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Writing Workshop:  
A Plan for Classroom Management

9<sup>th</sup> grade English  
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This fall I am changing the way I do a lot of things. Most teachers know that our practice changes and is enhanced as we learn while doing, and learn through courses and research that we seek out to make us better at what we do. This year I am moving to a new classroom, incorporating three new initiatives (International Baccalaureate, ENI standards-based incremental lessons and testing, and Learning Targets for formative assessment), and implementing writing workshop as my primary classroom format. I am going from desks to tables, and one door to two.

Though these differences bring about need for a change in the way I do things, I have also been discontent with other elements of my practice and student response. I have many attributes that help me with classroom management – humor, a “big” personality, a non-confrontational problem-solving style, and good rapport with students. Students enjoy my class. I work a lot on community-building, and it pays off. But there are other areas that have concerned me that I’m hoping to be able to better address with a more informed and concrete classroom management plan. Many of my students are “social promotions” – kids who haven’t been successful and passed middle school, but are moved up to 9<sup>th</sup> grade because they are now 16 years old. They struggle immensely with motivation, and I struggle with the misbehaviors that ensue. In this plan, I hope to create a safe and productive environment with high, enforceable expectations in which all of my students can better engage and grow as readers, writers, thinkers, and communicators.

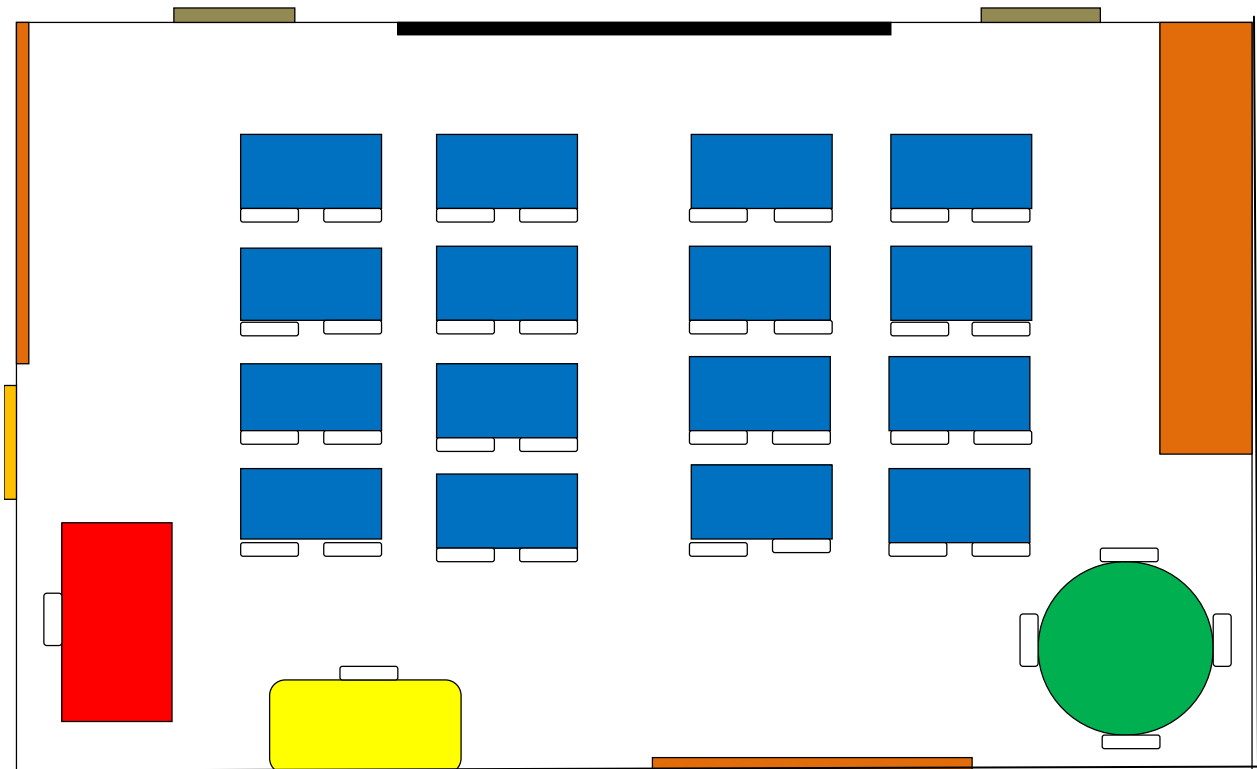
Focus #1: Physical Arrangement

The physical arrangement of my classroom has to serve many purposes and many types of learners. There will be times that students are working independently and need to cut out distractions and be able to focus without distracting others, times when all students need to be facing forward for whole-group instruction, times that students will pair up to discuss and work, and other times when students will be working in larger groups of four for writing revision, etc. I was able to get tables for my new classroom that will fit two chairs apiece. I decided to create four rows of tables facing the front with four tables in each row.









