Holding Students Accountable for Misbehavior: The Use of Participation Points as a Classroom Management Tool

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**ABSTRACT**

This case study examined the effects of holding students accountable for misbehavior through the loss of individual participation points, which decreased their overall grade. The primary goal for this project was to develop a helpful classroom management tool that would hold students accountable for being on time, prepared, and well-behaved. In the beginning of the study, all participants were reluctant to follow the new policy, but as a consistent and concise routine was established, student’s participation grades began to increase. The increase in grades was shown to be related to established and positive student/teacher relationships.

**INTRODUCTION**

Education has come a long way over the past century, yet modern educators are constantly creating new innovative strategies to keep students interested and engaged in learning. Schools are required to educate the ever-changing student with less resources and high stakes due to state and national imposed accountability standards. Schools must be able to meet the challenge of educating all students in a setting that is safe and allows the student to feel secure (Kritsonis & Cloud, 2006). Classroom management and student behavior are always areas of high priority for educators. Parents, counselors, teachers, and administrators understand that in order for teachers to be able to effectively and positively impact students, classroom management must be implemented professionally. Poor student behavior is usually a result of boredom, frustration, desiring attention, power struggle, or giving up due to a lack of understanding (Buck, 1992). Successful classroom management provides a tool for prevention of misbehavior, enabling teachers to focus on instruction and keeping students engaged in learning.
Classroom management is not limited to dealing with student behavior issues, but also includes motivating students to come to class prepared and on time. Students that are not prepared or on time disrupt the class and need special attention to catch up with the rest of the class. This burdens teachers and requires additional time and effort on their part managing the class instead of spending sufficient time educating students. How can teachers manage a classroom so that students will be motivated to be on time, prepare, and well-behaved? Can students accept responsibility and help manage the classroom? If students realize that when they misbehave their participation grade will suffer, will they take responsibility when they see their overall grade dwindle? Students must feel the need for a safe, secure, and a well-behaved classroom for them to take responsibility for their learning.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Discipline and classroom management have been a struggle for educators since the earliest of classrooms and in the twenty-first century things have not changed (Manning & Bucher, 2005). Regardless of subject or grade level taught, discipline is consistently a major concern for all educators (Buck, 1992). Discipline is often confused with classroom management, but discipline problems are usually a result of poor classroom management. Although, discipline and classroom management are related, they are still two different topics. Classroom management deals with how things are done, while discipline is the responsibility of the student to obey how things are done. Classroom management entails structure, procedures, and routines to the point of becoming rituals, where as, discipline deals with students having appropriate behavior (Marshall, 2005). Classroom management deals with the cooperative effort of teacher and student. If educators consistently set up proper classroom management structures,
then students have the responsibility to behave appropriately and follow these guidelines. When students fail to follow the structures that are given to them, then a student’s behavior becomes disruptive, impeding learning for other students (Kritsonis & Cloud, 2006). If students choose to not follow guidelines, then the teacher must discipline the student. “Failure to address discipline issues will weaken every aspect of the school’s climate” (Ruder, 2006).

There are several classroom management intervention strategies for addressing student misbehavior, such as planned ignoring, praise around, giving students’ choices, student-teacher conferences, weekly progress reports, contracts, timeouts, and the token system. Each strategy may be effective depending on the particular school’s climate. Choosing a strategy also depends on the types of students being disciplined (Buck, 1992; Obenchain & Taylor, 2005).

This study implemented a strategy similar to the token system, referred to as the Participation Points Policy (PPP). Each student starts the period with ten participation points. Five of these points go towards the student’s punctuality and being prepared with pencil, pen, and notebook. Points will be removed when students forget supplies or arrive late to class. The other five points will go toward student behavior; talking while the teacher is, outbursts, not raising a hand, and not being respectful are all misbehaviors that students can lose points over. Paying attention and being involved is class discussions are good behaviors that students will receive full credit for.

When a student is not prepared for class or misbehaves, I simply stop the class and make note of the infraction in my grade book and move on. Students that break the rules are held accountable immediately because their actions interrupt the whole class. I carry a notebook with every student’s name in it, with a column for each day of the week. Grades will be shown to the students twice a week as a motivation tool so that students are aware when their grades are
decreasing because of misbehavior. If students follow all of the classroom rules and expectations for the day, they will have the chance to earn extra participation points. If a student remains at ten points or exceeds ten points each day for five days in a row, then they will be rewarded extra credit towards their over-all grade.

Focus & Question:

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- Will classroom management shift; allowing the teacher to focus on their instruction and less on disciplining students?
- Will peers change behavioral issues for those students who speak up and start governing the classroom when they are being distracted and losing points?
- Will students that say they do not care about their grades be concerned when they see them twice a week?
- Will students obey classroom rules more when they see their grades decrease because of infractions?

