

A Classroom Discipline Plan That Teaches Democracy

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This article has two purposes. It presents a classroom management model that both works and teaches democracy by having students use the democratic process to create their learning environments; and it presents the model's impact upon the interest of 60 college seniors as they prepared to enter the classroom for their secondary social studies student teaching the next semester in a pretest-posttest/control group study .

This work represents a teacher's effort to assist students in becoming stewards of democracy by drawing up and adhering to behavior contracts in the classroom. The intent of this article is not to criticize nor critique other classroom management plans, but rather this work is presented as a method to fulfill a need in current American classrooms. As early as 1779, our founding fathers charged that public schools should be considered a means for educating students about democratic citizenship (Jefferson, 1779). In large part, it was this assumption that led to the creation of social studies as part of the American public school curriculum (Shinew, 2001). Is there a way to improve classroom management that gives more time for subject mastery and, at the same time, teaches democracy by allowing students to discuss, debate, and vote on not only how they want their classroom to be managed but how they want to learn?

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The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 1994) says that there are four goals in social studies education that teachers should have for their students:

1. Have subject mastery;
2. Be a life-long learner capable of problem solving;
3. Be a good participant in democracy; and
4. Be a contributor to the common good.

While the present presidential administration is attempting to reform education from the top down, it might be possible to do a better, more lasting reform from the bottom up by bringing democracy into daily classroom procedures (including management). Using the classroom management program discussed in this article, students learn democratic procedures first-hand as they create a better classroom learning environment. The result is that there is less time taken away from instruction by student misbehavior, while students learn social skills.

To provide the best learning environment for their students, teachers need to have good classroom management skills. Teaching future teachers how to infuse democracy into student discipline offers them a way to improve such skills. Sixty secondary social studies education candidates engaged in such a process in their social studies methods class and the results of this process had a positive impact upon their interest in learning to become teachers. The contracts used are at the end of this article (see Appendices A, B, and C). In addition, each student had an equal vote in approving the three class contracts that set up the classroom environment.

The following sections will review the literature on the need to bring more practical knowledge of democracy into American classrooms, state the conceptual framework for teaching democracy within a classroom discipline program, explain the program as it was created for both college seniors and their future high school students, and describe through the data collected the effects of teaching this program had on the college seniors.

Review of the Literature

Social studies educators need to provide their students with citizenship education of “the highest quality “ (*Social Education* staff, 2005, p. 414). American public schools are “the only institutions with the capacity and mandate to reach virtually every young person in the country” (*Social Education* staff, 2005, p. 415). While all subjects can be appropriate vehicles for teaching democracy, social studies is particularly involved because the subject was placed in the public school curriculum to promote knowl-

edge of democratic principles (Jefferson, 1779; Shinew, 2001). Therefore, educators are urged to set up learning communities in their classroom “in which young people learn to interact, argue, and work together with others, an important foundation for future citizenship.” (*Social Education* staff, 2005, p. 414). One of the best outcomes of such an approach would be students creating contracts by which they “buy” into their classroom management and how they want to be taught. In the process, they can discover how people want to be treated—thus, learning social skills.

The idea of classroom contracts has existed since the 1980s. Studies have shown (Adolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003) that youth socialization and interaction in schools can lay the groundwork for civic and political habits that persist into adulthood. Believing that “schools can [and should] provide training grounds for civic involvement, offer opportunities for open discussion” (Adolina et al., 2003, p. 333) and create democratic classrooms, this research not only refined a model program but also charted the results of using classroom management to teach democratic citizenship. Indeed, an earlier study reports that it is when teachers encourage open discussion that student scores on scales of civic behavior/knowledge of democracy climb (Adolina et al., 2003).

The Problem

The need for more opportunities to teach democratic principles may be inferred from Hahn’s report in 2001 that stated, “sizable numbers of young people are not supportive of democratic principles in particular contexts” (p.456) when compared to their peers internationally. Hahn believes that this is because American students are not given enough instruction in democracy. The International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement (IAEEA) found in 2001 that most fourteen-year-olds in America were not likely to have had a specific course in American government (Baldi et al., 2001). In addition, the IAEEA study showed that students’ socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity mattered in what they knew about democracy, with African American and Latino students scoring lower (Hahn, 2001).

Verbal attacks on teachers and students are increasing in the schools (Charles, 2002). For the most part, students who use violence come from homes where parents use violence (Massey, 1998). There was a time when teacher stress occurred mainly in secondary schools (Charles, 2002) and elementary schools (McCormick, 1997). Kindergarten teachers are reporting stressed-caused aggression as a major concern (Micklo, 1993). Even university faculties are noting unacceptable aggressive behaviors in students (Schneider, 1998).

