

Creating Mutual Trust-Based Classrooms to Foster
a Quality Constructivist Educational Environment

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Statement of the Problem

Imagine learning in an environment where fear, oppression and distrust are not only the norm in the school environment but the cultural environment as well. Imagine trying to learn in an environment where racism is encouraged, poverty is rampant, and violence is an integral part of the culture. Imagine learning in an environment where local teachers have a cultural belief that control of the classroom is more important than the learning going on and that yelling is a teacher's most effective tool. Imagine teaching in a system where parents tell their children they do not have to listen to out-of-state teachers. This describes the Hawaiian public school system that I have experienced.

The problem I saw in Hawaii is an inability of the general public to see education as a pathway out of poverty. I experienced a basic lack of trust by the community of the educational system. People who value education, do not seem to trust that the Hawaiian public school system can deliver a quality education, and those who do not value education believe it had no bearing on their lives nor will have in the lives of their children. This trust gap is a barrier for the children of Hawaii to excel in school. How does one create trust in another without first showing that person that they are trusted? Trust is earned. Trust is learned. Trust is reciprocal. Trust is cumulative. Is it possible to teach trust to a group of students who have been conditioned by family, teachers, and community to not trust?

Field of Action

Maui Waena Intermediate School is a title 1, 6th through 8th grade middle school on the island of Maui. Due to historically low reading and math scores the school has spent the past two academic calendar years in academic restructuring under the direct control of Edison Education. The school provides services to a diverse population of students most of which live at

or beneath poverty level. The school is located in the town of Kahului, HI, an area on the north shore of central Maui which features a predominantly Asian/Pacific Islander population. 89.5% of the town's population are minorities, with 60.5% percent of the population being Asian and 18.8% Pacific Islander. (MuniNetGuide) Being a Title 1 school, over 40% of the school's population has qualified for and receives free or reduced lunch.

According to Bolante (2008) of Honolulu Magazine, the school ranked 229th out of 258 public schools, thus ranking in the bottom 12% of all public schools in the state. Over the past two years great strides were made at the school, however in Keany (2010) of Honolulu Magazine reported Maui Waena ranking 195th out of 257 public schools in the state, remaining in the bottom 25th percent.

The school has a large population servicing over a 1000 students a year and class sizes typically range in the area of 25 to 30 students. The population is working class and suffers from all of the typical trappings of poverty. Many of the students' parents were teenagers themselves when they first had children. Drug use, gang involvement, and prison sentences are common occurrences in the families of many students. The school is prone to on-campus fights by both male and female students and suspensions are a common occurrence.

I teach four sections of 6th grade mathematics (one is an honors section) as well as one elective class called 'exploratory wheel' which is a teacher choice elective course. As a former science teacher it is my personal goal to improve the students understanding of mathematics and help them see that math is a language, which describes the world around them. I focus on hands on group activities designed to foster conceptual understanding with real world application. I work diligently to create a constructivist-learning environment, which fosters a joy of learning in my students. My challenge for the past two years was creating learning opportunities for my

students that allowed them some control, while experiencing strict directives with dead lines arbitrarily established off site. Edison set up strict rules about how much time could be devoted to each concept regardless of the progression of the class. Monthly computerized exams were given by Edison. Teachers were not allowed to see the questions prior to the tests and were instructed to not prepare the students for the monthly benchmark exams. Edison's philosophies do not reflect John Dewey and Jean Piaget's theories of constructivist learning. This was a problem I felt I had to address because I also believe, as Foote et al (2001) stated "...the understanding that knowledge is constructed by individuals and not dispensed as a commodity from 'the outside-in.'" (pg. 13)

Literature Review

As the best minds of the past two centuries debated how learning occurs in the learner, the classroom has remained amazingly unchanged. Mindstorms and Logo creator Seymour Papert often challenges educators to imagine a time traveling teacher coming from the 19th century to the present and then states that the teacher as Papert (1992) said "could quite easily take over the class." (pg. 2) The modern classroom is, as it most often has been in history, a teacher driven, top down model in which the learner is relatively powerless.

To change this thinking would require a rejection of the traditional model in which the students are viewed as "empty or evil creatures who need to be filled up, controlled, and contained" as stated by Cook-Sather (2002, pg. 9). I have found these themes to be prevalent in the Hawaiian school system.

Traditional education in the United States views the learner generally as a passive recipient of what others define as education. It is based on trust. (Cook-Sather 2002). Hoy & Tschannen-Moran (as cited in Owens and Johnson Jr. 2009 pg. 315) defined trust "as an

individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent." This definition was built from the earlier work of Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (also cited in Owens and Johnson Jr. 2009) with their addition of the idea that the trust is also conditional to the inability of one party to monitor or control the other party.

Bringing about change in the modern classroom through a mutual trust model encounters obstacles. The teacher must be an honest, open, benevolent participant in the teacher/student relationship and then both parties must be willing to be vulnerable to the other. Teachers often see this as a show of weakness, which is an invitation to classroom chaos. Moody-Wallinger (1997) stated "In teacher training programs across the country, the last thing they tell newly certified teachers is "Don't smile before Christmas!""

This approach to classroom management may make administrators happy when they walk the halls of their silent educational institutions, but is all but forgotten when the year end scores are reported and the school yet again fails to show progress. Perhaps the failure is one of trust, trust of teacher, trust of school, but most importantly, trust of self. Perhaps one of the failures of Hawaiian classrooms I encountered is the lack of mutual trust. The inability to recognize that trust is a two-way street and the act of not being trusted is considered a judgment of ones character (Bottery 2004). Bottery describes four stages of trust:

- *Calculative* is the lowest level of trust based on the mathematical-type calculations of how trust worthy a newly met person is.
- *Roll* trust is the trust which comes with a given title that carries with it some form of socially expected weight, Doctor, Police and Teacher earn this type of automatic trust.

- *Practice* trust is the process of confirmed or disconfirmed assumptions of those that previously fell in the Calculative or Roll trust categories, however have had significant time to prove ones self to be trust worthy
- *Identificatory* trust is the highest level of trust built over years and ending in an intuitive understanding of how the other will react to a given situation

Teachers arrive to school the first day with *Roll* trust. Teachers may show themselves to be unworthy of that trust if students feel not trusted. Rules and consequences are often the focus of school and classroom learning. This focus on behavior control may give students the impression that they are inherently not trusted.

