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### A Comprehensive Classroom Management Plan

It is currently the summer after my first year of teaching, and I have had the opportunity to decompress, and reflect upon my practices this past year. In combination with my graduate studies at Michigan State University, I have been able to analyze which practices were beneficial, and which practices were unsuccessful. I began my first year (like most other first year teachers I think...) with my head buried in the sand, so to speak. I did not have a solid plan for classroom management, and thus I sank until I swam, and I learned (and made a lot of mistakes) along the way. I learned the hard way that my lack of classroom management routines, organization, etc. made for a more chaotic classroom, and a more troubled teacher. In preparation for my second year approaching this August, I am creating a comprehensive classroom management plan, based on literature and research based strategies. According to Tom Savage, managing the classroom “involves creating an environment that facilitates learning and responding to incidents of misbehavior...and creating an environment and establishing conditions that facilitate student success in achieving both academic and social goals” (Savage, 2,7). I have created a graphic organizer flow chart adapted from Savage to outline my classroom management plan in figure one on the following page.

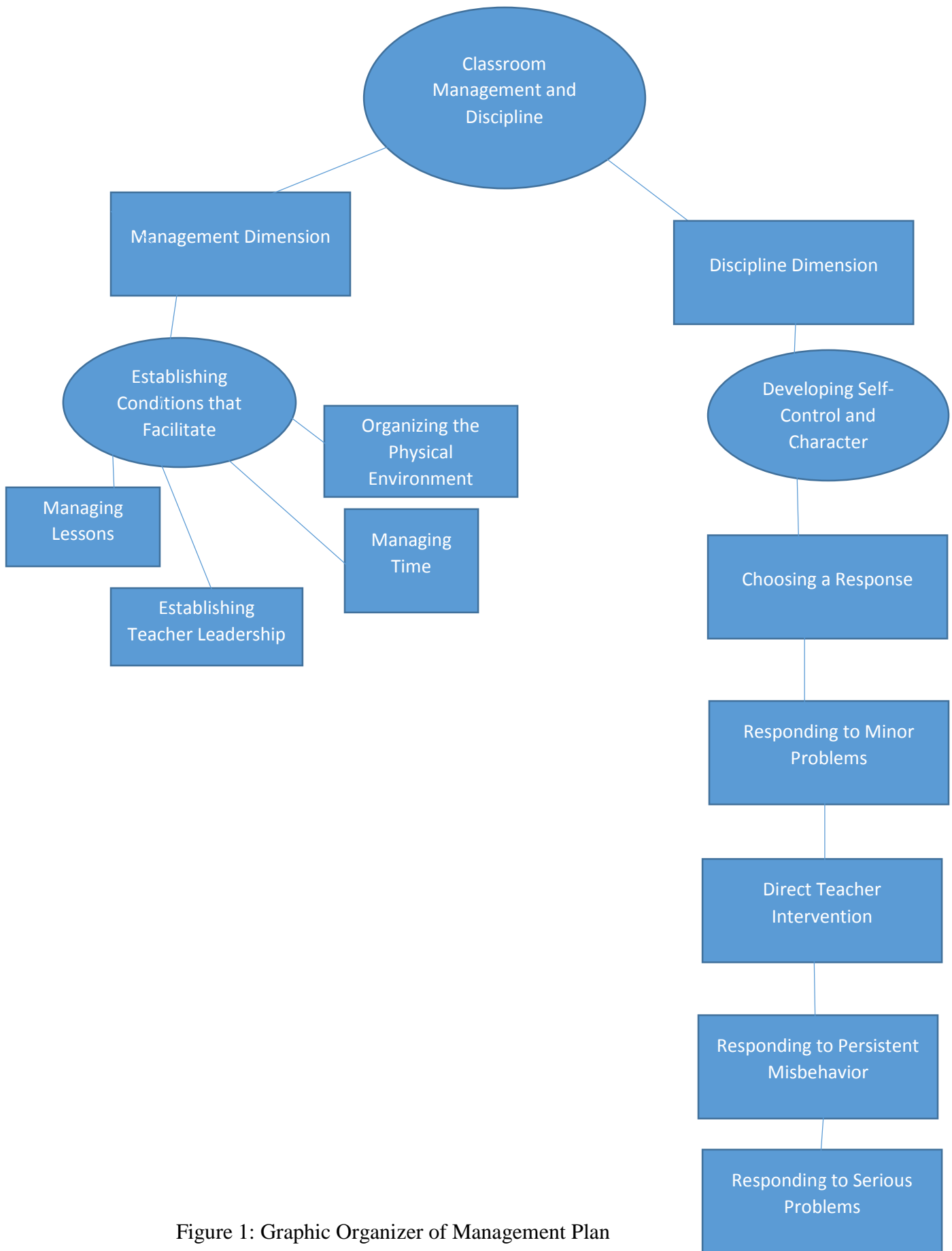


Figure 1: Graphic Organizer of Management Plan

The first aspect of classroom management that I will focus on is the many facets of organization. Effective organization allows teachers to create the positive learning environment. Organization includes a) creating a positive physical environment/ physical arrangement of the classroom, and organizing efficient daily schedules/ lessons. According to Randy Sprick, a “well- designed physical space prevents a wide array of potential behavioral problems” (Sprick, 2009, 70). Unfortunately, I will be sharing room 248 with another teacher (who is the primary “owner” of the room) and therefor I will not have much control over the arrangement of this classroom. However, I will have control over the arrangement of the room in room 155, and this is where I will focus on for this portion of the management plan. Based on the shape of my room, I believe that desks in clusters is the best way to set up my room. A clustered or pod desk arrangement is highlighted as one example of an effective seating strategy by Sprick (2009). The advantages to desks in clusters is that they allow easy access from any part of the room to any other part of the room. This is very important, because it allows me to effectively circulate among my students to check in on their progress, assist them, and monitor their behaviors. In addition, the desks in a clustered form is excellent for cooperative learning activities. I often like to engage my students in small group work (my clusters are in groups of four). At the beginning of the year, I obviously do