Four Instructional Strategies that Impact Student Achievement

by Barbara R. Blackburn, PhD

In today's age of accountability, it's important to choose the most effective instructional strategies—those that have the most impact on student learning. Let's look at four that can make a difference in your teachers' classrooms.

Strategy One: Begin Your Lessons with Excitement

Ideally, you want to start your lessons with an exciting activity that immediately engages students. When I was teaching, I began each lesson with a "Do Now" or some type of written work students could do independently while I took care of attendance. My students were bored, and by the time the lesson started, they simply weren't ready to learn. Instead, let's look at some other ways to begin your lessons.

First, for the topic you will be teaching, create a webpage or blog entry that mimics an online encyclopedia entry. Include at least four content errors. Ask students to compare the webpage to a credible site, such as the National Geographic Channel. Their task is to correct the mistakes. This is a great way to build some prior knowledge and hone students' analysis skills.

Next, you can begin the lesson with a question to prompt their thinking. Dr. Richard Curwin shares a variety of questions to begin your instruction (see table below).

Another option is to begin the class with quick debates (see table on page 2). Perhaps today's social studies lesson requires students to analyze multiple perspectives. Or, you want students to compare main characters from two stories. Let's set the foundation by allowing students to debate two sides of an issue. They might debate which is better, the blue or red crayon. Or perhaps the issue is whether iPhones are better than Androids. The topic itself does not need to relate to your lesson; you are teaching students how to look at things from different points of view.

Strategy Two: Playing Games to Learn Vocabulary

Next, we need to experience new words and concepts multiple times in a variety of ways. Too often, we expect students to fully understand a word after they have read it one time. However, reading a word multiple times doesn't ensure understanding either. Your students need to play with words in fun and different ways to help them learn.

- **Middle school math:** What does Martin Luther King have in common with algebra? (Answer: Both are concerned with equality.)
- **First grade science class studying particles**: What is the smallest thing you've ever held in your hand? *(Warning: Do not use this question in high school.)*
- **Elementary art**: If humans could be a color other than any of the colors that they already are, what color would they be? Why do you think this? Draw some people of this color.
- **Elementary English**: What is the best name for a book about your life?
- **Second grade reading**: We are going to redesign the alphabet. What three letters can be eliminated? (Answer: C, Q, X)
- **Eighth grade physical education**: Why is a soccer ball harder to control inside the gym than on the field? (Answer: Friction)
- **Middle school English**: Why don't *good* and *food* rhyme? Given the definition of best, can you have more than one best friend?

Source: http://www.edutopia.org/blog/questions-answers-drive-great-lesson-richard-curwin

Sample Debates
Water vs. Ice
TV vs. Internet
Moon vs. Sun
Squares vs. Triangles
Numbers vs. Words
Poems vs. Raps
Sweet vs. Salty

During "Head Band," Erin Owen writes a word on a sentence strip and makes it into a headband. First-graders in her class give clues to the person wearing the headband, who must guess the word. All students are involved, and the activity encourages students to learn from each other.

James Good, a middle school drama teacher, points out that his students find the language of Shakespearean plays challenging. For key scenes, students are divided into groups with five acting parts and a group director. "Students identify difficult turns of phrase or specific vocabulary words and make their best educated guess as to meaning. They run lines with one another to improve pronunciation and dramatic reading. The director makes suggestions as to simple stage movements that can be done in the small space at the front of the room. The group discusses appropriate tone, body language, and facial expression. Concerning themselves with the dramatic

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aspects of presenting to the other three groups more or less forces them to make meaning. Each group takes a turn in a kind of 'drama slam.' They try to outdo the others and get delightfully hammy."

Strategy Three: Problem-Based Learning

Problem-based learning is "an inquiry process that resolves questions...Student inquiry is very much an integral part of PBL and problem resolution" (John Barell, 2006, p. 3). You may be thinking that PBL sounds a lot like projects. The main difference is that in project-based learning, the teacher directs the questions and assigns the final product. In problem-based learning, the students are more self-directed and come up with many of their own questions.

I recently visited a kindergarten classroom using PBL. Students were learning about various colors, and one student asked, "Are there other colors we don't know about?" The teacher took advantage of this question, and asked students to work with a partner to create their own colors. Students had total flexibility with how they determined their color, how they would explain the color to the class, and how they would show and/or demonstrate the new color. As one student said to me, "It was awesome to answer our own question!"

