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CEP 841

Creating Routine and Transition to Reduce
Behavior Problems

Problem Statement

Throughout schools and districts nationwide there are constant problems pertaining to classroom management and the correlation to student behavior. Establishing routines within the classroom can help to create positive behaviors. This is because students will know what to expect on a daily basis. “The number one problem in the classroom is not discipline; it is the lack of procedures and routines.” According to Harry Wong, a teaching expert, he believes in creating a classroom plan and implementing it during the first days of class each year. These ideas are then reaffirmed throughout the year in order to insure that they are continually demonstrated.¹ This will signify that a task is a daily event that is repeated and has importance. Routines “are done the same way each time” and are frequently done without notice because they are practiced.² This type of prevention is a good idea to implement in current classrooms in order to reduce behavior problems pertaining to lack of routines or transition troubles. Teachers “need routines that integrate classroom management and instruction before they can attend to student learning. Only when these routines are in place can [teachers] begin to focus on student learning.”³ Even teachers can benefit from routines and transition procedures. Students can greatly benefit from time management and routines established within the classroom atmosphere.

Description of Program

“Daily routines provide structure...to tasks throughout the day. Routines typically follow the same sequence...making them very predictable.”⁴ The predictability of the day makes the tasks and routines much more manageable to the students rather than being surprised or caught off guard all the time in the classroom. This program or idea greatly reduces behavior problems in the classroom. Establishing routines within the classroom can reduce the amount of behavior problems that surface because of student uncertainties. According to Aspen Education Programs “pre-processing what to expect, [can make children] feel less anxious and are [better] prepared for success.”⁵ This idea includes prompting for changes with enough time for students to process what is expected of them. When students are well prepared or able to manage changes then they know what is expected of them throughout the day.

Students often become anxious because they do not know what to expect and this causes misbehavior. According to Inclusive Schools Network “preparing a child for an upcoming event that may be perceived as stressful will help him or her to have an understanding of the event before it occurs.”⁶ With a reduction in stress students can behave better. Having smooth routines, procedures, and transitions can greatly prevent negative behaviors because students are less anxious. According to Tom Savage, “developing routines that help you avoid wasting time [by noting] recurring and predictable events that occur in the normal course of a day”⁷ can be a preventative

¹ Wong, 2009

² Larrivee, 2009

³ Levin 2009

⁴ Predictable classroom routines, 2007

⁵ Aspen Education Programs: Talisman Summer Camps

⁶ Inclusive Schools Network

⁷ Savage, 1999 pg. 85

measure useful in all classrooms. Establishing routines creates an ease in the classroom that can ultimately lead to more academics taking place.

Having posted schedules with times and activities listed will make visual cues for all students along with prompts before changes. This establishes to the students what to expect everyday with little or no surprise changes. An example of a typical daily schedule might look like this:

Typical Daily Schedule

7:00 am Wake Up
7:15 am Morning Routine
7:30 am Area Cleanup
8:15 am Morning Group
8:30 am Breakfast
9:45 am Morning Activity
12:15 pm Lunch Group
12:30 pm Lunch
1:30 pm Down Time
2:30 pm Afternoon Activity
5:15 pm Dinner Group
5:30 pm Dinner
6:45 pm Evening Activity
8:15pm Evening Group
8:30 pm Nighttime Routine
9:15 pm Flashlight Silent Time
9:30 Lights Out

This schedule is one that was used at the Talisman Boarding School. Each group signifies a transition from one thing to the next and this routine is done regardless of if you are on campus or at an away activity. Having posted schedules and visual cues that show how or what each event requires will definitely help to contribute to behavior management control. This is especially true for students with disabilities. Having posted charts will guide children through the classroom routines.⁸ Along with charts posted with schedules and behaviors, teaching about transitions can minimize problems. Transitions happen when changing between activities, cleaning up, and arriving or leaving school for the day. This can create challenging behaviors.

“Children’s challenging behaviors during transitions may be related to how program staff structure, schedules, and implement transitions.