not know my students well, and it takes some time to get to know them (another important aspect of classroom management). However, as I get to know my students better, I can rearrange the seating assignments within the pods to create the best working academic environment. I can strategically seat students who might distract one another away from each other, while seating students who work well together in a pod. Half way through this previous school year I adopted the clustered pod setting, and I found it to be very successful. I have included a sketch (Figure 1) of what my room 155 will look like this year on the following

page. As you can see from the sketch, my science classroom is a hybrid between a classroom and a laboratory. Towards the back of the classroom there are five lab benches bolted into the ground, with desk space in the middle. Because my classroom is shaped very rectangular, and the lab benches stick out, I find that the desks in clusters is the best way to organize them. As you can see from my sketch, there is very open and easy access for myself to move from cluster to cluster, as well as easy access from lab bench to lab bench. There is open space, so the safety hazards that accompany a lab based classroom are minimized. I do not have to worry (as much) about students tripping over backpacks or other miscellaneous items throughout the room. Also, very important to note is the easy access to the exits, and to the safety equipment. Safety equipment like the safety shower, fire blanket and fire extinguisher should be easily access but everyone in the room, as well as the exists in the case an emergency. When we are doing work that involves students having their attention directed towards the front of the classroom, it is very easy for those students facing backwards or at an awkward angle to simply turn their desks around temporarily for that particular activity, and then turn them back. In addition, students can also place themselves at a lab bench for board work, as each lab bench is accompanied with stools (not shown). The clusters work well because as I previously indicated they are great for small group work, and for individual work as well. Many students enjoy working individually in their pod because they can ask a classmate for assistance if they run into trouble. To accommodate those students who are distracted by the close proximity of other students, they can simply find a quiet place on the bench. By implanting this physical set-up, I am able to minimize the safety hazards that accompany a science lab, provide easy access to exits and lab safety equipment, and therefore, make it the safest environment in can be. In addition, this set up allows me to circulate through the lab benches and pods to reach every student to address

questions and concerns, as well as monitor my student's progress and behaviors. By implementing this classroom arrangement, I minimize distractions and misbehaviors that can not only be distracting and disruptive to the learning environment, but also dangerous as well.

