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It Pays to Behave: Investigating Effective Classroom Management

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### Abstract

The focus of this Capstone project is on improving the work ethic and engagement of students by reducing challenging behavior that comes with classroom transitions and management. This is an important issue for educators because when an instructor spends too much time redirecting students, a lot of crucial learning time can be lost. Consideration of the issue included the perspectives of the training and program specialist and child program assistants of the observed after school child care center. Based on the findings, action was taken to help refine the educational opportunities and help decrease challenging behavior during instruction time to help further student engagement.

### It Pays to Behave: Investigating Effective Classroom Management

“If the key to classroom management is consistency, I am highly effective. I am consistently exhausted (Bacall, 2008)!” I believe every child has a talent. Many of them have the same behavior in the classroom all manifested at the same time disruptive or challenging behavior. For the past five years I have worked at several jobs with elementary aged students. Although many of those jobs have been outside of the traditional classroom setting, my work experience has still required me to have an arsenal of group management skills. Ideally, I would love for the students I work with and my future students to fully participate in my activities and interact with their peers. The reality of implementing a lesson plan is a little different. Challenges may arise that were not accounted for when initially planning the lesson like lack of interest and cooperation from the students, which can lead to challenging behaviors that can take away from a conducive learning environment. Through activities that require group cooperation, students are still learning how to behave in academic settings. It is my job as a caregiver and educator to give them as many tools as I can to make sure they are as equipped to gain as much as they can from the educational setting.

One of the issues is that sometimes a group of students can fall out of alignment and succumb to disorder if there is not an effective plan in place to manage all of the personalities that come together in a school program. I have been working at an after school program for the Army, that mainly aides students of service members. Because of the military standards, lesson planning and curriculum areas are a must. My group activities, whether they be an art project or a team game on the playground, require me to manage a group of up to twenty students. In that group, I have the serious child, the sensitive, the determined, languid, questioner, and every other personality in between. Being well prepared means not only having all my materials ready for the exercise, but also being ready to mentally prepare my students for what will be expected of them.

The favorite parts of curriculum at my job are life skills and academic mentoring. I combine both of those in my food science class. My students and I not only get the life skills of

preparing and cooking food, but also they also receive the academic skills of learning the “why” behind a recipe: cooking concepts such as why bread rises, basic versus acidic food, tempering chocolate and other kitchen. I have taught groups of students that are able to be self sufficient and read along with me throughout the recipe. With self-reflection, I realize the less strenuous times were when I made expectations clear before and during the activity. I also let them know what I needed from them after the activity as well. During the cooking process we often go back and forth from the oven, the stove, the sink and the dining area. For the whole procedure to flow, I make sure to let them know of those upcoming transitions as well.

Thinking back on times where activities were not smooth or were completely stopped to regroup students, they were all due to being ill prepared to come before them for said activity. Taking the time to prepare a lesson plan to be implemented is the equivalent of reviewing a game plan before an important sports game playoff. It is the creative process that allows a teacher to construct their own game plan together for the classroom. Having efficient strategies for classroom management is key to that game plan’s success. Being able to have appropriate levels of authority over the tone and mood in the classroom can help the teacher’s vision of student success become a reality. I feel more successful as a teacher when I am fully prepared to help them be successful with plan A, B, C and D.

### **Literature Synthesis and Integration**

Educators are responsible for leading the classroom environment in a positive and productive direction. Effective transitional periods between different activities and between indoor and outdoor activities are critical to a classroom’s success, as well as general classroom management. The most seasoned teacher can have a difficult time combating challenging behaviors once they begin to arise due to bumpy transitions and ineffective classroom management. The environment can be more conducive to learning and feel more comfortable for students to cooperate when an instructor or teacher first established themselves as a leader and sets realistic boundaries and goals that help to manage the classroom and help the teacher’s vision of student success to become a reality.

