Student Motivation and Classroom Management

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Setting the Stage

Blaming Others Lesson Plan

This lesson plan includes a series of questions connected to a quotation from President Obama, and a survey that can be used with students to help them measure their own sense of personal responsibility. Although not scientific, it can be used as a tool to get students to think about and see what personal responsibility might look like in their own lives.

Nathanael J. Fast, a University of Southern California professor, found that people could be influenced to take more personal responsibility by reading about others who have done so. In addition, he found that a simple writing activity could enhance a person’s self-image, which in turn would lessen the likelihood of blaming others for their mistakes (Fast & Tiedens, 2010). These findings, along with research results cited earlier in this chapter about the effects of blaming others on the people doing the blaming, compose part of this lesson plan.

Blaming Others Lesson Plan

Instructional Objectives

Students Will:

1. Learn the negative consequences of blaming others for their mistakes and the positive effects of accepting personal responsibility.
2. Articulate these negative and positive effects in writing and verbally, and reflect on their related personal experiences and goals.

**Duration**

One 60-minute class period

**Common Core English Language Arts Standards**

**Reading:**

1. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

**Writing:**

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

**Speaking & Listening:**

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**Language:**

1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing

**Materials**

1. Student copies of personal responsibility quotations sheet (Figure 2.1, page 38), Read Aloud on the effects of blaming others, the Taking Personal Responsibility questionnaire (Figure 2.2, page 39), and the Taking Personal Responsibility survey (Figure 2.3, page 41).
2. Student copies of the self-esteem writing activity (if the teacher wants to use it).
3. Document camera or overhead projector.
4. Computer project and Internet access for showing short video (optional).
Procedure

1. Teacher explains that she is going to distribute sheets sharing several quotes (Figure 2.1, page 38). In partners, she wants students to take turns reading each section to each other. Students are to write a one-sentence summary of each quote, and then write a sentence explaining whether or not they can find anything that they all have in common.

2. If desired, the teacher can play the one-minute video clip of President Obama actually saying the quote on the sheet (http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0209/18344.html).

3. After five minutes, the teacher can ask students to share their summary of one or two of the quotes, and then ask if they found anything in common. Teacher writes what students say on the board, probably something about taking responsibility for mistakes.

4. The teacher explains that, yes, those were examples of people taking responsibility for their mistakes. However, when things don’t go well for us, it’s easy to instead blame somebody else. Teacher gives examples from her life when she has done it. She says that in a few minutes students will get an opportunity to come up with their own similar experiences. She then explains that it can cause problems on a much bigger scale, too. Former aides to President Nixon say his tendency to blame others is what led to his disgrace, and researchers believe that placing blame and not taking personal responsibility is one of the major reasons behind major space accidents at NASA (Fast & Tiedens, 2010).

5. The teacher explains that researchers have been studying the issue of personal responsibility and blaming others. She says she would like to share what they have learned, and says she would like students to read silently with her as she reads a Read Aloud. She places the “Effects of Blaming Others” Read Aloud (page 39) on overhead or document camera and reads what it says. Afterwards, she can distribute copies to students, if desired.

6. Next, she announces that they are going to take a test to see how personally responsible they are. Students should circle one answer for each question. After they are finished, they should add their total—every time they answer number one, they get one point; for answer number two, they get two points, and for answer number three, they get three points. Tell students they should answer honestly and will not be graded on it. It is a tool to help them assess themselves.

7. The teacher distributes the questionnaire (Figure 2.2, page 39) but not the evaluation sheet indicating what the totals mean.
8. After a few minutes, the teacher tells students to total up their scores, and says she is now going to share what the results mean. She shows the analysis sheet on the overhead. She asks students if they agree with what the test says about their level of personal responsibility, and allows students to share their results with classmates—either in partners or with the entire class. She suggests that students keep these test results in mind when they set goals for themselves (see Question 1: How Do You Motivate Students?).

