

Step 1

I observed several routines and rules in my class in the first week. The most evident was the way in which class is started. Air Force Academy uses the Military Model, which means that cadets have two ways they can enter the classroom. They can line up outside, at attention, in a single-file line during passing period and be greeted and have their uniform and ID checked at the door before entering the room; or, they can enter the room, stand behind their desk until the bell rings, and then be called to attention by the class leader who calls roll and then allows the class to be seated. As stated before, these routines come from the Military Model, which is a guiding set of principles under which all CPS military academies operate (“Military Model”). The opening and closing procedures for class are designed to instill a sense of citizenship, character development, leadership, and personal discipline in cadets. These are the principles that underlie both available beginning of class rituals.

My mentor teacher chooses to abide by the second option, where cadets enter the room and stand behind their desks. When I asked her reasoning behind the decision, she said that cadets often lean on lockers, sneak into the end of the line after the bell has rung, or get distracted by their friends in the hallway if they are allowed to line up outside. For her, the principle behind this rule is classroom management at the beginning of the hour. By having cadets come immediately into the room they cannot sneak in late and, even if they get distracted by their friends, are in a contained space where they can regain their focus easily when called to attention. I noticed that this method allows her to greet each student at the door casually before the military roll call begins, which she wouldn’t be able to do with every student if they lined up at attention. This aspect also aligns with the point in *Middle and Secondary Classroom Management* about how “clear routines and rules...minimize the loss of instructional time” (Weinstein & Novodvorsky). In the case of this routine, that occurs by having cadets

organized and quiet, and by building in attendance-taking with the role call to start class. This also allows students more time to socialize among themselves, which would be a positive thing for them, and would allow them to finish up their conversations so that they might be more likely to pay attention in class. The school also has a tardy policy that all students need to be inside the room at the time the bell rings. Students who are made to stand outside the room must be there earlier in order to have time for them to be called to attention and file inside before the bell. Allowing cadets to enter the room at any point and calling them to attention at the bell allows more time for passing between classes, which also reduces the number of to-class tardies incurred. Although, Ms. Vaughn noted, a tradeoff is that the classroom becomes an environment for talking, which makes it difficult to get them together for attention and roll call at times. She does concede that lining students up outside would lead to a more orderly transition into instructional time, but for her the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

Another classroom rule emphasized was that no makeup work will be given to students who miss class unless they have an excused absence slip from the front office. When I asked Ms. Vaughn her justification behind the rule, that was the answer she gave: it discourages students from skipping her class. Air Force has a chronic problem with attendance and students cutting classes or cutting school all together. She believes that while some of the cadets don't care about attendance, most do genuinely care about their grades. She did say that this rule posed a challenge, however, because some students miss class for legitimate reasons but forget to turn in a note to the office, so their absences get marked as unexcused and they can't get their makeup work. While this rule provides incentive for students to be more responsible with their attendance slips, it also compounds the damage done when a student misses class for any reason. If they have missed instructional time in the classroom, a student is placed at a disadvantage for having missed the material; trying to learn things you weren't taught in class is

difficult enough and would lead to a potential drop in grade on assessments. Not allowing them to make up assignments missed, as well, prevents students from practicing skills they missed and negatively impacts their grades on the assignments themselves, too. From a school perspective, any rule that a teacher puts in place to increase attendance is viewed as a good thing. Air Force Academy is currently at risk of losing their Level 1 School status, partially due to low attendance rates (Air Force Academy High School Board of Governors, 2017). In an effort to combat this, administration has urged teachers to take measures stressing the importance of consistent attendance. By putting in place a rule that encourages students to come to school and to turn in excuse notes if they have to miss, Ms. Vaughn is contributing to the school's goal to increase their attendance and solidify their rating. This principle - increase attendance through whatever means necessary - is the driving force behind this rule.

