Analysis of Classroom Learning Environment

Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport

Explain how you established and maintained an atmosphere of trust, openness and mutual respect in your classroom. Describe specific strategies used to encourage:

- Positive student verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- Positive student social interactions

While student teaching, I established an atmosphere of trust, openness, and mutual respect by respecting and incorporating students’ ideas, keeping communication between students and myself open, and giving students opportunities that demonstrated that I trusted them. I made a point to greet students individually at the door, told them it was great to see them, and asked how they were in order to get to know each one of them and show that I cared. I also supported students in their other extracurricular activities by attending some of the events and making sure to comment about it the next time I saw them.

At the beginning of the school year, I had the students create a list of expectations for the classroom environment, lovingly nicknamed the “Choir Family Rules” by students. Some of the things they listed were respect, positive attitudes, and constructive communication. I modeled these behaviors to students through positive constructive feedback, genuine and specific compliments and words of encouragement, and showing respect in the way that I interacted with students. In order to encourage these behaviors, I recognized students who were meeting expectations and reminded students of their own expectations for each other before putting them into groups. If a student was not meeting these expectations, I would find an appropriate time to pull the student aside and ask him or her to explain the situation I witnessed and the reason for their behavior, discuss it with them, remind them of the expectations, and tell them to show me a choice by their behavior classroom behavior whether they were going to continue to be a member of the “family” or not. At my elementary placement, I addressed this in a similar way, but the expectations for respect, positive attitudes, and positive constructive communication were stated as my expectations and the choices were between participating in the fun activity or five minutes out.

I utilized non-verbal communication in the classroom in several ways. High school students communicated to me that they were ready to start class by standing up silently, folders in hand, and ready to warm up at the time I had posted on the board If we were singing through a piece and I wanted to give students feedback but did not want them to stop, I would try using nonverbal gestures to show what I wanted to happen. If I needed the attention of the choir, I refused to shout over them and At the elementary school, I used the school-wide sign for attention, which was a finger on your lip and the other hand raised with two fingers in the air. It was also important to the usage of raised hands at the elementary level for students to communicate their desire to speak. In both settings, I was conscious of the way facial expressions and body language communicated my attitude and was constantly self-assessing to make sure I was communicating positively, even on difficult days.
Establishing a Culture for Learning to Encourage Student Engagement and Responsibility

Describe how you created a culture for learning in your classroom. Describe specific strategies used to encourage:

• Active engagement in learning
• Student responsibility for their own learning
• Student commitment to the subject
• High expectations for achievement
• Student pride in work

During the first couple of weeks of school, I made an effort to ask students about their favorite pieces they had performed before and what they were interested in learning about. There was a common theme in the students’ responses in that they enjoyed pieces with rich harmonies and were interested in learning more foreign language pieces. This let students have a say in the selection of the music, which made them more engaged during class and committed to learning the piece. I also made sure to select a piece difficult enough that, although we were working on improving literacy skills toward independent musicianship, they would not be able to get performance-ready entirely independently, but still at an attainable level where they could perform the piece well in front of an audience and feel really good about it. Individually recorded singing check-ups required students to be responsible for their own part, instead of leeching onto classmates. Since there are very few markings in terms of dynamics and phrasing in the music, I gave students options for stylistically appropriate ways of executing them and let them vote on which markings we would write in. This gave them additional ownership of the piece’s performance. As we neared performance time, I would take the class to rehearse in the commons area to rehearse which helped build student ownership and pride, as well as raised awareness of the choral program throughout the school.

At the elementary school level, I made sure to engage students by tying lessons in with the seasons or upcoming holidays and using various learning modalities. For example, during the fall I taught steady beat and prepared for quarter and eighth note rhythms. Students sang, played, wrote, listened and moved to music about squirrels, leaves, and pumpkins focusing on these concepts. As the excitement built up for the 5th grade Nutcracker performance, I introduced form to younger students through movement to music from the Nutcracker Suite.

Managing Classroom Procedures

Describe your classroom routines and procedures. Include specific procedures used to promote:

• Student responsibility
• Smooth operation of the classroom
• Efficient use of time (e.g., organizing and managing groups of students, distribution and collection of materials, use of student helpers, transition between activities, etc.)