I taught for over 15 years in public schools, both middle and high school social studies, and I know from that experience that, unless democracy was a topic mandated to be taught in the curriculum, it did not get taught. With this democratic discipline plan, no matter what subject is being taught, the students are learning democracy because each student has a voice in how they are to be taught and how their classroom is to be managed. There are schools (especially inner city ones) that put such an emphasis on order and discipline that the school atmosphere is authoritarian rather than democratic. Thus, it is imperative that educators blend democracy into their student discipline plan so that no time is lost with student misbehavior and students also pick up democratic skills with first-hand applications.

Conceptual Framework

I developed this classroom management program over a three-year period. I discovered that student achievement (students' grades went up on assignments) rose because the amount of student misbehaviors went down while referrals to the principal's office went from 50-60 a year to one or two a year. When I moved to higher education, I decided to teach the ideas of this program to first-semester college seniors who were enrolled in a secondary social studies education program.

There were several goals to this project:

1. To model and instruct future teachers on how to teach democracy to their future students by using an effective classroom management plan.
2. To research the impact that this program would have on raising students' interest in learning to be teachers.
3. To raise students' inter and intra-intelligences (i.e., knowing themselves and interacting positively with others).

This work draws on the ideas of Ruby Payne, who developed the concept of class contracts tailored to students within her Generational Poverty culture (Payne, 1998) and John Dewey, who developed a taxonomy of cognitive skills and argued that students should be operating at the top three levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation/prediction (Dewey, 1916).

This work also draws on the research of Howard Gardner and Daniel Goleman. When Howard Gardner (2002) developed his Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), he postulated that there are more intelligences than just analytical/mathematical or linguistic. Gardner believed that

other intelligences included naturalist, kinesthetic, spatial, musical, interpersonal intelligence, and intra personal intelligence.

Goleman (1995) defined Emotional Quotient (EQ) as both inter and intra personal intelligence. Goleman wrote that EQ was more important to success in life than Intelligence Quotient (IQ). He wrote that raising EQ can be done by working to lessen one's liabilities by using one's assets. He also wrote that getting other people to do positive actions also raises EQ. This classroom management program raises EQ because the students have to use their assets to develop an effective classroom management plan that will work with their liabilities to improve both learning and behavior. The result is an EQ learning environment whereby the students monitor themselves, thus freeing the teacher from being a policeman and giving the teacher more time to be an educator. Civility is enhanced when developing students' EQ because the students will start to understand others and want to help them.

Procedures with the Proposed Solution

There were two sets of lessons used to teach the college seniors how to bring knowledge of democracy into classroom management. First, the college seniors were taught how to draw up their own class contracts. Second, these college seniors were taught how to adapt what they had just learned for their future high school students.

The methods students were taught that there are five manifestations of misbehavior (Charles, 2002):

1. Aggression—physical and/or verbal attacks;
2. Immorality—acts contrary to accepted ethical norms (e.g., cheating);
3. Defiance—refusal to do as the teacher requests;
4. Classroom Disruption—talking too loud, etc.;
5. Goofing Off—e.g., fooling around, out of seat, etc.

By doing preventive work, all of these reasons for misbehavior can be reduced drastically. Students will find that this classroom management program helps them succeed. As the class monitors itself, the number of referrals to the office is drastically reduced and students learn more.

“The Teaching Democracy Within Student Discipline” Program

Discipline needs to be about structure and choice, not punishment (Payne, 1998). The college seniors were taught how to write three class

contracts (of several parts each) in which discipline becomes a matter of structure and choice—rather than punishment. One contract is about how the class is to be managed and taught; one contract is about what happens when someone breaks that first contract; and one contract is about how to correct behavior so that the problem will not occur again. Examples of these contracts are located in the Appendices at the end of this article.

Within the limits set by the syllabus, the professor and her college students followed those contracts throughout the semester. When the college seniors were writing their class contracts, the professor also taught how this program could be changed to help their future high school students understand democracy by creating their own classroom management plan. What follows is both the program for the college seniors and the suggested program for their future high school students.

The Process

- Divide class into groups of 3-4 (consider using an aptitude/personality scale like *Colors* (Lowry, 1979).
- Instruct class on the need for civility in the classroom, the Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) and Emotional Quotient (EQ).
- Each group discusses and writes proposals on all parts of all three contracts.
- Each group presents their ideas on all three contracts to the class; the class discusses them; and the teacher writes the comments down.
- Next class, the students go over what the teacher wrote down and make edits on all three class contracts.
- Each member of the class votes on each part of the newly-edited class contracts (majority vote wins).
- Both the teacher and all the students sign the class contract, which is now binding on all

First Contract

- How is the teacher to treat us?
- How are we to treat each other?
- How are we to treat the teacher?
- How do we want to be taught?
- What do we do when someone breaks this contract?

