

Research: The Quality Assignment Routine

Overview

The Quality Assignment Routine is used by teachers to plan course assignments, introduce those assignments to their students, and evaluate students' performance on the assignments. The research on this routine was conducted in two phases. In Phase I, 10 middle-school teachers, 14 students with learning disabilities (LD), and 13 students without disabilities participated in focus groups that discussed and listed factors related to planning and introducing quality assignments. Next, a survey was developed based on the written responses collected during the focus-group meetings. This survey was completed by 71 teachers, 71 students with LD, and 102 students without disabilities. The students were enrolled in grades 6 through 8.

Twelve middle-school general education teachers participated in Phase II, where the routine developed in Phase I was implemented in classrooms. Six teachers were trained to implement the routine in inclusive general education social studies classes in which students with LD were enrolled. A multiple-baseline across-teachers design was used to depict the experimental teachers' observed performance as they planned, introduced, and evaluated assignments. The remaining six teachers served as comparisons. A satisfaction questionnaire was administered to all the teachers and their students.

Results

In Phase I, the focus groups and the survey yielded 12 assignment characteristics and 9 teacher explanation factors deemed by students to be important for teachers to include as they plan and present assignments. Such assignment characteristics as the assignment has clear, well-organized directions, allows for interpersonal interactions, is personally relevant to students, provides opportunities for creative expression, and allows for student choices were identified. Teacher explanation factors such as stating the purpose of the assignment, explaining the criteria for quality work, naming available resources, and providing examples or models were also identified.

All of these assignment characteristics and teacher explanation factors were built into the Quality Assignment Routine that was taught to the teachers in Phase II. Before training, the six experimental teachers performed a mean of 45% of the planning behaviors, 36% of the presentation behaviors, and 11% of the evaluation behaviors identified in Phase I.

All of the teachers exhibited improvements in their performance immediately after training. They performed a mean of 99% of the planning behaviors, 97% of the presentation behaviors, and 93% of the evaluation behaviors after training. Similarly, at the beginning of the study, the comparison teachers performed a mean of 47% of the planning behaviors, 30% of the presentation behaviors, and 8% of the evaluation behaviors. The comparison teachers showed no gains at the end of the study by performing a mean of 41% of the planning behaviors, 27% of the presentation behaviors, and 3% of the evaluation behaviors.

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Analyses of variance and multivariate analysis of variance were conducted to determine whether there were differences between the two groups of teachers' behaviors. No differences were found between the teachers at the beginning of the study. After the experimental teachers had received training, significant differences were found between the groups with regard to the number of validated assignment characteristics contained in the assignments [$F(1, 6) = 355.70, p = .0001$], the number of explanation factors included in the verbal presentation of the assignments [$F(1, 9) = .342.20, p = 000$], and the number of evaluation behaviors used by the teachers [$F(1, 6) = 948.33, p = .0001$], in favor of the experimental group for each measure.

With regard to satisfaction, the experimental teachers' satisfaction with factors related to their assignments, their presentation of assignments, and their students' reaction to and performance on assignments substantially increased after they received training and had used the routine several times. They were very satisfied with most of the factors except for two, which related to student effort on checking the quality of their work. The mean satisfaction ratings of the comparison teachers at the end of the study were similar to or below the mean ratings of the experimental teachers during the baseline condition. The comparison teachers at the end of the study and the experimental teachers at the beginning of the study indicated that they were not satisfied with factors related to assignments. When the ratings of the experimental teachers and the comparison teachers were compared at the end of the study using a one-way analysis of variance, a significant difference was found [$F(1, 10) = 16.60, p = 002$], in favor of the ratings of the experimental teachers. A significant difference was also found in the experimental teachers' satisfaction ratings before and after they had used the routine [$F(1, 5) = 387.20, p = 0001$], in favor of the post-intervention ratings.

The students of experimental teachers were generally more satisfied with factors related to assignments than the students of comparison teachers. When the ratings of the student groups were compared, no differences were found between the ratings of the experimental students during baseline and the ratings of the comparison students at the end of the study. When the ratings of the experimental students and the comparison students were compared at the end of the study using a one-way analysis of variance, a significant difference was found [$F(2, 84) = 2144.12, p = 0001$], in favor of the ratings of the experimental students. A significant difference was also found in the experimental students' satisfaction ratings before and after their teachers had used the routine [$F(1, 171) = 33.43, p = .0001$], in favor of the post-intervention period.

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Conclusions

The focus-group results and the survey results gathered in Phase I showed that students with and without disabilities had substantial agreement on the characteristic of quality assignments and teacher explanation factors. Teachers and students agreed on most characteristics and factors except those related to student choice. Students rated the opportunity to make choices highly, and teachers did not.

The Phase II results demonstrated that teachers can learn to include validated characteristics in their assignments and to present and evaluate assignments according to a finite routine. The teachers who learned the routine were substantially and significantly more satisfied with their assignments than before they learned the routine. They were also significantly more satisfied with their assignments than the comparison teachers at the end of the study. The teachers' use of the routine was associated with higher student satisfaction with assignments.

Reference

Rademacher, J. (1993). The development and validation of a classroom assignment routine for mainstream settings. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Lawrence: The University of Kansas.