After reading *The Moon Book* by Gail Gibbons, students in an elementary classroom asked, "How long would it take to go to the moon?" In groups, they decided on a method of transportation, such as a rocket or on a light beam, researched the time it would take to make the trip, created a list of needed supplies, and then described their travels. Some wrote a book, others produced a simple video, but all combined creativity with information to demonstrate their learning.

Remember, with problem-based learning, there is more control

with the students. They generate questions based on a standard or essential question, and then discover the answer through their own research. This doesn't mean that you allow them to stumble through the project on their own; you'll need to guide and facilitate as well as frame parts of the activity to provide a loose structure. As an end result, students choose to demonstrate their understandings in a creative way via videos, blogs, reports, models, experiments or metaphors.

Strategy Four: Using Writing to Demonstrate Learning

Finally, we can use writing to allow students to "show us what they know." I liked using a "pizza wheel" to review material students were assigned to read before class. Each student writes a fact he or she learned on one of the pizza slices. Then, working in small groups, students pass their papers to the next group member, who also writes a fact. This continues around the circle until each pizza is full. Students can discuss the material using the pizza wheels as a prompt, then you can review with them as a group.

In another kindergarten classroom, they used pizza wheels divided into thirds. The teacher told students a number, such as four, and the students had to rotate visually expressing the number. They could write the number itself, spell out the word or draw the number of items that the number represented. Although you can measure your students' understanding in an oral discussion, asking each student to write his or her response ensures all students are involved in the lesson and provides an opportunity for every student to respond.

A Final Note

There are a variety of instructional strategies that can impact student achievement. Planning to incorporate those which are engaging, motivating, and that make a difference is key.

Creativity in the Classroom, Part 6
So, If You Want to Be Creative, Here's What You Have to Do!

by Patricia Barry

Over the past year, we've explored the 25-year trend toward a severe decline in creativity scores, especially in the very young. We examined how to nurture creativity with more than 30 proven strategies to spark unique thoughts and to fuel the creative processes in both students and teachers. We also reviewed the components of a creative classroom and traditional educational practices that squelch creativity. Current trends in classroom instruction, research proven statistics, reasons and consequences of this decline have all been highlighted.

Hopefully, you believe as I do, that we can turn around trends and start serving the creative needs of our students and communities. The urgency to form plans of action now is very clear. Let's explore **practical** suggestions and clearly enumerated plans to help your teachers start taking integral steps towards building a more creative classroom.

Practical Suggestions for Classroom Set-Up for the New School Year

Research, collect, and define strategies to use in your class as daily and weekly rituals. (See *Instructional Leader* September 2015-July of 2016 for six-part series "Creativity in the Classroom.")

More than 10 years ago, when I first began actively seeing evidence that the decline documented in *Time Magazine* was truly happening on a large scale in my students, I started to collect and develop strategies to combat this frustrating, and sometimes paralyzing, trend. In part five, "The Vanishing Commodity", I explored many ways to use brainstorming and other thinking strategies to broaden fluency, flexibility and originality in thinking in your life and in the classroom.

These strategies really do work, but **must be frequently repeated** when thinking creatively for pre-writing, pre-experimenting, and pre-creating in language arts, science and arts classes. Since all three of these disciplines are similar processes, many strategies will produce multiple benefits for all three disciplines.

Create a room display with ideas of what a creative process is and its components to illustrate the steps in the process for visually oriented students.

I keep a visual prominently displayed in my room about the interconnection of these three processes. Students need to be reminded, visually, verbally, and in actions, to realize that thinking is not compartmentalized as was once thought. No one is just left-brained or right-brained. The best learning occurs when whole-brain activity is sparked in the classroom.

There are a wide variety of graphics available online to illustrate the similarities between process learning across the disciplines if a teacher doesn't feel secure in artistic skills to create their own, but a display that graphically illustrates connectivity in learning is a great plus in a 21st century classroom that hopes to ignite creativity.