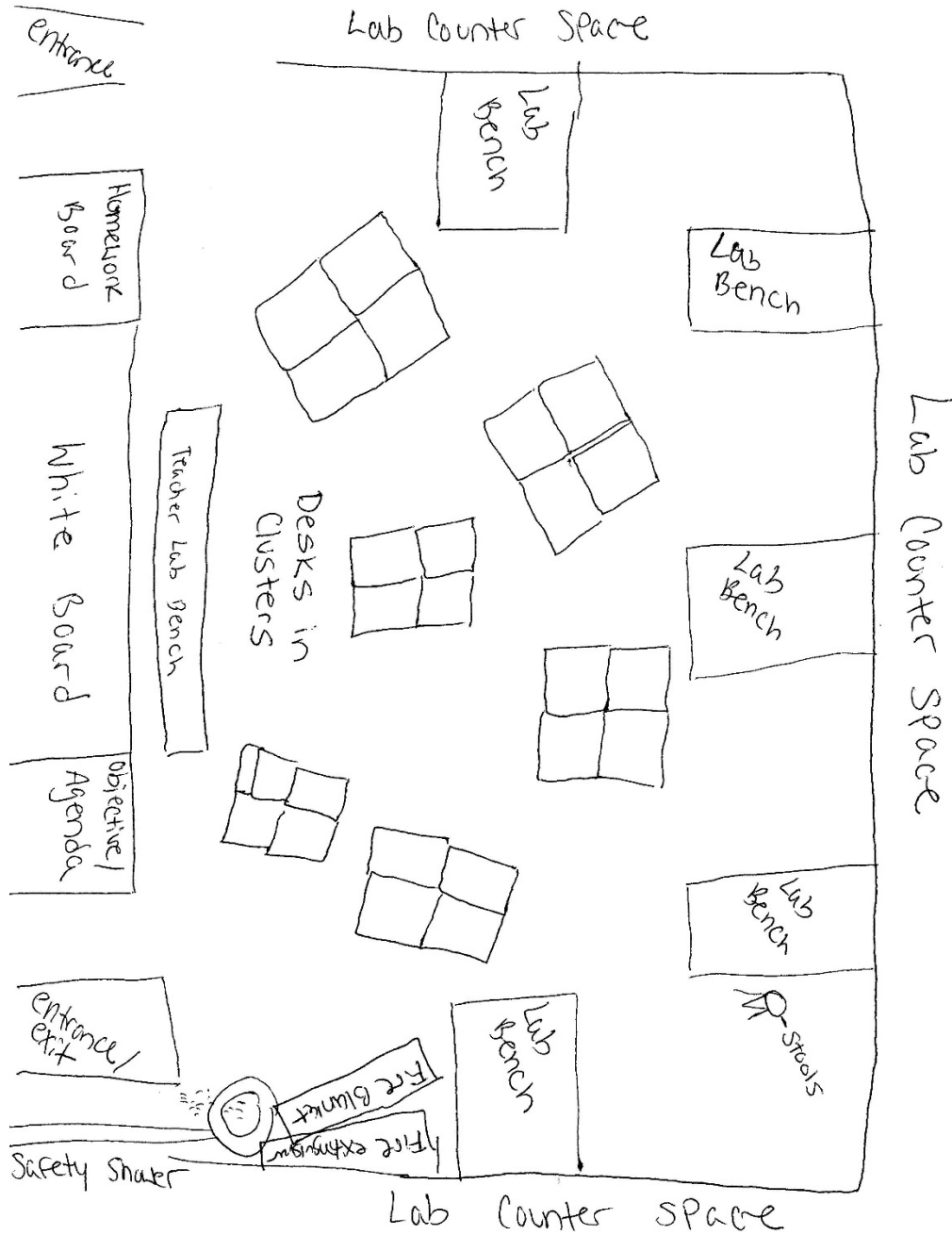


Figure 2: Sketch of Room 155 Physical Environment

The second aspect of organization I would like to focus on is the management of instructional time. According to Savage, “efficient and productive use of the time when students are in the classroom is another key to the prevention of problems and the development of student and teacher satisfaction” (Savage, 14). One approach to classroom management that many teachers take is to “keep the kids busy.” Although in theory this could be an effective solution, it begs the questions of are the students busy doing learning activities, or are they busy completing non- instructional tasks. Studies have shown that improvement in achievement is directly related to increasing the amount of time students spend on learning tasks, and when students are not engaged in learning tasks they are more likely to engage in misbehavior (Savage, 14). In addition, Sprick explains the importance of creating or modifying the dialing schedule to maximize instructional time and responsible behavior, and to minimize wasted time and irresponsible behavior (Sprick, 64).

