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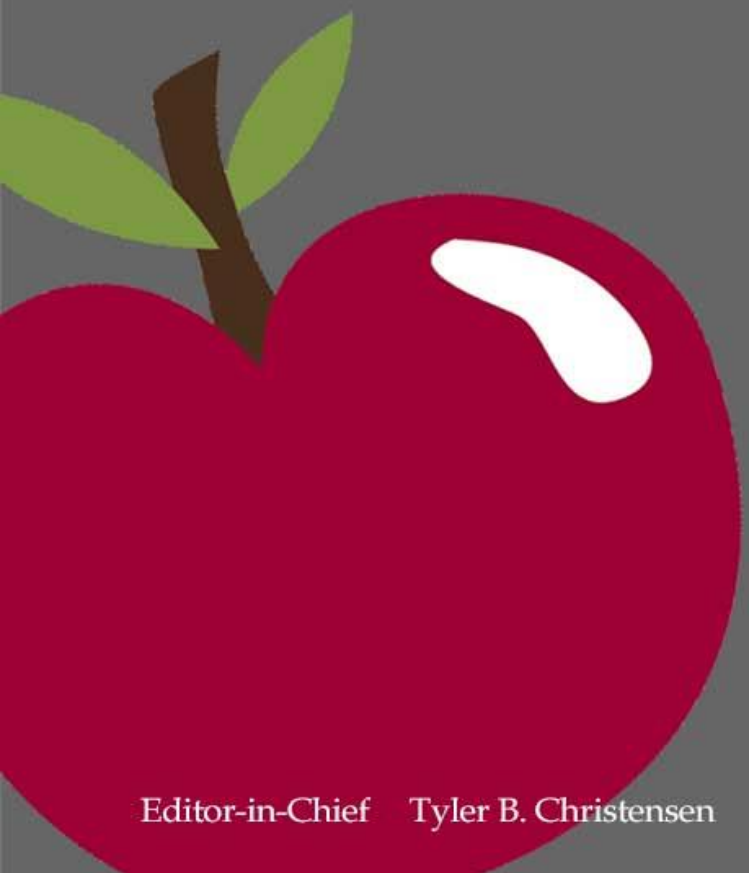

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Preface to Volume 2, Issue 1

Keaton Anderson, Associate Editor

Welcome to another addition of *Journal on Best Teaching Practices*, a journal made by students, for students. This issue of the journal is themed toward topics teachers, new and old, need to think about before the teaching process even begins. Such article topics included in this issue are classroom arrangement, daily classroom agendas, getting the most out of lesson plans, student rewards, building a classroom community, collaborative learning, and parent involvement.

Haley Chinander's article "The Teacher's First Day of School: What to Do Before Walking into Class" explores ideas new teachers need to consider before opening their classroom door for the first time. These include finding a mentor, classroom layout, available technologies, and parent involvement before school even starts.

"Placement of the Teacher's Desk" is Matthew P. Krych's article dedicated only to the teacher's desk placement. A seemingly simple task can play a huge difference in the classroom dynamic. He discusses the desk location and its effects as well as if a desk is necessary at all.

Olivia Wannarka addresses the issue of classroom orientation in her article "Organization in the Classroom." She describes in detail where certain objects should be in the room in order to create a positive learning environment along with the optimal learning conditions for students.

The next article describes in great detail the importance of a classroom agenda. Natalie Lewis explains how using a daily schedule can promote time-management, reading skills, writing skills, and leadership in the classroom in her piece "Daily agendas: the key to organizing the classroom."

Writing a lesson plan can be an extremely time consuming process for teachers. Marissa Fredrickson examines in her article "Time to Get Serious: How to get the most out of your lesson plan!" which components should be included in a lesson plan to be the most productive for students.

"Building a Classroom Community" written by Sara Joslin, describes how teachers can intentionally build their classrooms to provide an emotionally stable, physically engaging, and growing academic community. She also explains how children who work toward a common goal tend make stronger connections with classmates and the content being taught.

Anna Wessel writes about a unique type of learning in her article called "Peer Learning Strategies in the Classroom." She explores some ideals that make up peer learning including peer tutoring, small and large groups for class discussion, and online discussion and feedback.

"Let's Collaborate about Cooperative Learning" by Sarah Renslow explores the world of cooperative learning. Along with examining solutions to problems teachers might face with collaborative learning, the article shows how students working with small groups are able to collaborate with one another and achieve academic as well as social benefits.

Kaile Marlatt addresses the topic of student rewards in her piece "Worth the Reward." She describes how rewarding children for completing tasks and being well behaved can help them improve, but if rewards are improperly utilized, the child and the classroom can suffer.

The last article by McKell Larson titled "Getting Parents Involved in the Classroom" expresses how to get parent involvement before school even begins. He shares the different types of involvement, ways to get parents involved, and the positive outcomes of parent involvement in secondary education.

The Teacher's First Day of School: What to Do Before Walking into Class

Haley Chinander

Abstract: The focus of this paper is to outline important tasks that new teachers should complete before entering the classroom on their first day of the job. The key points include: discussing technology in the classroom, deciding the layout of the classroom desks, how to find a mentor, and how to promote parent or guardian involvement before school even starts.

As future educators anticipate their first day in the classroom, they typically have an idea of what to prepare for. They need to find ways to incorporate technology in lessons (Smart Boards are fun but what else is there?), set up their classroom (desks should always be in rows, right?), think of creative ways to engage parents and more. In order to become a prepared future teacher, it is vital to consider classroom decisions like those listed above and create an educated foundation on how to accomplish them promptly.

The majority of today's future educators have grown up in a world dependent upon technology. We use it to set our alarms, keep a scheduled planner, communicate, research, and that is not even scratching the surface of what we can do. Therefore, it makes sense that teachers would be required to use technology in the classroom with their students who have had a similar, if not more prevalent experience with electronics. Technology should be used to enact common teaching practices like collaborating with other students in a way that exposes children to the global advancements at an early age so that kids can be able to command commonplace devices and grow up with technology instead of catch up (Groff, Haas, Klopfer, Osterweil, 2009, p. 1-2). For example, kids can have a global or national classroom by FaceTiming, Skyping, or Google Video Chatting with fellow students from other states or countries. The idea of video chatting in the classroom has become the modern-day pen pal where students can meet and learn about education, language and culture in other parts of the world. However, through the improvements of using video, students can laugh together and chat with the other students of the classroom in live time. Technology is also used to present lessons so that they are organized, interactive, and visual via powerpoint, such as a Prezi or Google presentation. It also allows for students to study online through resources such as Quizlet, where teachers can create online practice quizzes. Websites like Schoology or Remind101 can also keep students on schedule with homework, test dates and other crucial upcoming deadlines through an app or a text (which students can easily download and open on their phone). As a teacher, it is imperative to learn about these resources and how they can be applied to the classroom. However, it should be noted that some websites require a fee or a user profile, so it is important to set this up before class.

Although technology is essential to incorporate in the classroom, another consideration is how to arrange the desks in the room. First off, it is necessary to recognize that there are many different ways to set up a classroom in order to accommodate a class's unique students. Allowing students to freely discuss the class environment can be beneficial to the students' productivity. Kids typically know how they work best. Students with ADHD may want to sit towards the front of class in individual desks where there are less distractions. Some students may learn better through group work however, and suggest making the desks into pods. It is also important that educators do not feel "locked in" to the set-up that they choose. Teachers can change around the desks for certain lectures, tests, or in order to keep their classroom focused. In fact they may realize that they have to change the set-up in order to

regain their students' attention and participation (Sommer, 1977, p. 174-175).

Teaching is tough, especially for first-year educators. Therefore it is beneficial to find a mentor, someone who has been working at the same school and has a class of a similar grade level or subject matter. Research has shown that educators who have a mentor are more likely to continue teaching than those who do not (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 23-25). Approximately 15.7% of teachers leave their job positions each year, which is quite a startling percentage (Riggs, 2013). In order to help increase the retention rate, it is important that new teachers find co-workers from within the same school to ask questions and relate to. The first year will be a year of transition, and with all change there will likely be mistakes made. New teachers will be less likely to quit due to feeling deficient, frustrated, or exhausted as long as there is a caring mentor who has been in the profession long enough to understand how to troubleshoot common problems. Learning communities are also great for teachers to swap ideas of what works in the classroom and what does not (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 23-25). This communication will help the school create a positive working environment.

It is also necessary to get parents involved in the school, and specifically their child's work in the classroom. Research has found that children whose families are involved in their academic lives excel in the classroom at greater rates than those who do not have involved families. A study from 2004 also showed that most parents are genuinely interested in learning about their child's school and how they can support their child. Some common ways that parents "support their children at school" is by volunteering, helping their child with homework, keeping in touch with school staff, and going to PTA meetings, as well as conferences. However, it was addressed that schools in wealthy areas have better rates of parent involvement than schools in poor areas, which correlated with the fact that schools in wealthy locations try harder to get parents involved (Hill, & Taylor, 2004, p. 161-164). In order to start the year in high hopes of family involvement, new teachers can send a friendly E-mail to parents or guardians before the first week of school with information such as the classroom philosophy, office and homework help hours, ways to contact the teacher, a student supply list, and crucial dates that they should keep in mind.

