

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TIPS

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LESSON PLANNING ARTICLE

Don't Waste a Minute!

What do you do with those awkward moments that arise in every teacher's day, those times between classes or before specials, when there's no time for a new lesson but plenty of time for kids to act up? Try some mini lessons, quick activities that fill time without wasting it! Included: Dozens of mini lessons to keep kids busy -- and learning -- every minute of the day!

We've all experienced it -- that dreaded gap between classes, lessons, or activities that can quickly lead to chaos. What's a teacher to do?

Education World decided to go to the best source and ask some innovative teachers what *they* do.

"My favorite fill-in activity is called Who Has It? Who Doesn't?" said Cathy Jimenez, a bilingual teacher in the Escondido (California) Union School District. "This activity helps children develop observational skills and practice categorizing.


"I choose an observable object, such as hair ribbons, a watch, or a white shirt, and say, 'Juan has it. Belen doesn't. Homero has it. Andres doesn't.' When students think they know the answer, they raise their hands and ask, "Is it a watch?" (or a ribbon or whatever object you chose). The student who guesses first is the first to line up for recess, lunch, or wherever we're going," Jimenez told Education World.

"I've used this activity with students up to eighth grade and the kids seem to like it," Jimenez said. "When I do it with lower grades, I have the children who 'have it' line up along one wall and the children who 'don't have it' line up along another wall so they have a better view of one another."

"I like to play Don't Be Greedy! with my students," Rosalind Te Maari, a math teacher in Sydney, Australia, told Education World.

"Students stand beside their seats, and I roll a die," Te Maari explained. "Each time I roll the die, students add the number to the previous total, keeping a running score. Students can sit down at any time during the game, accepting the total at that point as their final score. For example, if a student sits down after three rolls of the die showing 4, 6, and 1, he or she has a

Find a few dozen more activities in our [5-Minute Fillers archive](#). Use these fun quick-tivities whenever you have 5 or 10 minutes to spare!



score of 11. The game continues until someone rolls a 2. The students still standing lose ALL their points -- because they've been greedy! The seated student(s) with the highest score wins."

Beverly J. Sandness, an elementary school principal in Minot, North Dakota, told Education World about some of the fill-ins she used while teaching second grade at Northridge Elementary School in Bismarck, North Dakota.

"I used to teach poetry while my students waited in line to enter the gym or music room or to be dismissed," Sandness said. "We also learned lyrics to old songs. By the end of the year, the children knew the songs and poems so well, I could just call out a title and they would respond."

Sandness also suggested these fill-ins:

- Brainstorm ideas for class projects.
- Share weekend or holiday plans.
- Tell riddles or jokes.
- Practice math facts or spelling words.
- Match states with their capital cities.

Diane Samuels, who teaches emotionally disabled students at Northwest Elementary School in Huntington, Indiana, shared these favorite fill-ins with Education World:

- Play What's in the Box? In this variation of 20 Questions, students ask questions requiring only yes or no answers and try to identify an object hidden in a box.
- Ask each student to name three things he or she learned that day.
- Read a poem and have students supply the last word of each line or stanza.
- Play Follow the Leader. Each time the leader stops, students must turn around and pay a compliment to the next person in line.
- Challenge students to find three things in the room they can straighten or clean in one minute -- and do it.
- Invite students to share a riddle or joke.
- Play The Change in My Pocket, another variation on 20 Questions. Students try to guess the number and kinds of coins in someone's pocket.
- Ask a student to name a noun that begins with *A*. Have the next student name a noun beginning with *B*, and so on.
- Ask students to name all the "green" words they can think of.
- Play Simon Says.
- Have students arrange themselves in groups based on the kind of pet they own or would like to own -- without using words.

FOURTEEN 15-MINUTE ACTIVITIES

- **Storytelling.** Tell the first two or three sentences of a story, and then ask each student to add a sentence. The last student should complete the story.
- **Problem Solving.** Display a number of items, such as a rope, an over-sized pencil, an eyelash curler, a CD, a newspaper advertisement, a straw, and so on. Explain to students that they are archaeologists

investigating a lost city. Ask them to describe the lives of the people who might have used the items. Encourage them to consider unusual uses for the common items.

