

PART 4

Classroom Systems and Routines

Creating classroom systems and routines is a powerful way to put learning on the fast track and streamline the instructional processes that can eat up precious learning time. For this reason, I would strive to implement the following routines; to start the year with discipline-building activities that will gradually become “systematized” through routine implementation. The routines outlined below are a few creative ideas for a first-year K-12 teacher. There are virtually infinite ways to routinize a process in the classroom. Lemov (2016) states that “routinizing procedures requires a strong start, consistency, and patience.” As Lemov points out, “it’s almost always worth it” (p. 59). Many by-products can be garnered from a system or routine.

Routine 1: When students enter the classroom

Develop a series of brief starter activities to begin each class on a positive note as students walk into the learning environment. The activity listed below is called *Sign the Classbook!* It eliminates the need for taking attendance and is simple to implement. It also brings order to a generally chaotic process and provides an outlet and exercise for student self-expression. The instructor can learn much about each learner through the answers and responses provided.

Sign the Classbook!

The instructor will purchase or create an official class guestbook. Students will sign in each day when entering the class and answer a simple question beside their name. There will be a new question each day, like the examples shown below. Each day, the students' comments will begin to reveal their identities, personalities, traits, preferences, and thought patterns.

The instructor will learn more about each student's personality, interests, and values. This information can be used to tailor instruction in the classroom for each student. The data can also be used to create other meaningful lessons and activities that students will find compelling and fun. The overarching objectives are to:

1. Bypass attendance.
2. Start each class session with positivity.
3. Learn more about the students through their responses to the questions.

Below is a sample week of guestbook entries. The questions can be serious, funny, insightful, or open to allow students to express themselves fully through language and writing. This activity has much potential for further development. For example, the instructor could integrate selected student responses to create a wall bio for each student or write up favorite lists for the school yearbook.

Restrictions: Any use of student entries from the class book would come with the student's full blessing, and identifiable information could only be used to help the student socially, academically, or enhance the student's experience positively. It must not cause harm or distress to the student. It must be restricted to school-related contexts, events, and activities and be treated as a meaningful and respected contribution to the learning community.

Sign the classbook, leave a comment (Sample questions)

1. *Monday - What was the last song stuck in your head? Respond with the name of the song or artist.*
2. *Tuesday - What was the last film you watched? Respond with the film title and rate the film in two sentences or less.*
3. *Wednesday - What three words come to mind when you hear "diversity"?*
4. *Thursday - What is happiness to you in three words or less*
5. *Friday - Write a comment in six words or less that reflects your mood today?*

This routine aims to establish positivity and order at the start of each class. The practice enables the instructor to learn more about each learner. The above questions should be simple and can be serious or humorous. Students can write about their favorite musical artists, spectator sports, tv personalities, places visited, etc. The instructor will develop sensitivity and understanding of students' social and cultural identities. This information will also reveal learning needs and interests in the classroom and away from school. The activity has immense flexibility. The sign-in book could be a tool for keeping regular and consistent attendance. The questions can be funny, serious, academic, philosophical, and thought-provoking, but they should all bring about feelings of self-affirming positivity.

Routine 2: Student hall passes during class hours

The routine for accessing a hall pass for the bathroom will follow a specific protocol. The main entrance will keep two different wooden hall passes. One pass will be for girls and the other for boys. Students always need a hall pass to exit the classroom per school policy. Responsibility is a privilege. Therefore, students can leave their desks during class to retrieve a hall pass, provided they follow the protocol. This protocol is based on the same routine already practiced by the faculty members of the elementary school where I completed my fall internship.

The protocol for hall passes is as follows:

1. There will be one bathroom hall pass for girls and one for boys.
2. Passes will be kept at the main entrance.
3. Students must sign the hall pass log when leaving the classroom, and sign back in when returning, noting the sign-out and sign-in times.

4. A maximum of one boy and one girl student may be out simultaneously on a bathroom break. When a boy returns, another boy can go. When a girl returns, another girl can go.
5. Each student must sign the bathroom log and note when they exited the classroom.
6. Upon returning from a bathroom break, each student must sign in and note the exact time.
7. Bathroom breaks will be limited to five minutes or less per break and one break per class session.
8. Students must inform the instructor if a bathroom break requires more than five minutes.
9. One student may wait at the main entrance for another student to return from the bathroom.
10. Any student who is found to violate the bathroom protocol intentionally will be required to ask permission to use the bathroom during class until trust is reestablished. The objectives are to devise an efficient hall-pass routine and reinforce the idea that responsibility is a privilege.

Routine 3: Homework dropbox

Students will submit assignments with a due date via the homework drop box. If there is a student intern or teaching assistant, I would ask them to check the drop box after each class and provide me with a list of student names who did not submit the assignment. I would record this before students can claim the instructor lost it. The homework dropbox will be kept in the front of the room near the hall passes and sign-in book. This routine will help streamline the collection of homework, saving precious class time for learning. The dropbox can also be used to submit worksheets and visual organizers completed during class.

