

A teacher who has the best intentions, dynamic curriculum, and plans for differentiation cannot--and will not--move forward unless that teacher is at ease with translating the ideas into classroom practice. In other words, teachers who are uncomfortable with flexible classroom management will *not* differentiate instruction, even if they understand it, accept the need for it, and can plan for it (Brighton et al., 2005).

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There are some sad and predictable cycles perpetuated by educators' perceptions that most students can only function maturely in tight-ship classrooms. One of those cycles stems from the reality that students often misbehave when the work they are asked to do is consistently too hard or too easy for them. Teachers in dysfunctional and adequate classrooms, as well as many who believe in the tight-ship model, necessarily persist in giving students tasks that are a poor fit for some of them (because differentiating requires flexibility, which threatens order). In turn, some students continue to be frustrated (and show it), which further reinforces the teacher's perception that to "loosen the reins" would be catastrophic. This conclusion, of course, simply feeds the frustration of many young people.

Classroom procedures and routines are prescribed ways of doing things that allow teaching and learning to proceed in a structured, predictable, and efficient manner. Their purpose should be clear to both teacher and students -- they exist to help students learn as effectively as possible. They should be methods to build student competence, not mechanisms to control students. Regardless of the procedure or routine, there are important steps that teachers must follow...[bulleted list is excerpted]

- Determine them
- Clarify the rationale for them
- Develop them
- Teach them
- Apply them
- Automatize them
- Reflect on, revise, and review them

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As you develop procedures, guidelines, and routines for group work, and as you design the work groups will do, consider (and make sure your students understand) the following skills for effective group work.

- Be prepared for the work of the group.
- Understand the parameters of the group's work.
- Make a plan to accomplish the work of the group, including creating an effective division of labor that matches individual strengths with key goals.
- Evaluate the progress of the group toward achieving goals, and adjust plans as needed.
- Listen to one another carefully.
- Be empathetic when group members have difficulty.
- Help one another solve problems.
- Make and respond to suggestions.

When students learn routines for getting help while they work independently and in small groups, the teacher is free to do targeted teaching and strategic observation.

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