

Maximizing the Efficiency and Structure of Your Classroom

Chapter Three

- I. The Need for Procedures and Routines
- II. Common Procedures and Routines
- III. Teaching and Reinforcing Procedures

Introduction

Twenty-eight fourth graders run toward you from the playground and fall into a double line along your class's special crack in the concrete. You greet the group warmly and turn to walk back to your classroom. You progress up two flights of stairs and by four other classrooms and not a sound is heard behind you except the squeak of shoes on the floor. You pause beside the doorway and say good morning to each student by name as they enter the classroom. Speaking only in hushed tones, they quickly hang their coats and backpacks on their labeled pegs, put their homework in the homework tray, pick up their 3-ring binders from the shelf, sit down at their desks, and begin to respond to the questions you have written on the "Do Now" section of your board. You start your timer for six minutes. Since all notebooks except Aimee's have been retrieved from the shelf, you mark her absent and clip the attendance form to the door for your "attendance monitor" to bring to the office on his way to lunch. You circulate around the room, checking in with students, making sure Chris understands the directions and Traci stays focused. The timer goes off. Hands shoot up in the air; students are eager to share their answers. The day has begun.

Some would compare the beginning of this day to the working of a well-oiled machine. This teacher has established and enforced a morning routine that allows him to make contact with each of his students, to get students working immediately on an academic task, and to efficiently deal with administrative responsibilities. The students clearly know what is expected of them at various points in the 15-minute window described above – everything from what to do when their teacher appears on the playground, to how to walk through the hallway, to how to enter the classroom, to how to share their responses to the warm-up activity. Not only is this first 15 minutes efficient, it also presents a secure and predictable structure for students.

This chapter builds off of the components of classroom management covered in chapter two. Classroom procedures and routines combine with rules and consequences to create a structured and efficient classroom environment that helps students to feel safe and secure and provides the teacher more time for instruction.

I. The Need for Procedures and Routines

Procedures and routines create a classroom environment where everyone understands which student behaviors are appropriate and what teacher responses are expected in every situation. Students crave that structure and predictability. Consider this excerpt from an essay entitled "My Favorite Teacher," written by one corps member's student:

Every day, Ms. Bothner says hello to each one of us at the door when we walk in. Every day, the Focus is written on the board and we work on it while Ms. Bothner walks around and stamps our assignment book if we completed our homework. If students talk during the Focus time, she gives them a warning or a check, just like she told us she would at

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the beginning of the year. Everyone knows what to do in Ms. Bothner's class, and if we do it wrong, she helps us do it right.

Along with classroom rules, procedures help ensure excellent behavior by teaching students specific behaviors for specific circumstances. But rules and procedures are different. Classroom management experts Lee and Marlene Canter explain why:

Your classroom discipline plan spells out the general rules of your classroom – rules that are in effect at all times. The most important of these rules is, "Follow directions." This rule is included to ensure that students promptly follow any direction you might give during the day. To comply with this rule and meet your expectations, students must understand what each and every specific direction you give means. You can't assume when you enter into a new activity anytime during the year that your students will know how to behave the way you want them to. You would never make this assumption about math competency or reading skills. Why assume that your behavioral expectations are as obvious? After all, every teacher has different ways of moving into groups, collecting work, distributing assignments, etc. Your students need to follow *your* expectations, not another teacher's expectations.¹³

Imagine asking a class full of 33 seventh graders to "pass in their papers." Sounds simple enough. Yet inevitably a small group of students might playfully wave their papers by a neighbor's ear. Some might take the opportunity to jump up and walk over to your desk, while others would want to hand you the paper directly because that is what their teacher did last year. Chaos. However, developing and practicing a specific procedure for passing in papers (left across the rows and up the first aisle, for example) will create an orderly response to that request, avoid conflicts between students, and shorten the overall time it takes for this managerial task.