- Two graphics representing **the writing process** (branched and linear formats) are available at https://www.flickr.com/photos/vblibrary/6124465878 and http://www.shopbecker.com/decoration-and-display/bulletin-board-sets/_/the-writing-process-bulletin-board-set/
- **The scientific process** represented in linear and branching six-step graphic is available at http://www.conversiongarden.com/blog/2012/05/cro-is-not-so-new-an-introduction-to-the-scientific-method and http://science.howstuffworks.com/innovation/scientific-experiments/scientific-method6.htm
- **A Circular Scientific Process** is available at http://www.slideshare.net/Tamashi13/scientific-method-2012341
- **A Circular Creative Process** is available at https://www.crayola.com/~/media/Crayola/For%20Educators/Free%20Resources/downloads/Creativity/8CCAC%20CREATIVITY%20Workshop%20Handout.pdf

In 2012, I developed the lobed representation of the art process (see page 5) to try to illustrate the ongoing, circular thinking process of making art in the classroom. Also on page 5, you will see a linear representation of **The Art Process** on cabinets in my room five years ago. On page 6, see Radially branched **Art, Science and Writing Processes** on my wall this year.

"Creativity is not a linear journey but a circular event,

returning to the same context over and over again." -Michael Avatar, *12 Rules of Creativity*

Reflect on your own place on the creative continuum. Actively seek professional development for you and your staff.

It is virtually impossible to pick up an educational journal and not find articles about the need for creative procedures in education today. Recently, while on a plane to Chicago to attend the National Art Educators Association Conference, I reached in the back of the seat pocket in front of me and immediately found an article in the *Skyways Magazine* on creative thinking strategies in business that mimic classroom techniques I have used for years in my classes. Upon returning from conference, I saw the April issue of *Texas School Business Magazine* featuring an article, "Raising the Creative Class." The topic is hot, and resources abound for both personal growth and staff development.

Define creativity for yourself. Have your staff/students define creativity.

Using several simple writing organizers and strategies can facilitate quick ideas of a working definition of creativity that is **personal** for you, your staff and your students. Yes, you can look creativity up in a dictionary, but a personal, working definition is much more human and to the immediate point. One of those writing strategies is to simply brainstorm an ongoing list of descriptors of a creative mind. Use that ongoing, ever-growing list to **make a "wordle" poster** to go on your wall to visually become an anchor chart for future discussions. Visit http://www.wordle.net and http://www.speedofcreativity. org/2009/09/30/visualizing-ideas-

about-creativity-with-wordle/. **Make a class or individual mind map** of descriptors of creativity and display in class. See graphic "Creativity: The Missing Pieces" on page 6.

Use "reversal strategy" to define creativity. List all the many, varied and unusual things it is **not**:
Creativity is not…_____
Or_____
Or_____
Or_____

Use a poetry formula "diamante" to compose a definition of what creativity **is**…and what it **is not**
Line 1 Creativity (noun)
Line 2 (two adjectives describing creativity)
Line 3 (three *ing* words that describe creativity)
Line 4 (four nouns…two relate to creativity, two to its opposite)
Line 5 (three *ing* words that describe*?*)
Line 6 (two adjectives describing*?*)
Line 7 (the opposite of line 1= *?*)

Pattern "My Rules" by Shel Silverstein, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, using this simple framework of his poem.
If you want to be creative, here's what you have to do:
First, _____.
Then, _____.
Next, _____.
Last, _____.

One of my fourth-grade art students, Amanda D, wrote:
"If you want to be creative here's what you have to do.
First, you have to warm up your brain by thinking lots of ideas.
Then, you look at your ideas, and decide if there are just a lot, or if there are really different ones, and even some really weird or unusual ones.
Next, you think about the best, weirdest and most unusual ones

and see if you can expand them.
Last, you select the one you can envision the most details with, and begin to draw with that vision in your head, and on your paper.
And, because you have used your brain, and will keep using it, your artwork will be really impressive!"

Paul Love-Kretchmer, an Austin ISD teacher and participant in the CEPFA Summit 13 in Austin, Texas, wrote:
First, you have to learn the rules of art.
Then, you construct art from them.
Next, you destroy the rules of art.
**Last,** you envision the new rules and construct new art.
Then, forever, repeat this eternal artist's cycle.

Compare and contrast the two. Make a Venn diagram or some other visual graphic to help set your course of instruction to expand both concepts and places on the creativity continuum. Visit http://www.math-aids.com/Venn_Diagram/.

Plan and discuss with all classes, then write a Creativity Constitution that enumerates the *Bill of Rights* and the *Resident Responsibilities* of having a creative environment in class. Visit http://www.teachersdiscovery.com/product/25336/government.