Low trust environments can be a lost opportunity for both the learner and the teacher, according to Abrams as cited by Mooradian, Renzl, and Matzler (2006) “Trust leads to increased overall knowledge exchange, makes knowledge exchanges less costly and increases the likelihood that knowledge acquired from a colleague is sufficiently understood and absorbed that a person can put it to use.” (p. 65)

Increasing the amount of knowledge exchanged between teacher and learner and the ability of the learner to apply that knowledge should be the goal of educators. If we can find ways to create a safe environment built on mutual trust between teacher and learner we may see a significant change in the classroom-learning environment. Being trusted fosters a sense of positive self-esteem and self-worth while being mistrusted produces feelings of anger, deflated self-esteem, powerlessness, and a distrust of those displaying the lack of trust. (Bottery 2004)

Much of the research conducted on the topic of student trust has been on college-age students. (Owens & Johnson Jr. 2009) In my Literature Review I have extrapolated from sources on the idea of trust relationships as they pertain to learning in general. As I further examine

building a room of respect and trust for my Action Research I will use the following statement as a guide.

A person's ability to trust waxes and wanes according to the types of relationships they have experienced in their past and how they internalize those experiences over time. (Owens and Johnson Jr. 2009)

Trust appears to be a key element in the creation of a constructivist classroom for several reasons. The basic social aspect to constructivist learning theory requires social interaction, it is through the self analysis of experience for the express purpose of communicating the experience to another, the examination of the experience through the eyes of another that allows understanding to occur (Dewey 1916). The traditional classroom allows for little interaction and thus little opportunity to reach the level of understanding Dewey mentions. The teacher must trust a classroom full of children to either stay on task or self correct to task. Secondly when Dewey (1916) was speaking of the cultural influence of societies he stated that the "unconscious influence of the environment is so subtle and pervasive that it affects every fiber of character and mind." (pg 21).

In summary, a person's ability to trust waxes and wanes according to the types of relationships they have experienced in their past and how they internalize those experiences over time (Owens and Johnson Jr. 2009).

Cycle One.

In the Hawaiian school system, students are often restricted in their ability to make decisions when it comes to their own education. Cultural norms influence the school and classroom environment and students often find themselves in an environment of discipline and what might be called a traditional classroom. Classrooms of the Hawaii Public School system

are typically highly structured and teachers are viewed as disciplinarians and figures of authority. Seating charts, strict dress codes and identification cards are commonplace and opportunities to monitor one's own behavior is not. At the intermediate school where the majority of my research was conducted students are not allowed to enter a classroom without presenting their identification card and planner. The consequence for not supplying these documents is to be sent from the classroom to pick up garbage during instructional time. The atmosphere of many of Hawaii's schools appear to be more akin to a prison environment rather than a learning environment. This approach to school wide discipline is often referred to as teaching 'responsibility'.

In my first cycle I will be challenging this notion by examining two classes, an intermediate level 6th grade math class of 32 students and an honors level 6th grade math class of 25 students. I removed the rules that are deemed 'school wide agreements' and focused solely on math content. I removed myself from the role of authoritarian driving the room from the front and allowed the students to make decisions for themselves and work as teams.

First Cycle Research Question

Will showing my students that I trust them, by allowing them to make decisions about their own education on their own behalf, foster the development of trust in themselves and ultimately a trust in education?

First Cycle Action

The actions I took in the first cycle were as follows...

Action 1. Change greeting procedure: It is school policy to stand at the door before each period and check for both identification cards and planners and send any who forgot either one out of the classroom to pick up garbage (at least 10 pieces). In place of this procedure I stand at the door and greet each child as they enter; for those without identification cards or planner we discuss a plan for helping them remember next time.

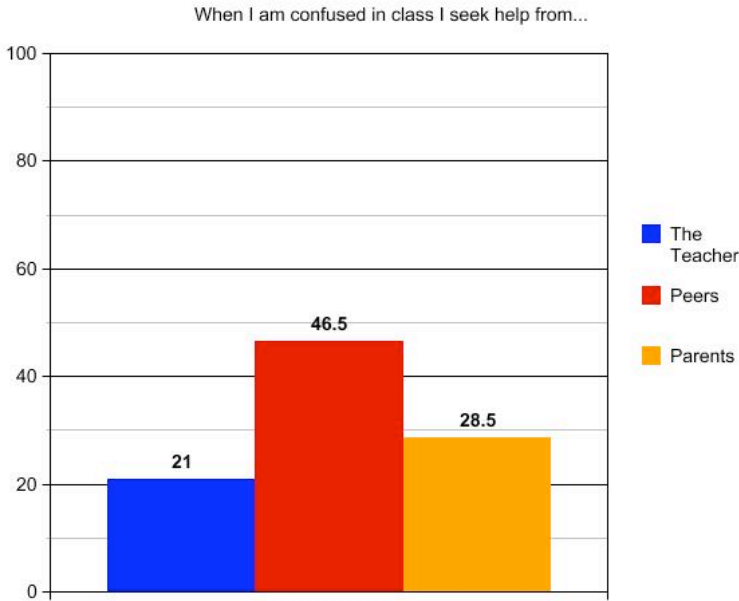
Action 2. I allowed students to choose their own seats in the room after informing them it was a privilege to choose their seats, which would be removed if their choices caused disruptions to learning.

Action 3. I allowed them to choose their own small groups for independent work time, again informing them it was a privilege, which could be removed

Data Analysis.

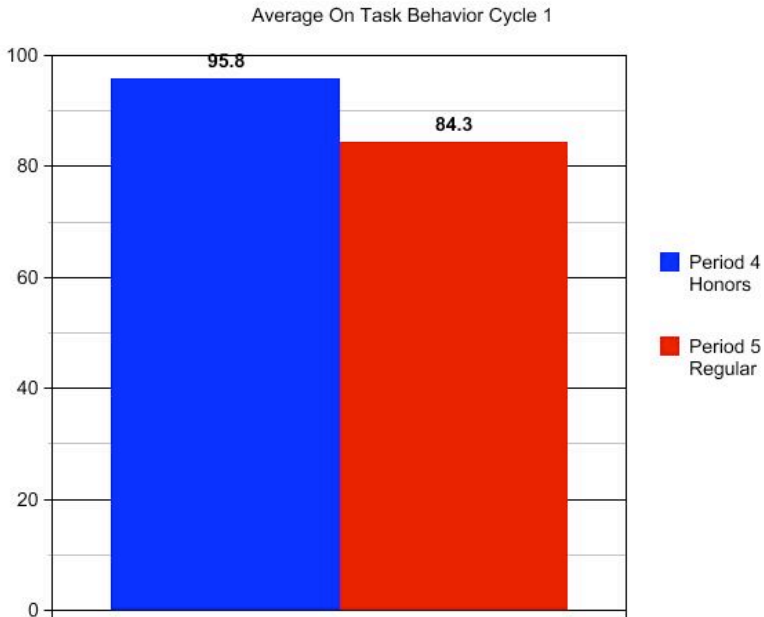
My observations included initial survey of school attitudes, teacher observation journal, and learning assistant observation journal.

