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**Core Function: Classroom Instruction**

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Effective Practice**Maintain sound classroom management**

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**Overview:** Research suggests that a well-managed classroom is essential for effective instruction and student achievement. Sound classroom management includes the capacity to teach and reinforce clear classroom rules and procedures, effectively manage transitions between activities and maximize instructional time through use of effective wait time activities, and maintain a well-organized classroom. Effective teachers also use a variety of instructional modes to engage all learners and reduce the off-task behavior that can lead to behavior problems and loss of instructional time. For example, teachers should build a sense of urgency and engagement by assigning concise and time-dependent learning tasks in which students know they will be accountable to share their work publicly with peers, and ensuring that even reticent or shy students are encouraged to contribute when sharing work.

**Evaluate Your Practice:** Do all teachers explicitly teach, model, and reinforce preventive behaviors that result in safe and positive learning environments? Are rules and procedures displayed visually throughout the school, particularly in classrooms with younger children? How does the school determine whether teachers consistently enforce classroom rules and procedures? Has the school provided professional development to help teachers effectively manage their classrooms? What do classroom observation data say about teachers' capacity to provide transitions that maintain engagement and instructional time? Do teachers convey instructions and behavioral expectations for students during transitions? Do all teachers maintain well-organized learning environments with easily accessible instructional materials? Have all teachers established a repertoire of engaging and instructionally relevant wait time activities? What evidence is available regarding teachers' capacity to maximize instruction time and limit off-task behavior? Do teachers' lesson plans include a variety of instructional modes to encourage engagement and on-task behavior? What do observation data reveal about teachers' ability to enhance motivation and on-task behavior for all students (even those who may be shy or not engaged for other reasons)? What professional learning may help teachers enhance their ability to build student engagement?

### *Introduction*

Classroom management has been defined as “actions taken to create and maintain a learning environment conducive to successful instruction (arranging the physical environment, establishing rules and procedures, maintaining students' attention to lessons and engagement in activities)” (Brophy, 2006, p. 17). Effective teachers organize their learning environments and use classroom management approaches that maximize student engagement (Redding, 2007). Meta-analysis research consistently shows that effective teaching and learning require a well-managed classroom (Durlak, Weissburg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Jones & Jones, 2012; Korpershoek, Harms, de Boer, van Kuijk, & Doolaard, 2016; Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). Hattie's effect size research synthesizing the research of thousands of studies also demonstrates that classroom management and decreasing disruptive behavior are likely to have a positive impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2017). Preventive classroom management strategies (e.g., teachers negotiating clear rules with students and decreasing opportunities for off-task behavior) have generally been shown as more effective than reactive strategies (e.g., punishment) (Marzano, et al., 2003). This brief will review preventive classroom management strategies that can help teachers foster a positive learning environment and enhance student engagement.

*How can teachers use classroom management practices that prevent behavior problems and foster a positive learning environment?*

**Teaching and reinforcing classroom rules.** Research shows that implementing and reinforcing clearly defined classroom rules is associated with positive behavior within the classroom and school (Kern & Clemens, 2007; Sugai & Horner, 2002). A What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) research report provides recommendations for reducing behavior problems in elementary classrooms, including providing a learning environment with classroom rules and procedures that inhibit problem behaviors (Epstein, Atkins, Cullinan, Kutash, & Weaver, 2008). Epstein, et al (2008) recommend that teachers “actively teach expectations for appropriate student behavior and corresponding classroom routines to students at the beginning of the year and revisit them regularly, showing students clearly what to do and what not to do” (p. 24). Effective teachers convey these expectations daily through explicitly teaching strategies, modeling desired behaviors, and developing positive relationships with students (Epstein, et al., 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Classroom rules and procedures should address student behavior in a variety of situations, such as arriving/leaving the classroom, turning in work, requesting teacher help, transitioning to new activities or settings, and working independently and in small groups (Epstein, et al., 2008).

Classroom rules and procedures should be displayed visually, with pictures of desired behaviors enlarged and posted in the classroom, particularly for younger students (Epstein, et al., 2008). Elementary students need frequent practicing of behavioral expectations, particularly at the beginning of the school year, and whenever new expectations arise or frequent behavioral lapses occur (Sugai & Horner 2002). Older children may also need a review of rules and procedures, especially following vacations. Time invested in explicitly teaching and reinforcing classroom rules and procedures and reviewing them throughout the year enhances the chances that students develop ownership of a positive classroom environment (Epstein, et al., 2008).

