

Will the implementation of procedures and routines increase student learning?

by Peggy Taylor

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Biography



Peggy has twenty-eight years of experience in primary, junior and intermediate divisions. She has worked in regular classrooms, special education classes, library, physical education and computer assignment. This experience ranges from rural to urban settings and the following paper is the result of her first Action Research investigation.

Abstract

In September of 2003, I was in a Grade 4/5 classroom. I had been teaching Special Education with small classes, Resource, Library and Physical Education. This would be my first time in 18 years that I would have my own room. I knew that consistent rules were important for a well run classroom. As Rod Peterson states, "Be specific in setting routines. Focus on prevention and building relationships. Know the difference between routines and discipline."

I knew that it was an area for growth. I viewed Harry Wong's Video Series based on his book, The First Days of School. It gave me many thought provoking ideas leading me to think that this was an area in which I could make a significant impact on my students. I could increase their learning by increasing the amount of time on task.

Getting Started

I chose to write an Action Research paper because I wanted to grow as a teacher and share with colleagues. This topic is one that I strongly believe can have an impact on student success.

The Process

During the summer of 2003, I amalgamated the information from the books that I had read, the tapes that I watched and the in-services that I attended throughout this past year.

The learning I wish to apply is:

- classroom management is the art and science of managing: time, space and behaviour. Gustafson states that "Procedures are a part of life—We follow procedures for using a telephone book, boarding an airplane, approaching a traffic light, or attending a wedding. The reason we have procedures in life is so that people can function in society knowing the acceptable and efficient ways people do things"(Gustafson, in Wong, 1998) Students need structure. They want to know how they are expected to behave and work in a classroom.

Classroom procedures are statements of student expectations necessary to participate successfully in a classroom.

- Efficiencies can be attained in class. Procedures and Routines allow many different kinds of activities to take place efficiently in class with a minimum of wasted time and confusion.
- Increased on-task time can increase learning.
- Procedures and Routines teach a student how things operate in a classroom. This reduces frustrations and discipline problems.
- From Harry Wong's book I learned that it was important to list all classroom procedures, routines and rules. I could not expect the students to follow the rules if they were not consistently applied. When I started walking through my day at school, I was amazed to see how many procedures we expect students to routinize. How do they learn them?

My next step was to realize that not following routines required re-teaching not consequences. Routines were expected to be followed. The student would repeat the routines correctly until it became second nature to them. The first month of school, I would repeat, "What is the routine for that?"

Good classroom management creates on-task time. Efficiencies are created by: fewer interruptions during lessons, having an effective discipline plan, students being aware of expectations, consequences and rewards.

Quicker transitions are accomplished by: implementing procedures and routines, having a discipline plan/routines that reduced the number of distractions. The discipline policy and procedures that I used are included as appendices.

Students become more committed to learning by: feeling bonded and connected with the teacher and experiencing success. All stakeholders need to know your plan. These include the Principal, Students, Parents and Colleagues who share the class (i.e. French teacher, Librarian and Supply teachers.)

At the beginning of the year:

I was concerned about the amount of time in a day that I was spending repeating things. (eg. walking quietly in the hall) As the month went on I realized that these procedures were becoming automatic behaviours. Throughout the year it was necessary to review these routines, especially around high stress times, like holidays and bad weather days.

I had a new student move in just before March Break. This individual was a high-needs behavioural student. This was quite a test for the students and myself. To meet the needs of the student I reviewed the routines and behaviour code daily for the first week. The fact that he came late in the year was a bonus as I think the class was consistently following routines and rules. Also that a positive consequencing system was in place. This did not allow extreme behaviour to deter them. They were praised often for their ability to ignore distractions and stay on task.

I was honest with the students from the very first day. You can't fool a child. They can see right through you. The discipline plan I had written was copied and sent home. It required three signatures: a guardian, their own and mine. This step gave all three ownership of student behaviour. The behaviour agreement and the class routines were stapled into their homework books. It was also posted on the classroom website for parent's to access at anytime. This took away the, "I did not know the rule" excuse.

I gave frequent feedback and encouragement throughout the year.

If we do not regularly encourage students who show responsibility for their behaviour, they can give up due to lack of recognition. Positive consequencing is just as important as negative consequences.

The student who only hears negatives will eventually give up.

