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ABSTRACT

This paper is a report of a middle-school teacher's study of classroom management. The teacher/researcher was interested in how some of the techniques in the Kovalik Integrated Thematic Instruction model of training would influence the teacher/researcher's classroom management; the effects of direct instruction within a community circle; the effects of plants, lighting, and music on student behavior; and the significance of teacher preparation on classroom management. Data were collected from surveys of the teacher/researcher's students, classroom observations, and self-observations and journal entries. The study revealed that the amount of teacher preparation, presentation method used, and aspects of classroom environment all influenced classroom management to some degree. Teacher preparation was strongly linked to off-task student behavior. Students were more on-task when direct instruction was given in a community circle. The classroom environment, mainly soft lighting and music, created an inviting and comfortable atmosphere promoting on-task behavior. From the study the teacher/researcher created an action plan. Included in the paper are a literature review; a number of tables and graphs illustrating important points; and appendices that include the survey instrument, a seating chart for classroom observation, and a journal entry form. (WFA)

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Classroom Management.

Terri Sue Dinsmore

June 20, 2003

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Classroom Management

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EDU 690: Collaborative Action Research

Marygrove College

June 20, 2003

EA032657

Classroom Management

Introduction

A seventh grade math teacher at Webber Middle School in Saginaw, Michigan conducted this study. Webber is one of four middle schools in the Saginaw City Public School District. The student population at Webber Middle School is around six hundred students predominantly of African-American decent in grades sixth through eighth. Classes are heterogeneous, with one class on each seventh grade team including students identified as having special needs. The state of Michigan classifies Webber Middle School as a school that has not made adequate annual yearly progress. The student population as a whole is significantly below grade level. Webber Middle School is an inner city school, with the majority of the student population qualifying for, free and reduced lunch.

I have four years of full time teaching experience, all of which have been at Webber Middle School. In my first year at Webber, I taught sixth grade math and science. For the past three years, I have been teaching seventh grade math. As with most beginning teachers, classroom management is an area that I feel I could benefit from having more knowledge. I was particularly interested in how some of the techniques recently learned in the Kovalik Integrated Thematic Instruction model (ITI) training would influence classroom management. Of great interest to me were the affects of direct instruction within a community circle, the presence of plants, lighting and music on behavior. I was also curious about the significance of teacher preparation on classroom management.

Literature Review

In 1998 Fenwick noted, "Classroom management is one of the most perplexing and difficult aspects of teaching and that it is an important task teachers must learn if they are to be successful in the classroom" (Good & Brophy, 2000, p. 122). Beginning teachers rated classroom management as their number one concern in a 1998 survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in Greer-Chase, Rhodes, & Kellam, 2002). In 1989 Clapp reported, "More than 80 percent of her 1,388 survey respondents indicated that their university did not offer an undergraduate course dealing exclusively with the issue of classroom management" (as cited in Greer-Chase, et al.).

Regardless if future teachers are offered a specific course in classroom management, they have access to a vast amount of research in the area. Three well-known approaches to classroom management are Assertive Discipline, Contingency Contracting, and Cognitive Behavior Modification (Good & Brophy, 2000). Lee and Marlene Canter developed the Assertive Discipline approach in 1992. This system has the teacher develop clear expectations for the students behavior that are formed into rules that have rewards and punishments associated with them. Teachers who put students names on the board followed by check marks when breaking a rule are using an Assertive Discipline technique. Contingency Contracting allows the teacher and the student to collaborate on plans for reaching expectations and the rewards that will follow. Teachers reward their students when they meet their expectations and withdraw rewards when they do not. In 1977, Meichenbaum developed Cognitive Behavior Modification, which are procedures to teach self-control skills. One of these techniques is to model the behavior

while at the same time using self-talk to let the students know what thought processes are going on inside of your head. Besides these approaches to classroom management, there are endless amounts of discipline models. Teachers can best address discipline issues through using a combination of various approaches.

Classroom management oftentimes is viewed as how well the teacher controls the students and what takes place in the room. The term management as used in the business world is suggestive of a supervising and controlling role as it relates to employees (Kohn, 1996), hence the conclusion readily made in education. Classroom management is much more than a discipline plan, it encompasses the teacher's beliefs and values, as they relate to discipline, but also how they intertwine with various other underlying aspects of the class' structure. The physical environment of the classroom, the amount of teacher preparation, and ways in which the lesson is presented are three of the aspects influencing classroom management. These are only a few of the aspects of classroom management that influence the amount of discipline a teacher will likely have to take, but I feel these are three important areas that deserve a more in-depth look.