Indeed, procedures serve to help your classroom run smoothly, thereby maximizing instructional time. The amount of time students are actually engaged in learning activities in many classrooms is shockingly low. In one particular study, only 40 percent of the school day was allocated to learning activities.¹⁴ Even in the best of scenarios, your time with your students is frustratingly limited. Given your ambitious goals, you can't afford to waste *any* time, let alone 60 percent of your time, in your classroom.

Teachers have to view the world in the same way as a business consultant, surveying the space, structures, and systems for opportunities to get more learning for your (and your students') investment of time and energy. You *need* students to stop their center work and give you their full attention in the time it takes to count down from five to one; you *must* be able to transition from math to language arts without wasting seven minutes every day; you *have* to create the expectation that students will silently complete their "Do Now" while you take attendance and address other beginning-of-class administrative details. As you set ambitious academic goals for your students, and you realize how much they have to learn, you – and your students – will become very protective of your precious instructional time.

¹³ Canter, Lee and Marlene Canter. *Assertive Discipline: Positive Behavior Management for Today's Classroom*. Santa Monica, CA: Canter & Associates, Inc., 1992, p. 122.

¹⁴ Cangelosi, James S. *Classroom Management Strategies: Gaining and Maintaining Students' Cooperation*. White Plains, NY: Longman, 1993, p. 11.

II. Common Procedures and Routines

Every school and classroom has unique procedural needs, and there are multiple procedures that can work in each environment. When determining your procedures, you should keep two things in mind. First, you should develop procedures that allow students to know what they should be doing and how they should do it for every situation in your classroom in which a specific process is necessary. Second, you should develop procedures for classroom activities that can be particularly inefficient – such as taking attendance, distributing materials, or transitioning from one activity to another. The following list outlines several common times during the school day when a procedure would make the task more structured and more efficient.

Taking Attendance

- Calling roll verbally is perhaps the least efficient way to check attendance, as it wastes instructional time and distracts students.
- Instead, handle attendance while students are involved in an instructional task (writing in a journal, silently reading, etc.). Many teachers open each day or class period with a quick assignment, often called a “Do Now,” “Focus,” or “Warm-up” that students can do independently while the teacher records attendance.
- Some teachers use a seating chart and put it inside a plastic page protector. They quickly scan for empty seats and mark the chart with an overhead transparency pen. Later, they transfer the information to their attendance book and wipe off the chart for the next day.
- If your students keep an in-class 3-ring binder, have them put their names on the spine. As they enter the class and take their binder from the shelf, you will quickly see who is absent, as binders of absent students will be left on the shelf.

Getting the Attention of the Class

- You should establish certain cues so you can quickly gain the attention of the entire class and signal what needs to happen next.
- Possible cues include clapping in a special rhythm and having students mimic the rhythm, holding two fingers in the air, counting down from 5 to 1, saying “1-2-3 All Eyes on Me” to which students respond “1-2 All Eyes on You,” shaking your special tambourine, turning music off, or giving simple directions such as “notebooks should now be closed” or “cluster into your groups of five.”

Managing Classroom Space

Before considering specific procedures and routines that you might use to create an efficient and well-structured classroom, it is important to make sure your physical space – the classroom itself – is organized to maximize safety, comfort, and efficiency. The organization of the physical learning environment greatly affects student achievement. If a student can't see, or is cramped, it will be difficult to concentrate and learn. Room arrangement can facilitate orderly movement and minimize distractions, so you'll want to pay attention, for example, to the way students are grouped for learning; the orientation of their desks with regard to other desks, the teacher, and the chalkboard; the displays on bulletin boards; and the design and placement of learning centers.

Bear in mind the following four tips for organizing your physical space:

- Keep high-traffic areas free from congestion. This includes group work areas, space around the pencil sharpener and trash can, doorways, certain shelves, students' desks and your desk.
- Be sure that you can easily see all students and they can see you. Sit down at every desk before the first day of school.
- Make sure that frequently used materials and supplies are readily accessible. This will minimize set-up and clean-up time for activities.
- Be sure that students can see instructional presentations and displays.

