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## **How to Say Nothing and Everything at the Same Time: A White Teacher, Students of Color, and the Trial and Error of Building Relationships of Opportunity with ENVoY**

Melissa Bougie

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HOW TO SAY NOTHING AND EVERYTHING AT THE SAME TIME: A WHITE  
TEACHER, STUDENTS OF COLOR, AND THE TRIAL AND ERROR OF  
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS OF OPPORTUNITY WITH ENVOY

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts in Teaching.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

## Research Question

This project seeks to address the intersection between academic success and student-teacher relationships. While starting my career as a white educator working with primarily students of color, I have been faced with many hard questions about how our education system serves my students. The general consensus from teachers, administrators, and researchers, and my general impression from looking at my own education practices in the mirror, is that we are not doing it right. The achievement gap is widening. The research is showing that relationships matter, but in practice, there is not much guidance for what that means specifically for students and teachers, whose main goal is to cultivate learning communities that offer opportunities for academic success. My impression is that this gap between research and practice with education's favorite buzzword, relationships, is leading to education malpractice, especially between white teachers and students of color. This project seeks to identify how ENVoY's Classroom Management system might be an important filler for these growing gaps between white, affluent students and everybody else--guiding teachers in how to actually build meaningful relationships that actually serve their students. My research question is: *How might ENVoY's classroom management techniques impact relationships and academic success in diverse classroom settings?*

Research is showing us that relationships with students are important. Murray (2009) found that relationships are one of the biggest contributors to positive student functioning at school. While this generally applies to all students, the research shows that it is especially true for students who are exposed to high levels of stress, or as Murray

(2009) calls them in the title of his study, “low-income urban youth” (Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Murray & Greenberg, 2001; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995). But Jones, Jones, & Vermette (2013) state that classroom management may be the most important factor contributing to student success at school, as well. This shows an essential connection between classroom management practices and relationship building. However, I notice an important lack of understanding about how this connection works amongst teachers, schools, and districts. As a teacher who serves students primarily of color, in a system that is not necessarily designed to serve them, it feels even more pertinent that I ask: what classroom management system *will* serve them, what types of relationships do they *really* need, and how do I ensure that the choices I make in regards to classroom management techniques and relationship building lead to my ultimate goal, which is academic achievement for each of my students? These inquiries lead me to the research question being investigated in this capstone.

Through this project, I use a defined classroom management system called ENVoY as my focus. ENVoY stands for Educational Non-Verbal Yardsticks and was created by Michael Grinder. It uses non-verbal communication as a cornerstone to classroom management. The goal of the system is to preserve relationships with students and use influence rather than power to ensure academic success through our classroom management choices. I will use Michael Grinder’s *ENVoY: Your personal guide to classroom management* as a focus text for this project as I explore how implementing ENVoY (Grinder, 2018) might affect relationships between white students and teachers of color that increase academic achievement in a racially diverse high school setting.

## **Overview**

In this chapter, I first discuss how the topic for my project has developed over time from when I first started working in education until now. Then I provide an introduction to ENVoY, which is followed by a discussion of the various implications for why my topic matters to me in my specific educational context, and how it might prove useful for others in different educational contexts. Additionally, I consider how my project fits contextually inside broader questions in education, and how my research topic might give insight to those broader questions.

## **Journey to My Research Topic**

Between my junior and senior years of college, I found myself teaching in a summer program for youth who had been picked out as possessing traits that indicated that they may be affected by the opportunity gap. The opportunity gap is a play on the phrase “achievement gap” which points to a gap in student achievement that is predictable by race. However, the phrase “opportunity gap” instead of focusing on a lack of achievement, which focuses on the deficits of students, “opportunity gap” indicates the difference in opportunities students receive from the system that is predictable by race, thus focusing on the deficits of the system to serve all students adequately (Pedakur & Harper, 2016). Darden and Cavendish (2012) found in their research that “schools with large poor and minority populations—usually in urban or large suburban settings—often have overpopulated classrooms, fewer well-trained, properly credentialed and experienced teachers, and less in overall resources than schools with higher



socioeconomic status” (p. 63). This indicates that perhaps students are not achieving less due to their race, but due to a lack of opportunities provided to them by the system.

I had applied for the summer program excitedly, standing behind the mission to offer more educational opportunities and resources to students who had been unfairly offered less. I then got the job, and started in with the first two weeks of training. They told us all about their lesson plan template and gave us long lectures about the plagues of the opportunity gap. They even had us role-play classroom management situations. However, with three years of teacher training under my belt, I felt more than prepared and did not think I had much to learn from these two weeks of training; my co-workers on the other hand, many who were not in school for this, were *really* the ones who were in for it on that first day.

I fleshed out extremely detailed lesson plans, put together how I was going to teach routines, and readied myself for the first day where I found myself staring at a group of black students swearing across the room at each other, with no regard for the teacher (me) in the front of the room. From my position as a white person in a room of people of color and knowing I was somehow supposed to be “in charge” of them, the racial power dynamic suddenly felt visceral. While these students were just acting like typical high schoolers, I suddenly found myself feeling unprepared and uncertain about being in this power dynamic of teacher and student that was also so racially charged. Classroom management instantly became more complicated: relying on my positional authority flew out the window.

I do not remember how I got them to stop swearing, but this was the first of many classroom management mishaps that summer. Students frequently did everything under the sun except work on the content I prepared for them. They watched videos, listened to music, texted their friends, continued to swear across the room at each other, painted their nails, and ate snacks.

Quickly, my content and classroom management attempts slipped. We turned to what we called “inquiry projects” where students watched videos I chose for them on a topic of their choice and filled out worksheets, sometimes. While my content and classroom control fell to the wayside, my relationships with students bloomed. Students really *liked* me! I was having *fun*! We got along, shared laughs, and I learned a lot about my students lives and students learned a lot about me. This is what education *is really about*, I thought to myself.

There were often conflicts between philosophies in classroom management with my coworkers at the time. While some firmly believed that the pedagogical emphasis should be placed on nurturing positive relationships (which I thought I was doing), others felt strongly that students should be held accountable for their actions and the focus in the classroom should be placed firmly on academic learning. I continued blindly, however, with the belief that “relationships”--for which I had no real definition of at the time--, especially for *these* students, was what really mattered. In one particularly poignant discussion with my coworkers, I remember saying that it felt “historically inappropriate” to manage black students, as a white teacher. In reply, one of my black coworkers said something that planted a seed, “it’s historically inappropriate *not* to manage black

students.” I do not remember exactly how I replied, but I am sure it would not have been in a way that I would be proud of today (as very little of this experience is). That summer, I learned a hard lesson, one that would not really solidify for me until I landed in my own classroom, two years later, in a school with 80% students of color, about 30% of which are black.

This past year, I taught all ninth grade English, with three of my sections co-taught with an English Language Learners teacher. This time, I had a bit more experience under my belt, and felt more prepared to take on a classroom of students, without a chip on my shoulder. Little did I know at the time that my co-teacher practiced ENVoY classroom management techniques, and actually served as an ENVoY coach at a previous job. When I heard about ENVoY for the first time, I had no idea what it was--just that others called it “amazing” and that my co-teacher was “the best” and I was all for getting on board with some amazing classroom management skills.