The first step in managing the classroom is to set the climate and create an inviting learning environment (Longway & Cockman, 2002, p. 25). Calming colors and music help set the climate. Natural colors found in nature, and 60-beats a minute music is suggested (Hart, 1999, p. 207). Hart (1999, p. 207) also suggests having plants in the room. Plants are aesthetically pleasing, absorb toxins and provide oxygen. Classrooms should be well lit, using as much natural sunlight as possible or full spectrum lighting (Hart, 1999, p. 207). The classroom needs to reflect what is being learned. Kovalik recommends creating an immersion wall; this is an area of the room focusing on what the

class is learning (Kovalik & Olsen, 2002, p. 2.19). Students should be seated in groups or learning clubs (Kovalik & Olsen, 2002, p. 1.19). Teaching and using the Lifelong Guidelines and Lifeskills from the Kovalik Integrated Thematic Instruction (ITI) model will also help create an inviting classroom environment (Ross & Olsen, 1999, p. II-5, 12; Kovalik & Olsen, 2002, p. 2.10). Group building activities will foster the development of student-student and student-teacher relationships, which create an absence of threat in the environment (Ross & Olsen, 1999, p. II-18). "Learning is enhanced when, in addition to ensuring an absence of threat, the bodybrain partnership has a supportive physical environment and meaningful curriculum content" (Hart, 1999, p. 206).

Those involved in education often say a well-planned lesson is the key to classroom management (Longway & Cockman, 2002, p. 24). Veteran teachers plan their lessons by asking themselves the following questions in regards to the learner, content, and context. 1.) Who are my learners? 2.) What information, ideas, and concepts do I want my students to grasp? 3.) Under what conditions will instruction occur? (Freiberg, 2002). There are four components to lesson planning: initial, active, in-flight, and follow-up planning. Initial planning is when teachers visualize how they will teach the lesson and how the students may respond. When teachers pull together the materials and resources for the lesson they are actively planning. Both initial and active planning is done before entering the classroom. Veteran teachers excel at in-flight planning; this involves changing the lesson as they are teaching. Critical to new teachers is follow-up planning; it is at this time that they reflect on the lesson (Freiberg, 2002). Planning for a lesson takes much teacher preparation. The time is well worth it, a smooth flowing lesson usually presents less disruptions.

A major part of planning the lesson is deciding how to present the lesson. According to Hart, "curriculum of the 21st century must be conceptual in nature, based in the here and now, and experienced in the context of real life" (Hart, 1999, p. 207). To accomplish this we need to get our students out of the classrooms into the "real world", in the Kovalik ITI model this is called a "being there" experience. From Kovalik training I have attended, she also suggests that you do direct instruction in a community circle (Kovalik, 2002, p. 8.6) and limit it to 16 or less minutes for each hour (Kovalik, 2002, p. 1.25). When in a community circle everyone is in close proximity and the students are more on-task. Varying your lesson presentation, making sure to address all the learning styles will help students stay interested and focused.

Using a reflective approach to classroom management enables teachers to take a proactive stance, which helps alleviate discipline problems. Teachers using this approach to classroom management examine what they are doing in order to find ways to improve. These teachers are constantly searching for answers to a number of questions relating to being perceptive, being creative, and setting a good example (Woody, 2001). Through this self-reflective process, teachers strengthen their classroom management skills allowing them more time to focus on teaching the lesson.

Research Process

The research process described below was developed to address the following questions. Will students be more on-task when direct instruction is given in a community circle? Does on-task behavior increase with the presence of plants, soft lighting and music? Does the amount of teacher preparation make a significant difference in classroom behavior? Student surveys, teacher observations and journaling were methods used to collect data for this research study on classroom management.

Teacher observations were conducted as follows to collect data for the first two questions presented. I used a seating chart to record my observations of off-task student behavior while direct instruction was given to students seated at their desks. When students were off-task, I simply put a mark in their space on the seating chart. The marked seating chart enabled me to compare it with the list recorded of students who were off-task during instruction presented in a community circle. I also used a seating chart in the same manner to record my observations of off-task behavior during work time. Off-task behavior during independent work time without soft music playing in the background was indicated with a red mark, and with soft music playing a blue mark.

