
STARTING
STRONG

SURVIVING and
THRIVING as a
New Teacher

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EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to teaching. You have entered into one of the most exciting careers that you could have chosen and will soon find yourself on an “E” ticket ride. You will have days of *exhilaration*, days of *exhaustion*, and days of *exhilarating exhaustion*. You will have days when your students make you laugh so hard that your side hurts and days when your students bring you to tears as you drive home.

You have chosen a career in which no operational manual fits for all teachers. You must find your own way in this career; you must pursue your own unique, individual path.

This book is a survival guide for your first few years of teaching. It features time-tested ideas that will make your first years flow more smoothly. It offers suggestions and advice that will move you quickly past the survival mode and help you flourish in this wonderful career called teaching. As you embark on this career, you become a student of the teaching profession. If you put your entire mind, body, and soul into it, you can move out of the survival mode quickly and move on into the deeper and richer tasks of daily influencing your students’ lives.

Teaching is more than a profession. It is a *lifestyle*. It calls the brave and strong at heart to enter into a dynamic world of preparing students for a future that is unrecognizable to those staring into the crystal ball of time.

Teaching has always been a complicated and challenging profession. To many, however, teaching in the early part of the twenty-first century seems far more challenging when compared to teaching in earlier time periods. Information doubles every few months, and the Internet continues to transform the world into a smaller and smaller place.



Teachers are asked to embrace this new world for themselves first and then to pass these needed skills on to their students – to teach their students to be cognitively flexible and ready for a future, incomprehensible world. This new millennium calls for a new type of teacher – a teacher that comes to the classroom each day with one eye on his or her students and the other on the future. This teacher recognizes that his or her own intellectual growth is a key component in teaching. This teacher is also willing to sit at the feet of those who have gone before and learn the history before jumping too far into the future.

The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS, 1991), a report issued by the U.S. Labor Department, predicted what skills students would need to succeed in the new millennium. SCANS identified five areas of skill competency: (1) effectively using resources, (2) acquiring and applying information, (3) working with others, (4) working with a variety of technologies, and (5) understanding complex interrelationships. SCANS recommended that teachers use a three-fold approach to foster these competencies: (1) teach basic skills in reading, writing, arithmetic, listening, and speaking; (2) cultivate thinking skills; and (3) enhance students' personal qualities (responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity). This is a large bill for any teacher, experienced or new, to fill on a daily basis.

As if preparing students with these skills is not enough, teachers are also called on to build a sense of community for students, to collaborate with colleagues, to supervise technology, to prepare students for high-stakes exams, to help all students meet high standards, to be counselors, and to manage fleeting material resources. Having the skills, knowledge, and motivation to put all of these different pieces together in the teaching puzzle does indeed take a special kind of person.

Teaching is not a *goal* as much as it is a *calling*. Becoming vice president of the Saturn Car Company is a goal; teaching a young wild thing named Saturn is a calling. This calling is answered in the details, the routines, and the many conversations and discussions that make up a teacher's day. You could have chosen any career you desired, but something in your soul called you to teach – called you to walk into the classroom on a daily basis to nurture and teach souls. It wasn't luck. It wasn't a wild night in a college pub where everyone shot darts at a career dartboard. It was a fateful calling of a career to you – it called to you when you drove past the local school with students getting out – kids running and screaming. It called to you when you saw national



statistics on science and maths achievement. It called to you when you saw field trips of tiny children cross the street in front of you, holding hands, and being led by a mother hen. It called. You listened. You answered.

Now your job is to be open to what you will learn through this work and to be open to the mysteries of it all. Your job is to find your *meaning* and *identity* within the walls of your classroom and the boundaries of your schoolyard. The challenge is to not lose your soul in the busyness and challenges of this calling. There are very few professions that ask for so much – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Yet somewhere in the middle of the mayhem, your soul is calling – calling you into the art of teaching and beckoning you to bring your many unique gifts and talents.

