



CELEBRATING, REFLECTING & PREPARING

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Looking back - looking forward.

It is Term 4 and the year is rapidly coming to an end. While the year might have had challenges, now is the time to stop and look back on the year that has been. Celebrate the positives and prepare to make changes to things that can be improved. The beauty of being a teacher is that we value learning and there is always another chance to do things better.

As I look back on my early teaching years, I can see that I was so busy making sure I planned for every hour, I had little time left to look at big picture planning. I did, however, find time every week to record written reflections on the teaching and learning happening in my Year 4 class. The 30 minutes I allocated weekly often felt like time I didn't really have but it was the best things I did in my first year of teaching. It was a decision that grounded me as a reflective practitioner and a lifelong learner. I was certainly working hard to do the best that I could but when I compare my teaching practice now and then, there are some key changes that have made an impact on the effectiveness of my teaching.

Using your time efficiently is key to being always effective in this fast paced yet rewarding career. Plan smart and keep your focus on high quality teaching and learning. In this article, I will reflect on some of the changes I made after the first few years of my career and unpack different ways to use time more efficiently. Many things have changed, however, the one thing that has not changed is my desire to be a highly effective teacher.

Three suggestions for using time wisely

Time with your students is limited, as is the amount of time available to plan the teaching and the learning of your students. There is even less time for you to access the knowledge, expertise and experience of other teachers from whom you can learn, plan and improve your own teaching practice. Term 4 is a great time to start looking forward to next year; a time for reflection and refinement as to how you can best

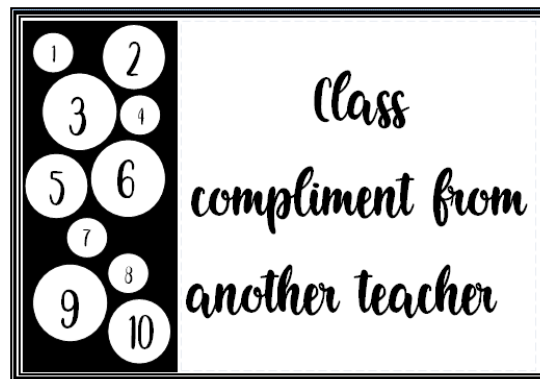
utilise your time. What is really worth spending your time on and what is not? Below are three suggestions for more effective ways to manage your time as an early career teacher.

1. Creating routines and managing transitions between lessons

Creating routines and structures at the start of the year can save you so much time, allowing you to teach freely as students know what to do and what is expected. Develop relationships with students that remove the need for extrinsic reward. This may take some time at the start of the year to develop and may feel as if it takes too long. However, the opposite is true and is time well invested. Once relationships and routines are established, you will find that they should hum along nicely for the rest of the year with minimal time needing to be reinvested. For example, with my first ever class I used a task called 'table money'. Although my students loved it and it *appeared* effective in improving student engagement and behaviour choices; in reality it took up too much classroom time. Time we never got back! Today in my classroom you will find class goals that foster students working together and create a learning environment that we all benefit from. Once the goal has been reached ten times, we stop everything and celebrate with a game!

Some of our class goals were:

- A compliment to the whole class from another teacher
- Class transitions completed in under two minutes
- Everyone at school on time three days in a row



Remember, the purpose of routines and structures is to *allow you to teach and students to learn*. If students have been taught how to transition from one activity to the next, to pack their bags, and what to do when they finish early – you will save so much time not repeating instructions. How many times this year have you had to repeat the steps for end of day pack up (everything off tables, everything off the floor, homework folder, home reading folder, bag locker empty). Imagine if each day all you had to say was, 'it's pack up time,' and students confidently completed the task.

2. Time spent planning and creating resources

It is important to prioritise what gets done during your allocated planning time. I like to allocate certain aspects of planning to each planning hour and save the jobs like printing, photocopying and even resource making for when it doesn't matter if I get interrupted, or when I have only five minutes spare. Focusing on content and lesson planning will ensure the urgent and important things are attended to, and you will maximise learning opportunities for your students.

Prioritise your time for collaborative planning opportunities and deepen your understanding of the learning activities being planned by asking questions around the how, what and why of these. Your time with other teachers is key to your own development. Ask questions! Watch people teach! Opportunities for growth are everywhere. There is no need to reinvent the wheel – so don't!

During planning time, it is important to remember what you already have instead of constantly creating new resources. Push back the dream of a 'Pinterest perfect classroom' and focus on the student outcomes you are trying to achieve. In my early years of teaching I was busy finding, making and laminating resources. I felt I needed so many things – a game for this, a poster for that. Yet many years into my career it is rare to see me create something that will only be used for one skill or concept. It is not that I don't have time, rather I now focus on developing more targeted resources that directly address student learning needs.

In my recent years as a School Mathematics Leader and classroom teacher, I have made huge changes in this area. In order to preserve my teaching and non-teaching time I am very selective in the resources I create and introduce to students. The criteria I use to determine if something is beneficial include:

- Can this game/resource be used to teach content, skills and concepts?
- Is it a game that students can learn and set up with minimal class time?
- Is the game likely to engage the majority of students?
- Will the game/resource allow for multiple exposures of a concept?
- Will the game/resource easily allow for differentiation?

As a school leader, I also consider whether the game/resource could be utilised across multiple levels, or even the whole school.

One of the [High Impact Teaching Strategies](#) (Department of Education and Training, 2017) that reliably increases student learning is Multiple Exposures. This is when teachers provide learners with multiple opportunities to engage with new ideas. This is based on current research on how people learn. Learning is an evolving and ongoing process and revisiting ideas multiple times in multiple ways is highly supportive of this.

3. Time for observation

Often the physical set up of schools means seeking feedback as a teacher doesn't happen as naturally as we would like. While I highly recommend participating in formal peer observation (being observed and being the observer) there are other options to increase your awareness of what other teachers are doing in your school. One of these is to make arrangements with a colleague to watch them during your non-teaching time. While you may not have the time to do additional peer observation every week, it's possible you may be able to informally observe a colleague while you complete other planning tasks quietly in the

back of a classroom. Comparing your own teaching to the teaching of others is a wonderful way to gain perspective on what aspects of your teaching could be more effective, and the best thing about it is you already have a new strategy to try in your own classroom.

No doubt, many people have helped you become the teacher you are and the end of the year it is nice to acknowledge them. A simple note of thanks and appreciation to your fellow teachers, mentors, parent helpers and even students will be greatly appreciated.

A key takeaway

Compare what your students can do now to what you were working on in Term 1. Sometimes when you are in the thick of teaching new concepts or routines it feels like no progress is being made but if you look back now, you will see all that has been achieved. Celebrate the academic growth, the progress with routines and your classroom culture. Celebrate the small steps that students made in developing as lifelong learners. All our students are on their own learning journey and progress will look different for each student. It's amazing how much we can improve in our first year of teaching, and how good it feels to consolidate learning in subsequent years of teaching. Acknowledge and celebrating your growth this year. One of the greatest gifts you can give students is to model being a lifelong learner.

Discussion with your mentor

Take some time to reflect on your teaching year so far and think ahead to next year.

- In what ways have your students made progress with their routines, structures and transition strategies this year?
- What routines, structures or transition strategies could you focus on further embedding next year?
- How effectively have you used your non-teaching time this year?
- What strategies could you put in place next year to make even better use of this time? Consider how you plan, share and store resources.
- How valuable were the opportunities you had this year for observation and feedback?
- How could you create or seek further feedback opportunities in the future?

References

Department of Education and Training 2017, High Impact Teaching Strategies: Excellence in teaching and learning,

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/support/high-impact-teaching-strategies.pdf>