

GRR to Conquer Classroom Management

By Michelle Hovland

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Classroom management is normally a challenge for new teachers. Whether or not the new teacher establishes a well-managed classroom can be the difference between a bright beginning to an exciting career or reason for an early exit! However, using the *Gradual Release of Responsibility* (Pearson and Gallagher 1983), new teachers can quickly establish classroom routines that support a positive learning environment!

Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) was introduced by Pearson and Gallagher in 1983 after they reviewed studies on reading comprehension instruction. These researchers found that learning occurred when it happened over time within a repeated instructional cycle that included explanation, guided practice, feedback, independent practice, and application. Within this framework, responsibility is gradually released from the teacher to the student, with the anticipation that the student will take responsibility of the task.

Danielson (2007, 60) stated, "the best instructional techniques are worthless in a chaotic environment." Therefore, teachers find that they must develop procedures for the smooth operation of the classroom and the efficient use of time before they can address instructional techniques. An important aspect of good classroom management is ensuring that students understand expectations immediately. With *GRR*, teachers begin establishing effective classroom routines the first day of school, which is the optimum time of course, and the time when most teachers and students are filled with positive energy! As Whitaker (2004, 20) commented, when school starts "we are still undefeated . . . students have not been 'in trouble'. . . and we have the chance to build new relationships." Introducing classroom routines using *GRR* allows teachers to set high expectations and prepare students for success.

For example, some of the most difficult classroom-management times any teacher faces are transition periods between activities. Often these periods are chaotic, even after the teacher and students have repeatedly discussed moving quietly from one activity to another! If this is the case, aspects of transitioning quietly are not fully understood by the students. To ensure that the students

first *understand* what is required and then *perform* as expected, the teacher should teach quiet transitioning applying the steps of the *GRR*.

Step 1. *Demonstration*. In the first step, the teacher demonstrates exactly how to move from one activity to another. The demonstration includes explaining *and* modeling the task. During this phase of the framework, the teacher is in control and the students are observing,

Step 2. *Shared Demonstration*. The second step in the *GRR* framework is *shared demonstration*. In this example, the teacher now invites a couple of students to the front of the class to participate in a *shared demonstration* of quiet transitioning as other students observe. The teacher still has the majority of control during this step.

Step 3. *Guided Practice*. During this step, the teacher transfers responsibility for implementing the task to the students by shifting to a facilitator or support role. The teacher is still available to provide suggestions, feedback, and assistance if needed. Allowing time for students to practice what was observed in steps one and two, the teacher *sets up* the following situation: Students are at their desks pretending to work. From somewhere in the classroom, the teacher announces it is time to switch to a new activity and area of the classroom. The students then *transition* to the new area and begin the activity.

As the transition occurs, the teacher aids success by giving a *reminder* of the expected behavior. If the students (even a few students) do not perform the transition to the teacher's expectations, they are asked to repeat the guided-practice step. As the students again practice with guidance, the teacher judges whether a repeat of the demonstration or shared-practice steps is needed. Even if the students perform the transition appropriately, it may be helpful to repeat the guided-practice step.

Step 4. *Independent Practice*. Finally, the students are given opportunities to independently use the new technique. In this classroom-management vignette, the teacher sets up one final scenario in which she acts as though she is instructing a small group of students and nonchalantly asks the students to begin a new activity. The students transition to the new activity without teacher assistance. A group meeting follows the independent practice, allowing students to reflect on their performance.

Teachers using the *GRR* framework to teach classroom routines, constantly observe and evaluate students' reactions and performance to determine whether proceeding to the next step is appropriate or returning to a previous step is required. If, at any time, the students regress to

unproductive behaviors, the teacher should again teach the desired behavior using the *GRR* framework.

A clearly defined and implemented classroom-management plan that includes explicit instruction in routines helps create a productive learning environment. Using the *GRR* framework to establish classroom routines takes time, persistence, and patience; however, the reward will be a well-organized classroom where learning can occur!

References

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