As a great lesson in American democracy, and to illustrate powerfully that students do have a voice and can help to make the rules and procedures, this is a very necessary step to becoming a creative classroom. Many students **and** adults think that a creative person thinks he or she can do whatever they want. That could not be further from the truth. "Creativity thrives on constraints,"

The Creative Art Process
Drafted August 2012 by Patricia Barry
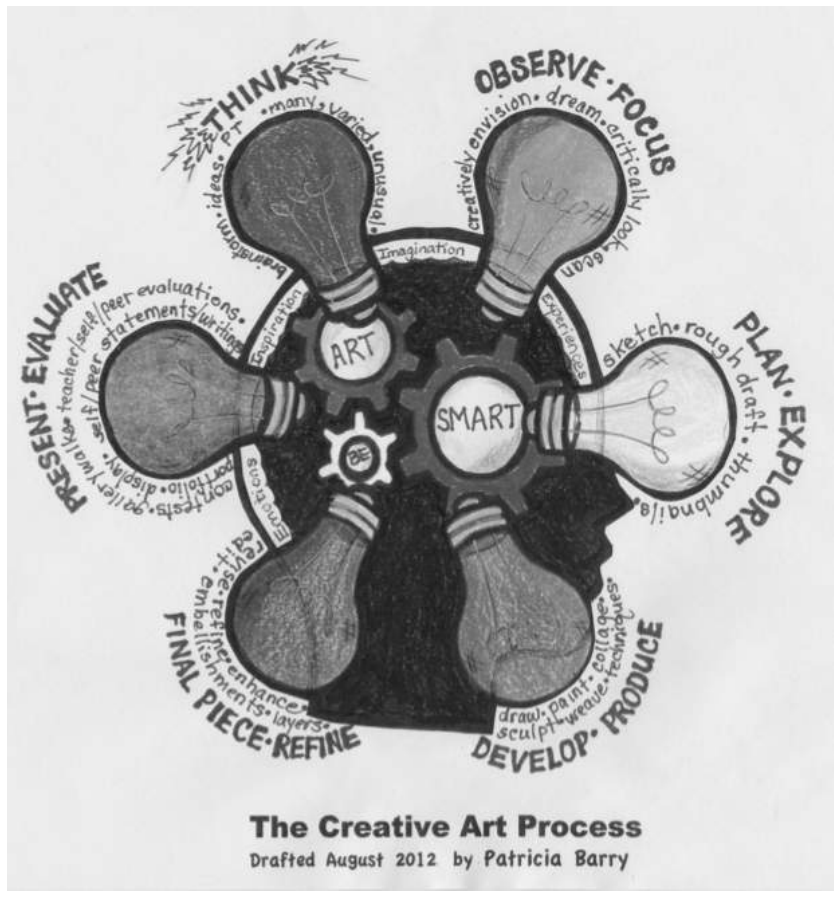
Lobed Representation of the Art Process

Linear Representation of The Art Process on Cabinets in My Room

says French artist, philosopher, and creativity researcher, Benoit Philippe. With each right comes an equal responsibility.

Our schoolwide behavior matrix stresses five points:
- Show respect.
- Positive attitude is displayed.
- On task is expected behavior.
- Take responsibility for yourself.
- Success will be yours!

Our classroom constitution for creativity must reflect these and classroom procedures while enumerating the rights of each creative student and the corresponding responsibilities.

Some of the student constitution statements from this past year were:

"We have the right to decide how to solve a problem in our own creative manner."
BUT…"We must stay on task and get our problems solved."

"We have the right to choose the materials we use for our artworks."
BUT…"We have the responsibility to clean up and store all materials neatly."

"We have the right to discuss our creative ideas."
BUT…"We have the responsibility to say positive things about others and their work."

"We have the right to voice our opinions and original ideas."
BUT…"We have the responsibility to listen and observe when the teacher is talking."