- **Art.** Provide students with blank 5-inch by 7-inch index cards. Ask them to draw pictures of their favorite places or activities at school and write captions or brief messages under the picture. Have them turn the pictures into postcards by writing their home addresses on the backs of the cards.
- **Language Arts.** Ask each student to write a definition of *friend* on a strip of paper. Glue the papers together to form a friendship chain.
- **Math.** Provide students with colored construction paper. Ask each to draw a circle, square, triangle, or rectangle on the paper with a black marker. (You can cut out colored shapes ahead of time, if you prefer.) Have students line up, creating a pattern with the colored shapes. "Read" the pattern aloud, and then clap your hands to have students form a new pattern.
- **Decision Making.** Ask each student to give one good reason to.... (Or one good reason not to...!)
- **History.** Assign each student an important event in history and ask students to form a human timeline.
- **Language Arts.** Provide students with the first part of a well-known maxim, such as "An apple a day..." or "The early bird..." and have them take turns providing new endings.
- **Geography.** Write a list of scrambled country names on the chalkboard. Have students take turns unscrambling the words and locating the countries on a map.
- **Language Arts.** Have one student call out a noun, a second student call out an adjective, and a third student call out a verb. Ask a volunteer to use all three words in a sentence.

The following four activities require some advance preparation, but once the materials are created, they can be used over and over again.

- **Language Arts.** Create a set of word cards by writing a noun, verb, adjective, adverb, article, or pronoun in large letters on each card. Arrange students into groups, give each student a card, and have the students in each group arrange their cards in alphabetical order, into sentences, into lines of free verse, or into parts of speech.
- **Problem Solving.** Print copies of online puzzles, such as [Brain Binders](#) and distribute them for students to solve.
- **Geography.** Create a set of bingo cards with the name of a state or country in each square. Keep the cards handy and use them to play 'Capital Cities Bingo.' You call out the names of capital cities and students mark the corresponding countries or states. (Be sure to check the winner's card!)
- **Math.** Provide each student with a sealed see-through bag containing an assortment of "coins." The amount of money in each bag should match the amount in exactly one other bag -- although the denomination of the coins should differ. Have each student find the student whose total matches his or her own.

Article by Linda Starr
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Lesson Planning

Let's divide lesson planning into two parts: the lesson plan which generally teachers are expected/required to turn in to the office, and the lesson plan which is the script/blueprint for classroom teaching.

The Office Copy

We will further divide the lesson plan to be given to the office into two parts: the classroom teacher's plan and the substitute teacher's plan.

- **THE SUBSTITUTE TEACHER'S PLAN.** The reality is that these plans may never be needed, although in most cases (few teachers never get sick) they will be needed, and possibly will even be updated during the school year.
 - Schools place these substitute plans on file to be used if the regular teacher is absent without a lesson plan, or the substitute can't teach the plan that was left for the day, and/or the regular teacher wants the substitute to teach the substitute plan rather than the regular plan.
 - In preparing plans for a substitute there are a few things to keep in mind.
 1. Substitutes may know little about the subject matter.
 2. They may arrive shortly before class begins or even after class begins.
 3. Students may not all have supplies with them.
 4. The substitute doesn't know the room or the students.
 - The substitute has a difficult job at best, so do all you can to improve the chances that the substitute will have an easy, successful day. A happy substitute is good for the entire school. Substitutes are often hard to get, and happy ones will want to return. For more on preparing for a substitute, see the [Substitute Planning](#) page.
 - Provide the substitute with a plan which is self contained: one that is on a new, simple topic or review topic with all materials provided (you may need to leave a note telling where the materials are in the classroom).
 - Overplan - you do not want the students to run out of work. This can easily lead to discipline problems for the substitute.
 - Student assignments due at the end of the period provides both closure and accountability for students and substitute. It also supplies the teacher with work to assess understanding and productivity.
 - A comfortable substitute folder would contain a five day supply of lesson plans. This would cover a lengthy absence and/or the possibility of students moving through the lessons more rapidly than anticipated