**What is the issue?**

Based on the literature review from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL, 2008), there are behavioral issues that arise during transitions and ineffective classroom management that lead to “stressful and frustrating” experiences in the classroom or instructional setting. Transition periods, according to the CSEFEL, are described as a time of change and can include transitions between activities, between multiple settings, or transitions between programs (CSEFEL, 2008). Having a set plan helps instructors be proactive in preventing challenging behaviors that happen in the classroom, instead of being reactive and missing teachable moments in the height of student’s emotions. Management techniques used by the teacher either “facilitate or interfere” with smooth transitions (Borg, W., Stone, D., Stowitschek, C., Hansen, T., Marshall, D., Horn, K., & McEvoy, R., 1973). The research conducted by Utah State University in 1973 states that behavior problems can arise with three different types of instructor interference. One, is that the teacher becomes distracted from the main activity with other stimuli in the environment that is unrelated to the activity. The second, is the instructor interrupting the activity in an untimely matter with no real intent to add to the lesson academically. Lastly, teacher interference can also look like starting a new lesson without giving the prior one a proper close out. The most accomplished teacher can still have issues in classroom management, especially when transitional periods are not well thought out to help guide students towards success. When students have difficulty following transition directions it can lead instructors to repeat directions, punish those who did not comply, wait for the students who are not complying to catch up with the students who are, or ignore the non-compliant students and move on to the next part of the schedule (Fudge, D., Skinner, C., Williams, J., Cowden, D, Clark, J., & Bliss, S. 2008).

### **Why is it an issue?**

Transition time for some students can be a source of frustration and confusion (CSEFEL, 2008). Having a set plan and backup options can help reduce challenging behavior that arises when switching between activities. Teachers or instructors can analyze their daily schedule to see what parts of the day can be improved in classroom management or transitioning between activities, to help reduce unnecessary stress between child and caregiver. Part of providing quality and positive guidance for students is having a consistent schedule. Transitions, whether it

be to a different activity in the same day or to a different area altogether, take time out of the child's schedule. The goal between changing activities is to not take too much time. Students can be more prone to behavior issues if they spend too long waiting in line for games or mealtimes (School Improvement Network, 2014). If directions are not clear or not understood at the level they were given, transition time can be a frustrating experience for the child and the caregiver (School Improvement Network, 2014).

Jacob Kounin, classroom management theorist, believed and researched the idea that teachers are not merely warm bodies to pass on factual information. Rather, they are also the role models in the classroom for behavior as well. In the 1970's he asserted the idea that teachers must combine disciplinary and instructional actions to get the most out of their classroom. More specifically, Kounin believed that smooth transitions were key to the most effective classroom management and keeping students motivated to stay involved (Kounin, 1970). One of the pieces of student success that the School Improvement network lists is relevant and engaging instruction (2014). Regardless of the nature of a given learning task, it makes sense that students must be engaged in order for learning to occur (Emmer & Stough 2001). Teachers have one of the most important jobs of setting the tone in the classroom. In their book about classroom management, Marzano, Marzano and Pickering state that even if the school they [the students] work in is highly ineffective, individual teachers can produce powerful gains in student learning (2003). Figure 1.1 illustrates the impact of teacher effectiveness on student achievement. The results shown in the chart come from research conducted on the percentile gains made in a year with a teacher who is judged to be most effective versus least effective. The judgment comes from three criteria. The first being wise choices about ineffective instructional strategies to employ in the classroom, such as knowing when to implement group work or individual work. Secondly, designing classroom curriculum to facilitate student learning. Thirdly, making effective use of classroom management techniques. According to the figure, students in the classrooms of teachers classified as effective, gain about 52 percentile points in a year's time. Students in the classrooms where teachers are classified as least effective can only be expected to gain about 14 percentile points over a year's time. To put those numbers into perspective, students already gain about six percentile points a year from everyday life and personal experiences. So in reality,

ineffective teachers actually only help students gain about eight percentile points as opposed to their more effective colleagues, that help students gain about 40 more percentile points more than what they already learning from their own lives Marzano, R., Marzano, J. S., and Pickering, D. J. (2003).