⁸ Aspen Education Programs

Challenging behavior is more likely to occur when there are too many transitions, . . . when transitions are too long and when children spend too much time waiting with nothing to do, and when there are not clear instructions.”⁹

Because of these reasons it is quite important to formulate strategies regarding transitions and routines in order to prevent misbehavior. Overall, “routines . . . rid [children] of distractions and inconveniences are fewer, as are opportunities for misbehavior.”¹⁰ This can enable the teacher to focus on academics rather than taking multiple pauses to redirect negative behaviors that are caused by lack of knowing schedules and transitions. Transitions can pose many problems for students and teachers due to the fact that misbehavior could arise quickly without proper structure in place. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) explains that these situations are even more hazardous for students with disabilities.¹¹

“Some students may have a difficult time with transitions due to disabilities (difficulty with change is a characteristic of autism, for example) or limit communication, social emotional or cognitive skills. Some children may engage in challenging behavior during transitions because they do not want to stop what they are doing, they do not want or need to go to the next activity, or the transition occurs without warning.”¹²

When there is no warning some students may have a difficult time transitioning from one activity to the next. All of these factors can be perceived as the child acting up regardless of whether the child has a disability or not. Sometimes the students do not know how to see the help they need during routines and transitions in order to not misbehave. A lack of structure again can have an impact on behavior during these classroom routines and activity changes.

Implementation/Application

Because routines, procedures, and transitions are so crucial to behavior, it is important to keep in mind how to make these steps as smooth as possible. With the proper techniques it can reduce behavior problems a great deal. Savage discusses how a classroom can operate efficiently with routines. The routines can include how students enter or exit the classroom, how they gather supplies or turn in assignments, and clean up procedures. It also includes administrative procedures such as taking attendance and handling students who were absent. Things that occur at the beginning of the class period are especially important to establish a set routine for procedures because these things do not directly relate to the academics that should be taking place in the classroom. These procedures should include taking attendance, collecting paperwork, giving school wide announcements, and dealing with previously absent or tardy students. Wong states that a

⁹ Hemmeter, 2008

¹⁰ Linsin, 2009

¹¹ National Association for the Education of Young Children

¹² Hemmeter, 2008

teacher should “explain, rehearse, and reinforce.” This means that we should state what needs to be accomplished as well as practice with the students what is expected, while finally making sure the class maintains these behaviors.¹³

In order to accomplish this a teacher needs to define the task, state why it is important, demonstrate the task, and model the procedures. This can be done by:

- Ensuring that Students understand the reason for the routine.
- Clarify the procedure through modeling.
- Allow students opportunities to practice the routine through rehearsal.
- Try not to overwhelm students by teaching too many routines at once.
- Remember that it will probably be necessary to revisit this process as you see the need.¹⁴

Defining these procedures can be tough. First the teacher should discuss why the routine is important and give the rationale regarding the task.¹⁵ Next state the exact process for the routine. The process should have a definite beginning, middle, and end if it is an action process where each step is taught and practiced.¹⁶ Describe what is acceptable and allow students to role play. Include skits on both inappropriate and appropriate behaviors. Have students discuss why it is or what was inappropriate about the scenario.¹⁷ Make sure to describe clearly what you would like accomplished through defining clear directions.¹⁸ Some students verbally struggle to understand what is being asked of them. If too many directions are given it can often lead to misbehavior because the students are not keeping up with the many things asked of them.¹⁹ Demonstrate how we put materials away, how to line up for lunch, and what to do during the morning/afternoon routine. Always as a teacher model the routine as best as possible. Lastly, reinforce the routine frequently.

“If the class begins to ignore the routine or become lax in its application, you will need to remind students of the routine and have them practice it again. These two actions signal that the routines are important and that students are expected to follow them. Establishing routines for recurring and predictable events, insisting compliance and monitoring students...can result in more learning time...and fewer behavioral problems.”²⁰

¹³ Wong, pg. 175

¹⁴ Young, 2010

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Predictable Classroom Routines, 2007

¹⁷ Watson, 2010

¹⁸ Savage, 1999 pg 92

¹⁹ Hemmeter, 2008

²⁰ Savage, 1999 pg 91

Following the above steps can reduce issues relating to behavior as well as create a more efficient classroom.

