**2.  The Role of Classroom Schedules**

Problems often occur in the classroom when students do not know what to expect; are bored, confused or frustrated; feel hurried; experience wait time between activities; or are over-stimulated and lack time to relax and refocus (Docking, 2002; Miller, 1984).   Problems can also arise when students do not know what is expected of them (Walker & Walker, 1991).  Most students benefit from a consistent and predictable learning environment that limits surprises (Kerr & Nelson, 2002; Reinhart, 1991).  A predictable schedule of what to expect during the school day and week cultivates more productive students and therefore greater learning (Burden, 1995; Kamps, 2002).  Such a schedule sets the stage for teachers to communicate to students exactly what is expected of them and allows the teacher to identify behaviors that must be directly taught to one or more students, which, in turn, helps them to develop greater student autonomy, responsibility, and self-control (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2001; Reinhart, 1991). Schedules can be helpful in promoting periods of transition from one activity to the next, particularly high probability (preferred) to low probability (less preferred) activities or from high-activity events to more calm ones (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2001; Greer, 2002; Kerr & Nelson 2002; Whaley & Bennett, 1991).  Finally, drawing up a schedule requires the teacher to plan ahead using good organizational skills (Short, Short, & Blanton, 1994).

An effective classroom schedule combines basic structure with enough flexibility to allow the teacher to respond to unanticipated events that may occur during the school day, ranging from assemblies to episodes of extreme behavior problems (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2001; Reinhart, 1991).  Schedules should align with the way the individual classroom instruction is organized throughout the day and include those events over which teachers have little control, such as recess, lunch, or physical education (Gartrell, 2001; Kerr & Nelson, 2002).

For example, after recess or a physical education class, there might be a specified transition time built into the schedule to allow students to calm down and prepare for a quiet activity that might follow (Burden, 1995). Once a daily schedule is set, teachers should regularly review and modify it to diminish the occurrence of conflicts caused by problems with the environment or activities in which the students are engaged (Gartrell, 2001).

It is important to remember that just because a schedule is set does not mean that all students will be able to follow it (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2001; Kerr & Nelson, 2002). Many students will need to be directly and systematically taught what to do to successfully negotiate the range of expectations reflected in the daily schedule (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2001; Kerr & Nelson, 2002). Successful teachers also use the class schedule as a vehicle to teach students various skills such as organization and time management, communication, reading, writing, and mathematics (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2001).

In establishing a class schedule, teachers should take into account the fact that some students may exhibit difficulty actively engaging in instruction for long periods of time; therefore, it might be advantageous to break larger teaching/learning tasks into a number of smaller more manageable tasks, separated by short breaks in instruction (Quinn, Osher, Warger, Hanley, Bader, & Hoffman, 2000). Teachers may also want to ensure that the schedule contains a mix of teaching/learning tasks – in both content and activity level – to keep students actively engaged (Kerr & Nelson, 2002). In addition, Kerr and Nelson (2002) suggest placing less desirable tasks (low probability) first and follow them with more preferred tasks (high probability); not only is the more enjoyable activity an incentive to focus on the less enjoyable one, it is also a reward for successfully completing it. Interspersing high probability tasks

throughout the instructional day and manipulating the amount of time and/or actual number of low probability tasks are other research-based options.

Practically speaking, the daily or weekly schedule should be posted in the classroom where all students can see it; and students should be told when any changes in the schedule are anticipated (Burden, 1995; Kerr & Nelson, 2002; Walker & Walker, 1991).  For those students who participate in activities or classes outside the classroom – such as resource room instruction or a session with a speech therapist, more group/individual schedules might be taped to their desks (Reinhart, 1991).  Finally, it is useful to cue students, either verbally or nonverbally, regarding their progress through an activity to maintain on task behavior and to encourage them to manage their time effectively; reference to a wall clock (more intrusive) and verbal reminders (less intrusive) regarding the time that is left in a session are two such methods  (Kerr & Nelson, 2002).

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