

## Reflection Paper

Subject: Reading    Grade: 3+4

Module 1: Classroom Environment for Active Learning : Teacher implements instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by:

Selected Indicator: 4. Fostering appropriate standards of behavior that support a productive learning environment for all students

### Goal:

I will research and implement strategies to redirect the students off-task behaviors. As a result, students will participate in a positive reward system to help build their academic stamina and monitor their own behavior, which will maximize their learning time. (Indicator 4)

### Initial Summary:

In a thirty minute pull-out reading group of two fourth grade students and one third grade student, off-task behaviors are creating distractions which are impeding student learning. The off-task behaviors include calling out, conversations with other students, drawing on papers and walking away from their seats. Currently to address these behaviors, I verbally redirect the students. The verbal redirection will remind the students they need to pay attention and focus on the task at hand. Although I addressed some of the behaviors, it is hard to address every off-task behavior and teach a lesson at the same time. The more time I am addressing the behavior, the less the students are learning in a short 30 minute reading block. I became aware of the need to extinguish these off-task behaviors in order to maximize their learning.

As a part of my current behavior management, the students can earn a ticket at the end of the reading block. Tickets are given for students that transition in and out of the classroom appropriately and give 100% effort during the 30 minute lesson. After the students collect 20 tickets, they can be cashed in for small prizes. The ticket system has been successful but only for transitions. I needed to also include providing tickets given appropriate classroom behavior. I noticed I needed to decrease the number of tickets earned before the students earned a reinforcer.

### Development of New Learning

The development of my new learning started as a discussion with my mentor teacher to review my current practices and to determine the impact that these practices were having in my classroom. After reviewing the CCT Performance Profile and

reflecting on my students disabilities, I decided to focus on behaviors that support a productive learning environment. This is important because two of my students receive special education services under the exceptionality of Other Health Impairment - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Because my students' off-task behaviors during their decoding instruction were interfering with the flow and delivery of the instruction, I chose to focus on developing appropriate standards of classroom behaviors that would in turn would allow students to take responsibility for their own learning. I felt that this was extremely important due to the fact that I only have my students for half an hour. A plan needed to be developed to maximize their learning so they could make significant reading gains.

At this point, I decided to observe a lesson taught by my mentor teacher. This gave me the opportunity to see how students were engaged during the entire lesson. I learned about different ways to increase student engagement, which limited the number of off-task behaviors for her students. It was evident that my mentor had established a daily routine for her students. Because her students were well aware of the routine, there was little time wasted in getting started on their daily review. It was an easy transition from there to the new skill that was being introduced.

After observing my mentor teacher, I had her come into my class to observe a reading decoding lesson. When observing the lesson, my mentor teacher observed each student for three minutes at a time and tracked their off-task behaviors. My mentor said she observed Student's A, B and C being on task 100% of the time during the lesson. This was surprising because this is the first time I was able to deliver the lesson without any interruptions. This may have been due to the fact that my mentor teacher has a long established rapport with these students.

A discussion with my mentor about how she tracks students behavior, led me to an idea of how I would track my students off-task behaviors. I created a small tally card to track my students' behavior. The tally card was small enough to be placed in front of my students during the lesson without being a distraction. The students will be able to see when they receive a tally for off-task behaviors. Not only are the tally cards important in tracking behavior, but more importantly, this tracking system eventually

lead students to becoming more self-aware. This self-awareness will then lead students to accept responsibility and change their behaviors.

When students are excited about their learning, they are more motivated to pay attention and engage in the lesson and activities. Based on conversations with my mentor along with some online research, I decided to design a set of lessons that were both multisensory and interactive. Using a visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile approach may help to keep my students engaged and assist them in mastering multiple decoding skills.

After reading, *The Mind Up Curriculum* by the Hawn Foundation, I gained a better understanding of the importance of making students aware of their behaviors in terms of how their brains respond to stress. Under stressful situations, both in school and at home, can lead both students and adults to become reactive as opposed to responsive. I noticed an increase in stress and anxiety when students were faced with a new decoding skill. Anxiety can cause students to shut down if they feel they will be unsuccessful. I have witnessed this first-hand with one of my students. Practicing breathing techniques with my students, may teach them to focus their attention and relax so they are ready to learn.

Brain breaks not only relieve stress but improve students' concentration. Brain breaks are used to help activate, energize and stimulate the students' brains. I had heard about teachers in my school implementing brain breaks and decided to read articles about them to learn more on the impact they can have on students. Research done by the University of South Carolina said they "found positive associations between physical activity, fitness, and physical education with multiple cognitive assessments and academic achievement measures." They also discussed how brain breaks "require few additional resources and a brief amount of time, making them ideal for schools with reduced budgets and limited time in their rigidly structured curriculums."

Another book that was helpful was, "*Mindset, The New Psychology of Success.*" Author Carol Dweck discusses the differences between a fixed mindset that limits the students' achievement and a growth mindset that encourages students to persevere based on the premise that "everyone can change and grow through application and experience." Because of this book, I now encourage my students' effort as opposed to

the end result. I will often comment to them, if they are struggling, “You’re not there yet! But if you stay with it, I know you will master this skill.” or “I like the way you were really focused trying to read those difficult words.” Using phrases of encouragement like these will hopefully have a definite impact on student learning.

### Impact on Practice

The new learning that has occurred has impacted my practice in positive ways. Since the initial summary was written in the beginning of October, I have moved away from using constant teacher delivered verbal redirections to having the students self-monitor their own behaviors. In this way, students become active participants in becoming aware of off-task behaviors in order to change them.