9. Next, the teacher can explain that President Obama spoke about this topic at a commencement address he gave at a high school in 2010. She can place the Taking Personal Responsibility Survey (Figure 2.3, page 41) on the overhead and reads the Obama excerpt (she also has the option of playing a video of it from the Internet; see http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/president-obama-gives-commencement-address-kalamazoo-central-high-school).

10. Then the teacher can explain that students will answer the questions on the survey on their own. She reviews each question, giving her own brief answers to each one. She passes out copies of the survey.

11. After 10 minutes of students writing their answers, she asks students to get into partners and share their responses with each other. During this time, she is identifying students who have particularly thoughtful answers and telling them she will ask them to share their answers with the entire class in a few minutes.

12. After a few minutes in partners, the teacher calls on selected students to share their answers.

13. Students do the assessment activity.

**Assessment**

1. Students can be asked to highlight one piece of information they found most interesting using the ABC format discussed in the previous chapter (see page 17). It will be clear whether or not students have followed the format in their responses.

**Possible Extensions/Modifications**

1. If desired, the teacher can followup immediately with the Self-Esteem Writing Lesson Plan (see page 42).

2. Students could create a poster illustrating what they learned in the lesson.

3. The teacher could ask students to respond to this writing prompt about President Obama’s comments on personal responsibility:
According to President Barack Obama, how should people react when they make mistakes in life? To what extent do you agree or disagree with his opinion? To support your essay, you can use examples from your own experiences, your observations of others, as well as any of your readings, including the president’s speech.

The prompt could be accompanied with a simple graphic organizer with three boxes. The first box could say “They Say,” the second could say “I Say,” and the third could say “Why I Believe What I Say.” That organizer is adapted from the book They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter In Academic Writing by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein (W.W. Norton, 2009).

**Ed Tech: Animation**

Students could create an online animation with a site like Doink (http://www.doink.com/) showing the difference between blaming someone else for a problem and accepting personal responsibility. For more information, see http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2008/05/11/the-best-ways-for-students-to-create-online-animations/.

**Figure 2.1. Examples of Personal Responsibility Quotations**

**Lippi Takes Responsibility for Failure**

Italy coach Marcello Lippi took full responsibility for the reigning champions’ disastrous World Cup exit following Thursday’s dismal 3–2 defeat to debutants Slovakia at Ellis Park.

“I take full responsibility. There are no excuses because when a team comes to something as important as tonight’s game with terror in their legs, their heads and their hearts, and they don’t manage to express themselves, it means that the coach hasn’t prepared them in the right way from a psychological, technical and physical perspective,” he said.

“I take full responsibility, I’m sorry for everyone in Italy but obviously I haven’t prepared this team well enough.

("Lippi Takes Responsibility," 2010)

**Schwarzenegger Takes Responsibility for Failed Initiatives**

Friday, November 11, 2005 Associated Press

SACRAMENTO—Two days after suffering a stinging election defeat, a conciliatory Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger took responsibility for the failure of his initiatives and said he learned that he needs more patience in seeking government reform.

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“The buck stops with me,” he told reporters Thursday during a Capitol news conference, referring to the clean sweep against his proposals in Tuesday’s special election. “I take full responsibility for this election. I take full responsibility for its failure.”

(“Schwarzenegger Takes Responsibility,” 2005)

Read Aloud: Effects of Blaming Others

Researchers have found that people who tend to blame others for their mistakes:

- Don’t learn from their mistakes
- Are at a higher risk for being depressed
- Reach lower achievement levels
- Are liked less by their peers

In other words, by accepting personal responsibility, you:

- Learn from your mistakes
- Are less likely to become depressed
- Reach higher achievement levels
- Are liked more by your peers

Figure 2.2. Taking Personal Responsibility Questionnaire

1. Your girlfriend/boyfriend ends your relationship. Do you...
   1. Badmouth her/him to all your friends.
   2. Think he/she is a loser, but keep it to yourself.
   3. Use it as an opportunity to think about what you might have done to not be a good partner.