The **Classroom Management & Culture Toolkit** found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet has further information (pp. 17-19: “Managing Classroom Space”). ✨

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- If the class is engaged in an individual or group activity, an auditory signal is usually most effective. Examples include ringing a bell or counting down from 5 to 1.
- Note: turning lights on and off rapidly could be dangerous for students who are sensitive to flashing lights, and perhaps even seizure-prone.

Distribution of Materials

- Have materials prepared before students even enter the room. For example, if multiple materials are needed for a group activity, create a bin for each group before school. When the group activity begins, you or the “Materials Master” for each group gives the group the bin with all the necessary materials.
- Keep needed materials, such as the pencil sharpener, scrap paper, paper towel, etc., in standard places so students know where to find them.

Giving Instructions

- If your students can read, put written instructions on the board. That way, while students are getting started on the assignment, you can walk around and individually address those who are off-task.
- Use audio-visual aids prepared before class, such as overheads, rather than writing things on the board while students wait. In addition to saving time, overheads do not require that you turn away from the class, assisting with classroom management.
- Do not depend solely on oral instruction to the entire group. Have instructions already written on the board or on the assignment so students can progress at their own pace.
- Remember the importance of checking for understanding, as discussed in the *Instructional Planning & Delivery* text. Asking a student to explain the procedure again to the class before you start will help you identify any potential misunderstandings (which later become inefficiencies).

Getting Started

- In order to encourage students to be ready quickly, consider creating a simple challenge – “Let’s see if we can put away our bags and be seated with our math books open faster than we did yesterday. Let’s try to break our 30-second mark!”
- Depending on the resources available, you might need to plan rotational activities. Some students can be working at their desks while other groups use lab equipment. Students should never wait around while others use special materials.

Transitions Between Activities

- Accommodate students completing work at differing times. For example, avoid scheduling a large group discussion after a written assignment.

Do not underestimate the power of counting down from 10 to 0. In my first year, I watched in awe as a veteran English teacher regained complete control of her noisy, rambunctious 8th graders just by counting backwards from 10. Her students silenced one another, dropped their activity, and froze momentarily before rushing back to their chairs ready to work. I asked her what happened to the class if they didn’t get under control by zero - she said she had never gotten to zero. Even as a fledgling teacher I found similar magic with this procedure in my own classroom. Now, I count backwards from 10 anytime I need my class to get focused, wrap up an activity, clean up for dismissal, or retrieve materials for the day’s lesson. I never get down to zero either.

Caroline John, D.C. ‘03
Founding Principal,
Excel Academy Public Charter School

Every morning, I greet my students at the door. After a quick, personal dialogue, my students unpack their backpacks, get to their seats, and start on their Morning Work - a 2-sided sheet that has daily Language and Math practice questions. Because the routine is the same every morning, often I can attend to other matters (such as a student who may need my special attention) and have confidence that everybody is working on something substantial.

Deborah Lee, D.C. '03
Former Senior Policy Associate,
National Institute for Excellence in Teaching

- Before beginning an independent activity, review with your students what they can do when they are done. Many teachers have an "If You Finish Early..." poster in their classroom that has a number of activities students can do independently if they complete the assignment before others are ready to move on to the next stage of the lesson (1. Read your independent reading book, 2. Study your vocabulary words, 3. Write Ms. Park a letter that explains one thing you really like about the class and one thing you would like to improve, 4. Draw a picture/comic strip that represents something you've learned in the past week, 5. Begin working on your homework if you understand the assignment). Having copies of kid-friendly magazines or puzzles on hand is also a smart idea.
- You'll also want to develop transition activities for regular transition times such as entering the classroom. For example, in an elementary class, you might have your students walk into the classroom quietly every day after lunch and automatically begin silent reading. Or, in a secondary class, you might begin with a "warm-up" or "Do Now" that you have written on the board and that will serve as a review activity or an introduction to the day's activity. For other effective transition techniques, see the **Classroom Management & Culture Toolkit** (pp. 20-21); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✂

