

“Let’s Focus!”

Implementing ADHD Interventions to Increase a Student’s Time On-Task

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Introduction

As a student teaching intern in a fifth grade classroom through the Professional Development Schools partnership between The Pennsylvania State University and the State College Area School District, I have had the extraordinary opportunity to work with a group of students for a full year. Throughout this experience, I have gradually been drawn to and have grown curious about the behavior and performance of one particular student. As evidenced through his behavior in the classroom, this student clearly has difficulty paying attention during whole- and small-group lessons and activities. When working independently, the student frequently has difficulty concentrating and remaining on-task without teacher assistance or redirection for the given period of time. Additionally, samples and overall analysis of the student's work indicate that he is performing at an average or below-average level in all academic subjects. Soon after making these observations, I began to wonder if a correlation exists between the student's focusing difficulties and his academic performance. Thus, I have researched the characteristics and causes of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); additionally, I have attempted to determine what is considered to be "best practice" in classroom methodology for students struggling with attention issues – including ADHD – in order to implement these practices in my classroom to see if those techniques are effective in improving both the overall behavior and academic performance of my struggling student. In this attempt to create a more suitable learning environment and effective learning activities for this student, I have discovered potential classroom interventions and treatments that may be effective for many other students having difficulty focusing in the classroom.

What Are My Wonderings?

Central to my inquiry project are several general questions:

- What is considered to be “best practice” for teachers working with students with Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?
- How can I implement these practices in my classroom?
- Are these practices appropriate for a specific student having difficulties focusing and concentrating in my classroom?

While researching these initial questions, I began to generate a list of additional questions to investigate, including:

- How does individual attention – one-on-one time with a teacher – affect the student’s academic performance and classroom behavior?
- How can I utilize other students’ skills and strengths to maximize my time with all students in the classroom?
- How can I help this student to prepare for a more independent middle school environment? Specifically, how can I help this student to develop responsibility, study skills, and organizational skills?
- What is the student’s reaction to the physical environment of my classroom? How can I manipulate this environment to suit the needs of the student without drawing attention to his specific needs?
- How much structure – in schedules, routines, rules, and expectations – does the student need to succeed? Will increasing the amount of structure provided increase his success, both academically and behaviorally?
- How much is the student aware of his focusing difficulties? Does he know what kind of academic and behavioral interventions could help him achieve greater success in those areas?

The Research: What Is ADHD?

As parent and educator of ADHD children, Anna M. Thompson recalls the many terms used to classify students with such inattention and hyperactivity issues: “organic drivenness, ‘fidgety Phils,’ post-encephalitic behavior disorder, minimal brain damage, minimal brain dysfunction, hyperkinesis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder (ADD), and attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity (ADD/ADHD)” (Thompson, 1996, p. 433). Despite these changes in official title, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), as it is currently known, has affected significant numbers of elementary students throughout the past several decades. Conservative estimates of the number of school-age children affected by ADHD ranged from 3% to 5% in the late 1980s and early 1990s (ERIC Digest, 1989); presently, researchers and educators have increased these estimates to between 4% and 7% of elementary students affected with the disorder (Reif, 2003).

With such an increase in its prevalence, a tremendous amount of research has been conducted in attempts to determine what characteristics and symptoms constitute the disorder and how effective diagnoses can be made. According to educator and author Sandra F. Reif, “ADHD is a neuro-biological behavioral disorder characterized by chronic and developmentally inappropriate degrees of inattention, impulsivity, and, in some cases, hyperactivity” (Reif, 2003, p. 3). In other words, ADHD is a medical condition that often manifests itself as a variety of behavior problems in the classroom. The majority of these problems involve what psychiatry and psychology professor Mark D. Rapport refers to “the regulatory processes of the brain – that is, the brain’s ability to regulate itself appropriately (which includes both the initiation and inhibition of behavior or activity) on an on-going basis and under a range of normally occurring circumstances and conditions” (Rapport, 1990, p. 4). Russell A. Barkley clarified this idea in his