Using a journal, I recorded information to help with the data collection process for all of the research questions. The following information was collected in the journals: amount of teacher preparation, overall classroom behavior, presentation method, and amount of material covered during direct instruction and independent work time, and whether music was played during work time.

Students in each math class were asked to assist with the research project by filling out a short survey. The student survey was conducted at the end of the school

year, which accounts for the low numbers of students in each class. Fourteen students in the red class responded to the survey, ten in the yellow class, and fifteen students each in the blue and green classes. The survey included questions that allowed me to collect information for all three of my research questions. Using the student surveys, I could analyze the data by individual classes and get a combined overview.

Data Analysis

My research indicates that the amount of teacher preparation, presentation method used, and aspects of the classroom environment all influence classroom management to some degree. I found that teacher preparation was strongly linked to off-task student behavior. Students were more on-task when direct instruction was given in a community circle. The classroom environment, mainly soft lighting and music create an inviting and comfortable atmosphere promoting on-task behavior.

What teachers do before entering the classroom can have a tremendous impact on their classroom management. From personal observations and information gathered from my journal, it is evident that the amount of teacher preparation influences student behavior, which in turn affects the amount of material covered. I find that when I am not as prepared the students are more likely to be off-task, because the lesson does not flow as smoothly. Usually when I am less prepared, we do not cover as much material, partially do to off-task behavior. One of the questions from the student survey stated, "If I feel the teacher is not prepared I am more likely to be off-task." Table 1 shows the responses to this question by class and gives the totals for the classes combined. Undecided means that the student responded both yes and no.

Table 1: Data from a student survey for a classroom management research project.

Likely off-task when the teacher is not prepared.

Classes	Yes	No	Undecided	Blank	Total Surveyed
Red	11	3	0	0	14
Yellow	6	4	0	0	10
Blue	8	6	0	1	15
Green	8	6	1	0	15
Summary	33	19	1	1	54

Thirty-three of the fifty-four students surveyed, sixty-one percent, said they were more likely to be off-task when they felt the teacher was not prepared. When asked to explain why, several students said because there is nothing to do. One student answered, "I feel that if he/she is not prepared, FREE TIME." "I won't have anything to do, so I will find something to do", responded another student. I feel that these two statements are very telling. As the results from this question would indicate, a well-prepared teacher can greatly reduce the likelihood of off-task behavior.

When planning a lesson the teacher has to determine the best way to present the material, which was examined in this research project. This part of the research focused on whether students were more on-task when whole class instruction was given in a community circle versus at their desk. For greater understanding into the data, it is important to note that desk in this classroom are arranged in groups of two or three, and a community circle is a small circle including everyone. On the student survey, I asked two questions to gather information on the influence of presentation on behavior. "I find it easier to focus on whole class instruction when given…" was the first question. Students had to circle either: in a small circle, while at my desk or other and indicate what way. To get an accurate representation of the data, four responses need to be withdrawn because it is not possible to give whole class instruction in the manner chosen. These answers included one-on-one instruction, in the hall, and reading by self. Table 2 summarizes the remaining fifty responses addressing presentation method.

Table 2: Data from a student survey for a classroom management research project.

