

**Increasing Student On-task Time Through the Use of Movement
Activities**

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Abstract

How can using movement activities in the classroom increase student on-task time and well as their ability to focus? Children are active individuals and need the opportunity to move when possible. The wondering of how incorporating movement activities in the classroom can positively influence students brought on my inquiry.

Background

The school environment at Park Forest Elementary is that of a close-knit community. All the teachers work hand-in-hand, always willing to help each other out. Additionally, teachers take the opportunity to co-teach, allowing the students the benefit of having two teachers presenting the material.

Within the first grade classroom there is a wide array of students and abilities. The class consists of twenty-one students, thirteen males and nine females. In terms of their academic abilities the majority of the students can read and write at a first grade level. While all students can mainly spell only specific sight words (and, the, he, she), they all use sound spelling quite efficiently. There are six students below the first grade level in reading. These students meet with the Title 1 teacher during stations where they “miss” going to the listening station (listen to a book on tape). Lastly, there are four students that read and write above the first grade level. During reading, these students are given books that have both challenge words and an increased amount of words.

Throughout the day, student behavior is normal. During any typical day, there are a few students that towards the end of the day have a hard time concentrating. At this point, they begin to move around the rug, talk to their neighbors, and make random noises. Normally, calling their name and telling them to check their bodies will correct the misbehaviors. Other than these few instances, student behavior is rather appropriate for school. Between students, it is obvious that some students work together better and that some students have formed small “cliques.” However, when working as a group, all students are able to participate and show respect for their classmates. However, there are a few students that are not able to work together. Either from kindergarten or this year,

their relationship and actions prove they are not capable of working cooperatively.

Racial diversity is not overly present in the classroom, but nonetheless, it is there. There are two African American students and one Asian student. The rest of the students can be classified as Caucasian.

In terms of social and behavioral problems there is one student who is unable to work and listen to others. When instructed to do something, this child acts out, disrupting the entire class. Many times his actions are for attention while other instances result from a lack of self-control.

Rationale

Throughout my school career I have always found that when I was able to get up and move around the classroom while interacting with the material, I was able to learn and digest the information much better. This then led to me staying on-task longer and being able to focus on the work I was doing. When I reached high school and the majority of my classes were lecture form, I began to lose interest and found that I was not focusing as well. Therefore, I realized that my learning style allows me to move around and “play” with the material to better understand what it is I was learning while remaining on-task. To me this became critical, as the lessons would pique my interest and allow me to think on a much deeper level. Knowing my learning style and background, I then wondered how these types of activities would also work for my students. Would moving around the room, playing with the materials, and interacting with their peers allow them to stay on-task and remain focused?

“You can use group activities to reinforce academic content without creating a lot of new activities” (responsiveclassroom.org). When teaching a lesson, I can always tell when my students have been on the rug/seats for too long. I can see many daydreaming and some begin to talk with their neighbors. Therefore, the wondering about how movement activities influences student on-task time and their ability to focus came into play. Would these simple group activities be enough to keep students on-task?

I believe this inquiry will allow me to find certain instances where movement activities can be used to increase student on-task time. While not all lessons are appropriate for these activities, being able to determine when they are useful and beneficial will greatly allow my classroom to run more efficiently.

Wonderings

I came into this inquiry wondering if there were efficient and numerous ways to keep students on-task and focusing their attention. Knowing that students are active individuals, I wanted to know how to use this information in my classroom to better suit my students. This then led me to my question:

How do movement activities (stations, hands-on, group activities) increase student on-task time and their ability to remain focused?

This main question then led me to a number of sub-questions. These questions would better help me understand the more detailed aspects of movement activities. These questions are:

Are students more engaged when they are moving around the classroom?

Do students better retain information when actively involved?

How can movement activities be used on a daily basis to aid in student learning?

Can movement activities diminish student learning?

Each of these questions forms the platform of my inquiry. I wanted determine their effects on students as well as how efficiently they could be used daily in a classroom.