presentation at the Schwab Foundation for Learning in May 2000, claiming that ADHD is, in part, a developmental delay in some or all of the “executive functions” of the brain – the functions that comprise general self-management (Barkley, 2000). Sandra Reif refers to these functions as “the management functions of the brain” and “the variety of functions within the brain that activate, organize, integrate, and manage other functions,” including the ability to inhibit responses, to curb immediate reactions, and to “stop, think, and plan” before acting (Reif, 2003, p. 5). Executive functions are necessary for developing working memory, organizing thoughts, planning, sustaining alertness, and regulating and controlling behavior. Challenges because of developmental delays of these abilities often present themselves in an elementary classroom setting, where these abilities and expectations for academic and behavioral performance (following rules, sitting quietly, and paying attention) are first required and assessed frequently (Reif, 2003). As a result of these students’ delayed executive functioning, teachers may notice that these children lag behind their peers in areas such as problem-solving, organization, and time management, for example (Reif, 2003). Although researchers do not yet agree about what exactly constitutes these executive functions, they have at present time concluded that when a neurological difficulty results in a developmental delay of such functions, behaviors consistent with those of and diagnosable as ADHD appear.

Although students with ADHD may range in degree from mild to severe and may exhibit many different behaviors and combinations of behaviors, many educators, psychologists, and physicians divide these children into three major groups: those who are “mainly hyperactive or impulsive,” those who are “predominantly inattentive,” and those who are “mixtures of both types” (Baren, 2000, p. 4). The fourth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV)* – the official guide for diagnosing ADHD –

categorizes symptoms similarly (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Students diagnosed as “predominantly hyperactive/impulsive” have difficulty regulating activity level and inhibiting behavior; they demonstrate at least six of the following characteristics:

- often fidgeting with hands or feet
- often leaving seat in the classroom when remaining seated is expected
- often running or climbing excessively in inappropriate situations
- often having difficulty playing quietly
- often “on the go” or acting “as if driven by a motor”
- often talking excessively
- often blurting out answers before questions have been completed
- often having difficulty awaiting turn
- often interrupting others

Similarly, students diagnosed as “predominately inattentive” have difficulty attending to tasks; they demonstrate at least six of the following characteristics:

- often failing to give close attention to details or making careless mistakes in schoolwork or other activities
- often having difficulty sustaining attention in tasks
- often not appearing to listen when spoken to directly
- often not following through on instructions and failing to finish schoolwork or other duties
- often having difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- often avoiding or disliking tasks requiring sustained mental effort, such as schoolwork and homework

- often losing items necessary for tasks, such as school assignments or pencils
- often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
- often forgetful in daily activities

Students diagnosed as having the most common “combined type” of ADHD meet the sets of criteria for both hyperactivity/impulsivity and inattention (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, pp. 83-84).

To be officially diagnosed with ADHD, the child must have demonstrated some of the above symptoms before 7 years of age, indicating “early onset of the major characteristics” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, pp. 83-84). Symptoms must have been present for at least six months and must occur in two or more settings, such as school and home. Evidence for clinically significant impairment in social or academic functioning must exist, symptoms must be inconsistent with the student’s developmental level, and symptoms must not be accounted for by another mental disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Even when a child is diagnosed as having these symptoms, as medical doctors Edward M. Hallowell and John J. Ratey note, “the face of ADHD changes with the weather, inconstant and unpredictable” (Hallowell and Ratey, 1992, p. 1). Symptoms and characteristics present in one ADHD child may be completely absent from another child with a similar diagnosis; additionally, symptoms and characteristics present in one ADHD child may appear in that child one day and seem to disappear the next, only to continue this cycle again and again.

Additionally, Reif notes that approximately two-thirds of children and adolescents with ADHD have an additional coexisting disorder, (Reif, 2003), including one-fifth to one-third with specific learning disabilities, one-third to one-half with an oppositional defiant disorder, and one-fifth to two-fifths with a level of antisocial behavior diagnosable as a conduct disorder; ADHD has also

co-occurred with anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorders (National Institute of Mental Health, 2004). For these reasons, working with an ADHD student can lead to frustration for both student and teacher.

The vast majority of elementary students diagnosed with ADHD continue to exhibit the disorder in adolescence (approximately 80%) and adulthood (approximately 67%) (Reif, 2003). Statistics indicate that as school-age children with ADHD grow older, they are much more likely than their non-ADHD peers to be involved in serious accidents, to fail a grade in school, or to drop out of school (Reif, 2003). Thus, it is crucial for interventions, accommodations, and coping strategies to be introduced and implemented as early as possible in order for diagnosed individuals to manage their disorder with success.