### **Non-Verbal Classroom Management and ENVoY**

Early in the year, before I had received any ENVoY training, my then co-teacher introduced me to my first glimpse of non-verbal classroom management skills. I had just released the class to work on an assignment, and immediately started to circulate around the room, answering questions and getting students started. Of course students were not actually getting started--they were talkative, on their phones, some were starting to get on task--, and my co-teacher had us both go up to the front of the room, where there were directions on the board. We both stood on either side of the directions, and silently pointed at them. If students asked us a question, we just made the hand signal for “one

second” and continued to look at our directions on the board, standing silently. What I did not know at the time, was that this was actually a specific ENVoY skill, and one of the important “seven gems” called “The Most Important Twenty Seconds” (Grinder, 2018). This first time though, I felt so awkward. Just standing there and staring at the board? Not helping students? This was going against everything I felt I had been taught about teaching! But gradually, a hush started to come over the room, and students quieted down. I turned towards my class, and for the first time, most students were doing exactly what they were supposed to--sitting down, with the materials in front of them, getting to work. I was shocked. My co-teacher then motioned for us to slowly circle the room. We answered a few questions from students quietly, crouching down to their level and using a whispering voice , and then headed to our desks. Every single student was working. This felt like absolute magic. From then on, I was hooked. In November, I attended the official ENVoY training and started implementing even more non-verbal classroom management in my room, focusing on what ENVoY calls *the seven gems*: “Freeze Body”, “ABOVE (Pause) Whisper”, “Raise Your Hand”, “Exit Directions”, “Most Important Twenty Seconds”, “Influence Approach” “OFF/Neutral/ON” (Grinder, 2018). I will discuss each of these skills and their role in the classroom in Chapter Two. Once I started implementing these skills, things were not perfect, but I started to feel less out of control as a teacher. I could keep students engaged with the content, and my fear of how students might react to management decisions disappeared. I knew I could hold my ground with non-verbals, de-escalate situations as they arose, and began to see how managing my actions in the classroom could influence student behavior, rather than

managing student behavior influencing how I acted. This switch radically changed the power dynamics in the room, allowing for relationships with students to thrive through the content--rather than feeling, as I did in my first teaching experience, that relationships with students were somehow in battle with the content of the course. These experiences started to get me more interested in ENVoY as part of the solution to a big problem--the opportunity gap for students of color. I started to really ask myself--how do we define for teachers how to create academic opportunities for students through the way we manage our classrooms and the way we relate with students?

At my school, ENVoY is not utilized throughout the school, and I started to notice differences in my classroom that did use ENVoY and other classrooms that didn't. I started to discover that other white teachers had the same problems in their classrooms that I had faced initially in teaching, and still faced, albeit on a smaller scale. As a teaching staff, we shallowly seemed to all be on the same page: relationships with students were important, we had high expectations, creating equitable opportunities for students of all backgrounds mattered. But, as I watched, those phrases seemed to never be clarified, and thus, lost their meaning. We all knew these were things that should be happening, but how do we make them all happen simultaneously? What is a high expectation? Why do relationships with students matter? How do we create an equitable learning environment? I could see that whenever a white teacher or administrator seemed to do one of these things, the other two fell by the wayside. Each teacher seemed to prioritize either relationships or content, but as a first-year teacher, I felt constantly conflicted between creating relationships with students, managing my classroom, and

actually teaching content. I knew I had to be intentional about where I landed. I took a note from my early mistakes and listened carefully to the teachers of color I worked with and the parents of my students, listening to their very high expectations for the young people of color in their lives. They were not going to beat around the bush when it came to behavior or low academic performance, and if they weren't, neither was I. They were relational with students, but held expectations high. They were not afraid of a confrontation. I knew for me, however, as a white teacher, how I related with students might be different. I had a history of power standing behind me that constantly threatens to get in the way of my students' success, especially my students of color. Here is where I relied on ENVoY and especially the seven gems (Grinder, 2018). Anecdotally, it has proven to be a method that produces a clearer version of the classroom culture I sought to cultivate: a space where students had more freedom to be who they are, to bring their whole selves into the classroom, while still ensuring students equitable academic success in a system that is inherently white. It allows me to lead with influence rather than power, a skill as a white teacher that I find incredibly important as I function in a racist system. Influencing students relies on managing our own behavior as teachers, where as using power with students relies on managing student behavior. While before implementing ENVoY I might have engaged in more power struggles, seeking instead to influence their behavior with management of my own behavior gave students more freedom to use their voice and make their own behavioral decisions. I name this new dynamic building "relationships of opportunity", relying heavily on the philosophy of behavioral influence that ENVoY suggests. In the relationships that I saw emerge with ENVoY, students were

given opportunities in the spaces where I communicated nonverbally. Instead of being forced through a power struggle to change a behavior, students were given a choice to change their behavior. They were influenced through the ENVoY skills I employed. The way I related with them created an opportunity for their academic engagement. This differs greatly from other relationship tactics that I see white teachers use, which can often close off an academic opportunity.

### **Purpose of Project**

Much of what I shared above emerged organically as I began to implement ENVoY in my classroom without much outside structure. While many schools and districts have ENVoY coaching support built into their system, my specific school does not. I also found that while there is a lot of classroom management content for teachers on the internet, there is little- to- none that is ENVoY specific. Teachers are often left to believe that classroom management and building relationships with students is just an art that some have and others don't. Thus, my project seeks to fill both of these gaps. This school year, I want to create a structure for myself to implement ENVoY skills in my classroom with more structure and purpose. I also want to share my experiences with ENVoY and classroom management with other teachers in an honest way that lets other teachers see that classroom management can be intentional and strategies-based: that they can build relationships of opportunity for students through classroom management.

In writing a blog detailing my personal experiences implementing ENVoY with my personal set of students, I hope to provide some insight for other teachers who are working towards creating a more equitable environment in their classroom, or

administrators who are thinking about how they can help their school achieve all three of the goals I mentioned earlier--high expectations for all students, strong relationships between students and school staff, and an equitable learning environment in each classroom through ENVoY implementation. The literature, some of which is summarized in Chapter Two, speaks to all three of these objectives, and discusses non-verbal classroom management, but rarely paints a picture for how all three of these goals can work together, especially while focusing specifically on white teachers who serve students of color. With my blog, I hope to fill in the gap between the theoretical and the practical. We know that relationships, academic success, and classroom management exist concurrently in practice, in an actual high school classroom with actual students. Through reflection and dialogue with others, my project, a blog chronicling my experiences implementing ENVoY, seeks to fill the practical gap: where do relationships, academic success, and classroom management intersect in the high school classroom? How might nonverbal classroom management practices impact that intersection?

### **Summary**

I began Chapter One by stating my research question, and providing an overview of the chapter. I then began sharing pieces of the journey that led me to my research question. I discussed my first experience in the classroom, and how that started to shape how I saw my role as a teacher. I then discussed my first year teaching, and shared my first exposure to ENVoY non-verbal classroom management. This was followed by a discussion on the implementation of ENVoY in my classroom, and the results I have seen



anecdotally. I then offered how this project might be useful to me in my teaching practice, but also how it may be useful to others.

In Chapter Two, I will review the literature that already exists to help contextualize and guide my project. I discuss the definition of classroom management, focus in on non-verbal classroom management, and then move to discussing ENVoY in particular. In Chapter Two I also discuss the research behind healthy student-teacher relationships and the role non-verbal communication plays in those relationships. I also discuss the conditions students need for academic success and implications for students affected by the opportunity gap and white teachers who work with those students. In Chapter Three, I will give a detailed overview of my project and discuss my rationale for why I decided to write a blog as my project. I address who I expect my audience to be, as well as the setting that my project will take place in. I also brainstorm how I will know my project is effective and what the timeline for my project will look like. In Chapter Four, I will share my evaluation of my project's success and what I learned along the way, as well as discuss the limitations of my project and what next steps one might take for further research on this topic. I also return to the literature review, discussing the benefits my project has for the profession as a whole.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research that already exists in regards to my topic. I will start out by exploring classroom management. I will discuss what classroom management is, why it is important, and provide an explanation of what ENVoY specifically is and what skills it focuses on. I will then focus on student-teacher relationships, explaining the nuances of these relationships, and what aspects of the student-teacher relationship are important to cultivate. Next, I will dive into why relationships and classroom management practices matter, considering what exactly contributes to student academic success and the barriers students might face, especially the students I work with over the course of this project. Then, I will provide an explanation for how my blog will fill a gap in the research landscape and identify more specific research questions that my project plans to address, in addition to my main research question: *How might ENVoY's classroom management techniques impact relationships and academic success in diverse classroom settings?*

#### **Classroom Management**

## **Defining Classroom Management**

The job of a classroom teacher generally falls into two broad, distinct categories: content and management. While many teachers receive extensive training in their content area and delivery of instruction, classroom management training is generally lacking (Stough, 2006). That leaves many teachers with a big gap in understanding: what is classroom management and how do I do it? Lasonde and Lasonde (2010) point to two purposes of classroom management that help to define exactly what it is: the ability to control the learning environment, and the ability to control student behavior within that learning environment. According to Jones, Jones, and Vermette (2013), this means that classroom management specifically looks at the decisions teachers make, student-teacher relationships, and the expectations that they set for students. Classroom management thus differs from discipline which refers to consequences students receive for specific behaviors they display (Lasonde and Lasonde, 2010).