Inquiry versus Project

When looking at the question you must put yourself on the inside of the question trying to look out. This project is inquiry based because I am looking at a wondering that cannot be answered with a yes or no. Instead of researching something that has already been done and applying it to my classroom, I am taking something I am curious about and see how different techniques will affect my students. In addition, the wondering is cyclical. Whereas a project has a defined start and stop position, my wondering will continue to circle around based on the data I collect. When one bit of information is found, it will directly affect my next step. Each time something new is found out there will be new information to take into consideration when teaching the class. Finally, my wondering is inquiry based because it is focused on providing insight into my teaching practice and how I can increase my student's on-task time through the use of movement activities. The data I collect will directly correlate to my students and classroom.

Plan

In order to fully grasp the effects movement activities have on students, I will focus primarily on observations of student actions during lessons. Throughout the course

of the inquiry I will constantly watch student behaviors/actions to see if there is a difference within their on-task time. However, I will focus on their actions both during movement activities and those lessons where they must primarily sit on the rug. I will be watching specific students to make sure I am able to focus my attention on an attainable goal. These few students will cover a wide array of the academic levels in the class. Additionally, I will survey the other teachers to ascertain how/if they use movement activities in their classrooms and if they believe they increase the time students spend on-task.

The first step taken was surveying other primary teachers. They were asked a series of questions dealing with movement activities (Appendix A). Based on their responses I was able to attain an idea of how often these activities are possible the reasons for which they are used. From this information I was able to build a basis for when and how movement activities were appropriate.

With the aid of other interns and my mentor, I was able to come up with lessons that would incorporate movement activities whenever possible. When teaching, I kept a record of those students I was watching every time they performed a certain action. These actions (moving around, talking, daydreaming, getting up, etc) were marked down each time they were carried out and would later be analyzed. To ensure that the activities were the result of my observations I watched students during a number of lessons that involved no movement, some movement, or mostly movement.

When observing students I constantly watched both when I taught and when my mentor taught. This was to ensure that students were given multiple opportunities to perform the observed actions in two different settings.

Data Collection

A. Teacher Surveys (Appendix A)

When beginning, I first wanted to assess how other teachers in Kindergarten to 2nd grade use movement activities. I sent out a survey asking teachers to explain how they used certain types of activities and to explain if they found them to be beneficial. These surveys were also sent out to determine if teachers thought such activities could be used on a daily basis or if there were a limited number of lessons that could be involved in movement. The survey also represented a basis for which types of movement activities teachers used and which were most useful in their classroom. They were asked to name a few types they commonly used and to describe why they used them.

B. Student Observations

After implanting the answers from the teacher surveys into my lessons, I attempted to include movement activities whenever possible. Knowing that there were multiple times students can be off-task; I planned to observe students during a number of lessons, each with a different amount of movement.

The first types of lesson watched were those that involved little to no movement. The selected students were observed to determine how many times students would perform a number of different actions, representing that they were not focused on the lesson (Appendix B).

The second types of lesson were those where students had some movement. These types of lessons commonly included Language arts Stations. However, specific

segments of math and science lessons were observed where students had the opportunity to move at appropriate times (Appendix C)

The third type of lesson was ones in which students were constantly moving, only stopping now and then. “Some students learn best when they engage their whole bodies” (Crawford, 2004). This shows that having students “up and about” can increase their learning by keeping them focused. These lessons were primarily science lessons where students were studying prehistoric life. These lessons were observed to see if movement activities could be used throughout a lesson to increase student on-task time (Appendix D).

C. Video of Lesson Being Taught

A video recorder was set up to watch students during two types of lessons. The first was Morning Meeting where students had the opportunity to move around when specified. The second type of lesson recorded was a math lesson in which students were required to sit on the rug for most of the lesson. The math lesson, while asking for student input, did not allow for too much movement.

D. Journal of Specific Lessons (Appendix E)

A journal was written to examine the effectiveness of a specific day’s lessons in which students had some opportunities to move. The journal was another source that would allow for further analysis of why specific lessons were successful or not in keeping students on-task.

