

# A Day In My Classroom

January 26, 2012

I'm doing something new in my class: **I've stopped assigning homework every night and instead assign an exit ticket every day.** This is one of several posts describing this.

I've tried to write about this for a few weeks now but it's been hard to compress everything I want to say into one post. It took a while to realize that writing about this change to my classroom means (1) describing this new procedure I'm doing and how it fits in with the rest of my classroom procedures, (2) comparing the procedure to what I did last semester, which involves some serious reflection, (3) discussing something I casually refer to with friends as 'The Homework Problem', and (4) an opinion/reflection on what I consider effective use of formative assessment in my classroom. I can't do all of this in one post, even though it's all related. So, this post is attempting to address (1): A day in my classroom, culminating in a description of what a daily exit ticket looks like (if you just care about the exit ticket part, skip to the end)

So: I don't assign homework every night anymore (which I did do last semester). I also don't collect bellwork every day (which I did do last semester). Instead, my new classroom structure looks something like this: students come in and work on bellwork. I walk around and stamp the bellwork of students who have begun working diligently as soon as the bell rings. This stamp is worth 1 EC point. I do not let students make up bellwork if they are absent, so these EC points (in the long run) offset sporadic absences. The stamp is also an excellent nonverbal 'You need to focus and begin your work' signal with a tangible incentive (more points!) – plus, if I have a cool stamp, the kids like it.

After 5 minutes or so, we check the bellwork as a class. Students correct and score their own bellwork with a colored pen. I give partial credit if a student has corrected their mistakes on their bellwork. At the end of the week, I collect the bellwork and grade it. Bellwork is my 'sometimes you need to learn something by doing problems, seeing it modeled by the teacher, and learning from your mistakes' aspect of my classroom. I check bellwork by asking my students to tell me everything I need to do, which is a form of formative assessment – I get into their heads and, if 2 or 3 students can't tell me the right answer, I know I need to use this 'correct the bellwork' moment as a 'reteach this concept' moment, then assign an extra bellwork on the fly to see if they pick it up the second time around. On a good day, a student wants to write their answer on the board instead of me, so I get to sit down with the other students and be annoying. Bellwork is also a 'you may think you're not good at math but you really are and I'm going to make you more confident' moment when I could call a student who I know got the right answer but would normally be too shy to share it with the group – they don't like me when I call their name out of the blue, but hopefully they like how excited I get when they tell me the right answer. In my opinion, doing this enough times helps create a 'I'm willing to take a risk and be okay if I'm wrong' classroom, which is what I want.

After bellwork, we start the lesson, which can be very multifaceted depending on what I'm trying to do – are we focusing on practice? Are we learning something new? Is the 'something new' procedural or conceptual? Do I need to allot time to passing back papers and other administrative classroom interruptions? All of this happens. As it does, my kids do *a lot* of practice and structured notes – “Write this down. Do this problem. Refer to your notes. Check with your neighbor. Try this one now. How many people beat me to the answer? Good – let's keep going”. Trying to paint a generic picture of my day-to-day lessons is difficult because my classroom isn't generic.

Anyway – lesson is coming to an end. Students have the last 5-10 minutes to complete 3-4 problems that are an exit ticket. I didn't mention this before, but these 3-4 problems are up on the board the entire class period. Students can scan the problems as they come in and see what they are expected to do by the end of the period. These problems can be purely procedural practice problems – “evaluate... solve...”, ‘were you taking notes?’ problems – “write the definition... list the properties...”, or more challenging ‘get inside your head’ questions: ‘compare... describe... Mr S claims that \_\_\_\_ – is he right or wrong? explain why”. I make my students complete these on a half-sheet of paper. I've done them too, so I know the answers. When they finish, they raise their hands and I collect it. If they got 100%, I give them a thumbs up / high five / yell ‘Boom goes the dynamite’ (inside joke, which I will probably share one day). If they get it wrong, I tell them they got a problem wrong and tell them to fix it. There's a mastery component to this – you're not done until you have 100%. When the bell rings, students turn in their tickets to a basket I have in the center of the room. I grade each exit ticket every night and give detailed feedback. I return them to students (hopefully) the next day and only to students where the feedback is useful. Misscalcul8 asked on twitter one day ‘What do you give feedback on and how often?’ – there's my answer: every day there's an exit ticket.

