

MAKING EVERY MINUTE COUNT

Time Management for Multigrade Teachers

By Erma Lee

Time—friend or foe? Teachers struggle against the constant erosion of the minutes and hours of each school day. They often wonder if they are gaining or losing.

Time management is of particular concern to multigrade teachers. They may have up to 25 or more lesson preparations or presentations daily. These busy teachers have to make every minute count.

It is difficult to find the most effective use of time, a very consumable commodity, in a classroom that includes many grades and ages. The teacher must make daily decisions: What should I teach? How should I teach it? Who is ready to learn?

On any given day a dozen or more interruptions may erode away the teacher's time. Using a variety of strategies, the teacher may regain some of that lost time. Nevertheless, being prepared and effectively using time to accomplish goals are challenges that confront classroom teachers each day.

Planning Preparedness

Preparedness does not just happen. It must be planned. Necessary paperwork should be accomplished without excess paper shuffling. Required reports and forms should be completed promptly. Papers should be graded and recorded promptly and efficiently.

The teacher should seek to be personally prepared, which means getting the day off to a good start. This helps one to feel in control of circumstances. For example, the teacher should consciously decide whether to eat breakfast.

The teacher's daily schedule should include predictable tasks. It should also allot realistic blocks of time for their completion.

Teachers should expect from themselves the same level of preparedness that they require of students. Not superhuman achievements, but reasonable accomplishments that result from planning and setting priorities.

The Teacher as Travel Agent

One can think of school as a daily trip.

Preparedness does not just happen.

Imagine the teacher as a travel agent and the students as travelers. The distance students travel each day can be measured by the degree of learning that takes place.

A travel agent does not accompany the passengers on the trip. However, the agent must ensure the success of the trip by making the proper arrangements and assisting the traveler in preparation. Following the same analogy, the teacher is responsible for the students' preparedness and destination in the learning process. How far are your students progressing each day?

Seize the Moment

Learning should take place from the moment the student walks into the classroom. Use spare moments at the beginning of the day to initiate thinking. Thought puzzles may be written on the chalkboard or put on an overhead projector. The following exercises will develop problem-solving skills:

- Overheads from the ARTWORKS program,
- A cloze exercise,
- A thought question requiring simple research or observation.

Any one of these activities will prime the students for a day of mental activity.

Lists

Become an inveterate list maker. This should ensure that everything you need is available. Be overly prepared. Always plan more than you think you can accomplish. Some days will go so smoothly that you can move faster and further than you anticipated. Don't feel discouraged, though, if you don't always make it through your list.

Involving Students

Encourage students to assume responsibilities that would ordinarily take up teacher time. Record keeping is one area

that should be streamlined.

In preparing students to assume responsibility, model the process to be followed. First, have a student leader watch you perform a specific task. Careful watching will prepare him or her to take over the task the following week. At the beginning of the second week, select another student to be trained by the student leader.

Students can perform many classroom tasks if they have been trained to do so. Answering the phone, recording the date on the chalkboard, or dismissing students for recess or lunch break can easily be cared for by students.

Minimizing Paperwork

Don't accumulate stacks of student papers that need to be checked. Whenever you can do so, allow students to check their own classwork.

When several children are performing the same task, have them work together to make an answer key. You will need to lay some groundwork, but it is well worth the effort.

After the work is completed, have students quietly share their answers. If one or more students have a different answer from the rest, have each child recheck his or her answer, going back to the source of the original question or problem.

During this exercise, students may explain to one another their understanding of various processes. Reteaching thus takes place at a peer level.

This technique works well in math, as well as in other subjects such as Bible and social studies. It trains even the most astute of students to locate errors like misunderstanding questions or transposing numbers. Students receive almost immediate feedback on completed work. They learn a great deal more by checking their own assignments or by checking work with partners or as a team.

Individualize Instruction

If you must spend your time checking student work, make sure that the work is significant to the students' learning. Don't waste your pupils' time with busy

work. Their time, as well as yours, is valuable.