A third rule that is in place in Ms. Vaughn's classroom is that students can only write in pencil, never in pen. Writing in pen will result in 50% of your grade on an assignment being taken off. Ms. Vaughn stresses that especially in upper-level math like precalc, showing work is important and something that cadets need to do in the class. In my observations, when the cadets write in pencil they consistently erase all of their scrap work and turn in only the problem and the answer, especially on formative assessments like bell ringers. I asked about the rule and her justification made sense to me; she claimed that students make too many mistakes to use pen all the time, especially in a class that will eventually involve a lot of graphing. They'll want to be able to erase and correct small mistakes in their images for the sake of the neatness of their papers. I understood this justification and she managed to convince me that the rule was worthwhile, if imperfect. From a student perspective, one cadet I spoke to said that the ability to erase your work lowers the risk involved in making errors. If they can erase the work, they could feel more free to make a mistake and be able to correct it (Buccio, 2017). Other cadets

expressed that they didn't mind the pencil rule because writing in pen felt uncomfortable and was messier because it could smudge. From a school maintenance perspective, too, pencil graffiti on desks and other classroom materials is much easier to clean than pen marks. Requiring cadets to show work to receive credit or saying explicitly in directions not to scratch out or erase might be a helpful tactic to reduce the tradeoffs of the pencil rule while maintaining its advantages.

Step 2

When observing Ms. Vaughn's classroom management "moves", the first thing I noticed was her use of facial expressions, particularly a raised eyebrow, to stop disruptive behavior. While she was trying to begin the class, a student was asking loudly and repeatedly if he could remove his service dress (the blue blazer that students are required to wear to school on Thursdays as part of the uniform). Ms. Vaughn either did not notice or chose not to respond to the student at first, and he persisted in asking loudly until she turned around, looked at him, and raised one eyebrow. In response to this move, the student said "sorry" sheepishly, removed his jacket, and began to work. Ms. Vaughn explained to me after class that she had heard the student being disruptive but knew that he was turning the simple request into a big disturbance to get attention. So she chose not to respond verbally because she felt that that would be unnecessary; all the student needed to get him to calm down was acknowledgement, which is what she gave. The disapproving look on her face, she says, was intended to let him know that the behavior he was exhibiting was not a behavior she would support in her classroom, but she said she nodded (which I didn't pick up on in my observation) to indicate that he could in fact remove his jacket. The disapproval was effective, as evidenced by the student's apology. This approach is a perfect example of a nonverbal intervention (Weinstein and Novodvorsky). By using her "teacher look", Ms Vaughn was able to intervene in a way that was unobtrusive but

effective. It also allowed her to get back to the task at hand quickly and place the student in charge of correcting his own misbehavior. It also aligned with the principle of being “timely and accurate” responding to student behavior, and matched the severity of the behavior she was trying to eliminate. Ms. Vaughn told me that there were some potential tradeoffs with this move; an eyebrow raise is not a punishment by any means, so the student may cease the disruptive behavior for now but not have gained much motivation not to do it again in the future. She perceived this risk as being worth it, however, since this move allowed her to stop the disruptive behavior without fueling the student’s desire for attention and without distracting much from the start of the lesson. In my experience at Air Force, it’s never just one student who asks to remove their service dress in class. A potential disadvantage of the subtle, nonverbal move is that the permission to remove a jacket is not communicated to the class as a whole, just to one student. This leaves the possibility for more students to ask to remove their jackets later in class, which would cause continued disruption. A more outward move, such as making a general statement to the class that anyone may remove their service dress, could prevent this from happening but would probably have disrupted the flow of the lesson launch.

The next classroom management move I observed was used when a student’s cell phone made a noise during the lesson. The class was progressing as usual when a text tone sounded from the backpack of a student in the back of the room. Another student laughed and made a gesture toward her friend’s bag, and Ms. Vaughn turned around. She announced “you better turn that off whatever I just heard.” The student whose phone went off responded “I didn’t hear anything!” as he reached for his bag and turned off the phone. Ms. Vaughn and the rest of the room laughed and returned to the lesson. Ms. Vaughn described her motivation for that statement as wanting to be firm but not punitive. As long as the student turned off the phone, which he did, she really didn’t mind that it had gone off in class as she understands that kids

forget to silence their devices. But she also wanted to make sure she communicated clearly that the cell phone needed to be turned off and that its use was not a behavior she would support in her class. This direct verbal intervention was effective and well aligned with several of Weinstein's and Novodvorsky's principles; it was timely and accurate, and it was of appropriate severity for breaking a school-wide rule. But I believe it could have been more aligned with the principle of keeping instruction going with the minimum amount of interruption. If the student was not actively using their cell phone, could some deliberate nonintervention have been more effective for the flow of this lesson?