Unplanned Interruptions

- Teach students a procedure for handling interruptions (e.g., you are suddenly called down to the office and an aide will be covering your classroom), such as teaching students to work on a particular independent reading assignment whenever the activity at hand is interrupted.
- Practice how students will react to a PA announcement or a visitor at your door who needs to speak to you for 20 seconds.
- To prepare for the day when you have a practice fire drill and don't have enough time to begin the first stage of the lab activity, or the day when the principal calls half of your students to the gym for class pictures, keep a drawer of short activities (sometimes called "sponge activities") that fill small instructional opportunities and serve as quick ways to reinforce or review material. For sample "Sponge Activities," see the **Classroom Management & Culture** (pp. 22-23). ✂

Student Needs (Bathroom, Water, Tissue, etc.)

- You may have decided that you won't allow students to leave your class to go to the bathroom except in an extreme emergency (this is particularly reasonable at the secondary level, where students can use the time between classes to go to the bathroom or get a drink). But, to save the ensuing distraction and time it takes to ascertain whether that one-foot hop really constitutes an emergency, several corps members report success with giving each student one emergency bathroom pass for each semester. Students are responsible for keeping the pass. In the case of an emergency, students raise their hand with the pass in hand, the teacher nods, signs it while continuing to teach, and the student leaves the room. When the student returns to class she gives the pass to the teacher.
- Design a signal for students to give you when they need to get up and get a tissue. (It's often helpful to have tissues in a set place in the classroom; consider asking parents to donate one box at the beginning of the year). If a student raises her hand and taps the end of her nose, you can nod your permission without stopping what you're saying to the rest of the class.

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Absent Students

- Absent students need to know what they missed while gone from your class. It is not the best use of your time, especially if you have 150 secondary students, to meet with each one individually to explain what they need to make up.
- Elementary teachers might create a mailbox or folder for each student where they place handouts for absent students.
- Dave McCall (D.C. '99), a high school chemistry teacher, shares the following:

My favorite efficiency system is The Notebook. I hole punch all of my handouts and have my students keep an individual notebook for my class where they archive all worksheets, homework, notes and warm-ups. I keep my own copy of The Notebook on my desk, which saves time when students are absent. Since I keep a copy of all handouts, test review hints, visual aides and detailed homework directions in The Notebook, students who are absent can go to this central place to find out what they missed, rather than all of them coming to ask me. I also number my homework assignments, so if a student is missing an assignment, I can say, "you are missing assignment number 6," instead of saying, "you are missing the assignment where we had to graph the results of our most recent lab."

New Students

- When a new student shows up unannounced, you'll want to help them acclimate to your classroom as quickly as possible. But, you won't have even 15 minutes to spend with them right when they arrive – you need to keep the rest of the class running. Some teachers create ten "New Student Kits" before the school year begins. Then, when a new student joins the class, the teacher welcomes them warmly and asks them to review and fill out the materials in the kit. This gives the new student something to do until the teacher can carve out time to meet with the student individually.
- The New Student Kit might contain a letter of welcome, a letter for the student to take home to her family, a student interest survey, a student information sheet, the rules and procedures of the classroom, and any other essential reading or forms that other students received at the beginning of the year.
- Many teachers also assign a "buddy" who is responsible for familiarizing the student with the procedures of the classroom and introducing her to her classmates.

Misc. Administrative Requirements

- Have a folder or in-box for paperwork that must be completed to ensure you are meeting your professional responsibilities.
- "Hire" your students and put them in charge of things like counting the number of students who are having the school lunch that day, helping to make bulletin boards, washing the boards and overheads, or passing out student journals at the beginning of class. Stephanie Crement (Bay Area '99) hired a messenger, a materials manager, classroom librarians, a phone manager and a greeter, who welcomes guests at the door. Emily Goldwasser (Baltimore '97) had her students apply for their jobs, which included positions on a classroom decorating committee. Both Stephanie and Emily, now Program Directors in Philadelphia, taught middle school, debunking the myth that classroom jobs are baby stuff.
- Sample forms for Setting up classroom jobs are included in the **Classroom Management & Culture Toolkit** (pp. 24-27), found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖
- If you make extra copies of every handout (perhaps 5% extra) you will greatly simplify your life later, as you'll have them on hand for a student who misplaces the original, for catching up new students, or for students who want to redo the assignment because they've made mistakes.
- Keep everything in its own place everyday, such as a specific spot on your desk for your roll book and another one for your overhead pens and homework stamp.