From the initial survey of students attitudes about school an important fact materialized, if the students were not allowed to speak with their peers in class they were less likely to receive help when confused with a lesson. 21% of students responded that they went to the teacher when confused while a full 46.5% responded by saying they sought out help from peers.



Jennifer’s Journal Observations

Summary: Jennifer is a learning assistant who spends 2 days a week in my classroom I asked her to keep track of on task behavior and record how many groups were working on their assignments. Over the course of the first cycle she recorded an average on-task behavior rate of 95.8% percent for the honors class and an 84.3% for the heterogeneous 5th period class. Behavior was considered on-task if the students were working within their groups and the majority of discussions were ‘task’ directed or mathematical in nature. A student was considered on-task if they self-corrected off-task behavior or responded positively to peer refocusing.



The teacher reflections showed some early trends, which were concerning for the researcher. Excerpt: ***Journal Entry: Day 3: Cycle 1; Pd. 5** Boys KH, RG, & JE are not handling the change well, their production in class which was never high has ground to a halt... With the exception of the three boys, discussions about math versus non-school conversations are running about 60/40*

Excerpt: ***Journal Entry: Day 3: Cycle 1: Pd. 4** Discussions about math versus non-school conversations are running about 85/15.*

Excerpt: ***Journal Entry: Day 7: Cycle 1: Pd. 5** class revolted against the three boys today because of their constant distractions, I am worried that the few are going to ruin this for the many...*

The unintended consequence of the first cycle was that, for some, the removal of the traditional classroom rules was more than they could handle. It seems they have been so conditioned to their lack of freedom that giving them freedom appears to have been beyond their ability to control.

If the student was a moderately motivated individual before the change they have excelled, if the student was not motivated previously they took full advantage of their new situation to their own detriment. This choice was interesting considering that the overwhelming majority of students believed that what they were learning mattered for them today (92.6% agreed or strongly agreed) and for their future (91.2% agreed or strongly agreed). It was as if they were being released from prison only to end up breaking the law assuring their return... it was an educational recidivism. It suggests that if they are not being controlled by strict guidelines then they don't know how to act; they are lost.

In action 1 (the ending of the policy of sending students out to pick up garbage) I discovered that the habitual ID and Planner forgetters had developed a simple get-out-of-class-free card, they simply forget one of the articles and then spend the class walking around campus. Since every teacher checks every period they often spend much of the day missing the lessons they so desperately need. Initially they were angry with me when I didn't send them out to pick up trash and instead made them do their opening work, they have all since adjusted. However, I believe since they still use the ruse to get out of their other periods they have no motivation to change for my class.

The students overwhelmingly believe that their teachers care about them with 85.5% saying most or all of their teachers care about them, yet only 1 in 5 go to their teachers when they do not understand their lessons. Yet 69% either did not trust what other students told them or were neutral about trusting their fellow student and in spite of this fact 46.5% of them go to another student for help as their first choice.

It has been difficult for me to watch the separation of the classes. The majority of my students made good choices and carried a more positive attitude into math class. Discussions

about math increased throughout both classrooms and peer-to-peer teaching between students increased for most students (78% of students were having math conversations according to Jennifer's data from week 1) however the 12% who did not engage in these positive learning activities saw a reduction in participation as well as a reduction in work completion.

My challenge in Cycle 2 will be to revoke the freedoms of 'partner-choice' and 'seat-choice' for the small minority without punishing those that have excelled under the new policy. Being that there is not an empty seat in my period 5 class four people who have done well in Cycle 1 will be inadvertently punished to make empty seats for my troubled four boys. The only other option will be to create new spaces for them to be located while assuring them that if they wish to regain their freedoms in class they will have to regain my trust.

Cycle One Reflection

After cycle one was complete I reflected on the outcomes of providing more freedom to the students in my effort to instill trust by giving trust. The immediate outcome of my actions was two fold (1) the vast majority of students reacted in a positive way with period five having an on-task average of 84.3% and period four (honors) having an average of 95.8% on-task behavior. Students were working well and moving through their workday with little prompting from the teacher.

Conversations in the room were predominantly about mathematics and achieving the task at hand. (2) The second outcome was that the small percentage of students who were off task became increasingly less capable of exhibiting any form of self-control. The experience of classroom freedom created a backlash, which created an environment of 'testing the waters.' The children who were so used to being in trouble on a daily basis in all of their other classes pushed

hard to find the line of which they should not cross. Cycle two was going to require me to establish the lines without punishing those who were exhibiting positive behaviors.

To achieve this difficult task I was required to redirect the off task students in a way that instilled in them that I in fact trusted them to be able to achieve these simple goals. I was going to try to thread the needle between allowing freedom and establishing boundaries.

Cycle Two:

Second Cycle Research Question

Can I establish positive rules in the classroom without creating an atmosphere of oppressive control? Is it possible to redirect off task behavior without the use of the coercion or fear that the students have been conditioned to expect? Is it possible to change the attitudes of the most disorderly students without removing the trust showed to the others in the room?

Second Cycle Action

The actions I took in the second cycle were:

Action 1 Student Conference: I had a conference with the few students who were causing the majority of the chaos in the classroom to try to redirect their classroom behavior. The meeting included all of the troubled students at one time and did not include, counselors, administrators or parents. During this meeting I was sure to not threaten punishment or use the fear of failure as a motivating factor. During this circle discussion I provided the students the opportunity to explain their behavior in a safe environment.

Action 2. Seat Assignments. After allowing students to choose their own seats I informed the ‘chaos circle’ that they had forfeited their right to open seat choice and assigned them specific seats on the front outside edges of the room. I informed them that my trust could be re-earned

through better choices in the future and this would allow them to go back to choosing their seats and groups. This allowed the rest of the class to continue to be able to pick their own seats.