As argued in *Make Me!*, a disconnect between what students view as respectful and what the school system decides is respectful can lead to student resistance (Toshalis). If students thought they were being respectful and behaving appropriately by leaving their cell phones in their backpacks, they may view it as excessively strict for a teacher to comment on it going off as long as it was not being used. The teacher enforcing expectations that students see as unnecessary or overly-restrictive could lead them to resist the cell phone rule (or other school rules) more in the future, and a deliberate non-intervention could prevent this. Furthermore, this could have been an opportunity to engage in Culturally Responsive Classroom Management. The goal of classroom management is not for compliance or control, but to give all students an equitable opportunity to learn ("Culturally Responsive Classroom Management Strategies"). While the verbal intervention performed in class reflects the practice's dedication to setting clear and explicit expectations, the insistence that a student turn off a cell phone that is not in use seems to be more an issue of control than it is an issue of creating an equitable learning environment. In a classroom full of millennials, the pervasiveness of technology is an element of youth culture that cannot be ignored. I would not argue that it should not be regulated, as cell phone use has the potential to be devastating to the effectiveness of a lesson. But erring on the

other side, of over-regulation and the insistence that phones be not only away but powered down, is evidence of an attitude that could be considered “stuck in the past” and not responsive to the realities of a computerized generation. As for Ms. Vaughn’s reflection, she thought the tradeoffs were similar to those presented in the use of the eyebrow move. While the move got the student to correct the problem and abide by the rules in the moment, its lack of real consequences could lead to a likelihood that the problem would reoccur. She argued for her use of a verbal intervention because, as per school policy, students are expected to have their cell phones fully turned off and in their backpacks. By making a statement to the class, she communicated that even if the cell phone wasn’t in use, teachers were expected to enforce the policy and students were expected to follow it.

A tradeoff that needs to be considered in issues of school-wide policy, too, is that teachers are both the enforcers of policy and also some of the people expected to follow it. Despite the fact that a teacher may see a rule as unnecessary or overly strict, they are under an obligation to enforce it or they may face consequences from the school or district administration. While our readings have asserted (and I agree) that resistance is a key component in making change, how are educators to balance a desire to encourage student resistance, a desire to resist themselves when they have due cause, but also an obligation to enforce the rules and regulations that they feel compelled to resist against?

This tradeoff was demonstrated later in the hour when another student’s phone went off in a different part of the room. Ms. Vaughn responded with another warning: “What did I just say? That better get turned off, it came from over here.” This time no students reached for their bags and one shouted that it wasn’t his, so she added “I’m looking at you Buccio” and waited for him to reach for his backpack before returning to the lesson. Because it was a different student but the same problem, Ms. Vaughn claimed that she chose to use the same approach as

before, but with an emphasis that she had already had to say this once. She intended for that to be a signal to other students that she did not want to have to correct a third person, and that they should turn their phones off too if they hadn't already.

Finally, I observed Ms. Vaughn use a combination of eye contact and visual signals to manage talking in the room. Two students in the class were both attempting to participate in discussion of an example problem at once. When the boy was midway through explaining a thought about the problem, a girl across the classroom interjected trying to ask a question. Ms. Vaughn made eye contact with the girl who had tried to ask the question, but pointed at the boy who was still finishing his thought. This prompted the girl to be quiet while her peer finished speaking. When the boy had finished his thought Ms. Vaughn said something in response, while maintaining eye contact with the girl, and then pointed to her to indicate that it was her turn to talk. She then asked her question and had it answered, and the class moved forward. Ms. Vaughn told me after class that she could see that neither student was going to yield the floor to the other, as both were very strong personalities and generally "loud" students, so she knew she needed to intervene in order to keep the conversation moving smoothly and ensure everyone was heard. This move seemed tricky to me, and Ms. Vaughn explained that its downsides were that it only controlled the behavior of the two students in question and that the separation of eye contact from the student who was talking might have made them feel like their comment wasn't being heard - that's why she made sure to address his comment verbally before allowing the girl with the question to speak. This completely nonverbal form of classroom management move was a combination of eye contact and hand signals that proved really effective in Ms. Vaughn's room. It most closely followed Weinstein and Novodvorsky's first principle of maintaining a safe and comfortable classroom environment, as it corrected the misbehavior (talking over each other) while still allowing both students to have their voices heard and contribute to the