In conclusion, future educators preparing for their first year of teaching will start the year feeling more confident after their summer preparation. Teachers can finish up their classroom websites, create Quizlet accounts, arrange desks, E-mail parents, and seek out great mentors during the summer in order to relieve the stress from the anticipation of the first day of school. The first year will be a year of transition, and it will be best to prepare ahead of time to review plans and change them if need be. In order to prepare for a great year with these tools however, new teachers must balance the act of applying unique teaching strategies to their classroom and keeping their energy up for the kids to promote lifelong learning.

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Placement of the Teacher's Desk

Matthew P. Krych

Abstract: The question of where to put the teacher's desk in the classroom often goes unanswered or is lost in the commotion of setting up the rest of the classroom. This article examines and compares the effects of placing the teacher's desk in the front of the room, back of the room, and having no desk at all.

There are often debates about how to organize student desks, whether into rows, clusters or to completely rid the classroom of desks and start using tables. Less often talked about is the placement of the *teacher's* desk. There are several leading ideas as to where to put it. Some say front and center, a few argue no desk is the way to go, and others swear by putting it in the back of the room. After analyzing numerous sources, it is clear that the best teaching practice is to place the teacher's desk in the back of the room.

In the traditional classroom, the teacher's desk is front and center. Many teachers argue that having the desk in plain sight of all students is a good thing because students who are out of the teacher's view may not see any reason for participating in reading and writing (Fawcett, 1992). Sometimes it is impossible to see every student clearly so Dr. Tom McIntyre suggests, "If some students must be outside of [the teacher's] line of site, be sure that they are the compliant and focused pupils" (McIntyre, n.d.). McIntyre is proposing that the "focused and compliant pupils" will be on task whether the teacher can see them or not. Additionally, putting the teacher's desk in the front and center of the room can help the teacher keep the class attentive as it conveys a sense of power and authority (Cuban, 1986). But this power and authority can sometimes come off too strong for students. When the teacher's desk is raised and isolated from students desks, it can "signify the teacher's status in relation to the student and the direction of the flow of knowledge", meaning the teacher's desk is higher therefore they know more (Proshansky & Wolfe, 1974). This is definitely something to avoid as teachers never want students to feel like their opinion doesn't matter.

Often students perceive a negative message when the teacher's desk is front and center. This message conveys an authoritarian feeling and students see the teacher's desk as "immobile and inviolate" (Proshansky and Wolfe, 1974). The location of the teacher's desk in a traditional classroom can also communicate that the teacher is isolated from students and effectively set the teacher's desk off limits to students (Proshansky & Wolfe, 1974). A teacher never wants students to feel like approaching the teacher's desk is off limits. In addition to feeling scared and cautious, students might feel embarrassed. When the desk is at the front of the room, some students may feel ashamed to walk up to the teacher's desk because all of the other students see them do so (T. Savage & M. Savage, 2010). They just stay put and fail to understand the material.

Another disadvantage of putting the teacher's desk in the front of the room is the fact that it may encourage teachers to sit down and teach as opposed to standing and moving around while they teach. Sitting down while teaching can lead students to believe that the teacher isn't excited about the material and in turn the students have fewer positive attitudes (T. Savage & M. Savage, 2010). As student attitudes can determine effort levels, teachers don't want their students to feel scared to come ask for help. For many reasons, it is safe to say that putting the teacher's desk front and center is not the best teaching practice.

There is an alternative theory and fast growing trend that getting rid of the teacher's desk all together is the best option. Some teachers claim that it takes up too much space that could be better utilized for student focused furniture. McIntyre even argues that the teacher's desk is a waste of space and the teacher should never be sitting down anyway. He states that if the teacher really can't do without their desk, they should put it in a corner or near a wall so it takes up less space (McIntyre, n.d.). Another justification for ridding classrooms of the teacher's desk could be that it disallows teachers from desk-teaching and it puts more emphasis on students. It can also help to reduce the previously described "flow of knowledge" and "authoritarian" feeling a front and center desk can give off. However, there is still a better teaching practice than completely ditching the desk.

One of the best teaching practices while setting up the classroom is to put the teacher's desk in the

back of the room. There are numerous advantages to keeping the teacher's desk behind students. First, by putting the teacher's desk there, a student centered environment is created (Getzels, n.d.). The teacher's desk is no longer the first thing students see when they walk into the classroom, they see *their* desks first. So now that the teacher has centered the environment on students, they can focus on student behavior better too. As many students base their behavior and rule following off of the teacher's behavior, and more specifically whether they are watching or not, the teacher needs to get creative (Adkins & Damer, 2000). When the teacher's desk is in the front of the room, students can see whether the teacher is looking at them or not. However, when the teacher is seated behind the students, they have to look back to see if they are being monitored. The students frequently looking back can be easily identified as students who may be off-task.

Teachers are also less distracting during work time when their desk isn't front and center (Kelly, n.d.). Often even the slightest ruffling of papers or clicking of the mouse can distract students both of which can be reduced when the teacher is in the rear of the room. Also students feel compelled to watch a teacher sitting in the front of the room rather than staying busy (T. Savage & M. Savage, 2010). The teacher additionally gets more privacy in the back of the room so increasing is not only student productivity, but teacher productivity as well (Kelly, n.d.).

Who sits in the back of the classroom? Often the most disruptive students and the ones who need the most attention and help sit in the back of the classroom, each for different reasons (Kelly, n.d.). When the teacher's desk is near the back both of these groups' problems can be solved. The disruptive students will never know when the teacher is watching and the students who require the most help will feel comfortable walking back to the teacher's desk knowing that the whole class can't see them doing so (Kelly n.d.; T. Savage & M. Savage, 2010). Granted, assigned seating can dictate where students sit, however this arrangement is useful in advanced courses where the teacher usually does not assign seats.

It is very important that the teacher's desk is a safe zone and conveys a degree of openness so that students feel comfortable asking for help ("Building Great Classrooms", n.d.). In addition to students feeling comfortable at the teacher's desk, they need to have access to it. The teacher's desk area must not be congested with traffic, so it is easily reachable by students and the teacher (Evertson & Poole, 2002). Teachers also need to consider the pathways and routes students are using to get to the teacher's desk. Teachers should observe whether on their way up to the desk, students are bumping or disrupting other, possibly more on-task, students (Evertson & Poole, 2002; McIntyre, n.d.). All of these goals can be achieved using the best teaching practice of simply moving the teacher's desk to the back of the room.

When examining the different options concerning the placement of the teacher's desk, it is clear that the best teaching practice is to move it to the back of the room, behind student desks. This best teaching practice has many benefits including increased student and teacher productivity, improved student behavior, and increased teacher privacy. The simple act of placing the teacher's desk in the right spot can go a long way in determining student and teacher success.

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Organization in the Classroom

Olivia Wannarka

Abstract: This article explains the importance of organization in the classroom. It breaks down the assumption that organization is simply "where things go" and discusses that organization in the classroom is actually a mixture of elements that enable success. These elements are class management, creating a positive learning environment, and the physical set-up of the room. Implementing these aspects of organization is a best teaching practice that leads to optimal success for the teacher and the students.

There are many pieces to the puzzle of a successful classroom. One of the most pertinent pieces to this puzzle is organization. When one hears the word "organization", they may assume it is simply tidiness or a certain precision when determining the placement of items. However, organization implies much more than "where things go." Maintaining a physically organized setting is of value when one has their own classroom, but the other components of classroom organization are equally valuable. The main components of organization in the classroom are effective class management, creating a positive learning environment, and the physical set-up of the room.

Effective class management is vital to having a classroom run smoothly. If an instructor cannot stay on task and apply adequate management to their classroom, then chances are they will not be successful in applying their curriculum either. Steps to be taken in applying classroom management are establishing set rules and routines, addressing potential disciplinary actions, developing relationships with and among students, and administering engaging education (Garrett, 2013). It is a common misconception that adequate classroom management cannot be taught; it is quite possible through learning the most effective strategies and practice (Garrett, 2013). Although effective class management is necessary in keeping a classroom organized and running smoothly, it is also important to maintain a personable disposition in doing so. This leads into creating a positive learning environment.