Data Analysis

When analyzing my data I first needed to analyze each piece separately to find specific instances in each data piece. The analysis began the week of March 25 when I felt I had enough data to begin looking at themes in my data.

The first piece of data analyzed was the surveys to teachers. The surveys were spread out on the ground and looked at the answers given. I specifically looked at whether or not teachers used movement activities, which types they used, and whether or not they were useful. Additionally, I looked for whether or not teachers said they did not use them and their reasons for not using movement activities.

When analyzing the observations of students during specific lessons, I needed to create a chart that would allow me to combine all the information taken in one place to see any unifying themes between students and the type of activity (Appendix F). I first found the total number of times students performed certain actions and began to add these amounts to the chart. At the end, I was able to see how students behaved and worked during specific lessons. Doing so also allowed me to see how the total amount of the certain actions varied from activity to activity. These actions were then analyzed to see if there were specific lessons in which each student observed had roughly the same number of actions, or if each student reacted differently to different activities.

Lastly, to analyze the video, I watched five-minute segments to see if there were particular times in which students performed the certain actions. The video also acted as

a resource to watch the class as a whole. While I was not always able to watch every student during normal observations, the video allowed sufficient time to see if there were common actions among all students. To aid the video analysis, a journal was written to further analyze the video and what had occurred during the lessons. The journal acted as a source to further develop themes among student behavior and work habits during different activities.

Claims

Claim 1: *Students were able to remain focused and on-task longer when they were able to move around during an activity.*

Evidence: After observations were complete and the data was analyzed, it was apparent that movement activities greatly increased student on-task time and their ability to remain focused. Student J reduced his off-task behavior by 38%, Student L 44%, Student D 57%, Student C 58%, and Student A 75% (Appendix F). While the numbers vary greatly, this was due to the wide range of student types. The students focused on covered the spectrum of student types in the classroom. However, when focusing on the numbers, it is noticeable that movement activities will increase student on-task times.

Additionally, when reviewing the videotape and observations from the stations of the math lesson, student off-task behavior had a wide margin. While sitting on the rug students became off-task within ten minutes. However, once moving into stations, students were able to regain their focus and work through each activity. There were two externalities to this time where these students had trouble with their partners. As a whole, however, students were able to remain focused as they moved through four stations and being able to directly interact with the material.

Claim 2: *Lessons can become chaotic when attempting to make them involve movement activities.*

Evidence: During examination of my video recorder of a math lesson, it was apparent that when I attempted to involve students and have them moving, many became off-task. Students were to count the total number of hands from a given amount of students. After having ten students stand to count their hands, what the video revealed was amazing. While the ten selected students were counting their hands, the rest of the class was doing a number of different things. Some students were throwing their hands in the air and bouncing on the carpet. Other students would loudly say the wrong numbers while counting (as a joke to get attention). Additionally, when having these selected students stand, I heard a few say to their friends “Yay, I got picked!” This then turned their friends off-task, and some just sat on the rug doing nothing. This shows that attempting to have movement in a lesson that is not appropriate can work against the teacher.

During a science lesson, I attempted to have two stations for students to move between (while working independently). However, after explaining the activities and allowing students to begin, many students were found to talk to friends on the carpet (one station was held here) while others were trying to work. With the two different groups on the rug, it became hard for students to complete the activity, and many were confused about the material.

Claim 3: *Students recognize that they become less focused during no movement activities.*

Evidence: Before starting a read aloud to students, I recognized that the book was rather long. During my observations of this read aloud, it was apparent that students couldn't sit in one place for an extended amount of time. After reading for roughly ten minutes, one student raised his hand and said, "Can we get up and go somewhere else now?" After he said this, a number of students agreed with him saying, "Yea, can we move now?" I told students that if I could read a few more pages, we would have a stretch time. During these next few pages I saw many students squirming around on the rug or talking with their neighbor. This told me that I should have stopped when students said something, allowing them to have their stretch time right then and there.