**Using effective wait-time, transition and classroom organizational strategies.** Teachers need to be prepared to manage lesson pacing and student engagement by “thinking two steps ahead” to ensure smooth transitions and avoid behavior problems and loss of instructional

time (Alber (2012). Well-orchestrated transitions between learning activities are quick with clear beginnings and endings, and help avoid reduced time on task and decreases in attention, thus increasing the likelihood of sustained student engagement (Finley, 2017; Marzano & Pickering, 2010). Examples of classroom transitions include entering/exiting the classroom for recess or lunch, moving from group to individual work, and putting away materials and preparing for the next task. Teachers must plan out the steps in each classroom transition, and communicate instructions and behavioral expectations to students. McIntosh, et al (2004) suggest that teachers provide a rationale for why the transition is happening, explain and demonstrate what the expected behavior looks like, give students opportunities for practice, provide feedback, and reteach behaviors as necessary. Students’ behavior during transitions also benefits from teachers’ use of pre-corrections, or quick pre-transition reminders of expected behaviors (e.g., right before asking students to line up, the teacher asks “How far apart should you be when you line up?”) (McIntosh, et al., 2004).

Well-organized student learning materials can also facilitate transitions and appropriate “wait-time” activities can increase instructional engagement (ADI, 2011; Stronge, 2007). To maintain and organize learning materials, teachers are recommended to consider whether materials are clean and in good working order with all parts present, easily accessible if children use them independently and inaccessible if they do not, sorted and stored in bins or boxes on shelves (color coding helps), kept near the place where they are used, and clearly labeled with words, graphics or both (Responsive Classroom, 2016). As Stronge (2007) states, “...in the effective classroom there is a place for everything and everything is in its place.” When students are waiting for teacher assistance or waiting for the next step for some other reason (e.g., finishing work early), they should be provided with curriculum-related activities to maintain on-task behavior and reinforce and/or extend learning. Wait time activities should not involve busy-work but should address learning objectives, and be student selected and/or individually targeted to meet students’ learning needs if possible (ADI, 2011). Pappalardo (2014) suggests that when students finish work early or otherwise are waiting for a classroom transition, they should be asked to 1) check and work on unfinished work/projects; and if work is complete then 2) write (students

continue with work in progress); 2) read (independent reading or reading workshop); or 3) sketch (preferably curriculum-related). Using a daily schedule of wait time activities (e.g., Mondays are always writing then reading, Wednesdays are sketching then reading) helps prevent students from always engaging in the same type of waiting activity (Pappalardo, 2014).

**Use a variety of instructional modes to engage all students.** Engaging all students within a classroom can be challenging; off-task behavior has been shown to be the largest factor that reduces instructional time and increases disruptions within the classroom (Florida Education Association, n.d.; Godwin, Almeda, Petroccia, Baker, & Fisher, 2013). Teachers must be skilled at using a variety of instructional modes to incorporate well-structured lessons that include properly paced lesson presentation with manageable amounts of content that can build student engagement and enhance learning (Marzano & Pickering, 2010; Walberg, 2007). Effectively used direct instruction can accelerate student achievement considerably (Hattie, 2012; 2017); direct instruction involves the use of a variety of modes to include whole-class, teacher-directed instruction (typically occurring first), followed by teacher- or student-directed small group work, independent and/or computer-based work, and homework (Redding, 2007). The second phase of instruction is differentiated to meet the needs of students; the key is to plan in advance using student learning data to determine which instructional mode will best meet the needs of each individual learner (Redding, 2007). Teachers should take care not to overly rely on one instructional mode. For example, several studies of elementary student engagement suggest that overreliance on whole-group instruction in which students work individually at their desk, and seatwork in which students work on their own can result in lack of student engagement (Florida Education Association, n.d.; Godwin, et al., 2013).

Teachers can encourage on-task behavior by building a sense of urgency for learning tasks. For example, assigning a manageable chunk of work that students will be accountable for in a short and precise amount of time can build student concern for the learning task so that they stay focused and on-task (Ferlazzo, 2014). To build engagement of all learners, Ferlazzo (2014) conveys the suggestions of one successful educator:

[Teachers should] work to establish a classroom culture in which it is understood that, with every task they

perform, students know there is a strong possibility that they will have to share out their results in front of their peers. When calling on students to share out, avoid calling on the hand raisers, and make it a point to regularly call on students you think are at risk of not being engaged with the lesson. Along with the use of time, knowing that their work will be made public is another factor that raises the students' level of concern.

To enhance motivation and on-task behavior, teachers are also recommended to maintain an energetic pace and "mix things up" by occasionally altering the instructional mode (e.g., occasionally rotating partners for small-group work and changing students' mode of response) (Ferlazzo, 2014; Marzano & Pickering, 2010).

#### Indicators to Support the Effective Practice

- All teachers provide students with curriculum-related activities for use when the student is waiting for assistance from the teacher.
- Transitions between instructional modes are brief and orderly.
- All teachers use a variety of instructional modes (whole-class, teacher-directed groups, student-directed groups, independent work, computer-based, and homework).
- All teachers maintain well-organized student learning materials in the classroom.
- All teachers display classroom rules and procedures in the classroom.
- All teachers reinforce classroom rules and procedures by positively teaching them.
- All teachers conduct an occasional "behavior check."
- All teachers engage all students (e.g., encourage silent students to participate).

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