Discussion of First Contract

It is important that both the college seniors and their future high school students realize what goes for one part of the class contract goes for all parts. In other words, how we are to treat each other should be the same as how we are to treat the teacher and how the teacher is to treat us.

To ensure success in developing this classroom management program, the students are divided into viable working/learning groups. This writer used *Colors*, which is an aptitude/personality inventory (Pass, 2006). Other teachers use *Colors* with success in their learning groups (Ruskin, 2006). In three years of high school teaching, only once has this author had to transfer a student—the system works very well. In these learning groups, the future teachers (i.e., college seniors) were told to give two assessments for each student—both a group and individual student grade. This makes the individual student and groups more responsible. When academic assessment improves, so does student behavior because the assessment is just. This approach makes everyone accountable.

A benefit of this first contact is that each learning group ends up policing itself and this also teaches responsibility. Most students would prefer to be taught by MI to raise the EQ of both themselves and the class. Students who traditionally did not do well on a pencil-and-paper test were particularly interested in this approach. Using it, the author was able to raise achievement over the period of three years. When asked, students remark that the traditional approach teaches them to memorize while the second teaching style teaches them how to think. Critical thinking may be a survival skill for this century.

Second Contract

The second contract is focused on the consequences of a student breaking the first contract. Its goal is remediation rather than punishment. The two contracts (one for the college seniors and one for their future high school students) differed. The college seniors did not need to be guided, but the high school students will have to be guided by the teacher. One possibility is that the teacher can remark that he/she needs to be comfortable with what the high school class writes. Otherwise, the students might not write a good second contract. The following are suggested second contracts.

Second Contract for College Seniors

- Professor or students remind about class contact.
- Professor talks to student during office hours.
- Third contract is written.

Second Contract for Secondary Students

- Teacher or students warn privately.
- Teacher holds private conference.
- Third contract done but, if broken, the teacher will:
 - Call home.
 - Referral to principal's office.

Discussion of Second Contract

The college seniors were told that successful student contracts in the public schools have been created by students as young as 3rd grade (Charles, 2002). Teachers should remind their students that misbehavior should be turned into a learning experience and no condition should violate school/school district policy.

Third Contract

The third contract brings discipline and choice into what could be called by some high school teachers a detention contract. This remedial contract needs to be filled out when the student breaks both the first and second contracts. Its purpose is not punishment but the examination of unproductive behavior—with the student deciding what the alternative (and more acceptable) behavior would be in the future.

- What did you do wrong?
- Why did you do it?
- What three things could you have done instead?
- Next time, which one of these three things will you do?

Discussion of Third Contract

The college seniors were instructed to tell their future students that everyone has the right to learn and nobody has the right to interfere with someone's right to learn. If there is misbehavior in the classroom, chances are that someone's right to learn is interfered with.

With this third contract, discipline becomes a matter of choice. The third contract is never done during class time (that would interfere with the misbehaving student's right to learn). Instead, this third contract is done before or after school or during lunch. While the misbehaving student fills out this contract, both the teacher and student discuss the choices in it. Once an approved solution is made, the student signs the third contract and is bound by it. The student starts all over again fresh with a new commitment to his/her contracts. The school's administration strongly approved of the teacher handling her own discipline problems. The students appreciated a second chance to start over with no misbe-

havior written down on their record. Student appreciation for the opportunity to have choice and structure in their classroom management program was shown by a decrease in misbehavior as time went on.

After the college seniors learned about the democratic discipline program, data was collected on the results of their knowledge to discover if there was an impact upon their interest to learn how to teach secondary social studies.

Data Collection

Instrument

An instrument was developed by this author to discover if teaching this type of classroom management plan had a positive impact upon college seniors' interest in learning how to teach social studies. The instrument was assessed on usefulness and reliability (N=322) in 1999 and again (n=60) in 2002. With a Cronbach's alpha of .98, the instrument is reliable.

