

Introduction

It is extremely difficult to describe to beginning teachers what their first year of teaching will be like—the planning, the paperwork, the parents, and the pressure. Although new teachers have completed full-time student teaching, this is a sheltered form of reality. Until they assume responsibility for their own classrooms, new teachers will not have a true understanding of all the challenges that teaching presents. However, after surviving the hurdles of the first year, there is a great sense of accomplishment, honor, and reward, and each year thereafter gets better.

For a new teacher, the first stage is one of survival and a desperate search for the tools needed to move past this phase. Although beginning teacher support programs are being implemented now more than ever, it is still common to encounter new teachers who feel overwhelmed as they are faced with the challenges of gathering resources for their daily lessons, managing the clerical and clinical sides of teaching, and seeking a way to balance their personal and professional lives. As a beginner, I did not have a systematic form of support or a teaching mentor who was officially assigned to me and could orient me to simple clerical tasks, school culture, or the bureaucracy of education. Instead, I reflected back upon my preparation and scoured through my education textbooks searching for helpful tips that might aid me to deal better with the shock of assuming the responsibilities of my own classroom. Unfortunately, I found little or no information in these sources about practical insights into the world of teaching.

The main focus of education textbooks and classes is to transmit the differing philosophies of teaching and lesson planning. Information that bridges the gap between educational theory and actual classroom practice is lacking. New teachers search for the practical knowledge that the veterans of their profession possess;

these are the critical bits of information that can be achieved only through experience. This insider knowledge, coupled with the historical and valuable research of teaching, is the missing link that new teachers seek and may be what is needed to make the transition into the teaching profession smoother for beginning teachers. However, given that teachers spend most of their time in classrooms separated from their colleagues, the likelihood of veteran teachers having the opportunity to share this hidden curriculum with new teachers is minimal. As a result, this vital, practical knowledge continues to be missing for those entering our profession, and many new teachers continue to suffer through the survival stage just as I did.

More efforts have been made to help beginning teachers with the inception of new teacher mentor programs and beginning teacher support programs. However, beginning teachers have criticized these mechanisms of support for repeating the topics of standards-based instruction and professional development already covered in their teacher preparation programs. For example, aligning lesson plans with state standards and formulating professional goals to develop as an educator are key topics that beginning teacher support programs typically address. Although these dimensions of teaching are important, new teachers are hungry for the insider's knowledge of teaching that experienced teachers possess. Beginning teachers seek the valuable lessons learned through practical experience. More specifically, new teachers are interested in learning how veteran teachers might answer the following questions:

- How do I run the first day of class?
- How do I manage my time effectively?
- How do I get all the grading or preparation done?
- How do I manage, discipline, and teach my students successfully?
- How do I get the students to respect me and to like me?
- How do I make learning fun in my classroom if I am not particularly creative?

These practical insights into the world of teaching appeared to be missing from my college textbooks and are not commonly found in a clear, concise, and friendly text for teachers, whether new or experienced. The stories, tips, and useful knowledge that

teachers learn while on the job need to be disseminated and shared within our profession, for these are the gems of information that help all teachers thrive.

Having worked in K–12 education for 10 years and now working in teacher education at the university level, I serve as the veteran teacher or mentor to many prospective teachers each semester. When asked the question, “Do you think I should be a teacher?” my thoughts and memories are filled with joy, enthusiasm, passion, and a bit of concern as I try to describe to the students how much work is involved in teaching, especially in the early years. Then I always encourage the students by explaining that teaching will change their lives. And for me, now 16 years after joining the teaching profession, I look back on my own experiences and know that I have never regretted my decision to answer the calling to be a teacher.

In reflecting on my own journey as a teacher, I wished that I had more opportunities to glean valuable and insightful lessons from experienced teachers. It is easy to become so involved in our own cultures that we overlook the little nuances that would be helpful to newcomers and are essential to surviving and thriving in that culture. This, combined with the limited interactions of teachers in schools, makes it difficult for such information to be shared. It is my hope that with this book, all teachers will benefit from some personal, simple, and valuable lessons and insights that were learned the hard way by me and other new teachers and that have helped the beginning teachers whom I have mentored to make faster and easier transitions into this noble field.

The beauty of these lessons learned from teaching is that they are not simply lessons for teachers—rather, in my student teaching classes, I refer to them as “life lessons” and believe that they can be adapted to other workplaces, mentor programs, and even to parenting. Although teaching poses many challenges, it can be more rewarding than simple words can describe. Many of my own triumphs and successes in teaching can be attributed to the practical knowledge and insights into teaching that colleagues and friends have shared with me. And so, as you, too, embark upon or continue the journey of being a teacher, I hope that you will be able to use these practical insights into the world of teaching to empower and inspire you to take the actions necessary to transition successfully into this profession and thrive in it for years to come.