Creating a positive learning environment is a key to success in the classroom that often gets undermined. Educators have to present themselves in a way that shows that they not only care about what they are teaching, but that they care about who they are teaching to as well. It is proven that if a teacher creates a positive learning environment, they also develop an efficient classroom setting alongside an emotional setting that boosts student performance (Bailey, Beasley, & Swafford, 2014). To be specific, one way to create a positive learning environment is to encourage student engagement. Studies show that classroom engagement is highly correlated to students' academic achievement (Finn & Pannozzo, 2004). Overall, having a student-oriented classroom is the best way to manifest a positive learning environment (Bailey, Beasley, & Swafford, 2014). The atmosphere of a positive learning environment is crucial in letting students know they are in an organized classroom setting. The physical set-up of the classroom plays a role in this as well.

The physical set-up of a classroom is important because it is the first thing a student sees when they walk in. Factors such as unorganized bookshelves, unruly and random (student) desk patterns, and excess clutter can all make a difference… and not for the better. If the room is disorderly and unkempt, it reflects badly on the educator. A messy, (physically) unorganized classroom also creates a sense of instability. It is important to not only keep a tidy classroom, but to appropriately utilize space as well. In a study of classrooms done at Hong Kong, it was shown that shelving, cabinets and learning corners were stationed along the sides of the room with chairs and desks at the center to optimize the space they had (Li, 2006). A key factor in determining how to set up a classroom is the age group of the students. When considering how to set up a classroom for elementary students, it is wise to have a more open environment where there is room for low-key activities, such as sitting in a circle on the floor during story time or show and tell. On the other hand, when considering how to set up a classroom for secondary students, room for activities is not as important. Rather, creating a set-up that is conducive to discussion among the class should be heavily considered. It is important for students to be able to not only learn from the teacher but from each other as well. Another aspect to consider when creating the classroom set-up that

often gets overlooked is the teacher's desk/work space. A teacher's desk says a lot about them since it is their personal space. If it is untidy, cluttered, and overly secluded from the rest of the room, it will make it hard for students to feel comfortable approaching the teacher during independent work time with questions, for example. Evidently, there is much to consider when orchestrating organization in the physical set-up of the classroom.

Effective class management, creating a positive learning environment, and physical set-up all have their own important role in implementing organization in the classroom. Although one may think that organization is simply, "where things go," there is much more to it. Organization in the classroom is one of the best teaching practices that can make for a successful educator and class.

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Daily agendas: the key to organizing the classroom

Natalie Lewis

Abstract: The following article explains the benefits of teachers incorporating a daily agenda into their classroom. This practice is helpful in all grade levels. Using a daily schedule and displaying it for students to see can promote time-management, reading skills, writing skills, and leadership in the classroom. Schedules should be detailed, include a list of all the day's lectures and activities, and the times at which all events will occur. Teachers have the opportunity to be creative in making the agenda, because there are many materials that can be used to design it. The following article goes over benefits of the agenda, ways to create one, and its relationship to autistic students.

What is a teacher's secret to running a classroom efficiently? The answer is organization, and effectively scheduling activities and lectures. Imagine a classroom in which the educator lacks time management skills and has not put enough thought into what needs to be accomplished at school. The instructor would be stressed out and overwhelmed. Moreover, they would achieve less at their job, having done no pre-planning, and students would feel confused about what they are supposed to be learning and getting done. Fortunately, there are methods teachers can use on a daily basis to keep organized, plan ahead, and avoid chaos and confusion among students. An example of one such technique is the implementation of a daily agenda or schedule.

To provide some background, the article And on Today's Agenda…defines "agenda" as a detailed list of all tasks that need to be carried out on a specific day. Moreover, the agenda should explain the learning objectives that are met through reaching these benchmarks (Eccleston 2004). Examples of what an agenda should include are lessons and lectures, as well as information about assemblies, recess, lunch, and special classes (Eccleston 2004). Agendas should contain a considerable amount of detail, such as the chronological order of activities throughout the day, and the specific times when they will occur.

After school each day, teachers should spend time planning out the next day, or in other words, creating the agenda. Many educators write down lesson plans in a planner or have other notes and memos they rely on at their job, so creating an agenda is generally simple and not very time-consuming. The article Daily Schedules: A Helpful Learning Tool, asserts that educators of all grade levels should make daily schedules, whether they are teaching pre-school or high school seniors. After all, every student can benefit from learning how to organize information and plan for future events (Downing and Peckham-Harding 2001). For teachers, making agendas can be a creative activity, because they may be created in a variety of ways. As long as the schedule is physically displayed for students to see, teachers can use any materials they desire to produce it. For example, elementary teachers might decide to take a large piece of cardboard, grab a marker, and write the next day's schedule down in large letters. Young students will be able to easily see the agenda from anywhere in the classroom, and may appreciate the colorful text. Agendas may also be tactile, in book format, part of a school notebook, Velcro symbols on a clipboard, or objects in series of boxes (Downing and Peckham-Harding 2001). Agendas not only teach time management, but also promote reading and writing skills in the classroom. Young students might trace a laminated version of the schedule, or perhaps write it down in a notebook on their own, based on a model the teacher has written. Older students will learn how to make their own schedules and manage their time. When making an agenda, the most important thing is that students are able to follow along with the day's events, and can visualize what they will be doing before the lessons or activities take place. A daily agenda can eliminate students asking too many questions, and decreases their dependency on the instructor for directions.

To prepare students for learning, it is beneficial for teachers to begin each class period or school day by going over the agenda. This will outline the

student's day for them, and teachers will have the opportunity to emphasize the most important upcoming lessons or tasks. Pupils may be more motivated to work and focus more intently if they have a clear understanding of what objectives matter the most to their teacher. Additionally, teachers can use the time going over the agenda to point out areas that students need to improve in. Perhaps the class did not behave well the day before at recess, or they were so off-task that they were unable to get as far as they should have on a lesson or art project. Discussing the plan for each day opens doors for teachers to have such conversations, particularly because some tasks from the previous day's schedule might be carried over to the current day (Eccleston 2004). Once the school day nears its end, teachers have another opportunity to bring out the agenda. Before the class goes home, a volunteer could come to the front of the room, review the agenda, and determine what the class was able to accomplish that day. The agenda serves as a "checklist" for the student leading his or her peers (Eccleston 2004). In order for the instructor to assess what students learned on a given day, the volunteer should be asked to summarize the lessons mentioned in the daily schedule. Moreover, teachers can encourage other students to make suggestions about the agenda, and ask questions. Is the class being as efficient as possible in getting the tasks of the day done? Are there any points from the daily lesson that the teacher could clarify? The use of the agenda facilitates many constructive discussions in the classroom, and also promotes the practice of public speaking when students review it one last time.

In addition to the benefits above, the daily agenda serves as a good communication tool both in the classroom and at home. If students are given a physical, written copy of the schedule they can take home, it opens up communication with parents, because they have a tangible record of what they did that day (Downing and Peckham-Harding 2001). When a parent asks their child, "What did you do in school today?" the standard response is "nothing." However, owning a copy of the agenda gives students a good starting point to begin a conversation about their day. It draws to their memory specific things that transpired during each event listed on the agenda. Also, parents can ask specific questions about the items on the schedule, prompting more detailed answers from their child. A final advantage of taking the daily agenda home is that teachers can write notes on it about a student's accomplishments and behavior that day (Downing and Peckham-Harding 2001). If a child worked especially well with others, got an "A" on a test, or needed extra help in a certain subject, teachers can send messages home to inform parents about these matters, allowing them to be in-the-know and play a more active role in their child's learning.

When teachers construct daily plans for their classroom, it is important that they consider not all students have the ability to follow the same schedule. The article Teaching On-Task and On-Schedule Behaviors to High-Functioning Children with Autism Via Picture Activity Schedules explains that children with autism or other learning disabilities may have difficulty staying on task, finishing activities, or transitioning to the next job that needs to be done. Verbal prompts from teachers can be difficult for students with autism to decipher, so Schopler, Mesibov, and Hearsey (1995) have suggested using a structured teaching program that features visual stimuli, which are easier for these students to understand. Autistic students could receive their daily schedule of activities through such mediums as photographs, drawings, symbols, and words (Bryan and Gast 2000). The key is developing a specific system for the student that he or she will personally comprehend and work well with. Teachers need to discover what particular approach works best for an individual student. If a child with autism can visualize what needs to be done, they can learn to follow their own activity schedule, both at home and at school. The goal of incorporating specialized agendas is to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn as much as they are able to, and to encourage that children with special needs integrate as much as possible into the classroom setting. The TEACCH program is a model implemented in schools to better educate students with disabilities, and suggests the use of visual schedules to improve the classroom participation and performance of students with autism (Bryan

and Gast 2000). As a teacher, it is important to know that not all students have the same cognitive abilities, and while schedules and structure benefit everyone, some students need to see the agenda in a different form and with some modifications.

