Time and Organization

Teachers’ Use of Time
In addition to having positive attitudes about students' capabilities and using democratic practices to promote student responsibility, effective teachers increase learning by using time effectively. Time is a valuable resource; efforts at reform have suggested lengthening the school year, school day, and even the amount of time devoted to certain subjects (Karweit, 1989). However, improving learning through increased time isn't as simple as it appears on the surface. There are several types of classroom time. Allocated time is the amount of time a teacher designates for a content area or topic—it is the planned time. Instructional time is the amount of a teacher’s time that is left over after routine management and administrative tasks are completed. Engaged time is the amount of time students spend actively involved in learning. Finally, academic learning time is the amount of time during which students actively involved in learning activities are successful.

As one moves from allocated time to academic learning time, the relationship with learning becomes stronger (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1989). In classrooms where students are engaged and successful, high levels of learning occur, and learners feel good about themselves and the material they're learning (Fisher et al., 1980).

Unfortunately, teachers don’t always use time effectively. Research indicates that a great deal of class time is spent on non-instructional activities—often more than one-third of teachers’ allocated time (Karweit, 1989). Further, some teachers seem unaware of the value of time as a resource, thinking of it as something to be filled, or even “killed”, rather than thinking of it as an opportunity to increase learning (Eggen, 1998; Wiley & Harnischfeger, 1974).

The instructional ideal is to increase each of the other levels to the point where it's as close to allocated time as possible. When time is maximized, learning increases (Stallings, 1980).

Organization
Being well organized in one way of maximizing instructional time. How many times have you put something away and later couldn’t locate it? Have you ever said, "I've simply got to get organized," or, "If he'd just get organized, he could be so effective?" Organization affects both our lives and our teaching. Teacher organization affects learning because it determines how efficiently time is used (Bennett, 1978; Rutter, et al., 1979).

Organization includes the set of teacher actions that increase instructional time. These characteristics include starting on time, preparing instructional materials in advance, and establishing routines to maximize the flow of students. Teachers who have their materials prepared and have established efficient routines can devote their physical energy and working memory space to thinking about and guiding student learning. This is essential if they are going to regularly conduct engaging and meaningful learning activities.

Organization is also important from the learners' perspective. Well-established routines are predictable and give learners a sense of order and equilibrium, all of which contribute to a productive learning environment.

References