Routine 4: Making up missed work

Extensions granted for assignments with a deadline will be considered case-by-case. This conversation will be between the teacher and the student and should take place before the assignment deadline, not before, but there will be exceptions. The point of the routines is not to set rules in stone but to provide a framework and protocol for situations that can become cumbersome for the teacher and student and to avoid potential he said-she said scenarios. In other words, deadlines must be respected. The instructor will always try to accommodate students with extenuating circumstances.

Routine 5: Quieting the classroom

There are many ways to creatively and respectfully quiet a class. One of the teachers at my placement school used a cowbell, which I did not like. It sounded crude. The sound made me think of a wrangler herding livestock, an analogy that someone might mistakenly interpret as equating students with cattle. The teacher never made this connection, but the sound made it easy for me to visualize. Any sound or gesture used to quiet a K-12 classroom should be serious. I suppose a sound doesn't need to be pleasing to the ear, but it shouldn't be offensive or make students think unpleasant or hilarious thoughts. In the EDIS 5030 course, various gestures were used throughout the semester, and some were amusing. This was a fun and effective way to quiet a college classroom, but K-12 students might not respond the same way to some funnier gestures. One interesting gesture would be to use real American Sign Language (ASL) to quiet the room.

Figure 2. How to sign the word “Silence” in ASL.



Source: ASL Teaching Resources (2015, Aug 20) *Learn How to Sign the Word Silence*. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4l1OpKpoXUM>

SIDE DISH 1

Working with Students' Families

K-12 public schools and districts increasingly expect ESL teachers to communicate and meet with students' families as an essential part of providing a quality, engaging, and culturally responsive education.

Step 1: Reach out to parents

Establish and maintain a database of parents' contact information, write a welcome letter to all parents and send it by email. Send a follow-up letter by standard mail for parents who do not respond.

Step 2: Meet parents

Attempt to meet parents at school functions and by reaching out to them via email. Some parents will not be comfortable interacting with the instructor. I will need to read and interpret these signals. Ultimately, the instructor must convey to resistant parents that they are accessible and available when appropriate.

Step 3: Remain connected to parents

Devise a rotating schedule for reaching out to parents to communicate positive feedback about their child in the classroom and positively address areas for improvement (if needed). Send holiday greetings before extended school breaks. And, when parents do something nice for the teacher, always express gratitude with a hand-written thank-you note.

Step 4: Interact with parents in accordance with their preferences

Some parents welcome enhanced communication and connectivity with their child's teachers, but others do not. I will do all I can to optimize teacher-parent communication and make people feel welcomed and comfortable. Still, I will respect the wishes of parents who prefer distance. Completing this assessment will not be easy. How can teachers interpret what parents think when they seem unreceptive to enhanced communication with the teacher? When parents show they prefer less contact with the teacher, continue to be welcoming and inclusive, but respond in a discreet and culturally sensitive manner.

Community-building strategy 1: Host an international day

Building a rich learning community takes effort. Part of that effort will include planning special events that bring people together for school-related events and activities. If the school already has an international day, inquire about getting involved. I would use this opportunity to create an inclusive, diverse, and interactive event that might incorporate fund-raising opportunities to support student clubs and organizations.

Community-building strategy 2: Start new academic clubs for Spanish and ESL learners.

Encourage all students to join. Remind them that participation will strengthen their college applications. Plan events to raise money for the club and connect with Spanish/ESL clubs at other schools.

Community-building strategy 3: Instructors should partner with other faculty and departments to bolster community-building efforts through cross-disciplinary activities and events ideal for bringing students, parents, and teachers together.

Examples for Community-building strategy 3 include:

1. **Plan an international market event** where students sell things they can make that represent other cultures and ethnic groups.
2. **Plan themed events that are creative and fun for students**, such as an Olympics-style competition. Students can dress up, put on war paint to represent different countries and cultures, and compete in the games for symbolic medals. Students can generate an extraordinary amount of energy and spirit to celebrate other cultures, languages, and traditions and raise awareness about the importance of diversity in the school community.
3. **Plan a talent show event** for music performances, art expos, skits, show-and-tell, etc.
4. **Host a cultural research symposium** where students can present on aspects about their home cultures and traditions with food, art, music, and crafts.

Welcome letter to parents

Dear Parents/Guardians and Students,

My name is Anton Brinckwirth, and I am thrilled to welcome you to my Spanish/ESL classroom this year! I have a doctorate in Instructional Leadership and a Master's in Teaching with endorsements in ESL and Spanish. I am originally from St. Louis, Missouri, and I have also lived in New England and the Bay Area in California. I am a passionate teacher enthralled with language, communication, culture, film, and media.

I look forward to being your child's Spanish/ESL instructor and meeting you at our opening parent-teachers conferences this week. I aim to cultivate a learning community that includes parents in their child's developmental journey to ensure a quality learning experience and a path to academic success. I am attaching a copy of the syllabus, which outlines my classroom policies and expectations.

If you have questions about the syllabus or any other matter, please email me at esl-instructor@myschool.edu to set up a meeting. I look forward to working with you and your child this school year!

*Sincerely,
Anton Brinckwirth*

REFERENCES

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