

## Using Student Assistants to Foster a Student-Centered Classroom (3/19)

**I. Intros:** (Names, positions only). Me, Alicia, Dave, Rowyn, MJ, Maddie, Jillian (Annie?) [2 minutes]

I just want to say that as teachers, we all know what a hassle it is to leave our classrooms. While I am here, there is no adult in the building with any sub plans for my classroom. Becca and Riley, two 8th grade assistants, are running things. Legally, an adult must be in the classroom, but for the most part they won't be doing anything. I was out in February, and Rowyn took the day off from her 8th grade classes and spent the day as my sub. MJ and Maddie did this several times. These are amazing young people.

Read through bullets so see where going.

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**II. Idea of Student Assistants:** (Doug) [5 minutes]

A. Superintendent's talk about famous people--Eminem--hating school--suicidal. District goal to reach all students.

B. Son completed freshman year of high school and complained a lot about middle school. I asked what was so much better about high school than middle. He mentioned things like behavior (hard to change), but then mentioned **choice**. Even though he had little choice in his freshman classes, he looked ahead and saw how much choice he'd have as a junior and senior (he's an art and music kid). I reflected on how little choice our middle schoolers truly have. You can take any language you want as long as it's French or Spanish. You can take any music you want as long as it's band, orchestra, chorus, or general music. Little **real** choice.

C. A final factor was I'd had three amazingly talented sixth graders the previous year. Very strong academically and socially. I thought why can't they assist me and my students as 7th graders? We had a homeroom-type period twice a week. Then I thought bigger and thought about taking them out of a class. PE and music were my first thoughts. All were athletes, and most weren't passionate about music.

D. Very last minute brought idea to Annie--MS curriculum coordinator--and she immediately saw the potential. She got permission for a pilot from the district office. I talked to parents and students. Lots of enthusiasm! We were a go.

E. At that time, I ran a traditional science classroom. A lot of hands-on, minds-on activities, but still very teacher-centered. Maddy, Jordan, and Jillian were amazing. So natural at guiding students without giving answers. Still, there were a lot of times there was little for them to do. Paper-and-pencil test days, going over tests or paper-and-pencil homework assignments, writing notes of the board for students to copy. At times I had my three assistants doing these things, but then the rest of us had little to do. Hmmmm--I knew I was wasting some valuable resources.

### **III. Learner-Paced Classroom:** (Doug) [5 minutes]

A. In August before my second year with assistants (I added four 7th graders to go with my three 8th graders. All girls. Hard to find boys with the social maturity to do this.) Annie suggested I read a book called ROLE (Results Oriented Learning Environment) Reversal. Written by an 8th grade English teacher from Indiana, ROLE Reversal described an incredibly student-centered classroom. Students were not all moving at the same pace. Annie had visited a school in which teachers were trying this system and the principal was extremely excited about it. He wanted to move his whole school in that direction. She visited two 8th grade teachers running ROLE. I LOVED the book, finishing it soon before the school year began. Annie arranged to have me, Dave, and her observe the two 8th grade science teachers in October. As the demands of the new school year hit me, memories of ROLE Reversal waned. I'm not sure I'd have thought back to it had we not observed those 8th grade teachers. As soon as I SAW it, I knew I could do it. As you might imagine, a ROLE Science class is different from and ROLE English class. Even though I never had tried ROLE, I couldn't wait to flip my whole classroom around!

B. My new plan consisted of several major changes.

**Unit activities were all typed up:** (IMMENSE UNDERTAKING!!) When students completed activities, they signed up on the board and I, or an assistant, interviewed them. Students worked alone or in groups of their choosing. We recorded interviews as 1 (show little or no understanding), 2 (shows understanding, but inconsistently or

only with guidance), or 3 (shows understanding consistently and independently). All formative assessment.

**Periodic Whole-Group Instruction/Demos:** (once or twice a week, 10-15 minutes per): Once the class was past certain activities, we discussed them. As amazing as my assistants were, I still wanted to get a consistent message to my classes.

**Little or no written homework. Limited paper-and-pencil summative assessing:** Primary summative assessment is a product students create from scratch. Students receive a score for the product itself, and are also interviewed. Students may create products with partners, but are interviewed individually.

During the last part of today's session we want to model this approach with you as learners and these young ladies as assistants.

**IV. Expanding the Student Assistant Program:** (Alicia) [5-10 minutes]

**V. Administrative Perspective on the Student Assistant Program:** (Dave) [5-10 minutes]

**VI. Demonstration of the Student Assistant Program in a Learner-Paced Classroom:** (Student Assistants) [20-30 minutes]