbolizes their comradeship to one another in the course.

As the course continues, the students are constantly reminded of the rules and consequences of the course. By reminding and berating the students again and again, the students are accustomed to the rules enough that they know and understand the policies such that if they violate any of them, they can recite the consequence from memory. This process is reiterated for the first week and slowly eases off as student efficacy reaches a constant baseline, at which, further reiteration becomes somewhat irrelevant and unnecessary.

In the rest of the course, the students fall into a regular routine where they are expected to just follow the rules and set the consequences for themselves. I, at this point, no longer micro-manage as much as I would do in the first few weeks. Instead, the students are running more of the class and I am just there to make sure that the system is fully functionally. It does need to be noted that the students must have reached a level of self-directed empowerment in order for this phase to be effective.