



Teaching Threads

Teaching Smarter

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In today's there-is-just-too-much-to-do world, we are all looking for ways to be more efficient. In this document I present ten suggestions for *Teaching Smarter*, not just harder. As you read through these suggestions, consider your current situation and personal goals for strengthening your teaching. Select the one or two suggestions to work on for a few weeks adding additional suggestions when you are ready. Teachers have found working with a colleague to be helpful, affirming, and fun.

1. Get An Attitude

The Smart Teaching Attitude is a positive, enthusiastic, capable, and efficiency-focused attitude demonstrated by teachers who:

- Are proud to be professionals in education
- Continually engage in personal education and independent learning
- Value information
- Believe that all students can be taught regardless of behavioral, family, emotional, social, community, and/or environmental factors
- Believe in their personal ability to facilitate positive changes in the lives of students
- Accept the responsibility for student progress
- Demonstrate an excitement for learning
- Have fun on the job!

2. Access Information

Teachers who work smart, are smart. Smart teachers take responsibility for what they know and don't know. They seek out reputable and evidence-based information by

- Joining professional organizations

- Reading professional publications, State Departments of Education publications, educational agencies, government, higher education, and institution documents
- Attending workshops, conferences, in-services, meetings, podcasts, webinars, and training sessions
- Researching in libraries and on the Internet

3. Prioritize, Plan, and Prepare

Smart teachers are *pro-active*, not *re-active* in their work to strengthen student academic and behavioral skills. When prioritizing, planning, and preparing instruction they consider

What Can I Do to Make it Easier for My Students to Learn and Behave?

They seek out classroom strategies that

- *Prevent* student academic failure and undesired behavior
- *Increase* student academic progress and desired behavior
- *Decrease* student academic failure and undesired behavior

One Smart Teacher

One of the smartest teachers I've met was a fourth-grade teacher in a very small town in Iowa. She taught in an old school with windows and bookcases along one side of the classroom. Before she left school each afternoon or evening, she planned every minute of the next day. She set out in order every book, ruler, worksheet, flashcard, and material she and the students would need on the bookcases. She did not leave until everything was planned and ready for the next day. As you can imagine, her teaching was efficient and her students were engaged. No matter what happened during the day, a sick student, a fire drill, a parent visit, instruction continued. The

**WORK
SMARTER
Not Harder**

student teacher in this classroom learned an invaluable lesson from this teacher.

4. Use What's Effective and Efficient

An effective teacher is one who

- Maximizes the time students are truly engaged in learning
- Maximizes teacher-directed instruction and minimizes independent seatwork
- Continually and accurately monitors the effectiveness of teaching and makes necessary changes
- Carefully monitors student progress and promptly provides corrective feedback in a positive manner
- Works to identify the causes of student difficulty and address them through teaching and providing supports
- Maintains a high level of positive teacher-student interactions
- Monitors the difficulty level and demands of instructional tasks
- Creates and maintains a classroom environment with a strong academic focus
- Provides students with options and choices
- Designs meaningful, purposeful, relevant learning activities which present variety, challenge, and motivation for students
- Serves as a model for students in behavior, attitude, academic achievement, enthusiasm for learning, and respect toward others

5. Evaluate Your Outcomes

Teaching smarter involves using a Data-Driven Instruction model in which teachers

- Define the critical behaviors, skills, or outcomes to be taught
- Determine how student learning will be assessed
- Assess (pretest) student skill/knowledge level before instruction
- Design instruction using evidence-based strategies
- Deliver instruction
- Assess, document, and evaluate student learning and the effectiveness of instruction
- Return to step one and repeat

This process helps teachers focus on what will be taught, how it will be taught, how students will demonstrate their learning, and an evaluation of the results of instruction.

6. Use Existing Resources

Smart teachers seek out and use several professionally prepared resources to provide structure and efficiency to their teaching including

- Common Core, State, and District Standards
- General education curricula with the Teacher Edition and supplemental materials
- Special education curricula and IEP's
- RTI and PBIS resources

The most effective curricula contain standards based goals and outcomes for students supported by evidence-based research, a sequential scope and sequence of skills to be taught, comprehensive instructional plans, and authentic assessment tools. Smart teachers know that each curriculum must be taught completely and correctly to be effective and that short cuts lead to achievement cuts.