With this knowledge of the ADHD disorder, I felt comfortable researching some of the strategies used to encourage success among such students, as I was noticing some similar behaviors in my selected student. Although I was not attempting to diagnose him with the disorder, I did decide that looking into some of the proven techniques for increasing student focus could be beneficial despite my student's lack of ADHD diagnosis.

How Did I Collect and Analyze My Pre-Intervention Data?

After determining that this course of action would be an appropriate means of gaining a better understanding of as well as generating ideas for interventions to assist my student who struggled to focus during class activities, I began to collect data to determine what the student's specific areas of difficulty were. Through detailed observations, an informal survey, and personal journal reflections, I was able to pinpoint specific behaviors and habits that contributed to my student's struggle in the classroom.

Because my students do not eat lunch each day until 12:30 PM, my mentor teacher and I have instituted a snack time at approximately 10:00 AM; at this time, students may eat a snack brought from home while working independently or in small groups or participating in a large group discussion or activity. However, my struggling student seemed to have difficulty with this multi-tasking, taking an average of fifteen minutes – and at times up to twenty minutes – to eat his snack, whereas his peers were taking an average of five minutes to complete the same task. While eating, the student frequently did not have the required materials on his desk and spent the time looking around the room instead of focusing on the teacher.

A major discovery made during my inquiry was my reactions toward and conveying of expectations through my words and actions during while the student was or was not actively participating in class. After reviewing and reflecting on one instance where my PDA was able to observe and script my lesson and the student's behaviors and performance as I taught, I noticed that although the student raised his hand to answer a question on several occasions, I did not notice or call on him to participate. Additionally, I noticed that the majority of my reactions toward him were rather negative, asking him to “refocus” and reminding him that it “frustrates me” when he is turned around and talking to others while I am teaching. Immediately after making this comment, the student left his seat and signed out to use the bathroom and the water fountain. Although I did not make the connection at that immediate time, I began to wonder if my infrequent praise and increasing criticism of the student made him feel as if he was not a vital enough participant in the discussion or even member of the classroom to remain a part of that setting, thus causing his loss of interest and resulting in his decision to take a break from the classroom setting.

One of the most frustrating behaviors that I have observed in this student is the frequency with which he puts his hands and nearly any object that he finds in his mouth. During one observation, the student kept his hands in and around his mouth and nose for over four minutes at a time. Not only is this behavior distracting to him and to neighboring students, the constant movement of fingers, pencils, and other objects in and out of his mouth is unsanitary and creates an unhealthy environment for the student and all other students and teachers in the classroom. Several “community concerns” – notes written anonymously by students and placed in a box to be opened during class meeting conflict resolution times – had mentioned these behaviors, forcing me to realize that I was not the only person noticing and concerned about the student’s habit.

Observing the student’s behavior provided me with a wealth of data; however, I felt that perhaps my outsider perspective on the situation was not always accurate, for I could certainly think of instances where I was moving my head or hands but still actively listening to a speaker or an instructor. Thus, I took the student aside during a free writing period and appeared to other students to be having a writing conference with him. I explained to the student that – like him – I was working on a big writing piece for my class, and I needed his help with my project about how children pay attention in school. After assuring him that he would not be graded or in any way evaluated on his responses, he agreed to answer my questions.

When asked, “how often do you think you pay attention during school – always, most times, sometimes, or never,” the student answered “sometimes,” then decided to change to “most times.” When I asked which of the two he would pick if he had to choose, he said “it’s actually both – I do pay attention when I have to.”

Using this comment as a springboard for additional discussion, I asked the student what subjects or activities make it easy for him to pay attention. Quickly, the student said, “reading – it’s easy, because all you have to do is read the book and answer questions.” After writing down this response, I asked him if there were any other subjects or activities that we could include on this list, and he suggested “math...science...social studies...and sometimes spelling.” When I asked why spelling was a “sometimes,” he commented, “that’s why I have to ask you to repeat the words – people around me keep talking, and it’s hard for me to pay attention.”