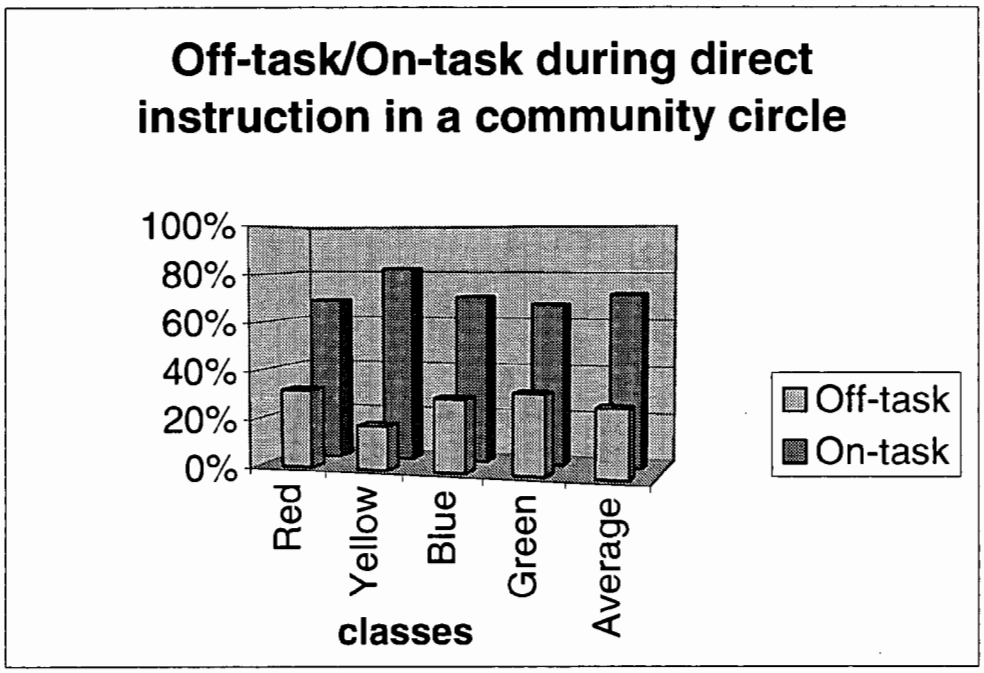
Easier to focus on whole class instruction

Classes	Community Circle	Desk	Other
Red	5	5	4
Yellow	3	6	1
Blue	11	2	0
Green	7	5	1
Summary	**26**	**18**	**6**

Twenty-six out of fifty students, fifty-two percent, responded that it is easier for them to focus on whole class instruction when given in a community circle. Thirty-six percent of the respondents are more focused at their desk, and twelve percent prefer other methods. Being seated by themselves was chosen by four of the six students who answered other. One student preferred being seated with a partner, and another student was more focused while standing.

From personal observations I found an average of seventy-two percent of the students were on-task during direct instruction in a community circle. Data collected from these observations is summarized in Figure 1. Based on this data and the following question on the student survey, I feel the percentage of students on-task in a community circle is likely closer to seventy percent. Students were asked, "Are you more likely to be on-task during direct instruction if the teacher was in close proximity to you?" Forty-one out of fifty-four students responded yes, which is seventy-six percent of the students. This would seem to support providing whole class instruction in a community circle setting because the students are closer to the teacher.

Figure 1: Data from classroom observations of off-task and on-task behavior during direct instruction in a community circle.

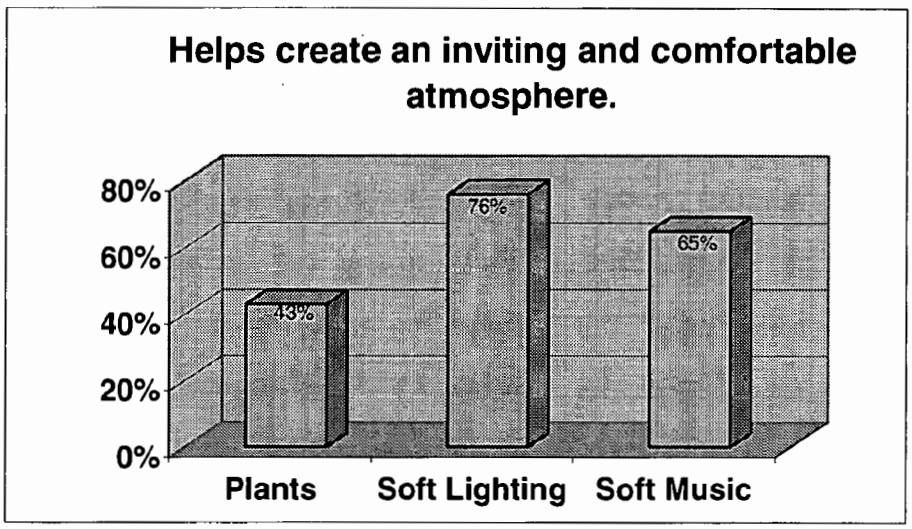


What the teacher does outside of the classroom oftentimes has the most significant affects on classroom management. Just as teachers need to prepare for each lesson, we also need to put great thought into the classroom environment. As part of this study, I looked at the effectiveness of plants, soft lighting and music on creating a classroom environment that is inviting and comfortable, and whether this type of atmosphere influenced student behavior.