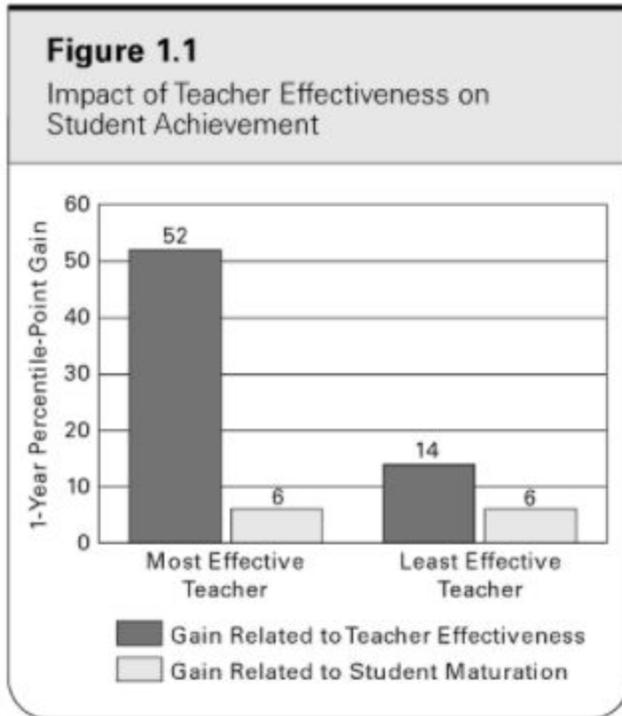


Figure 1.1 Marzano, R., Marzano, J. S., and Pickering, D. J. (2003)

### What should be done?

Caregivers or teaching instructors should first ask themselves a series of questions about their methods of instruction and management to analyze what type of interference is resulting in behavior problems in the classroom. Analyzing what measures can be taken to add clarity to the daily schedule, and how individual needs of students who might need more support or different types of support during transitions and activities are being met. The School Improvement network has a framework that closely aligns with theories from Jacob Kounin on classroom management and how to identify the root issue of what is causing challenging behavior. Instructors should look at the classroom vision and the expectations set in the classroom. If they are set too high students are not set up to be able to reach goals in a reasonable amount of time

which can cause frustration. Intervention and redirection are important factors as well. Instructors should dedicate themselves to getting to know their students and learn how to challenge them as well as learn their limits and when extra help is required. Students can often get distracted while working so having a positive redirection plan is important to keep students on track. Relationship and support building in the classroom is equally critical to student's motivation. If students do not feel comfortable expressing themselves and lack support from their peers or their instructor the classroom structure can become undone. And lastly, clear procedure and engaging instruction crucial to the power balance in the classroom. If rules and roles are not clearly laid out and it is not understood what is needed from the students as individuals and as a classroom together, the teacher is not being proactive in leading the classroom to success. In addition to methods mentioned above, according to Robert and Jana Marzano, apart of effective group management in the classroom can be also attributed to appropriate levels of dominance, using equitable and positive classroom behaviors, and awareness of high-need students (2003). Instructors should be sure to keep the environment comfortable but not permissive. To combat challenging behavior the teacher should be able to express clear cut behavior expectations in a way that strongly guides students towards appropriate behaviors.

### **Conclusion**

After looking at some of the key pieces to effective classroom management: classroom vision and expectations, intervention and redirection, engaging instruction, clear procedures and relationships and support, educators should be able to analyze what exactly it is that the classroom needs more of. These are some of the key pieces that help build the foundation to an effective and high functioning classroom. By using some of the tips and information supported through literature, teachers and caregivers in any type of learning set up can help students be more successful.

### **Method**

For this Capstone Project an investigation was conducted to analyze how teachers and after school care providers view transitions between activities and the behaviors associated with them as well as classroom management, and what they think could be done to improve them. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, an action was formulated that

responds to the focus issue in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

## **Context**

Mifflin Child Care Center<sup>1</sup> is a supervised recreational center for active duty family members, retired military family members, and Department of Defense (DoD) civilians in the Bay Area Military Community (Mifflin Child Care Center). Mifflin Child Care Center is home to many diverse groups of families from all across the continental U.S and some students from overseas.

## **Participants and Participant Selection**

Three individuals were invited to participate in the study of effective classroom management and transitions. These three participants have years of background with children and they are valuable to the study because they have experience implementing lesson plans, activities, and having their own classroom or group of children to manage. The interviews and observations reflected the strengths and challenges they have faced in the classroom.

**Pamela.** Training and Program Specialist for Mifflin Child Care centers. She has been in this position for about two and half years and has worked with school age children in and out of classroom settings for over five years. Her job is to keep staff up to date with their training and lesson plans and help develop and oversee instructional materials and plans.

**Meredith.** A childcare assistant at the Mifflin Child Care Center. She has over 10 years of experience with children preschool to fifth grade age.

**Creeda.** A childcare assistant at the Mifflin Child Care Center with three years of experience with the current location. Was voted “best team player” by staff for 2016. She is included to observe how she manages to be a team player among students and staff.

