

Time for Teaching and Planning

By Rick Wormeli

[Note: This article was originally submitted for AMLE's Middle Ground magazine. It ran in its February 2013 issue. It has been updated several times since then. This is a ceaseless working draft, typos, weekly new ideas, and all. This version has been updated as of late 2019. – RCW]

Most schools aren't designed for teaching. Most are designed to protect the status quo, emphasizing the factory model of schooling set up over 100 years ago: 50 minutes each of math, science, history, English, physical well-being, then lunch, and a class or three in the arts, technology, or foreign language. Well into the second decade of the 21st century, we know this cattle call from class to class actually limits student learning, but it is entrenched.

Faced with increased class sizes, diverse students, expanding curriculum, on-going professional training, and dwindling resources, we wonder: When are we supposed to do all that is asked of us? We're conscientious people who want to do right by our students and our profession, but we need that rare commodity, time, to be effective.

Let's explore the time issue in two directions: Finding time to meet the needs of students, and finding time to plan and prepare for teaching students. Both are important, one can't be done without the other.

Time to Meet Students' Learning Needs

It's not uncommon in middle and high schools to have forty students in a classroom built for 28 and for that class to last only 45 minutes or less. In such situations, an individual student is lucky to get five minutes of undivided teacher attention, yet many of our students need considerably longer one-on-one and small group time in order to be successful. If we're going to really teach students, we have to transcend accepted classroom boundaries. So much goes unlearned in students because we adhered to conventional notions of time for learning!

They are not singular answers by themselves, but there are many ways to extend students' learning beyond the classroom experience:

Saturday School – From 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. every Saturday of the school year, this is way beyond “Breakfast Club” stereotypes. Teachers work with students in ratios of no more than eight students per teacher. Students work on homework, projects, basic skills, or specific skills and content as assigned by classroom teachers. Many teachers love the extra stipends for working with students on Saturdays, and students desperately want to be productive, learn the material, and get their work done. Seriously, they do, and their weekly activities or family lives may get in the way.

Early-Back Programs – Students who struggle with math, reading, and/or writing report back to school after summer vacation four weeks early. Their days run from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., with teachers reporting at 8 a.m. to prepare for the day. During their half-day sessions, students review material from the previous year and learn material for the new year. When the real first day of school begins, they are already acclimated to school, confident, and, “firing all thrusters.” This much better than their usual journey: Overwhelmed and falling farther behind with each passing day.

Audio and Video Podcasting of Daily Lessons – With today's technology and most students' access to technology at home, café, library, or parents' work, this is easier than ever and very helpful. Usually five to 20 minutes in length, these posted podcasts can be reviewed by parents trying to assist their children with homework or by students reviewing the algorithm, content, and skills for themselves. As a student, I appreciate being able to go through a lesson a second time when I struggle with content. The classroom camera is focused on the teacher during the content presentation portion of the lesson only, not the students.

Lunch Period – It's important for teachers to get together at lunch to socialize or connect for academic discussions most of the week, but we can give up one period a week to both eat and work with students as necessary. If students need several lunch work periods, we can rotate monitoring those sessions among the team or department.

One Assignment for Two Classes -- Sometimes a student has such huge snowball of content to learn and work to do, it's overwhelming; they give up. In these cases, let's combine efforts and make life livable for students by letting a student incorporate content/skills from one subject into the work of another subject. It's actually a lot easier than people think, and it often results in surprisingly creative and substantive projects that increase student engagement: Evidence of skills in probability and statistics woven into an expository essay about a new lottery or casino coming to the state; graphic design skills incorporated into lab drawings; HTML/web design skills used to create a media presentation on viruses and what constitutes living things; musical parody (with proper music terms and dynamics) of math properties. Interdisciplinary techniques work well, remember?

After and Before School Work – We often need parent permission and transportation support for these, but they are worth seeking. Some schools have “Late Bus Days,” in which students

can catch a ride home on a special bus that re-traces the normal after-school route 90 minutes later.