I established classroom routines and procedures from the first day of school. At the high school, students were expected to come to class with their folders, music, board work packet, and pencils and take their assigned seat and begin the board work for the day. I always had a start time written on the board. Until that time, students were free to talk quietly while they worked on their board work and ask each other questions about it, as needed. When the clock reached the start time, students were expected to stand up silently, folders in hand, and ready to warm up.
eliminate variables, I had students practice this several times, not assuming they would get it right on the first try or that they already knew the exact way I expected them to sit and stand. After several practices, it became a game to see how quietly they could stand when it was time. Throughout the school year, if students did not meet these expectations, I had no problem practicing them a few times just as a reminder. If anything needed to be passed out, it would be on a chair placed in the entrance to the classroom so that students could pick it up on the way in. Since I stood at the door to greet students, I could remind them to pick up the item if I noticed they did not grab one. Students were placed in assigned seats according to voice type, timbre, and strength to create a balanced ensemble and for ease in taking attendance. For the first few days, the seating chart was projected on the board alongside the board work so students who might have forgotten their spot could double-check without having to ask.

At the elementary school, expectations were established and practiced on the first day of school before I got there, so I made the decision to go with the same expectations as my cooperating teacher so that students were not confused by two different sets of expectations. Students were expected to walk into class quietly and go directly to their assigned spot on the rug and sit down “criss-cross applesauce” with their hands in their lap. Students line up and practice this procedure again before we let class begin if there is running, excessive talking, students do not go directly to their spot, or if they are not sitting correctly. If I needed students to come into class in a different way than the routine, then I would stop the class at the door and give specific instructions for how they should come in. If students were going to need additional materials starting at the beginning of class, I would have them pick them up off the counter as they walked in the door. If students were going to need additional materials later, depending on the item, I would pick student helpers who were modeling good behavior to help pass them out. When using instruments, they were either pre-placed or if students had the opportunity to pick instruments they were called up in small groups to pick instruments from the instrument cabinet.

**Encouraging Appropriate Student Behavior**

Describe your classroom management plan. Include specific classroom management strategies used to:

- Establish clear expectation of conduct
- Monitor student behavior
- Respond to behavior that does not meet your expectations

I set my expectations and procedures for classroom behavior on the first day of school. I gave students the opportunity to express what they expected behavior-wise from themselves and their classmates. They’ve been in school long enough that they came up with a very nice list that included everything I probably would have included had I written it myself. The students then voted to approve each item. This way, with the very few behavior issues I had, I was able to say it was not only an expectation of mine the student had broken, but also an expectation of his or her classmates and one he or she had voted into action. When there were behavioral issues, I praised the students who were meeting expectations and used proximity with students that were not, when possible. I would then gently but firmly remind the class of the expectation that was set that I was seeing being broken without calling the student out. If the behavior continued, I would kindly remind the particular student of my expectations and ask them to do their job. If it continued, I would pull the student aside during class as soon as I was able to and discuss the
behavior and ask them to make a choice with their actions whether they would come back to
class and participate with appropriate behavior or face consequences that suited the inappropriate
behavior they were displaying. I dealt with classroom management at the elementary school in a
similar way, except that they did not have the opportunity to create a list of behaviors and vote
on them. The consequences after being pulled aside in the elementary setting was usually sitting
out from the activity for five minutes. After that, if the behavior was still an issue and the student
was causing students in the class not to learn, a student support monitor would be called to
remove them from the classroom and further discuss it and assign additional consequences.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizing the Physical Environment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attach a simple sketch of the arrangement of the physical space of your classroom. Design and describe a plan to:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Make learning accessible to all students</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Address safety concerns</td>
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<td>• Arrange the furniture to support typical learning activities</td>
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In both my secondary and elementary classrooms, several classes were near the maximum
occupancy limit for the classroom. This meant that furniture and materials had to be mainly up
against walls to create as much free space for students to move around in, as possible. Materials
had to be in easy-access containers in which it was easy to tell what was inside to get out as
needed. Emergency plans and supplies were all in a designated spot next to the door and were
practiced regularly.