

A Day in the Life of a Self-Paced Teacher

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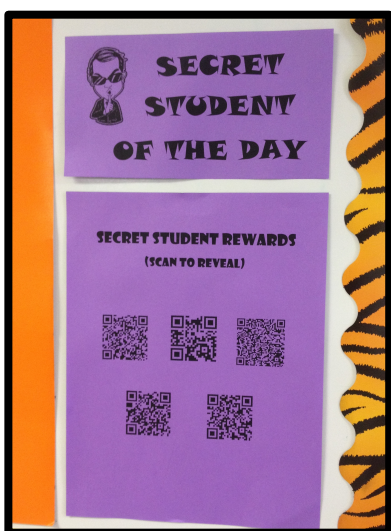


Introduction

I am a seventh year math teacher at Taylor County Middle School. As a result of Taylor County being a performance-based district, I teach 6th grade math but have students in my classes ranging from 4th-6th grade. Myself, along with my co-worker, Mrs. Jessica McCubbin, created the model for self-paced classes in our district. My current classes are all self-paced, which allow my students to move through the content at a pace that is suitable to them.

Early Morning

It's 7:00AM, and before heading down to the teacher's lounge for my morning coffee, I reach for my teacher iPad. As I proceed to walk down the hall, I access the random



name selector app on my device. I utilize this application to choose the “secret student of the day” for each of my classes. The “Secret Student” initiative is utilized as a motivator for my students to stay on task and to complete their work in this diverse classroom environment. Each class has developed a set of criteria for what hard work looks like in a self-paced class. If the randomly selected secret student exhibits the class expectations all period, they are revealed as the “Secret Student of the Day.” As a reward for meeting the class expectations, I created and posted QR codes in my classroom for students to scan. Once the code is scanned, a reward such as bonus points, preferential seating, “me time” on a game or device, candy, etc. is revealed.

After determining the secret student for each class period, I sit at my computer to create the bell ringer using Microsoft PowerPoint. I am extremely intentional in choosing the topic for my students' bell ringer each day. Looking at the deadline board in the back of the classroom, I determine that all students should have at least completed up through the lesson on dividing fractions yesterday. By creating a bell ringer on a topic that should have already been covered by my students, I am able to recognize students who are behind or struggling. Bell ringers can be as simple as a problem on the board for them to solve, or more interactive, such as having them

use the EduCreations interactive whiteboard app, Google Forms, Khan Exercises, internet searches, etc.

Self-Paced Classes

Around 7:55AM, I step outside the door to greet students coming into my class. A couple students are eager to put their stickers on the classroom chart indicating that they have completed all the activities for a particular lesson on their unit pacing guide. Two other students, who are ready for their next unit guide and materials, go to the colored drawer system labeled with the unit they need. One student shares with me that her mom was able to help her with an assignment because they sat down together and watched one of my teacher video lessons. The rest of the students begin accessing EduCreations, an interactive whiteboard application on their iPads, to complete the bell ringer that is on the Promethean smart board in the front of the room.

A second group of students enter the room after a couple minutes have passed. This group is comprised of 4th and 5th graders from the elementary school who have been bused up for sixth grade math content. Some of these students will leave my class a few minutes early to get bused back down to the elementary school while others stay for more accelerated classes.

Once students have had the opportunity to formulate their answers and show their work on their screens, I have them to hold up their iPads for me to see. This daily routine provides the opportunity to formatively assess students and helps me decide who I need to sit with and provide extra assistance to during the class period.

After the bell ringer, students who have proven mastery in the content are selected as peer coaches and asked to sit in designated locations in the classroom to assist other students needing help. The peer coaches are given bonus points for their efforts. They are also allowed to continue on with the content they are currently working on just as others in the classroom are. Traditionally, the teacher's voice is the main voice heard in a classroom, but in this new setting, I hear peer coaches teaching/re-teaching struggling students. As peer coaches move to their designated spots in the classroom, I hand back the six tests I graded the previous night. Not only was I able to grade the tests in one night but I was also able to provide meaningful written feedback on each test. I meet with these students in a small group on the rug in the front of the classroom to address misconceptions



and have conversations about the assessment. While I discuss the tests with the six students up front, the others are able to move on with the content and work through their unit pacing guides.

