

# Research: The Course Organizer Routine

## Overview

The Course Organizer Routine is a set of planning and teaching procedures that can be used by teachers to plan a course and explain the whole course to students. The routine involves reflecting on the most important content of the course and on creating ways to launch the course, maintain course themes throughout the course, and close the course. This routine was developed after a year of study in which 70 teachers identified the most critical features of course planning. Then another 35 teachers completed surveys to validate the initial identification of critical attributes of course planning.

Next, eight secondary subject-area teachers and their students participated in the intervention study. Each teacher targeted one inclusive class for the study, and every class had a mixture of high, normal, and low achievers in addition to students with disabilities. Four of the teachers initially volunteered for the study; they had participated in identifying the critical attributes associated with course planning. They served as the experimental teachers who implemented the Course Organizer Routine. The additional four comparison teachers were matched with these teachers by grade level and subject area taught. Each group of four teachers included one middle-school science teacher, one middle-school social studies teacher, one high-school science teacher, and one high-school social studies teacher.

In the four experimental classes, there were a total of 116 students (18 of whom were classified as having learning disabilities). In the comparison classes, there were a total of 108 students (13 of whom were classified as having learning disabilities). Qualitative data were collected through observations, planning interviews, teacher and researcher journals, group discussions, and interviews with selected students. Quantitative data were collected through teacher observations, student questionnaires, and student tests over 10 critical course questions identified by the teachers.

## Results

When teachers used the Course Organizer Routine, they spent considerably more time introducing major course ideas, concepts, themes, and routines to students than teachers who did not use the routine. In addition, they integrated an average of eight innovative instructional practices into their classroom routines on an ongoing basis, whereas comparison teachers used an average of one innovative instructional practice. Students with disabilities enrolled in the classes where teachers used the routine answered an average of three course questions correctly at the beginning of the course and eight course questions correctly at the end of the course. Students with disabilities in comparison classes answered an average of three course questions correctly at the beginning of the course and four course questions correctly at the end of the course.

## Conclusions

The use of the Course Organizer Routine to create a classroom "learning community" and to focus on major course themes substantially affects how much time teachers communicate with students about the course as a whole, how many innovative instructional practices they utilize, and how students perform when they are asked to answer major questions about the course content. The performance of students with and without learning disabilities with regard to remembering course content is substantially better when the Course Organizer Routine is used versus when it is not used.

## Reference

Joint Committee on Teacher Planning for Students with Disabilities. (1995). *Planning for Academic diversity in America's classrooms: Windows on reality, research, change, and practice*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.