

Summary Report

When I began this project, I felt that I was, frankly, terrible at managing my classroom. I could recall incidents where I was unhappy with the way I responded or the outcomes. I also felt that I was the only teacher who had such troubles, even though I knew that was not a rational thought. Now I know that I am not that bad after all. I had overlooked the day-to-day things I did well and focused on what were truly unusual events, which would challenge even the most seasoned teacher.

My feelings now are that I am at least average to good at classroom management, but with room to grow and improve. The ideas and techniques I learned from this project give me opportunities to achieve that growth.

I know that I need to recognize when I am handling situations well, to document challenging situations, and to have a long-term improvement plan. Having these in print and readily available to me in the classroom will give me the opportunity to review them regularly. This will strengthen my skills and my resolve, as well as show me how I am improving. In this report you will see a draft of the improvement plan I expect to implement in my classroom. I am inspired by the quote, "With a classroom environment like that in place, a teacher would have time to teach." (cpi management strategies)

The first insights I had were, surprisingly, from the definition of classroom management. I had always thought of my classroom as a place of learning, but I see now that I will need to emphasize that to my students in each class during each semester. I can't assume they have arrived with the same idea. Their background might be that the classroom is a place for goofing off, or trying to irritate the teacher, or a place where the teacher makes sure they will pass the class. I don't know, so I should make sure we all have a chance to view it the same way. To this end, I created a PowerPoint slide show that asks them, "What is the purpose of this classroom?" and concludes it is a place of learning and that we all must work to make sure the room is a safe and comfortable place for everyone to learn. While I don't expect it to be 100% effective, I hope it will create the right attitude and atmosphere at the beginning of the semester. It will also give me something to refer to if a student has any behavior problems.

Something else that I enjoyed seeing: Part of the definition of classroom management is

From a student's perspective, effective classroom management involves clear communication of behavioral and academic expectations as well as a cooperative learning environment (Wikipedia Classroom Management)

While this idea isn't new to me, I was pleased to see it included because it emphasizes a teacher's responsibility to the students, whereas the rest of the definition tends to talk about how a teacher should manage student behavior.

Another insight I had was on the strong connection between classroom management and discipline. The two must work together to create that safe learning environment. It is important to my plan to show that connection and to help me use them well. I'll need advice on how to blend them effectively.

I began studying classroom management because I had no training in it before becoming a teacher. When I interviewed K through 12th grade teachers, I was astonished to discover how little training they

had. The articles and opinion pieces I read all agreed that classroom management is an important skill for a successful teacher, and yet it is not a topic that is emphasized in the K – 12 teacher training. From that I realized that I was not alone in my troubles and frustrations. I asked those teachers if they thought they were good classroom managers; many said they were but some credited other jobs, like managing an office, for preparing them for it. Some didn't receive any training until they were already full-time teachers.

I saw many different strategies utilized by the teachers. Some I agreed with and others I didn't. However, what was important was that their strategy worked for them and their classroom.

It was interesting to read about the different management styles. I had seen them before taking the self-assessment, so I knew what I had hoped my style would turn out to be: authoritative. This is a "coaching" or "selling" style that appealed to my desire to treat my students as adults and have them respond positively to that. I was pleased to see that it did, but I was also enlightened by the idea that my management style should be fluid. That is, I should be willing and able to adjust my style according to the students and situation at hand. There are advantages to each style, and I should pick the one that I think will work best at the time.

I was not surprised to find that teaching/management styles correlated closely with parenting styles. I relied a lot on my parenting style when I first started teaching regularly, and I believe I still do. I want to include in my improvement plan the description I found for authoritative teaching and parenting, so I can review it at the beginning of the semester. This should remind me of how I want to be and set my focus and attitude in the right place. Part of this includes a reminder of how teaching is a performance art and how my mood and body language can affect the class' attitude and behavior.

The second self-assessment needs to be a part of my plan's structure. It is a checklist that I can modify to suit my goals and use to see if I am meeting them. The modifications should match the goals of the plan.

I also want to include a description of how my body language should look when I am teaching: erect posture, radiating confidence and leadership, appearing approachable. I want to create the impression that I am a "helping person" who also gives the students opportunities to self-discipline. One behavior I do not want is to be a "co-dependent enabler." I want my students to learn how to be good students without expecting me to always hold their hands, make them do everything, or not allow them to struggle.

It was not surprising to see that a teacher's behavior and body language can affect student behavior. My own experiences as a student showed me that I reacted negatively to a teacher who often walked into the classroom radiating anger, and positively to a teacher who always presented herself as pleasant and interested in her subject. My own teacher persona has been modeled on teachers whose teaching styles I liked. Now I know I need to focus on the ones whose behaviors I appreciated, too.

I really liked the advice and steps given for teaching students to listen to me. It makes sense, it helps me to treat them as responsible adults, it helps them become more responsible, and, as a bonus, it will prepare them to be better listeners for their future teachers. This will be in my plan. My challenge will be to wait silently for long enough. I wonder if I will react appropriately to the students who ignore me: Will those "leader" students the advice mentions truly step up and correct them?

