

Distributing Materials

A student can distribute materials and have everything returned in a few minutes. Read how it's done in the **Going Beyond** folder for Chapter 20 at EffectiveTeaching.com.

We all know the value of engaging students in hands-on, minds-open activities. All effective teachers actively and physically immerse their students in the learning process. So it's urgent that materials, whether they are math manipulatives, physical-education equipment, science supplies, fine-arts materials, or even textbooks, are dispensed as quickly as possible.

Here's how it can be done in fifteen seconds, with no pain or strain, and without losing any items, either!

Do Not Use a Central Table

The potential for disorganization and disaster occurs when the teacher places all of the materials for an activity on a central table and announces, "All right, everything you need is on this table."

All period long, a multitude of students are parading back and forth, getting one or two items as they are needed. Students even yell at their classmates, who are at the supply table, "Get two rulers, not one!"

Does the student who goes to get the item return via the same path or in the same length of time? We all know what happens. They stop and talk, and if they are seen with a ruler, they are challenged to a mock fencing match as they fend off a gauntlet of defenders who are guarding the length of the aisle. Then we have those "lethal weapons," like meter sticks, compasses, and batons. *En garde!*

To make matters more complex, in some classes, liquids are used, such as paints, chemicals, and water. During the same movement from the central table, these liquids are spilled, even flicked at other students, and the teacher who does not know what to do, reverts back to lectures, worksheets, and "quiet study time." And we all know that quiet time is a waste of productive time in the classroom.

Finally, we come to the worst scenario, which comes at the end of the class period. The teacher announces, "All right everyone. The bell's going to ring in five minutes. Let's clean up."

First, what does "clean up" mean to a group of second-graders, or a pubescent seventh-grader from a dysfunctional home, or a high-schooler with no concept of "clean up your room?" If the teacher is more specific and says, "Bring everything up to the (central) table," that's exactly what the students will do—drop everything on the table and exit quickly as the bell rings to end the class.

Now, the harried teacher can be seen sorting and rearranging things. "Oh, no, two rulers are missing!" The class is gone and the next class is beginning to enter. Angry? Please don't be. The students are not entirely at fault; it's the way the entire activity process was managed that resulted in chaos.

How to Dispense Materials in 15 Seconds

Here's the favorite system used for years in Harry's classroom with much success. It is readily applicable, in concept and practice, to any other classroom activity at all levels. **It's called the TOTE TRAY SYSTEM, indicating that everything is preorganized in a carrying container and is carried or toted to the work area.**

Distributing Materials (continued)

- Gather a collection of similar containers sufficient for the number of groups and the size of your class. Typically, this may mean 15 or more plastic boxes, coffee cans, shoeboxes, dishpans, copy machine paper boxes, and shopping bags.
- The groups will determine the number of tote trays needed. To determine how many groups will be organized, consider that the number of people in a group must equal the number of jobs in the group. (See page 206.)
- So, if you have 30 students and there will be five students in each group, six tote trays will be prepared.
- Prepare a page, which is saved from year to year, that lists what is needed for each student group.
- With student volunteers, an aide, or yourself, place in each tote tray what is needed for each student group.
- Number each tote tray; a marking pen on a piece of masking tape will suffice.
- On the board or a transparency, list the contents of each tray.
- One student in each group is designated responsible for the tote tray. (See page 208, “Student 1.”)
- A numbered tray is assigned to each one of these students and they are asked to come and get the tray. **Everything is dispensed in 15 seconds or less; there is a minimum of movement; and the teacher can easily monitor the movement.**
- Using the list on the board or transparency, ask the students to identify each item in the tray. Do not assume they know the likes of a protractor, Cuisenaire rod, Bunsen burner, or whatever is unique to your class. Here’s the big secret:

**You are really taking inventory
and conveying to the class that you know what’s in the tray.**

- Before the activity begins, ask all groups to account for all of the items in the tray.

Collecting Everything in Minutes and With No Loss

The procedure for collecting the materials is even more important than the procedure for dispensing the materials—assuming you want everything returned.

- **Before you announce that the activity is over, post an inventory list of what’s in each tote tray.**
- Announce that the activity is over (not that the class period is over). It’s the activity—not the time—that determines when a task is completed. When the students understand this, they will not wait until the bell rings; they will clean up after you make your announcement.

- Ask the class to help the student who is responsible for the tote tray, emphasizing that each item is to be cleaned and counted as it is placed in the tote tray, using the inventory list to check them off.. Emphasize the words, “inventory list,” which is a way of saying to the students that you know what and how many are in each tray. If needed, provide a physical checklist so the assigned student can mark it off and sign for the accounting even though you have the inventory list posted.
- Tell the student who is responsible for bringing the tray to the central table, where the teacher will be conveniently standing, examining and inspecting each tray, as it is returned. The students see you checking consistently with each and every activity and they know that you are accounting for every item in every tray, or at least they have that perception.

**Everything is returned intact
and nothing has disappeared.**

- The trays are quickly returned, everything is cleaned, everything is accounted for, the trays are ready for the next class, and

the teacher is relaxed, stress-free and happy, knowing that an organized classroom is a class that’s ready for productive learning and responsible students.