“A goal for a teacher should be to engage in at least 3 to 4 positive interactions with the student for each reprimand given”

The positive interactions that I used included:

- focussed, specific praise, non-verbal exchanges (e.g., smile or thumbs-up from across the room)
- an encouraging note written on the student’s assignment.
- positive notes home
- whole-class free activity time i.e. movie and popcorn party for the class (movie tied to curriculum being taught)

To earn the reward the class had to put together a 100 piece puzzle. Puzzle pieces were put in randomly as good acts and positive situations occurred. I used this to reinforce the routines early in the year and then as we progressed through the year, I added random acts of kindness and support of their fellow student’s. i.e. a student who helped a peer who was struggling with a math concept.

These rewards can be listed as part of the Discipline Policy for your room.

These positive interactions are brief and can often be delivered in the midst of instruction without missing a beat.

Data Collection and Analysis

1. Response Journal

I kept a journal of life in my classroom over the year. This was one of the hardest parts of the Action Research procedure. I did not always remember to write in it at the end of the day, or I would think of it when I was at home and the journal was at school. Occasionally an incident would have upset me to the extent that I was not sure I was clear-thinking enough to write a journal response. The journal responses early in the year indicated a higher level of talkativeness in class and difficulty to settling down which resulted in negative consequence. As the year progressed there were fewer incidents of this kind. I realized that I was raising the bar of acceptable noise as students were focussing more on their work and meeting deadlines.

2. Curriculum expectations for the grade level

At the beginning of the year I had taken the Grade four and Grade five subject expectations and enlarged them on a chart for the three terms. I have presented all the skills this year to the students and feel confident that this was possible because we had very little wasted time during the day. I would meet them at the door as they came in from outdoors. It was expected that jobs would be started as soon as they entered the room. At morning bell, there was a bell work question on the board that was tied to the curriculum either as a pre-teaching or review of a skill.

3. *Video tape of class*

I was not sure if I was being vigilant enough as I wrote my observations in my journal early in the school year. To allow me to have a second look a video camera and sett up at the back of the classroom over a three day period. I chose to have it there for a length of time so the students would get use to it and I would get a real view of the classroom. The students knew the video camera was there for the work I was doing for my Action Research. It showed me that I had a tendency to answer the students who came up behind me when the class was working quietly at their seats rather than using the correct procedure. It also showed me that the class was on track with following the procedures more often than not and that there was very little time being wasted in class.

4. *Supply teacher feed back:*

This was a good acid test for the students to show how well they had routinized classroom procedures.

The following quotes were taken from the notes left by the supply teachers that were in my classroom over the year.

“You have a wonderful group of students”

“A lovely class! Good work habits and a willingness to help others”

“Your students were exceptional both days I was here. They were truly a joy to teach”

“Your class is great! Very easy to direct”

“Your class is fantastic! They were co-operative and worked well most of the day. You have a Super class and I really enjoyed the day.

5. *Student feedback*

- Halfway through the year I made a notation in my journal about a student from one of the other classes in the school wanted to be in my class because, “You have an awesome class”
- When the teacher from the room next door came in and made the comment to one of the students that they were working so quietly his response to her was “she taught us to be this way”
- Only extreme behaviours were dealt with by the principal. I took the responsibility to consequence my students. They are my responsibility.

6. *Comments from professionals working in the classroom:*

“It is obvious that there are well-established procedures and routines in the classroom. I have been impressed with the high level of cooperation the students afford the teacher. This cooperation is extended to supply teachers, as students are well aware of the expectations for classroom behaviour. As a result, the students are always engaged in on task behaviour, which can only lead to increased productivity and learning. When students have completed assigned work ahead of others they usually engage in another form of productive activity such as, reading or completing unfinished assignments.

The expectations for classroom behaviour have been well established through consistent enforcement of classroom procedures and routines. The students in the class have adhered to these procedure and routines even in the presence of negative influences ie, misbehaving individual students. “

Jeannette Wharton

Itinerant Teacher for the Hard of Hearing

7. Staff feedback

At the end of the year the talk in the staffroom was of getting together and writing a discipline policy for the whole school, so that all students were following the same discipline rules with the same consequences. I was excited to see this positive response to my Action Research.

Conclusions and Next Steps

I have found that this was a worthwhile endeavour as it helped to improve my current teaching methods and to introduce new skills through observation and evaluation. I also found that I did not put enough value into response journal writing. I realize now that this process is crucially important. The journal can effectively chart the changes that take place throughout the year. You can see the effect on the learning environment that you expect to take place. I will make a better effort to keep a more concise record. I feel that with the compacted curriculum that we are required to teach face each year, it is vitally important to have routines and procedures in place so that precious time is not wasted. The behaviour of a student should not steal on-task time from their peer.