This way, students can work independently, consult with a neighbor during pair shares, and students in every other table can simply turn their chairs around to face the pair behind them to create groups of four. This arrangement will eliminate the need for moving furniture, and create opportunities for many types of interactions in the classroom. It will also allow me to control more of the types of student interactions. There is a middle aisle as well, providing more room for me to circulate, and a space for my media cart when I show films, use the overhead or data projectors, or show examples of student work on the document projector.

In the CHAMPs text, many ideas for classroom arrangements are provided along with rationales, strengths and weaknesses of each (Module 2, Task 2, pages 54-60). The arrangement I've created seems to address the purposes that I have in writing workshop. I've also placed a large circular table at the back of the room, allowing for teacher/student conference space, extra student-group work space, or a quiet area distanced from the group for students who need it. I placed it in the back so conferences can go on with minimal distraction to the larger group, and students who need to be removed to a quieter area will not be in the line of sight of their classmates. The computer station can also be used in the back of the room without creating a visual distraction for the rest of the class.

My classroom arrangement is included below, along with a key to placement.



Key:

	Student Seating
	Teacher Desk
	Independent/Group Work Table
	Computer Desk
	Chalkboard (Dry Erase Board)
	Bookshelves/ Storage
	Classroom Doors
	Door to Storage Space

## Focus #2: Classroom Rules and Expectations

I have traditionally had pretty simple rules in the past, including things like *Be on Time, Come Prepared*, and *"Don't do anything that causes a problem for anyone else."* The first two are measurable and obvious, but the latter is a "catch all" – and not the most effective. It's too vague. At least half of my students are African American, and the Jones and Jones text states that, "Studies indicate that African American students learn more effectively from teachers who set clear expectations and, in a caring yet firm manner, hold students to these expectations" (179). I need to be more explicit with what my rules and expectations are, and get "buy in" from the students as well (Jones and Jones, 182). There are many ways to do this, such as leading students through the process of discussing and creating their own set of rules for the classroom community. Since I teach high school and have five different sections of students, having them make their own rules wouldn't really work; it would be ridiculous to function with five different sets of rules for five different classes! There are other ways to get commitment and "buy in" from the students that Jones and Jones cite that I think would work well for my students, however. The two that I will use this year are discussing the value of classroom rules and expectations (178) and making connections between classroom and community rules (190). This takes the arbitrary nature out of those "don't do" lists on the wall and makes the connection between each student's actions and the health of the classroom community.

CHAMPs makes some suggestions for classroom rules that I incorporated into my thinking about my own rules and expectations for students (75-77):

*Decide who will have input into the rules.* As I stated before, it wouldn't work to have classes develop their own rules, but initiating a discussion on rules and expectations in the classroom can get students thinking and talking about what good rules look like and why they are needed. I will have my rules created already, but will make lists of rules each class thinks are good ones. After this discussion, I will post my rules and we will make connections between the reasons behind the rules they came up with and the rules of the classroom. This helps to establish the value behind the classroom rules, and creates "buy in" as well. Who knows, maybe they will come up with one or two that I will add to the "master list" !

*Make sure your rules will be "effective".* When thinking of the basic necessities for keeping classes running smoothly and effectively, I can think of the following:

*Arrive on time with all your materials (writing utensil, independent reading materials, homework)*

This rule will make starting class smoother, and eliminate more "off task" time.

*Follow directions immediately*

Time is wasted when I have to repeat my directions, and students need to know that I ask them to do things for specific, class-related reasons.

*Work during all work times*

This eliminates more off-task time and helps students to be more productive.

*Speak only after thinking, and without hurting others' feelings or dignity.*

This rule is not only important for everyday classroom activities, but for small and large group discussions, and students' communication skills outside of school.

*Keep hands, feet and objects in your own space.*

This is a simple safety issue, and again eliminates distractions.

