4. Use of Classroom Routines to Support the Learning Process

Both research and experience tell us that it is more effective to build positive behaviors than control negative student behavior (Strain & Sainato, 1987). To prevent problem behaviors in the classroom, it is often necessary for teachers to change their own behaviors (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2000). The same strategies and procedures will not necessarily be equally effective with all students. Classroom routines can positively affect students' academic performance as well as their behavior (Cheney, 1989; Vallecorsa, deBettencourt, & Zigmond, 2000); therefore, one proactive strategy is for teachers to adopt a consistent classroom routine. A routine is simply a set of procedures for handling both daily occurrences (e.g., taking attendance, starting a class period, or turning in assignments), and minor interruptions of instruction, such as a student's broken pencil or the arrival of a note from the main office (Kosier, 1998; Savage, 1999). Essentially, once taught, routines are daily activities that students are able to complete with little or no teacher assistance, which accomplishes two objectives (a) students have more opportunity to learn and (b) teachers can devote more time to instruction (Colvin & Lazar, 1995).

Establishing a consistent and predictable routine serves a number of classroom functions. For example, a routine helps to simplify a complex environment and inform students exactly what to expect, what is expected of them, and what is acceptable behavior (Burden, 2003; Cheney, 1989; Colvin & Lazar, 1995; Kosier, 1998; Newsom, 2001; Savage, 1999; Strain & Sainato, 1987; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2000). Routines allow students to quickly accomplish day-to-day tasks that are required of both the teacher and students. Routines also help to create smoother transitions between activities and therefore allow fewer opportunities for disruptions to occur (Burden, 2003; Docking, 2002). In addition, when students are expected to complete routine tasks, they have the opportunity to learn greater responsibility and more self-management

skills (Colvin & Lazar, 1995; Savage, 1999). Routines that require interaction between teacher and student (or among students) also serve to positively reinforce interpersonal communication and social skills and are one way for teachers to judge the quantity and quality of students' skills in these areas (Colvin & Lazar, 1995). Finally, student-performed routines free the teacher to focus on more effective instruction and on the unexpected events that come up throughout the school day (Savage, 1999).

There are a several guidelines that most teachers follow in establishing classroom routines. First, teachers should identify recurring and predictable classroom events (Burden, 2003; Savage, 1999), which may include: (a) administrative procedures, (b) instructional tasks, and (c) interactive routines (Colvin & Lazar, 1995; Savage, 1999). Administrative procedures include activities such as storing coats or books; using the restroom; sharpening pencils; taking attendance; making announcements; and dismissing students to go to another classroom, the playground, or home. Instructional tasks include getting every student's attention for instruction; reviewing spelling words or math problems on the board; ensuring that students behave in ways that maximize positive outcomes during teacher-led instruction or group-learning settings; handing in or returning student work; and having a set process for how students should write the heading on their homework assignments. Finally, interactive routines include knowing how to participate in discussions, behaving as expected in groups, and following rules for getting the teacher's attention. Once these routine tasks are identified, teachers should establish clear, discrete procedures for handing routine events that are simple, easy for students to understand, and quick for them to perform (Savage, 1999). Of course, classroom routines will vary according to the teacher's goals, by grade level, and students' ability to exercise control of their behavior (Burden, 2003; Colvin & Lazar, 1995; Savage, 1999).

Teachers can take a number of steps to make classroom routines more effective. First, it is essential that students be systematically and situationally taught each procedure and what is expected of them; once taught, these skills should be reviewed and retaught frequently to ensure consistency and to communicate to students the importance of each behavior (Burden, 20035; Cheney, 1989; Colvin & Lazar, 1995; Gartrell, 1994; Savage, 1999; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2000). In addition, teachers should consider appropriate consequences for when students follow or fail to follow procedures and communicate both sets of consequences to students (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2000). The repeated failure of one student to demonstrate the expected behavior may suggest to the teacher one course of action; however, if the teacher observes that multiple students do not successfully engage in that behavior, that is a clear signal that a different response is called for. It is important for teachers to monitor student performance of routines throughout the school year to ensure that the way they are scheduled and were taught is how they actually occur (Strain & Sainato, 1987). Revisions to classroom routines can cause some students to become unsure of exactly what to expect; not surprisingly, students perform better if there is consistency between teachers' expectation, student responses, and teacher feedback (Bos & Vaughn, 2002; Burden, 2003; Newsom, 2001; Strain & Sainato, 1987). If a teacher finds that she (or the students) have made changes in the routine, it may be necessary to review with students the expectations for routine tasks and to model and provide students further opportunity to practice their performance to restore a sense of consistency and order to the classroom (Savage, 1999).

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