Additionally, The article An Examination of the Effects of a Classroom Activity Schedule on Levels of Self-Injury and Engagement for a Child with Severe Autism explains that certain classroom activities are very high-stress for autistic individuals, which could cause the child to engage in high-risk behaviors such as self-harm (O'Reilly et. al 2005). If a certain activity or transition proves especially difficult for a student, teachers should limit time on the child's schedule spent on the anxiety-producing task. Also, if there is a particular activity the student with autism enjoys, teachers should incorporate it into their specialized agenda more often. Then, the child will be more inclined to engage in the classroom, and can achieve higher levels of social and academic achievement (O'Reilly et. al 2005). When an autistic student is asked to do an undesirable activity, it is best for teachers to put a rewarding task after it on the agenda, in order to make the child more comfortable.

Over all, using a daily agenda can help teachers run the best classroom possible, and schedules are a great tool in student's learning. They promote a variety of skills in the classroom, and can be used in many different ways. Daily schedules help everyone at school stay organized, plan ahead, and manage their time. It is truly a Best Teaching Practice for all educators to use.

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Time to Get Serious: How to get the most out of your lesson plan!

Marissa Fredrickson

Abstract: As a teacher the most time consuming activity you will do is form a lesson plan. Within this article I have listed out the competencies that a teacher should add to a lesson plan, to make it effective. When the term effective is mentioned within the article, it means a competency that helps a student succeed academically.

As teachers the most tedious part of the job is compiling a lesson plan. This is also the most important part of your job. Lesson plans set the pace of the year's activities, and what will be covered with in the curriculum that year. It is also extremely important to do a good job, because one mistake can mean the difference between a student succeeding or failing. As a teacher or a future teacher how can you make an effective lesson plan? When we say effective, we mean a lesson plan that engages students and educates them to the highest degree. Making a lesson plan is critical to the teaching profession, teachers should aim to include areas like technology integration, student motivation, and critical thinking these are the first steps to an effective lesson plan. We all want our students to grow as learners and scholars.

Technology is everywhere it's simply not going anywhere, as teachers we might as well face it head on. Why should you even bother putting technology into your lesson plan anyways? "Computers help us communicate with others, celebrate successes, inform the public, publish student work, work collaboratively with others on classroom projects, and use a variety of sources to formulate ideas. In the Information Age, educators must innovate constantly. Our world values flexibility, innovation, self-direction and collaborative problem solving." (Seamon, 1999, 4) Seamon is explaining the positives of technology in our world; it also can better the education we give to our students.

The use of technology in the classroom is important; it can help cement ideas and competencies. "These competencies include improved understanding of complex concepts, connections between ideas, processes and learning strategies, as well as the development of problem solving, visualization…(Moeller & Reitzes, 2011, 5)" The most common mistake when it comes to technology integration is using it as simply just drill practice, students need to learn how to analysis and research effectively (Moeller & Reitzes, 2011). As teachers making the lesson plans; we need to make time in our agendas for teaching students how to research effectively. We want all students to be discerning and knowledgeable evaluators of information (Seamon, 1999). We need to make the most out of computer programs that help students understand concepts from the mathematics and science classroom. There are so many programs out there; we just need to start putting them into our lesson plans.

We can do this by giving the student's time to work with computers, and other technology used in the classroom setting. Another important aspect would be to allow time in our lesson plan for media literacy instruction. This will act as a base or foundation for further lessons to come. In recent years barriers have been put up against technology integration. One of these barriers is poor lesson planning and preparation, so in order to avoid this one must take charge ahead of time (Ertmer, 1999, 47). We all want to empower students, but first we need to give them the tools to do so.

There are just some subjects that make it hard to keep a student on task and or interested. Keller's ARCS model of motivation outlines the steps a teacher must include in a lesson plan to achieve a student's motivation. First of all the lesson must gain the student's attention, this can include something of the unexpected (Keller, 2000). This can be a simple task, just put a pun or brain teaser on the board, all you want to do is gain a student's attention. After you gain their attention you have to keep it, this means changing up variety in your

teaching techniques (Keller, 2000). Secondly, you want to relate your content to the students. Why should the student care, if it doesn't matter to their lives or future? All you have to do is relate your content to their future jobs, or their academic requirements (Keller, 2000).

Another route is to use examples and case studies to support your content. "For example, secondary school children enjoy reading stories with themes of stigma, popularity, and isolation because these are important issues at that time of their lives.(Keller, 2000, 2)" All of these ideas will help to extend your student's attention. Lastly you want to build confidence in your students; a student that is confident is a motivated student. "Often students have low confidence because they have very little understanding of what is expected of them. By making the objectives clear and providing examples of acceptable achievements, it is easier to build confidence. (Keller, 2000)" Make the topics and main points clear and concise. If a student doesn't understand a topic one way, explain it differently. Students gain confidence when they understand a topic. You do not want your students attributing their success to "luck" (Keller, 2000). This ends with the student being reactive as opposed to proactive with their studies. To help students sustain their confidence, give them recognition on a job well done. Give them a pat on the back; put a sticker on top of an exam with a good grade. This will cause the student to want to improve themselves. Beware of giving extravagate recognition, like a "prize". The student will end up expecting it every time, and the one time they do not receive the "prize"; they may regress. By including this in your lessons you can motivate your students, and let them get the most out of your lessons.

Critical thinking is an important skill to have in the real world. What better of a place to learn this, than the classroom. As a teacher you want to teach your students how to argue effectively. Firstly you want your students to be able to avoid fallacies, and support their stance when making an argument (Kurfiss, 1988). Also encourage them to seek both sides of an issue before reaching a decision. To further foster your student's critical thinking skills, hold class discussions and or debates. This will help a student cement their understanding of the topic, and build research skills all in one. Not only do argumental skills matter in the classroom, it matters in the real world (Kurfiss, 1988). These skills help build a foundation for future learning. If you add these skills into your curriculum, you will be fostering lifelong learning for your students. Including this in your lesson plan will be the icing on your academic year.

In conclusion for teachers the hardest task is making a lesson plan. It is also the most important thing they will do. Lesson plans decide how the year's activities will unfold, and what will be covered that year within class. It is also important to do the best job possible. As a teacher it is possible for you to make an effective lesson plan that engages your students fully. All you have to do is follow the details outlined earlier. Making a lesson plan is necessary to the teaching profession, trying to include details like technology integration, student motivation, and critical thinking in the classroom are the first leaps to an effective lesson plan. Our students are our next leaders, lets give them our upmost best. The students certainly deserve it.

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Building a Classroom Community

Sara Joslin

Abstract: This paper will discuss community in the classroom and how teachers can intentionally build their classroom's to provide an emotionally stable, physically engaging, and growing academic community. The paper will discuss the importance of a secure emotional environment showing how this allows students to feel confident which in turn promotes academic growth. Another topic the paper will go over is how children who are working towards a common goal tend make stronger connections, which again, allows for academic growth. The skills these children are learning in their elementary classrooms are setting them up for success in their future academic endeavors.

Community is a term used to describe many things; it can describe a group of a people in the same area or people with the same background. This paper will discuss community in a more specific way; we will talk about how to build a community in your classroom as well as why it is important for children to experience a sense of community in classrooms. Communities are not just formed overnight and it is the job of teachers to orchestrate the building process necessary to complete these classrooms. There are three facets of a classroom; emotional, physical, and academic, "Without an excellent, intentionally designed, emotional environment (one which builds authentic community in the classroom), … standards are of little value" (Shaw, 2013).

The process of building communities requires a carefully thought out plan, teachers should use "get to know you" activities to encourage students to share. It is important that such activities encourage children to be comfortable with each other; this will lead them to feeling safe and confident in the classroom, which stimulates the emotional environment of the class. In Anne Shaw's blog post "Back to School: A Surefire Strategy for Building Classroom Community" she describes such an activity used on the first day of school called "Take What You Need". The teacher takes a few squares from a roll of toilet paper and passes it on to the next person, each child will take a few squares (as many as they need) and pass the roll on. When the passing is over each person will count the squares of toilet paper they have, each square represents one thing a student will share with the class, the teacher will go first, by doing this they will demonstrate the types of facts and information that should be shared with the class. This activity is repeated throughout the year; students share their triumphs, tragedies, and small tid-bits from their days. Carefully thought out activities like this one encourages students to share outside of academics, allowing them to take risks, grow, and develop as learners.

Another essential part of building community in your classroom is creating a physically engaging class, a class where children are able to work together to create an environment conducive to learning. As a teacher it is important to create a positive atmosphere, one way to do this is starting the day with greeting each student as they walk into the classroom. By doing so you are setting a positive tone for the rest of the day. Placing the desks in small groups or clusters instead of separate rows or a U-shape has been proven to be best for teamwork, although it is important to move desks around every once in a while to encourage interactions amongst all students. A great way to strengthen the room's sense of teamwork is using self-sticking posters or flip chart paper to display students' work whether it is group discussions, ideas, or drawings. Showing off each teams' work creates a strong sense of ownership amongst students and their clusters or groups.