## **Researcher**

I work closely with children everyday and I know firsthand that if the environment is not set-up correctly, then the children who require a bit more attention regularly, have a hard time staying focused in something productive and making/having positive experiences. I have been a program assistant at the after school care site for about three years now. I have seen the program

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<sup>1</sup> “Pseudonyms have been used to protect the names of people, places, and organizations interviewed and observed for this paper.”

when it is at a high efficiency. Staff members clarified the program running at high efficiency to mean low number of accident and incident reports, with students being able to interact with peers and adults with minimal challenging behavior. I have observed when it is functioning on the lower side with multiple incidents and accident reports written daily. What was different about transitions then and now?

I am someone who in my future classroom will value expectations and rules set out before all else. If students do not respect the authority in charge it can be difficult to reign in challenging behavior and the instructor could lose the classroom. I think what makes me different is I am on the “inside,” having experience working with the program, so I know procedures for lesson plans and what implementing them can look like when it is running smoothly and when the program is having bumps in the road. I am experiencing the behavior that can come with not so smooth transitions and program assistants that cannot control or interpret the cause of negative behavior. **Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions**

1. How would you describe how we open, transition to, or close an activity?
2. What do you see as the problem with opening, transitioning to/and closing an activity; *or* What are you concerned about when it comes to the behavior associated with environment and activity changes? Consider before school, after school, and holiday school break care.
3. What do you think should be done about the negative/challenging behavior associated with a transition/activity that is not well planned?
4. What is currently being done to improve transitions and lesson plans facilitated by staff - what do you think about these efforts? Why?
5. What do you think **should** be done to improve transitions and lesson plans?
6. What do you think are the obstacles to improving transitions and lesson planning?
7. What are the obstacle to changing the way the center trains staff on how to open, move through, and close an activity?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to say about transitions, behavior, lesson planning and/or the improvement of such?

## **Procedure**

Participants were invited to the study if they worked at the Mifflin Child Care Center. I had approached several employees that had over a year's experience in the center and were willing to give opinions on how the center might improve student engagement in planned activities through effective classroom management.

### **Data Analysis**

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes. Through the coding I was able to develop common themes between the words of coworkers and management team from Mifflin Child Care Center and the literature. As a result of such transcriptions I was able to create a plan of action to take relating to increasing student engagement through effective classroom management.

### **Results**

For this Capstone Project, child and youth program assistants as well as their training and program specialist, were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve group management and transitions during activity time. This is important because to be able to facilitate a daily schedule and maximize learning and play time, all depends on how well a teacher or caregiver can command the attention of a room. Based on an analysis of the data from the interviews and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential action option by the following criteria: time it will take to implement such actions; possible funds needed to implement such actions; and the reach of the actions and how much they will affect the staff and youth who attend the center, negatively or positively. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

*Evaluation of Action Options*

	Time	Probability of Impact	Reach
Changing NEO (new employee orientation)	High	High	Medium
More lesson planning time	Medium	Low	High
Child Behavior Accountability	Medium	Medium	High

**Changing new employee orientation (NEO)**

From the interview of the center's training and program specialist I found out that new employee orientations only happen every three months. If the Child and Youth Services (CYS) organization were to make them more often, new employees who join the team between the time periods of NEO would be able to benefit from more information about group management and transition. Is there any money involved in making NEO meetings happen more frequently? Are the resources (space, orientation speakers) available to make NEO happen more often, and if so, are there any additional funds?

**More lesson planning time available**

How much time is needed beyond what is given in the schedule, and how would that affect flex, part time, and full time employees?

How are employers prepared to give more hours than what is currently scheduled, while staying within individual employee job status agreements (flex, part time, full time)?

Who can be affected by more time for lesson plans? Are there any drawbacks? Who benefits?

### **Child Behavior Accountability**

How much time should be invested in methods to keep children accountable for their actions, so the same negative behaviors are not repeated when activity time and transitions arise?

Are there any specialist that can be brought in to help supplement staff trainings for a cost?

Can we collaborate with parents on behavior accountability?

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, keeping in mind all related positive and negative outcomes the best option is to provide additional lesson planning time for staff who are required to complete lesson plans. The limitations that exist in this job are large, and the other two options would require entire standard operating manuals to be changed which is not something that is feasible time wise. Although having the new employee orientation changed to more than once every three months, so that new employees are able to have some of the core and foundational pieces of teaching to help facilitate classroom engagement, it is not something that I had the power to do in my capstone project timeline. Some of the potential negative outcomes involved in having additional lesson plans is that it is now the responsibility of the teacher or caregiver to utilize all of the time that they are given to create an engaging classroom environment for their students.