- **THE CLASSROOM TEACHER'S PLAN.** This plan is often presented on Friday as a Xerox copy of the teacher's plan book for the following week. The plans presented in this form are often nothing more than a date, pages covered, and assignments given. If this meets the requirements of the administrator, and if the teacher is comfortable with this format, nothing more needs to be done.
 - However, with little more work - actually with less work in the long run - a lesson plan can be presented which is of real value to teacher, student, parents, and administrators.
 - What I am suggesting is writing an undated lesson sequence to cover, perhaps, a quarter. This will relieve the teacher of the weekly ritual of having to turn in weekly lesson plans before leaving for a weekend of well-earned rest.
 - The lesson sequence details pages to be covered and the assignments to be given, along with the lesson objectives - information frequently available in the textbook's teacher resource materials.
 - The absence of a date allows the instructor to increase or decrease the pace of instruction in keeping with student needs and mastery. Undated lesson sequences are also easier to revise for use from year to year than plans which have dates which have to be changed.
 - These lesson plans could be given to students and parents. Parents appreciate knowing what is expected of their children, and students will have the assignment even if absent from class.

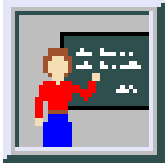
The Teacher's Classroom Script

Let us now turn our attention to what the teacher does in creating and writing the plan normally used in instructing the class.

- At the outset it should be understood that the teacher's lesson plan is a general idea of what the teacher intends to do during a class period. This plan is not engraved in stone, and may be changed from class to class. Some reasons to change from the original plan are: to accommodate different learning curves, the original plan just didn't seem to be working or meeting student needs, a school activity interrupts the lesson, or if some significant event (such as an earthquake) takes place (and takes precedence over your lesson).
- Under normal circumstances a lesson might follow a format somewhat like the following:
 1. An entry task. This is an activity lasting 5 to 10 minutes given to check students' retention a previous lesson or explore entry level of understanding a new lesson.

2. **Correction, evaluation, and reteaching of the entry task (10 minutes) to further review and raise understanding to strengthen the foundation for the new lesson.**
3. **Teach (model) new material (15 minutes) in small steps, taking care to cover new vocabulary, and make concepts concrete with examples tied to previous learning when possible.**
4. **Evaluate student understanding and reteach where needed (5 to 10 minutes). The evaluation tool may be the completion of some question or task involving the stated objective.**
5. **Closure (5 minutes) allows the students to draw their thoughts together and communicate in writing what they learned during the period. This, in turn, will help you to know where to begin the next lesson.**

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..... Classroom Management

This Site is Written and Administered by Dorothea Mynster for the Baldwin Park (California) Unified School District in her capacity as Classroom Management Mentor for Grades 6-12.

While some of the information applies only to teachers in Baldwin Park, most of it (acquired in over 30 years of teaching) should be useful to new teachers everywhere.

Before School Starts

A. Preparing the Classroom

Gathering Materials:

Instructional Lab located at Downing and Pacific.

- **Contains a large number of ideas and materials for making lettering, posters, folders, etc.**
- **Has machines to laminate your work.**
- **Contains audio-visual materials which may be borrowed for classroom use.**
- **This lab is open Monday - Thursday from 7:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.**

School Site

- **Availability of materials on hand will vary somewhat from school to school - become acquainted with yours.**
- **The location of materials likewise may vary, but generally will be found in or near the faculty/teacher workroom.**
- **Orders for materials are generally placed with your school secretary or department head.**

Educational Supply Stores

- **While these stores can supply ideas, especially for bulletin boards and posters, the merchandise tends to be pricey.**
- **In most cases these materials could be made at the instructional lab at no cost to the teacher.**

What About Shared Rooms?

