

## CHAPTER ONE

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# *Preparing*

### YOU ARE NOT ALONE

All teachers have one important thing in common: We all started out as students, with none of the responsibilities for planning or instructing. Then, one day, we found ourselves on the other side of the desk. As one novice teacher told me, “I went from attending the show to running it!”

One of my colleagues looks back at her first year of teaching this way: “After *that* milestone, I realized that teachers share something special regardless of our length of service, size of school, the grade level, or the department. Teachers feel an instant bond when we meet anywhere for the first time.”

It’s a rare novice who doesn’t experience some nervousness along with anticipation, so I suggest that you review this list:

### Eleven General Principles of Teaching

1. Birthdays and lost teeth are more important to a child than the addition facts.
2. A student who feels respected, accepted, and safe is apt to become successful.
3. Teaching is not about control: Good teaching is about good management of external conditions. *Lead, guide, assist, manage, motivate, demonstrate, and respect* are key words when working in the field of education.

#### 4 In a Class of Your Own

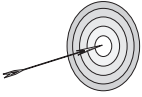
4. Teaching is not about the teacher. Students need to be reassured that every day is a new day, and that their mistakes or misbehavior have been forgiven or forgotten.
5. There is simply no room in the classroom for embarrassment or anger. Every child should go home at the end of the day thinking, “My teacher likes me.”
6. Teaching takes energy. (Can you handle the physical rigors?)
7. Teaching takes patience. (Are you willing to wait, repeat, and listen to others?)
8. Teaching requires creativity and flexibility. (Do you enjoy the challenge of coming up with new ideas or changing existing ones to fit new situations?)
9. Teaching requires accountability and reflection. (Are you willing to accept suggestions and take responsibility for your actions?)
10. Teaching takes acceptance and understanding. (Do you understand the stages of child development and the assortment of behaviors that accompany them?)
11. Teaching requires interpersonal skills. (Are you comfortable and effective in front of a group? Do you respect individual differences?)

If you have answered yes to these questions, then don't just stand there outside the classroom door . . . Come in! Come in!

### **TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF BEFORE TAKING CARE OF OTHERS**

Read the materials and curriculum guides supplied by your school district, and familiarize yourself with the policies and procedures. It expedites processing if you have your health records, birth certificate, and proof of certification.

As you go through the year, keep a record of the workshops you attend, with the date, number of hours, title, and presenter. At some point, you may be asked to document your professional development. Also, save your yearly contracts. You will be busy, but when you look back you'll be glad that you updated your resume or curriculum vitae (CV) regularly with regard to committee work, awards and professional conferences, publications, and other accomplishments.



**T.I.P.S**

A person who returns calls and messages promptly, completes forms accurately, and treats people courteously is perceived as organized, competent, and confident. Step off to successful teaching by keeping a record with the information on this sheet.

***Information Sheet***

Teaching start date: \_\_\_\_\_

School address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of district: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mentor: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Substitute call-in telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ (if applicable)

School hours: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Grade-level assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

Superintendent of schools: \_\_\_\_\_

Preparing also involves thinking ahead and finding materials, such as pictures and articles, that can spark writing and discussions. Now is also a good time to start a list of people who would be willing to make presentations to your class.

One of my colleagues strongly advises keeping up with your calendar. Plan ahead for events, such as school-colors days, back-to-school night, conference days, luncheons or special lunch days, assemblies, and field trips.

She learned the hard way, showing up at school on the day of a field trip to the Bronx Zoo—wearing heels and a white linen suit.

Do you have a special interest or skill? Take stock of your own talents. There may be opportunities for you to teach a class or coach a sport before or after school.

## **KEEPING YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR**

A quick check in the morning helps prevent embarrassing moments. I recall the day the principal came into a classroom sporting a new, bright green top with the size sticker still stuck in the middle of her ample chest. “Mrs. W,” one of the little girls spelled out loudly and proudly, “you’re L-A-R-G-E—large!”

Not only will children notice everything, from the tiny bandage on your elbow to your toe ring, but they will also ask you why it’s there, and where you got it. They don’t ask questions to embarrass you or to be rude: *they just want to know*. When one teacher walked into her room with a new, shorter haircut, she was greeted by a hushed class until somebody called out, “Ms. B, you got your haircut!” which was immediately followed by, “We liked it better the other way.”

Spontaneity is what makes teaching so unique. One child calls you “mom.” Another unclenches his fist and offers you a bunch of half-melted chocolate covered raisins. Children cry sometimes and giggle sometimes and sneeze all over the place. Oh, and they step on your shoes.

One afternoon, I pulled up a chair next to a kindergartener, so I could help him with a gluing activity. We both ended up sticky, so I suggested that we wash our hands. “I don’t need to,” he replied as he wiped his hands all along the arm of my new striped sweater. “I’ll just use this towel.”

