

Key Elements Classroom Environment Guided Observation and Classroom/Behavior
Management Plan Assignment

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COVID-19 has drastically affected our schools and the overall “traditional” classroom experience. Although the student I observed has not been in a normal school setting for a few years, his school-work and class time have both been adjusted to properly align with the current COVID requirements and guidelines. The student I observed is sixteen-year-old Matthew, a sophomore enrolled at Horizon Charter School, an innovative and publicly funded institution that provides a number of Learning Centers throughout the greater Sacramento region.

When Matt was eleven, he was diagnosed with Crohn’s Disease, a chronic illness that unpredictably causes a person’s immune system to overreact and severely flare up. At this time in Matt’s life, he was already beginning to display a lack of educational drive, it was challenging to get him up for school, remain at school, and complete his required homework. Typically, these behaviors would provoke parent’s to actively enforce a strong routine into their child’s life, especially a child who was already facing unpredictability, but instead his parents did the opposite. Soon after his diagnosis they removed him from the public-school setting and sought out an educational environment that allowed him to stay in the comfort of his home. Although Matt’s illness has since been stabilized through the implementation of a consistent treatment program, his educational and social environments have drastically suffered. Before Horizon Charter, Matt was a student at Options For Youth, another non-profit public charter school. “OFY” didn’t provide the resources Matt needed to excel in school and his family decided to connect with iStudyHQ, an organization that matches each student with an accredited and virtual public school that fits their needs. At the turn of his sophomore year, iStudy matched him with Horizon Charter School which supplies Matt with a uniquely flexible education. As he began his sophomore year, iStudy and Horizon assigned two individuals to Matt, a private tutor and teacher. These individuals collaborate

to ensure that Matt is supported throughout the duration of the school year and encourage him to stay on course through his individualized program.

I observed Matt in-person on Friday, November 6th as he attended his virtual courses. I also had the opportunity to tour the iStudy location he attends via Zoom. iStudy provides a class-like environment that Matt is supposed to attend one time per week. Beyond this one meeting and the collaboration of his teacher and tutor, Matt is completely independent in his studies. As a sophomore, he is enrolled in five courses: English, Career Exploration, History, Algebra I, and Music. These five courses are strictly online and accessed through the software program “Acellus.” It’s important to note that the flexibility his school provides is almost limitless; he is not required to log-on each day or for an allotted time, nor does his mom enforce it. His teacher and tutor both communicate via email, text or phone call, they also check-in with him a few times a week, assign his coursework, and review his progress and overall goals. When I observed Matt for his school-time he was sitting in a dim-lit room, in front of the television, with a Coco-Cola and phone in hand, “watching” an assigned video for his History course. For his school-time, he logs on to Acellus, clicks on a course links, watches a video and takes notes, and completes the assigned multiple-choice questions per each lecture. This custom program does not require any books, midterms, finals, and does not assign students with independent or group projects. It’s critical to mention that due to the complications of his Crohn’s coupled with this educational program, he quickly fell behind, which resulted in having to repeat a grade level. I believe this “setback” occurred as a result of the challenges that came with his disease, the lack of educational structure, and overall parental guidance. This independent program’s lack of routine and structure coupled with his at-home environment, allows for an already unmotivated student to easily procrastinate and lose interest.

While observing my target student during his school-time and touring his classroom, I discovered very few strengths. The two individuals he works with are available every Monday through Saturday from 9am-5pm and are easily accessible by email, phone, and text. Their communication with the parent and student is fluid, effective, and supportive. During Matt's on-campus school-time he has the opportunity to sit with his tutor and review any material he may find challenging. After each session, the student's parent(s) are informed on their child's progression and their goals are thoroughly discussed. This information is collected and then documented online for the parent and student to review at any time. The classroom environment Matt attends each week is clearly marked, organized, and inviting. It is a private space that allows each student to receive the one-on-one and direct support they need to thrive.

At the ripe age of sixteen, Matt has already dealt with a variety of personal traumas and changes, including his parent's ongoing separation, father's mental illness, alcoholism, and incarceration, severe cyberbullying, and his own chronic illness. There is no doubt that his overwhelmingly complicated background has heavily contributed to his academic setbacks and overall mental health. It's imperative that as a student he feels supported, encouraged, motivated, safe, and comfortable. I strongly believe that these factors will help him excel as a student.

- a. ***Classroom Design: Learning Environment:*** *How would you set up your classroom environment so that distractions are minimized, students have social opportunities, and supplies/materials are accessible? What would you do to create an environment that supports social-emotional needs? Ex: Calm area, sensory spaces, etc.*

Matt is the epitome of a student who thrives in an engaging and distraction-free environment. Unfortunately, both the flexibility his independent studies provide and his at-home work environment heavily contribute to his academic struggle. He has expressed how easily

distracted and unmotivated he can be when working from home, which I clearly witnessed when I observed him. Cheryan's Classroom Design Components states that a "classrooms physical environments – both facilities... and symbolic...affect student achievement" (Cheryan et al., 2014). These components are more specifically: lighting, temperature, layout, objects, and décor. In general, Matt is an individual that is intensely affected by his surrounding environment and finds the practice of focusing on one activity nearly impossible. First, we must tackle his at-home environment, an environment saturated with distractions. The elimination of those distractions is key because at this time he is not monitored and quickly succumbs to those distractions. Ideally, we must first locate a space where he would be required to complete all of his school-work. I would focus on finding a room and/or place in a room that produces natural light; this space would not have a television or any other technological distractions. I would focus on mimicking a real classroom, this means not allowing him to have his phone during school-time and/or allowing him to have access to his phone at specific times only. I believe this tactic would motivate him in completing his assignments on time. I would provide him with a spacious desk, comfortable desk chair, and ensure this space was equipped with pencils and other writing materials, paper, folders, binders, and anything else he may need for a class. Cheryan's findings discuss the idea that "adding symbolic objects...can positively affect student performance" (Cheryan et al., 2014). With that said I would encourage him to pick out artistic elements to add to the space; perhaps some pictures and/or posters, a white board, and a calendar. These elements would not only provide organization and structure but would allow Matt to feel like the space reflected his personal aesthetic. Beyond these design elements, I would concentrate and collaborate with Matt on a designated school-time that would be enforced each day. Matt is a student who requires a calm and independent space that

also limits his distractions and I believe by implementing these changes, he will begin to make progress.