The technique for controlling student “side-talking” is interesting. I see that it is up to me to decide what times and situations are appropriate for it. I must make these decisions before I try to teach my students about it. I especially like the part about having the students know a gesture for “not now” when a classmate tries to talk to them. This puts a lot of the control in the students’ hands instead of mine. I will include this advice in my plan.

The technique about using pauses in my talking to help make a point is one that I have used for a long time, but still needs to be in my plan to remind me. It took me a while to get comfortable with the silence, but I saw results quickly. The students had time to finish writing notes, reflect a moment on what was being said, and perhaps ask questions. Sometimes my pauses were when I was erasing the board; other times I just stopped talking and waited, watching them write, until it seemed they were ready to listen again. There are places in my lecture notes where I remind myself to pause and let the information sink in.

One of my biggest challenges is setting appropriate limits. The five-step approach to limit setting was very helpful for me, especially the idea that the purpose of limits is to teach, not to punish. The thought of offering choices with consequences is the parenting style I used, and I am glad to better see how to use it in the classroom. This will be included in my plan.

I was impressed by the article on gentleness as a good management strategy. It appeals to me, but I worry I might not be able to make it work, so it will be in my plan. This will be a primary challenge for me in improving my classroom management style. Part of including gentleness in my behavior is avoiding giving my students “the look” – which I never used much but I do know I have used it.

Another challenge I will have is building the type of rapport I want with my students. I want to hold them accountable, show them there are consequences for poor behavior or choices, and I want them to respect my authority as the teacher in the classroom. But I also want to be able to visit with them and get to know them at least a little. That fine line of achieving both will be an important skill for me to hone. I appreciated the part warning me about going too far and becoming unhealthily deferential. The goals are being fair and consistent.

Many articles and teachers recommended to me that I “pick my battles.” One article pointed out the flaw in that strategy: it can cause disrespect, resentment, and might even spawn more confrontations and arguing. My own experiences confirm this. The strategy of gentleness combined with a reasonable rapport suggests you should never have battles. A solid classroom management plan like that should work for you by eliminating battles in the first place. This same approach reminds us to think like referees when enforcing consequences. I need to remind myself of this regularly, so I will include it in the plan.

One article I found was on things you don't have to do to be a good classroom manager. Fifty items were listed and nearly every one of them was something I have done at some point in my teaching experience. To have them pointed out to me as behaviors and choices I can avoid was enlightening and liberating. I plan on keeping a copy handy to look at each teaching day until I know them thoroughly.

To boost this, an occasional review of the common mistakes and corrective suggestions is going to be part of my plan. The mistakes remind me of what not to do and the suggestions put me on the right behavior or response track, especially the ones on inconsistent expectations and consequences, and on

taking student behavior too personally. It will be interesting to resolve some of the conflicting advice given on the websites once I decide what methods apply to me.

It was interesting to find out how professional speakers handle hecklers. I have had some very challenging hecklers over the years and I wish I had the advice I found for this project back then. Some of the advice is specifically for someone who is giving a talk, as opposed to a teacher who meets with the class over and over again. Other advice seems like it might work, like staring at the heckler instead of responding, which uses social pressure to get them to calm down. I particularly like the reminder to avoid asking the heckler questions when you can't control the answers. There is no reason to give the heckler a chance to continue to heckle.

My plan will reference handling hecklers. Not every class has problems like this, so I don't feel like I need to review the techniques regularly, but I feel it is important to know there are ideas to consider if I do happen to get a heckler. It might be helpful to have a very brief list of the steps to take, just in case I need it on the spot.

Similarly for hostile students, I think I need a reference to the section as well as have a checklist of responses in my plan. I like the part that discusses some of the causes for hostile students, which gives me a chance to react from a place of compassion. It is good to know some students have the goal of getting the teacher upset or angry, so I have to remind myself not to let them put me there. I also need to make sure I don't try to reason with them when they are angry. That does nothing constructive and will probably frustrate me more. The advice that makes the most sense to me is to put limitations on the student but give him choices, with consequences. This, combined with the advice for spending some time quietly thinking before responding, might be an effective combination.

My immediate concern is how I react, so I will need to be able to quickly look at the parts about staying calm and watching my body language. I particularly like the "Principles of Active Listening." It is too easy to pretend you are listening when, in truth, you are planning your devastating response or even thinking about something else. Getting back into the habit of really hearing what the person is saying is a good goal. This tells me the effective communication strategies will go into the plan.

The role-playing scenarios will be a good reference for reviewing before a semester starts. I want to be prepared for a variety of situations, and they could be good conversations with my colleagues. It is better to think about them ahead of time than try to figure them out in the heat of the moment. This could be a resource that grows in time, with contributions from my own and my colleague's experiences.

While a reference to the classroom management guidelines should go in my plan, I don't want all of them in it. I will pick through the lists and choose the ones I think will be most helpful in general. What I want to do is select the ones that will get me through any situation at the time, with a reference for the others I can look at later as needed.

