It's Time for Centers

Megan Rothstein
Team Leader & Livonia Tutor

While tutoring in a third grade class in Livonia I have encountered an intriguing way of implementing centers into the classroom. Opposed to the traditional way of implementing centers; move from one center to the next in small groups my teacher uses a must-do, can-do system. The students have a set of expectations for each day and week that they must accomplish. For example, everyday students are expected to complete spelling and handwriting, and the assignments for each day are posted. After finishing spelling and handwriting students may move on to a must-do. The must-do's are as follows:

- Journal
- Writing
- Reading
- Listening
- Reading Comprehension
- Editing
- D.E.A.R
- Pocket chart/grammar

In addition to completing spelling and handwriting daily, students are expected to complete each one of these "must-do" centers during a two-week time period.

In This Issue

Are Kindergarteners too Young for Computers?

Erica Kresh
Livonia Tutor

Recently, I was tutoring in my kindergarten placement in Livonia when an interesting controversy came about. The teacher I work with was explaining to me how some staff members are against letting kindergartens use computers. They felt that the kids were too young to use the computers because of what may "pop up." In addition, they felt that they are too young to use the keyboard because they would not know how to use them. Interestingly, technology is part of the New York State standards for the kindergarten level. Students at this age should be able to complete fundamental tasks such as clicking a mouse. If they are too young to use the computers, how are they going to be able to meet these standards? Kindergarteners need to learn the basic concepts now, so they can add to these skills and be regular users of the computer in the future. Our world depends heavily on the use of computers and many of us do not know where we would be without them.

If the school you are tutoring at has a computer lab, I strongly recommend trying to get in and seeing for yourself what the students can do. I was fortunate enough to be at Livonia when the class was in the computer lab one day. It was amazing how many games and activities the students were able to participate it. There were spelling games, coloring games, mazes, matching games, etc. that were all halloween themed. These exercises were not only fun but educational. The students were able to practice learning their letters and new words all while obtaining new computer skills. I do not understand how someone can say that computers are inappropriate for kindergartners when I saw not only how much they were able to do, but how much fun they were having! The games and activities were designed with a variety of colors which appeal to this exact age group. If these students do not get to enjoy computer activities that were designed for their age level, who will?

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After students complete all of their must-dos they may move on to the can-dos. Examples of can-dos are:
- Science
- Fluency
- Art
- Computer
- Spelling games
- Vocabulary
- Math
- D.E.A.R

There are numerous students who are pulled out of the room during centers time, therefore their list of must-dos for a two-week time period is smaller.

I have found this system to be extremely beneficial for both teachers and students. The teacher is able to meet with small reading groups during center time. Also, students are able to work at their own pace to finish their work. However, they are expected to be responsible and complete all their work, otherwise they must finish it during recess time. At the end of a two-week time period students fill out a self-evaluation in which they evaluate what work they completed and how well they believe they worked. This system allows students to have some freedom in the classroom, while still holding them accountable.
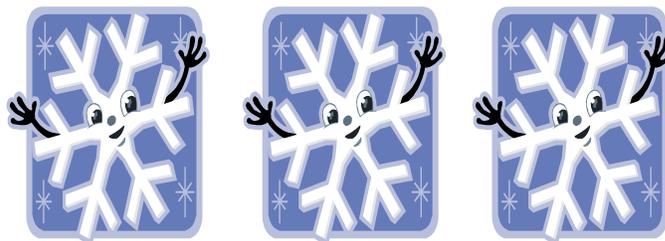
Dealing with Behaviors Effectively
Tracy Wangelin
Mt. Morris Tutor

Although educators wish that intrinsic motivation is enough to motivate good behavior, sometimes the practice of extrinsic motivation is needed. This strategy can be applied through various reward and punishment systems.

These are most successful when managed in a balanced way. For instance, over-rewarding could lead to the expectation from the student that they deserve something any time a good behavior is committed. Good behavior should be expected and thus should not be recognized as out of the ordinary. On the other hand, if a teacher over-punishes then the punishments do not seem as severe; rather, they would be looked at as a common part of the daily routine. If either techniques are over-used the effectiveness will likely decrease.

*Some examples of a **reward** system include:
1) Sticker Charts- student gets a sticker on a chart for a good behavior, once the chart is filled the student gets a prize
2) Point System- student gets a point, once points reach a certain number, a reward is given
3) Raffling- student gets a raffle ticket to put in drawing for certain prize, the more raffle tickets accumulated the better the students chances of winning

*Some examples of a **punishment** system include:
1) Name & Checks- name on the board, each check equals worse punishment
2) Stop-Light Technique- green, yellow, and red cards for each student, each card signifies different level of behavior
3) Loss of a Reward- loss of a reward gained through good behavior, ex. take a sticker back from student's chart

Another important concept to incorporate once in awhile is the "WE>me" philosophy. By doing class rewards and punishments based on entire group's behavior, a sense of teamwork will be learned and hopefully internalized. This is a great benefit since teamwork is utilized throughout our lives. If used properly, reward and punishment systems can be very effective in a classroom.