It is important that students feel comfortable with each other as well as the teacher. There are many ways to achieve a level of comfort, one of which is to "demonstrate your loving acceptance of all backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints" doing so will create an environment that shows students they are welcome (Church, 2014). By celebrating individual backgrounds and experiences you are creating a tight knit

community that is sewn together by diversity as well as unity. According to "Building a Community in the Classroom" written by Ellen Church studies show children who feel a sense of identity within a group are the most well-adjusted and successful in school. The different backgrounds, experiences, and abilities each child brings to the class will only enhance your experience as a teacher and theirs as a student. You, the teacher, are an essential tool in creating this sense of identity and community, your classroom is the epicenter of the skills they will learn throughout the year, "people skills of interaction, communication, collaboration, and problem solving" are the building blocks to a students' education (Church, 2014). Intentionally playing games and doing activities that require students to work together as teams, which highlight their individual skills and experiences, will only strengthen the foundation on which your community is built.

After you have laid out your foundation for your classroom community, it is important to build on it. Children who are "working towards a common goal, engaged in a fascinating topic, or trying to figure out a solution… feel more connected to school and each other" (Wilson, 2013). Knowledge should not just be about learning, it should include experiences; by presenting children with opportunities to work together you are helping them make connections that strengthen your community. In Margaret Wilson's article "Building Community Through Academics" she shares with us a unit she studies with her second grade students; she explains to children what the Caldecott book award is and then follows up with a list of criteria that each winning book followed. After reading a few Caldecott award winning books students would then turn their attention to that years' potential winners. As a group they share their thoughts and opinions on which book will win that year; after the results are posted students bond in their reactions whether it is excitement or frustration. By including activities like this into your units, students are not only thinking academically but they are "purposefully and jointly engaged in interesting academic endeavors" (Wilson, 2013).

Connections made through learning are just as important as those initial connections made during the first day of school. By encouraging students to share with one another on a personal level you are building their confidence to share on an academic level. By sharing ideas, opinions, and answers children are being engaged learners. Engaged learning allows students to discover concepts and apply their individual skills and experiences as they come up with their own ideas and reactions, promoting essential life skills such as problem solving. By building a classroom community in which students feel comfortable, safe, and confident teachers are setting their students up for academic success as well as giving them essential life skills.

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Peer Learning Strategies in the Classroom

Anna Wessel

Abstract: Peer Learning Strategies encompass a few different types of learning techniques both in and out of the classroom, including peer tutoring, small and large groups for class discussion, and online discussion and feedback. These methods have been proven effective in helping with student's academic and social skills, as long as the peer learning techniques are monitored and carefully structured.

American society values intelligence and personal growth and development. Current classroom learning structures, however, can impede this development in children. Students aspire towards perfect grades and will formulate answers to teachers' questions to provide what they believe the teacher is looking for, or do not answer the teacher at all for fear of saying something incorrect. This hinders students from expressing what they are truly learning and thinking. In the classroom, many children are afraid to speak their minds for fear that the teacher or peers will judge them, or that they will not sound sufficiently quick-witted.

Peer learning has been proven to be a successful venture when it comes to improving student's academics and social cognitive skills. With peer learning, children get the opportunity to aid in their peers' learning through tutoring and feedback. They also have the opportunity to speak more freely and with less pressure when in group settings and student led discussions. These strategies encourage greater communication among students and lead to increased academic success (Mengping 2014).

Peer learning encompasses several different types of learning techniques both in and out of the classroom. In both areas, partners or groups of students can be used to facilitate student-based learning. In each, there are aspects of teacher guidance at varying levels. The major peer learning strategies used in the last decade are; peer or student tutoring, group based discussions or group projects, and student-led classes or online discussions. All of these strategies have advantages and disadvantages depending on their group dynamics and the way they are executed.

With respect to student dynamics, peer learning strategies foster student relationships and help students develop a greater multicultural understanding and acceptance. When students are put into groups where they can talk freely, they can bring in aspects of their background and beliefs, potentially leading to more understanding among the members within a group. Students also learn to interact with a group of people that they may not generally work with and can engage in conversation even if it is outside of their comfort zone.

When students engage in peer tutoring, they are able to learn practical skills in how to teach and give critical feedback. The students learn how to engage in learning that is not strictly teacher-led, and can engage more in the dialogue and topic questions to help with clarification. Peer tutoring can help to promote children's natural abilities in context with their learning. If kids are good at a particular subject, and enthusiastic about it, they should be able to teach others about that subject. Rather than an extreme focus on individual success, the emphasis becomes on how the child interacts with and relates to others. These social abilities are arguably just as important as academic abilities in the critical learning stages of life.

The teachers in the case of peer tutoring provide guidance, being there to answer questions and help prompt discussion. The student tutors can be given instructions and guidance before hand on how to effectively teach quality material to others, and then take over whenever they are ready to tackle the task of tutoring. Programs in schools today where students can sign up to help other students are usually run by clubs such as the National Honors Society to give the students an opportunity to earn volunteer hours. Results from case studies show that through peer tutoring there are academic improvements in scores, and lasting positive effects from the experience for both the tutor and tutee (Lingo 2014).

In the classroom, children rely heavily on the ideas from their teachers, thinking that their ideas must be validated by the teacher to be true. In small or large group discussions, the students themselves have to hash out the different points that are brought to the table. They have no authority figure to go to for quick answers. This leads to more open discussion and invites more people to join in with their opinions. It pushes students to connect ideas and do more research, making judgments not based on what the teacher says, but on the consensus of the group based on their knowledge of the content and material. Nancy Hulan describes this idea of group discussion perfectly when she says, "Because answers do not need to be polished in such a setting, what Leal calls 'exploratory talk', occurs" (Knoeller, 1994). In this group setting, leadership skills are acquired when students step up to lead discussion or help to construct the feedback on the topic. Those who know the material will generally take on this role, and the others not in this position, are motivated to learn more of the material so they have the chance the be the leader at some point. In smaller groups, students who usually do not talk in class have the opportunity to voice their opinions and are even pushed into the direction of sharing their ideas with the group.

Through engaging in group discussion, students discover how to form good counter-arguments, and learn how to question assertions made by peers. In this case, students learn how to think in much more complex terms; not just how to respond to a teacher's question but how to respond to the various group members' assertions and how to make a claim of one's own. Students get to help clarify the thinking of their peers and help in their peers' attempts to answer group questions. This leads to a better understanding of how to work for something other than your own personal success. To work as a group instead of an individual is an invaluable opportunity to build many life enhancing skills.

In group settings, questions and answers can be looked at from multiple viewpoints and new ideas can be brought in. Instead of the teacher teaching answers to issues, the students get to explore the various ways to come up with an answer. Conflicts can be worked through multiple approaches instead of going to the teacher for the final say and the ending idea. Almasi and Gambrell did a study that concluded that student conversations were much more complex when the discussion was student led in comparison to the teacher led discussions where the student responses were "artifacts for assessment" (Hulan, 2010).

Online discussion, feedback, and tutoring are becoming more prominent as the age of technology starts. These are all mechanisms for having students assess the work of other students and give insightful and critical thoughts and guidance on how to improve their work. Teacher guidance is essential, so that these forums do not become a free-for-all. Online tutoring works when the student tutors have proven their proficiency in a given area and have received some instruction in how to tutor others. Online discussion and feedback have to be structured in a way that encourages positive critical discussion and have proponents of learning and guidance within it. Generally, online programs have proven to have beneficial results and they require minimal amount of effort and time on the instructor's part (Evans 2013).

As with every learning strategy, there are some problems that can arise from peer based learning if the program is not set up correctly. In the case of student tutoring, the tutors need to have some accelerated level of knowledge in the content area so they are able to effectively tutor the other student. If qualifications are not met for being able to teach the material, there can be conflicts and frustrations that arise from the efforts. In group discussions and projects, if there are not instructions to follow and directions and guidelines for how to facilitate the discussion and what needs to be discussed, students can tend to get off task. Effective peer learning strategies also depend on the children's level of learning. Young students have a hard time discussing and interpreting issues and topics, so for peer learning to be most effective, it should be implemented with older children; starting in late elementary and early middle school years.

Overall, Students feel more comfortable saying things to each other when the teacher is not around.

They add more to the conversation because they are not as intimidated as they are when they have to answer a teacher's question or address the large group. Group work and discussion is more individualized and gives each group member the ability to speak and argue for a point. New ideas can be brought into play and the students have to work through the problems themselves, stimulating intellectual thought and prompting students to speak up and voice their ideas on the subject, since they are the ones making the assertions and not the teacher.

Given the positive research results on peer learning, it would make sense to harness those benefits by designing the classroom experience in a way that encourages peer learning both in and out of the classroom. Peer learning strategies provide ways for the teacher to take a step back and let the students do the teaching and talking for a little while. These strategies can be extremely advantageous to the learning environment and allow a creative and interactive way to get the students involved. To be effective, peer learning does need to be very carefully structured and limited; if the whole class was based on peer learning, the students would not learn the course content from the teacher (the expert on the content material) like they should be. Peer learning strategies should be at least considered when teachers are designing their classes so they can try out the practices and see how the effects (which so far have been almost exclusively positive if executed correctly and efficiently) affect their classroom.