There are many reasons why classroom management is an important topic to consider. In fact, classroom management may be the most important factor contributing to student success at school (Jones, Jones, & Vermette, 2013). Classroom management takes up a big chunk of our time as teachers. Marzano (2003) cites Cotton (1990) who shares that issues regarding student behavior take up at least half of teachers' instructional time. Wubbels (2011) also notes reasons why developing strong classroom management skills as a teacher is important. He offers that poor management can lead to increased poor behavior and teacher burnout, while good classroom management can lead to greater academic achievement and student independence with learning (Wubbels,

2011). But this begs the question: what stands in between classroom management and greater academic achievement? What should good classroom management be leading to specifically in order to nurture academic achievement, especially for students of color?

Gregory and Ripski (2008) note three approaches to classroom management that are often used by teachers. The first is a traditional or custodial approach that believes teachers serve as parental figures and should thus be respected as such (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Hoy & Jalovick, 1979; Metz, 1978). Second is the behavioral approach which focuses on rewarding positive behavior in an effort to encourage more of the wanted behavior (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Lewis, Newcomer, Trussell, & Richter, 2006). The final approach Gregory and Ripski (2008) share is considered the relational approach, which encourages teachers to focus on building emotionally attached relationships with students (Hamre & Pianta, 2006).

Jones, Jones, and Vermette (2013) expand deeply on the relational approach exploring eight different components to effective classroom management. With the eight components, they complicate the understanding that relating with students is just “connecting with students about their lives and being available to their emotional needs” (Gregory & Ripski, 2008, p. 339), but that approaching classroom management through the relational approach means holding students to high academic standards of achievement using openness, helpfulness, and respect to help them get there (Jones, Jones, & Vermette, 2013). The eight components they present as part of a highly effective relational approach to classroom management include student-teacher relationships, high expectations for student behavior, non-verbal cues and redirection,

teacher consistency, teacher perseverance and assertiveness, capitalizing on human resources, restorative justice, and school wide consistency for student behavior (Jones, Jones, & Vermette, 2013).

### **Non-verbal Classroom Management**

Jones, Jones, and Vermette (2013) cite Larivee (2009), who points to a core standard of effective classroom management: that all management exists on a continuum, with non-verbal cues being the techniques we draw on first as classroom managers. Zeki (2009) suggests that interpersonal communication in general is mostly nonverbal. ENVoY focuses deeply on these non-verbal cues and aspires to cultivate effective use of non-verbal cues in teachers (Grinder, 2018). The goal would be to not *have* to move further up the continuum if the non-verbal cues are effectively utilized, since most of our communication is non-verbal. This then means that if our relationships with students are based in communication with them about our high academic standards and our openness, helpfulness, and respect towards them (Jones, Jones, & Vermette, 2013), then we need to ensure that our communication of those things are nonverbal. Jones, Jones, and Vermette (2013) assert that each of those eight components must be non-verbally communicated to our students in order to ensure effective classroom management. This is where ENVoY can help us answer the question--how do we communicate openness, helpfulness, and respect to students nonverbally?

**ENVoY.** Non-verbal classroom management refers to the variety of ways teachers use non-verbal communication techniques to manage the classroom. Some non-verbal techniques might be broadly categorized by body language, proximity,

silence, and non-response (Grubaugh, 1989). Wada (2016) notes a wide variety of other non-verbal communication categories that may be utilized for classroom management purposes. In addition to those noted by Grubaugh (1989), she includes gestures, breathing, paralinguistics, eye-gaze, haptics, pictures and written directions, posture, and classroom appearance.

ENVoY (Educational Non-Verbal Yardsticks), in particular, is a non-verbal classroom management system created by Michael Grinder. As defined in Chapter One, ENVoY utilizes various non-verbal communication techniques to manage student behavior and learning in a way that cultivates and maintains relationships in the classroom (Grinder, 2018).

*ENVoY seven gems.* While non-verbal communication techniques and practices can be seemingly endless, Grinder focuses on “seven gems” (Grinder, 2018) that he asserts are the cornerstones to effective non-verbal classroom management. These seven gems are then organized into the four phases of the lesson. Below, I will introduce the four phases of the lesson and what non-verbal gem should be used with each phase. I will also define each of the seven gems.

*Getting Their Attention: Freeze Body; ABOVE (Pause) Whisper.* Getting Their Attention (Grinder, 2018) refers to the phase of the lesson where we are redirecting students’ attention towards the teacher. This phase is essential to managing student focus; in order to manage student focus, we must focus ourselves first. ENVoY asserts that in order to influence student behavior, we need to manage our own behavior first. Grinder (2018) points out that to focus ourselves, we need to control our body and our voice. In

this phase of the lesson, in order to manage student focus, two non-verbal gems are used to help the teacher focus their own body and voice. They are titled Freeze Body and ABOVE (Pause) Whisper (Grinder, 2018).

- Freeze Body (Grinder, 2018): This gem focuses teachers on managing their bodies when they wish to focus student attention on them. Grinder (2018) notes four non-verbal steps to Freeze Body:
  1. Move to a location in front of the class that is reserved for Freeze Body
  2. Stand completely still and breathe deeply
  3. Distribute your weight evenly on both feet
  4. Point toes forward
- ABOVE (Pause) Whisper (Grinder, 2018): While Freeze Body focused on managing the body, ABOVE (Pause) Whisper focuses on managing the teacher's voice (Grinder, 2018). After a teacher has performed Freeze Body and has noticed a dip in the group's volume, they will then perform ABOVE (Pause) Whisper (Grinder, 2018). For this gem, the teacher will utilize paralinguistic non-verbal communication skills. Grinder (2018) again offers steps to completing this gem:
  1. Once you have noticed a dip in the group's volume, briefly request the students attention slightly above their volume level.
  2. With a frozen hand gesture, pause in your freeze body posture.
  3. After a few seconds, start to call on names of specific students who are not yet focused.

4. Pause again until all students are ready.
5. When all students are ready, start to speak with at least one sentence in a whispered tone.

*Teaching: Raise Your Hand to Speak Out.* The next important phase of the lesson is the Teaching phase (Grinder, 2018). While the Getting Their Attention phase encouraged focus, the Teaching phase prioritizes engagement. To promote engagement, ENVoY recommends the teacher manage student participation with a system of verbal and non-verbal cues. ENVoY asserts that this will increase participation and momentum (Grinder, 2018).

- **Raise Your Hand to Speak Out (Grinder, 2018):** This skill focuses on building momentum and participation in the lesson by matching a verbal direction for participation with a non-verbal cue. While the skill emphasizes the participation direction of the students raising their hand to speak out, Grinder (2018) emphasizes that this skill can be used for any mode of participation you wish the student to use.
  1. Verbally direct students to the mode of participation you want them to use. For example, “Raise your hand”.
  2. While verbally stating the direction, also use a non-verbal cue to model the way you want students to participate. For example, while saying “Raise your hand”, you also raise your hand.
  3. Continue to repeat steps 1 and 2 together, building momentum. Once the non-verbal cue has been matched with a specific



behavior, drop the verbal portion of the direction and cue the participation mode with just your nonverbal signal. For example, if you want students to raise their hand to answer a question, you will just raise your hand while remaining silent.