Rights and Responsibilities if you are using a room part time

- **Teacher's Desk - check on having two in the room, or at least having a locked file cabinet or locked cupboard in each room you share.**
- **Bulletin Board space for display of student work and display of unit materials should be divided according to the number of periods / amount of time each teacher uses the room.**

- **Portable Chalkboard** - if there is sufficient space in the room, and if there is one available, you might want to have the extra board space.
- **Placement of Furniture**, including teacher and student desks, should be mutually agreed upon.
- It is the responsibility of each teacher to leave the classroom neat and orderly for the next teacher, and to safeguard the materials used in that classroom.

B. Lesson Planning

Lesson Plans are for your use, the use of a substitute should the need arise and you are without emergency plans, and the information of the administrators. They are your guide.

What is Included?

A lesson plan should include the objective, worded as a measurable skill and the assignment the student is expected to complete to demonstrate understanding of the material of instruction.

Where are they Kept?

A teacher usually keeps a copy of the lesson plans and gives one to the secretary for placement in a substitute file. It is my suggestion that you might want to provide each student with a copy of your plan for their class and post the lesson plans for each class on your bulletin board(s). A student who is absent then knows the material that is being covered (or was covered) and can keep up or make up the assignment without creating any extra work for you.

When are they Due?

Lesson plans are frequently written for one week ahead and turned in to the office before you leave campus on Friday.

I would suggest that, rather than writing a dated weekly lesson plan, you consider writing a lesson sequence for as long as possible. This eliminates the weekly due date, and additionally, a lesson sequence is good for as long as you use the textbook to which it refers. You can add a footnote advising that assignments may be added as needed to achieve mastery.

C. What If I Need Equipment? (VCR, A.V., TV, Overhead, etc.)

Availability

This equipment is usually kept at a central location - very often the school library or media center. Teachers may visit that location to request and obtain materials and / or have the equipment delivered to the proper classroom.

A Caution and a Warning

Use of the VCR and TV and all duplicating must follow district guidelines and U.S. copyright laws. Video materials must be approved for school use. If in doubt, don't use the video until you have cleared it with your site administrator!

The Overhead Projector - the Teacher's Most Powerful Tool

- **I strongly recommend that teachers use an overhead projector. The overhead eliminates the need for the teacher to turn his/her back on the students.**
- **Use of the overhead allows the teacher to maintain eye contact with the students.**
- **The information shown on the overhead is frequently more easily seen than that written on a chalkboard.**
- **The use of acetate sheets allows transparencies to be made, erased and reused.**
- **Transparencies can be prepared in advance, saving the time of writing on the board.**

D. What About Duplicating?

Duplicating may be done at the school site or the district office.

Plan Far Enough Ahead

- **I suggest that you plan ahead as far as possible to save your time, save wear and tear on the site equipment, and to secure your copies as economically as possible.**
- **Materials sent to the district for duplication are usually back within a week. You may obtain the order forms from your secretary. It is more economical if you have both sides of the sheet printed.**

- For a small number of copies and/or when advanced planning hasn't made it possible to send your materials to the district, you must duplicate at your school site. Don't put things off until the last minute when the machines may be in use or broken down and not available.

Kinds of Duplicating Machines at Most School Sites

- Photocopy machines (Xerox) used for a small number of copies (less than 20 to 40)
- Duplicating machines which run copies from a master stencil for longer runs. Since most of these machines accept only sheet paper for making the master, you must first make a Xerox copy of a page from a book in order to make copies of selections from a book.

E. Who Can I Turn to for Help?

1. The district provides an extensive network of mentor teachers to provide assistance in classroom management, technology, and content areas. These mentors may be contacted at their school sites or through Educational Services. I may be reached by email at dminster@geocities.com ---- I will be happy to do all I can to make your teaching easier and more enjoyable. I will contact you via email, phone, or in person as soon as possible.
2. At each secondary school there are either department chairpersons or lead teachers who you can turn to not only for help in content areas, but also for questions of a general nature.
3. Office personnel, administrators, librarians, and custodians are all anxious to cooperate and help familiarize you with your school's procedures. Get to know them.

F. Are There Special Procedures for Record Keeping?

Generally there are special enrollment procedures for the first day of school (ie: a student is not officially enrolled even if his/her name is on your attendance sheet until the student sets foot in your classroom).

