Case History 2

Katie is a fourth grade student in Josh Brown's class. Here is how her morning went one day.

8:45 - 9:00/ Upon entering the classroom, Katie and her classmates immediately put away their personal belongings, and put their homework in the homework box. Table by table, the children in the class hung their nametags on hooks by photos of various "free time" activities (e.g., board games, arts and crafts area, classroom library, computer center) Katie returned to her seat, reached into her desk, and took out her diary. Other classmates took out drawing pads or books of one type or another. The principal led the school in the Pledge of Allegiance, made the daily announcements for the students and teachers, and finally, he posed the daily brainteaser or riddle.

9:00 - 9:15/ While Katie was writing in her diary (and other students were drawing in pads or reading books), Mr. Brown took attendance and the lunch count. Next, he met with two students who had been having difficulties with each other. Katie couldn't tell exactly what occurred, but there seemed to be a lot of talking going on between Mr. Brown and the two students.

9:15 - 9:30/ "One of everybody's favorite times of the day," thought Katie. Mr. Brown read a chapter today from Tim and Tess: Time Travelers. (The Tim and Tess series was about two ten year-old detectives who traveled back in time to solve ancient mysteries, using the knowledge of the modern world.) Mr. Brown read aloud with lots of expression, accents, and dramatic flourishes. Katie and all her friends would read along silently (and sometimes chime in) from their own paperback copies of the book as Mr. Brown read aloud.

10:00 - 10:30/ Katie was beginning to see a pattern in the way Mr. Brown taught math. "Whenever we start a new topic, Mr. Brown teaches the whole class a new idea, and then he helps us do a lot of chalkboard problems. We do workbook assignments on our own, that he checks - sometimes he helps a couple of kids who are having trouble while we do the workbook pages, and he spends a lot of time reviewing stuff. Then the next day, he reviews it all, and he adds something a bit different. After a few days of that, he has us work on group projects. It starts to get a little boring, but then he usually does something neat. Like this Friday... each of the groups has to work on a real recipe that uses fractions, but no group will get the right measuring spoons. He said we'll have to use what we know about fractions to do the recipes the right way. And we have to explain how we did it. It's going to be fun."

Katie got it right pretty much. A look at Mr. Brown's lesson plans for the next few days would reveal these objectives: a) Students will reduce 10 proper fractions to simplest terms in ten minutes with 90% accuracy; b) Students will match the following terms with their definitions with total accuracy: proper fraction, mixed fraction, improper fraction, numerator, denominator, common denominator; c) Students will use knowledge of fractions to complete a recipe when a complete set of measuring implements are unavailable (i.e., no group has a complete set of measuring implements and they must convert numerators and denominators to finish the recipe); d) Students will make a presentation that explains how they accomplished the task mentioned in (c) (e.g., mock interview, chart, story).
10:30 - 10:45/ Free time!! Katie went to the arts and crafts area and continued working on her weaving project. She hoped to have a potholder finished by the end of the week. Katie was getting wise to Mr. Brown (and so was everyone else). When there were no behavior problems during free time - and there almost never were - Mr. Brown would often extend it for five or ten minutes. And, she noticed, he did that a lot when the kids participated well during math.

10:45 - 11:45/ Mr. Brown was BIG into science. It was Katie's team's week to check the class weather station, log the data for the thermometer, barometer, wind speed and direction, check the clouds, and go on the Internet to report their data a some schools hundreds of miles away. (Katie was proud that she and the kids in the class made many of the weather instruments themselves.) And after all that, each team had to use the data to make a one-day and three-day weather report. When the weather activities were completed, Mr. Brown took the class outdoors because they were beginning a unit on the food web. The tasks for the next several days: catalogue and then identify the plants and animals on the school grounds.

11:45 - 12:00/ Get ready for lunch and RECESS!