Validity was established with both a factor analysis and Delphi technique (Sax, 1980, p. 573). The factor analysis revealed some mutuality of factors and all the components were stable over time. Three factors arose from the data analysis; namely, student interest, motivation, and sense of value in learning the subject. The alpha values on all 3 factors were good. Factor One (interest) had an alpha of .6179; Factor Two (how students valued the good that they would receive from learning the subject) was .6857; and Factor Three (student efficacy or motivation derived from deductive lessons) was a .6023. Eight teachers and four professors used the Delphi technique with exchanges over a period of two months and it was determined that the instrument did measure student interest, motivation, and sense of value in learning the subject (i.e., social studies education).

Procedure

The 60 college seniors were given the student-rating instrument as a pretest prior to instruction on classroom management and student discipline. Group One just received instruction on traditional methods of student management. Group Two received the same instruction plus the democratic discipline program. Both groups took the student-interest instrument as a pretest and a posttest.

Results

Table 1 shows the posttest data results and Table 2 shows both the pretest and the posttest item scores.

Table 1
 Pre and Posttest Results on Interest/Motivation Learning Teaching
 Please rate the following statements on an agreement scale of 1 to 5

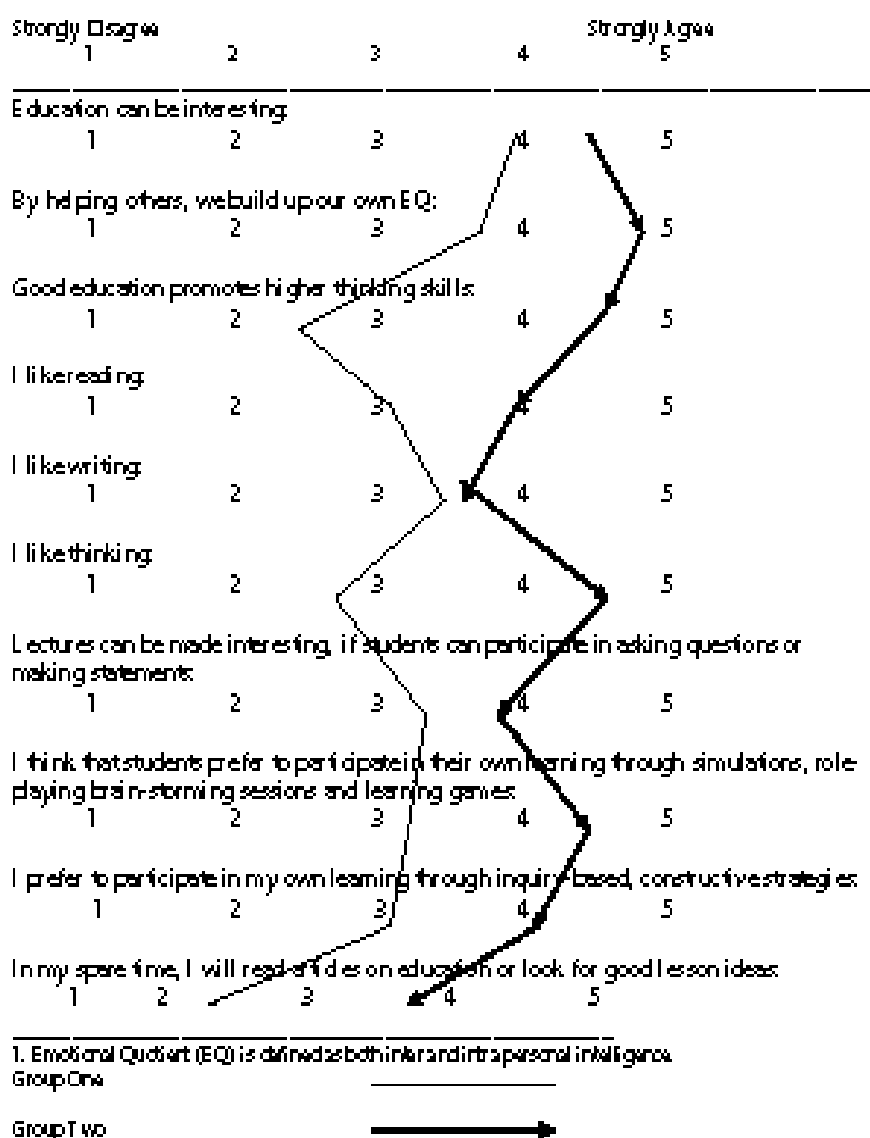


Table 2
Interest, Motivation, and Sense of Value in Learning Education

Pre	Group One		Group Two			
	Post		Pre	Post		
Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly Agree
Education can be interesting:						
4.01	4.05			4.04		4.80
By helping others, we build up our own EQ (intra and interpersonal intelligence):						
3.39	3.43			3.32		4.67
Good education promotes higher thinking skills:						
2.16	2.32			2.31		4.83
I like reading:						
2.14	3.10			2.10		4.04
I like writing:						
2.23	3.37			2.38		3.71
I like thinking:						
2.34	2.86			2.25		4.58
Lectures can be made interesting if students can participate in asking questions or making statements:						
2.89	3.48			2.78		3.84
I think that students prefer to participate in their own learning through simulations, role playing, brainstorming sessions and learning games:						
3.15	3.30			3.09		4.38
I prefer to participate in my own learning through inquiry-based, constructive strategies:						
3.07	3.19			3.05		4.13
In my spare time, I will read articles on education or look for good lesson ideas:						
2.25	2.48			2.19		3.46