Managing transitions also creates an efficient classroom. There are many ways to curb misbehaviors. Again, demonstrating what needs to happen and letting the students practice it will prepare them for transitions. Having transitions is important for the social aspect of children. Some key factors include minimizing the amount of time and the number of transitions while making sure transition times are filled. If setting up an activity it might be useful to have the students conducting quiet fillers such as reading, games, or songs. Songs are particularly useful because they can serve as prompts to cue the students on the activity they are about to transition to.²¹ As a teacher

You should outline the steps of the transition carefully, give clear directions to the students, and make sure that all students understand where they are to go and what they are expected to do. Transitions that occur frequently should be developed into routines and practiced. Posting daily schedules and notifications of any changes in the daily routine are also useful in preparing students for transitions. When they understand what is going to be happening and when time limits are established for activities, students develop a sense of security. Transitions then tend to be smoother and less disruptive. Students do get accustomed to a schedule, and when an unusual break occurs, they may waste considerable time complaining that it is not yet time to change.²²

This can help facilitate smooth transitions from activity to activity. Daily schedules are significantly important at all age levels. Younger students should have visual cues that are age appropriate. Pictures and clocks with the times posted all in an easy to see place anywhere in the classroom make it possible for students to keep track of the schedule. Older students will require less visual cues but rather instead maybe just highlighting important dates such as major projects, exams, and school events.²³ Yet it is very important to keep in mind that preschoolers or young kindergarteners might struggle to understand longer concepts of time. This could result in more frustration and confusion that could lead to misbehavior during routines and transitions.²⁴ Keeping to the scheduled routine helps students stay positive and reduces confusion.

Students with disabilities will benefit from a visual schedule. The best way to keep a visual schedule is create a month long poster board on a bulletin board while keeping a running daily schedule on the whiteboard. Sometimes the visual cue is not enough for that type of students. In many cases verbal cues must be given several minutes before the actual activity change. Despite it being visually represented,

²¹ Hemmeter, 2008

²² Savage, 1999 pg 93

²³ Establishing Classroom Routines, 2010

²⁴ Beneke, 2008

sometimes misbehavior will occur if not given proper warning cues. If this does not help further plans might have to be individualized per student needs.²⁵

Often transitional groups can be beneficial to remind students throughout the day on what to expect or any possible changes. This is best in the morning to prepare students of possible activity variations due to lack of supplies, sick instructors, or inclement weather. When the transition group takes place it can also be a great time to remind students how to act during the change. Saying prompts such as “after this group we will grab our lunches then get on the bus” will help. Ask the student who does not focus what is expected then have another student remind of the bus routine. Before adjourning group remind students one last time of the prompts and the future schedule. This transition group allows students to have clear expectations of what is happening most currently and for the rest of the day.²⁶

There are many examples of when a routine and transition process should be taught and monitored. Here are some examples:

- Beginning the day
- Entering and exiting the classroom
- Labeling papers
- Collecting and distribution of papers
- Signaling for quiet and attention
- Appropriate times for moving around the room
- Emergency drills and procedures
- Going to the restroom
- Moving throughout the school
- Late arrival
- Grading and homework policies
- Asking questions
- Attendance
- Making announcements
- Coming unprepared to class
- Pencil sharpening
- Students assisting each other
- Participating in discussion
- Working in groups^{27 28},

These types of procedures should have proper routines, transitions, and consistent consequences for violating the routine. The examples include administrative, lesson, and rules for interaction routines.

²⁵ Hemmeter, 2008

²⁶ Aspen Education Programs, Talisman Summer Camps

²⁷ Savage, 1999 pg 90

²⁸ Young, 2010

Conclusion

Establishing routines and having proper transitions can be very helpful in creating a positive atmosphere for student learning. This is the ultimate goal because your classroom will be able to run as smoothly as possible. Establishing routines also determines how much time you take for the activities mentioned above that might take away from academic areas. Teachers should remember to discuss why they are setting up a routine and have the students model the behavior several times in order to demonstrate that they understand the concept. After this students should be able to continue the task with little prompting throughout the rest of the school year. Visual reminders are important for those that might forget often what routines are set in place while sometimes prompting verbally will get the transition going smoothly.

Routines go beyond reducing anxiety for students it also creates a sense of community that bonds the classroom together into a safe feeling environment. With that community the classroom will run smoothly without even noticing the routines that have been practiced at the beginning of the year and reinforced throughout the semesters. The idea is to establish routines so that students can have a good understanding of how your classroom is run in order to prevent behavior problems in the future. Students will feel prepared and know what to expect. This will reduce the amount of anxiety that some students feel while at school. If this is accomplished students will not be caught off guard and will not act up during procedural times or transitions. Setting routines will make it easier for students to cope with changes in schedule.

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