

Managing the Learning Day

When we gather to learn in classes of 20 to 30 students, we seek ways to manage the day to ensure that each child in the group gives maximum attention to learning. This means that the lessons must engage the learners—meet them at their skill and interest levels. It means that students must learn in ways that are most effective for them—sometimes within the whole class, sometimes in small groups or with partners, and sometimes one to one with a teacher. It means that transitions throughout the day must be quick and designed and led at various times by everyone in the room so that everyone is invested in the smooth running of the day. And it means that disruptions need to be handled in a way that minimizes their negative effects on everyone. We manage the day right along with teaching the academic curriculum. Carefully designed routines help us succeed in both.

Sharing Responsibility

We need to explain this to children: *We use routines to get less important things done quickly and well so we have as much time as possible for more important things. Our routines need not be bothersome or time-consuming. We want to grow in reading and writing and math; we want to grow in leadership and cooperation; and we want time for fun, invention, and thoughtful questions. Good routines, smoothly carried out, help us get what we want.*

Collaboratively made and executed routines allow teachers and students to construct “democratic, reciprocal, and inclusive school climates.”¹ We enjoy school and learn more when we work together as a community to 1) share responsibility to make the day go well; 2) anticipate the breakdowns that surely

will occur; and 3) reflect: everyone thinks about how things are going and what could be improved. Routines that allow as much student self-management and independence as possible deepen students' satisfaction and engagement in learning at the same time. Routines allow everyone to share responsibility for the well-being of the class.

Satisfying the needs for competence and autonomy

Creating routines together reduces the feeling of being bossed around. If you are used to spontaneity, moving when you feel like it, and saying what you want when you want, shifting to a classroom community takes a lot of adjustment. Helping shape the day and assisting in guiding each other through it allows a sense of autonomy in a situation that, at first, can feel not only unfamiliar, or even foreign, to a child, but also arbitrary and unfair.

The list of needed routines is long: entering the classroom, taking attendance, the lunch count, classroom jobs, the signal(s) for attention, handing in homework, passing out papers and materials, asking questions, getting materials, going to the nurse, and on and on. Many schools spend a significant amount of time during the first few weeks of school establishing and rehearsing routines, because good routines mastered early in the year by everybody make for a more positive learning environment. Children can participate in figuring out how to facilitate a schedule that works for everyone.

What is the best way for us to handle the daily snack? How can we take care of our classroom supplies so they are not wasted or messy? How loud should our voices be so we can talk to each other and others can still concentrate?

If I am part of the problem, I want to be part of the solution.