conversation in a more organized way. Tradeoffs involved with this move, according to Ms. Vaughn, were that these two students very clearly had all of her attention during this interaction, which made her less able to control the rest of the class. And if three students had been trying to talk simultaneously instead of two, she would have had to use a different move entirely.

Step 3

Stage 1: Describe the Dilemma

A dilemma often encountered in my 5th period pre calculus class is that students are disruptive with their off-task talking throughout the hour. During the beginning of the hour, the class leader calls the room to attention and students are supposed to be quiet and at attention when roll is called. In this class, however, most of the students will continue with their conversations for several seconds until either the class leader calls them to attention a second time, or a statement of reprimand is made by the teacher. This is surprising to me, since the attention position is at the core of military discipline. During instructional time, talking usually occurs in the same groups: Two boys, Troy and Bocco, across the front of the room, and “the girls” (a group for four girlfriends who sat together on the first day of class but were subsequently separated) across the back. In the past, Troy and Bocco (as well as anyone who happens to be near them) have descended into discussions of video games, music, and sneakers they’re saving up for during independent work time instead of doing their assignments. While this doesn’t typically disturb other students in the room and, ultimately, it’s their own responsibility to practice the material so that they can master it, it’s still frustrating to see them pay no attention at all to the math they are supposed to be working on. Meanwhile, I’ve observed “the girls” attempting to finish conversations from across the room after roll call, out of their desks to talk or trade items during work time, or even signalling to each other using hand signals while Ms. Vaughn is lecturing or explaining a problem on the board with her back to the

room. While admittedly entertaining, this all contributes to an atmosphere of chaos and disorder in the room, and one that I don't perceive as being conducive to learning.

Stage 2: Interpretation

There are many possible explanations for why these students persist in talking in class. I have considered that the students may not have had time to finish a conversation between class periods. Another possibility is that students may be uninterested in the class material; they could think it's easy and be talking because they're bored, or they could find it too challenging and be talking because they've given up, or they could just not value the work they're supposed to be doing and want to talk instead. In the case of conversations with a more serious tone, a student may have an issue going on with friends or family outside of school that they consider to be pressing and that requires their and their friends' attention right away and cannot wait until after class. My final consideration, inspired by *Make Me!* Chapter 1, is that students may be talking as a way to resist participating in the school environment or the class. Students may perceive systemic barriers to their success, like rigid rules about talking or an environment that privileges academic language and precision over the types of language that they use colloquially. In response, these students may resist that structure's rules and expectations in part by talking during class instead of paying attention (Toshalis).

At one point last week there was a field trip and classes were small, so I took that opportunity to ask Troy why he and his friends are always talking during their work times. He told me that the problems were boring, so he was uninterested. "Nobody cares about...donuts," he said as he looked at a problem in the textbook, "If these problems were about how many pairs of Yeezys you could afford, then I'd pay attention" (Ortiz). So at least in the case of the boys in the class, I would be led to believe that the most likely explanation is that they are uninterested in the work that is being assigned to them.

Stage 3: Identify the Stakes

Each hypothesis identified has its stakes for both the students and the teachers.

Regardless of the cause, students talking off task during the lesson could serve to provide students with social interaction and the ability to form or strengthen bonds with peers, but at the risk of missing out on valuable class instruction if they do not pay attention, or at the risk of disrupting the pace and amount of material covered in the period when they take longer to settle down at the beginning of class. For teachers, allowing this behavior could position you as a “good guy” who lets students socialize, but with the tradeoff of not being able to communicate the content that needs to be covered for the day; this could hurt student performance, teacher evaluation, or a teacher’s rapport and ability to control the room in the future.