Action 3. Group Assignments. I broke up the disruptive students from their group (they had chosen to work together) and distributed the troubled students into other groups. I gave the existing groups the option of allowing the new member in or not, so as to not punish those who had been trust worthy.

Evidence Used

- Questionnaire designed to uncover the students attitudes about the role of the teacher in the classroom
- Teacher Journal of classroom behavior and ‘chaos circle’ discussion

Data Analysis

Using a private survey in which the students were asked questions about their past teachers two questions from the survey were focused on primarily:

Question 1: Without using names describe the worst teacher you ever had, why were they your worst teacher?

Question 5: When your teacher is not forcing you to be ‘good’ in class, how do you act and why?

Trends were displayed when comparing the two classes.

Period five is a heterogeneous class with a wide range of abilities. It is my largest class with 32 students. Two of the students will be moving into the honors section next school year, while two of the students were identified as needing special education assistance for 7th grade. It is my most academically diverse class.

Period four is an honors math class with 24 students, 21 of the 24 are students with exceptional skills and three of the students were misplaced in honors by their 5th grade teachers.

When analyzing the answers to question one a pattern emerged, the honors students had an overwhelmingly more positive opinion of their teachers in general. It is important to note that these students all came from the same elementary schools.

Question 1 Results, March 21, 2010
Describe the worst teacher you ever had?

Percent of students who used a form of the word **YELL**.

Period 5... 48% Period 4... 16.6%

Percent of students who used a form of the word **MEAN**.

Period 5... 51.7% Period 4... 12.5%

Percent who were called or made to feel **STUPID**.

Period 5... 13.7% Period 4... 4%

Percent who, when describing the teachers as **MEAN** or **YELLING** used the phrase "**FOR NO REASON.**"

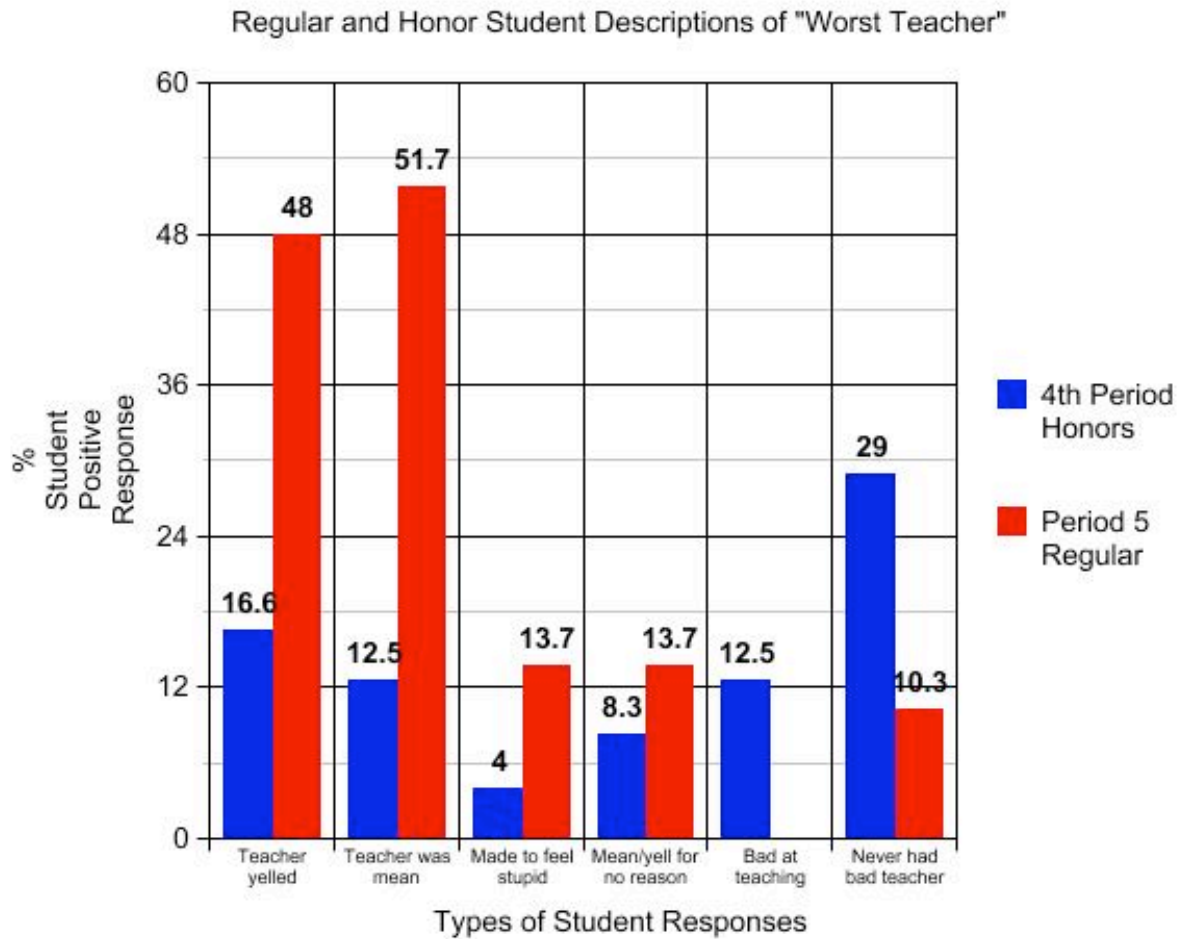
Period 5... 13.7% Period 4... 8.3%

Percent who claimed their teachers were **BAD AT ACTUAL TEACHING**.

Period 5... 0% Period 4... 12.5%

Percent who said that **THEY NEVER HAD A BAD TEACHER**

Period 5... 10.3% Period 4... 29%



Two students obviously had the same “worst teacher” as is evidenced from their responses:

“The worst teacher I ever had called me the devil and that I had an evil seed in me.” 11 year old honors student.

“The worst teacher I ever had pointed out all the students that had the bad grades and bad behavior and said that we were born with an evil seed.” 12 year old honors student.