An accurate attendance is important. Your attendance sheets are a legal document. In your teacher's handbook you will generally find a list of attendance symbols (ie: "E" for Enrolled, "/" for absent, "T" for Tardy).

I recommend making a seating chart the first day (using colored "sticky notes" - blue for boys, pink for girls) on a blank sheet of

notebook paper. Once it is completed, just slip the chart inside a plastic cover sheet. Mark your attendance on the plastic and later transfer these marks to your rollbook.

G. How Will I Know If I Have Supervision Duties?

Teachers are expected to serve supervision duty. There will be a posted schedule (often made with teacher input). It is your responsibility to be at your assigned duty at the time and day listed. If you have some sort of a conflict, find a teacher to trade with you and / or notify the office. Check and see if you have first day duty.

In addition to supervision duty during the regular school day, on may faculties teachers are expected to give a certain number of additional supervision hours for school dances, sporting events, and special programs, etc.

H. Is There Anything Else I Should Know Before School Begins?

At most schools there is some sort of faculty club which selects officers and functions for the purpose of supplying fellowship, cameraderie, and a sense of caring. This group frequently will have sign-up lists for supplying coffee (from those who drink coffee) along with sugar and creamer. There is also generally for those who want to share in bringing and enjoying treats, usually once a week or once a month. On significant occasions (births, deaths, weddings, Boss' Day, Secretary's Day) the faculty will provide a card signed by all along with some appropriate remembrance. To pay for these cards, gifts, and remembrances faculty clubs collect a small dues fee each year.

In these days of School-Based Management, much of the work of running the school is given to committees, and each teacher is expected to be a part of one or more of these.

There are faculty meetings scheduled, generally the days before classes begin. At this time many of the school procedures will be discussed, and sign-ups for duties and committees will take place. Other faculty meetings will be scheduled throughout the year, often on "special days" (ie: student-free, shortened, or minimum days).

In planning bulletin boards, it is a good idea to make and post a large bell schedule. In addition to the schedule for regular school days, you might want to include schedules for all the special days (shortened, minimum, and assembly).

There are "Student-Free Days" scattered throughout the school year. Although the students are not present, these are regular work days for the teachers and are used for staff development. All teachers are expected to be present throughout that work day.

What Do I Do On The First Day?

A. Follow enrollment procedures and complete any supervision duty.

B. Take Attendance.

C. Make Seating Charts

This will make getting acquainted with your classes easier. I would suggest being creative in making your charts. Using alphabetical order can lead to problems when students find themselves next to the same people in several classes, leading to relationships which carry from class to class, making classroom control more difficult than it might otherwise be.

D. Provide Students With "Student/Parent Letter"

This should include classroom standards/rules, procedures, and grading systems. This is also a good place to inform students of any special materials they might need, or projects which might be required for the class.

E. Get A Student Writing Sample

If time permits, a short paragraph or two written by each student on their expectations for the class might provide you with valuable information about the students' skills, abilities, and work habits.

What Do I Do After The First Day?

After the first day you settle into making your plan work, or altering the plan so you will accomplish your objectives with maximum student success. To this end I would suggest the following:

A. Activities

It is better to have planned too many activities and too much work than not enough. You never want students with time on their hands and nothing to do.

B. Control

It is easier to relax your control than to try and regain it if you allow a class to get out of control. Be firm, be fair, and most of your students will respect you and work.

C. Establish a Routine

Have a routine and follow it. This is especially important at the beginning of class in controlling tardies. This is the time when the tone for the entire period is established.

- 1. Here I would suggest that when the passing bell rings for students to begin entering your class, have an activity which they are to complete in a specified amount of time after the tardy bell. Give a grade or point value to this assignment. The earlier students arrive, the more time they have to complete the task. The tardy student loses out.**
- 2. Have your objective for the class clearly before the students as a reminder of what they are to be learning that period. The chalkboard is a good place to write the objective. At the period's end you might have the students write a brief summary of the main points they have learned about that objective.**
- 3. Have a homework box near the door in which students deposit their work before taking their seats. Homework not in the box when the tardy bell rings is either not accepted or given only partial credit. This encourages students to be on time by penalizing those who are not. It also allows you to do a quick check and quickly return the**

assignment, pointing out those who neglected to turn in their homework.