E-mail “Fan Out” Message to All Faculty Asking for a Student to Be Sent to Us If He Finishes Early -- If a student finishes 10 minutes or more early in one class, we invite colleagues to send him to us. We have materials ready for him to use no matter when he comes, and we leave notes on our classroom doors if he shows up while we’re in the washroom or cafeteria: *“Wait here, Jeremy. Yes, you’re being watched. Don’t bother looking for the camera. It’s micro-technology; you’ll never see it. I’ll be back in 90 seconds.”*

Summer School Program – Half-day, four to six weeks, focused on one or two subjects

Tutoring/Mentoring – Some schools work with families to pay for twice a week or more tutoring or mentoring during the year and through the summer months not only to fill in the missing content, but to also getting a running start on what’s to come.

On-line Tutorials – This field has exploded in the last few years and worth investigating, if we haven’t already. It includes all forms of distance learning, even Skype. There are many Websites already set up with wonderful explanations of content we teach, such as Schooltube.com, Teachertube.com, Teachingchannel.org, and Khanacademy.org. Of course, each on-line explanation must be vetted for accuracy and appropriateness before we promote them to students, but using such sites creates flexibility, as students can refer to them 24/7 as they work.

Lesson Complementing/Reinforcing App’s and Games! – There are new app’s coming out on-line (on phones and other tech) each week. Many students are already with quite savvy with their use, so it makes sense to curate a list of apps specifically connected to our course content and skills and publicize that list to our students frequently. Instead of having to find a friend or adult with whom to review material, students can use the apps 24-7 asynchronously as they have the time and awake attention. Some of the apps I’ve used or seen students use in the past include: iTunes U, Lumosity Mobile, Quizlet - Flashcards & Study Tools, PhotoMath, Fit Brains Trainer, SkyView® Free - Explore the Universe, Khan Academy: learn math, biology, chemistry, economics, art history, Free Graphing Calculator, Learn Spanish 24/7 FREE Language Learning, NASA App, Learn Spanish by MindSnacks, Drivers Ed, My Math Flash Cards App, The Official SAT Question of the Day, Star Walk™ - 5 Stars Astronomy Guide to the Night Sky Map & Planets, How to Draw - step by step Drawing Lessons and Coloring pages, Learn French by MindSnacks, How to Make Origami, 3D Brain, Google Classroom, Spanish English Dictionary + Freemium, Coursera, Codecademy: Code Hour, Sign Language!, How to make Paper Airplanes, SAT Vocab by MindSnacks, Funbrain.com, Knowledgeadventure.com, Coolmath-games.com, Math-play.com/Algebra-Math-Games, Mangahigh.com/en-us/games/algebrameltdown, Historyglobe.com/jamestown/, besthistorysites.net/general-history-resources/games-animations, Brainpop.com (Science games and more!), Edheads.org (Wow!)

Again, apps will change over time, so it makes sense to review what's out there once each semester, if possible. Type, "Education apps," into any search engine, and you'll get dozens of websites that list and describe education apps. Some will charge fees, but many are free. It'll provide an initial sense of what's available, however, and inspire more focused searches for your specific needs. In addition, many national subject associations have on-line chat rooms, twitter conversations, and similar vehicles for teachers to share practical tips, and practical apps for the classroom are frequent topics. Check them out!

Volunteer Adults Sitting with Students in the Classroom – Some parents and retirees like to stay active in local schools and this can be very meaningful for both them and students. Every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, for example, Mr. Hooper can sit next to David from 10:45 to 11:55 a.m. to answer his questions, keep him focused, and provide descriptive feedback on his work. Not only does this help his new learning, it keeps him from falling behind.

Resource Room/Class – Classroom content is shared with specialists in learning disabilities, speech and language issues, and other challenges, and students have a period a day in which they work in much smaller groups with these experts on that content while also working on their study skills and personal development.

Peer Tutoring Programs – Start one, if your school doesn't have one. Struggling students who need more time with specific subjects can sign up for peer assistance. Be sure to train peer tutors how to be helpful, not to just do the work for their peers.