*Transition to Seatwork: Exit Directions; Most Important Twenty Seconds (MITS).*

The third phase of the lesson that Grinder (2018) emphasizes is called “Transition to Seatwork”. In this phase, productivity is the emphasis. In order for students to be productive, Grinder (2018) asserts, students need to transfer their engagement away from you. Thus, the power must transfer to the student. The skills in the “Transition to Seatwork” phase (Grinder, 2018) emphasizes non-verbally communicating to students that power has been transferred and how to harness that power within students.

- Exit Directions (Grinder, 2018): While ENVoY indicates that out of 31 total skills, seven of them are “gems”, Grinder (2018) goes on to state that “Exit Directions are the most important skill in this book!” (pg. 28). Exit Directions enforces always having a visual display of what students should do during the “Seatwork” portion of the lesson (Grinder, 2018). The goal of Exit Directions (Grinder 2018) is that students are being prepared in all ways possible to be independent of you as the source of knowledge and learning. By displaying visual Exit Directions, students now have the power to do their Seatwork activities with or without *you* (Grinder, 2018). In your visual Exit Directions, students should have access to this information: materials needed, what to do, how to do it, when to finish it

by, where to put it when they are done, and what to do when they are done (Grinder, 2018). By giving students all of this information, the goal is that students should not need you to complete any of the task unless they are struggling academically to complete the task. Otherwise, the power is in their hands.

1. Display Exit Directions (Grinder, 2018) visually so that all students in the room can access the directions easily.
  2. Verbally read the Exit Directions (Grinder, 2018) to students.
  3. Ask for questions.
  4. If a student asks a question and the answer is not on the visual Exit Directions, add the answer to the Exit Directions (Grinder, 2018).
  5. If a student asks a question and the answer is on the visual Exit Directions, say nothing and point to the Exit Directions and non-verbally confirm the student has read the answer to their question (Grinder, 2018).
- Most Important Twenty Seconds (MITS) (Grinder, 2018): This skill marks the official transition between Teaching and Seatwork. During MITS, a teacher is modeling to students that they should be engaged completely in their work. This is enforced by the fact that you are modeling the exact behavior you seek from students.
    1. Standing beside your visual Exit Directions (Grinder, 2018), release students verbally or nonverbally.

2. Freeze your body completely and look at your Exit Directions (Grinder, 2018). If students approach you, give a non-verbal signal that they should wait one second and return to their seat. You will then continue to look at your Exit Directions (Grinder, 2018).
3. Once all students are engaged in their work, slowly begin to move around the room.

*Seatwork: Influence Approach; OFF/Neutral/ON.* The last phase of the lesson is called “Seatwork” (Grinder, 2018). This phase of the lesson also focuses on student engagement and fostering empowerment within students to do the task we are asking of them independently. The power is completely in their hands, and through the skills we use during seatwork we remind them that they are the ones in control.

- Influence Approach (Grinder 2018). This skill aids the teacher in identifying how they should approach students who appear to be off-task, or not engaged, as this phase of the lesson asks students to be. The non-verbal behavior the teacher is asked to use in this skill models for students' engagement with the work, rather than approaching students with power which models students engaging with other people, especially the teacher. This skill utilizes proximity in strategic ways.
  - The Influence Approach (Grinder, 2018):
    1. Approaches students from the side, rather than the front
    2. Looks at the students work rather than making eye contact or looking at the student's face
    3. Breathes deeply rather than holding breath

4. Only gets as close to the student as needed for them to re-engage, does not get extremely close to the student right away
  5. Uses non-verbal redirection. If the teacher does have to say something, it is in a whisper.
- OFF/Neutral/ON (Grinder, 2018). This skill is used concurrently with Influence Approach (Grinder, 2018). While Influence Approach addresses how to approach a student, OFF/Neutral/ON develops a teacher's ability to assess how long they should stay with that student (Grinder, 2018).
    1. Use the Influence Approach (Grinder, 2018) on a student you notice who is off task.
    2. When you notice the student has moved to a neutral state, pause. Do not look at the student at all during this time.
    3. Wait until the student breathes, and notice them shift to being on task. If the student does not shift to being on task, and shifts again to being off task, apply the Influence Approach (Grinder, 2018) more heavily (using greater degrees of proximity). Once you shift into more power and the student begins to be on task, shift again quickly into influence.
    4. Pause. Take a few breaths.
    5. Move away slowly from the student.

***Other Classroom Management Programs.*** While I will speak to ENVoY in this project, other classroom management programs share many of the same goals as ENVoY. One program in particular is called Responsive Classroom, which is a professional

development program for teachers that focuses on building teachers' ability to support and maintain a "well-managed classroom environment characterized by respectful social interactions and academically engaging instruction" (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014, p. 569). Like ENVoY, they hold professional development workshops and create standardization of their practices through a certification program. They also share many of the same goals as ENVoY in that they work to promote high expectations, a positive learning environment, and put emphasis on building classroom community while also fostering independence ("About Responsive Classroom", 2019).

***Why ENVoY?*** While there are other classroom management systems similar to ENVoY in style and goal, ENVoY is the only classroom management system that I have found to focus in on non-verbal communication in their techniques for teachers. Non-verbal communication is a powerful tool in creating and maintaining student-teacher relationships and thus, academic success at school. Students perceive teacher trust and credibility through non-verbal cues. As I will clarify in future sections, student-teacher relationships are strongly based in student perceptions of the teacher. How do we create perceptions? Through non-verbal behavior. Zeki (2009) cites Cruickshank et al. (2003) stating "regardless of a teacher's knowledge, experience, education level, or position, a teacher is credible only when his/her students believe s/he is. Since eye contact and facial expressions are considered as signs for reflecting teacher's self-confidence; they have an impact on teacher's credibility and trustworthiness," (p. 2). Trustworthiness and teacher credibility are essential to building strong relationships with students, as I will elaborate on below, and the most important way we do this as teachers is through our

non-verbal communication with our students. The fact that ENVoY relies on, and has teachers intentionally thinking about, their non-verbal communication, is why ENVoY is so successful at aiding teachers in building relationships with students that lead to academic success for students.

## **Student-Teacher Relationships**

### **Defining Student-Teacher Relationships**

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a relationship as “the way in which two or more people, groups, countries, etc., talk to, behave toward, and deal with each other”. However, a student-teacher relationship takes that basic relationship and puts it in the context of an educational space. Often in personal relationships, we base the effectiveness of those relationships on personality and likability. Instead, Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, and Hanna (2010) cite Bender (2003) who clarifies that student-teacher relationships are more complex and teacher-driven. Student-teacher relationships are built through the way students perceive the teacher’s communication of clear learning goals, their interest in the student personally, and clarification of appropriate and positive behavior for the environment (Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2010; Hall & Hall, 2003; Rogers & Renard, 1999).

It is important to put a great deal of our effort into the student-teacher relationship. Wolk (2003) states that for many teachers, “their relationships are their teaching” (p. 14). This points to my idea that teachers *create* academic opportunities for their students through relationships. Many goals of effective classroom management are achieved through the development of student-teacher relationships (Jones, Jones, and

Vermette, 2013) . For instance, when teachers focus on relationships in their classroom, less defiant behavior tends to occur (Gregory & Ripski, 2008). Meehan et al. (2003) even found that positive student-teacher relationships led to less aggression among African American and Latino children that had previously been labeled as expressing aggressive behavior. The effect of the student-teacher relationship proved to be even more effective for them than for White children that had also been labeled aggressive (Meehan et al., 2003). Beaty-O’Ferral, Green, and Hanna (2010) cite a study by Marzano (2003) that reveals a similar notion, noting that relationship building with students led to 31% fewer disciplinary issues compared to teachers who did not focus on relationship building. In fact, Marzano (2003) also acknowledges that the disciplinary action that does happen in classrooms is often due to a fracture that occurs in the student-teacher relationship, and that disciplinary actions could often be prevented if more effort was put into the student-teacher relationship (a.k.a. classroom management).

