

Routines and Procedures – The Brick and Mortar of Effective Classroom Management

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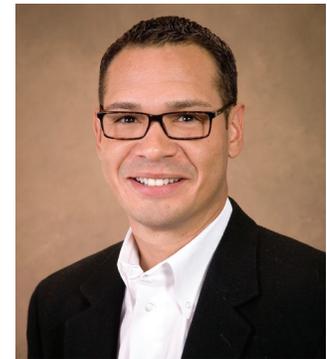
BACKGROUND

Ongoing research on effective classroom instruction has caused radical changes to the look and feel of learning. Historically, classroom teaching and learning consisted largely of students sitting in desks and rows; completing “one-size-fits-all” worksheets; and listening to “sage-on-the-stage” lectures. Yet today’s classrooms consist of an interplay of much more physically and mentally active learning activities. Cooperative grouping, hands-on learning, dialogue-rich student discussions, differentiated instruction, and authentic hands-on activities are now the new norms of school.

Yet these positive changes to teaching and learning have not come without their challenges. Today’s research-informed instructional practices demand that teachers possess a much deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the forms and functions of classroom management—arguably, much more so than what was required in the past.

WHAT IS CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT?

Classroom management consists of all of the strategies and systems that teachers use to establish and maintain instructionally productive, prosocial behavior. One of the primary aims of classroom management is to increase student academic engagement (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015; Everston & Weinstein, 2006). Effective classroom management principles are equally effective across almost all subject areas and grade levels (Brophy, 2006; Lewis, et al., 2006).



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Lee Wright began his career as a kindergarten teacher in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Over the next 20 years he spent time as a Literacy Coach, Texas Statewide Staff Developer, and Professor of Education. He earned his doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction in 2009. Lee’s passions and expertise grew out of the joys and challenges he faced while working in Title I schools within large urban school districts throughout Texas. Today, he trains educators on topics that focus on the importance of effective classroom management, small-group instruction, and early literacy.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

The challenges associated with effective classroom management are not new topics. Classroom management has long been identified by new and veteran teachers alike as one of the most challenging skill sets of effective teaching.

The manner in which a teacher decides to seat her students; how she chooses to present, monitor, and provide feedback on the classroom's rules and routines; and the shared student learning responsibilities that she promotes all concern classroom management decisions. These decisions are rarely simple and often require considerable knowledge, skill, and time to practice before mastery can be achieved.

Classroom management decisions are particularly challenging for elementary school teachers because

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young learners are much more limited in their knowledge and skills and thus require very clear instruction on expected behaviors, which makes it harder for teachers to be able to perform classroom management tasks with mastery. The younger the student, the more explicit and systematic the classroom management instruction must be to ensure learner success.

For teachers to make effective classroom management decisions, they must possess a solid understanding of the developmental abilities and needs of their learners, knowledge of explicit and systematic instruction on behavioral expectations, and the ability to foresee and be proactive in teaching all of the norms necessary for students to remain actively engaged in instruction throughout the school day.

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THE LINK BETWEEN CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Marzano (2003) states that many scientific studies continue to demonstrate that a teacher's decision making has a much larger impact on student achievement than do school, state, or federal policies. Moreover, Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) conducted a widespread literature review that consisted of analyzing 86 chapters from annual research reviews, 44 handbook chapters, 20 government and commissioned reports, and 11 journal articles to produce a list of 228 variables affecting student achievement. Of all the variables analyzed, classroom management resulted in impacting student achievement more so than any other.

HOW CAN TEACHERS IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PRACTICES?

No one strategy is magically capable of transforming a teacher into an effective classroom manager. Nonetheless, there are a few highly effective classroom management themes that have stood the test of time in terms of their ability to positively impact student learning. Two of these, perhaps, most tried-and-true of themes are *Routines and Procedures* (Lester, Allanson, Notar, 2017).

When it comes to classroom management, the words routines and procedures are often used synonymously. Yet these two terms refer to very different practices. It is important for teachers to understand the differences that these two terms represent, their potential for positively impacting student achievement, and how investing in routines and procedures can significantly improve virtually all areas of classroom management.