Alternative, Less Time Intensive Assignments/Assessments – Pascal said it well, "If I had more time, I would have written less." We can shorten a lot of our assignments. Consider asking students to do one page of excellent writing on a topic rather than 3 pages of throwing everything into the mix, hoping something will stick with the teacher. Five problems done well, 'even analyzed, can be more useful than doing 35. A student could build a model out of everyday objects of an abstract concept and defend it as a good representation of the concept instead of answering 25 chapter review questions.

Consider, too, "banking" portions of tests that are done well when asking students to re-do tests and assessments. If a test is compartmentalized into sub-sections, students only need to do re-do the portions done poorly, not all of them. If the test is large and interwoven, of course, they do the entire test again.

Teaching Students Personal Study Skills – Many students are inefficient with their studying and time management. It takes them an hour to do something that should have taken 15 minutes. Unfortunately, many teachers assume students have the skills for independent study, and they don't. Temporarily suspending the curriculum to teach these life skills and weaving them into the units of study are wise moves. Between us and our students, brainstorm at least 50 specific techniques students can use to manage their time and study on their own.

Reconsider the Media and Approach We Use – Sometimes we spend time distributing a class set of media tools, replacing two of them that don't seem to work (6 minutes), looking for a lost

computer file (4 minutes), and trying to get access to the Internet (5 minutes), when we could have drawn a quick picture on the chalkboard or asked to students to portray the four parts of the plant in our demonstration. On the other hand, a long-winded, overly elaborate, multi-prop demonstration of complex content would have been understood by students more quickly with a clear animation found on-line. Let's not let technology and its trappings get in the way of efficient learning, nor should we fail to use the modern age. Teach smarter, not harder.

Finding Time for Planning and Preparation

Most of us want to differentiate instruction, incorporate the latest teaching techniques and tools, order supplies, return parent phone calls, sponsor afterschool clubs/sports/arts, unpack standards, change the water in the fish tanks, catch up on professional reading, participate in PLC's, keep up with the pacing guide, get a birthday card for the custodian who cleans our classroom, grade papers, get some exercise, and create wonderful multi-media presentations to engage students every day. Then reality interrupts, and we spend our time lowering our expectations, wondering if airline ticket agents on stormy, "Flights Cancelled" days at Chicago O'Hare have easier jobs and maybe there were openings.

Let's consider ideas on how to find time to plan and do more of the things we'd like to do in teaching:

Divide and Conquer – We can divide the units of study for the year among our subject-like colleagues, and each one of us design multiple instructional and assessment options for the unit plus a list of great on-line resources, so we all don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Prioritize Standards as "Power" or Primary Standards – We have curriculum overload, and we can't do justice to all our standards, so let's decide which ones get the most time and attention because they create the most leverage in students' lives, the power standards. Once decided, we can place these large "boulders" into our schedule and spend our time and students' efforts primarily on those concepts, weaving the other standards in and around them as we can.

Some will read this and say, "But they're all important," and my response is, "No, they're not." Consult with your larger subject association's benchmarks and standards, and make professionally informed decisions, but stop claiming all standards are equally important in students' lives.

On-line Search of Lesson Plans and Standards/Outcomes Unwrapped – Hey, someone has already invented the wheel! Let's grab it and use it as a template for our own work or a catalyst for something even better. It's amazing how many Websites now have lesson plans and instructional ideas for the content we teach. Let's start looking for them and collecting them.

Use Some of the Ideas Listed Above for Meeting Students' Learning Needs -- The banking-portions-of-the-test-done-well will save us time proctoring tests, as will our visits to those on-line tutorials such as Teachertube.com.

Use Parents/Volunteers – Parents feel distanced from schools when their children reach middle and high school, and they don't need to be. Yes, it's cool to have Room Parents for each period or someone to coordinate volunteer efforts. Save time and use parents to do anything that is not confidential, such as: record-keeping, collations, fundraising, creating/maintaining bulletin boards/centers/libraries/supplies/cages/Websites, coordinating fieldtrips, photocopying, lab set-ups, lining the soccer field, and cleaning/fixing/returning equipment and repairing books.