Question 5

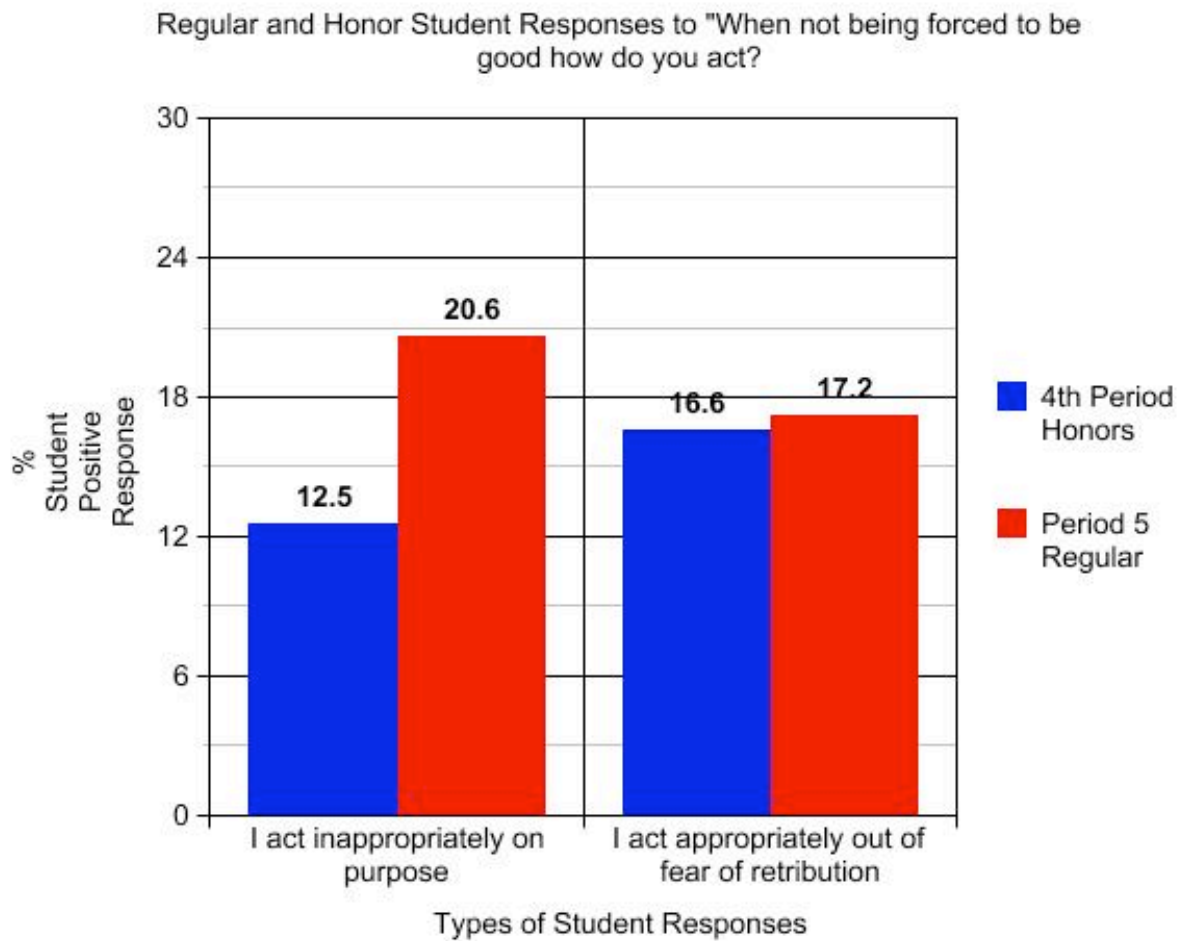
When not being forced to be good how do you act? Why?

Percent of students who claimed to **act inappropriately on purpose** when not being forced to behave.

Period 5... 20.6% Period 4... 12.5%

Percent of students who **did choose to act appropriately out of fear of retribution**

Period 5... 17.2% Period 4... 16.6%



Period 5 quote on choosing to be bad:

"I act bad in class because I am not scared of him and I walk around in class, I do whatever I want because I am not scared of the teacher. I just feel like doing these stuff when I am not scared of this teacher." 11 year old regular education student.

"I act all weird and random because its really funny. A lot of people like funny. Plus, I would want to make the teacher annoyed." 11 year old honors student.

‘Chaos Circle’ Teacher notes.

Students who were invited to the circle discussion for inappropriate behavior were:

From Period 5 K.H 504 behavior student (11 year old male), R.G. mainstreamed ELL student (11 year old male), I. J. regular education student (11 year old male), S.S. Unidentified SPED

student (11 year old female), T.M unidentified SPED student (12 year old female), J.E. regular education student (11 year old male).

From Period 4 S.Y. honors student (11 year old female), J.C. present honors student who was demoted to regular education for 7th grade (12 year old male).

**Observations and quotes from the discussion.
Lunch, April 14th, 2010.**

S.Y. and J.C. (honors) are visibly shocked to be sitting in a circle discussion about behavior with this group of kids. K.H. recognizes this fact and begins harassing S.Y. about being a “loser too.” Interesting that he included the “too.”

S.S. and T.M. are typically silent as the four boys from period five set about destroying the meeting, especially K.H.

I open the discussion with a short list of questions and ask the students to raise their hands for yes and leave them down for no.

Do you like being allowed to sit wherever you want? 8 yes/ 0 no.

Do you like being allowed to pick who you will work with? 8 yes? 0 no.

Do you believe you have been doing what is expected of you in class? 2 yes/ 6 no. (one yes from each class pd. 5 T.M. and pd 4 J.C.)

Do you need me to be mean in order for you to do what you know you are supposed to do? 4 yes/ 4 no (all four pd. 5 boys said they required me to be mean).

I then asked for a discussion... *If you were the teacher what would you do to fix this problem we are having in class?*

J.E. “You have to yell more mister.”

K.H. “Give us detention and make us pick up garbage, that’s the only way I am going to do anything!”

Follow up question... So that works in your other classes... you do your work for Miss K.?

K.H. “Hell no! I hate that b*#&h! Sorry Mister, I just hate her so much.”

Me. “So then why would you want me to do the same thing?”

K.H. “Because it’s the only way I will behave.”

Me. *“So you don’t do work for either of us, but you are quiet for her and don’t bother your neighbors?”*

K.H. *“Yeah, sometimes.”*

I.J. *“You cause trouble in all of your classes K.H.!” (student used child’s first name)*

K.H. (Making his traditional battle cry woop that he does all of the time, K.H. stood up and shouted) *“You Know!!” with great pride.*

The conversation broke down at this point. I informed the students that they had the opportunity to regain my trust by acting appropriately in class, however until then they have lost the right to choose their seat and choose their groups. I informed them that I would be choosing for them and that the only way to regain my trust was to “do what they know is expected of them in class.” The 5th period boys all complained and grumbled as the meeting ended.

Selected Entries from teacher observations.