For an even more extensive list of times during a typical school day when procedures and routines would improve your class's efficiency and discipline, see the **Classroom Management & Culture Toolkit** (pp. 28-29: "Considerations for Classroom Procedures"); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

In determining your procedures, you will have to weigh a number of variables that sometimes conflict. For example, you will need to decide what you will do if a student comes to class without a pen or pencil. Even if one of your rules is, *Come to class prepared*, and you give him a warning for not bringing a pencil, you still need to decide whether or not you will lend him a pencil for the class period. If you do lend him a pencil, that would require you having extra pencils on hand and determining a way to ensure he returns the pencil at the end of class. Furthermore, you would need to decide whether having extra pencils on hand would discourage the student's personal responsibility and essentially enable him to break the rule again in the future. The flip side, of course, is that without a pencil the student may not be able to do his work and is more likely to disrupt other students; so, the benefits to lending him a pencil may outweigh the costs. Even seemingly simple procedures can raise a myriad of practical and philosophical considerations. (Incidentally, some teachers solve the pencil problem by requiring collateral before a child can borrow one, or providing a pencil but deducting the class' effort points for failing to be prepared. Watch as the same children who said they didn't have pens to lend Lenny suddenly brandish their ballpoints for his use.)

Minimizing Inefficiencies in the Classroom

You'll want to challenge yourself to constantly identify ways in which you might be able to better use your time. For example, you might question whether it should really take twenty minutes to walk your class to the bathroom, or ten minutes to pass out last week's graded tests. Over the course of a year, the five minutes a day that students use returning supplies to the cabinet, or the five minutes eight times per day that students are taking to transition from one subject to another, add up to considerable amounts of time. Shaving off a few minutes here and there can literally provide you an additional week of instructional time over the course of the year. Your emphasis on efficient use of time will also reinforce with your students the idea that learning is important. For additional questions to help you reflect on ways to maximize the structure and efficiency of your classroom, see "Identifying Classroom Inefficiencies" in the **Classroom Management & Culture Toolkit** (pp. 30-31). ✖

Research Secrets: Stay Alert and Involve Every Student

In the 1970s, researcher Jacob Kounin studied a series of classrooms, some with major student misbehavior problems and others without. His findings about the higher-order skills cultivated by successful teachers continue to be affirmed by scholars of education to this day:

- **"Withitness."** One distinguishing characteristic of excellent classroom managers is their ability to know what all students are doing at all times. They are always monitoring the class, keeping eye contact with students. Even when helping an individual student, they've positioned themselves to see the rest of the class and immediately address students who are causing a disruption.
- **Overlapping.** Teachers who can "overlap" are managing several tasks at once, nodding to give one student permission to use the bathroom while giving instructions to a group of students in a literature circle while simultaneously readying the room for the next classroom activity.
- **Group focus.** A key to effective management is getting every student involved in your lesson, rather than focusing on just a few students. In *Instructional Planning & Delivery*, you will read about ways to design group practice of academic skills, rather than "ping-pong" questioning that involves one student at a time.
- **Movement management.** Skillful pacing and transitions also make a huge difference in management effectiveness. Effective teachers make sure that both classroom activities occur at a brisk pace, with little opportunity for students to goof off, and clear instructions are delivered when everyone is listening, so students are never confused about what is expected of them.

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III. Teaching and Reinforcing Procedures

Procedures must be taught, modeled, and reviewed with students, just as rules must be. You might simulate the end-of-class bell over and over, practicing the desired behavior of staying in one's seat and walking calmly to the door when dismissed. You might practice lining up for lunch or going to a special assembly over and over again until students fall into a double line and hold their hands clasped in front of them without prompting.

