

Chapter 18

A Thousand Days

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A hundred days...

In many Math Their Way classrooms, as a part of the ceremonies that begin the day, students and teacher add a stick representing each new day in school to the bundle of sticks for school days past. Students also use a number line to mark the passing days. As the hundredth day of school approaches, a celebration is planned. Whether the hundredth-day celebration takes place within the class, or is planned as a school-wide event, it is the living expression that mathematics is not confined to lessons on a page.

No celebration of day two hundred is planned—the two-hundredth day does not occur until the beginning of a child's second year in school. The three-hundredth day occurs nearer to the end. The four-hundredth and five-hundredth days happen in year three. Even though we teach our students that school learning is connected to life outside of school, we pass them on with no promise that what they learned in our room will be connected to what they learn next year.

Suppose the celebration of a hundred days were a beginning and not an end. Using a continuous hundredth-day celebration could connect learning from one year to the next. When the first-year teacher persuades the teacher in year two to celebrate days two hundred and three hundred, a link is formed. When the second-year teacher persuades the teacher in year three to celebrate days four hundred and five hundred, an even stronger link is forged. Imagine the connections if the celebrations passed on for a thousand days or more.

A timeline of events...

Now suppose that the kindergarten teacher passed on not only a number line for the days the children spent in school, but also a chart of events matched to the numbered days—a timeline of events recording a class's anecdotal history of life in school.

What might this chart of events include?

Events that happen to the class:

- The months of the school year.
- Major field trips.
- Major storms.
- Dates of classroom parties.
- Any other events special to the class.

Events that happen to each child individually:

- A picture of the class.
- A separate picture of each individual, with the year's starting and ending heights and weights written underneath.
- When each new child began school.
- When a child left.
- The dates of specific academic, artistic, or physical accomplishments.
- A list of favorite foods and/or TV shows and/or movies.
- What else might be added?

A timeline passed from grade to grade could include a folder containing a page or two of work from each child for each new year in school. The folder's contents could be displayed on graduation day at the end of grade five or six or eight, depending on the school.

The benefits...

What are the rewards of a continuing hundred-day celebration? Students might gain:

- A sense of belonging.
- A sense of being valued.
- A sense of community and connectedness.
- A sense of history—a connection from one year to the next.
- A sense of time.
- A sense that learning is a continuum, not a daily lesson plan.

Difficulties...

Difficulties are not barriers that keep us from our goals, they are obstacles to overcome.

How would a chart like this be passed on from year to year?

In small schools, where one classroom full of students is sent intact to each successive grade, a passing of a chart can be as easy as passing students on. In larger schools, it is likely that no one grade will receive all the children recorded on the chart. In a larger school, what follows each child into each new grade is the number of days in school, and not necessarily the chart. The chart itself can be stored some place outside any individual class, so the common heritage it records is visible to all the children whose history it reflects. Or some other way of passing on a class's history can be devised by this year's teachers and the next. Teachers are as good at problem solving as their students are.

Schools with interior walls between classrooms could display each year's timeline along the corridors, or the charts could decorate the walls in the cafeteria or a multi-purpose room for public viewing. If the school's library has walls big enough, the library can be the chart's home. If there is no permanent wall space available, then the charts might be brought out for special occasions such as open house, or back-to-school night, or any other family gatherings or potlucks at school.

How appropriate would a timeline be in a school where the turnover rate is so high that few students in the fifth or sixth grade were there in kindergarten or in first?

Knowing that a piece of their personal history exists is important to children, especially those who move around a lot. Should we not treat children in the best manner that we can while they are with us, regardless of the length of time they stay? Even in schools with high turnover rates, some children remain for years. A timeline can give these children a sense of continuity, even if the world around them is in constant change. Children who have moved away can return to enjoy a glimpse of their past.

If a school begins a timeline in the kindergarten or first-grade class, what would the fourth or fifth grade teacher do while waiting for it to reach his or her class?

Every teacher can start a chart with his or her class. The timeline started in a lower grade will eventually find its way to the upper grade. Classes in future years may bring with them longer histories, but that does not mean this year's class has no history at all.

Patterns and Connections...

Mathematics is patterns and connections. Life is patterns and connections, too. We use mathematics to connect our class to home and to connect each child's home to school. We use mathematics to connect every subject to every other subject that we teach. We use a thousand days to connect each grade in school to every other grade. Each year in school is a part of every other year.

A thousand-days timeline can strengthen the connection between parents and the school, as well. Every parent visiting can see a record of every child's life at school. Every parent can see that, where their child goes to school, every child matters. Every child has a place on the wall. Every child has a place in history.