Next, I asked the opposite question: “in what subjects or activities is it hardest for you to pay attention?” Immediately, the student mentioned the subject that the students were to be studying and had just completed a mini-lesson on at that time – “writing.” When I asked him to explain why writing was a difficult subject for him to pay attention to, he said that “it’s hard to think of stories when you have so many stories in your head.” Then he continued to say that “it’s boring listening and not doing anything – keeping your pencils down.” I asked him what else was “boring” to him, and he listed “taking notes” because it is difficult for him to find “good information” – what he explained to be the “5 W’s,” or “who, what, when, where, and why” something occurred.

My final two questions I thought I had posed to the whole class frequently, as I set expectations for a particular activity. First, I asked “what does paying attention look like to you?” The student determined quickly that I as a teacher would see “pencils down” and “sitting there listening to you guys” if I looked at him at a time when he was paying attention. He gave a fairly “expected” response to the opposite question (“what does NOT paying attention look like to you?”), telling me that not paying attention is “goofing around,” “looking in the sky,” and “playing with pencils,” among other things.

Looking at and analyzing all of this collected data, I found several characteristics that “stuck out” to me as areas to focus on when planning interventions and accommodations. First, I wanted to be sure that I was doing my part as a teacher to clearly set academic and behavioral expectations; because my data showed that I became frustrated with the student for his inability to stay focused on more than one occasion, I wanted to be sure that our communication about rules and expectations was clear. Second, I wanted to manipulate the physical environment of the classroom to provide the student with enough access to his peers so that he would be able to receive quick assistance from a peer if necessary but also far enough removed from his peers so that they would not continue to be a distraction. Finally, I wanted to continue or extend the behavior management system that we established earlier in the year, prior to my inquiry project, to encourage the student’s active class participation.

What Interventions Did I Implement?

Three major types of interventions and accommodations may be attempted to manage a student’s ADHD: medical interventions, psychological and behavioral interventions, and educational interventions. Because the student is not diagnosed as having ADHD, medical and psychological interventions were beyond my grasp as a teacher and potentially inappropriate, given the current knowledge about his circumstances. Thus, I carefully examined a number of educational interventions and attempted to match some interventions with the behaviors and habits that I wanted the student to change.

Because many of the impairments in functioning caused by ADHD appear in educational settings – where the need for “executive functions” appears more profoundly than in other settings – the implementation of educational supports and interventions is crucial in encouraging an ADHD student’s success. More importantly, the classroom teacher – with the assistance of

the ADHD child, the child's parents, and the school support staff – needs to develop a number of environmental, academic, instructional, or behavioral interventions to deal with the specific needs and capitalize on the specific strengths of the child (Reif, 2003). When a child exhibits ADHD-like behaviors and difficulties in the school setting – whether or not the child has been formally diagnosed with ADHD – environmental accommodations, behavioral interventions, and academic and instructional strategies should be implemented to increase student success in the classroom (Reif, 2003). In other words, the research demonstrates that students do not necessarily need to be identified as having the disorder in order for most of the educational interventions to assist in improving their abilities to focus and concentrate.

As stated by Reif and in accordance with my developing knowledge about classroom management, clearly stating and setting rules and expectations for general classroom behavior as well as for specific classroom activities is vital to assist ADHD students in achieving academically or behaviorally in the classroom setting. A structured and well-organized atmosphere should anticipate and avoid potential problems. Keeping rules and expectations to a minimum of four or five and stating them as positive, observable behaviors that the students should exhibit is helpful; defining what these behaviors should “look like” and “sound like” as well as modeling them for students provides ADHD and all students with a stronger understanding of what is expected of them behaviorally and socially (Reif, 2003).

Communicating and modeling these expectations during transitional times of the day is even more important, as Reif notes that “students with ADHD typically have the greatest behavioral difficulties during transitional times of the day in the classroom” (Reif, 2003, p. 115). Thus, it is crucial for teachers to “give specific instructions about how students are to switch to the next activity” as well as to “clearly teach, model, and have students practice and rehearse” these

procedures, providing students with enough support so that they can find success and gradually reducing this support as necessary (Reif, 2003, p. 115).

With these ideas in mind, I began to make a deliberate effort to clearly state rules and expectations when transitioning to and from activities; because of my desire to keep these instructions minimal, I decided to choose the most relevant academic or behavioral expectations according to each specific activity. Until this constant stating of expectations became automatic to me, I made notes to myself in my lesson plan book or on a Post-It note so that I would remember this crucial step in my instruction.