Subscribe to Professional Education Magazines/Journals – They have compelling ideas that will save us time and energy, but here's the kicker: we have to actually read them. It sounds weird to say we need to find time to read about how to save time, but it really works: Those of us who carve time into the day for professional reading and contemplation are more efficient and effective in the classroom. And an added bonus: We get excited about what we're doing and the things that stress us don't seem so threatening.

Read Those Education Books We've Been Thinking about Reading - We get energized by these books, fully vested in our profession, and we make connections and find strategies and principles to improve our teaching performance. It has even greater impact when we talk about what we've been reading with colleagues. I am much more efficient and effective in teaching because of the ideas I've stolen from others. Go for it!

Participate in Blogs, Listserv's, Webinars, and Other On-line Communities – Post the question, "I need 5 creative vocabulary ideas for my "force and motion" unit. Any ideas?" or, "Does anyone know a good source for science probes?" and you'll get multiple suggestions for both within hours. Read about one teacher's use of 6-word memoirs to get amazing insights from students about historical figures, musical composers, or math symbols, and you have your summarization method for tomorrow's class. Join a 50-minute Webinar on how to increase text complexity for the Common Core, or how to create a Prezi for your unit on Machu Picchu. These are intensely useful professional development vehicles for busy teachers.

Use SmartBrief and similar on-line "Updates in the Profession" Tools -- Smartbrief reads the latest articles in education (and other topics) as they are published, then creates a brief description of each one and posts those descriptions for the top 10-15 articles each day. For busy educators who don't have time to look through all that is published in education each day (research, practical ideas, commentary, new programs, technology, evaluation, politics, etc.) and decide which articles to read, this is immensely helpful. They have Smartbriefs for almost everyone, including: math teachers, middle school teachers, social studies teachers, English teachers, teachers of gifted, school boards, and STEM careers. While these are all good, don't forget to sign up for the one from ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) as it is a general education Smartbrief and has pertinent articles for everyone.

Go to www.smartbrief.com, and choose education from the categories offered. There you will find the specific briefs you'd like to receive. They are all free.

If you are willing to pay for someone to read the latest research articles and commentary on the big ideas in education and post the main points for each of those articles in a thoughtful, concise manner, I highly recommend the Marshall Memo by Kim Marshal. Visit the Website and take a look: <http://www.marshallmemo.com>

Read and Use Some of the Materials Publishers Put in the Teacher's Version of the Basal Text – Most adopted textbooks provide material for two to three years' worth of instruction. They want teachers to be fully fortified for any classroom reality. Look for great ideas in the margins of the teacher's version, and look through the supplementary materials in hand and on-line. There will be stuff you can use.

Establish a Faculty Portfolio of Ideas (FPI) at every Photocopier in the Building or On-line – Every time we photocopy something for classroom or professional use, we can make one extra copy and insert it into the appropriate hanging file in the plastic crate next to the photocopier. When others are looking for ideas for their own lessons, they can look through these files, pullout and photocopy what they want, replacing it for the next person. At the end of the year, these readings, worksheets, tests, puzzles, project directions, assignments, etc. can be placed into a binder representing faculty wisdom for that year and accessed in the professional library of our school for years to come. Of course, we can also provide space on the school's Intranet for teachers to post articles, reflections, and teaching tips for any subject that can ready be access from classrooms or home while planning.

Conduct Instructional Roundtables – Someone, teacher or administrator, posts a topic for discussion as well as a time and a date for the meeting a week to 10 days in advance, usually conducted before or after school, but some have been at dinner time after teachers have finished their committee, sports, or club sponsorship activities. The topic is usually very specific and practical such as, "Setting up Formative/Summative Gradebooks," "Dealing with Chronic Disruptors," "Vocabulary Acquisition for Intense Content," "Positive Responses to Difficult Parents," "Setting up the I-Pad for Record Keeping," "Yoga for Busy Teachers," and, "Efficient Ways to Deal with all the Paperwork." These are all voluntary; participants attend the topics that interest them.