*Develop consequences for rule infractions.* I have decided on the following consequences:

*Arrive on time with all your materials (writing utensil, independent reading materials, homework)*

Tardiness: I will close the door as soon as the bell rings and begin class after taking attendance (class will be working on "bellwork" prompt). Tardy students will be let in after that, which ensures that I've recorded who is tardy. Students will be expected to get started upon their arrival, and will not receive extra time in class. Students will receive detention and a call home after 3 tardies.

Lack of materials: Students will lose their daily participation points. "Knuckle busters" (golf pencils) are available for those without a writing utensil, and independent reading material will be assigned for those who do not bring it.

*Follow directions immediately*

Students who ignore or deliberately do not follow directions after one reminder will lose daily participation points, and this may be escalated in severity to include

detention, then a pass to the "time out" room and a discipline referral. Escalations will also be followed up by a call home.

*Work during all work times*

Same as above (see "Follow directions immediately").

*Speak only after thinking, and without hurting others' feelings or dignity.*

Same as above (see "Follow directions immediately). Certain names, put downs, and cussing will result in immediate call home and/or being sent to "time out" room". Threats will not be tolerated and student will be removed from the classroom with a discipline referral.

*Keep hands, feet and objects in your own space.*

Same as above (see "Follow directions immediately). Hitting, kicking, throwing things at someone, or tripping another person will not be tolerated and student will be removed from the classroom with a discipline referral.

*Teach students what the rules are and how they can demonstrate compliance.* We will talk about the school rules in relation to community rules (Jones and Jones, page 190), the reasons for following them as they relate to laws and rules in the community, and their responsibilities as citizens of a community (at school, in their families, in the workplace, and in the larger community). We will also talk about how violating the rules breaks down the community and hinders the individual from their own expression and freedom. I will also implement a "Contract for Success" (191) as a part of their goal setting for the course.

### Focus #3: Classroom Procedures

I've chosen to focus my procedures on the four main areas that Jones and Jones point out as the main areas most effective in secondary classrooms (187). This is also outlined in the CHAMPs model (Conversation, Help, Activity, Movement, Participation). Making connections between procedures and "real life" will also help me to teach and review these expectations with students. I can use the same idea of discussing school procedures in relation to community procedures to increase understanding and build commitment (190).

#### I. Beginning Class

- A. Students come into the room, sit in assigned seats and begin work on the posted daily prompt in their English notebooks (kept under desks and color-coded per class).
- B. Homework due that day should be turned in to the correct hour's tray on the front counter. Late work or work turned in after an absence should be turned in to the "Late Work" tray.
- C. The classroom door will shut when the bell rings.
- D. Tardy students should knock once, and wait for the teacher to answer the door (this will happen when attendance is taken and beginning

instructions are given, if needed). Tardy students will sign in on the tardy log upon entering, and begin the daily prompt work.

- E. If students have questions about the writing prompt, they may ask a neighbor once, and raise their hand for assistance if needed from the teacher.

## II. Instructional Activities

- A. During independent work time, students should place a book upright on their desk if help is needed but they are still working. Students should raise their hand if they need immediate help. During pair or group work, the same procedure applies if pairs or groups need teacher assistance. Students are encouraged during pair and group work to consult each other for assistance first.
- B. Students may get up as needed to sharpen pencils or to get additional paper, but need to do so quietly and without talking or disturbing others. Any other needs to get up during work times should be asked of the teacher, using the same methods as above.
- C. Attention signal: lights will flicker twice. Full attention is needed after second flicker.
- D. All headings should be on the upper left hand side of each paper, in MLA format (posted in front and back of classroom).
- F. If students have questions during independent work time, they may ask a neighbor once, and follow the directions above for assistance if needed from the teacher. Students are expected to discuss actively during pair share and group work times, staying on the topic assigned.
- G. If students finish with time to spare, they may read their independent reading selection, or work on other assignments for *English* class.

## III. Ending Class

- A. English notebooks should stay in the classroom, and be stored underneath assigned seats on the bottom of the pile so the next class's notebooks are on top. Any art supplies used for assignments should be returned to the art supply cabinet.
- B. Class is dismissed by the teacher, not necessarily by the bell. Class will not be dismissed until all materials are put away and students are in their assigned seats.