Even as I began to clearly set expectations before each activity, I found that my student was still not focusing – though displaying those behaviors that he defined in my informal survey to “look like” and “sound like” paying attention (“pencils down,” etc.). Soon, I realized that this particular student had become adept at pretending to listen and pay attention while still continuing to daydream or otherwise remain off-task. Thus, I decided to hold him accountable for listening to the directions and being able to communicate them back to me; after I gave instructions for a particular activity, I turned to the student and asked him to restate those instructions. Although he could not successfully repeat these directions on the first or second occasions that I attempted to ask, by the third lesson in which I utilized this procedure, he was able to explain to his classmates that they had to “turn over their index cards, read the word on the front of the card, and write down more specific words for the first word on the back,” perhaps gaining success because he was becoming familiar with the idea and procedure of listening and repeating directions and knew that he was going to be held accountable for knowing those directions.

According to a large body of research, making seemingly minor changes to the physical environment of the classroom can be one of the most effective ways to accommodate students with ADHD. Finding a desk space for the student that is both close in proximity to the teacher's desk as well as to the front of the classroom is key; with this arrangement, students will have increased access to the teacher as well as minimal distracters during instructional time (Council for Exceptional Children, 1989). Additionally, surrounding these students with strong peer role models, both academically and behaviorally, provides ADHD students with extra support, particularly during collaborative and cooperative learning activities (Council for Exceptional Children, 1989).

Throughout the course of the year, I have struggled with finding the perfect seat for this student in my classroom. I began by moving his seat close to my desk, so that the student would have increased and constant access to me for support and suggestions. However, I soon began to feel that his growing dependence on me – for example, not necessarily listening to the directions the first time that they were given, knowing that he could ask me to give him a personal explanation following instructions to the group – was detrimental to his academic and behavioral growth, as I noted in a reflective journal earlier in the school year. Additionally, as I began to become the central teacher in the classroom, I began to spend far less time near the area of my desk; placing the student close to that area so that he would be able to receive additional assistance, as I had originally intended, was becoming increasingly illogical each day.

My next placement for the student – using the abovementioned research to guide my thinking – was in the front of the classroom. Without any people or major obstructions between the student and the front of the classroom, where most of the writing on the chalkboards and teacher demonstrations are performed, the student should have much less of an opportunity to

become distracted during class times. Although the student mentioned several times that he “loves this new seat” in the front of the room, I was still concerned about how to place other students around him as I created a room full of cooperative groups rather than straight rows.

While considering this placement, I observed and reflected on the attitudes of the other students – particularly the other students in his immediate vicinity – toward my student with focusing difficulties. Generally, I heard comments such as “let’s give [student name] this job to do to keep him busy; he won’t mess it up too bad” and “[student name], why aren’t you listening,” the latter often following the student’s requests for help from his peers. After reflecting on the overall negativity of these student comments and the possibility that this negativity contributes to a negative self-image and low self-efficacy, I determined that my particular student needed to be surrounded by positive and encouraging classmates.

Additionally, I thought that perhaps enlisting the “help” of some of his high-achieving peers would decrease the student’s dependence on me as the only resource in the classroom; I chose students who enjoyed taking on the role of “leader” in a group setting to sit close enough to the student to help to direct him to the appropriate pages or to help him find the appropriate materials. Moreover, choosing close listeners and active participants to surround the student would, I assumed, immerse the child in the behavior that I desired to elicit from him.

Although I am still in the process of making observations of this behavior, I have noted in anecdotal records that both “sides” of the partnerships that I have created have benefited from the arrangement. While my student with focusing difficulties has additional help with redirection and quick answers to his often quick questions, the strong leaders and “helpers” in that situation have been able to act on their leadership instincts without involving the whole class – a situation that often frustrates some of the “strong but silent” leaders in the classroom. For

both parties, a need is fulfilled without drawing the unneeded attention of the entire class, helping both parties in turn to wean themselves away from the need for constant teacher attention.

Additionally, another element of the physical environment – the presence of visible schedules and routines in the home and in the classroom – is known to be very comforting for the ADHD child (National Institute of Mental Health, 2004). Having a similar routine each day and making that routine visible – whether on the classroom chalkboard or the home refrigerator – helps the ADHD child to become aware of and adapt more easily to transitional times. When changes to the schedule must be made, parents and teachers are advised to make those changes as far in advance as possible and to provide the ADHD child with enough time to prepare for and adapt to those changes (National Institute of Mental Health, 2004).