- 4. Control the paper flow. Remember to "teach smarter, not harder." You deserve a life apart from teaching, so don't get buried under a ton of grading - control the paper flow.**
- 5. Have your class under control at all times, right up to the time of dismissal. Students should not be allowed to leave until the classroom is neat and orderly. Remember, you dismiss the class, the bell does not.**

D. Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Keep a file of correspondence stored on a computer disk. Stored correspondence, including the student/parent letter, positive and negative notices, recommendations, back to school and open house letters may all be revised and easily updated without retyping the whole thing.

If your school has prepared forms, keep a supply of restroom, office, nurse, and library passes on hand. This will help keep class disruption to a minimum when these passes are requested and/or needed.

Likewise, a supply of detention and referral forms should be kept on hand and made out at least in duplicate when needed. One copy should be kept for your file.

E. How Do I Get And Keep Control (How Do I Discipline)?

Good discipline, good control, does not just happen - it is the result of careful planning, consistently implemented.

- 1. You must know what you want, what you expect of students**
- 2. You must convey your expectations to your students**
- 3. You must make them accountable by having them sign an agreement (ie: your student/parent letter)**
- 4. You must have a system of consequences and rewards which are fairly and consistently carried out**
- 5. You must always treat a student professionally and with respect - never allow your anger at a student's misdeeds to impair your good judgement and jeopardize your career.**

Other factors which contribute to good classroom control:

- **Good lesson planning is a main component of good discipline. Be sure to check the [Lesson Planning](#) page for detailed suggestions.**
- **Most schools will have a basic school-wide plan for discipline, perhaps covering things like tardies, gum chewing, and dress standards. These must be enforced.**
- **It is a good idea to meet the students at the classroom door for the following reasons:**
 1. **You can monitor the hall**
 2. **Your presence may remind students to hurry on to class**
 3. **The personal, friendly "Hello" conveys an attitude of interest and caring**
 4. **You may be able to pick up certain "vibes" to things going on that you will want to watch during the period.**
- **When students enter the classroom, there should be a routine that is to be followed (an expected behavior). I particularly like to have students deposit their homework in a box, immediately take their seats and begin work on a timed activity.**
- **An objective written on the board helps students focus and direct their energy and attention during the class period.**
- **Even at a time when students are working in groups or with partners, the teacher must be in control. This is achieved by advance preparation in which the teacher carefully explains the lesson and the expectations for completion.**
- **It is generally advisable to have students submit their work at the period's end, thus holding them accountable and having an immediate assessment of understanding.**
- **A light, fast-paced lesson is more conducive to good discipline than one that is boring or undirected, where neither teacher nor student is certain about the objective or point of the lesson.**

Back To School/Open House

"Back To School" night traditionally comes at the beginning of the school year and Open House is held in the Spring. These are two times during the year when the community, especially students' families, are invited to learn more about (and share in) what the school has to offer.

Back to School Night

Coming early in the school year, this is a wonderful opportunity to capture the enthusiasm, resolve, and renewed commitment of parents and students to a more successful year. Teachers should take this opportunity to build a partnership with the parents and students in which all parties cooperate to maximize the students' learning. Some suggestions of ways to help develop this cooperation by demonstrating professionalism, recognizing the vital role the parent plays in the educational process, and demonstrating a desire to enlist parent help are:

- **Parents should know they have entered the classroom of a professional. Frame and display photocopies of your college diploma (or other degrees if you have them), teaching credential, any awards or certificates related to teaching or your subject field. These can help to inspire confidence and portray the teacher as qualified to instruct the class.**
- **Materials and resources that will be used should be available for parents to examine. Also it is a good idea to have extra copies of the parent/student letter you sent out earlier. This will allow parents to review the course of study, procedures, expectations, grading standards, etc. A list of assignments that students have had / will have is also helpful.**
- **If possible, have a list of suggestions on ways the parent can help the student achieve success. Solicit parent suggestions on ways you can help meet the needs of their student.**
- **Provide information to the parents on the best time to phone to reach the teacher (probably your conference period). Having a business card with the school phone number and the time of your conference period would make a professional and business-like impression (with today's computers, that's a simple do-it-yourself project). It is generally much easier for a working parent to reach the teacher at a given time than for the teacher to reach a parent who is working.**
- **A sign-in and sign-up sheet should be provided at a welcome table near the door. Sign-in allows the teacher to acknowledge parent attendance, and possibly give credit to the student. The sign-up allows parents to set a time for a conference or to offer help if they would like to do so.**

Typically the teacher's role at Back-To-School Night is to welcome parents and make a brief presentation about the class. Then allow lots of time for questions.

Open House

Open House in the Spring is a time to show off and celebrate the year's learning and accomplishments. It is also a time to build up excitement among younger siblings for the years to come. It is also an opportunity to give thanks to all those whose efforts contributed to the learning process.

Best examples of student work from throughout the year should be placed on display. If students have kept portfolios, these should also be on display, with each student selecting a piece of work to attach to the front.

This is not a time to discuss problems, but a time to celebrate learning. As you did with Back-To-School Night, a welcoming sign-in /sign-up area will allow guests to sign-in and to make appointments for more private discussions they may desire.

For both Back-To-School Night and Open House grades and records are best kept locked away for the evening, to be taken out and shared with parents and/or students in a private conference.

Communications

Effective Communications and a record of them can be a great asset to effective teaching.

- The use of a computer can greatly simplify the task of communicating with parents by generating documents which can easily be stored and recalled to revise the following year.
- Your communications are most commonly for informing, creating interest, soliciting help and cooperation, and creating accountability.
- At the beginning of a new school year most students and parents are anxious to learn about the year's new classes. They will often be full of resolutions for a year more successful than the previous one. You would be wise to seize the moment with a well thought-out and carefully written student-parent letter to give students the first day.

The Student-Parent Letter

- The student-parent letter should be discussed in class the first day and given to students to take home for their parents/guardian to read. A tear-off signed by both the student and parent/guardian acknowledging that the letter has been read should be returned the next day. The teacher should keep the signed acknowledgements on file.
- In the student-parent letter you would probably want to include a little about the subject of the class, requirements and expectations, the grading system, classroom procedures, rules and consequences, any special materials needed, and any special help or opportunities given to build success.
- It is important that you encourage both student and parent/guardian at the outset to form a partnership for success. It is also important to extend an invitation to the parents to visit the classroom whenever they wish, and to provide them with the best time to contact you by phone during the school day.

A Sample Student-Parent Letter

This is only one example. Your letter should reflect your subject, grade level, standards, and expectations. If you have a letter that you think would be helpful to others, please send me a copy and we might be able to include it here.

September, 1997

Dear Student and Parent/Guardian:

I am Mrs. Dorothea Mynster. I welcome you to the 1997/98 school year, which hopefully will be our most successful yet.

In this math class you will be expected to work hard to master the curriculum in basic skills and math applications, working with ever more challenging material demanding higher level thinking and reasoning. To achieve success in this endeavor we will form a partnership of effort, cooperation, encouragement, and help, both at school and at home.

To make it possible for us to maximize teaching and learning at school, we have a few basic rules which students are expected to follow:

- 1. Students are to place due assignments in the homework box, and be in their seats ready to work prior to the tardy bell. Homework not in the box will not be counted. Students not in their seats ready to work will be counted tardy. Beginning with the third unexcused tardy, detention will be assigned.**
- 2. All students are to do their best and allow all other students and the teacher to do their best. Any student off task will be given detention.**
- 3. All school rules will be enforced and detention assigned for violations.**

Students will be graded in the following way:

- Daily Quizzes = 20%**
- Chapter Tests = 30%**
- Portfolio = 50%**

Letter grades will be assigned as follows for an average of:

- 90 - 100% = A**
- 80 - 89% = B**
- 70 - 79% = C**
- 60 - 69% = D**
- 59% and below = F**

A portfolio which will include all assigned work is to be kept by each student. An emphasis is being placed on literacy in all classes, therefore writing will be a part of each assignment.