The two major underlying ideas behind my self-paced classroom is that students should be able to move on with the content without having to wait on me, their teacher, or the rest of the class and should have access to all unit requirements and resources to avoid having to come to me for directions on each activity they need to complete. Students have access to my teacher-created video lessons along with worksheets, online simulations, partner activities, etc. for the unit they are currently working on.



When I finish working with the test correction group, I scan the classroom and see a group of students working on their fraction project on the floor in the back. Checking out in the hall, I discover a partner pair on beanbags who are taking interactive notes on a teacher-created video lesson over multiplying mixed numbers. Students sitting along the wall in the classroom can be seen working on an online simulation together, while others are at their desks playing a card game on

integers. There is also a student at the sticker chart, charting his progress. By placing a sticker next to his class number on the chart, he is indicating that he has completed a “box” on his unit guide sheet. If an outsider came to my classroom they may become a bit overwhelmed with this unconventional setup. However, I refer to this typical scene as “controlled chaos.” Students know what is expected of them and are motivated to learn and, therefore, this setup is successful for both her and her students.

I also notice a group of three students struggling with the dividing fractions lesson. I ensure that they have listened to the YouTube video song on dividing fractions posted on Vbrick, which is a housing place for all teacher-created and other videos. The students realize that they had overlooked it on their unit guide sheets and start to listen and sing along.

As the class period comes to an end, it’s time for me to reveal the secret student. I announce that John was the secret student for the day and explain that he met all the expectations set by the class. John is then allowed to scan a QR code posted in the room. Students clap for John as the bell rings and as I direct their attention to the Friday deadline board, indicating the lesson they must at least have completed by tomorrow.

At 9:50AM, I greet my second block of math students. Even though this is a self-paced sixth grade math class like my first block, it's apparent that depending on where students are in the content, the scene is much different. After the bell ringer and spending time assisting several small groups and individual students, it's time for lunch. On their way to lunch, I notice a few students from the traditional sixth grade math class in the hallway who were absent the day before listening to one of my teacher created video lessons. Not only do my students utilize my video lessons but the students and teacher from the traditional sixth grade math class do as well.

After lunch, students jump back into their pacing guides and work on an array of activities until the class period is over. At 1:10PM, my 3rd block of math students begin to enter and the process starts again.

After School

As the afternoon bell sounds to dismiss bus riders, I post a sign on the door to my classroom that reads, "Recording in Progress. Please Do Not Disturb." I plug my headset into my computer, bring up a PowerPoint lesson from my last sixth grade unit on statistics, access screencast-o-matic.com (free online recording software program) and begin recording a video lesson to post on Vbrick. Several accelerated students, who are motivated to finish the content early, have been working well beyond the deadlines in order to have the opportunity to move on to seventh grade content before the end of the year. With such enthusiasm towards moving on with the content, it's vital that I am prepared with the material and video lessons they need when they need them.

Tomorrow is Early Release Friday in the district and I will be meeting with one of my Professional Learning Communities, which consist of all the teachers in the math department. I also plan on preparing for the potential Cyber Snow Days, which the district is piloting for the state in order for students and teachers to make up days missed due to snow. Students with internet access at home will be able to access their unit pacing guides and digital materials, while students without internet access will have a folder sent home containing paper copies of their materials.

Night

When I get home, I go ahead and grade the few quizzes and tests that were turned into me that day in class. The days of dreading to grade over a hundred assessments at one time are over. In my self-paced classes, students take tests when they are ready for them, which has me grading only 5-10 tests per night and provides the time to write meaningful feedback at the top of each assessment.

As a result of being able to sit with small groups and individual students throughout the entire class period today, I begin to think about my plan of action for tomorrow.

I decide which student and/or students in each class period I need to make time to work with the following day that seemed to be struggling.

I am thankful for the opportunities that this type of learning environment has provided both my students and myself and would highly recommend others giving it a shot!