2. You don’t do well on a test in class. Do you...
   1. Think the test is unfair and the teacher wanted students to flunk it.
   2. Not care since you’re going to pass the class anyway.
   3. Think you should have studied harder.

3. You hit someone after he/she hits you, and you’re sent to the office. Do you...
   1. Say the other person started it and it’s not your fault.
   2. Say you don’t really remember what happened.
3. Say the other person started it, but you realize you shouldn’t have hit back and didn’t think before you acted.

4. Who would you rather have as a friend. Someone who said…
   1. “It’s the teacher’s fault I got an F. He’s always picking on me and is a lousy teacher.”
   2. “Who cares about school? I don’t need to know most of what they’re teaching.”
   3. “I really blew it in his class. I need to work harder.”

5. Your dog bit someone after he/she tried to pet her. You…
   1. Hit and punish the dog and then get rid of her.
   2. Think the person should have asked you first before he/she tried petting her.
   3. Realize you should have trained your dog better, and decide to start right away.

6. You break a bowl in your kitchen when your mother isn’t home. Do you…
   1. Blame your little brother or sister.
   2. Hope your mother doesn’t discover that she’s missing a bowl.
   3. Tell your mother your broke it before she finds out, say you’re sorry and that you should have been more careful.

7. The teacher is giving a test. Someone talks to you and you respond. The teacher sees you talking and reduces your grade. Do you…
   1. Say the other person talked to you first, and you’re tired of the teacher always picking on you.
   2. Glare at the teacher and roll your eyes, but not say anything.
   3. Say you’re sorry and get back to working on the test.

8. Your homework is late because you stayed up late watching TV and playing video games instead of working on it. Do you…
   1. Think to yourself that the teacher gives too much homework, and just take a zero.
   2. Not say anything, and get the homework in the next day.
   3. Tell the teacher you blew it, and that you’d like the opportunity to make it up, but would understand if he didn’t give it to you.

9. You get stopped for speeding by the police. Do you…
   1. Tell the officer that everybody else was going the same speed and why is he picking on you?
   2. Tell the officer you didn’t realize what the speed limit was, and can he please, please, please give you a break.
   3. Tell the officer you’re sorry, and realize you were speeding.
10. You’re playing baseball or football with some friends on your street. You throw the ball and it accidentally cracks a window in a neighbor’s car. Do you…

1. Run away and think to yourself they shouldn’t have parked their car there, anyway.
2. Go home and tell your parents what happened and ask them what you should do.
3. Write a note saying you’ll pay for the window and leave it on the car window with your name and phone number on it.

Count Up Your Score—One point for every time you answered number one, 2 points for every time you answered number two, and 3 points for every time you answered number three.

**What the Score Means**

If you scored between 24 and 30 points, you tend to take personal responsibility for your actions and learn from your mistakes.

If you scored between 17 and 23 points, you’ve got some work to do, but you have a basic understanding of what personal responsibility means.

If you scored between 10 and 16 points, you should spend more time reflecting on why personal responsibility is important and reread the information about the consequences of blaming others for your mistakes.

**Figure 2.3. Taking Personal Responsibility Survey**

Don’t make excuses. Take responsibility not just for your successes, but for your failures as well.

The truth is, no matter how hard you work, you won’t necessarily ace every class or succeed in every job. There will be times when you screw up, when you hurt the people you love, when you stray from your most deeply held values.

And when that happens, it’s the easiest thing in the world to start looking around for someone to blame. Your professor was too hard; your boss was a jerk; the coach was playing favorites; your friend just didn’t understand.

President Barack Obama, commencement address at Kalamazoo High School June 7, 2010

("President Obama Gives Commencement,” 2010)

1. Please think about times somebody has blamed you for something, when it was really their responsibility. Write about at least one time here:
2. Please think about times when you have blamed someone else for your mistake. Write about at least one time here:

3. Please think about times when you have taken responsibility for your mistakes. Write about at least one time here:

4. Next time you feel like blaming someone, what could you do instead? What could help you remember to do this?

5. If I take more personal responsibility, and blame others less, I think it will make me feel ____________________.