April 20, 2010 Period 5 *K.H. back from a 3-day suspension.*

After four great classes in which, 29 of 31 students were on task for the majority of the classes (S.S. and R.G. the lone exceptions) K.H. came back to school. In his absence I did not have to prompt the opening “Do Now” exercise for the class, they all came into the room, sat down and began their work. Conversations were predominantly about math and were of an acceptable volume level.

K.H. entered the room and announced loudly “I’m back!” and then did a dance in the front of the room.

Student “You know it was quiet while you were gone!”

K.H. walks a loop around the room on his way to his desk and disrupts 2/3 the class. I am forced to prompt the “Do Now” for the first time in 4 classes. I.J. and J.E. are off task for the day due to K.H.’s return.

May 3, 2010 Period 4 (honors)

Challenged my honors class today with a set of “Do Now” questions which, were very difficult. Students were given 9th grade algebra problems which required them to use all of the skills we had been learning all year and synthesize them into a new set of problem solving strategies. Even though the ‘do now’ has been an individual task to start class all year (students are allowed to get the occasional hint from their neighbor) today the kids did something amazing.

When they sat down R.F. (the most gifted math student in the room) asked “Mister do we know how to do these?”

I responded “I don’t know? Do you? Give them a try!”

Without permission the class quickly reorganized into their learning groups and began attacking the problems. Math conversations were not only happening within groups but also from group to group. When we checked the answers several of the groups had solved 4 of the 5 questions. As we checked the answers the kids cheered... this was a great day to be a teacher.

Reflection.

After Cycle 1 I was surprised by the student surveys especially their answers to the question ‘how many of your teachers care about you?’ 85.5% answered most or all, with 48% saying all of their teachers care about them. This was shocking to me because two of the six teachers these children had this year were, in my opinion, oppressive to the point of being mentally abusive, I believe this because of regular conversations with the teachers and because I can hear them yelling on a nearly daily basis from three rooms away. This led me to try and discover the children’s attitudes about what it means to be a ‘bad teacher.’ I needed to know what their perceptions were about the teacher’s role and their role in the classroom. When my ‘chaos circle’ had their round table discussion I was shocked to hear the young men demand that I treat them harshly. Why had they internalized this need to be abused? What was their motivation?

In the face of overwhelming success with the bulk of the students, was I going to have to teach the class through oppressive tactics to control the few? Was the classroom they were used to, the one that destroyed trust and created an atmosphere of fear the only way to control the small minority of students? The honors students were three times as likely to say ‘they never had a bad teacher’ even though all of the students came from the same schools with the same teachers. The regular education class was 5 times as likely to use the words ‘mean’ and ‘yelled’ while describing bad teachers, again all having the same teachers. Yet it was the regular education class students who wanted me to yell and be mean. It appeared that this was an

example of self-fulfilled prophecy, I had removed what they new as normal and even though it was for the positive they appeared to be very thrown by the change itself.

It was the same children who claimed their teachers were mean and yelled that answered the question ‘How do you act when you are not forced to be good?’ with answers like... *“I act bad in class because I am not scared of him and I walk around in class, I do whatever I want because I am not scared of the teacher...”* fear seems to be their primary motivation. Many of those who chose to act good in a class did so out of fear, and for the first time in the survey it did not matter whether the student was a regular-ed student or an honors student 17% were ‘good’ to avoid retribution even when none was presented. Their fear seems to have become ingrained.

I struggled with how I was going to let the minority effect my actions in the classroom I decided to continue teaching the class with trust and freedom as the guiding principal. With those who were seeking drama I simply moved them quietly and politely to the ‘work-alone’ station in the corner of the room and allowed the rest to continue without the fear of the few punishing the many.

Cycle Three.

Early in cycle 2, I reexamined the pressures placed on the students by the system in which they were being educated. After removing the seating charts, room entry requirements and labor based punishment (garbage collection) I looked to the final top down edict of which these children were subject to, outside monthly computerized testing. The feeder schools from which the vast majority of these students come are now, and have been, in restructuring since the children have been in the first grade.

Under Edison Education, our students have been subject to monthly Language Arts and Mathematics exams since 1st grade. Scores are posted, students who receive scores of 72% or

higher are awarded monthly certificates and those that do not reach the desired score are singled out for 'help' and unfortunately often ridicule. Students are required to post their scores each month on the first and second page of their planners which they are required to carry at all times. The bar graph that is half a page requires the student to pencil in a 1-inch wide and 6-inch high (if they get an 100%, much shorter for most kids scores) bar graph at the end of the exam, I believe reinforcing their feelings of failure.

Third cycle research question.

Is the constant monitoring through high stakes monthly exams for which, there can be no studying and no test preparation by the teacher, reinforcing the students lack of self trust and inhibiting feelings of success for the students.

Third cycle action.

In my final action I withheld my classes from taking the Edison exams for the months of March and April choosing to only give the students the May Edison exam on the final day of instruction for the year. Would giving my students a three-month break from the monthly exam, created on the Mainland, in a language that few of them understood, give them enough time to build self-trust in their math abilities?

Evidence used.

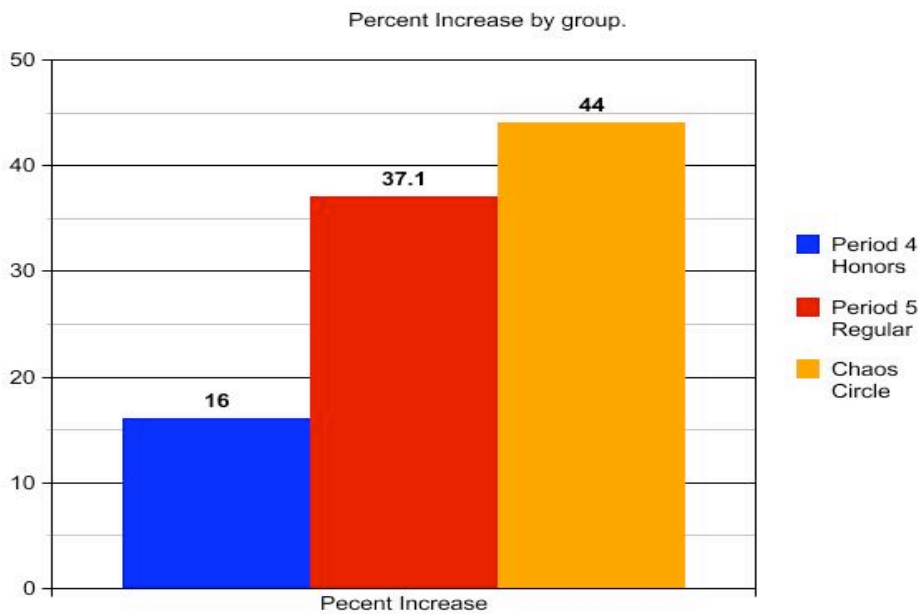
Test scores for the monthly exams for each student over the course of the year.

