

# Preface

I've been studying teachers since I was five years old—first as a student, then for most of my adult life as a colleague. It has been my privilege to observe many gifted master teachers who educate and inspire by their words and actions, truly making a positive difference in the lives of their students. I didn't write this book for them. This book is for those new to teaching who are attempting to define themselves as professionals, as well as for experienced teachers who have stepped into their natural role as mentors. New teachers will make many mistakes as they gain experience during their first year of teaching, but if they are perceived as being professional by their administrators, they will be welcomed back the next year; if not, their errors in judgment may be the only impressions they leave behind.

Conducting ourselves as professionals has a far greater importance than mere job security; we need to be mindful of the powerful impact that we have on our students as they develop their impressions of appropriate adult behavior. I recently read a description of a multimedia presentation titled *uBung*, written by Josse de Pauw. The audience faces a large movie screen that covers the entire back wall of the stage. On it runs a film of a group of adults at a party—laughing, joking, flirting, drinking, and later on, fighting. Standing in front of the screen on stage is a group of ten-year-olds who mimic the adults' actions in an eerily realistic manner. In Flemish, *uBung* means “practice,” and de Pauw is making the point that children are observers of the adult world—watching, mimicking, and learning. This is the joy and the burden of the teacher. Many of us will be remembered as some of the most influential people in our students' lives, and attention must be paid to what we do and what we say.

In this book I offer advice about defining professionalism in teaching, locating a mentor, and figuring out what is appropriate to wear on the job. I also suggest ways to open up the lines of communication with parents, assume your role as a productive member of the staff, and avoid the petty pitfalls of gossip and resentment that occur at any place of work. Finally, I describe specific

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ways to use documentation to protect yourself, discuss the use and abuse of power, and suggest outlets for your continued growth as an educator. My goal is to help you create a vision of your unique self at your professional best.

I divided this book into ten “commandments” as a way to focus my writing—I do feel a passion for teaching akin to religious fervor, but this book is not associated with any religious sect or organization. Also, I use stories to illustrate my advice, but the individuals described in this book are composites of teachers I’ve known, and none of the names are real.

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