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Besides the computer lab, the students also benefit from computer use within their classroom. While the students in this classroom do not have a Smartboard, they have something very similar. They have a small grey machine on the whiteboard itself with a projector that hangs from the ceiling. Together, they produce the ability for Smartboard games to appear on the whiteboard without the board itself. The students have a blast doing activities on the board while practicing their language arts. Currently, the teacher has given me the opportunity to create a game on her computer with Microsoft Publisher that will be transferred to the "Smartboard." I have never even used Microsoft Publisher before and this opportunity has allowed me to explore the program while adding to my computer skills. However, I could never have done this without knowing basic computer skills, such as using a mouse. These computer essentials are pivotal for being able to not only use a computer but for expanding one's computer skills. If you have the opportunity to ask your teacher if you can create a game with Publisher or any program on the computer, or if you can take part in a computer lab exercise, I would definitely take the time to do this. I realized how much I didn't know about computers and how beneficial they can be to students of any age. Students, even at the kindergarten level, need computers for learning, exploring, and of course, having fun!

What to do when they don't want to do ANYTHING!
Kristin Ververs

As tutors and future teachers I'm sure many of you have already come across a student or two who just seem like they don't want to do anything. They would rather sit in their seats bored than look at another worksheet or correct another workbook. I have been fortunate to gain some experience of how to help these students without driving myself totally crazy and I would like to pass it onto you. Of course these suggestions are not fool proof and they have already been through trial runs, but each student varies, so I hope that you try these suggestions or that they inspire you to come up with strategies of your own.

- Sit there and don't coerce.
  If they truly need help and want to complete the assignment they will reach out to you.

Gotta Love Math!
January Gallagher

I have never had a more enjoyable job than tutoring for America Counts. Tutoring in a 5th grade class room in Dansville, I am allowed be creative with the material because the teacher tells me the lesson before I come so I know the material. I really enjoy this because it gives me knowledge of what I will be helping the students with and I can teach it using any materials I think would be useful.

An example of a lesson is teaching the students to estimate numbers to the nearest hundred, multiple the numbers, and finally say if the answer is in the 1's, 10's, 100's, 1000's, or 10000's. For example, 458 x 23 would be 500 x 20, and 500 x 20 is 10000. For this lesson, I created material to make learning more fun and engaging for all the students. On different colors of construction paper, I wrote 1's, 10's, 100's, 1000's, or 10000's. I used these by having the students work with a partner and after they estimated and solved the problem they can hold up what they believe the problem will fall around. It is a lot of fun and the students have fun trying to figure out the problem and if they estimated properly. I think kids love math when it can be learned through games.

Make Learning Fun
Samantha Petterson

As a kindergarten math tutor and a student myself, I have come to find that learning should be fun. Lessons should grab the students' attention and engage them from start to finish. If students are eager to learn and actively engaged in the learning process then classroom management, teaching, and tutoring become that much easier. Hands-on learning is one of the easiest ways to achieve this and my cooperating teacher has provided several examples of how to do so:

1) Incorporate movement into the lesson:
   a. "Blast-Off" is an activity in which students start off crouched on the ground and count backwards from any number, 15 for example. As they work their way towards zero they gradually straighten out and at last on blastoff they hop up as if blasting off into space.

Make Learning Fun

 b) "Step Down" is another activity that allows the students to move while simultaneously helping their counting. The teacher/tutor has the kids all stand in a circle and picks a number, 5 for example. Go around the circle and count off, starting at 1. Whoever ends up being 5 has to step down (sit on the floor) and then the person immediately after the student that sat down, as long as they themselves are standing, starts off with one again. When only two students are left have the kids make a prediction as to which child is going to have to step down and then test their predictions by having the two students count off.

2) Incorporate music whenever possible:

 a) For a lesson on patterns my cooperating teacher used the popular children's song "BINGO" and talked about the pattern that takes place within the song (taking away 1 letter and replacing that with a clap each time you sing the song). Getting kids to sing along was easy and they grasped the concept of a pattern more easily when it was explained in terms of their previous knowledge of and familiarity with the song "BINGO."

 b) Use all the senses:

  i. "Feely Bags" is something which I was unfamiliar with before working with kindergarteners. Feely Bags are cloth bags with objects placed in them that they're studying, like different shapes (square, rectangle, circle, triangle), and are used by teachers to help students grasp different concepts being taught through their sense of touch. For example, the teacher may put four shapes in the Feely Bag and ask the students to close their eyes and feel in the bag for the two shapes which are the same.

  ii. It's always fun when food is incorporated into a lesson. Try using things like apples or pears in lessons on counting. You can cut open the fruit for the students and have them count the seeds. After they've successfully counted the number of seeds the students get to enjoy a healthy snack. Students are easily motivated when some sort of "special treat" lies ahead, something different than what they're used to.

  iii. When thinking about things to do when teaching basic concepts of measurement consider using different tables, like a water, sand, rice, or macaroni table. At each table have a variety of containers and scoops available for the students to use and have them see how many of scoops it takes to fill each kind of container. Incorporating tactile activities into a lesson plan are important for two reasons: it makes learning fun and it gets the students actively participating in the learning process.

   I've noticed that in the kindergarten classroom(s) there is, and rightfully so, more hands-on learning than lecturing. I think that all tutors, regardless of grade level, should keep in mind that hands-on learning can often prove more beneficial than lecturing. So, my advice to tutors and teachers is to get your students involved in the lesson, have them experience things for themselves and learning will be easier and more enjoyable.

What to do...

- Let them use a special pencil or pen.
  I never thought this idea would work, but a simple mechanical pencil has now become a magical productive pencil that helps a student complete his assignments faster.
- Get to know your student.
  When you can't think of anymore ways to reword a problem without giving the answer, take a break and talk with your student. Not only will it take both of your minds off of the problem, it will also increase rapport with your student.
- Reinforce positive behavior.
  Simple stickers or erasers can boost a student's confidence especially after working through a tough assignment. If positive behavior continues candy rewards can be especially enticing.

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