Through personal observation, I can see that the students are more relaxed when the lights are not all on and there is soft music playing in the background. I feel that this level of comfort leads to more on-task behavior. Data gathered from a student survey provides us with the most significant insight. The first question relating to this aspect of the study asked, "Does the presence of the following things help create a more inviting or

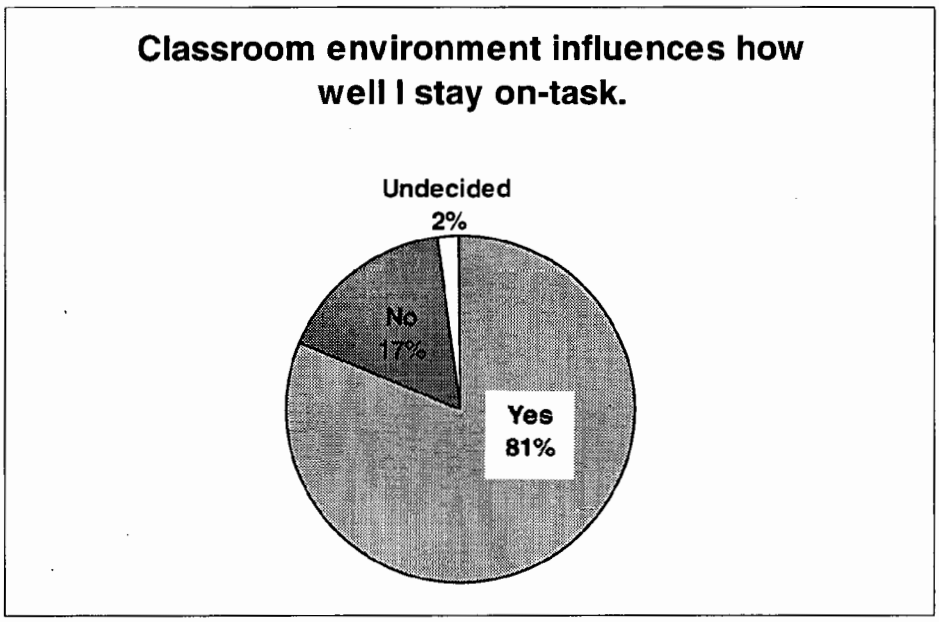
comfortable atmosphere?" Students circled either yes or no and indicated why they thought plants, soft lighting, and soft music helped create or did not help create a more inviting or comfortable atmosphere. Of the fifty-four students surveyed, twenty-three students said yes plants help create an inviting environment, twenty-four said no, one circled both yes and no, and six students did not respond. Forty-one students said that soft lighting helps create a comfortable atmosphere; ten said it did not, and three did not respond. Seventy-six percent of students indicate that soft lighting has an affect on creating a comfortable environment, which is a significant finding. One hundred percent of the students in the inclusion class responded yes to this question. Whether there is a connection between the affects of soft lighting and those students diagnosed, as having special needs is unknown, but would make an interesting and beneficial future research topic. Soft music helps create a comfortable environment for thirty-five of the students, seventeen said it did not, and two did not respond. In Human Brain & Human Learning (Hart, 1999, p. 207), sixty beats per minute music is recommended to create a relaxing atmosphere. Figure 1 shows the total percent of all the students who responded plants, soft lighting, and soft music help create a more inviting or comfortable atmosphere. Teachers will benefit from knowing how influential, lighting and music is to the classroom environment.

Figure 2: Data from a student survey for a classroom management research project.



The follow-up question was, " Does having a classroom with an inviting and comfortable atmosphere influence how well you stay on-task?" Yes responses to this question ranged from seventy to ninety-three percent. Several students stated, "It feels more like home." One student simply explained, "I will be willing to learn if I am comfortable." The results shown in Figure 2 indicate that the classroom environment has a significant influence on behavior, and merits great thought and planning before entering the classroom.

Figure 3: Data from a student survey for a classroom management research project.



Delving more deeply into the influence of music on behavior, students where asked specifically whether the presence of soft music playing in the background during work time helped relax them and lead to more on-task behavior. I found the individual class responses to be rather interesting. Results to this question are presented in Table 2.