Routines

THE “WHAT”

Classroom routines are day-to-day classroom tasks/jobs/chores necessary for effective learning to occur. Routines represent a teacher’s expectations of what students should be able to do, independently, throughout the school day for effective learning to occur. Instructionally productive classroom routines are intended to maximize instruction time, minimize learning distractions, and promote prosocial skill development. Put simply, routines are “what” a teacher expects her student to do, on their own, so that the classroom’s instruction time is optimized.

Classroom routines are typically more specific than classroom rules in that routines often concern a specific task that is conducted during one particular time of the day (such as tasks to complete when entering the classroom) and/or conducted during one specific content area (such as how to gather and store writing journals).

Common classroom routines include, among others, what students are expected to do when:

- Walking in the hallways
- Entering the classroom
- Passing out papers
- Sharpening pencils
- Transitioning from one activity to the next
- Asking for assistance
- Taking turns talking

Most teachers understand the importance of routines and thus invest considerable time and effort in establishing them in their classrooms. Yet many teachers also experience struggles with how to ensure that most—ideally, all, but realistically, most—of their students can learn to successfully perform classroom routines consistently, throughout the year, with little if any reminders.

How to Improve upon Classroom Routine Instruction

PRIORITIZING ROUTINE INSTRUCTION

Teachers can employ various practices to ensure that they are making the most of their classroom routines. For example, at the start of the year, teachers should plan to invest time in mentally rehearsing exactly what their students’ behavior should demonstrate from the second they enter the classroom door to the second they leave at the end of the day, to maximize instruction time and minimize distractions to learning.

Teachers can do this by thinking of what their ideal classroom could look like, sound like, and feel like at every second of the day. This initial step in the process of identifying routines involves reflecting on and visualizing every aspect of the school day and taking the time to jot down notes as to what students will be expected to do so that each lesson, each day, unfolds in an optimal manner.

For example, as a teacher engages in this kind of reflection, s/he may think: *“During our daily Read Aloud, I see myself sitting in a chair and all of my students seated around me, looking at me attentively and listening as I read a book out loud. I see me asking them questions periodically, and I see them raising their hands quietly and answering once called upon. I also see that during the entire Read Aloud time, all students are still and everyone takes turns talking and engaging in book discussions.”*

This example reflects highly effective teacher expectations of her Read Aloud time. However, for this expectation to become reality, the teacher will next need to figure out and jot down all other routines she will likely need to teach to be able to engage in daily Read Alouds in this manner.

Her list could include something like this: *“Before my students are able to engage in Read Alouds in the way that I envision, I will first need to teach them how to:*

1. *Transition effectively to the classroom carpet area*
2. *Sit appropriately on the classroom carpet area*
3. *Maintain and respect others’ personal space while at the carpet area*
4. *Look at the teacher when she is speaking and listen quietly as s/he reads*
5. *Raise their hand quietly if they have questions*

6. (Depending of the age of the student) Know how to answer teacher questions
7. Take turns talking and listening to the teacher and each other
8. Effectively respond to opposing points of view
9. Engage in peer discussions
10. Transition effectively from the carpet to the next group setting"

As you can see, creating daily Read Alouds that optimize instruction time, minimize distractions, and promote prosocial skills requires at least 10 different, separate routines to be taught.

As a teacher goes through this reflection exercise and identifies more and more routines that she will likely need to teach, she will likely discover that many of the routines she jots down will repeat. For example, the aforementioned 10 routines are equally necessary for being able to teach high-quality phonics lessons, Read Alouds, cooperative math problem group work, and science projects.

The list of frequently repeated routines that teachers identify and jot down should be prioritized for instructing first, at the beginning of the school year. Less frequently needed routines should be prioritized for introducing afterward.

STATING THE "WHY"

Yet another way to improve upon classroom routines is to involve students in the process of understanding the value of each routine for their personal learning and the communal classroom learning. When presenting a new routine, teachers should tell their students what they expect them to do and explain in student-friendly language why the routine is important for their learning. During the introduction of a routine, a teacher should encourage students to ask questions about the teacher's expectations and encourage students to contribute their thoughts about how the routine can benefit the classroom and themselves. When given a voice in a routine's development, students are much more likely to take ownership of wanting to develop mastery of the routine.