Additionally, while watching the videotape of a math lesson, there was an instance where students, as a whole, become off-task and less focused. One part of the lesson required students to count the classroom number tape (records the number of school days) by 2s. When beginning students were on-task. But as the activity continued and students were merely sitting there, many started to lie down on the carpet, climb on desks, or talk to neighbors. After regrouping the students, they immediately went back to conducting off-task behaviors. It became apparent to me that having students sit for too long while trying to complete an activity was not allowing students to gain the knowledge of the activity.

Conclusions

The implications from my inquiry will be long lasting when I move on to teach my own classroom. First and foremost, I have learned that movement activities can be a great asset to the classroom. "In planning for group activity, it's important to achieve a balance between game-based activities and arts-based activities"

(responsiveclassroom.org). Here, students enjoy the opportunity move around the room and interact first-hand with materials. If students are allowed to do so they are on-task a greater portion of the lesson and are able to remain focused when engaged in the material. In order to allow students this opportunity it may be necessary to deviate from the required lessons of units, but as long as the purpose of a lesson is met, students will benefit greatly.

Additionally, I learned that when students do not enjoy lessons, their ability to retain information is decreased. Because children are active and need the opportunity to move, requiring students to stay in one place for too long is detrimental to the classroom as a whole. When just a few students begin to lose interest they have the potential to disrupt the rest of the class. Therefore, incorporating movement into lessons as much as possible will greatly decrease the risk of students becoming off-task and losing focus.

“Children learn eagerly...and movement are naturally appealing to children, and incorporating these art forms into daily curriculum work sweetens the exploration of just about any subject” (Crawford, 2004). In future teaching situations, I know that it is impossible to incorporate movement activities into all of my lessons. However, I know it is necessary to attempt to have students moving around the room at least once during the course of a day. This will enable them to have fun with the material while also remaining focused on what it is they are supposed to be doing.

I think the greatest thing I learned throughout this process is the overall implications gained and lost during movement activities. “Students are too often passively engaged memorizing facts, completing worksheets, and displaying their knowledge on paper and pencil tests” (Paris, 1998). Clearly, movement activities will

allow students a different opportunity in learning. But if used too much, or forced into a lesson, the goal of a lesson can be lost. For this reason, it will be necessary to appropriately choose which lessons should include movement activities and which ones should not. One additional thing I learned about my teaching is that during movement activities I need to allow my students some breathing room. While I know they enjoy these activities, I commonly expect students to check with me each step they take during a lesson. I realize now that they need to be more independent, know what is expected of them, what to do after they are done, and how to complete an activity correctly.

Additional Wonderings

This inquiry has definitely led me to additional thoughts and wonderings about my teachings style and the use of movement activities. The main question I have is:

Will movement activities be as beneficial to students at any grade level?

While I know that with young students, they are greatly beneficial, will they work just as well with older students? While I believe all students, no matter their age, enjoys moving around, will older students gain the same effects as younger students? Will they stay on-task and remain focused throughout the lesson?

Other Wonderings

Will I be able to fit in movement activities into my classroom when I am the sole teacher?

Will movement activities be able to “reach” all students, or will some not react to certain activities?

These wonderings will encourage me to look for other paths in teaching. “Everyone will have the chance to show us the landforms, but each person can decide how” (Crawford,

2004). In this case I will ensure that I don't get stuck doing one specific thing, but rather allow my students multiple ways of learning the same material. I will attempt to allow students the opportunity to move about the classroom and use multiple materials to present the information they are learning.

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*Note: All appendices are the hardcopies of forms used. I need to find a scanner to scan my actual copies into the paper.

Appendix A

1. Do you use movement activities in your classroom?

2. If you answered yes, would you say you use them (circle one)
Always Often Sometimes Rarely

3. If you answered yes, can you please explain why you use them?

4. If you answered no, can you please explain why you do not use them?

5. Which movement activities do you use most often?

6. If you could use movement activities in all lessons would you? Why?

7. If you have any comments that the questions did not address, please feel free to write them below.

Appendix BType of Activity: No Movement

Place a tally each time the student performs one of the given actions.