In contrast to rules, every procedure need not be taught on the first day of school. Procedures are best taught when the need to use them arises for the first time. However, most teachers find that they teach a significant bulk of their procedures in the first two weeks of school, as many are required for a smoothly functioning classroom. Great teachers will tell you that although this may at times seem counterintuitive, investing considerable time up-front teaching and practicing the routines and procedures of your classroom will pay huge dividends in saved time later. Here are some tips for teaching and reinforcing your procedures:

Explain the need for procedures to students. Just as you need to explain the rationale for rules, students need to be invested in the rationale for procedures. "Because so much learning has to happen this year, I don't want us to waste time on classroom activities that don't help you to read on a higher level or allow you to solve more challenging math problems. Imagine if we wasted 15 minutes every morning just getting ready for the day..."

When introducing a new procedure to the class, demonstrate the correct process. Start by demonstrating the process yourself, step by step. Narrate what you are doing. Then ask 2-3 volunteers who think they understand the procedure to model the process for the rest of the class. Ask the audience to comment on what students did well and what part of the procedure they should repeat. Ask other volunteers to demonstrate the process, this time giving them specific scripts to follow, some perfect, some slightly off, and some terribly wrong. Again, have the audience point out what was done correctly and what was done incorrectly. Of course, then you need to give each student the opportunity to practice and demonstrate understanding of the procedure, both individually and then as a whole group.

Allow each student to practice and demonstrate understanding of the process. Practice process. Practice process. Practice process. Younger children need to practice lining up. If your students can line up quickly and smoothly, it will save you hours of instruction time over the course of the year (please touch your right shoulder and make sure it lines up with the person in front of you...how will we hold our hands as we walk through the hallways? That's right, clasped in front of us. Excellent. Let's walk down to Ms. Powell's room and then come back.)

When they say it takes time to save time, it is TRUE! I spent the first week making sure my students knew exactly what to expect. I gave them extremely clear expectations, explained them, quizzed them, and held them and their parents responsible for knowing and following the expectations of the Stellar Scholar's classroom. Each student has a list of expectations and procedures at the front of their class binder. It's signed by the scholar, the scholar's parent, and by me.

Helen Cosner, RGV '04
Educational Counselor, Otterbein University

As a pre-K teacher, I am continually amazed by how much my little ones are capable of once they understand the rules and procedures of my classroom. During the first month of school, I focus almost exclusively on teaching them how I expect them to get my attention, to follow instructions, and even how to handle disagreements with other children. Rules and procedures are imperative to the smooth functioning of my PreK classroom. My goal is to build my students' independence and interdependence on their friends so I can be free to oversee my classroom, manage the big picture and teach small groups.

Zarabeth Parker Davis, Delta '02
Pre-K Teacher
Memphis City Schools

With older children, you may be well served by practicing how students will pass up their tests (to the side and up the last row), or what students should do if they were absent the day before (ask their note-taking buddy if any notes were taken, look in their class's tray for any handouts with their name on them, and check the homework binder). Kelly Harris-Perin (Delta '98) has the following advice on the value of practicing procedures:

For the first two weeks of the year, I kept wondering if all of the time we spent practicing classroom procedures was worth it. We passed out our folders, got into groups, and got ready to leave class dozens of times. But by the time we were done, every student knew what to do when she stepped in the door, when to sharpen pencils, and when it was okay to whisper to a neighbor. Having really clear rules and procedures was LIBERATING—it freed me from being the policewoman and let me focus on using every minute to teach. It was so easy: everyone came in, got their folders, took homework out and placed it on the

corner of the desk, and began the Warm-Up for the day. Meanwhile, the Attendance Taker figured out who was present and the Dress-Code Checker made sure all shirts were tucked in. And I got to walk around, check homework, greet each student personally, and start off every period calm and focused after the first five minutes. Worth it? Definitely.