- b. ***Classroom Design: Activities:*** *How would you structure learning activities to include and engage all students, (including those who may be deaf or hard of hearing, blind, have other health impairments or multiple disabilities)?*

I think the engagement of student is key for a student to succeed. In learning about my target student's independent studies, I was informed that he does not participate in any individual or group projects. The videos and assignments required of him are lecture based and not interactive. If interactive elements were intertwined into the course material, I believe he would be more apt to remain engaged and have less opportunity to become distracted.

If I needed to structure learning activities to include all students, I would first make sure the assigned activities were flexible to accommodate each student. One way to approach this would be granting each student the opportunity to choose an activity that fits their needs but all aligns with the same goal.

- c. ***Behavior Management: Instructional Strategies and Practices:*** *How would you go about determining which evidence-based practices to prevent or address problem behavior would be appropriate for students in your classroom? How would you ensure that they are implemented with fidelity?*

First, I would collaborate with the teacher and discuss his/her concerns regarding the behaviors a student or students were displaying in their classroom. As a School Counselor it's critical that I listen and understand the goals and needs of each teacher I work with. At this time, I would ask that teacher to elaborate on their current rules, practices, and procedures that they currently implement in their classroom and how those things are enforced. I would then both schedule and randomly observe the classroom. This preparation would allow me to determine

which evidence-based practice would be appropriate to implement into the educator's classroom and why these specific EBP's would help prevent or address problem behaviors. If Matt, my target-student was the student that I was observing in a classroom, I would discover which behaviors needed to be addressed and determine that the appropriate EBP's for him would be minimizing distractions and enforcing structure. In the article from the University of Connecticut entitled: "Evidence-based Practices in Classroom Management: Considerations for Research to Practice," the authors discuss that "classrooms with more structure have been shown to promote more appropriate academic and social behaviors" and "[exhibit] greater task involvement...more attentive behavior...and less aggression (Morrison, 1979). The article continues by stating that minimizing distractions allows for "...less student distraction from noise, more student satisfaction..." (Ahrentzen & Evans, 1984). To ensure these EBP's are implemented with fidelity, I enact weekly and/or monthly follow ups and pop-ins with the teacher, meet with the teacher in the months following the implementation of these practices, and observe the student's behaviors. It will be important that throughout this process I am diligent in remaining organized and in my data collection.

- d. ***Behavior Management: Schedules:*** *How would you ensure that students know the daily schedule and what is expected of them with regard to work completion, etc.*

I believe this generation is quite visual so one effective way I could ensure students know their daily schedule is simply by creating a visual schedule that would be displayed in the classroom. This visual element could be something as simple as a large whiteboard. I would then review this schedule and discuss my expectations for the day, and refer back to this schedule if need be.

- e. **Behavior Management: Transitions:** *Discuss how you would prepare students for transitions and how you would minimize instructional minutes lost during transitions.*

I would prepare students for transitions by providing a visual schedule for each school day. I would start each day by reviewing the schedule, which would ensure that each student knows what to expect. I would then prompt my students throughout the day and at various times I would reference the daily schedule. In minimizing the loss of instructional minutes, I would allow myself flexibility between each task, this means I would have already incorporated transitions into my schedule. I would then focus on securing the attention of the student's, verbally initiate the transition, and observe their responses. If one of my student's was struggling with these classroom transitions, I would look to create an individualized transition plan and implement strategies to help that student with these challenges. The article "Moving Right Along...Planning Transitions To Prevent Challenging Behavior," address four questions someone should ask themselves as they create these individual plans. These four questions are: "Why is the behavior occurring? How can it be prevented? How can I respond if the behavior occurs? What new skills should I teach the child?" (Lentini, Vaughn & Fox, 2004)

- f. **Behavior Management: Rules and Procedures:** *What would your 5 classroom rules be? (Make sure they are phrased in a positive manner). How would you ensure that students are aware of them and that they are followed?*

At the start of each year I would create a visual component that states the class rules. Each student would be required to sign and agree to these rules and I would make sure this component was easily visible for the duration of the year. Along with these rules, I would create something

that discusses the various consequences that would be enforced if those rules were somehow broken. I would also work to create a reward system that encourages students to work and support one another. Another idea would be maintaining a tally system, this tally system would allow me to track which rules were broken, by whom, and how many times. If a specific student broke the rules more than (x) amount of time, then they could not participate in the reward. My goal would be making the classroom a safe, interactive, and fair environment.

Five Class Rules:

1. All electronics (besides your Chromebook) must be silenced and put away during class time. If you need to check your phone, please let me know.
2. Raise your hand when you would like to speak in class for any reason and please wait for others to finish speaking before you speak.
3. Be respectful, kind, and courteous to others. Treat others the way you would like to be treated (No yelling and/or swearing).
4. Each morning, enter the classroom prepared and give your full attention to the classroom.
5. Respect other students' personal belongings and their views. If you disagree, determine if it is worth the energy to speak up. If you speak up, do not be disrespectful. If you need time to decompress/calm down, let me know.

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