The first step in organizing a lesson is to have a clear and focus objective. Note that in figure one, there is dedicated space on the white board for a written account of the daily objective. In addition to simply writing the objective however, it is important that the teacher deliver the objected to the students with clarity. The objective reflects what students should learn or be able to do as a result of the lesson. The objective is couple with an agenda, which is a list of the activities the students will engage in. However, it is important to note that an objective is not an agenda! According to Savage, when students are clear about the objective, they are more motivated and better able to understand the logic or purpose of the lesson and the reasons for various activities (Savage, 102).

In addition, how I arrange tasks across the class period is important and relevant to how the students will behave. Sprick gives an example of a middle school teacher who schedules

independent work for the last half of the last period of the day, and explains that the teacher should not be surprised when there is an inordinate amount of off task behavior (Sprick, 64). According to Sprick, “an effective schedule provides enough variety that, at any given time, students won’t find it difficult to keep their attention focused on the task at hand. An effective schedule also takes into consideration the maturity level of your students and the degree of skill that you, the teacher, have in presenting various tasks and activities” (Sprick,64). I teach fifty-five minute periods, and here is an outline of my schedule for the day:

5 minutes: Bell work (review of previous concepts) (student centered)

10 minutes: Introduce objective/ new concepts/give directions (teacher centered)

10 minutes: Guided practice/notes, video viewings (student/teacher centered)

20 minutes: Independent work/ cooperative learning activities (student centered)

10 minutes: Corrections, closure, time to begin homework assignments (student/teacher centered)

With a schedule like this, there are many transition periods, so students do not get too tired or restless. In addition, there is switched responsibility between student and teacher centered activities. According to Sprick, it is important to have a “reasonable balance among the type of activities” (Sprick, 66).

According to Jones and Jones, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” (Jones & Jones, 49). I have learned that I can prevent misbehaviors in several ways. I learned last year how important it is to give clear directions, and according to Savage, “a major contributor to lost time is unclear or poor teacher directions” (Savage, 92). Even when you think you have been as

clear and throughout as possible, you probably haven't. I was able to improve my direction giving throughout the year, and modified many lab documents to make sure the procedures were more clear. I increased the clarity of my directions by writing them down ahead of time, because "written directions prompt teachers to be more concise in their direction- giving behavior" (Savage, 92). Another important aspect of clarity is to reduce ambiguities such as approximations (about, almost). Vague and ambiguous terms interfere with lessons clarity (Savage, 103). By implanting these practices, my students are better behaved, miscommunications are minimized, and the lesson and overall classroom environment is smooth without chaos.

Thus far, my management plan has focused on organization of physical space, academic schedules and classroom time. For the second half of my management plan, I am going to shift gears into thinking about developing authority, discipline, and how to manage misbehaviors.

Traditionally, the word discipline means a set of rules and punishments applied in order to keep students on track. It implies that primary concern is to obtain student obedience and conformity. This casts students and teachers as adversaries, which in turn leads to more conflicts and power struggles (Savage, 9). Anyone would agree that an adversarial relationship between teacher and students is not an effective way to manage the classroom, nor create an effective learning environment. However, Savage proposes that there is an alternative definition to the word discipline. Discipline in the way that I will implement in in my classroom is defined as the "development of self-control, character, orderliness, and efficiency" (Savage, 9). This definition goes beyond the response to a misbehavior and establishing conformity and compliance. I have learned that we need to teach discipline...we have to teach our students self- control, character, etc. this is something that I initially took for granted this previous year. For example, I thought it



was obvious that students should not play with the gas hoses on the lab benches or the safety shower. Of course misbehaviors occurred, and were followed with punishments. It was not until recently that I considered that well...I had never taught my students that these were inappropriate behaviors. I had never outline those expectations. Which brings me to the next part of my plan, the development of teacher authority and expectations.

Teachers are expected to be the leaders of their classrooms, and to demonstrate authority. However, much like the different types of authority regarding parenting styles, there are also different types of authority a teacher can achieve. In terms of teaching, I believe that the two most effective authority/leadership styles are the expert and referent authority. When one possess expert authority, they are regarded with esteem because they are an expert (as the name would suggest) and they have superior knowledge about a subject. As a high school science (content area) teacher, it is expected that I know what I am talking about. We have all experienced someone who clearly is just trying to make it up as they go, and we hold that individual with low regard. We don't trust what they are saying, what their motives are, etc. Therefore, I think it is very important for an educator to present oneself as an expert in their particular area. Referent authority refers to individuals who are liked and respected, but are also given authority. As a general rule, people are more likely to follow someone who is perceived to be trustworthy, ethical and concerned for the welfare of others. This can easily be applied to the student teacher relationship and I believe that it is important for a teacher to earn referent authority.