Some more specific hypotheses demand individual attention on the stakes for students partaking in off-task talking. If students are talking in class, there may be a pressing personal matter that is impacting their lives outside of school. If students talk because they are in crisis or otherwise in emotional or physical distress, a teacher squelching that talk could prevent students from coping or confiding important information to friends, and they could be negatively impacted by a lack of opportunity to reach out for support. The counterargument, some would say, is that even pressing personal information could be communicated to friends between or after class. If students are talking to resist a school culture that does not value what they have to offer, stopping that conversation could potentially reinforce the structures that the students are resisting. Allowing it to continue would allow students some agency over what parts of school culture and expectations aligned with their own values, though that doesn’t change the fact that it becomes difficult for a student to learn math while talking about sneakers.

An additional set of stakeholders, of course, are the other students in the classroom who are not talking off task, or who are trying to do their work. These students don’t appear to have

much to gain from the off-task talking of their peers, though if they tend to be students who put their heads down or fall asleep in class the noise level may help to keep them alert. These students do stand to lose instructional time and their ability to focus; if the teacher were to respond to the classroom's noise levels by imposing a rule of silence, these students could also miss out on the opportunity to talk to peers about relevant topics and to collaborate in order to understand the work. The stakes in this scenario are raised for students who may have social-emotional issues or IEPs for learning disorders such as ADD or ADHD. These students already sometimes require support from teachers to focus in class. The additional variable of hearing their peers talking off task would be even more detrimental to their learning, more so than other students in the room.

Stage 4: Developing Alternatives for Action

In terms of a plan of action, there are several that correspond to the different potential reasons for student behavior. If students are talking out at the beginning of class because they didn't have enough time to finish conversations during the passing period, I could set a limit by describing what is expected (for students to be quiet when called to attention) without telling students what to do about it (Fay). This could be combined with a statement of misplaced behavior, something like "this is an awfully chatty room for cadets who are supposed to be quiet." When students are working individually and being disruptive, the plan of action must change a little. If students are talking out because they are uninterested in the work, techniques like standing closer to the student, a hand on a shoulder, or even changing the location of a talkative student could be effective (Fay). If I suspect something distressing is happening in a student's personal life that could be causing them to talk out, giving the student an appointment to talk about the problem would probably be the most appropriate response. And if students are talking off task as a way to resist the structure of the school, an "I statement" (Fay) could be

most effective. Students will probably still want to resist the power structure of the school, but may be more willing to comply if they view it as a favor to me after expressing that “when you guys talk while you’re supposed to be working, I get frustrated because I can’t help your peers who have questions effectively.”

As an additional option if I think students are acting out because of the dynamics of power in the school, I could start referring to them by their ranks. At Air Force, each cadet has a rank that they work to earn and wear on their uniforms. This year, the whole school has been taking the initiative to know and be able to refer to cadets by their name and rank, instead of just their names; the idea behind this is that reminding students that they have achieved something, hold a position of leadership, and that they have the ability to meet the high expectations set by the Air Force of integrity, service, and excellence (“U.S. Air Force: Vision”). As noted in *Make Me!*, the way we label students can have a powerful effect on their self image and thus their behavior (Toshalis). By intentionally addressing troublesome students in a way that assigns them agency, competence, and a sense of leadership, they may internalize that image and begin to behave in a way that reflects those qualities.