## IV. Other procedures

- A. Teacher's Desk: Students will not step behind the teacher's desk or use anything on or in the desk without permission from the regular classroom teacher. Permission from a substitute does not count. Work should not be turned in on the teacher's desk.
- B. Fire drills: Students should leave all belongings and exit quickly and quietly through the East door and meet the teacher by the corner of the baseball field. The teacher will leave the room last, so any students not waiting for her will earn a detention.  
Tornado Drills: Students should leave all belongings and exit quickly and quietly through the East door of the classroom, go through the gym and meet the teacher in the hallway by the wrestling room. The teacher will leave the room last, so any students not waiting for her will earn a detention. Students should sit facing the wall.
- C. Hall passes are not given unless in emergency situations. Students should use the restroom during passing time. Locker passes will not be given. If a student needs to go to their locker, they may go and receive a tardy upon return. Students may step into the hallway with permission to use the drinking fountain, but should follow the procedure above for getting the teacher's attention.

#### Focus #4: Peer Learning Groups

Working in peer groups is such an effective way to reach different types of learners. After reviewing Gardner's work on Multiple Intelligences (Jones and Jones, pages 249 – 252), I realized that I need to implement much more peer group work to engage more of my students. I have always been a little wary of group class work – opting for group work geared toward "getting to know you" activities and ice breakers. While these are important and helpful in building the classroom community, they don't tap into students' different perspectives and learning styles when it comes to academic success. I need to change that! This is, after all, one of the "Academic Learning Needs" (#5 to be exact) listed in the Jones and Jones text – students need to "receive instruction responsive to their learning styles and strengths" (246).

Because the nature of writing workshop is "workshopping" with peers for ideas regarding content, revision and editing, teaching and modeling peer group learning is imperative. The Jones and Jones text calls cooperative learning "one of the most popular and effective method[s] for meeting students' varied learning styles and actively involving students in the learning process" (278). I plan to use "The Teacher's Role in Cooperation Learning" guide on pages 282-283 of the Jones and Jones text, along with the questions on page 283, to ensure that students have explicit direction and understand the relevance of the activities before implementing them. They are also wonderful questions to ask to help to debrief a group activity and reflect upon what worked well and what needs further attention for future success.

I looked for some direction and models for using group work effectively in writing workshop, specifically in teaching narrative writing, and found it in the book *Narrative Writing: Learning a New Model for Teaching* by George Hillocks, Jr. He illustrates the concept by using his "Shell Game" as a model. In large group instruction, the teacher held up a large shell and encouraged the students to describe it in as much detail as possible. He tells them that they will be working in groups to do this, so the students know what the end goal is to the activity. After leading a discussion that comes to what kinds of responses he wants (similes, metaphors, figurative language), he splits the class up into small groups and has them work together simply to choose which of two shells they will write about as a group (the teacher has given each group two shells from which to choose). He spends his time circulating and asking probing questions, "observing and coaching" (47). He is able to formatively assess students' understanding of the activity this way. The students then work together to write about the shell in a way that will help the others in the class to identify it based on the writing alone. They have roles (discussed in Jones and Jones, page 280), such

as “writer” and “facilitator”, and must listen to each other and come to consensus about describing the shell. They initiate ideas, add to them, debate them, and decide upon them. After all is done, the teacher collects the writing and reads them aloud, as the class tries to guess which of the many shells each group was working to describe.

This text, along with the checklists and lists of questions in the Jones and Jones text, will help me to use the shell game to teach and model positive and effective peer learning groups for writing workshop.

#### Focus #5: Motivation

The concepts surrounding multiple intelligences and peer learning groups is highlighted in the same chapter as motivation in the Jones and Jones text. This is another reason why I want to incorporate writing workshop into my class. Many of my students have not felt successful for a long time in school, and engage in many of the misbehaviors detailed in CHAMPs (Module 7) that can stem from these feelings of failure and frustration (purposeful/habitual). Many have been labeled “bad” or “behavior problems” from a very early age and no one has really taken the time to ascertain whether or not they have even really known what is expected of them in the first place (awareness type). By the time they get to high school, so much of their behavior is engrained, almost like a security blanket. Often, students don’t get the kind of attention they need at home, so they try to get it in any way they can – positive or negative (attention-seeking).

I plan on using to success contract (page 263, Jones and Jones) to help students with goal setting and looking more critically at their behaviors and the impact they have on the workings of the classroom community. The lesson design on page 255 is also helpful, and ties in wonderfully with the International Baccalaureate units I’ve been working on. Making connections to other subject material, other subjects, “real life”, and students’ interests is the key. Tying concepts in to real life experiences shows students that they understand many of the pieces of the learning puzzle, and increases their feelings of success. I’ve attached a copy of one of my writing workshop International Baccalaureate units; the things I’ve learned in this class have helped me to better conceptualize motivating students to learn.