The Life Reading Series encourages teachers to utilize the program to instruct the students in needed activities. No student will need to do every page of a workbook, or all suggested activities. Choose which skills and activities your students need. Avoid making mass assignments.

Learning objectives set forth what is to be accomplished, not necessarily the "how" of it. Know your students well enough to personalize their learning. The time you spend preparing a variety of learning methods will be repaid by the degree to which students can assume ownership of the skills.

When you give assignments, save time by requiring students to listen carefully the first time. You train students *not* to listen by repeating the same information over and over.

Make Every Moment Count

By modeling good use of time, you will encourage students to do the same. However, you may find yourself occasionally slipping back into old habits. Students will have the same problem. Make a pact with your pupils to remind each other to make every moment count. This gives them the right to encourage you, and you in turn, to encourage them.

Plan the details of your classroom operation, but be flexible. If you encourage students to look for ways to save time, you may be in for a pleasant change. Often students provide interesting slants on routines that a teacher has always done the same way.

Discuss with students ways to accomplish routine classroom tasks more efficiently. Finding a more orderly way to distribute papers is a good example.

Define Goals Clearly

To save time, make sure students know exactly what they are to learn. The goals of the lesson may be clear to you, but students need to hear them. Saying, "Today we are going to . . ." tells students that their time is being taken seriously and will be used to the best of the teacher's ability.

Students should, when possible, be allowed to choose how they will learn or reinforce each concept. Allow them to choose whether to work in a group or alone, at a work station or at their desk. Let students decide whether to write or to tape-record their projects and accomplishments.

Use Nonverbal Signals

You can also save time by designating signals or locations for specific behaviors. Students can give nonverbal signals without interrupting another class in

progress, thus allowing them to communicate their need for assistance, for a conference, to notify the teacher that they have completed a particular assignment, or to indicate that they need to take a break.

Plan Surprises

Use some of the time you gain through your ingenuity and that of your students to break the routine. Research indicates that students see repetitious instruction as dull. Little learning occurs, for students tune out the instructions.

Often the unexpected teaches the most. You can enliven your instructional program by interjecting an unexpected activity or making an unusual lesson presentation.

Some teachers have special days, times, or signals that alert students that something special is going to occur. One teacher uses a "red wagon day" to stimulate student interest. Her pupils are never sure what is going to appear in the red wagon as it is pulled into the room.

Imagine the amazement of one student when she saw her grandmother sitting in the wagon. The student's parents had worked with the teacher to arrange this surprise visit.

The students in this classroom enjoy the red wagon day. They always look forward to seeing the wagon appear and to discovering what it contains.

Such activities help to bond a class together, spanning the age and grade differences of the students. As children grow and bond together, other problems begin to fade. A sense of closeness and sharing develops that cannot be replicated by any directed instruction.

Help Students Own Their Own Learning

Students should feel that the classroom is their place for learning and not the teacher's place for teaching. This gives them a sense of ownership for what transpires there. As a result, learning becomes the primary goal. Students realize that they must work efficiently and earnestly to maximize their learning opportunities.

Careful ability grouping and cross-age tutoring can provide more learning time for your students. Used to their greatest advantage, these techniques help each student grow.

Utilizing these methods reinforces learning, provides enrichment, and frees time that you can use for other activities. In preparing students to do cross-age tutoring, have them practice the "pause, prompt, praise" technique. When the student being tutored makes an error, the tutor should pause before prompting, and praise the student if he corrects his own mistake.

The Gift of Time

Each day, give yourself the gift of time. Take a few minutes after school to put your tools and classroom in order. Store lesson plans where they can be easily located, prepare the next day's materials, and tidy up the room. This will make returning to school in the morning much more enjoyable.

For other tips on the use of time in the small or multigrade classroom view the "Small Schools Digest," a series of three videos expressly designed to assist teachers of small schools. They are available from the North Pacific Union Conference Office of Education, P.O. Box 16677, Portland, OR 97216, U.S.A. □

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