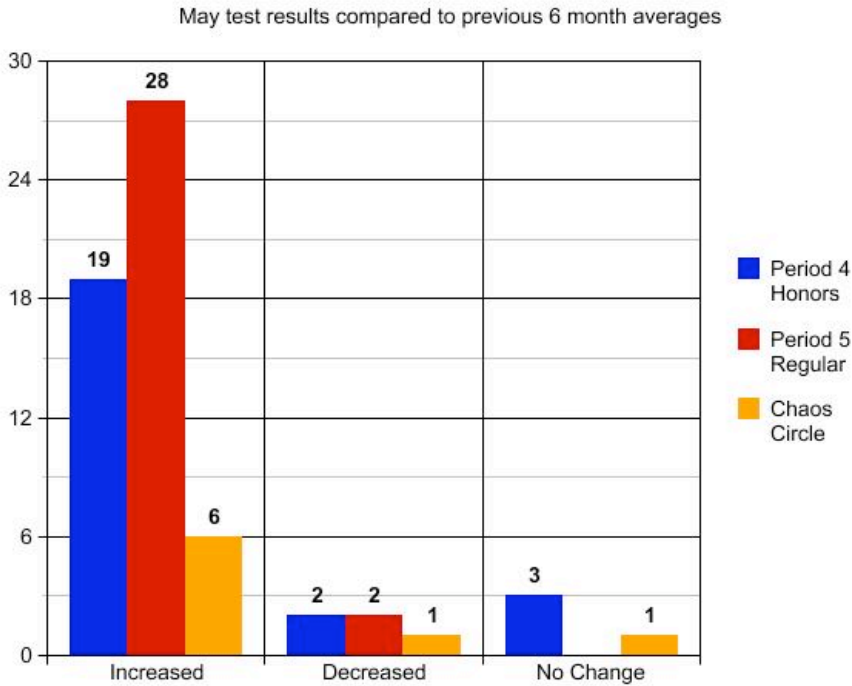
Data Analysis

When comparing the averages of the previous six months worth of test scores and the test scores from the May exams (after the two month hiatus) the data showed that 87% of students showed an increase in their May test scores compared to their yearly average, 7.4% showed a

decrease in their May test scores compared to their yearly average, and 5.6% showed no statistical change in score (plus or minus 1%).

Of the 87% who showed improvement in their scores the Honors students showed a percent increase of 16%, the heterogeneous class showed a percent increase of 37.1%, and the small group of students known as ‘the chaos circle’ showed a percent increase of 44%.





Period 4.

19/24 saw a rise in scores from an average of 74.7% up to an average May score of 86.7% for a percent increase of 16%.

2/24 saw a drop in scores with their averages of 77% dropping in May to an average of 70% for a percent decrease of 4.9%

3/24 students saw no statistical change (plus or minus less than 1% test scores)

Period 5

28/30 saw a rise in scores from an average of 54.7% up to an average May score of 75% a percent increase of 37.1%

2/30 saw a drop in score from an average of 40.3% dropping in May to an average of 34% for a percent decrease of 21.2%

The Chaos Circle (6 students from period 5 and 2 from period 4)

6/8 saw a rise in scores from their average of 44.5% to an average May score of 64.1% for a percent increase of 44%

1/8 saw a decrease in scores from his average of 42.6% dropping in May to an average of 36% for a percent decrease of 23.7%

1/8 students had no statistical change in score (plus or minus less than 1% test scores)

The students showed marked improvement over the course of the second semester. I was thrilled to see test scores improve for 87% of the students in my classes when compared to their average scores for the previous 6 months. The two classes for whom I took these actions saw a marked improvement over my other two classes, period-4 84% average, period-5 72% average vs. period-2 63% average and period-3 61.5% average. My honors class saw a smaller percent increase in their overall scores due to the simple mathematical fact that they were already scoring high to start with, however my heterogeneous period 5 saw a percent increase of 37% in May over their average scores.

Those students who saw their May scores go down only missed, on average, 2 additional questions on the test. Not only did the vast majority of students see marked improvement but also, the students who gave me the most trouble because of their newfound freedom showed the most improvement.

The 'chaos circle' had 75% of the members show increases in their May test scores. When compared to their 6-month averages the 6 students showed a percent increase of 44%. To my utter amazement even K.H, who was the most vocal and ardent demander of harsh treatment, not only showed improvement but scored a 72% on his May exam which earned him his first math certificate of 'on-grade-level' performance ever.

Final Reflection:

By removing the threat of fear and showing my students that I trusted them, positive outcomes arose. Allowing the students the freedom to work together and speak with their friends at first resulted in off topic conversations but as the months proceeded, the conversations became overwhelmingly mathematical in nature. I challenged them to use math in ways that they had rarely done before, activities were constructivist, hands-on and applicable to them. For example

when examining algebra we went outside with stop watches and tennis balls and timed descents to deduce heights, they played with math to prove who could throw a ball the highest. They argued math to prove they were correct. They laughed and learned in an environment that was fun. I showed them that I trusted them to make good decisions and the overwhelming majority returned that trust by being trustworthy.

John Dewey said, "Education is a social process. Education is growth. Education is, not a preparation for life; education is life itself." How can a social process like constructivist learning prosper in fear, distrust and silence? This researcher has come to believe, after this process, that it cannot. Why is it that so many classrooms are mired in old thinking about learning? How is it that anti-social classroom models linger in the age of constant connection? How is it that teachers still believe that children who are in constant contact with nearly everyone they know via cell phones, text messages, email, and social networking would learn best in isolation?

Through this process of doing my action research project I realized several things about myself as a teacher, first I believe in the power of an active and noisy classroom. It is time that education realizes that the old model is no longer relevant, the world has changed, the students have changed, the book has changed, the library has changed and it is time the classroom change as well. It is time that that Papert's mythical time traveling teacher from the 18th century be just as lost while visiting a 21st century classroom as the 18th century surgeon would be in a 21st century operating room.