It also takes **time** to incorporate these strategies into the regular flow of the class, with real practice given to teach the strategy and to repeat it frequently. So, patience, wait time, quiet thinking time for some, and concrete planning aids are needed

Radially Branched Art, Science and Writing Processes on My Wall This Year
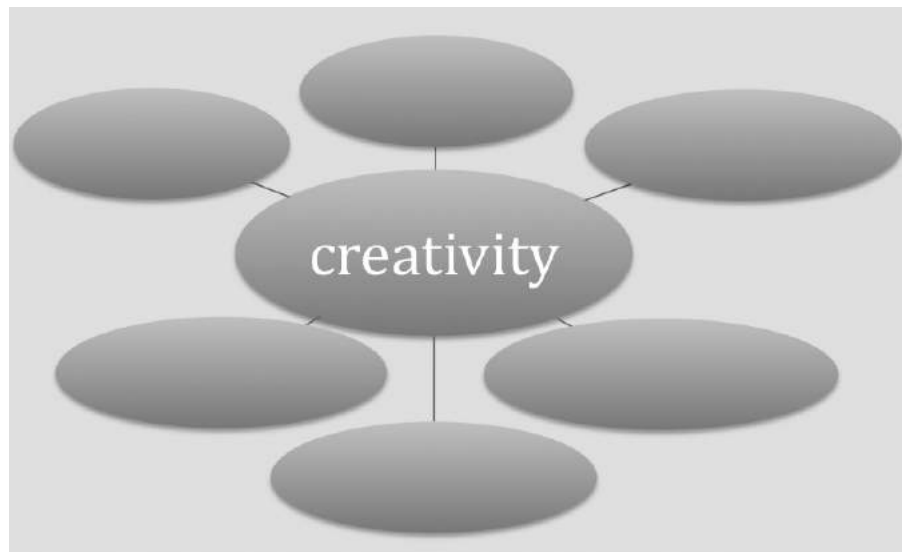
Created for PowerPoint "Creativity: The Missing Pieces" by Patricia Barry, CFISD

for many. Modern classroom schedules, driven by the clock, must be slowed down for the essence of creative thought to arise.

Sadly, today, many educational schedules are broken down into five-minute increments with expectations for each five minutes enumerated. We are losing "the teachable moment" in classrooms, when a student brings up a phenomenal idea in class brainstorming, but no time is allotted for exploring, extending or using it as a springboard for more creative thinking. Students and adults alike require processing time to answer questions, and it is research-proven that the most creative idea is rarely your first idea.

Michael Avatar, author of *How to Be an Artist*, and *Every One is Creative* writes in his newest book, *12 Rules of Creativity*, "If we stay in one place, watching, and waiting, inspiration always comes."

There are literally hundreds of ways to spur creativity in the classroom; but attitude and confidence are two very powerful ones.

> "There's no single answer to making young people creative—it's more about giving them permission to be creative and recognising [*sic*] that the ideas that they have, that maybe seem slightly out of the box, may well be quite important..." -Brian Boyd, Scotland, *Journey to Excellence*

So...you must give your students *and* yourself *permission* to be creative.

Once you and your students have established permission to be creative and follow the rules and procedures you have cooperatively written, then where do you go?

What do you do? The old adage, "Practice makes perfect!" certainly applies here!

Celebrating Creative Successes: Everyartist Live!
Starting school in August, and powering through September with the techniques and strategies to spark creativity in your classroom will make a difference. By October, you will be ready to celebrate the creative successes of your school and students. What better way to highlight this progress than to participate in the annual national art initiative, **Everyartist Live! on October 27, 2016.**

If you have been following this series in the *Instructional Leader*, you know Everyartist.me is a social initiative founded by American artist Brendan O'Connell when he realized his elementary school-aged children did not have art as an integral part of instruction in their school.

Everyartist.me is a volunteer organization of artists, educators, business people and administrators who truly believe in the need to support, spark and celebrate creativity in young students. Each fall, Everyartist.me sponsors a one-time-a-year national event, Everyartist Live!

The online celebration kit provides a national lesson plan aligned with the newly revised core standards, resources for teachers, suggested extensions, and a broad list of suggestions for conceptual artworks that can respond to a yearly theme. Strategies for implementing this STEM to STEAM event, complete with media recommendations, are all free at www.everyartist.me.

Schools and districts with art instruction led by an art teacher can use the online kit with media contact suggestions to enrich

their already strong programs. The plans are written to be an all-inclusive guide to the event so schools, districts, or even single teachers or parents who do not have art instruction as part of their curriculum, can plan and present a quality event. Concepts such as Gratitude, My Favorite Story, and What Fuels My Creativity have seen thousands of individual pieces of art created and proudly displayed in a myriad of venues, as well as on the Everyartist.me online gallery since 2012.

This past fall, Everyartist.me proudly announced that its first national museum partners, The Museum of Fine Arts Houston and The High Museum of Atlanta, would show area student artworks. Digital displays in both museums' galleries hosted beaming parents, teachers and excited students in amazing shows on free family nights. Across the nation, and internationally, celebration numbers swelled from the first year to gain national media attention.