## **DEFINING YOUR ROLE AS TEACHER**

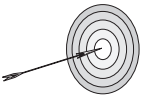
Defining your role as a teacher can be accomplished in four ways. Perform routine tasks without complaining. Show sincere thanks or

appreciation to groups or individuals who give you help. Apologize for mistakes without offering excuses, and show confidence without arrogance.

We can all take a lesson from the young pair-skating duo that was trying out for the Olympic team. The TV commentator was silent for the entire four minutes of their flawless program. Then he said, “These two skaters have been skating together for only two years. The reason they’re strong contenders is because they are aggressive on the ice . . . and they never apologize for their lack of experience!”

A novice has *plenty* to offer. Just think about it. You’re fresh and motivated. You may be able to see teaching applications for new technology. You’re eager to try out new ideas and methods, and every day is an opportunity to learn, and experiment, and find out what works for you.

Remember, you’re only a neophyte until the next one comes along. My first principal told me that another teacher was scheduled to start in March, and asked me to show her the ropes. So just like that, after only three months, I was no longer a newbie.



### T.I.P.S.

Don’t assume that you have complete anonymity when you are off duty. Even if you live in a different neighborhood, city, or town from the one in which you teach, you may be recognized. Because of your connection to the school, the likelihood that you’ll be spotted by many other students and their families increases. Although many students are savvy, it’s interesting that some of the very young children still find it hard to imagine that their teacher has a life away from school. Even the older ones show a little surprise and embarrassment when our lives collide with theirs in places like the pizzeria or the mall.

Of course, when you are away from school, the time is yours to go out and do as you please; but don’t be surprised if, on Monday, a student says, “We (or my parents) saw you at \_\_\_\_\_ on Saturday.” The blank can be completed with any one of the actual *teacher sightings* that follow, so it’s a good idea to be conscious of and careful about what you are saying or doing in public:

I saw my teacher . . . in a restaurant, at a movie theater, a tennis match, or a department store, at a car wash, a bank, casino, or hair salon, at the local Fourth of July fireworks, at the dentist, at an airport, in a laundromat, at a political rally, on a ski lift . . . or at the police station.

## WORK RELATIONSHIPS

An elementary school is a unique workplace filled with small furniture and books with happy endings. We go to “school” in the morning, rather than to “work.” You’ll find school symbols, mottos, school songs, and mission statements designed to boost positive social interaction.

In many ways, teachers are dependent on one another, whether it’s the teacher next door who covers your class for a few minutes or the art teacher who loans you paint brushes when you run short. Although your family and friends may be there for you, your colleagues are the ones who are truly able to commiserate with you. I’ve never encountered a teacher who refused to give advice to a novice who needed it.

It has been said that the style and the personality of the principal sets the tone for the school. Some principals request that their teachers resolve classroom issues, while others prefer to be informed of the details and handle problems themselves.

Some principals like to work directly with students and are visible and approachable during the day while others spend more time with administrative duties. Still others strike a balance. But regardless of the style of your ship’s captain, the “big three” for teachers are being *prompt*, *prepared*, and *proactive*. Hand in forms, report-card comments for approval, plan books, and other information when due. Be on time for work and meetings, and respond quickly to requests.

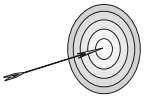
Make sure that your plans are up to date. You can anticipate situations by keeping running records and notes on students whom you think may have issues that will need attention. If possible, have discussions with a child’s previous teacher, and check information on new students. It’s also wise, after a reasonable amount of time, to make the parents aware of any concerns you may have.

Art Fredman, university field supervisor, Kean University, New Jersey, offers additional advice for working cooperatively with your principal or supervisor: “Strive for a good attendance record. Focus on the job ahead of you, and put personalities aside. Respect the position and the experience even though you may disagree with your supervisor. Don’t hesitate to ask questions or ask for clarification. Accept suggestions, and try to incorporate the advice by the time of the supervisor’s next visit.”

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

*Teachers should be knowledgeable about the municipality in which the school is located. Municipal officials can be a valuable source of information. They can also help guide you in the development of a project involving your students.*

—Harold M. Klein, Executive Director, Downtown Millburn Development Alliance, Millburn, NJ



### T.I.P.S

The following are suggestions for making a positive connection to the community in which you teach:

- Find out the street names in the neighborhood.
- Have your students make a poster of the pictures and names of local government officials.
- Read the local newspaper for events that involve the school, such as elections, town or city clean-up campaigns, ethnic parades or block parties, fundraisers . . .
- Visit local businesses. Many owners support school activities.
- Find out about student groups, tutors, student council, sports teams, and afterschool activities.
- Participate in school and community activities; volunteer to judge an art contest, help out at an event, or attend a student art show or musical performance.
- Consider preparing a display on an educational theme for the local library or for a store window.
- Write about a successful class activity, and submit the press release to the school newspaper if your school has one. You might also submit to a district or interschool newsletter, local paper, or teacher's magazine. (But remember, you must receive written photo permission from students' parents before publishing photographs of your students.)