Students are encouraged to have and use a scientific calculator which includes fractions.

Tutoring in math is available each morning for 45 minutes before classes begin and during lunch time.

Parents are encouraged to give support to their child in math, to visit the class at any time, or to contact me from 2:00 - 2:30 just to keep in touch.

Please sign the tear-off section of this letter and return it to class tomorrow.

Thank you,

Dorothea Mynster

I have read the Student/Parent letter in math.

Student _____

Parent/Guardian _____

Date _____ **Class** _____ **Period** _____

Environment

Stop for a moment and think of your environment....

What is it? Your environment is all that surrounds you at the moment: the sights - the sounds - the smells - the feelings - the temperature - everything!

As a teacher, you want to create the environment in your classroom that is most conducive to maximizing learning.

What are the things you can control? You have a degree of control over sights, sounds, temperature, and feelings. Feelings? Yes, feelings. I will explain that a bit further on in this section.

The Sights

I suggest that you would want to create a visual environment that:

- 1. Is Attractive**
- 2. Is Functional**
- 3. Is Stimulating**
- 4. Is Motivational**
- 5. Creates pride and self esteem**

Attractive materials are neat, colorful, and pleasing to the eye. These materials may be self-made, purchased, or textbook resource materials.

Functional materials, in addition to being attractive, teach or reenforce a concept or skill. Calendars and current event notices are functional materials.

Stimulating materials would be thought-provoking and questioning in nature.

Motivational materials are often in the area of morals and values, with the goal of raising viewers' awareness and offering hope and encouragement.

Materials which create pride and boost self esteem may be student work or posters celebrating students' accomplishments or birthdays.

The Sounds

There is a substantial amount of research in support of relaxation being an important ingredient in improving and/or accelerating learning. Such research further supports the idea that instrumental music by such composers as Mozart and Bach are calming and actually help to raise student test scores.

Soft music can be played as students enter class, during the introductory activity while roll is being taken, during class work times, as well as during testing, to help set a calm, relaxed pace and tone for the class.

The Temperature

Temperature is another important element in the environment. If you are in a classroom without air conditioning it is important that you do all you can, especially in warm weather, to get the best air flow to help keep students comfortable and alert.

Research suggests that we are most alert in rooms that are on the cool side - in the low 70s. A well ventilated room is better than a close, stuffy one. Try to open as many windows and doors as necessary to create a good cross-ventilation. The use of a fan may help create a comforting air movement on warmer days.

Feelings

Creating an environment conducive to concentration, study, and learning is more than having attractive, stimulating sights, relaxing sounds, and good ventilation. It is creating a place where all feel comfortable and at ease, a place where the surroundings are neat and orderly. It is a place where there is mutual respect in a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere, a place where everyone can bloom and do their best.

Substitute Planning

Few are the teachers who do not fear having to be absent and leave their class in the hands of a substitute. Few are the principals who do not dread the days when enough substitutes to fill the classrooms of absent teachers cannot be found.

Planning in advance for a substitute can help to give the teacher peace of mind during an absence, provide the students with meaningful lessons, and help the substitute have a successful and enjoyable experience that will leave the substitute happy to return, thus making it easier to maintain a supply of substitutes.

Creating a SUBSTITUTE' S BOX

A substitutes' box contains all that the substitute will need packaged in an attractive Welcoming Box.

A box can be made from a heavy carton, such as those with removable covers in which reams of 8 x 11 writing paper are shipped. You can then have students help decorate the box with a welcome greeting for the substitute affixed to the outside.

The box might contain some or all of the following: a couple of reams of paper, a supply of sharpened pencils, pen, chalk, kleenex, hall passes, goodnews card (or student commendation form), detention and/or referral forms, updated seating charts and a copy of rollbook (never leave your original), lesson plans with any necessary materials provided, a brief discription of your classroom procedures and the names of any student helpers .

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