As an introduction to having students track their own behaviors, I began with a discussion with my class about what off-task behaviors looked like during our class. Together, it was determined that our focus would include the following: calling out, getting out of their seat, and having side conversations with each other. I then created a small tally card which was taped in front of each student. When a student exhibited an off-task behavior, I would mark a tally on their card. At the end of the lesson, the students and I conducted a short one-to-one conference to look at the number of tally marks for each particular behavior. During this conference, we set a goal for the next day to decrease the number of tally marks.

Initially, the teacher was responsible for making tally marks on the self-monitoring card that was in front of each student. After about a week, students started to show that they were becoming aware of their own behaviors and the simple, gentle, physical prompt was given if a student needed to mark his/her card. This procedure led to less disruptions in the delivery of my lesson.

After a few weeks of implementing the self-monitoring charts, students were able to chart their own behaviors with only a few promptings from me. By the end of four weeks students were almost fully independent in marking a tally on their sheet when engaged in off-task behaviors. Sometimes a student needed a visual reminder from the teacher to make a tally mark. My hope for the students is that they become fully responsible in monitoring their behaviors.

Overall, there has been a decrease in the total number of off-task behaviors. In October before implementation of the new learning, my lesson was interrupted by off-task behaviors an average of 12 times during a thirty minute lesson. At the end of October this number decreased by 4 times. Although there was improvement, I still felt I was losing instructional time and needed to try something new.

My focus now was for students to become aware of when they were on-task. A new self-monitoring tally sheet was now developed to include working quietly, raising hands and focus on the task at hand. Every ten minutes during the thirty minute lesson students were asked to reflect on their current on-task behaviors. Tally marks were earned for appropriate behaviors. Since the end of October on-task behaviors consistently increased for each of my students.

The qualifications for earning tickets has also changed in my classroom. Students who had less than five off-task behaviors marked on their sheet were able to receive a ticket. This changed once students were tracked on their on-task behaviors. Students who were on task three times during the thirty minute lesson earned a ticket. The number of tickets to earn a prize has also decreased from twenty to fifteen. This decreased the time of earning a prize from about a month to less than a month. This scheduled reinforcement has worked well to decrease the number of interruptions to my lesson.

Initially my students were unable to sustain their attention for the thirty minute lesson. To help my students, I began to use 1 to 3 minute brain break activities when the lessons demanded significant focus and attention from the students. The students then started to participate in brain breaks everyday before the lesson began. Behavior expectations for brain breaks were set between the teacher and students. Brain breaks included chair aerobics, stretches, and breathing exercises. With brain breaks implemented, I have been able to increase the pace of the lesson thus covering higher level decoding skills.

After discussion with my mentor, we decided to plan activities that integrated a more multi-sensory approach. These activities included having the students manipulate letter tiles, word/syllable cards and using personal whiteboards. The implementation of these activities helped keep students engaged and active during reading lessons.

After observing another lesson by my mentor, I came to realize the importance of providing structure and routines for my special education students. Each day, I begin my lesson by reviewing some previously taught skill/concept. This review of previously taught skills/concepts is important for my special education students as it provides the necessary repetitions to ensure mastery. From there, a new skill is introduced and then opportunities for practice are provided.

### Impact on Students

Using tickets for positive reinforcement, I have seen a change in my student behavior. Instead of earning tickets for transition and engagement in the lessons, students now earn tickets for having less than five tally off-task marks or three on-task marks. I noticed with this change, students were becoming more successful in earning tickets using the positive on-task tally system, rather than the negative off-task behavior system. The number of tickets to earn a prize has also decreased from twenty to fifteen. With these changes, students are more motivated to earn tickets because they can earn prizes faster, decreasing the time of earning a prize from a month and a half to less than a month.

From the time the initial summary was written, I have seen a tremendous change in all three of my students. As a result of my new strategies I have observed my students raising their hands and engaging in more on-task behaviors, instead of calling out. Initially, Student A would become off-task because the work was too easy. Now that the decoding lessons have become multi-sensory and more rigorous, she has become more involved in the lesson. Student A has made a great deal of progress in the work completion area, but showed difficulty when the tally marks were made for off-task behaviors. She became fixated on the negativity that came with a tally mark. Once the tally marks were changed to making a mark every ten minutes for positive on-task behaviors, she would become excited and start off-task behaviors. I will continue to work and conference with Student A to find a way to track on-task behaviors that require less attention. Initially Student B would remove himself from the table, seeking movement. With the implementation of the brain breaks and decoding lessons that incorporate a multisensory approaches, I have seen an increase in his attentiveness.

Student C has made progress in focusing on her own on-task behaviors, she used to be worried about what others were doing, but with the others on-task she has less to negative student behavior to engage with.

I have seen several areas of growth in my students throughout the process of implementing my new learning. These areas of growth include an increase in positive behaviors, increased academic stamina and engagement during lessons and in mastery of decoding skills. The development of my new learning and implementation to my teaching practice helped my students in their decoding skills. Because of the students' focus on the reading lesson, they were able to master certain decoding skills moving from one syllable words to two closed syllable words. Students have also shown mastery in reading goals from their Individualized Education Plan. Student A has moved from 60% to 92% accuracy in decoding multi-syllable containing multi-syllable closed and silent e syllables. Student B has moved from 54% to 80% accuracy in decoding words that contained welded sounds, blends and silent e. Student C has moved from 60% to 100% accuracy in decoding short vowels in isolation and in one syllable words.