

More Than Twelve Ways to Enjoy It All!

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"The most important action an effective teacher takes at the beginning of the year is creating a climate for learning."

—Mary Beth Blegan, former U.S. Department of Education teacher-in-residence

Enjoy classroom management? Really? I can just hear some of you saying that, but it is true. You can enjoy it by planning well in advance, sticking to the plan when you can and adapting the plan when you need to do so.

While researching for this article I found a great list of twelve "To-Do's" for starting a new teaching year. I have listed the ideas and my versions of them for your perusal and enjoyment.

Howard Miller, associate professor of education at Lincoln University (Jefferson City, Missouri) suggests 12 steps teachers can take at the beginning of the year to promote effective classroom management.

1. *Develop a set of written expectations you can live with and enforce.*
I have this in my room and I call them "Winning Behaviors" which I took particular care in writing in a positive manner. Here are my classroom expectations:
 1. Be on time to class
 2. Pay attention
 3. Ask questions
 4. Apply yourself to the assigned work/submit homework when it is due
 5. Bring all supplies daily
 6. Respect yourself and others
 7. Remember: When in class, you must fast!
(The last one was the only way I could think of saying "No eating or drinking" in a positive manner. It makes for great conversation in the beginning as to what it means.)
2. *Be consistent. Be consistent. Be consistent.*
When you go to your favorite market or see your favorite bank teller, what is it about the place or person that makes you want to return? Consistency is probably part of the answer; consistency in smiles, concern and quality. I think of my classroom in the same way. I strive to be consistent in everything I do so my students feel safe and comfortable. I am NOT perfect, but I do try!
3. *Be patient with yourself and with your students.*
Remember the age-old adage, "Count to ten before..." and then live by it. No matter the grade level you teach, this is very good advice. You will never know what a loss of patience might have done for that moment of teaching...and isn't that a good thing (never knowing, that is)!
4. *Make parents your allies. Call early and often.*

Use the word "concerned." When communicating a concern, be specific and descriptive.

I love email! I use it with any parents who are willing to share their email addresses with me. I keep a file of the parent addresses and I make sure I send out a small "FYI" each week or two alerting parents to upcoming events at school, current work soon due or assessments happening soon. I not only get to stay in touch quite regularly, I can do it really late at night or really early in the morning... the times of day that phone calls would not be appreciated. Of course, phone calls and written messages may be your only choice if your parents do not have email either at home or work. It pays, though, to ask in the beginning of the year and encourage them to use it to contact you as well. I put my email address on every item I send home to the parents. (I also have a very simple website for the parents and students.)

5. *Don't talk too much. Use the first 15 minutes of class for lectures or presentations, then get the kids working.*
I learned this long ago, and it is so very true. I try to get my students actively involved in the learning process as soon as possible. Whether it is summarizing an investigation from the day before or group-solving a related problem, I try to get the minds working and the pens moving.
6. *Break the class period into two or three different activities. Be sure each activity segues smoothly into the next.*
I find this particularly helpful, especially since our school changed to a modified block schedule. In a regular schedule of about 46 minutes, I would always have at least two different activities whenever possible. When doing this, transition time is very important and it helps if it flows naturally. In our long block times of 86 minutes I may have as many as four different activities, some short and some long, but again with easy flowing and natural transitions.
7. *Begin at the very beginning of each class period and end at the very end.*
This may be one of the most difficult strategies to keep consistently because of the deluge of distractions that teachers field each and every day. I try to keep my students on task by using the wonderful ideas of Harry Wong and practice, practice, practice the routines the first two weeks of school so my students know them by heart by week three.
8. *Don't roll call. Take the roll with your seating chart while students are working.*
This strategy is a great time saver. I have my students grouped and I can take roll in about

one–two minutes while my students are completing their agenda. The agenda is a book into which they must copy the learning we are doing for the day and any homework that is due. I also collect homework at this time using good helpers who organize the papers and then hand them to me. I have used this system for many years and love it. It takes time, though, to initiate it each year...sometimes I have to keep practicing past the two week mark to get the routines solidly internalized.

9. *Keep all students actively involved. For example, while a student does a presentation, involve the other students in evaluating it.*

This may sound so very simple and like what I would call a “V-8 Moment” (think of the commercials where people slap their heads and say they could have had a V-8) but it truly works. If you are new to teaching, talk with some experienced teachers at your site and get ideas from them for engaging the students. Keep adding to your repertoire, because teachers are always monitoring and adjusting...and keeping students actively engaged can be a moment-to-moment prospect sometimes.

10. *Discipline individual students quietly and privately. Never engage in a disciplinary conversation across the room.*

What works well for me is to ask the student to see me after class. I try to say this while I am within earshot of the students. This does not always happen but it is what I strive for each day. I also keep a written record if I ask someone to stay because I can forget just as easily as the student can forget.

11. *Keep your sense of perspective and your sense of humor.*

I have never believed in “Don't smile until...” because that is just not me. I believe that you must be yourself because it will come through in what you do, and being true to yourself is just that...you! I should tell you I am known as a very demanding teacher because I have high expectations for my students. I believe teachers are a very special breed of person with a caring heart, a guiding manner and the passion for lighting “light bulbs” above the students’ heads! So...keep those lights on!

12. *Know when to ask for help.*

I really do not know what I would do without the personal resources I have networked and nurtured over the years. If you have parents who are experts in the subject areas you teach, solicit their help. It can turn into a lifetime friendship and a wonderful resource. I know first hand because I have had the privilege of having several wonderful engineers work with my students for a total of over 15 years. We stay in touch and share ideas. The engineers also still visit my students and share their real world experiences whenever they can.

I know all of this sounds like a daunting amount of work and effort. I truly hope that even just one idea I have shared will help make your school year the best one yet. Plan for a great year and then have one. Be positive, be good to yourself and your students, communicate well with students and parents...it is good for you...it is good for your students...and it is good for science!

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