METHODOLOGY

The observation took place in an Agricultural Science and Technology class at a medium-sized Pacific Northwest high school. The classroom is located in the main building of the school, but is the farthest room away from students’ lockers and the center of the building. The classroom has three rows of tables with three tables in each row and three chairs at each table. There is a door and window and each are located in the back of the room. There are eighteen students in the class that participated in this case study. There were ten boys and eight girls, ranging from ninth through twelfth grade. Observations were done daily for four weeks, although results were only for three weeks because the first week was a trial run and was not recorded.
RESULTS

Week 1: January 29 – February 2, 2007

This was the first week I introduced the Participation Points Policy (PPP). I thought that it was important to give the students a week to learn the system and how it will work. I simply explained how things would change. When students broke the rules, I warned them and explained that next week they would lose points for those infractions of the rules. This allowed the students to see for a week what was required of them, before they were held responsible.

Week 2: February 5, 2007

Today I started the class right when the tardy bell rang. After giving students a week to practice, most of the students were on time and ready. There were three students that were tardy, so each of them lost three points. Once attendance was taken, we began our lesson on the FFA organization. It took several minutes for the class of 20 to get settled. When students would interrupt me, I would simply stop and start writing in my participation points chart. Students quickly realized that I had stopped teaching and was taking points from them. I had to take points from several students today and it took a significant amount of class time. It seems that students had forgotten the new policy we practiced the week before. Students are challenging to keep on task on Mondays.

February 6, 2007

Most students arrived to the classroom on time, but there were still a couple students late. Once I took attendance, I showed students their grades from the day before. Some kids were frustrated to see that out of ten points, they only received four. I showed them their grades in hope of them realizing the importance of being punctual and well-behaved. Some students were not very happy about their grades from the day before, but saw the importance of following the classroom
policy. Even though students saw their grades, some students still chose to be disruptive during class. Students have been noticing more quickly when I write in my binder, hopefully within a week I will not have to stop once during class and we can have a positive learning experience.

February 7, 2007

The bell rang and we got started with class right away. It was the first day no students were late, but students seemed to feel as though the first few minutes should be free time where they can talk. I took points off several students for talking when I was trying to begin. I also had to take points off students for not being prepared. A couple students came to class without pen or pencil. It is still a challenge to stop class several times and mark people down for not following the rules, especially at the beginning of class. Tomorrow I will give them a word search right when they get to class and see if this helps students focus better at from the beginning.

February 8, 2007

The students did very well today. As they came through the door, I greeted them and gave them a word search with FFA terms in it. Every student was on time. They all took the word search, sat down, and began to work on it. I took attendance and then asked the students to set their word searches aside, assuring them that they would have time later to finish them. Class began and it was the first day that I was able to get through the whole class without taking any points away. We had a good interactive class and students were engaged and attentive. I wonder if just giving them a word search was the reason for this. I will find out tomorrow because I am going to start class as usual.

February 9, 2007

Today each student arrived on time and ready for the class activity. This was the second day in a row students seem to be buying into the new classroom policy. Yesterday we learned about
Supervised Agricultural Experiences, and today we went to the computer lab to fill out a mock-proficiency award for an SAE they would like to have. Students listened to instruction well before we left the classroom. When we arrived at the computer lab all but two students followed instructions and began on their assignment. Other than the two students who were not on task, no one lost any participation points. The students worked hard from bell to bell. This was a great accomplishment for a Friday and showed that they were on task without having a word search at the beginning of class.

Week 3: February 12, 2007

No School – Teacher in service day.

February 13, 2007

When the bell rang, there were five students late. Without saying anything, I took three points off each of them at the beginning of the class, as promised. Several students lost points for talking while I was trying to get class started as well. The first day of the week students seem to be more talkative, especially after a three day weekend. I did not get mad at them though. I just stop teaching for a moment, opened my PPP binder and took points off students who were talking. They responded quickly when they saw I was writing in the participation point’s binder, but I did have to stop several times. At the end of class, I showed each student their grade for the week before. That was the first full week of the new policy. There were a couple students that were not happy about their grades, because they have not been doing what they should have. They did not realize that ten points a day and 50 points a week can greatly influence their grades. I talked to them about the importance of being on time and being well-behaved. These were students that said they did not care if they did not get participation points and had been off task most days. However, once they started realizing their actions were lowering their grades
significantly, they started buying in to what was required. Some students say they do not care about grades, but they really do, especially if they consistently see their grades.