### **Action Documentation and Reflection**

I chose to focus on the issue of classroom (or classroom type setting) management and transitions. Proper group management can lead to a more productive and respectful environment. For my research, I interviewed an after school care center's training and program specialist, and two child and youth program assistants. After looking at the literature, and analyzing the themes that came up during the interview process, as well as reflecting upon my own work experiences,

a few action options emerged. One of them was to change the frequency of new employee orientation, the second being more lesson plan time for program assistants, and the third was to explore creating options to help the children become more accountable for their actions.

The action that I found most feasible was to collaborate with management on making more lesson planning time available for staff members. Currently our schedule allots us one to three hours, once every three weeks. In that time we are to plan engaging curriculum for three weeks out. This action was one that arose due to one of the themes in the interview process. Being that because there is not enough time to lesson plan, the quality and engagement of them may not be as balanced as they could be. With more time, further lesson extensions and accommodations could be made to prevent challenging behavior and to cultivate an environment with better understanding of expectations, both from the teacher and the student. From the interviews it was clear that because planning time is rushed, so is the implementation of such plans, which causes lack of clarity for the student. Additionally, there was less time for teachers to develop extensions or create backup plans. The outcome so far has been positive. I have observed that certain staff members have really utilized their extra time for planning to create more engaging lesson plans, and when implementing those plans they seem well prepared to lead students through the activities.

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to me 

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED

After completing the questions you had sent me, it provided me with the opportunity to do some self-reflection. I reviewed our operations manual and discovered that the plan that was put into place was not accurately providing our staff with the appropriate amount of time for lesson planning and training requirements. Staff our allowed one hour of lesson planning time a week and one hour of training time a week. Currently our staff have been given 3 hours for lesson planning and training a month and it is completed in a block time frame. I brought this to our management team and it is something we are going to fix. We first want to approach the staff about which option they would prefer and have them make a joint decision. Regardless, if the staff decide to complete their training in a block time frame or have the one hour a week, they will still be allowed the extra hour to make sure they are getting the required 4 hours. Also, as a management team, we have discussed whether or not staff would be able to have more time when they come in prior to having to work with the children. Our concerns with this is whether or not staff are utilizing their time effectively. At times, we see staff standing around or socializing with their co-workers and that is why we are hesitant to provide more time. However, what we can do on our end is to make sure not to take away the time that the staff have to prep. This means not pulling them away for conversations, briefs, etc. that would hinder their prep time. We also suggest to staff to utilize the end of the day when our ratios drop to start prepping for the day before as well. This could be something that the management team reminds the staff of because I feel it is often something that is forgotten.

The trainers of both centers have met and discussed how we can improve the incoming process of our new employees. A plan of action moving forward, we have discussed offering the child and program specific trainings more often than the previous time frame of offering it quarterly. This will help our new staff, especially the ones who come in with no educational background in working with children or experience. The only way we would move forward with offering these more frequently would be dependent on the number of new staff that have been hired in the time period in between the regularly scheduled NEO.

### **Critical Reflection**

I re-learned that I am someone who gets overwhelmed very easily, especially when I have such a critical class to my future success stuffed into my last semester with other advanced inquiry classes, because liberal studies course availability seems to be on the backburner. I realized that I need to set small goals for myself and set appointments for peer edits so I can be successful in all of my coursework. In my experience at CSUMB I have realized that self-care is something that is extremely important to me and I ended up putting it on hold for way too long, compromising my mental, spiritual, and physical help. As a future educator I never want to put this type of pressure on my students or overwhelm them.

To be able to see myself taking the next steps to work towards what I envision, rest and relaxation is what is important. I have worked so hard and so long solely supporting myself through this educational journey because my family could not afford to send me to college. I do not want to jump into a profession when I am so fatigued. I would love to spend time with myself and to travel to enhance my own sense of self, which will hopefully reflect on my future students.

The themes of the liberal studies department have not given me as much of a push into the workforce as my actual work experience has, but what I can say I have gained are connections and improved on my writing and speaking skills as outlined in MLO1 and MLO4. The community of teachers at CSUMB has helped me to realize that a lot of getting ahead in the work space is who you know that can help support your visions inside and outside of the classroom.

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