Recently, while attending the 2016 National Art Educators Association (NAEA) Conference in Chicago as a representative for Everyartist.me, my school principal, Gale Parker, and I spoke to more than 500 state, city, and school art representatives from across the U.S. and from as far away as Japan, Thailand and Canada. All levels of both public and private institutions agreed that the stifling of creativity is rampant in their student populations. Home school organizations, prison schools, schools for the disabled and mentally handicapped all had representatives at this conference looking for ideas and answers on how to stop the slide of creativity.

Please join us **October 27,** to set a new *Guinness Book of World Records* repeat record for the fourth

year in a row. Be wildly creative; be part of something bigger than yourself; be the spark to ignite a celebration of creativity in your life, your class, your school, your community, and your district. Together we can make an impact on the future of American education.

Practical Overview for the Beginning of the 2016-2017 School Year

- Research, collect, and define strategies to use in your class as daily and weekly rituals. (see series on Creativity in the Classroom, *Instructional Leader* September 2015-July 2016)
- Reflect on your own place on the creative continuum. Actively seek professional development for you and your staff.
- Define creativity for yourself.
- Ask your students to define creativity for themselves.
- Compare and contrast the two. Make a Venn diagram or some other visual graphic to help set your course of instruction to expand **both** concepts.
- Create room and hall displays showcasing ideas of what a creative process is and what its components are to illustrate the steps in the process for visually-oriented students and staff.
- Tie science, art and writing processes in the displays to show creativity does not just occur in art rooms.

- Plan and discuss with all classes, then write a Creativity Constitution that enumerates the rights **and** the responsibilities of having a creative environment in class.
- Display this Constitution in your classroom with other rules and procedures to give equal weight of importance to creativity.
- Allow time for creativity building activities often so they become an expectation, a regular ritual.

- Delight in and develop on "teachable moments" that occur when you begin to change mental behaviors with repeated use of thinking strategies and techniques.
- Acknowledge, praise and celebrate creative successes.
- Plan for schoolwide creativity celebrations and participate in Everyartist Live! October 27.
- Mark the date on your calendar: **October 27, 2016!**

EVERYARTIST.ME

Highlights from the 2015 Everyartist Live!

- 130,000+ children participated
- 39 states represented
- 4 countries: U.S., Canada, Cuba and the United Kingdom
- 380 teachers participated
- 333 schools participated
- Numbers ranged from 2 in a home school to 8,000 in one entire district
- 4 art centers
- 3 boys and girls clubs
- 6 home schools
- 1 school for the deaf
- 2 military bases (Laughlin and Randolph AFB)
- 35 teachers have signed up to be Local Champions to increase participation
- 2 museums (Houston Museum of Fine Arts and Atlanta's High Museum) display art from schools in their areas

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Log in to www.tepsa.org to access articles in the creativity series:
Part 1: The Creativity Crisis: What Are We Doing About This Mess? An Artist's Response
Part 2: Creating a Culture
Part 3: Putting the Squeeze on Young Minds - Suppressing Creativity
Part 4: Creativity: Divine Genius or Just Making Connections?
Part 5: The Vanishing Commodity = Creativity: Use It or Lose It!
Part 6: So, If You Want to Be Creative, Here's What You Have to Do!

View the webinar recording "Sparking Creativity: A National Initiative" at http://www.tepsa.org/Login.aspx.

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Keeping All the Balls in the Air

by Frank Buck, EdD

The principal is the school's instructional leader, a visionary, a decision-maker, public relations pro, and a confidant. A principal is also a counselor, a motivator, financial planner, and the face of the school. When the final bell of the day sounds, the principal is a spouse, a parent, a community leader, a sports fan, an arts supporter, and the friendly face in the grocery store who causes children to say, "Mom, look who's here!" The multifaceted nature of the job is what leaves the principal so tired each night, and so energized each morning.

Principals are busy people and may spend some part of the day putting out fires and responding to whichever wheel squeaks loudest at the moment. Some principals operate with a laser focus and demonstrate the ability to see a project through to the end. Given the endless options of how to spend their time, they seem to make the best choice in the moment. What makes the difference?

It Starts With the To-Do List

Starting the day with a list of *pre-defined* work is the first step towards making the day count, accomplishing what was intended, and doing it all with little stress. The very best make a tough job look easy.