After moving the student's desk to the front of the room, I began to write the schedule for each day on the section of the chalkboard directly beside the student's desk. Because he frequently asked "What are we doing?" and "What's next?" I again wanted to anticipate his need for support and provide him with the kinds of external supports that would allow for a degree of independence from me and my mentor teacher. When he came to me on the afternoon of the first day of having written that schedule in that space saying "Miss Ackerman, that schedule is such a great idea there," I had the feeling that I was at least partially successful. When I probed the student for more information about why my schedule is "such a great idea," he mentioned that "it's right there" so he is able to see it clearly; additionally, he noted that "when we're done with something, I can just erase it off for you," emphasizing the important role and responsibility that he was ready and willing to take on as an active member of our classroom community.

Finally, earlier in the year as an extension of my in-depth case study of this particular student, my mentor teacher and I had developed a behavior management plan to increase the student's class participation, and in turn, his time focused and on-task. The student has a daily chart on his desk with blanks where he can list each subject or lesson that is presented in class. Beside each of these blanks are a smiling face and a frowning face. If at any point during a lesson the student raises his hand, is called on by a teacher, and provides an appropriate answer, he circles the smiling face for that subject. If not, he circles the frowning face. As a teacher, I keep a similar chart to ensure that the student accurately represents his behavior. If the student earns at least two smiling faces by the end of the day, he earns a sticker to place on his sticker chart. Once he has earned five stickers, he receives his self-selected reward: a no-homework pass for one assignment, to be used at any time he chooses. The student keeps these charts and a basic list of what is required to earn a smiling face on his desk, as constant reminders of what he needs to do to earn his much-desired reward.

When this system was just beginning, I noticed that the student was very motivated to achieve the goal of a no-homework pass; however, after earning two no-homework passes through this system, the student still had not used the passes but had continued to receive homework slips for not completing his homework at least twice each week. When I entered into discussion with him about why he had not chosen to use these homework passes for some of his missing assignments, he claimed that he had lost the homework passes and "just kept on forgetting to use them." Clearly, this original reward was no longer as motivating as it had been, as the student had collected numerous homework passes and failed to "cash them in" for their value. Additionally, I began to notice a general increase in the student's overall participation, without relying on the promise of a sticker to motivate such participation. Because I would

much rather encourage the intrinsic motivation of wanting to be an active member of the classroom rather than extrinsic motivation of stickers or homework passes, I have been deliberately failing to replace the sticker charts on the student's desk. Because the student has not yet asked about the absence of these charts nor has he decreased his participation level during class activities, I have not yet reciprocated and replaced this form of extrinsic motivation, in the hopes that the student will develop strong enough intrinsic motivation to overcome the need for such additional "extras" as homework passes.

What Did I Learn From My Inquiry?

Students – particularly students with focusing difficulties – need structure, largely in the form of clear academic and behavioral rules and expectations stated before every activity. More specifically, making sure that rules and expectations stay at a minimum of four or five and are stated as observable behaviors that the students should exhibit help to ensure success for many students (Reif, 2003). When students – like my student with focusing difficulties – are given the additional expectation that they will be held accountable for knowing what is “going on” in the classroom, they may increase their level of concern for staying on-task and learning these expectations, as my student demonstrated as I continued to ask him to restate or demonstrate these expectations following my original statements.

The physical environment of the classroom – including the specific seating arrangements of students – can be changed to accommodate the needs of students with difficulty focusing in the classroom. Finding a desk space that provides minimal distracters during instructional time is a key factor in ensuring success for any student having difficulty concentrating in the classroom (Council for Exceptional Children, 1989). My student mentioned several times that he “loves this new seat” in the front of the room, noting that he is able to see the chalkboard, the

homework board, and the TV if he needs to, making it – in my eyes and, more importantly, in his eyes – the ideal space for him in the classroom. Additionally, the choice of strong peer role models to surround the student seems to provide an additional non-teacher support, particularly during cooperative learning activities (Council for Exceptional Children, 1989). My current observations indicate that while one student gains additional help during class activities, other students have opportunities to become leaders and helpers without drawing excessive attention to the acts taking place, decreasing the amount of teacher attention centered on both highly teacher-dependent students.