Perry's Stages of Cognitive Development are, I think, very helpful for the students to see at least once during the semester. It is a lot like learning metacognition: once you are aware of it, you can track your own development and see how to advance it. I will be including this in the presentations I give to my students to help them learn better study skills. It is also important for me, as teacher, to recognize the stages so I can determine where my students are as compared to where I am. If I am teaching from a

higher stage, then I need to include nudges to get the students higher, too. This is emphasized in the part about “Your Goals as Teacher.”

The part on the intellectual development of women is important to consider, too, especially since so many of our women students come from cultures where the male is dominant and the female is expected to be quiet. Being aware of their specific development patterns could be helpful in supporting their learning.

The section on teachers’ fears is, I found, very comforting. It is easy to feel like you are the only person with these concerns because everyone else is better/more experienced than you. I liked the discussion by the experienced teacher, and the conclusion: “Fear is a part of any important work. We don’t need to get over it, but we may need to change our approach to it.” (siobhancurious) The approaches discussed later in the section “reflect the resilience and resourcefulness teachers develop over their careers. It’s not that anxiety or fear in the face of problems disappears. Rather, there’s a shift. ... They invite challenges, lean into them, and live the questions that once caused fear.” (idti.pro fear factor)

I was glad to see that self-care was incorporated into dealing with fears and anxieties. This needs to go into my plan.

The information on stage fright is also helpful. There are important ideas here to help you enter the classroom with a good attitude and to create a positive atmosphere of learning. A short version of this list needs to be in my plan. Similarly for the frustration assumptions, it is good to recognize habits that might derail my attitude; this needs to be in my plan.

I included information on secondary trauma stress because I have experienced it in my classroom. Having students who, during the semester, were diagnosed with cancer, suddenly rendered homeless, had a family member commit suicide, or dealt with other life-changing issues caused me concern, worry, stress. Having the Professional Quality of Life survey will help me determine my emotional state and avoid burnout, more than just reminding myself to have a “healthy life-work balance.” The advice that is in this section can help me achieve that balance, so I am a better teacher and human being.

The book reviews play a vital role in this project. They support and enhance many of the ideas in the sections. For example, Games Students Play first defines “transactional analysis” and then how teachers can use it to defuse and deflect poor student behavior as well as understanding their own reactions to those behaviors. It lists and discusses a variety of games that are typical of students who disrupt the classroom; I appreciated the insight into the student’s motivation and goals to help me approach the problem with clarity.

Games People Play continues this insight by giving specific definitions of the types of ego states and expands the definition of transactional analysis. It shows how the transactions between two people can result in good communication (complementary transactions) or in a breakdown of communication (crossed transactions).

I was intrigued by the structure to analyze games. It is detailed and may help me understand the games better, especially if I take notes on the situations in my classroom.

These two books are worthwhile including in my classroom management plan. I want to list the ego states and their definitions, and I want to include a sampling of games to remind me of what to look for

and how to react. The most important part is to remind me of strategies to use at the time of poor student behavior.

Between Parent and Child is an excellent reminder of how to talk to people in a way that lets them listen without a strong, negative emotional reaction. I have loved its methods and try to employ them as much as I can in my life. The discussion on setting limits is supportive of the advice found in the previous sections. In my plan, I will only need a reminder for when I am upset by a situation.

The book, I'm OK – You're OK, expands more on the ideas of transactional analysis and of ego states. I liked the descriptions of the physical responses you can see when a person switches from one ego state to another. This will be helpful to analyze any difficult situation I am in and help me react appropriately. My plan should reference this list for regular review.

The same goes for Getting Past No, which strongly supports the ideas in BPC. It helps you to see how to react to difficult situations in a mindful way, breaking the dangerous cycles of automatic action-reaction. In fact, when discussing the different types of manipulation tactics, I was reminded of all the game descriptions in transactional analysis. The idea of “going to the balcony” and the techniques for controlling the situation so you can keep your composure are all worthwhile for my plan.

The article reviews give advice for dealing with difficult students, how to control how much I do for my students, how to motivate my students to want good behavior, and how I should behave in the classroom to emphasize my authority while still being an accessible teacher. These are worth reviewing regularly (especially before the semester starts) to remind me and set a good mental attitude. I liked being reminded to take care of myself so that I can be a good teacher, instead of a worn-out one. In my plan, I will list some of the features.

When I review the plan, contained in the pages after this one, I notice it seems like just a collection of ideas and not truly a plan. I recognize that it really is a collection of strategies for me to review and internalize, so that they can be turned into a plan when I need them. Instead of some orderly layout of steps to take towards improvement, it is a set of tools available to select and organize when a problem arises in my classroom or in me.

My expectation is that the plan will travel with me to my classes. I can review it when I need to and when I have some spare time. I will also keep a copy of the entire project in my office to review and remind myself as needed. There will be a copy of the project in my department, too, for the benefit of my colleagues and to inspire discussions.