However, a laundry list of unrelated, half-baked tasks is less than appealing. As a result, we set it aside. Compose a list that "works" by adopting these principles:

1. List the "Fab Five" at the top.
How much stress do you create through the fear that your most important items are buried far down the list? Review the list, identify the top five most critical items, and move them to the top. Each time you look at the list, you are reminded of what you decided was important for a successful day.

2. Batch related items.
Your list may include short interactions with a dozen different teachers. The entire dozen could be handled in a few minutes before the start of the school day if these were listed *together*, allowing you to quickly move from one teacher to another. Phone calls are handled quicker when those calls are made in succession. When items appear together on the list, the job of hammering through them all becomes easier.

3. Word the items clearly.
Every task on the list either motivates us to do it or to avoid it. When a task is worded clearly, it becomes easier to do. As human beings, we tend to do that which is easy. Setting up our list so it is easy increases the chances the items on it are actually accomplished.

Paper or Digital?

Once upon a time, my paper planner and I were inseparable. Slowly, technology has changed the way communication happens. It started with email and has mushroomed to the point the vast majority of what I read and most of what I save is digital. Doesn't it make sense that when information arrives digitally, we keep it digital?

For today's principal, a *digital to-do list* which syncs between all devices is the best choice. Many software options are available. Choose only one which offers all of the following seven capabilities:

1. Has a "due date" field and can be sorted by due date.
We often think of tasks *now* which need to be done *later*. Being able to assign a due date means what you want to see *next month* isn't mixed in with what you want to see *today*.

2. Allows for repeating tasks.
Education is a cyclic business. Much of what we do, we do again at the same time next year, next month or next week. Being able to put a task on the list once, and have it come back each time we need it, is a huge step in staying afloat in this multifaceted job.

3. Has a note section for each task.
Often, you have detailed information you want to have handy when you tackle a task. The note section is the perfect place for it.

4. Can be searched easily.
When you want to find every task related to "Jim," being able to search for "Jim" puts tasks at your fingertips. When you want to see every phone call you need to make, searching for "Call" puts every call at your fingertips, organized by due date.

5. Syncs across all devices.
If the list is available only on the computer, it is useless the moment you walk away from that

computer. If the list resides only on your phone, you spent too much time entering information with two thumbs on a piece of glass. Any good digital list provides both a web application and apps for mobile devices.

6. Can communicate with your email program.
How many emails do you receive which embed to-do items and the supporting information you will need? Getting that information out of your email and into your to-do list is a huge productivity boost.

7. Allows for voice input.
Input has always been the Achilles Heel of the mobile device. Nothing has been as easy as flipping open a paper planner and writing with pen…until lately. Every mobile device has some type of voice-activated assistant. Choose an app that allows you to create a new task by speaking into the device's digital assistant.

Of the many available options, a web-based service called "Toodledo" (Toodledo.com) is my pick. Its free plan is fine for most peoples' needs. Numerous apps for every mobile device sync with it. Tasks can be imported to it from a spreadsheet, and tasks can be exported from it to a spreadsheet. Its layout is similar to Outlook for those who are transitioning from that platform. Most importantly, it has all seven of the capabilities I require.

Having a System is Everything
Digital to-do lists offer many bells and whistles, most of which you don't need. You can enter the task, a start date, due date, a priority, location, category, color, reminder, and that's just a start. If you have ever watched someone spend lon-

ger putting a task into their system than it would have taken to do that task, you understand why I take a minimalist approach.

Every one of my tasks gets a due date. The due date is simply the answer to the question, "When do I want to see this task again?" Making input quick is important, whether I am at my desktop computer or whether I am out and about with my phone. My settings in Toodledo and my mobile apps assign a due date of "Today" as the default.

My list is sorted by due date. Therefore, those items which did not get done yesterday automatically start out towards the top of the list. My job each morning is to put this list in the order I want to complete the tasks. Since the list is sorted by due date, changing due dates is all that is necessary to give me a list I can work in order from top to bottom.

Email and List Work in Tandem
To-dos often arrive in the form of email messages. All too many principals wind up using their email as their to-do list. Toodledo provides the user with a unique email address. Anything sent to that email address is automatically added to the list in Toodledo.