Visible schedules help students to remain focused and ease transition times. Having a similar routine each day and making that routine visible – whether on the classroom chalkboard or the home refrigerator – is recommended by the National Institute of Mental Health to help the ADHD child to become aware of and adapt more easily to transitional times (National Institute of Mental Health, 2004). In my experience, the simple student comment, “Miss Ackerman, that schedule is such a great idea there,” provided me with the encouragement to continue posting the schedule. When I discovered that the student was beginning to take on an important role and responsibility as an active member of our classroom community by keeping track of the items on our schedule, I found an additional purpose for the schedule to serve – a purpose that I had neglected to develop through other means and will remain curious to investigate further.

Plans originally intended to improved behavior through the use of extrinsic motivation may still be effective when gradually taken away to increase intrinsic motivation. When the sticker chart system was just beginning, I noticed that the student was very motivated to achieve the goal of a no-homework pass; however, after earning two no-homework passes through this system, the student still had not used the passes but had continued to receive homework slips for

not completing his homework at least twice each week. No-homework passes were not being used by and perhaps had lost their motivation for this particular student, but the positive behaviors that they were to reinforce were not disappearing. To encourage the intrinsic motivation of wanting to be an active member of the classroom rather than extrinsic motivation of stickers and no-homework passes, I have gradually eliminated – or at least decreased the use of – the active participation sticker chart for the particular student.

Interventions and techniques in place to increase the concentration and other positive behaviors in students with focusing difficulties can also be effective for students who do not struggle in these areas. One of my most important discoveries throughout this inquiry endeavor is that students do not have to struggle with attentiveness to benefit from techniques designed to increase such attentiveness in ADHD students. As I began to more clearly state expectations, I watched not just my student with focusing difficulties but all of my students produce better work as the result of knowing exactly what was expected of them. Additionally, I noticed other students helping to write or otherwise manage the daily schedule. Although my student with focusing difficulties tends to dominate this classroom job – largely because of the proximity of his seat – I found a greater number of students than I had expected being very aware of the schedule and the day's events, asking specific questions and recalling the order of the events throughout the day. Thus, what is implemented to help one student to increase a particular behavior may actually function to help all students increase these behaviors – a concept that is becoming central to my teaching as I continue to investigate it further.

Conclusion

Working with a child with ADHD as a parent or a teacher can present great challenges. However, I found that “knowledge is power,” to be cliché, in this situation; the more that I was

able to learn about the disorder as a teacher, the more able I am to assist my student with focusing difficulties in my fifth grade classroom.

While I conducted my inquiry, I found that I began to agree with what Hallowell and Ratey suggest as being one of the most effective ways of managing the disorder: asking the child what will help (Hallowell and Ratey, 1992). Noting that “these kids are often very intuitive” and “can tell you how they learn best if you ask them,” Hallowell and Ratey suggest sitting down with the child individually and asking how he or she learns best and what types of class activities they have found to be the most memorable and engaging (Hallowell and Ratey, 1992, p. 2). This simple method can provide a wealth of information about additional possible interventions and accommodations tailored to the needs of and individualized to suit the particular learner. Recalling this idea throughout my future teaching – whether working with a student with difficulty focusing or not – should help me to remember that my focus as a teacher should not be on myself and my performance, but on the strengths and needs of each individual child in my classroom.

Additionally, I have come to realize that some of these strengths and needs may change through time. For example, because my student with focusing difficulties is now beginning to participate actively without the support of his behavior management sticker chart, active participation in class is not my primary concern for him. Instead, with the problem of participation remedied at least temporarily, I have come to notice the student’s extreme difficulty and struggle with organization and completing as well as turning in work on time. Future informal interventions will likely be attempts to remedy this problem while hopefully maintaining the progress made on the above goal.

Once again, the most important discovery that I was able to make through this inquiry process is that not only are these methods “best practice” for ADHD students, they are also effective ways of encouraging organization and structuring learning experiences for all students, regardless of whether or not the students have been identified as needing such classroom supports. Thus, in my future teaching, I hope to utilize these researched practices in order to provide all students in my classroom with opportunities to find success, regardless of the amount of support needed to reach his or her academic and behavioral goals.

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