**February 14, 2007**

Today every student was on time, in fact a couple students ran to the classroom to make it before the tardy bell rang. Students have been doing better at coming to class on time. They are realizing that it really hurts their grade when they come late. I am making progress as the term goes on; students are less disruptive and when they are, they quickly straighten out. They seem to be more concerned about their grades then before. I have also noticed that they are starting to understand that I am the teacher and that being prompt, prepared, well-behaved, and actively involved in learning is one of my requirements.

**February 15, 2007**

Monitoring students by using participation points has been working well. As the students have adjusted to me in the classroom, they know it is just one of the requirements. There still are a couple individuals that struggle, but I have been moving them and talking with them to try and help them from continually damaging their grades. Other than these students, the students are doing well and have been getting perfect scores. Today some students received ten bonus points for having five perfect days in a row. I applauded those that received the bonus points in front of the class. The students were excited because they did not realize they could receive bonus points. I hope this will encourage students to continue to follow the PPP.

**February 16, 2007**

Today was not a typical class period, after I took attendance we went to the computer lab to do some research on the computer. Students were on time so no one lost any points for that and when we walked to the computer lab, everyone stayed together. Once everyone got started on
their own computers, they all stayed on task. I was very happy with how everyone worked and made sure to tell them as they left the class today. I have been finding that classroom behavior is significantly better on Fridays when I use hands-on activities.

**Week 4: February 19, 2007**

No School – Holiday (Presidents’ Day)

**February 20, 2007**

It was a three day weekend and I felt like the students forgot everything about the PPP. Students came to class noisy today and several students were tardy as well. This was the first day of FFA week activities. Since this was the first year they had done them, that might have influenced the mood of the class as well. Students were excited about FFA week, and did not want to pay attention. The fact that it was the first day of the week and that it was FFA week caused students to lose several points. I addressed it at the beginning of the class and told them that we are still going to have class and learn, even though we are doing FFA activities. Students still need to obey the rules. It seems that some days students do not care about losing points.

**February 21, 2007**

This was the best day yet. Yesterday was one of the hardest days; I turned around and showed them their scores from yesterday and the week prior, helping students to recognize that regardless of what activities are going on, they still have responsibilities to uphold during class. I only spent a short time reminding them of expectations and then got started. The students responded great today. We had a fun class and got a lot accomplished. Students were engaged during class and were not disruptive.
February 22, 2007
The FFA activity at lunch was exciting today, so when class started students were on time, but very energized and talkative. It took a while to get students to calm down. However, students quickly realized when I stopped and opened my binder to subtract points. Once I stopped to take points away at the beginning of class a couple times, students began to pay attention and calm down. The later part of class was very productive. The PPP has become routine now to myself and most of the students. Students know when they are not obeying the policy and usually will check and see if I saw what they did or if I noticed they were late and unprepared.

February 23, 2007
Today every student was on time and ready to learn. Student really seem to have bought into the grading system and have been working hard at coming to class on time, being prepared, and actively participating. Today I noticed that the students who were losing a lot of points at the beginning of this study have been doing well the past few days. I gave a few more students bonus points for going several days without losing a point. As kids have gotten use to the new PPP, they have become much more interactive. The climate of the class has become more positive and unified. I noticed today that during class discussion almost everyone participated in some way. Students did not seem worried about getting teased. They seemed to enjoy learning today and I think they recognized that we have a positive and safe learning environment when we all obey the rules.
CONCLUSION / RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, I found that students actually care about their grades even if they say they do not. It took a couple weeks for students to get used to the new routine, but as I showed students their grades twice a week; they seemed to become more concerned about their grades then before. Students started recognizing that it was important to be prompt, prepared, well-behaved, and actively involved in learning. I found that if I was consistent with the new participation points policy, they began to embrace it.

As the teacher, being consistent was the greatest challenge. I needed to fasten the grading notebook to my hand so I could hold each student accountable. I would set it down and go help a student and then I would need it and have to find it. I found that if I did not write it down immediately, I would usually forget to subtract from their ten daily participation points.

When I used the notebook, students would see me, and know immediately that someone was losing points and it would be wise to pay attention. After I had been implementing this policy for a couple weeks, I found that it was hard to take points from students every time they broke a rule. I was not docking students enough and I started to see student misbehavior increase. Once I got back to holding students accountable for their actions, the classroom environment became very positive.

As educators, it is our responsibility to engage students from the time they enter our class until the time they leave. This is not as simple as it sounds, but it is crucial to the success of today’s youth. I found that holding students accountable for breaking classroom rules created expectations for them and led to increased participation, with fewer disruptions. I would say that the biggest determining factor for increasing student engagement is positive student/teacher relationships. As I gained insight as to what was happening in my students’ lives, I was better
prepared to keep students engaged and participating. Overall, this was a very positive experience and the method used will remain part of my day-to-day classroom routine.

REFERENCES