In order for a teacher to earn referent authority, they must feel positively towards their students. According to Savage, teachers who have negative feelings about learners will not act in ways that increase their referent authority" (Savage, 32). Referent authority is especially important at the secondary level because often times students explain that their misbehavior was

provoked by the perception that the teacher was acting in a respectful and caring manner. In other words, teenagers tend to resort to retaliation, and will retaliate against behaviors they deem to be unfair or unjust. Almost any source on education would proclaim the importance of establishing a warm and nurturing classroom environment and relationships between teacher and students. By establishing expert and referent authority, I would have the most genuine and productive authority over my classroom.

An important part of establishing leadership and authority is establishing clear classroom expectations. As I alluded to above, I think that this is an area I struggled with last year, and as a result my students “misbehaved.” They were punished for the misbehavior, and they deemed that to be unfair. In short, I think I failed at establishing referent authority last year, because I failed to clearly outline the expectations and establish the classroom rules. Several different sources suggest that the teacher takes adequate time to go over the rules with students, and explain why we have such rules. For example, a rule is that we do not touch the gas hoses unless we are instructed to by Ms. Udelsman because it is dangerous and could start a fire. The rule is clear, and the reason why is clear. These types of rules would be the “nonnegotiable(s).” In addition, several sources state that it is an effective practice to create small groups of students in which they discuss and propose rules that they think are important/needed in order for them to work well together, and for the entire classroom to work well as a unit. These rules should be stated allowed and voted/agreed upon. The rules should be clearly written down and posted in the classroom so that they are easily referable. Finally, possible consequences for the rules must be discussed, and should be mutually agreed upon between the teacher and students. It is very important the teacher demonstrate the rules as a model, and refer back to them often. The teacher should not expect the students to simply remember them from the first day, and therefor

rules should be posted and referred to on a need basis. Often, it might be sufficient to simply remind a student of the rules and consequences if you observe a misbehavior, before issuing a consequence. In addition, it is very important that the teacher enforce the rules and consequences fairly and consistently. Failure to do so will affect the teacher's referent authority and create an environment of resentment and anger.

Up to this point, my management plan has focused on measures to prevent misbehaviors through organization of the physical classroom space, organization and management of the lesson, development of authority and leadership, and outlining clear expectations/ classroom rules and consequences. The final part of my management plan will focus on how to respond to inappropriate behaviors (both minor and serious) and conflict resolution.

When student misbehaviors occur, it is important to immediately address the behavior in a manner that is consistent and firm, yet not punitive. I was watching a talk that Rick Lavoie, an expert on managing students with disabilities, gave addressing how teachers respond to misbehaviors. The example he gave was a minor misbehavior, a student with ADHD who simply could not help but call out answers. The teacher explained to him what was wrong with doing that, and went through the steps of how he could remediate (raise his hand, wait to be called on, answer). The next day the teacher asked the question the boy raised his hand and called out the answer at the same time. Lavoie explained that this could go one of two ways: the teacher could reprimand the student because he did not follow the procedure correctly, or the teacher could acknowledge that the boy raised his hand, and that he was making a step in the right direction. Therefore, instead of implementing a consequence, the teacher could praise the child for taking a step in the right direction, and remind him of the proper steps. And this example can go on and on until the student learns the proper behavior. I address this story in my management plan