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Let's Collaborate about Cooperative Learning

Sarah Renslow

Abstract: Cooperative learning is a useful strategy to employ in the classroom. By working with small groups students are able to collaborate with one another and achieve academic and social benefits. This paper will discuss details and benefits on cooperative learning, struggles teachers face with cooperative learning and how to solve them, what makes it successful, and finally it will provide the reader with some ideas on cooperative learning methods and how to include them in their curriculum.

Cooperative learning doesn't always come easy to students. When put into groups students may be quiet and only work together when an issue about their assignment arises. Roger and Johnson (1992) call this individualistic learning with talking, a negative result of a teacher's attempt at cooperative learning. There is a difference between having students work in groups and having students work cooperatively, so, teachers need students to learn together instead of simply sitting together. Emmer and Gerwels (2002) explain that cooperative learning is an "alternative to competitive or individualistic classroom activities" (p.76). With cooperative learning, the classroom becomes a multi-group structure. The teacher becomes less of an information transmitter and more of a discussion transmitter. Cooperative learning can be seen in many different forms, but the most common one is seen when small groups of students are put together and directed to complete a task. If done correctly, cooperative learning is a benefit to overall student achievement.

It can be hard for teachers to create a cooperative learning environment that'll benefit students because of the complexity of the components involved in cooperative learning. Many students have developed into passive listeners due to previous teachers that talk at the class instead of with the class. Gillies and Boyle (2010) discuss teacher's reflections on the issues of cooperative learning. With students rarely engaging in discussions and activities, Gillies and Boyle say that many issues arise when teachers try new cooperative learning methods. These issues may include maintaining classroom control, demanding curriculums, and personal commitment. Ten teachers were interviewed on their opinions of cooperative learning and many agreed that implementation was difficult because of time restraints, over socialization, and extensive input needed from the teacher. The interviewed teachers also noted that they had troubles with group composition and allocating tasks to students because of different home lives, economic status, race, gender, and achievement levels.

Although many teachers struggle with the challenge of incorporating cooperative learning into their classroom, the ten teachers that were interviewed also agreed that cooperative learning is a positive and effective way to teach students. One teacher stated that their students "were positively engaged and not giving up" (Gillies and Boyle, p.937) while another said "You can see them learning off each other" (Gillies and Boyle, p.935). If a teacher looks deeply into the aspects that make cooperative learning successful such as goal setting and teacher involvement they can create an ideal learning and social environment that will benefit their student's future.

In order to have successful cooperative learning, groups of students need common end goals. Groups participating in cooperative learning need to have "a sense of individual accountability" (Roger and Johnson, p.2). This means that cooperative learning can be successful if the small groups of students feel accountable for each other; they must be willing to work with one another towards a common goal. Roger and Johnson believe that if the small group understands that if one member 'sinks' the rest of the group will sink with him/her. Therefore, if the cooperative group has a common goal to do well on the assignment then all the students should swim their way to that goal together. Together the students must understand each other's motives and agree to

cooperate with one another to receive a successful result.

While working towards a common goal is one way for successful small group learning, Emmer and Gerwels (2002) state additional ideas that can make the cooperative learning environment a successful one. Previous research concluded that group tasks, teacher accountability, interdependence, and student/teacher evaluation are aspects of successful cooperative learning (Emmer & Gerwels). Their study took 18 elementary school teachers and found that feedback, manipulative materials, monitoring, and modification are additional aspects of a successful cooperative learning activity. Cooperative learning involves the students interacting with each other academically. Therefor, in order for the activity to be a positive experience, the children will need some direction in task management which develops into interdependence. If this is not present then the cooperative learning activity has the possibility to get out of hand quickly. Teachers also play a huge role in the student's success. Positive praise and teacher evaluation is another aspect of cooperative learning revealed as helpful. When the teachers take action and circle the room during activities students are more likely to cooperate with one another because they feel like their individual and group actions matter.

Through the study of 18 teachers, Emmer and Gerwels (2002) were not only able to support previous research findings but they were also able to conclude new ideas that made cooperative learning activities successful. One such finding was that "active monitoring and giving feedback allows the teacher to better diagnose problems, redirect group activities, and keep groups involved" (Emmer and Gerwels, p.89). This suggests that teachers cannot lounge around during group time if they want cooperative learning to be a success. Walking around and engaging with their students at all times is necessary in cooperative learning. Secondly, manipulative materials allow the students to get involved at a deeper level. By using their hands students are able to cut, glue, and color while learning cooperatively. This can engage more senses which will make the student learn more efficiently. Finally, the last idea discovered to create a successful cooperative learning environment is modification. Emmer and Gerwels say that "experienced teachers can and do modify cooperative learning to fit their beliefs, goals, and classroom conditions" (p.89). By slightly altering activities each year the different classroom dynamics will be accounted for, creating affective cooperative learning.

Cooperative learning is one of the most used techniques in classrooms. Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) say cooperative learning "is clearly based on theory, validated by research, and operationalized into clear procedures" (p.2). The effectiveness of cooperative learning over competitive and individualistic learning has been validated by over 900 research studies (Johnson et. al.). Moreover, cooperative learning should continue to be used because it lets students build off of one another's ideas, develop social skills, gain a positive attitude towards education, and achieve academic success. Roger and Johnson (1992) explain that when students work cooperatively they interact with each other in a positive manner which leads them to have a better perspective of their classmates and become willing to open up on challenging questions/ problems. When these aspects are combined it helps in the achievement of the student as well. Additionally, successful cooperative learning is important to use in class because "learning is a social activity […] when students discuss and defend their ideas or solutions with teammates; they learn to think problems through, to support their own opinions, and to critically consider the opinions of others before coming to [their own] conclusion" (*successforall.org*). People learn in communities, in our case, students learn in the community of a classroom. If teachers promote small group learning then we are promoting learning as a social activity which also makes it more pleasurable, effective, and fun for students.

There is an unthinkable amount of methods to put cooperative learning to use in future classrooms. Johnson et. al (2000) explains that cooperative learning is a generic term that refers to many ways one can conduct and organize their class. The first thing a teacher should do to create a good cooperative learning environment is to set up

his/her classroom to support the strategy. Considering the basis of most cooperative learning activities involves group work teachers will want to set up their class desks in pods. Each pod should have a diverse mix of students so they can discuss and explain countering ideas and get the most out of each activity. Roger and Johnson explain that the amount of students in each group depends on if you want more resources to be available (large), the cooperation level of the group (small if they are less skillful), and the time needed for the activity (small if it's a short period). With pod style desks, however, the teacher will have to be very active within the class in order for the set-up to be beneficial. It's also helpful to re-arrange students' seating assignments every month or so. This way the students get to participate with an ample percentage of their classmates.

After you have set up your classroom to support cooperative learning there are some basic principles on how you should structure the activities you use. Roger and Johnson (1992) lay out a model for cooperative learning that is easy to follow. First teachers must select a lesson. Roger and Johnson explain that most lessons can be adapted to use cooperation but as a teacher you will want to start off your year with one lesson and then build on more throughout the course of the year. The teacher must also provide the needed materials for the task at hand, as mentioned before, manipulative materials work well. Then the teacher must "explain the task and cooperative goal structure to the students" (Roger and Johnson, p.4). When teachers explain these items in detail to the students, the students will have a better group goal and understanding of what they need to do in order to get to that goal. Finally, the last step in the model to structure cooperative learning is monitoring. As described previously, monitoring the class during an activity is a vital component of successful cooperative learning. When monitoring the class the teacher can keep everyone on track and figure out what skills are lacking and what skills are present. This information will also aid the teacher in developing their cooperative activities for the future.

Johnson et. al. (2000) completed a meta-analysis on a variety of cooperative learning methods and discovered that certain ones are more effective than the rest when incorporating them into the curriculum. The top five methods that they outlined are: 1) learning together, 2) constructive controversy, 3) student-teams achievement division, 4) teams-games-tournaments, and 5) group investigation. Slavin (1980) is a respected author of many cooperative learning articles and describes a couple of the top five methods. Teams-games-tournaments are when teachers divide their class into teams and give them time to study items from a worksheet. Later the teams will compete in a tournament to test their knowledge of the subject matter. Student-teams achievement division is accomplished similarly to teams-games-tournaments, however, instead of tournaments the teacher uses small quizzes to assess the student's knowledge. When using these methods in the curriculum, teachers are more likely to see a successful achievement growth.