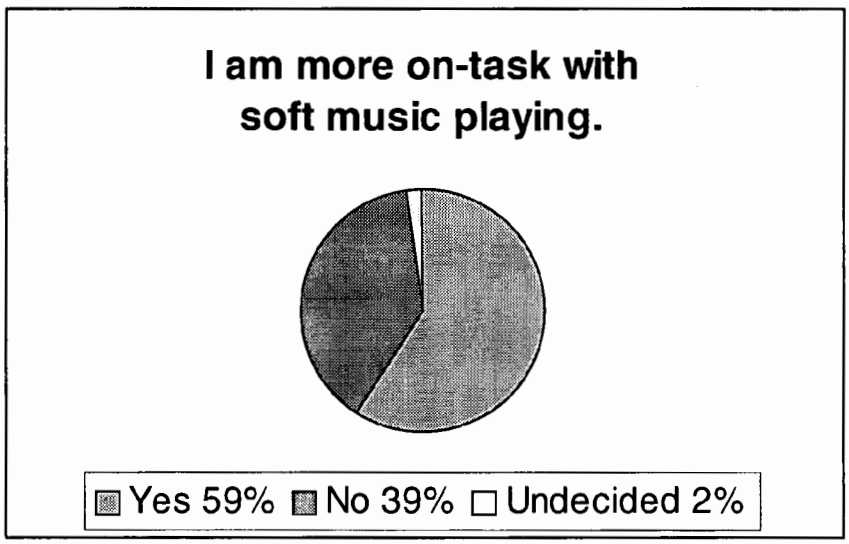
Table 3: Data from a student survey for a classroom management research project.

Music relaxes me and leads to more on-task behavior.

Classes	Yes	No	Undecided	Total Surveyed
Red	4	10	0	14
Yellow	6	4	0	10
Blue	14	1	0	15
Green	8	6	1	15
Summary	**32**	**21**	**1**	**54**

Most intriguing to me was that out of all the math classes only twenty-nine percent of students in the red class responded yes to this question. This was puzzling to me since all but two students in the red class are in band. Some students responded that it was annoying, distracting, or they did not like it. I think the latter had a significant impact on their responses, inner city kids are not used to listening to this type of music. Of equal interest was the overwhelming number of students in the blue class, ninety-three percent, who said music relaxed them and helped them stay more on-task. The blue class was one of those very talkative and mischievous classes, knowing this information maybe beneficial to my classroom management methods. Overall, more than half of the students felt they were more relaxed and on-task with soft music playing during work time. Figure 3 shows the percent total of all the classes' responses to the influence of music on behavior. Although as the individual class results suggests the use of music should be based on the preference of each class.

Figure 3: Data from a student survey for a classroom management research project.



Although only fifty-nine percent of the fifty-four students surveyed responded that soft music playing leads to more on-task behavior, I suggest that this is likely to be higher. Eighty percent of the students realize a change in their behavior with different types of music. Students said that soft music makes them feel comfortable, focus, and relax. Although some students responded that they get sleepy, this is not the desired effect. Through personal observation, I see the students get a little antsy when a more upbeat song comes on. As the data suggests, music is one way in which teachers can influence their classroom environment to have a positive impact on classroom management.

Action Plan

As my action research suggests, classroom management is much more than a discipline plan. Although a teacher's beliefs and values as they relate to discipline is part of classroom management, I conclude from my results that other aspects of class structure are very influential. I found the amount of teacher preparation, the classroom environment, and method of presentation all to have a significant correlation to student behavior. Teachers can positively influence classroom management by examining these areas.

This study first looked at the connection between teacher preparation and student behavior. In a student survey administered for this action research project, sixty-one percent of the fifty-four students responded they were more likely to be off-task if they felt the teacher was not prepared. From personal observations all teachers know that their lack of preparation can lead to off-task behavior. By making sure that I am prepared, I can help to eliminate the likelihood of off-task behavior. I will plan in a half hour at the end of each day to make final preparations for the following day. In this time I will put the following day's agenda on the board, make sure that all papers and materials are ready, and mentally run through the next day's lesson. Following this plan will ensure that I am well prepared for each day. To assist in long-term preparation I will sit down with a school calendar before the beginning of the school year and tentatively record the areas and lengths of time needed to cover them. Laying out the curriculum will serve as a visual reminder of the pace I need to follow to fulfill all the requirements. Taking these two actions I am confident will lead to more on-task behavior in my classroom.