Teacher Editions

Too often teachers are asked to teach without access to the Teacher Edition. This is unfair to the teacher and to the students. Having access to and using the Teacher editions of approved curriculum provide information essential for Smart Teaching including

- *Scope and sequence of goals, Objectives, and skills Standards*
- *Evidence-based methods of instruction*
- *Comprehensive lesson plans*
- *Cooperative learning activities*
- *Problem solving activities*
- *Investigation and discovery lessons*
- *Independent and group activities*
- *Alternative teaching methods*
- *Practice, review, enrichment, extension, corrective, and differentiated activities*
- *Manipulatives*
- *Assessment tools*
- *Across the curriculum activities*
- *Methods for grouping students*
- *Connecting content to students' lives*

- *Strategies for attending to levels of student learning*
- *Ideas for community learning*

7. Teach With A Focus

It has been said that teachers are masters at multi-tasking, making hundreds of decisions every day. Given that it may be difficult to maintain focus on what's really important. Smart teachers focus on

- Student achievement not compliance
- Teaching skills that will improve every student's quality of life and ability to function in current and future environments
- Building student independence and resiliency
- The realities of the worlds our student's live in.

While planning and delivering instruction, Smart Teachers consider the following.

What will my students be able to do or know after this lesson, that they could not do or did not know before the lesson?

Is what I am teaching today going to help my students be successful in their current and future worlds?

8. Maximize Time

Research recommends that all students actively receive or respond to instruction for at least 50 minutes out of every hour of instruction. Research also confirms that the more time students are engaged in instruction, the more they will learn and the less they will misbehave. Consider how time can be spent in the classroom.



- Time students receive and engage in instruction
- Time students respond to instruction
- Time required to manage materials and technology
- Time spent on assessment
- Time spent on relationship building
- Time set aside for breaks
- Time needed for administrative tasks

- Time spent waiting
- Time spent on interruptions
- Time responding to student disruptions and undesired behavior

Next consider, how time is spent in your classroom. Several teachers, after recording their classroom activity, have been surprised by their results. Consider now, your ability to control how time is spent in your classroom and

What can you do to increase the time students are directly involved in receiving and responding to instruction?

Take the time to manage your time.

- Use an appointment calendar and work planner. If you have 30 minutes of planning time, use them all. Don't spend 20 minutes checking your phone.
- Spend the first and last 15 minutes of each day reviewing your calendar and creating a simple To Do List.

Today	This Week
Tomorrow	This Month

- Set aside a block of time (30-45 minutes) each day to return emails, phone calls, and texts and stick to it.
- Make every minute count. Work as efficiently as you can everyday.
- Train yourself to just do it. Select one task, keep your focus, and get it done. Be aware of research that shows that multitasking is not efficient.
- Let some things go. If the Teacher's Edition has a good lesson plan use it. Avoid searching the Internet for other ideas. It's a huge time waster.
- Give jobs away.

9. Give Jobs Away, Give Jobs Away, and Give Jobs Away

This is so important I had to repeat it! Take a good look at your To-Do List and the jobs you do every day in your classroom. Some of those jobs are ones that *only you* can do while others can be completed by students, student workers, classroom assistants, or school volunteers. Devote your time and energy to

those jobs that require your expertise and skills.

I worked with a very Smart Administrator who trained students to run the copy machine and told her teachers, "I don't want to see teachers spending time making copies. You are too valuable." Prior to that I had been reluctant to ask others to make copies for me. This administrator helped me realize that I was hired for my expertise in teaching which gave me permission to give simple jobs away and focus on the jobs that I was hired to do.



It's OK For Who It's For
My career has been in special education, unfortunately I've too often experienced "It's OK for who it's for." I've been refused the curricula used in the general education classrooms and directed to use discarded, outdated books. I've taught in a janitor closet and storage area behind the stage. I've worked in schools with duct taped doors, chairs, and desks. Teachers are still asked to teach students without access to appropriate curricula, materials, furniture, and supplies in special education and highpoverty schools. Many states allow students requiring special education to be taught by teachers with little or no special education training. It's not OK for discriminatory educational practices. "Yagottawanna" be ready and willing to be an advocate for all students.

10. Surround Yourself with Yagottawannas

Several years ago, Algozzine, Ysseldyke, & Elliott (1997) presented the concept of "Yagottawannas" as a strategy for motivating students. I have adapted this to create "Yagottawanna" Teachers who

- Demonstrate the Smart Teaching attitude
- Believe "I can do it and I will work until I do."
- Work to be the best they can be, 24-7-365
- Are prepared and willing to take a stand
- Are informed, alert, involved, prepared, and ready
- Give whatever it takes and care about the results
- Accept responsibilities
- Just say *No* to mediocrity, just OK, whatever, oh well, the status quo, quitters and complainers, yeah butters, and to those who say "It's OK for who it's for."

Surround yourself with "Yagottawannas" in your professional and personal life. Teachers who seek out positive, supportive, and knowledgeable colleagues, are more likely to be successful and teach students who are successful.

Most teachers strive to be Smart teachers. But "being smart" isn't only measured by your grade on a test or in a course. It is measured by how you use your time, complete your work, set goals and plans to achieve those goals, and work to become the best professional you can be. Smart Teaching is making the decision every day to work efficiently and effectively with integrity.

As always, my intent in presenting these activities is to help teachers answer this question -

What can I do to make it easier for my students to learn and behave?



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