Cooperative learning is a subject of open opportunity for many activities. Energetic teambuilding activities (such as name-games) will develop student relationships and are helpful tools to use on the first day of class. When doing team builders students will be forced to break the ice and therefore become more comfortable speaking up in class. After the first day, think-pair-share is one activity in which small groups first think individually about a topic, then share with their group members, and lastly share with the entire class during discussion. Finally, another successful cooperative learning method is literary circles. Reading is a vital part of any classroom so getting students to cooperate in activities/projects based on text will enable them to learn life lessons and achieve academic prosperity.

Today teachers have countless ideas available to them online. By simply typing in "cooperative learning" to Pinterest one can scroll through thousands of visual representations of successful cooperative learning. Therefore, there is no reason teachers should not at lease try cooperative learning strategies in class. This cooperative learning strategy is beneficial to student achievement academically and socially. As teachers it is our job to prepare the next generation for what life has in store for them. It'll take hard work and

dedication from our end but the proven benefits from cooperative learning are well worth it. By incorporating cooperative learning into our teaching, with each passing class period we can help our beloved students make steps toward a successful future.

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Worth the Reward

Kaile Marlatt

Abstract: Rewarding children for completing tasks, or for being well behaved, can help them improve, but if rewards are improperly utilized the child and the classroom will suffer. Rewards should only be handed out for special occasions, but shouldn't be heavily utilized, because it could cause children to rely on them. Classroom studies have revealed: which types of rewards have the greatest effect on different age groups; different ways to reward to ensure the classroom is the best it can be; how children are able to learn and complete their assigned tasks; how to reward children to achieve their most efficient work.

An effective way to persuade a child to complete a task, such as potty training, behaving in school, or doing well on a test, is to reward them. Praising children in the form of rewards is a verbal technique utilized by teachers, parents and daycares to communicate to children that they are behaving properly. Giving out rewards in a tangible form is something that is regularly used, but has shown to decline a child's willingness to complete tasks. However, there have been some studies, conducted on children, which the results have shown a positive reaction to tangible rewards. This type of reward has helped improve the child's eagerness and focus in the classroom setting (Eisenberger 1996). The inconsistency of how rewards affect a child's behavior could have been caused by the accomplishments the child was rewarded for, as well as the form of reward given to the child. Another common factor to this inconsistency is that all children are different and behave differently depending on the circumstance. Students have also been praised with different rewards at home for accomplishing a similar task to those at school. Studies have produced different reward strategies to motivate children to ensure that the child is benefiting from both the reward and the situation.

Many individuals assume there is only one type of reward and each of them produces the same reaction; in reality, there are many different types of rewards that are used to praise or encourage a child. In order to determine if a classroom is benefiting from rewards or if they are causing potential problems, one must first understand the different ways to reward a child. Noncontingent, engagement-contingent, completion-contingent, task-noncontingent and performance-contingent are all different ways to reward a child (Deci 2001). Noncontingent rewards are presented to a child when they are accomplishing tasks from their daily routine without expecting anything and receiving the reward as a surprise. This situation can occur when a child is listening very well during group time and they might be rewarded by being given the opportunity to pick their free time activity. Engagment-contingent is a type of reward given to help a child work towards a goal. Giving out candy before walking in the hall to keep students quiet is an example of this type of reward. Completion-contingent rewards are given when the goal is completed. By putting a sticker on a finished worksheet is one example. Task-noncontingent rewards occur when a child is doing a task and receives a reward that they knew they would receive after they have completed their task. An example of a task-contingent reward is bribing a child to finish a worksheet, regardless of how well they do on it. Unlike noncontigent, task-noncontigent rewards inform the child that they will be receiving a reward before they start the assignment. Performance contingent rewards occur when the child's work is impressively completed or meets a certain standard and then is rewarded. Coloring contests are one way that a performance rewards are seen on a regular basis where maybe not all children get a reward unless they do their best work. Besides the many ways to reward, there are also different rewards to give a child.

The two major ways to reward a child are by using a tangible item or a verbal reward. With younger children a tangible item is used because it can be perceived as being more effective, but in reality a tangible reward can cause a phenomenon

known as reward dependence. Reward dependence can develop in children who consistently receive a reward either tangible or verbal before or after accomplishing a task. A tangible reward can be seen as a piece of candy or a point for a party or larger reward. This type of reward is seen to lead to a decrease in a child's productivity (Eisenberger 1996). Another type of reward is a verbal reward. This type of reward is seen to be the most beneficial with young adults and adults. Saying words of encouragement is an example of a verbal reward, which can increase a person's self-esteem and help them ensure they are completing what is expected of them. Verbal rewards can also cause a person to strive for excellence, because they are being recognized by an authority figure. This type of reward can be used on children, but not many are affected as strongly as young adult and adult by a verbal reward. To a child, verbal rewards are seen as unmemorable or unimportant. Children also do not understand that they are receiving a reward and that it is just in the form of a compliment or praise. Verbal rewards can be more beneficial than tangible rewards if they are communicated enthusiastically and sincerely. The studies that have been researched by Robert E. Salvin have been conducted using a tangible reward.

Depending on how rewards are handed out determines the child's ability to properly and effectively complete tasks by themselves. Some studies by Mr. Deci have suggested that rewards can "undermine students' intrinsic motivation and performance" (Salvin 1997). Students assume that they do not need to know the information if a reward is not given to push them to learn if they have been previously given rewards regularly. When Deci conducted tests on children, his results revealed that the reward could possibly improve the child's behavior, depending on the form of the reward. Deci tested children using the unexpected and non-contingent rewards they showed no evidence of a change in their motivation or free choice behavior. Free choice behavior is choosing to voluntarily complete tasks. Deci's results on unexpected and non-contingent rewards proved that they affect the child in a negative way. Engagement-contingent and completion-contingent also had very similar results (Deci 2001). Task-noncontingent rewards also tended to decrease the performance of children in the classroom setting. Performance contingent rewards however seemed to increase the motivation of his test subjects by 80% compared to the other types of rewards (Deci 2001). Performance rewards are shown to be the most effective way to reward a child, if the reward is given properly and in the right context.

Rewards can only be properly presented to a child if the situation is right. In the classroom many teachers reward students for doing well on tests with stickers or treats to show the child they exceled. Clingman and Fowler conducted a study to find out if giving a reward during testing can improve overall scores. The study was focused primarily on first and second graders. They were asked if they preferred candy as a reward and if their parents permitted them to have sugar. The children who were allowed to have candy were then split into three IQ groups. Within those groups they were given either no reward, contingent reward (candy for every right answer), or noncontingent reward (candy provided during the test) (Clingman 1976). The results were inconclusive, because the students' scores did not change enough between the two tests. Only the low IQ or intelligence quality group showed a small increase in performance when given a contingent reward. Clingman and Fowler concluded that children in the two other IQ groups were already thinking at higher motivational level (Clingman 1976). Some children had a noticeable decline in performance when they were rewarded because of how it was given during the testing process.

The results of many other studies reveal that different types of rewards are harmful to children. These studies were examined by Mr. Salvin and he decided that some of the data was incorrectly obtained by leaving out a control groups in different experiments. Unlike the other groups, the control group should have received no reward for completing the same task. The results of these studies were also slanted to make it seem that all types of rewarding were unbeneficial to children. Salvin, however, pointed out some harmful effects

caused by over rewarding children. One of these effects was the children relying on the reward and having withdrawal like symptoms from not receiving a reward (Elisenberg). This would cause the child to feel that they shouldn't complete any of their assignments, because it would not result in a reward and therefor was not beneficial to them. Rewards can also alter a child's self-determination and make them feel the need to only do tasks that will help them receive a reward. A child's quality of work has also been known to decrease if they receive a reward before they have completed an action or situation, because they no longer are driven to accomplish what was expected of them.

Throughout this article I have explained that rewards can be effective or be ineffective depending on which type of reward is given and in which form they appear in. There are also many different ways to give a reward and depending on the reason for giving the reward and how the child will react to the reward will help determine the most beneficial way to reward the children. Rewards can be helpful in classrooms when children are not interested in the material, because it helps them focus through an incentive. If a child needs to be pushed to do higher quality work, a reward can possibly but not always accomplish this goal. Rewards are used to manage behavior and keep a well-run classroom. They can also be neglected and be used for power over children. Rewards can be good, bad or indifferent depending on which technique is utilized and how often they are used. The best type of reward is a performance contingent rewards because this type of reward is utilized when a child completes average or above average work. There are many effective ways to reward children, but the most beneficial depends on the situation, the classroom environment and the child receiving the reward. Rewards if used correctly are acceptable once in a while but to have an everyday system of rewards will cause your classroom to experience challenges and not allow the children to determine their own since of purpose and complete goal on their own.

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Getting Parents Involved in the Classroom

McKell Larson

Abstract: "Most educators know that parent involvement can be a big factor in increasing student achievement…unfortunately, teachers sometimes have a hard time figuring out how to connect with parents in meaningful ways" (Epstein, 1988, 107). Parent involvement is a very important aspect of education, but many teachers struggle with how to engage parents in their student's education. Through extensive research, I have learned that many new teachers struggle with this, and through this paper, I want to share the different types of involvement, ways to get parents involved, the positive outcomes of parent involvement, and parent involvement in secondary education.

