

During this school year, literacy stations have become an integral part of our daily routine during our reading time. As I began to implement new literacy stations I noticed that my students were having difficulty transitioning to their next literacy station. With the identification of poor transitions occurring frequently, I began to research ways to develop more efficient transitions in my classroom. A pertinent source of my new learning was reading and applying specific strategies that Marzano's Classroom Management that Works highlighted as crucial to student success. I identified techniques that would help my transitions during literacy stations. Upon reviewing Marzano's strategies, I critically evaluated my own teaching strategies, and how they impact my practice on developing literacy stations that minimize wasted time on transitions. Specifically, classroom protocol and routines pertaining to literacy stations as Marzano (2003) identifies, "Rules identify general expectations or standards and procedures communicate expectations for specific behaviors."

Classroom rules had been discussed with the students, but never written down. The students did not have a visual representation to refer to during transitional times. I decided to re-teach the literacy station rules, and create a visual representation with the class. I focused on teaching four mini lessons before the start of literacy stations on four different occasions, based on the differences between a rule and a procedure. I asked, "What is a rule?" a student responded, "A rule is something we do." The student's response revealed students did not know the difference between a rule and procedure.

As a class we created a chart that exemplified the classroom rules and procedures. During the whole class discussion, we determined that during literacy stations we should "Transition to our next station quickly." On chart paper I devoted a section to the rules and a section to the procedures. Under the rules section we discussed and I wrote down, "We must move quickly and quietly to the next station." On the chart paper, adjacent to the rule, a block for procedures was created. A student described the procedure used to transition to a station quickly was to, "pick up materials and then move quickly and quietly to your next station." Two students modeled how to move quickly and quietly to a station. Students who were watching were responsible to identify what the students were doing correctly while they were transitioning. In order to make students accountable for their observations they were required to explain what they saw their classmates doing correctly. Students stated, "I noticed that they went from one station to another station very quickly." Another stated, "The students transitioned quietly too!" Based on the chart and student models, the students now had visual representation of the rules and procedures for transitioning. I implemented these strategies in my daily lessons by reviewing the rules and procedures chart so students became more familiar with the components. As students were exposed more frequently to the rules and procedures, they began following them more consistently. As I monitored students transitioning, I noticed that several students were still having trouble. I took those students aside and asked them to look at the chart and read the rules and procedures with me. Once discussed, I had students demonstrate how effective transitioning looked during literacy stations. The learning process took three days of practice for students to understand the learning expectations during transitional times, but with guidance, students were able to transition and start their work more quickly.

The most important learning experience I had was participating and observing a colleague's literacy stations. During a classroom visit, I observed the literacy stations initiation where the teacher would take the time to review the management board with the students. The board identified the student roles, and where each student would go during stations. The teacher was very explicit in her directions. She went through each pair of students and read aloud and identified the stations that they were going to next. She pointed and used pictures to show students where they would be working. She also gave time for student questions. If they were unsure of what they were expected to do and where they were going, the teacher would clarify this for them. This greatly reduced the interruptions during the teacher's guided reading groups. Based on this observation, I modified my own management board. I found that reviewing where each group would be transitioning to was very effective in changing how my own transitions worked. By explicitly identifying and explaining which stations they were going to, students had more direction. This also reduced questions that students had for me when I was working in my reading groups. Once I gave directions to the students, I would make them accountable for their transitions. Students were now required to explain where they were transitioning to. I asked each group which three stations they would be going to. One student said, "I don't know." When this happened, I created a peer learning group which allowed one student to explain and demonstrate how to use the management board. This strategy of peer clarification allowed me to focus on the class, and gave the students an opportunity to shape their own learning experience.

In addition to this classroom observation, I read an article from NEA titled, Bringing Order to the Classroom by Karen Zauber. In this article, Zauber (2003) stated, "streamlining classroom procedures helps make things clearer and makes time for new teaching and learning." I changed my teaching practice by implementing our "rules and procedures" chart which gave clear and explicit expectations for students during transitional times. As I changed my teaching practice to create clear transitional routines in the classroom, it established an environment of student accountability. When students were off task, they were required to review the rule or procedure they weren't following and correct their behavior. In order to have a high level of accountability in my classroom, students were expected to be able to explain how they moved efficiently to stations. Once a week I would have a whole class discussion where students would exemplify efficient transitions. I picked a student that I saw transitioning well and asked them, "What did you do well this week during stations?" The student responded, "I was able to move to each station quickly and get started right away." The rules and procedures were streamlined in a more consistent and explicit manner through the visual representations. Students were then able to know what they were expected to do, and how to complete the tasks in an effective manner which gave them more time for new learning in their stations.

While I observed another teacher during literacy stations, I was focusing on what she did to manage transitions in her classroom. As I observed the teacher's management board I noticed that each student had another student that they worked with. I also saw that each group of students had a maximum of three stations that they would be working at each day. When reflecting on my own management board, I realized I had five large groups moving simultaneously five times during literacy stations. Initially, I used this system because I wanted to meet with each guided reading group daily. When this was happening the transitions in the classroom were occurring too frequently and this disrupted learning for all groups. From the observation I realized that I needed to re-organize my management board. First, I took each

guided reading group and assigned each student one partner. This would be the student who they would work and transition with to their literacy stations. Once I had assigned partners I began to assign three literacy stations to each pair of students. This not only minimized the number of transitions from five to three, but it also gave students a partner to follow if they needed redirection to a literacy station. This also greatly benefitted my teaching because I was able to meet with three guided reading groups for an extended period of time. In the past I met with five groups for 15 minutes. Now I was able to meet with three groups for 20 minutes. These extra five minutes were crucial to student learning.

