Time Management Strategies

How to delegate tasks and increase daily teaching time for an efficient classroom

Teaching takes time. And in school, as elsewhere, there's never enough of it. Like any executive responsible for the efforts of others, you will find that managing time — yours and the students' — is one of your biggest challenges.

Time management is the thread running through almost all aspects of teaching — organizing the day, organizing the classroom, deciding how long and how often to teach various subjects, recording student progress, or keeping time-consuming behavior problems to a minimum. Students only have so much time in your classroom.

Effective use of school time begins with efficient classroom organization and management — and vice versa. Much of the essentials of classroom life involve time management in some way: paring down paperwork; planning; establishing routines that eliminate wasted time and confusion; using learning centers, independent assignments, and seatwork to give you time to work with small groups; and creating classroom environments that allow students and activities to move smoothly from one activity to the next.

Increasing Teaching Time

You may have less time to teach than you think. Lunch, recess, breaks, down-time between lessons and activities, moving from one classroom to another, interruptions, and other periods of non-instructional time account for at least 27 percent of an elementary school day. In many classrooms, that figure climbs beyond 40 percent. Incredible as those statistics may sound, they have been confirmed by separate studies at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, and the former Institute for Research on Teaching at Michigan State University.

Sure, lunch, recess, and restroom breaks are important, but too much teaching time can be lost to inefficiency. Add to that the time that slips away when students stare out the window or are otherwise disengaged during instruction, and you get the point.

Here are some ways beginners and veterans alike can substantially increase teaching time:

- **Find out which aspects of school time you can control.** In some schools, teachers discover they can change the scheduling of class periods, pull-out programs, extracurricular activities planning time, and outside interruptions. Ask your principal to help you control time-wasters such as unexpected visitors and frequent intercom announcements.

- **Schedule solid blocks of teaching time for each day.** You might hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign outside your door during those times. Also, secure your principal's help in scheduling pull-out programs around those blocks and ask parents not to schedule medical of dental appointments then.

- **Plan for smooth transitions between lessons and always try to have materials ready for each lesson or activity.**
• **Assign homework to extend practice time.** Homework should allow students to practice skills they have already learned.

• **Consider how and when you schedule restroom breaks for maximum efficiency.**

• **Improve student attendance.** Attendance has a big effect on teaching and learning time. Impress upon parents the importance of good attendance and teach an actual lesson on how it hurts to miss school. "At the end of each day, I try to tell kids what we will be doing the next day," notes first-grade teacher Susie Davis. "I emphasize the kinds of activities they look forward to, such as hands-on activities. This seems to encourage attendance."

**Delegating Tasks**

Good classroom managers know how to delegate. Aides, volunteers, and students can handle many classroom tasks and save you enormous amounts of time. Learn to use these valuable helpers.

If you are one of the lucky ones assigned a full- or part-time aide, draw on that person's special strengths and abilities. Aides can work with small groups or tutor individuals. They can make instructional games and resources, keep bulletin boards current, monitor seatwork and learning centers, read stories to the class, and assist you in testing. They can also help with clerical and housekeeping duties (those the children can't do for themselves). And their assistance with field trips, special programs, and class parties is invaluable. Help your aide become increasingly responsible and involved in the classroom.

Volunteers are another valuable asset. Volunteers generally can do anything aides do — with your supervision and guidance, of course. Volunteer programs not only give teachers much-deserved help, they can also improve home-school relations. Parents, grandparents, businesspersons, and other volunteers become sympathetic to the problems facing schools, and supportive of better budgets and improved opportunities. Also, they learn to play an active role in educating children. It's a winning proposition for everyone!