Not only do effective student-teacher relationships diminish unwanted behavior from students, but a variety of research has also shown that these relationships lead to other positive outcomes: improvement in students’ social wellbeing at school, their perception of school in general, motivation levels, and overall academic achievement (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Van Damme, & Maes, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008; Murray & Pianta, 2007; Schaps, 2005; Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Murray, 2009; Alderman & Green, 2011; Newcomer, 2018). These research findings have spanned age groups, racial

identities, and socioeconomic status. Building strong relationships with students is integral to achieving the goals of effective classroom management.

### **Aspects of the Student-Teacher Relationship**

As I stated earlier, student-teacher relationships are complex and function in a vastly different way than our personal relationships with other adults in our life.

Beatty-O'Ferrall, Green & Hanna (2010) note that the student-teacher relationship is defined by the specific behaviors, strategies, and attitudes that the teacher demonstrates to students. Students then respond to those specific and intentional practices, which informs the effectiveness and success of the relationship. In this section, I will discuss two essential student-perceived aspects of a successful student-teacher relationship: trustworthiness and care.

**Trustworthiness.** Newcomer (2018) proposes that trust is one of the main components of a student-teacher relationship. Teachers who focus on relationship building in the classroom often receive greater amounts of relational trust, especially in the teachers' use of authority and are more willing to give us the benefit of the doubt when perceiving our interactions with them (as reported in Gregory & Ripski, 2008). Trustworthiness in a teacher is built through explaining grading, exercising authority in a way that students perceive as fair, offering feedback quickly (if not immediately) and preserving the student's credibility and dignity in front of their peers (Teven & Hanson, 2004). Corrigan, Klein, and Issacs (2010) highlight that trust takes time to build and is built through our continued interactions. But once students have our trust, it is then more



likely that they will be open to being taught by us and engaging in our classroom culture and community (Wooten & McCroskey, 1996; Gregory & Ripski, 2008).

**Care.** For a working student-teacher relationship to occur, students need to perceive that we care about them (Teven & Hanson, 2004). Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors and strategies such as assertiveness, responsiveness, and immediacy all contributed to a student's perception of caring (Teven, 2001). However, the greatest contributor to a student's perception of caring relates directly to a specific teacher strategy: high nonverbal immediacy (Teven & Hanson, 2004). Immediacy relates both to our closeness and high amount of non-verbal interactions with another person (Mehrabian, 1969, 1971). The non-verbal interactions that increase immediacy include eye contact, gestures, calm body position, positive facial expressions, and proximity (Sanders & Wiseman, 1990). These also all happen to be teacher behaviors included in ENVoY classroom management skills (Grinder, 2018). However, Teven and Hanson (2004), also note other means by which a teacher might form a perception of caring in students, such as clear teaching, humor, narrative vulnerability, and verbal interactions that show interest in students' lives.

### **Academic Success**

As teachers, we want academic success for each of our students. However, we also know that there are barriers to many students academic success, and for some students more than others. In this section, I identify what contributes to a student's academic success as well as addressing the barriers students may face and what students in particular tend to face those barriers.

### **Aspects of Academic Success**

Resilience in students is one of the most important aspects of academic success (Henderson, 2013). O'Dougherty Wright, Masten, & Narayan, (2013) found that internal and environmental protective factors aid students in building resilience. Henderson (2013) shares that schools with protective factors such as caring relationships, structure, exploration of worlds beyond their own, shared narratives of overcoming adversity, and the expectation of basic human respect and dignity boost student resilience. Peters and Woolley (2015) identified three additional environmental aspects of academic success for middle and high school students: control, support, and challenge. Each, when students experienced them at high levels, predicted higher grades. Peters and Woolley (2015) further found that high control levels, which included establishing rules, guidelines, and boundaries for students, were the greatest predictor of academic success for students. Interestingly, they are also considered protective factors and help to build resilience in students (Benard, 2004; Theron & Engelbrecht, 2012).

### **Opportunity Gap**

Students face many barriers to academic achievement. The phrase *opportunity gap* holds space for these barriers, and the differences in amounts and types of the barriers that students have that are predictable by racial identity (Milner, 2010). Poma (2018) states that rather than focusing on a difference in student ability predictable by race, “the opportunity gap takes into consideration the historic, cultural, social, economic, and racial constructs that minoritized students encounter that prohibit an equal and equitable education, thereby accounting for the gap” (pg. 32). Filardo, Vincent, Sung, &

Stein (2006) point to a few of the way that the opportunity gap shows up in the classroom, stating that schools with large populations of students of color and students impacted by poverty often also have too many students in classrooms, less experienced teachers (and sometimes also fewer credentialed teachers), as well as less school resources. This research proves that it is essential to think deeply about our practices to ensure that students facing the opportunity gap are in classrooms that build resilience despite the barriers that exist.

**White teachers and the opportunity gap.** In the context of the opportunity gap, white teachers hold a particularly contentious place. Milner (2010) takes on teacher positionality specifically in his evaluation of the opportunity gap. When looking at white teachers in diverse urban schools, he focuses on the necessity of building relationships to ensure student success in the classroom for students affected by the opportunity gap. In fact, Milner (2010) speaks of relationships *as* opportunity: “When opportunities to develop meaningful relationships arise, educators must be prepared to seize them” (pg. 64). For students to accept academic opportunities, they first needed to accept the opportunity to form a relationship with the teacher. As Milner (2010) mentions above, these relationship opportunities that arise must be enacted upon by the teacher. This is one way that white teachers can intentionally increase opportunities for their students, especially students who face an opportunity gap.

### **The Gap in Research**

ENVoY as a classroom management system is quite new to the educational landscape. While I have gathered research for this project on many aspects of nonverbal classroom management and its connection to relationship building with students, and the essential role that relationships play in academic success, especially for students of color, there has been very little specific information published on ENVoY implementation. Through my capstone project, a blog on ENVoY classroom management, I hope to provide insight to teachers and administrators about how ENVoY might prove to be a useful system for teachers to adopt through my reflections. I also noticed that while there was a lot of research on nonverbal communication techniques in the classroom and its connection to relationship building, very little research focused on how these techniques might work specifically for students of color and white teachers. On my blog I also plan to offer insight into this relationship, and how nonverbal classroom management techniques function in a highly diverse classroom--does the research hold up in this context? My project offers insight into this question.

### **Project Questions**

My focus research question for my project is as follows: *How might ENVoY's classroom management techniques impact relationships and academic success in diverse classroom settings?*

However, I also hope to explore these questions as I focus deeply on the various principles of ENVoY:

- How does a focus on influencing student behavior rather than using power to control student behavior create a more equitable learning environment for students?
- Is the effectiveness of nonverbal communication in the classroom impacted by the race of students and/or teachers?
- How does ENVoY's techniques contribute to relationship building?
- What types of relationships with students build opportunities for students?  
Does ENVoY impact these relationships?

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I explored the variety of literature that exists around my research question: *How might ENVoY's classroom management techniques impact relationships and academic success in diverse classroom settings?* I first explored the nuances of classroom management and especially non-verbal classroom management. I then focused specifically on ENVoY and the “seven gems” (Grinder, 2018) that I plan to utilize in my classroom and explore through my project. I then explored student-teacher relationships and the nuances behind these relationships. I discussed some of the behaviors, strategies, and attitudes that teachers might use to cultivate relationships with students. I also explored why relationships and classroom management matter for students, especially students who experience a lack of opportunity. I then situated this project in the research and share how my project might contribute to the topics discussed. I finished the chapter by offering some deeper questions that my project will address as I work towards answering my research question.