Different articles give many different types of involvement, but the list that I found most relevant was in Gordon Greenwood and Catherine Hickman's 1991 article "Research and Practice for Parent Involvement: Implications for Teacher Education." Their list of types of parent involvement includes "parents as audience, parents as volunteer, parents as paraprofessionals, parents as teacher of own child, parents as learners, and parents as decision makers" (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991, 284).

Out of this list it is important for teachers to focus on the ideas of parents as teachers of own child. It is important for teachers to remember that school is not the only place where students learn. In a survey given to 3,700 elementary teachers in 600 Maryland schools, results showed that the teachers found four parent involvement activities were extremely important. These activities included spending time reading with their children, reading and signing paperwork and agendas, preparing materials, and encouraging summer learning at home (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991, 285). This list shows four different, and easy ways to get parents actively involved in their child's education from their own home, without having to spend extra time volunteering in the classroom, or being on committees.

Teachers must keep in mind that not all parents are able to be involved in the same way, and that there are many different ways to utilize parents. "Because of parents' work schedules, outside commitments, and individual preferences, it helps to give parents choices in how they can be involved" (Epstein, 1988, 107). Some parents may want to help in the classroom, and could share a talent, organize special events, or even assist with tutoring, while other parents would be more appreciative of ideas on how to help their children with schoolwork outside of school, or other ways to support learning outside of school (Epstein, 1988, 107). As teachers, it is our job to open and willing to work with each parent to get them involved, even if it is at the most basic level, because any involvement helps.

Other school districts, such as the low income ones in Connecticut that participated in the study that was part of the School Development Program believe that the best way to get parents involved is through a three level parent program. In James Comer and Norris Haynes 1991 article, "Parent Involvement In Schools: An Ecological Approach," they outline the three levels, level one being a small group of parents elected by peers to serve on a council representative of all parents, followed by level two, parent participation in day-to-day classroom and school and activities, and finally level three, a strong turnout of parents for general activities. Through this program, teachers would be most involved in level two, which would be having parents in their classrooms to help with day-to-day routine items. In order to avoid conflict with this type of set up it is crucial that the teacher has "clearly defined roles and activities for parents to perform to avoid confusion and conflict" (Comers & Hayes, 1991, 275). As a teacher, I think it is very important to have control in your classroom and feel like you are in charge and having another adult in the room could challenge this, but if we want parents to be involved we have to welcome them into the classroom. To avoid problems it would be beneficial to set up a meeting with the parents who

want to help before hand, so you could get to know them better and learn what they want to do, or what they have experience doing, and from this information it would be easier to assign them specific jobs that they would be comfortable doing, and would be helpful to the whole classroom. This is also a time when you could discuss specific roles in the classroom, and make sure you are on the same page.

In Joyce Epstein's "Parent Involvement" she discusses Before-School Conferences as a way to get parents involved in their student's education right away. These Before-School Conferences are just a short meeting with the parent, their child, and the teacher before the school year starts that provides each of them the opportunity to get to know each other, discuss the upcoming school year, expectations, and anything else that either side feels is necessary. As a future teacher, this is something that I hope to implement into my classroom right away because it opens up communication right away, and also provides the opportunity to get parents involved right away, and to discuss how we can keep them involved (Epstein, 1988, 112). Many schools have something like this, usually called an Open House, but I think these Before-School Conferences would be more beneficial because they are more personal and allow for the teacher to focus on just one family at time, while at an open house there could be three or four families there at a time.

Parent involvement in the classroom is a hot topic because of its many benefits on students. After large amounts of research have been done on the topic of parent involvement, the results are in, and their positive impact cannot be denied. This research shows higher academic achievement, a greater sense of well-being from the students, increased student attendance, more positive student attitudes and behavior, a greater student readiness and willingness to do homework, better student grades, higher educational aspirations among both students and parents, and greater parent satisfaction with teachers (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991, 280-281). Although all of the benefits in this list are reason enough to get parents involved, the one that really sticks out to me greater parent satisfaction. Obviously as a teacher it is impossible to please all parents, and that really isn't your job, but if you show an openness and willingness to work with the parents and they have a better attitude about you at home, which will carry into the attitude that their child brings to school. If by taking simple steps to get parents involved, even just a little bit, results in this many benefits for the students, every teacher needs to learn how to and focus on getting parents involved right away.

Parent involvement in secondary education can be difficult, because parents feel that their "students have passed [their] ability to help them in many subject areas; and high school is a time for students to learn independence" (Schrick, 1992, 36). Although parents' argument for students learning independence in high school is one of great validity, it has also been proven that students who receive continued support and whose parents remain involved in school are better students (Schrick, 1992). Ways for parents to give continued support and stay involved can be as easy as going to support the students in their extra curricular activities, or asking about their homework and grades on a day-to-day basis. As a student who had parents that remained actively involved in my education, it helped me a lot and motivated me to be a better student because I knew my parents were invested in my education and I wanted to make sure I was doing everything I could to make them proud. As a future high school teacher, I can clearly see the struggle here, but I believe that even in high school, parents need to remain involved, although not as involved as they once were. To satisfy the need for parents to be involved without demanding too much, I believe that a weekly or even bi-weekly news email to parents would be extremely beneficial. Through this email, parents could learn about what's been going on and what's coming up in my classroom, straight from the source, me, and this information would allow them to better interact with their students as far as what homework they may have. This communication could also prove to parents my willingness to openly communicate about any problems either of us have.

Another way to engage parents in secondary education is by brining them into the classroom.

"Parents…are a ready-made resource for bringing a reality-based curriculum into secondary education," (Schrick, 1992, 6). I believe, especially in secondary education, that there is a need for students to see a connection between what is being taught and the real world, and the easiest way to do this is by bringing parents into the classroom and letting them talk about how they use what is being taught now in their day-to-day responsibilities. This would provide students with a real world connection, that they need to stay focused, and it could also show students job fields that they never knew existed. This idea of having parents in the classroom ties back into parents as paraprofessionals as part of the types of parent involvement I presented earlier, and it is a great way to get parents involved without them feeling as if they are being too involved in their older student's education and taking away the independence they are trying to teach them before sending them out into the real world.

From the benefits listed it is clear that the best results are achieved only when these two institutions, the school and the family, work together. When implemented correctly, parent involvement has huge benefits for students, parents, and teachers. I have shared with you the different types of involvement, different ways to get parents involved, the positive outcomes of parent involvement, parent involvement in secondary education, and examples on different ways to implement and start parent involvement. I encourage as many teachers as possible to start getting the parents in their school district involved right away, and in as many ways as possible!

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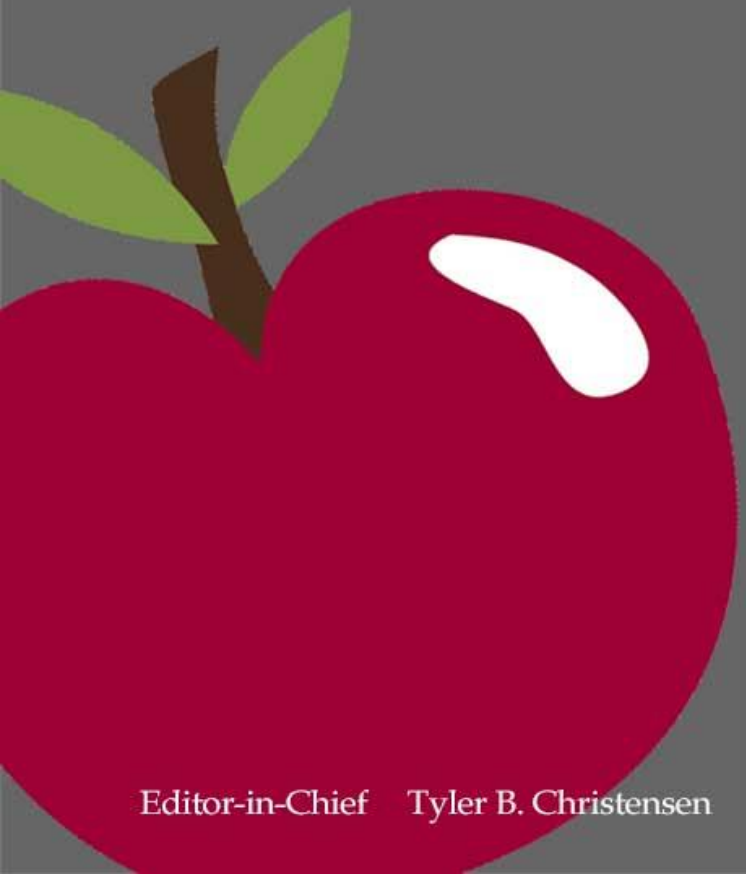

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