because I feel that it is important to remind myself that part of my job is to teach appropriate behaviors. If I refer back to Savage's alternative definition of discipline, this would be an example of teaching a student self-control. We cannot expect students to abide by certain behaviors if they have not been taught to do so. Furthermore, positive reinforcement encourages a change in behavior, while negative reinforcement only stops a behavior. How can I incorporate this philosophy into a 10<sup>th</sup> grade Biology classroom? Many of my students struggle with remembering to be prepared for class (i.e. having a writing utensil, their notebook, their homework, etc.). I may take a student aside and call home to remind the student and family how important it is that said student is prepared for class...and the student and parents assure me that tomorrow the student will have all of the required materials for class. The next day comes around and the student has remembered to bring in the completed homework assignment, but has left all of the other class materials at home. This is an opportunity for me to praise the student and contact the parents, explaining that great progress was made today because I received the homework assignment, but we can't forget the rest of the class materials! Prior to watching the Lavoie talk, I would not have thought of this type of approach. But this type of approach teaches the student discipline, organization, etc. I believe that using positive reinforcement and small increments of progress in changing the behavior to be effective strategies for managing minor issues. However, this is not always a successful strategy, and I have adapted the following graphic organizers from Savage to use as a flow chart reference for supporting self-control and addressing persistent misbehaviors.