Presentation methods were the second area studied in this research project on classroom management. This study examined whether students would be more on-task when whole class direct instruction was given in a community circle. The survey conducted with the students indicated that fifty-two percent felt they could focus better when instruction was given in a community circle. Data gathered from personal observations determined that percent to be seventy-two. Since seventy-six percent of the students stated on the survey that they were more likely to be on-task when the teacher was in close proximity to them, I feel that the data from the observations is more representative of actuality. I do feel that the students are more focused in the community circle, and plan to use this presentation method on a more consistent basis. I will us a community circle when introducing new material to the students, remembering to limit the time in the circle to about fifteen minutes per hour. I also think the community circle would be effective for reviewing and wrapping-up the day's lessons. This presentation method in itself is not the answer. Effective lessons mix numerous presentation styles and size groupings of students, while addressing the various learning styles and multiple intelligences of the class.

The final area researched in the classroom management study was the affects of the classroom environment on behavior. This study concluded that there is a significant correlation between on-task behavior and a comfortable atmosphere. Eighty-one percent of the fifty-four students surveyed indicated that they are more likely to be on-task if the classroom has an inviting and comfortable atmosphere. The presence of plants, soft lighting, and soft music may help create this type of an atmosphere. To determine what impact the presence of these things had on behavior students were surveyed. Results

from the survey showed that plants did not play a major role in establishing the atmosphere, only forty-three percent of the students said plants helped create a more inviting environment. Soft lighting had a significant affect on establishing a comfortable atmosphere. Forty-one of the fifty-four students surveyed, seventy-six percent, indicated that the lighting played a role in creating a pleasant environment. Sixty-five percent of the students said that soft music helped establish a comfortable atmosphere. Since eighty-one percent of the students' linked on-task behavior with the comfortableness of the classroom environment, it is an important area for teachers to examine. I will continue to have some plants in my classroom. Plants give the room a more homey feeling, absorb toxins, and provide oxygen. Part of the lights in my classroom will remain off, and I will use as much natural or full spectrum lighting as possible. Music may be used during independent work time. At the beginning of the year, I need to fully explain the research behind the benefits of using soft music in the classroom. After using music for a marking period I will administer a student survey to see how each individual class feels about having the music. As the results from this study suggest each class should be looked at individually to determine what best creates a comfortable atmosphere for them.

Knowledge gained from this research project is beneficial to teachers because it lets them know that classroom management is more than discipline. This study examined three areas in which the teacher can positively influence the likelihood of on-task behavior. These areas included teacher preparation, presentation methods, and the classroom environment. From this research, teachers will gain the understanding that there are areas

like these that can be examined before stepping into the classroom that will assist them in their classroom management endeavors.

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Appendix A

The letter for Portfolio Assignment 8/PA2 will be inserted here.

Appendix B

Color group _____

Classroom Management Research Project

Student Survey

Circle your answer and offer additional information to support your choices.

1. I find it easier to focus on whole class instruction when given:

   a.) in a small circle.

   b.) while at my desk.

   c.) other _____

   I feel that it is easier for me to focus during whole class instruction in the above chosen format because _____

   _____

   _____.

2. I am more likely to be on-task during direct instruction if the teacher is in close proximity (near) to me. YES NO

3. The following things help keep me on-task:_____

   _____

   _____

   _____.

4. If I feel the teacher is not prepared I am more likely to be off-task in class. YES NO

   Why or why not? _____

   _____

   _____.

5. Does the presence of the following things help create a more inviting or comfortable atmosphere?

Plants	YES	NO	Why? _____
Soft Lighting	YES	NO	Why? _____
Soft Music	YES	NO	Why? _____

6. Does having a classroom with an inviting and comfortable atmosphere influence how well you stay on-task? YES NO

Explain _____

_____

_____.

7. Does the presence of soft music playing in the background during work time help relax you and lead to more on-task behavior? YES NO