Roundtables last one hour or less. Everyone is told, "B.Y.O.S.S. – Bring your own snack and strategy." All are invited, but as their ticket to enter the roundtable, each participant must have at least one idea regarding the topic to share (photocopied at least 15 times – usually no more than 15 show up). *And here's the cool part:* For every idea shared by an individual participant, the larger group must add to it, improve it, or come up with a spin-off idea that also works. This means that, if seven people show up, each one will walk out with 14 practical ideas.

It's important to keep this a grassroots effort, not something mandated by administration. 'Anyone can post a call for an Instructional Roundtable at any point. Of course, the wisest of

the bunch double-check the master meeting schedule for the school to make sure their appointed time doesn't conflict with something major on the calendar.

Cultivate Personal/Professional Creativity – I've written about this in a previous column, but I can't emphasize it enough. Many times one or more doors are closed to us when working with students or trying to find time to get tasks done, and because we're not practiced in thinking divergently, we see only a tedious plow through hardened muck as our only way forward. Take a few moments to build personal creativity, combining and re-combining tasks and ideas, to see if there is not a more efficient, time-saving route.

Build Kinesthetics and Movement into your Lessons – Students bodies were not meant to sit in desks. They are built to move. By keeping them seated at desks or tables, we're imposing stress and frustration. Moving bodies get oxygen and nutrients to the cognitive portions of the brain, they relieve stress on bone growth plates, and they relax students, opening them to more learning. In addition, movement and kinesthesia can clarify abstract concepts and move understanding into long-term memory. Students learn content quickly and retain it longer, and we don't spend as much time remediating during our lessons. For some great ideas on adding movement to your lessons, visit these Websites:

- www.WellnessCKE.net
- www.jamschoolprogram.com
- school.fueluptoplay60.com
- www.braingym.com
- Carol Glynn's, "Carol Out of the Box" videos at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALgY0BywKy0. Don't forget her book, *Learning on their Feet*, available from www.Discover-writing.com.
- *Mindware* has a wonderful catalog of intellectual games, many of which use movement at www.mindwareonline.com.

These are excellent books for getting movement into instruction, problem-solving, personal maturation, and more:

- Fluegelman, Andrew, Editor. *The New Games Book*, Headlands Press Book, Doubleday and Company, New York, 1976
- Henton, Mary (1996) *Adventure in the Classroom*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt
- Lundberg, Elaine M.; Thurston, Cheryl Miller. (1997) *If They're Laughing...* Fort Collins, Colorado: Cottonwood Press, Inc.
- Rohnke, K. (1984). *Silver Bullets*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt.
- Rohnke, K. & Butler, S. (1995). *QuickSilver*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt
- Rohnke, K. (1991). *The Bottomless Bag Again*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt
- Rohnke, K. (1991). *Bottomless Baggie*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt
- Rohnke, K. (1989). *Cowstail and Cobras II*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt

Readers may have noticed that some of these ideas require money to fully implement. That's true, but remember, too, that about half of all education grants go unclaimed every year.

Really: No one in the building sat down and looked for them, then spent time filling out the applications. Change this for your staff: Give someone a period off every day just to work on finding and writing grants for others. Corwin Press, ASCD, NASSP have great books on grant-writing, and a quick search Chrome search on education grants will yield thousands of results. It's worth it.

In one of his speeches, President Kennedy said that we must use time as a tool, not a crutch. I would add, "...or an excuse," though it will happen occasionally. Let's not sacrifice good instruction to protect the master schedule. We're better than that. Administrators should take one thing off a teacher's "To Do" list for every new thing added, and we should not offer eight, nine short classes during the school day, and instead, offer depth but in fewer subjects. In addition, truly effective schools know that keeping up with the pacing guide is *never* the ultimate goal, but student learning is. Their teachers retain autonomy to do the right thing in its right time. It's arrogant to assume a committee designing the pacing guide over the summer will be able to account for every classroom reality during the year.

Time is the rarest mineral ore to teachers: so appreciated when given or discovered. Let's get good at its mining. This means we open possibilities heretofore untouched. We can turn schools into places of real learning and teaching – It's time we did.

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