During this process of personal examination, learning theory investigation, and action research I truly believe that I have improved my teaching because of the process. Never one to shy away from sharing, what I believed were controversial beliefs about what a classroom environment should look like, I found myself armed with the theories of Dewey, Piaget, and

Vygotsky to support my beliefs. Edison education walked through my classroom at least once a week with clipboards and cold blank stares, with some weeks seeing three to four groups walking into my room unannounced. Through my action research I found myself armed with quality learning theory to back up what to some may have looked like a chaotic classroom. I could quickly point out ‘why’ I was doing what it was I was doing, and that was the most liberating feeling for me as a teacher.

Action research provided me with the data necessary to support what I had always believed, not only for those walking through my room in an observational capacity, but also for myself. Believing and proving are very different things and my action research allowed me to prove to myself that I was taking the correct steps. Without the collection of data on the positives occurring in the classroom the disruptions of the few would have quickly led me to abandon the actions, which I believe, were instrumental in the children’s success.

As I examine the effects this process has had on my perception of my profession, I realize that this process once started can never be stopped. I must be able to justify my actions if I intend, as I do, to continue to push education in a direction I believe it must go. My ultimate take away from this research is that if I am to create trusting students who are receptive to learning I must employ an army of teachers to my task. I believe the mutual-trust-based classroom model’s largest stumbling block is the cumulative years of ‘lack of trust’ before my students ever reached my room by 6th grade, I must find a way to help other teachers create trust filled constructivist classrooms in every grade starting in kindergarten, or earlier.

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Appendix 1: Initial Student Survey Results

Initial Survey of School Attitudes.

Male_30__ Female__26__

1. Were you born and raised in Hawaii? __45/56 yes__ *

* If you were not born in Hawaii, where did you live before Hawaii?

8 Philippines, 2 California, 1 Texas

2. Choose the answer that best describes how you feel at school this year.

- A. All of my teachers care about me. 48%
- B. Most of my teachers care about me. 37.5%
- C. Some of my teachers care about me. 12.5%
- D. One of my teachers cares about me. 1%
- E. None of my teachers care about me. 0%

3. Choose the answer that best describes how you feel at school this year.

- A. When I am confused about school I go to my teacher first. 21%
- B. When I am confused about school I go to my neighbor first. 9%
- C. When I am confused about school I go to my friend first. 37.5%
- D. When I am confused about school I go to my parent first. 28.5%
- E. When I am confused about school I don't go to anyone. 3.5%

4. Choose the answer that best describes how you feel at school this year.

- A. At my school I feel teachers and students are a big team. 21.5%

<i>B. At my school I feel teachers and students are on two big different teams but working together.</i>	44.5%
<i>C. At my school I feel teachers and students are on two big different teams working against each other.</i>	3.5%
<i>D. At my school I feel teachers are one team and students are in lots of small teams</i>	23.2%
<i>E. At my school everyone is out for themselves</i>	7.2%

Circle the number that best describes how you feel about the following questions using the scale below.

5. My teachers trust what I tell them.

Strongly Disagree 1----- 2----- 3----- 4----- 5 Strongly Agree
 3.6%--3.6%--12.7%--23.6%--**56.4%**

6. I trust what my teachers tell me.

Strongly Disagree 1----- 2----- 3----- 4----- 5 Strongly Agree
 2%--0%--9%--25%--**64%**

7. Other students trust what I tell them.

Strongly Disagree 1----- 2----- 3----- 4----- 5 Strongly Agree
 1.8%--3.7%--22.2%--**37%**--35.2%

8. I trust what other students tell me.

Strongly Disagree 1----- 2----- 3----- 4----- 5 Strongly Agree
 2%--20%--**47%**--26%--4%

9. I believe what I am learning in school matters in my life today.

Strongly Disagree 1----- 2----- 3----- 4----- 5 Strongly Agree
 0%--3.5%--3.5%--14.3%--**78.6%**

10. I believe what I am learning in school will matter when I am grown up.

Strongly Disagree 1----- 2----- 3----- 4----- 5 Strongly Agree
 0%--3.5%--5.3%--18%--**73.2%**

11. **Short Answer...** What stops you from being successful in school?

- 53% of respondents blamed themselves, not doing homework, not listening, not being smart enough
- 15.5% blamed teachers, too much homework, not teaching well
- 31.5% blamed bullies, fights, or fear

Appendix 2: Selected Journal Entries

Teacher Reflection Journal (selected entries)

Journal Entry: Day 1: Cycle 1; Informed students of the removal of the seating chart and

dissolving of established study groups. Informed them that they were going to be treated like

adults as long as they could act like adults and make smart choices. Informed them that I ‘trusted them’ to make smart choices.

Pd. 5 KH exploded with a loud cheer. At which point the entire class yelled at him to be quiet, KG told him that he was going to ruin it for everyone. Kids quieted down and moved seats.

Noisier than normal.

Pd. 4 took changes in stride except SY and SO did far less work than normal, talked through class.

Journal Entry: Day 3: Cycle 1; Pd. 5 Boys KH, RG, & JE are not handling the change well, their production in class which was never high has ground to a halt. Majority of class is working well. With the exception of the three boys, discussions about math versus non-school conversations are running about 60/40. Girls are handling the changes much better than the boys. Pd. 4. SY and SO still showing a drop in production with SY bringing down SO. I am wondering how long SO will choose to sit in her seat. Discussions about math versus non-school conversations are running about 85/15.

Journal Entry: Day 7: Cycle 1; Pd. 5 class revolted against the three boys today because of their constant distractions, I am worried that the few are going to ruin this for the many. I am seeing real differences in the maturity levels especially between the girls and boys.

Journal Entry: Day 8: Cycle 1; Pd. 4 the honors class crushed their test today 19 A’s, 3 B’s, 2 C’s (KP and JP) with SY receiving a very low D. Interesting to watch her get mad at SO for getting a high A she is freaking out about her grade. I asked her if she had been making good decisions for the past couple of weeks and she said no, now to see if she makes better decisions.

Appendix 3: Jennifer's Observations for the first week of new rules.

Week 1: Pd. 4; Tuesday 23/24 students on task. SY combed her hair all class and RQ absent.

Wednesday 23/25 students on task. SY and SO chatted and got little done.

Pd. 5; Tuesday 21/32 students on task. 6 on task for at least half the Class. The boys KH, RG, and JE and the girls LK and SS off task most of the class period.

Thursday 17/32 students on task. A fight at recess had the class going crazy all period.