If I receive an email about something I now need to do, I forward it to that special email address. I can do this whether I am viewing the email on the desktop computer, laptop, tablet or phone. Before sending, I edit the subject line as needed. The next time I look at Toodledo, I see the forwarded email on my list. The subject of the email becomes the subject of the task. The entire body of the email is included in the note section of the task.

This one technique, turning emails into tasks, is one I have used for more than a decade to get my email Inbox empty every day, and consolidate on my to-do list everything which needs my attention. Other web-based services offer this same ability to forward emails to the to-do list. Outlook allows the user to "drag and drop" emails to the Task button to turn emails into tasks. Personally, I would not use a to-do list which did not afford this option.

Handling Multiple Projects and Goals
One element which makes the multifaceted job of the principal challenging is the number of different projects or goals going on at any particular time. All time-management systems recommend breaking goals into their individual tasks. Thirty years ago, Stephanie Winston's *The Organized Executive* emphasized defining and ordering tasks that comprise a project. Charles Hobbs advocated defining long-range goals broken into short-range goals, and finally into a daily action list in his hallmark book *Time Power*. In his best-selling book, *Getting Things Done*, David Allen emphasizes identifying the "successful outcome" of any project, and then asking the question, "What's the next action?"

Being able to see the task and the goal side-by-side helps me stay clear on exactly what to do and why I am doing it. The methodology I teach, and have written about in my own books, is to handle an entire project within one task. As soon as I inherit a project or envision a goal whose realization will obviously require a number of steps, I phrase my goal as a statement which is either *true or false*. If I have a vacancy

for a music teacher, have been asked to give a presentation at a local civic club, and want to write the article which you are reading now, my list would start like this:

xx Music teacher has been hired
xx Civic club presentation has been prepared
xx Article for *Principal* magazine has been submitted

Notice the "xx" preceding each goal. I now decide on the specific "next steps" which will move forward the goals I defined. Those

"next steps" go on the *other* side of the "xx." My list would now look like this:

Search applications at the central office xx Music teacher has been hired
Call Tom to ask about length of time allowed xx Civic club presentation has been prepared
Outline article xx Article for Principal magazine has been submitted

Any good to-do list includes a section for notes within any task. Other "next steps" and additional
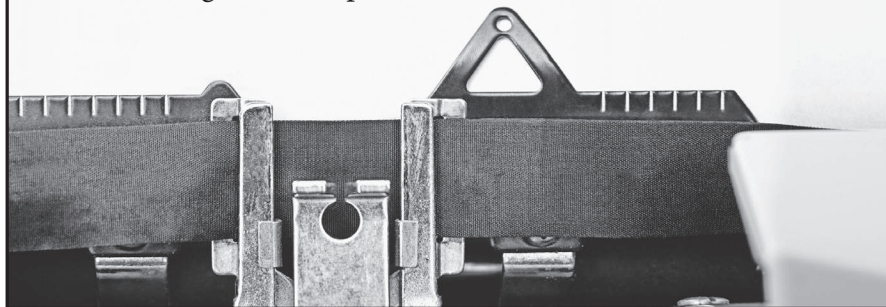
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Web Resources

Toodledo is a popular online productivity tool which syncs with a variety of apps across all platforms of mobile devices. The service offers both free and paid plans. Visit www.Toodledo.com.

Keeping All the Balls in the Air
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information will go there. What happens when I complete a "next step"? I remove it and replace it with the *next* next step.

Remember that I talked about one of the requirements of a good to-do list is that it can be searched? If the superintendent asks, "What do you have on your plate right now?" imagine being able to quickly search for "xx" on your phone and read off a list of every project or goals together with the next step towards the completion of each one.

One Person Can't Do It All
The principalship is a big job. Delegation is important. Prioritization is important. Deciding what to do as well as what is not worth doing is critical. When everything is before you, in one list, those decisions become easier.

A juggler is able to keep many balls in the air because he knows how many he has, he knows the position of each one, and he gives each the right amount of attention at the right time. For the principal, the responsibilities are great, and they extend across many fronts. But with a system which puts it all in one place and puts it in order, the principal can give each one the right amount of attention at the right time. A tough job just got a little easier.

Author
Dr. Frank Buck served as a middle-level teacher, principal and central office administrator during a 30-year career. He now speaks and writes on organization and time management. He is the author of the recently-released second edition of *Get Organized: Time Management for School Leaders* published by Routledge/ Eye on Education. Learn more at www. FrankBuck.org and @drfrankbuck.