

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.

References

- Downing, J., & Peckham-Hardin, K. (2001). Daily Schedules: A Helpful Learning Tool. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33 (3), 62-68.
- Eccleston, J. (2004). And on Today's Agenda... Essential Learning Products: *Teaching Pre K-8*, 34 (4), 54-55.
- Gast, D., & Bryan, L. (2000). Teaching On-Task and On Schedule Behaviors to High-Functioning Children with Autism Via Picture Activity Schedules. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 30(6).
- O'Reilly, M., Jeff, S., Lancioni, G., Edrisinha, C., & Andrews, A. (2005). An Examination of the Effects of a Classroom Activity Schedule on Levels of Self-Injury and Engagement for a Child with Severe Autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 35(3), 305-311.