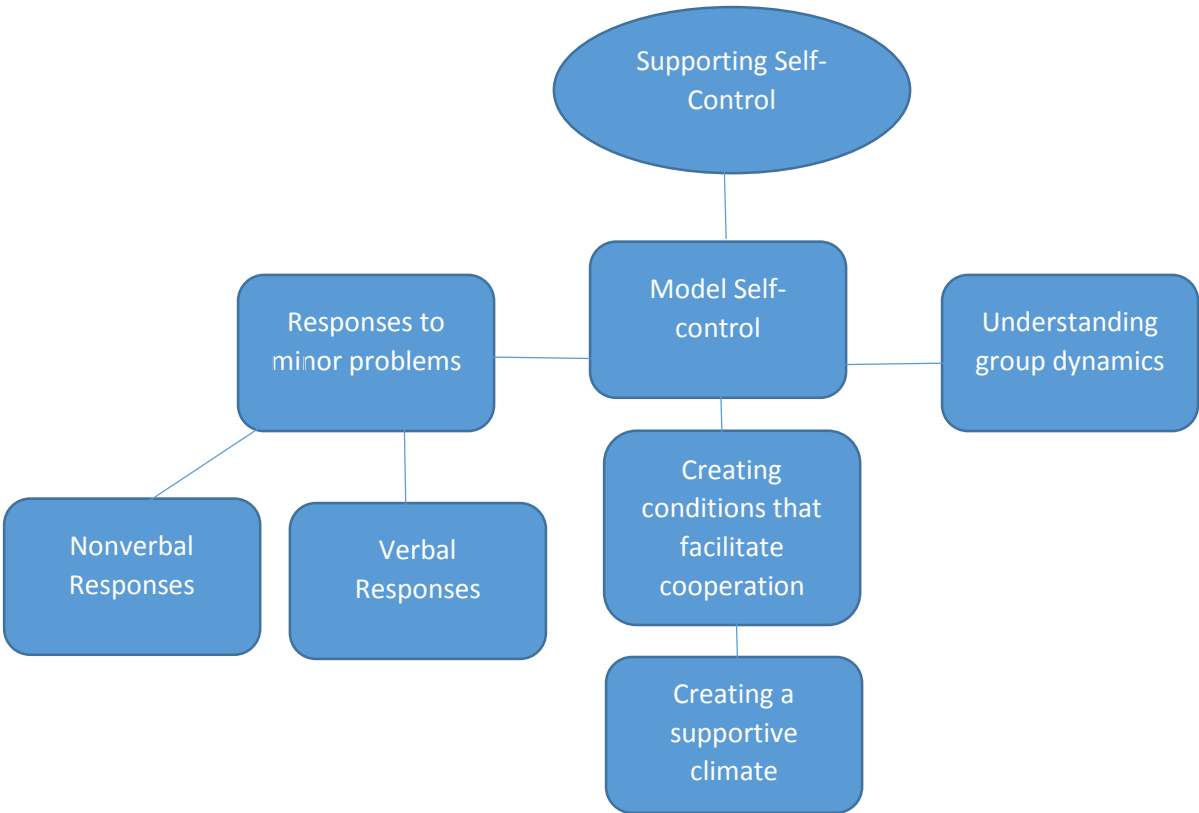


Figure 3: Graphic Organizer for Supporting Self- Control

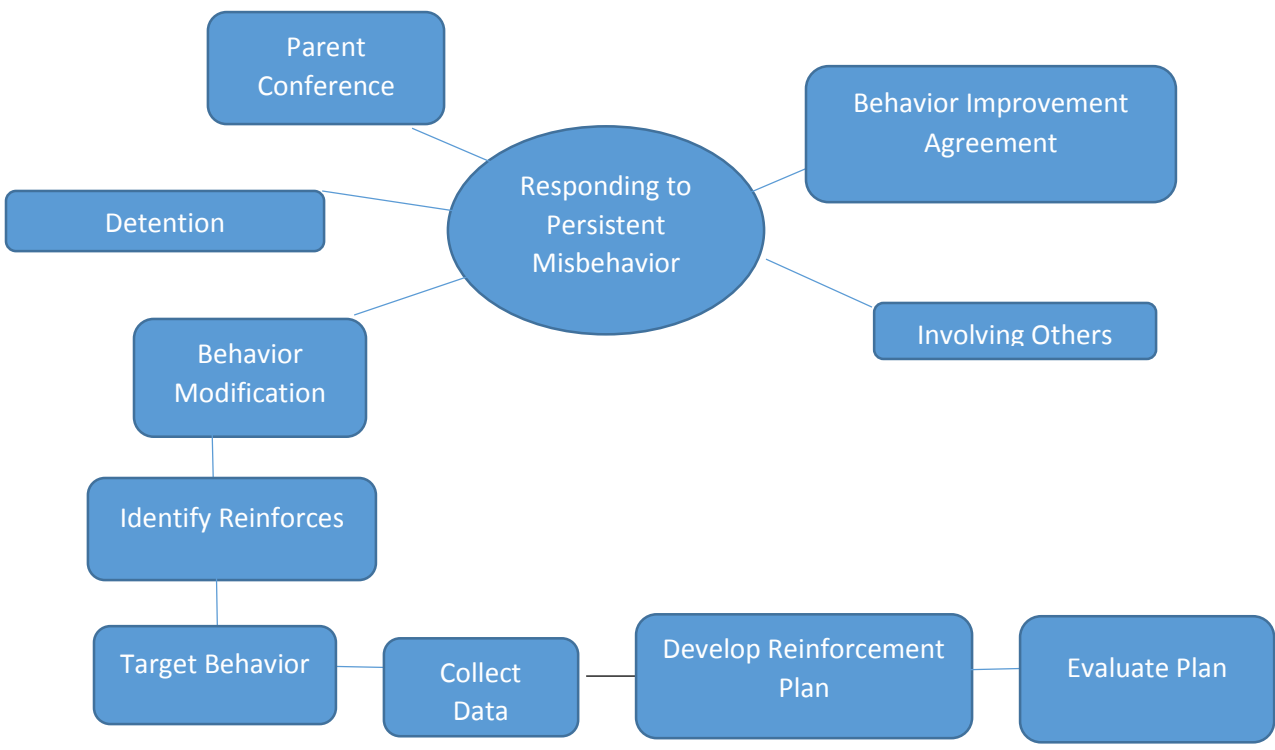


Figure: 4 Graphic Organizer for Responding to Persistent Misbehaviors

In terms of managing serious behaviors such as violence or safety hazards in the classroom, it is important that the teacher consult with and know individual school policies on this issue. For example, the way a teacher might address a fight in 1<sup>st</sup> grade is very different than how a teacher might address fights in high school. For serious issues that involve violence, vandalism etc. I immediately dial for security. We have trained security officers in each hallway, and they will appear in your room within thirty seconds of being called. Although teachers in my school are allowed to physically intervene in a physical confrontation, I personally do not feel comfortable doing so. Our principle acknowledged that anyone not comfortable doing so should never feel obligated to do so, and should call security. Once the serious situation has deescalated and the student(s) have been removed from the classroom, it is important for the teacher to regain control of and resettle the rest of the class. As for the students who were taken from class, I will meet with the student and administration to discover the cause/source of the incident, and then administration will handle disciplinary action from that point. What is most important for the classroom teacher is to ensure the safety of the other students, and to try and understand the root of the behavior, so in order to avoid an incident in the future.

This concludes my comprehensive management plan. To summarize, my management plan is outline in two dimensions, the management dimension and the discipline dimension. Most of my management tactics involve preventative measures as opposed to reactive measures. To paraphrase Jones and Jones...prevention goes a long way in managing behaviors in the classroom. I will use this comprehensive plan at the onset of my second year teaching beginning in August.

## References:

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