While Group One said that they felt prepared in classroom management, some asked for the democratic discipline program when they found out about it and several started using it when they became first-

year teachers. In Group Two, the statistically significant results of the study show that they also became more interested in learning how to teach (see Tables 3 & 4).

Table 3
Comparison of Means on Student Interest Rating Instrument

		Pre	Post	Pre/Post Difference
Group 1	N	31	31	
	Mean	3.10	3.46	.36
	SD	.52	.37	
Group 2 N	N	29	29	
	Mean	3.28	3.77	.49
	SD	.88	.45	

Table 4
One way ANCOVA for results in Table 3

Post-test	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	7.814	1	7.814	11.375	.002
Within groups	29.538	4	.687		
Total	37.352	60			

One limitation of this study is that it was done with a selected sample and that sample existed in higher education. The statistically significant improvement in the future social studies teachers' interest in learning about how to teach could have been due to another variable (for example, learning something in the textbook). There is a need for replication of this study using the instrument with secondary students and a larger sampling.

A strength of this study is that the instrument, method of implementation, and democratic discipline program are strong and valid. The reader is encouraged to build upon this knowledge. Another strength is that it was developed after many years in public school classrooms; it was proven to work for three years in a public high school; and it worked in this study for college seniors because there were no classroom disruptions and because they said (see discussion) that they felt empowered to teach in their future classrooms.

Discussion

An item analysis of the instrument indicates that this democratic discipline program did have an effect not only on college seniors thinking that learning about how to be a social studies teacher can be interesting

(Table 2) but also that their own EQ was built up. One college senior commented, "By learning to get along better with each other, we all increased our EQ." Another remarked that, "I felt I could now manage my future classroom." A third commented that, "There were no disruptions in our methods classroom after this program was enacted and I could learn better."

This classroom management program also required students not only to think about their own ideas but also understand the ideas of others. Group One did not have to do this as much as Group Two, who had to write the contracts. This is probably why the item on "good education promotes higher thinking skills" was only 3.43 for Group One but 4.83 for Group Two that learned this democratic discipline program. The item "I like thinking" scored 2.86 for Group One and 4.58 for Group Two, probably because students had to use the higher thinking skills of synthesis and analysis to create the contracts (this was not done for Group One).

At our university, college seniors are more apt to be taught by traditional methods of instruction (e.g., long lectures) rather than critical-thinking/inquiry-led methods. The item that states "I think that students prefer to participate in their own learning..." indicates that the college seniors might prefer to be more active in the college classroom (3.30 for Group One and 4.38 for Group Two).

Finally, while Group Two did not always have as high a pretest item score as Group One, it consistently had higher posttest scores on all items. One college senior said, "I believe that I will be a better teacher now and have more time to teach by using this method."

Conclusions/Implications

This program to infuse knowledge of democracy within a classroom management plan did have a positive impact upon the college seniors' interest in learning to be secondary social studies teachers and did raise their sense of self-assessed ability to be capable teachers.

While done in a social studies education program, the author believes that the results of this work might be useful for those involved in teacher education programs in other disciplines. If educators want to create democratic classrooms, they need to start by allowing their students to participate or "buy into" their own learning experience and classroom environment.

Students are leaving American schools without the requisite skills needed to make meaningful contributions to a democratic society (Burrroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005). One way to minimize this problem is to

infuse democratic education into an overall plan for classroom management and instruction. This would work for all subjects—not just social studies education.

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Appendix A

First Contract for High School Students

How are we to treat each other?
How is the teacher to treat us?
How are we to treat the teacher?
How do we want to be taught?

Appendix B

Second Contract for High School Students

Teacher warns privately.
Teacher conference.
Detention.
Call Home.
Referral to Principal's Office.

Appendix C

Third Contract for High School Students

What did you do wrong that broke the class contract?
What were you thinking/feeling when you did this?
What 3 other things could you have done instead?
What will you do the next time?

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