Explain _____

_____

_____.

8. Do you find that your behavior changes with different types of music playing?

YES NO

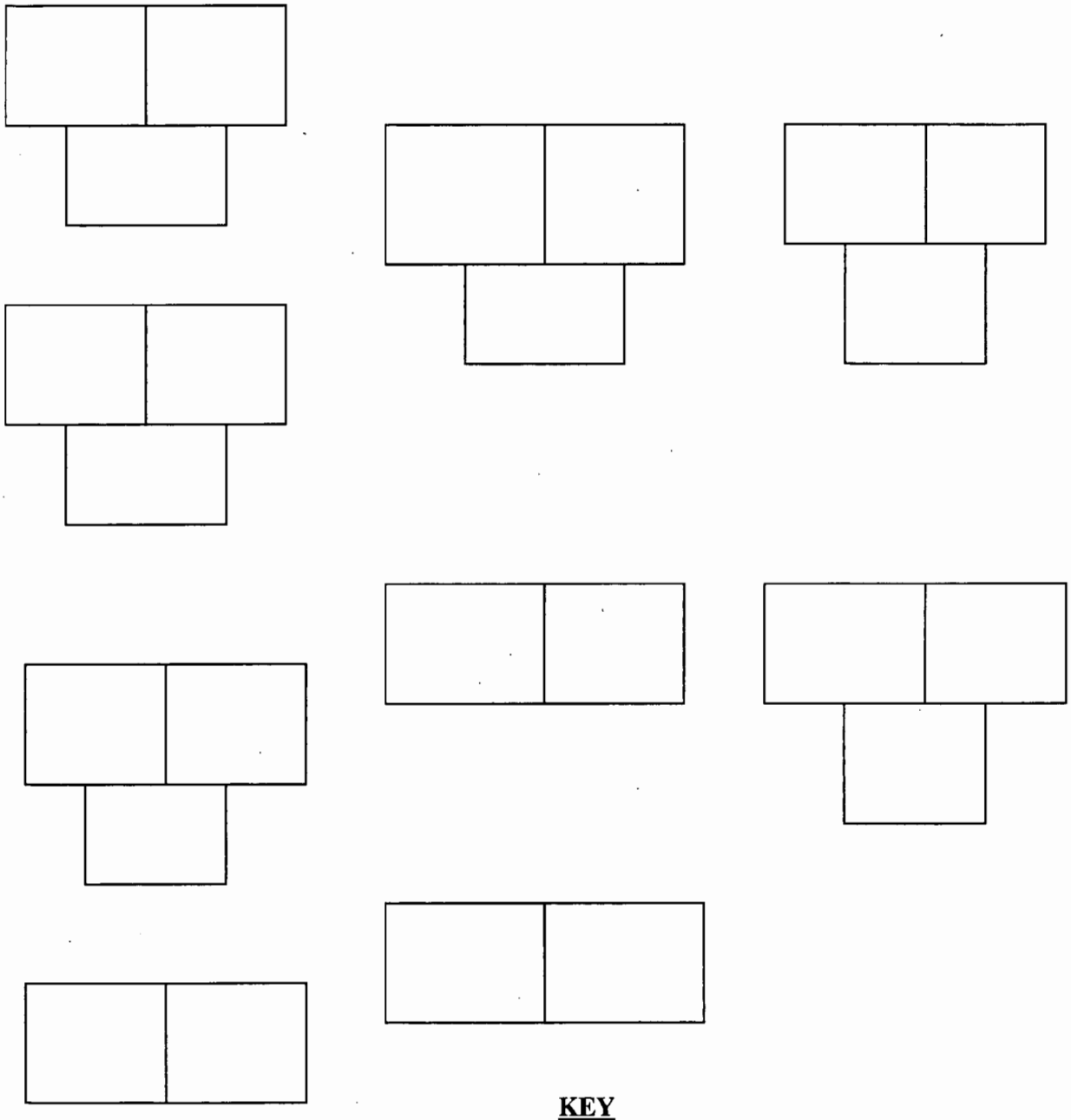
Soft music tends to make me _____.

Upbeat music tends to make me _____.

Thanks for your help in the collection of data for my classroom management research project. ☺ Ms. Dinsmore

Appendix C

Seating Chart for Classroom Observations



KEY
X- indicates off-task behavior

Appendix D

Off-Task Behavior during Community Circle

Color Group_____ **Date**_____

Student Name

Appendix E

Journal Entry Form

Color Group_____ **Date**_____

Amount of teacher preparation time: _____

Overall classroom behavior: _____

_____

Presentation methods used and behavior during that time:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Amount of material covered during direct instruction and presentation method used:

_____

_____

_____

Amount of material covered during independent work time: _____

_____

_____

Was soft music playing during work time? _____

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