Initially, students were not receptive to the idea of not getting to every station during their literacy time. I explained to students that, "we may not get to every station each day, but we have more time to learn at the stations that we do visit." The grouping of students with one person helped students transition more quickly. Now that students had a partner that they were required to work with, they were responsible for getting to their station so they could get started right away. I found that having students work with a partner gave students who had trouble with their transitions a role model to follow to each station. One day I noticed a student that was wandering about the room and I asked him, "Where are you supposed to be?" and this student responded, "I'm not sure." When I heard this I asked his partner to help him transition to their next station. His partner came right over and explained to him where they were working and that they needed to get started quickly. The added guidance of a partner greatly helped the students as well as me. While I had to redirect the occasional student, their partners became vital tools for them to move to their station more efficiently.

Another source of new learning came from an observation in a first grade classroom. The teacher would ring a bell at the end of each station to alert students it was time to transition to their next station. The students were conditioned to pack up their materials and move to their next station at the sound of the bell. Based on this I realized that instead of using my voice, students needed another indicator for transitions. The next day I purchased a bell that would be used to signify transition. I showed the class that we would be using this as our transitional bell and modeled it extensively. I began my modeling by having students start a task and whenever they heard the bell, they had to stop what they were doing. By having the students practice the first part of the transition with the bell helped students through the next part of the bell transition. It took several tries for everyone to know that when the bell rang, it was time to stop their work. Once everyone was responding to the bell, I had students go to a "mock" station. In this station they acted as though they were doing their work and when the bell rang they had to stop their work, pack up their things, and transition to their next station. I explained to students that I would be timing them to see how quickly they transitioned. Initially, students took two minutes to transition and get started. But as we practiced, once students heard the bell, they packed up and moved more efficiently. Their time improved from two minutes, to one minute and thirty seconds.

One day students took three minutes to transition to their station and I immediately stopped the timer. I then had the students stop where they were and we had a classroom discussion. I explained to them, "It just took us three minutes to transition and get started, can someone tell me why this happened?" Students were quick to realize that they were not following the rules and procedures. We revisited the rules and procedures chart and we went

through each component. I explained to them that, "We are following our rule to stop working, pick up our materials and move to the next station, but not following the procedure of walking quickly and quietly to our station." After this discussion we had a classroom modeling session to practice our transition. I realized that some students needed redirection and this was the perfect opportunity to do so. One student noticed, "Mr. G, I think what our problem was, was that we were talking too much between stations." The class agreed and we set a goal to remind others to stay focused on the rules and procedures at hand.

During an observation of a fifth grade classroom I monitored each literacy station. I asked students how they knew what to do at their station. Students replied, "We pick a task card and follow the directions on it." After I saw this happen, I asked students, "I see that you have a lot of task cards here, do you do them every day?" They responded, "We pick a different one each day." As I looked at the task cards, they were very explicit and goal oriented so students knew what was expected of them. I was impressed at the explicit directions given and knew that this would be a great way to organize my materials in stations. As I looked through the *Continuum of Effective Teaching* I realized that I needed to "organize my materials so students know how to access them without constant redirection from the teacher."

With this being identified as an area of need, I began to create new literacy station task cards. Prior to this, my stations had one or two task cards for students. I found this to be very rigid and noticed students would often try to complete all tasks in a rushed manner. I found that students should be given more opportunities to explore each station. I was able to do this by generating task cards which included a variety of activities that explicitly explained each station. As I created these task cards I then introduced them to the students. We had a whole class meeting and went through each task card. Student volunteers modeled how to complete these activities. I had students model how they would go to each station and immediately pick a task card for their station. As we were doing this students were expected to explain why they picked this task card and how they were going to use it. After our group modeling, I opened up the station and closely monitored the partners. Students were quickly picking a task card and getting started on their work. As this was occurring, students were more cognizant of getting to work immediately, and they were aided in this by the implementation of explicit task cards.

As I look back over the last eight weeks, I see many positive changes in my students' ability to transition more efficiently during literacy stations. As I overtly explained rules and transitions to my students, as stated in Marzano's *Classroom Management that Works* (2003) students were given more direction and accountability for their actions. This directly correlated with students' transitional times as they began to transition more effectively. Also, with the reduction in the number of stations and transitions, students have been able to reduce their transition times from two minutes down to one minute and thirty seconds. The improvement of transitional times has not only benefitted my students, but has benefitted me as well. I am able to meet with them for a more extended period of time in guided reading groups, and other groups of students are more directed and focused during their literacy stations.

During this module I focused on maximizing the amount of time spent on learning by effectively managing routines and transitions (Indicator 5). As a result of the strategies that I have implemented during this module, students have become more aware of their own

expectations during stations. In conjunction with the strategies that I have used, I have seen improvement in my preparation for our daily literacy stations. The ability to make classroom rules and procedures more explicit, as well as having materials organized so students know how to access them with minimal teacher direction (as identified in the continuum of effective teaching) has helped me run more systematic and well organized literacy stations.

Based on the improvement that students have made during their transitional times in literacy stations, I would like to continue using these strategies in other subjects such as science and math. As I look back on my students during this time I observed that when rules, procedures and materials were well organized, literacy station transitions became much more seamless and successful. Finally, I would like to continue to reflect on daily transitions and monitor them throughout the year and continue to improve them so my students can transition to a new station in less than one minute. My goal is to implement these strategies I learned so my future lessons can be more direct and beneficial for my students with minimal time wasted on transitions.