Procedures

THE "WHEN" AND "HOW"

Most often, teachers' challenges with maintaining classroom routines consist of a lack of students' understanding of when and how to perform a routine. Whereas routines state the "what" of the teacher's expectations, *procedures* state the "how" and "when." Procedures are the ingredients that give form to a routine.

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For example, a teacher may introduce the routine of what she expects of students when transitioning from their desks to the whole-group carpet area by telling them:

“Boys and girls, from now on I expect you, as good learners, to transition quietly from your desks to the carpet area when I tell you to.”

But afterward, this teacher may remain perplexed and frustrated when she sees that even though she reminds children of this expectation on a daily basis, some students continually leave their seats out in the middle of aisles, run to the carpet from their desks, accidentally shove other children, and push to be the first one seated next to the teacher. This scenario represents a routine that lacks procedures. The teacher stated a routine, or in other words, she stated “what” she expected students to do—I expect you to transition quietly—but did not tell them or show them “when” or “how” to perform the routine. As a result, some of her students' behavior may demonstrate that it's possible to transition quietly, and still run, push, shove, and leave seats in the middle of the classroom's aisles.

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This teacher could have prevented this kind of common classroom-management dilemma from happening by having spent some time in thinking through exactly “when” and “how” she expected her students to transition quietly and then communicated this to them and demonstrated the “when” and “how” when introducing the routine. The “when” and “how” of a routine represents the procedures.

Procedures consist of behavioral expectations. Behaviors, put simply, are what we can see and/or hear students doing. When it comes to procedures, behaviors are the sequence of actions that students are expected to do with their feet, hands, legs, mouths, eyes, and voices to perform a routine.

For example, if the teacher in our previous example had introduced her routine of Transitioning quietly by making sure to teach her students the procedures for when and how to perform this routine, she could have said:

“OK, boys and girls, from now on I expect you, as good learners, to learn to transition quietly from your desks to the carpet area when I instruct you to. This is important so that we don’t waste your learning time and you can have more time to talk with your peers and complete your work. OK, so this is how we will transition from our desks to the carpet area each day:

Procedures

1. *First, you will wait for my signal. When I ring this chime, it will be our signal to start transitioning to the carpet area. (The teacher will then ring the bell, several times, so students can learn what the signal will sound like.)*

2. *Next, we will carefully and quietly push our chairs into our desk area. Let me demonstrate how to do this. (The teacher then will show the students, multiple times, when and how to perform this step and may ask for a few students to come up and demonstrate along with her).*

3. *Next, we will take turns walking, one at a time, starting with table one, ending with table five, to the carpet area and sit on our assigned seats. As we are walking on the carpet, we must be careful not to accidentally step on or shove anyone. (The teacher then will show the students, multiple times, when and how to perform this step and may ask for a few students to come up and demonstrate along with her).*

4. *Next, we will sit ‘Chris Cross Apple Sauce’ with our hands in our laps and our mouths closed and eyes looking at the teacher. (The teacher then will show the students, multiple times, when and how to perform this step and may ask for a few students to come up and demonstrate along with her).*

5. *Then, when we are all seated, we will be ready to learn.”*

After the introduction of a routine and its procedures, the teacher should provide her students with ongoing opportunities to practice demonstrating how to perform all of the procedures, in the correct sequence. As students practice how to accurately execute the routine by demonstrating all of the procedures, the teacher should be sure to provide them with ongoing affirming and/or corrective feedback as needed until overall classroom mastery of a routine and its procedures has been demonstrated.

IN CONCLUSION

Although classroom management remains a complex skill set for new and veteran teachers alike, routines and procedures are two tried-and-true classroom management themes that teachers can focus on for improving many aspects of their classroom management system. When teachers invest the time and effort in making use of routine and procedures, this investment can directly and positively impact students’ academic achievement. As new research continues to unfold, the face of teaching and learning will surely continue to evolve. Nonetheless, routines and procedures have and will likely remain as the brick and mortar of effective classroom management.

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