In Chapter Three, I will provide a detailed explanation of my project. I will identify the context of my project including my audience and the setting that my project will take place in. I will describe the frameworks that will guide me in structuring my project and provide a timeline for when and how the project will be completed. In Chapter Four I will address the purpose of this capstone project and discuss the major learnings that occurred throughout the process of creating and implementing the project. I will also revisit the literature review and draw connections between the research and my blog. I will finish by offering some limitations I discovered while engaging with the project and discuss future research opportunities and benefits my project has to the profession as a whole.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### **Introduction**

The way we manage our classrooms is intrinsically tied to student achievement. Classroom management becomes even more important as we consider the ways our students' racial identities may influence our management choices and styles, and how such choices may lead our students towards or away from student-teacher relationships that contribute to academic success. In this project, I especially focus on the choices we make between verbal and non-verbal management, with a focus on ENVoY's non-verbal management system. Thus, I ask, *how might ENVoY's classroom management techniques impact relationships and academic success in diverse classroom settings?*

#### **Overview**

In the previous chapter, I addressed the literature regarding classroom management, non-verbal communication, as well as relationship building and academic success in diverse high school classrooms. I argue for the importance of student-teacher relationships and the large role that non-verbal communication plays in these

relationships. I also elaborate on the ways that the opportunity gap specifically calls for the development of student-teacher relationships between white teachers and students of color.

In this chapter, I provide a summary of my project at a glance, including a detailed description as well as a rationale for the framework of my project. I clarify my audience, as well as provide a detailed overview of the setting in which I work and that the project will take place in. I also include my perspective on how I will evaluate the effectiveness of my project. To conclude the chapter, I provide a timeline of the project.

### **Description**

For this project, I will be chronicling my experience using ENVoY's seven gems (Grinder, 2018) in my high school classrooms through a blog. As an early career teacher, and as somebody who is new to ENVoY classroom management, I want to use the blog platform as a way to hold reflective space for integrating ENVoY skills into my classroom management practices. Through this blog, I will post information about ENVoY, while also posting reflections on what went well for me or what did not work in my specific context. I will also share connections I make about student-teacher relationships and how implementing ENVoY skills has impacted those relationships. I also interview teachers who practice ENVoY in their classrooms and give them space to reflect on how their management practices, and specifically ENVoY, create an equitable classroom environment.

### **Rationale**



I am utilizing a blog as the framework for my project, focusing on cultivating a reflective process as I implement ENVoY skills and work on my classroom management practices. While many teachers use blogs in their classroom to support student learning and create authentic audiences for student writing, more and more teachers are also now taking to the form to use it as a catalyst for reflection and sharing of their educational practices.

It has been widely claimed that both personal reflection and community learning are invaluable to a young teacher's development (Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Calderhead, 1989; Schon, 1983; Forde et al., 2006; Turvey & Hayler, 2017). Instead of just writing down my thoughts about my experience with ENVoY in the pursuit of reflection, I have decided to use blogging as it allows me to share my learning and reflection in a communal space. I not only want to improve my practice, but do so in dialogue with other teachers who may also be interested in ENVoY or improving their practice. My purpose for the blog points to my main focus audience--other classroom teachers. Turvey and Hayler (2017) offer ways in which an online blogging platform could function in such a way for teachers that it fulfills both these ideals of personalization and collaboration in professional development. The weblog platform is in itself a personal space, but located within the public domain of the web. However, Turvey and Hayler (2017) cite Killeavy and Moloney (2010) and Macia and García (2016) who offer that more research may need to be done to determine whether blogging really does fulfill these ideals and in what contexts.

What is interesting for the purposes of this project, however, is the research that has been gathered about the professional development of young teachers in particular. While professional development is best done in community, it has been noted that for new teachers community should be done outside of the school community in which they work, in a “third space” (McIntyre and Hobson, 2016; Bhabha, 1994; Wood, 2012). This separate space allows new teachers to grow and reflect without fear of judgement from superiors, which is essential to the growth of pre-service and early career teachers. For me, as an early-career teacher, creating for myself this “third space” (McIntyre and Hobson, 2016; Bhabha, 1994; Wood, 2012) through blogging could prove to be essential to my professional growth.

### **Project Audience**

My main audience for this project is other teachers who are interested in also implementing non-verbal classroom management in their classrooms in an effort to create more opportunities for student success. I could also see the blog being relevant to administrators or other school professionals who may be curious about a teacher’s perspective on implementing ENVoY in their classroom. I plan to share my honest personal experiences engaging with this classroom management system. I use blogging to connect with other teachers in a “third space” (Bhabha, 1994) who may want more information on classroom management, non-verbal communication with students, or ENVoY in particular. In reflecting on my experience in a public forum, I hope to engage my audience, through my personal reflections about ENVoY, in a larger dialogue about

relationship building and academic success in the context of working with diverse students.

### **Setting**

There are two physical spaces that this project will occupy, in addition to the “third space” (McIntyre and Hobson, 2016; Bhabha, 1994; Wood, 2012) that the blog will create and that I detailed above. The first, at the micro level, is my classroom. During the Fall 2019 school year, I will have five class periods total. Two of the class periods I will be teaching are regular ninth grade language arts, but co-taught with an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher. In these two class periods, I will have about 1/3 of the students in those classes who are Level 3 or 4 ESL students. One of my class periods will also be regular ninth grade English, but with no co-teacher and a random selection of students. The last two class periods are tenth grade honors English classes. These students have self-selected to take an advanced English class for tenth grade. Each of my classes average around 30 students. Since part of my project is to discuss how ENVoY classroom management works for classrooms of diverse students, I am going to specify the racial identity breakdown of each of the classes I will be using ENVoY with over the course of my project. In my regular ninth grade English class I have 54% Black students, 22% Asian students, 14% of students who identify as two races or more, 7% Hispanic students, and 3% White students. In one of my ninth grade classes that are co-taught with an ESL teacher that have 1/3 of the students enrolled in EL services, there are 41% Black students, 28% Asian students, 22% Hispanic students, and 9% White students. In my other ninth grade English class that is co-taught with an ESL teacher, 35% of the students

are Asian, 32% are Black, 27% are Hispanic, and 6% are White. In one of my honors 10th grade English classes, 32% of the students are Asian and 32% of the students are White, 29% of the students are Black, and 7% are Hispanic. In my other class that is honors 10th grade English, 35% of the students are Black, 32% are Asian, 23% are Hispanic, and 10% are White. I include these percentages to prove that when I say “diverse” I mean it in the true sense of the word: my classes hold a wide range of students of differing racial and cultural identities.

The second setting of my project, at the macro level, is my school, which is one of three high schools in the district. The school I work at caters to two northern suburbs of Minneapolis and is the most racially diverse in my district. The racial breakdown of students is as follows: 12.7% self-identify as Hispanic/Latinx, 0.7% are American Indian or Alaskan Native, 31.3% are Asian, 36.7% are Black, 13.7% are White, and 4.8% identify as two or more races. 64% of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and roughly 12% receive special education services, and about another 12% of students receive ESL support. About 2% of our student population are identified as homeless. We serve students in grades 9-12, however ninth grade was added for the first time about four years ago. The school the project will take place in is also considered a Magnet school, so students outside the neighborhood can attend for a specific purpose--our IB (International Baccalaureate) Diploma program. The school has about an 80% graduation rate and a 5% drop-out rate.

Another setting that my blog will occupy is the digital space. In order to be successful in this space, I plan to follow the *Research-based Web Design and Usability*

*Guidelines* (2006) created by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These guidelines advocate for web spaces that are simple, provide easily accessible and relevant content, and are user-friendly. With my blog, I plan to really prioritize creating useful content and getting that content to other educators. For my purposes, I plan to do this by using the following guidelines in particular:

- 1:1 “Provide Useful Content” (p. 2): For this guideline I will strive to make sure that my content is engaging and relevant to the audience. To do this I will use personal stories as well as introduce practical skills.
- 1:5 “Set and State Goals” (done in this chapter) (p. 4): It is recommended that before starting the website, one should reflect on what the goal of the website is. Through writing this chapter I have planned what the website will look like and what type of content it will contain.
- 2:2 “Increase Website Credibility” (p. 10): This guideline is important for establishing the credibility of my blog. To do this, I have provided a short biography of myself that states my professional credentials, created the blog through a professional website, and also plan to link outside research and related links.
- 2:8 “Display Data in a Directly Useable Format” (p. 15): This guideline recommends that the website is created in a straight-forward and extremely useable format. I will do this by not adding a lot of extra information to my blog and making the content the focus.