Provide feedback. What happens if, after teaching a procedure, your students don't execute the procedure properly? If you expect your students to line up silently with their hands clasped in front of them, and Brittney and Sheldon are wiggling around and swinging their arms like windmills, you should ask the class to look at the line, determine what is wrong, and ask Brittney and Sheldon to return to their seats and join the line properly. If you have taught your students to pass in their papers in a certain way and they do so incorrectly, do you give them all a five-minute detention after school? No. You simply remind them of the correct process for handing in papers and you ask them to do it again. The "consequence" for not following a procedure properly is to repeat the procedure. However, sometimes your students will violate a rule while a procedure is happening.

For example, your procedure for entering class is to walk in silently, remove one's notebook from the shelf, sit down immediately, and begin the Do Now. If two students jostle and loudly insult one another while getting their notebooks from the shelf, they are not carrying out the procedure properly, but more importantly, they are also violating the rule *Respect your classmates*. The proper response is to give students the consequence you would administer for breaking that rule at any other time *and* to ask them to repeat their entrance into the class correctly. Remember that rules are always in effect, and breaking them at any time earns the student the appropriate consequence.

Teach procedures like you teach anything else. Write a lesson, differentiate instruction, practice, and assess. Do not rush through this piece in order to get to the "real teaching." Without structure, there will be very little "real teaching."

Emily Glasgow, Bay Area '98
Principal, Boston Public Schools

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Re-teach procedures regularly. This is especially true after long holidays or if the procedure hasn't been used in a while. Remind students of the need for procedures, demonstrate the procedure your self, ask for a small group of volunteers to model the process, critique their performance, and *then* ask the entire class to complete the procedure properly.

Teachers who effectively establish procedures in their classroom create an environment that almost “runs itself,” with appropriate student behavior and learning continuing even if they are out sick or attending a professional development workshop. For an example of how you might help a substitute lead the classroom in your absence, see the **Classroom Management & Culture Toolkit** (pp. 32-33: “Substitute Letter”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFA.Net. ✕

Building a Culture of Achievement

You've Got To Spend Time To Save Time

Three months into teaching, Liz Chase (New York City '00) was just about ready to give up. When she asked her fourth graders to take out their math books, they would...only to slam them on the floor. Students got into fights. It was when she saw a first grade teacher stop and wait for her students in the stairwell to follow instructions (right hand on the railing; left hand at your side, not swinging) that Liz realized something important:

I thought I had taught procedures and routines to my students, when in reality I had primarily expected my students to know what to do without explicit explanation and consistent reinforcement from me. When they entered the classroom sort of quiet, instead of silent, I allowed them to proceed. I tended to think there was something wrong with the procedure itself, not my teaching or reinforcement of it. Lacking confidence, I kept experimenting with and changing my classroom routines, but I grew more and more frustrated when I just couldn't find the ones that worked magically for my students. (Now, I realize there is no magic procedure—it is just what you insist on.)

That Monday, we went up and down the stairs until my students got it right. I had them come in and out of the classroom until they went in perfectly silently. We packed up and left the classroom repeatedly until they did it in the efficient and quiet way I asked them to. Each time they didn't do it right, I would tell them in a calm and matter of fact tone of voice, “That wasn't right. I know you can do it correctly. We need to do it again.”

Liz learned that, in order to maximize the time her students were focused on academic achievement, she needed to spend the time teaching her procedures:

I had wanted to give my kids a lot of freedom and choice, and yet my first three months proved that in order to get to a place where students can have a choice, they first have to have structure. The key to shifting my classroom management in the middle of my first year (as opposed to waiting to start over in the second year) was my determination to create that structure. I did not give up and was determined to make that year work.

Conclusion and Key Concepts

- Procedures and routines **maximize the efficiency** of your classroom; they also reinforce your high behavioral expectations and **help ensure a predictable and safe classroom environment** by teaching students specific behaviors for specific circumstances.
- You should develop these procedures and routines with the aim of **maximizing your instructional time and minimizing students' off-task time.**
- Procedures and routines must be **taught, modeled, and reinforced**, just like rules, consequences, and any other curriculum content.