Student J:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIIIIIII | II | IIIIIIII | IIII |

Student L:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIII | | IIII | I |

Student D:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIIIIIII | I | III | I |

Student C:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIIIIIII | | III | I |

Student A:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIIIIIII | | IIII | I |

Appendix C

Type of Activity: Some Movement (Stations)

Place a tally each time the student performs one of the given actions.

Student J:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIIIII | 1 | IIII | III |

Student L:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIII | | III | |

Student D:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIII | 1 | IIII | |

Student C:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIII | | III | |

Student A:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIII | 1 | II | |

Appendix D

Type of Activity: Mostly Movement

Place a tally each time the student performs one of the given actions.

Student J:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIII | | IIII | III |

Student L:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| III | | II | |

Student D:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| IIII | | I | |

Student C:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| III | I | I | |

Student A:

| Talked to Neighbor | Got Up | Moved Around | Plays With An Item |
|--------------------|--------|--------------|--------------------|
| III | | I | |

Appendix E

Inquiry Video

This week for my journal I wanted to examine and talk about the videotape of me teaching two lessons. While this was mainly done to show me specific things I am doing as I teach, it also served the purpose of data collection for my inquiry. For this journal, I will focus on the data for my inquiry.

First and foremost, the video revealed how effective movement activities can be in keeping students focused and on-task. When going over the calendar math, I am constantly asking for students to come up and help complete each activity. Watching the video, it showed how almost the entire class raised their hands at each activity hoping to be called on. While this is not the full movement activity that commonly keeps students on-task, the thought of being able to get up, interact with the material, and give their answer was a great asset to keeping students focused. Additionally, when reviewing the math lesson, this same aspect came into play. With the prospect of being able to get up and interact with the lesson firsthand, students were initially on-task and focused on what it was I was asking them to focus on. However, when moving into the “activity” students quickly became off-task, leading me to a very interesting claim.

During the math lesson, as mentioned before, the students initially were on-task. However, as the activity progressed, many students started calling out, standing up, moving around on the carpet, and throwing their hands in the air. After examining this segment of the videotape I found that not all lessons are appropriate for movement, and having movement in these lessons can directly cause students to become off-task. Additionally, when students become off-task, it was evident that many students became

annoyed or irritated the other students. There were two cases where these students who enjoy learning and following along in a lesson attempted to keep students on-task by saying, “Shhhhh” or “Be quiet.” Therefore, while lessons that are not suitable for movement can not only “force” students off-task, they can also irritate those students who always try to be exceptional students.

While many lessons can benefit from movement activities, there are lessons that are not suitable to contain these types of activities. Knowing which lessons are suitable is difficult to know right away. However, if attempting to include movement activities, you must be quick to act and stop the activities if they begin to allow students to become off-task. The biggest thing I learned from this is that students are active individuals, you must “play” to their strengths in order to have an effective lesson; whether that includes movement activities or not.

Appendix F

Chart of Total Amounts of Student Behaviors and Actions

Student J:

| | Mostly Movement | Some Movement | No Movement |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Talked To Neighbor | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Got Up | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Moved Around | 5 | 5 | 7 |
| Played With An Item | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| Total | 13 | 15 | 21 |

Student L:

| | Mostly Movement | Some Movement | No Movement |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Talked To Neighbor | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Got Up | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Moved Around | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Played With An Item | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 5 | 7 | 9 |

Student D:

| | Mostly Movement | Some Movement | No Movement |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Talked To Neighbor | 5 | 5 | 9 |
| Got Up | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Moved Around | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Played With An Item | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 6 | 10 | 14 |

Student C:

| | Mostly Movement | Some Movement | No Movement |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Talked To Neighbor | 3 | 5 | 8 |
| Got Up | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Moved Around | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Played With An Item | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 5 | 8 | 12 |

Student A:

| | Mostly Movement | Some Movement | No Movement |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Talked To Neighbor | 3 | 6 | 10 |
| Got Up | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Moved Around | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Played With An Item | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 4 | 9 | 16 |