Part of the reason for this switch is I make my kids *work* the entire period, which means we do a *lot* of practice problems as we go through the material and they are very good at checking with their neighbor – I don't need them to do 15 problems at home after we've done 10 problems in class. What I do need, though, is for them to do 1-2 rapid-fire practice problems and to see if they get them correct the first time through. For these types of exit tickets, I think to myself ‘what do I want my students to be able to do by the end of the lesson without assistance?’. They are usually procedural, based on example problems we completed, and straightforward. I can gauge how well my student's understood by gauging how many get it correct on the first try and how they interact with each other – are they asking each other ‘how do I do this?’, or are they asking ‘did you get this too?’ – I want the second one, and I want the other student to say ‘yes’ and then smile. Maybe they high-five too. And there's a rainbow in the background.

Or, if the lesson is geared more towards a conceptual understanding, then my exit ticket becomes more open-ended – more explanatory. These questions are guided by me asking ‘What do I want my students to understand by the end of the lesson? What new intuition should they have?’ I don't walk around and collect it – I let them turn it in to the basket and I check it later. Some examples of this distinction: today we did a lesson on area where I wanted them to understand that area is answering the question ‘how many squares can I fit inside a shape?’. My exit ticket: “Explain why the units to area are called *square units*”, “Mr S uses a grid to find the area of a rectangle. He then switches to a grid where the grid squares are *smaller*. Will the area of the shape increase or decrease? Explain why”. Tomorrow I want them to be able to use the formulas for area to solve

area problems. Tomorrow's exit ticket will be along the lines of "A rectangle has a base of \_\_\_ and height of \_\_\_ – what's its area?".

Okay. That's my classroom. I write all of this so it can be a base for some future thoughts on homework in a math class, some reflections on my last semester, and so I can tell you how this system is working out. But, that's enough for now. Now you have an idea of what it's like when I start and end my classes.

From → [Classroom Theory, First-Year Classroom](#)

6 Comments

1. [John Berray](#) [permalink](#)

I think having the homework on the board for them to see the entire period is genius. I think I'll give it a shot. Also, I struggle with knowing how much routine is too much routine, so it's useful hearing about another teacher's typical day.

[Reply](#)

2. [Deacon Klemme](#) [permalink](#)

I like what you are doing.

My issue in my class is that students take forever to do minimal things. I'll finish up with some instruction and begin worktime, but the student transition is anywhere from 4-10+ minutes for some. I too do not give homework, but it looks as if I may have to begin to just so they are getting the practice they need to have success. But then, they might not complete the homework either, so I'm back to square one.

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3. [Jennifer Lockett](#) [permalink](#)

I think that I'm going to steal your stamp idea... I have one class that has bell work. Stamping for Extra Credit is a good idea – grading every assignment has been killing me. I also like making them responsible for organizing it for hand in during the week.

Thank you for sharing your first year experience and growth. It's amazingly helpful – even for a totally different subject!

[Reply](#)

4. [Bryan Meyer](#) [permalink](#)

I appreciate that you have the courage to try this. Especially with math, some parents panic when they see that their student(s) doesn't have homework. There are lots of opinions/research out there about the ineffectiveness of homework:

<http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/edweek/homework.htm>

I stopped giving homework this year also. I teach in an "inclusive" environment (without tracking) and I only assign homework to the "honors" section of my class. I stopped assigning it from a social justice point of view. My thinking being that, for some students, lack of support, time, resources, environment, etc. prevented them from doing work at home. This negatively affects their progress, understanding, and grade in the class and, consequently, perpetuates

many of the stereotypes about who is “good at math.”

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