- 5:4 “Communicate the Website’s Value and Purpose” (p. 38): The main purpose of this guideline is to make sure the main idea of your website is clear. I will do this through my title and subtitle. Through my title and subtitle I provide the main purpose of my blog and what I will be discussing.
- 6:1 “Avoid Cluttered Displays” (p. 45): This guideline recommends making your website very clean and clear. I will do this by focusing primarily on my blogging content rather than other extras that clog up a website.
- 10:2 “Link to Related Content” (p. 87): This guideline suggests that when creating content that it important to link to other related content. I will do this by providing outside resources with my content that is related to what I am blogging about.
- 11:1 “Use Black Text on Plain, High-Contrast Backgrounds” (p. 101): Since I will be writing a blog, users of my website will be doing a lot of reading. To ensure ease of reading, my blog is completely white with black text.
- 11:2 “Format Common Items Consistently” (p. 102): To ensure I meet this guideline, I have created my blog on a reputable website that ensures design consistency between pages. This helps users of the site to navigate with ease.
- 14:4 “Use Video, Animation, and Audio Meaningfully” (p. 146): This guideline suggests that when using multimedia content, creators should be cautious to only use it when it adds meaning to the text. I plan to follow this guideline by focusing primarily on my text content.

- 14:8 “Ensure Website Images Convey Intended Messages” (p. 149): For this guideline I will ensure that all images match meaningfully with my text content and add meaning rather than changing or taking away meaning from the text content.

### **Effectiveness**

From the reflections I engage in on my blog, I hope to see more effective implementation of ENVoY skills. Killeavy and Moloney (2010) state that reflection is crucial to effective teaching, but some teachers may find reflection difficult due to isolation. My blog will be effective if I can create a community of educators to reflect on my ENVoY implementation with. Due to more effective use of ENVoY through reflection, I hope to also form relationships with students that serve their academic success.

### **Timeline for Completion**

The blog was created during the Fall 2019 semester. I made 10 posts on the blog in total reflecting on ENVoY skills, teacher interviews, and using ENVoY to build equitable learning environments for all students. I started my blog with an initial post that introduces the project and myself, as well as my classroom setting where the ENVoY skills were utilized. I also included information about ENVoY in general, such as who created it, who utilizes it now and for what purposes, as well as where other educators can find more information.

In my second post, I started moving through the various phases of the lesson that ENVoY centers their non-verbal classroom management skills around. I started with the first phase of the lesson “Getting Their Attention” and the two skills of that phase, “Freeze Body” and “ABOVE (Pause) Whisper” (Grinder, 2018). I gave a description of the phase, my current perceived classroom management challenges with that phase, and then how the class reacted with implementation of the skill. ENVoY encourages practicing the “Least Recommended” and “Most Recommended” ways of performing the skill, to notice differences in student reactions (Grinder, 2018). I wrote about my observations of these differences, with a special focus on the development of student-teacher relationships and academic performance.

In the next post I focused specifically on “Influence Approach” (Grinder, 2018). I focused on this skill at the beginning, even though it is included in a later phase of the lesson, because it is an essential philosophy that backs all of ENVoY’s skills. I again practice the least recommended approach (named “Power”) and the most recommended approach “Influence” and discuss my observations, with a light on student-teacher relationship development and academic success using the skill “Influence Approach” (Grinder, 2018).

From there I introduced the next phase “Teaching” and the skill “Raise Your Hand to Speak Out” (Grinder, 2018). “Raise Your Hand to Speak Out” (Grinder, 2018) where the teacher moves from a verbal mode of management, to pairing a non-verbal hand signal, to relying on the hand signal alone for management. I discussed the skill itself as well as how this skill contributes to an equitable classroom environment.



After “Raise Your Hand to Speak Out”, I continued with the second skill of the “Teaching” phase, “Exit Directions” (Grinder, 2018). I provided blog readers with a description of the skill, as well as my experiences with implementation, following a very similar format. I also included some examples of “Exit Directions” (Grinder, 2018) I have made and used in my classroom that other teachers can use and/or find inspiration in.

After “Teaching”, the next phase that ENVoY identifies in the classroom is “Transition to Seatwork” (Grinder, 2018). The first skill in this phase is “Most Important Twenty Seconds” (Grinder, 2018). In my post on this skill, I wrote a description of the “Transition to Seatwork” phase as well as a description of “Most Important Twenty Seconds” (Grinder, 2018). I explained what exactly we are communicating to students nonverbally with both the most recommended and least recommended version of “Most Important Twenty Seconds” (Grinder, 2018).

In the next blog post, I interviewed an ENVoY Demonstration Teacher. I discussed her experiences with ENVoY, as well as her ideas about how it fits into a classroom management practice that is equitable for all students. We also discuss her positionality as a teacher of color working with students of color and how that informs her ENVoY and management practice.

The last phase of the lesson that ENVoY identifies is “Seatwork” (Grinder, 2018). In the next blog post, I gave an overview on “Seatwork”, including the skill “OFF/Neutral/ON” (Grinder, 2018). For this post I explained the skill as well as what to look for to observe the phases of “OFF/Neutral/ON” (Grinder, 2018) with students. In

this post, I also included my experiences with implementation and how those experiences contributed to the building of an equitable classroom environment.

In my ninth post, I interviewed another teacher who implements ENVoY in her classroom. I discussed with her many of the same ideas I addressed with the other teacher that I interviewed, but I also talk deeply with her about her experiences as a white teacher working with students of color and how important relationships are to teaching across racial boundaries. We also discussed how ENVoY helps to maintain and build those relationships.

For my last post, I reflected widely on equity and my role as a white educator in a classroom with mostly students of color. I also included what the research says about ENVoY classroom management, using what I have collected in Chapter Two as a guide. I concluded the post by reflecting on why I specifically use ENVoY in my classroom.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I dove into the details and explained the framework of my project. I then offered a description of my project and provided a detailed rationale as to why I feel my project, a blog highlighting my journey implementing ENVoY classroom management skills, will be beneficial to my own professional development. I pointed specifically to the ways that blogging might contribute to my development. I then discussed the audience for my project: teachers and other school professionals who have interest in non-verbal classroom management. I also discussed the setting of my project--both my specific classroom and school as well as my blog. After that, I offered

some ideas of how I will know my project is effective. Finally, I provided a detailed project completion timeline.

In the next and final Chapter, I will evaluate my project as a whole. I will offer what I learned, revisit the literature I reviewed in Chapter Two, and share implications of my project moving forward. I will also share some limitations of my project, and what could be done next based on what I experienced with my project. I will explain how my project might be beneficial to the profession as a whole.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REFLECTION

## Introduction

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the way teachers create an equitable classroom environment through classroom management. The goal was to improve my own classroom management in pursuit of this goal, but also to start the conversation with other education professionals more generally: how does how we interact with students on a daily basis in pursuit of learning contribute to or take away from that very learning? How might we manage the classroom in a way that creates opportunities for students? How might we create relationships that increase academic opportunity for students rather than take away from it? For the purposes of the project, I focused specifically on one classroom management philosophy and program: ENVoY classroom management. I focused on this classroom management program to explore more deeply the implications of nonverbal teacher behavior and communication on academic achievement and relationship building in pursuit of understanding how classroom management impacts equitable learning spaces for students, specifically students of color. So I asked: *how might ENVoY's classroom management techniques impact relationships and academic success in diverse classroom settings?* I created a blog where I specifically asked this question of myself and my own practice as well as of other teachers who practice ENVoY classroom management, and of the research itself.

In this chapter, I share what I learned through the creation of my blog, I revisit the research I collected in Chapter Two and identify connections between the research and my project. I also discuss how I might move forward with the project. I evaluate how my project might inform decision-makers, I share limitations I noticed in my work, how I have and will communicate my findings to others, as well as discuss how my project might benefit the profession moving forward.