No learning can take place when you are disciplining. Learning takes place when the student is on-task and working.

Discipline Plan for Room Five

Classroom Rules

1. Have all appropriate materials and supplies at your table and be seated by the time announcements begin on the PA system.
2. Respect the people, equipment, and furnishings of Room 5.
3. Adjust your voice level to suit the activity.
4. Follow directions the first time they are given.
5. Observe all rules in the student handbook.

If You Choose to Break a Rule

First Time: Name on board. Warning

Second Time: One check. 15 minutes of lunch recess.

Third Time: Two checks. 30 minutes of lunch recess.

Fourth Time: Three checks. Complete lunch hour recess and parents called.

Fifth Time: Four checks. Lunch hour recess and last recess.

Student action plan written and reviewed by teacher, student and principal.

* * *

Critical Incidents Student referred to the office.

Names and checks erased at the end of each week.

Rewards

Praise

Positive notes home

Whole_class free activity time

Movie and popcorn party for class

Various other positive perks

The joy of learning

Students: I have read this classroom discipline plan and understand it. I will honour it while in Room 5.

Signature_____ Date_____

Parents: My child has discussed the classroom discipline plan with me. I understand it and will support it.

Signature_____ Date_____

Teacher: I will be fair and consistent in administering the discipline plan for Room 5.

Signature_____

*****IMPORTANT*****

PLEASE KEEP THIS SHEET IN YOUR COMMUNICATION BOOK AT ALL TIME.

Thank you

Classroom Procedures

Classroom procedures are for the benefit of everyone in our class. A PROCEDURE is how something is to be done. A ROUTINE is what the student does automatically without prompting or supervision. Thus, a routine becomes a habit, or custom for the student. Procedures and routines create STRUCTURE.

1. Entering the classroom

- remove belongings and hang up in your locker or hook
- place your communication book in the basket
- follow the morning routine

2. Late to school

- go to office for a late slip

3. Dismissal

- After the teacher gives the direction gather communication book, homework and backpacks then return to your seat.
- The bell does not dismiss you the teacher does.
- Time will be set aside at the end of the day to leave the classroom clean and tidy. All students will perform their assigned jobs quickly and quietly.

4. How the class becomes quiet

- I raise my hand and then you;
- freeze
- Turn and face me
- Pay attention and keep your eyes on me.
- Be ready for instruction.
- I will have something to say.

5. To obtain the teacher's attention

- if you wish to speak, raise your index finger
- if you wish to leave your seat, raise two fingers
- if you need help, raise three fingers

6. When you need help

- use the folded index card into a three-sided pyramid
- on one side are the words "Please help me"
- on another side is "Please keep working"
- the third side is blank
- Place the card on the table so that the blank side is facing the student. When you want the teacher's attention turn the card so that "Please help me" is facing forward and the "Please keep working" is facing you.

7. Passing in papers

- students in the row next to the side bulletin board place their papers on the table beside them
- next person adds their paper to it and places them on the desk to their left.
- this continues until the last row where the teacher will collect them

8. When you finish early, check What to do Next? Activities list at the front of the room.

9. Papers and notebooks will be returned by the monitor after they are marked by when marked and recorded appropriately.

10. All materials necessary for a productive work day are expected to fit neatly in your desk. Pencils should be left sharpened and ready to go after all recesses.
11. Travelling to the library and gym will be done in a single line following the line leader who stops the group at the entrance to the room and waits for the person in charge to invite them in.
12. Students walking in the halls during class time will do it quietly and without Interrupting classrooms or students.
13. Students will be expected to have French materials ready on their desk before Madame enters to begin the class.
14. When office announcements are made it is expected that you will stop what you are doing, stand still, listen quietly and be ready to respond correctly.
15. Fire Drills
 - stop immediately what you are doing and line up behind the line leader.
 - Follow the leader to the safety spot outside.
 - It is every student's responsibility to check the fire drill chart and know where to go.
16. If you are suddenly ill leave quietly for the bathroom. Return to the classroom as soon as possible and go to the teacher.
17. Washrooms breaks are expected to be taken during recesses or lunch time. In an emergency quietly get the teacher's attention for permission to leave the room.
18. Students will be expected to use PLEASE and THANK YOU
19. When visitors come to the classroom
 - it is the door monitor job to welcome them
 - inform the teacher quietly
 - return to your work
20. Water bottles (500 ml size or smaller) for rehydration are acceptable on the floor under your desk.

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