In my practice the option I often resort to first is the use of proximity, as it does not draw undue attention to the student, is not disruptive to my lesson, and leaves the student in charge of deciding an appropriate action to take or way to behave. This technique abides by Weinstein and Novodvorsky’s classroom management principles of fostering self-discipline and personal responsibility by giving the students the opportunity to correct their own behavior without a direct order. It also allows the need to meaningful instruction to prevail, as it this move is one of the least disruptive to the flow of the lesson. For the purposes of this unit, however, I will try implementing a verbal intervention first. Verbal interventions are something I don’t use often and would like to get better at, as it will allow me to practice my ability to gain social-emotional

competence by verbally correcting student behavior without “snapping”, modeling ways in which conflicts within and outside of class should be handled. Using verbal warnings is also a way for me to put into practice my awareness of my students’ cultural norms for interpersonal relationships; when I see my students interacting in the halls, they correct (and sometimes scold) each other verbally for behaviors that they find unacceptable, and I can practice making corrections to their behavior in class in a similar way. Verbal warnings can also often be interpreted as more firm or authoritative than proximity; authoritativeness is an aspect of my teaching persona that also needs strengthening. Finally, making use of verbal interventions would allow me to attempt to control talking in the room even while working on something else (such as submitting attendance or helping another student with a question).

Stage 5: Reflection

When I attempted to implement my new verbal interventions and old proximity stand-by’s, things did not go as planned. That day’s lesson primarily involved a set of review problems out of the textbook, and I was able to stand at the front of the room as well as circulate around to each table. At the beginning of class, the students were talkative when called to attention (as usual) and a reminder that the expectation during this time was for them to be quiet did the trick in getting them to comply. As they were getting ready to begin the lesson, I thought I would pre-correct (Weinstein & Novodvorsky) by calling Bocco by his rank as I asked him to take the attendance to the office. I asked “Cadet 1st Lieutenant Bocco” to please take the sheet down, and he looked at me, surprised. “Hey, how did you know my rank?” he inquired, to which I responded that “you wear your rank every day,” intending for the response to be a double entendre since he physically wears pins to communicate the information, but also all cadets “wear” their ranks by representing status through their behaviors. I felt really good about this

and hoped that it might make at least a little bit of a difference once class work began, but it did not.

Students were working quietly except for Bocco and Troy's table, so as a warning I tried a statement of misplaced behavior by saying, from a slight distance, "you guys are awfully chatty, is any math getting done over there?". They responded with a determined "yes," and set back to work with a slightly reduced noise level, and eventually descended back into full-fledged talking again. After a moment I went back over to the table and asked how their work was coming, which got me a "good" and not much further response. My proximity seemed to lead them to work better, though, even if they were still whispering. So, reacting to that, I got my computer from my desk and sat on a table next to them to work so I could maintain my position close to the group while not seeming like I was breathing down their necks, which could perpetuate the potentially-harmful power dynamic where students feel like they're being watched and "babysat" at all times. This technique worked in waves; students would be diligent for a few minutes, a few quiet comments would emerge, I would give one of the boys a "teacher look" and they would go back to working quietly, and the cycle repeated several times. Eventually, the teacher look stopped working and they were back to a full-fledged conversation about rap songs, so I took the opportunity to try out some more of my rehearsed moves. I got up from my tabletop seat and moved to put my hands on Bocco and Troy's shoulders. Despite my now physical presence, their conversation continued. I then tried providing choices by asking "is this a conversation that could be finished after class?" and Troy very confidently responded with "no." I removed my hands from the boys' shoulders, in an attempt to allow me to take on a more assertive tone. I told them that their talking was preventing me from attending to the things I needed to get done for the class to run smoothly, which didn't seem to have an effect on them. I tried to maintain my proximity, since that had worked last time, though this time it backfired as

the table began asking about the kind of music I liked. I thought this disruption would be best handled with deliberate nonintervention, as acknowledging the question would encourage it. This was ineffective, as when I didn't answer they began speculating and were further distracted from their assignments. Finally, I tried to suggest that one of them needed to move to another table, but at the point I had lost track of time and the bell was about to ring.

That is all to say, my attempts to enact these teacher moves were largely unsuccessful. Especially in an environment where the students know that I am a student and that their "real" teacher is not intervening in my attempts to manage them, it's not surprising that they would push and resist complying with my requests. I learned that a system of rules in which the code of conduct is limited to "respect each other and the instructors" may not be the most effective for particularly chatty classes or students; in cases such as this class, a more structured set of norms and rules for work time may be beneficial.

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