### **Major Learnings**

While writing my blog, I really solidified my ideas of how much of learning is a process. When I first started my blog, I knew I wanted to write about the ENVoY seven gems (Grinder, 2018), but I wasn't sure how the rest of my ideas would really materialize. I knew generally from experience that ENVoY allowed me to work towards an equitable learning environment in my own classroom space, but I didn't know exactly how it did that. Through writing and reflection, I was able to discover more concrete ways that ENVoY supported racial equity: through specific non-verbal communication with students. In addition to this, as I started to talk with other teachers and some of my colleagues began to read about the skills on my blog, I heard comments from them that they can tell what they're doing wrong while they're doing it but they aren't quite at the point in their learning where they can replace these behaviors. Learning is a process and even small steps forward, such as gaining more awareness of our behaviors and classroom management techniques, is still a step in the right direction. This was an unexpected learning. Understanding how exactly the "process" of learning is going to

move forward isn't something you can really put a finger on until you're at the end of your process, when you can look back and see exactly how the learning moved along.

As a researcher, I learned how important it is to get as many perspectives as possible. It was only through putting multiple voices side by side that I was able to create a clearer picture of my research and what the truth behind my ideas really is. This revealed itself as I did research, and as I began to interview teachers on ENVoY classroom management. While interviewing one teacher was extremely beneficial, it was even more exciting to interview another teacher and place their perspectives together. Everytime I talked to somebody new, or read a new piece of research, I was able to access deeper insights into my content. One perspective by itself could only really say one thing, it was through creating a kaleidoscope of voices that I could see the larger implications of my project, and how exactly ENVoY worked to create an equitable classroom environment.

### **Revist of Literature Review**

My entire project is based on the book *ENVoY: Your personal guide to classroom management* by Michael Grinder (2018). This book explains all of the ENVoY skills and elaborates on how they work and why they work. They also offer reflection activities and ways to practice the skills over time to continue to get better. This book really helped me to ground my work and to provide a solid base on which to jump off with my ideas. The other research that was essential to my capstone project was the research I collected on building and maintaining relationships, and how nonverbal communication actually works to build relationships with students. Beaty-O'Ferrall, Green & Hanna (2010)'s

work really opened my eyes to *how* teachers should build relationships with students and that these relationships are built on specific behaviors, strategies, and attitudes that the teacher demonstrates to students. What was also really interesting was Teven and Hanson (2004) and their ideas about high nonverbal immediacy. They discovered that high nonverbal immediacy with students was the most essential way that we show students we care. This piece of research really affirmed for me why ENVoY classroom management created an equitable classroom environment.

ENVoY, I discovered, essentially worked as a system for teachers to increase their nonverbal immediacy, which then helps teachers to increase the amount of care they communicate to students throughout the student's learning, which then builds stronger relationships with students, which allows for greater academic opportunities for students once that student-teacher relationship had been built through non-verbal classroom management. This research really aided me in creating connections across these seemingly separate areas of research and classroom practice. I discovered that they really all work together to increase student learning and ENVoY was a system that connected those various pieces together. I should also note that Milner (2010) allowed me deeper access as well to the realities of the opportunity gap, and how white teachers can create academic opportunities for students through relationship building, which helped to connect the last pieces of the chain for me in how ENVoY contributes to the end goal of an equitable learning environment. Without his work, I would not have been able to make that last essential connection between relationship building, and academic success.

### **Implications**

My blog dives deep into how ENVoY works, and what the skills communicate to students, but also clarifies how districts and schools might start to think about how to incorporate ENVoY in their systems. I highlight a professional development and coaching company in the greater Minneapolis, MN area, The Catalyst Approach, that focuses specifically on ENVoY skills and helps school systems to improve their learning environments with these tools and teacher coaching. Part of the goal of my blog was to help teachers, and even more so decision makers, see the philosophy of educational equity that exists behind ENVoY. Many districts are starting to think about how they can systematically create more equitable learning environments for their students. I hope through my reflections and interviews and that by sharing ENVoY's system that I could prove why ENVoY is a worthy investment for teachers and students. I wanted to give decision makers a way to think about how they might create opportunities for teacher growth in their systems. I believe that classroom management is an essential piece of equity work. How we non-verbally communicate with students impacts student success. The research shows that to be true. ENVoY is a way to train teachers to non-verbally communicate to students care, trust, and respect. It's an investment in educational equity for schools and districts that want to no longer see data of academic success predictable by race.

### **Limitations**

There are two limitations that I've found in my capstone project. The first is that I did not end up collecting any student perspectives. While I intended throughout my



project to collect student perspectives, I didn't end up feeling that I was using ENVoY with as much fidelity as I would have liked to gather my own student's perspectives. Looking back, I think I would have liked to interview students in a classroom with an ENVoY Demonstration Teacher (which I am not) to ensure that the students interviewed were receiving ENVoY classroom management with more fidelity than I could have personally ensured, since I am currently not certified as an ENVoY practitioner although I do use the skills consistently. Another limitation in my project is that I do not include any quantitative data. While this is not something that I think is essential to the success of my project, I do think that it would have added to my purpose of helping to show how ENVoY benefits student success.

### **Future Research**

Piggybacking off of the limitations I noticed in my project, I think future next steps for researchers would be to collect student perspectives on student-teacher relationships built through ENVoY classroom management practices and to collect quantitative data. I would recommend working closely with students who could reflect on their relationships with teachers who are certified through The Catalyst Approach as Demonstration Teachers in order to ensure that ENVoY is being used with fidelity. I think interviewing students about their perceptions of particular skills and how/if they feel those skills build trust in the teacher would be helpful in proving the connections I made across various aspects of an equitable classroom environment. I also think it would be useful to collect quantitative data of students time on task, academic success in classrooms where teachers utilized ENVoY classroom management skills, and data on

how ENVoY management impacted discipline referrals. While there is starting to be research collected on some of these topics, I think more is necessary to really prove the effects and the connections I have drawn through my project.

### **Communicating Results**

As my project is a blog, I have been posting live throughout the Fall 2019 semester and sharing on my personal and professional social media accounts. This has been essential to one of the goals of my blog: to get the word out about ENVoY and start a discussion about classroom management as an equity issue. Through these platforms, I have been able to engage with people outside of the education world as well as other teachers that I work directly with and teachers that I have never met across the country. Through social media I have also been able to share my blog with ENVoY trainers who are working with schools and districts to improve teacher classroom management. I hope to continue to use my blog as a platform to talk about issues of equity, ENVoY, and classroom management and to continue to use social media to share my thinking. The project has proved a useful way for me to reflect and improve my practice, as well as build community and conversation. Thus, I hope to continue to communicate my work in this manner.

### **Benefits to the Profession**

Another goal of my blog was to help other teachers begin to use ENVoY classroom management practices in their classroom. In talking with colleagues who have read my blog, they have used some of my posts as a way to start guiding their thinking about classroom management and have begun to reflect on their own practice. I see this

as a real benefit to the profession. The more teachers see their own treatment of students as directly impacting student success, the more teachers will be able to change or continue behaviors in service of positively impacting the success of students in their classroom.

### Summary

In conclusion, through the process of writing and creating this capstone project, I have learned that academic success starts with nonverbal communication between a teacher and a student, and that this truth is applicable across racial boundaries. I have learned that the burden of responsibility lies on the teacher to learn how to communicate nonverbally with their students in a way that impacts that academic success positively. ENVoY classroom management, the focus on this capstone project, is one way that teachers can develop their ability to do this with fidelity.

True educational equity throughout our systems, it often seems, is a lofty goal. And one that we as educators and educational leaders and decision makers have a hard time defining to ourselves and our communities what it will look like when we get there. But we know we need to try to get there, even though the destination is unclear. As I write in my last blog post for the capstone project, it is my goal as an educator to do right by my students in the boundary of the four walls of my classroom. Each hour of my day, I have 30 or so students that I am committed to do right by. I don't always do it; *we* don't always do it. I want these 60 or so pages of writing and research and 10 or so blog posts to be enough credibility for those that have larger walls than my classroom to hear me say: ENVoY is a blueprint for how *we might actually do* this educational equity thing,

how *we might actually close the gap* between white affluent students and everybody else,  
how *we might actually create* a classroom, school, district, community, or world that we  
can truly be proud of.

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