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Design Team Project:
Avoiding Dead Time

Dead time in the classroom is a problem that many classroom teachers struggle to handle, whether they consider dead time to be the minutes before waiting to line up for lunch or recess or time in between assignments. Eliminating dead time helps improve classroom management by decreasing behavioral problems and increasing student motivation to work. It also ensures that students get the most from their time spent in the classroom.

It is important to curb dead time since there is already a limited amount of time in the school day; therefore, it is necessary to find ways to stimulate the minds of students academically whenever possible. As mentioned earlier, avoiding dead time in the classroom helps teachers with classroom management since students who finish early are not disrupting others still working. Below are five possible solutions to help teachers avoid dead time that were developed after considering input from experienced teachers. If performed properly, teachers will see an increase in student motivation to complete assignments in anticipation of using the different activities set up around the classroom.

Five Solutions to Avoid Dead Time

1) *Individual Reading Books*

Many classroom teachers ask students to have a book on or in their desks at all times. It would also be beneficial for the students if their teacher had a classroom library which is easily accessible for students to choose an independent reading book. Another option is to have book boxes on the students tables filled with books from which the

students can choose. Students can be directed to read whenever they complete an assignment and do not have another task to complete. In this way, the students are quiet while they are also becoming better readers. They will come to enjoy reading more when they are given the opportunity to read books which interest them rather than solely those assigned by the teacher.

2) *Weekly Folders*

Another way to avoid dead time is to assign tasks at the beginning of the week that will not be due until the end of the week. While time may not be specifically set aside for these assignments to be completed, students are free to work on them during any extra time they have. This time could be in the morning after they finish unpacking and before the teacher starts instruction or it could be in the few minutes of transition between two subjects. The assignments could be review worksheets, handwriting worksheets, or journal assignments. It is the student's responsibility to complete the assignment by the end of the week, in whatever time is convenient to him or her.

3) *Writing Alternatives*

One of the solutions to avoid wasted time in the classroom is for students who finish first be able to type up what they write. Students are constantly writing in journals, writing during language arts lessons, and writing as extensions for other lessons. When students need to have final drafts of their writing, the students who finish first will have the opportunity to type their final draft. At the elementary age, students type slower than they write. By allowing students to type their writing, it gives students motivation to finish because they are able to do something fun and different. Also, typing is a practical skill that students need to practice and can serve as another proofreading tool. Typing

gives the students one more opportunity to review their work and fix any mistakes. By typing their writing, students are not just wasting time sitting at their desk; rather, they are practicing something they probably do everyday at home. As with the other solutions to avoiding wasted time in the classroom, students will find typing their writing a reward and motivation to complete their work on time.

4) *Enrichment Bags*

Enrichment bags are a great way to occupy students' time after they have completed assignments or while waiting for others to finish their bathroom breaks. Each month, teachers can update the bags with materials that help students review classroom topics or extend topics beyond original instruction. These bags are not intended to be used for a grade and are only available for the students own enrichment. The bags should be filled with activities that students look forward to doing, in other words, not busy work. Each classroom teacher can develop a system with the bags that works best for his or her classroom, but one suggestion would be to have three to four sets of four to five bags (depending on the number of students) that share the same activities. This way, students can collaborate and receive help on a difficult task and students will be able to complete each set before the bags are changed with new materials. Another benefit to having some bags with the same materials is that it makes the workload lighter on the teacher, which is a key concern for experienced and novice teachers.

5) *Classroom Centers*

Classroom centers are another alternative to avoid dead time. Teachers can set up centers around the room that students can immediately go to when finished with their classroom work. Students can be assigned to a specific center weekly so they know

where to go without having to ask. One of these centers could be a computer station where students use interactive websites, computer games, or SOL review PowerPoint. Other ideas for centers include a writing center or math center where students can choose from a variety of games or activities relating to these subjects. These centers should be located away from the students' desks or tables where other students may be working on graded assignments. As with the enrichment bags, classroom teachers should find a routine and method for making classroom centers work effectively in their own classrooms.

The previous five solutions have been compiled to offer classroom teachers a variety of approaches to help eliminate dead time in the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to find one or two methods that work best in their classroom to implement at one time and may even consider changing these implemented methods each quarter or semester to help keep students excited about the activities.