Only those who have chosen this profession can understand this calling. Teaching is more than a paycheck, more than a job, and more than something to do during the day. It is *soul work* – beautiful and satisfying soul work.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

There is no one way to be a successful teacher, and this book offers no silver bullet. However, this book does provide time-tested ideas and suggestions so that you can avoid spending time reinventing the wheel, and instead you can be teaching your children about the origins of the wheel. This book focuses upon the multiple roles that come with the job title “teacher.” Each chapter describes one of the roles.

Chapter 1: Teacher as a Creator of Classroom Environment describes the teacher’s role in fostering learning and social growth. This chapter describes different types of classroom layouts as well as ideas for decorating and arranging the classroom for optimal learning and collaboration.

Chapter 2: Teacher as a Manager of the Classroom provides positive strategies and innovative systems for creating rules and procedures that support learning goals. It offers suggestions for establishing procedures that promote positive behaviour in whole class, small group, and individual learning situations. Intervention strategies for dealing with difficult student behaviours are also discussed.



Chapter 3: **Teacher as a Designer of Instruction** offers **guidelines for designing curriculum and instruction** that meet high standards and reach all learners. This chapter is guided by the question: What do students need to know and do? It helps teachers navigate the challenging process of determining standards, designing lesson plans, and developing units.

Chapter 4: **Teacher as an Assessor** focuses on the question: **How do I know my students are learning?** The chapter describes how teachers can effectively examine student understanding through a broad range of assessments. It highlights information and suggestions for using effective measures during all aspects of the instructional process, with specific examples for assessing students before, during, and after teaching.

Chapter 5: **Teacher as a Promoter of Literacy** examines how teachers can offer a **systematic and balanced instructional approach to literacy** that ensures student success. This chapter also discusses the importance of developing a strong, independent reading program and gives suggestions building an excellent classroom library. The chapter also includes a glossary of the most current literacy terms.

Chapter 6: **Teacher as a Facilitator and Guide for Learning** concentrates on how teachers can **facilitate learning by using a wide range of effective and proven teaching strategies**. This chapter provides information on strategies such as cooperative learning, Socratic questioning, and cross-age tutoring.

Chapter 7: **Teacher as a Relationship Builder** examines the various **relationships encountered in teaching and provides ideas for effectively connecting with students and parents**. The chapter suggests ideas and activities for connecting more deeply with students, dealing effectively with difficult students, and communicating with parents. Practical strategies for confronting “energy bandits” and caring for oneself are also presented.

Chapter 8: **Teacher as a Communicator** gives **suggestions and strategies for oral and written communications with parents and colleagues**. It offers tips on how to make parent conferences successful as well as ideas for making back-to-school nights informative and interesting. Tips for creating newsletters and Web sites and using e-mail are also included.



Chapter 9: Teacher as a Learner **highlights the importance of teachers becoming lifelong learners.** It offers many suggestions for keeping the educational fire lit. The chapter demonstrates that teaching is a far richer experience when it is done in collaboration with others and when it focuses on continually improving teaching practice. The chapter describes the many vehicles available that can offer support and opportunity to grow as a teacher.

Each chapter offers powerful, specific suggestions within each role that can make your first few years of teaching effective and successful. The goal is not to overwhelm you with “to do” lists, but to offer you plenty of support and options as you develop in your practice. Each chapter includes Web site recommendations (Worthwhile Web Sites), connections to brain research (Brain Bits), and advice for the first days or weeks of school (First Week Flags). In addition, reflection questions are included at the end of each chapter to give you some food for thought as you evaluate your own practice. In fact, if you use this book during your induction program, you may engage in these reflections with others who are new to teaching.

You are embarking on the career of a lifetime. May your journey be filled with many moments of satisfaction of a job well done, emotions that touch your soul, and the knowledge that no other job in the world is better than teaching.

TEACHER AS A MANAGER OF THE CLASSROOM

First Impressions

Know Your Teaching Context

On the Road to a Well-Managed Classroom

- ▶ Establishing Classroom Rules
- ▶ The Other Part of the Formula – Procedures
- ▶ Delegation: Empowering Students Through Class Jobs

Keeping Behaviours in Check

- ▶ Positive Consequences
- ▶ Negative Consequences
- ▶ Catching Behaviours Before They Escalate

Dealing with Severe Behaviour

- ▶ Behaviour Management Plans and Individual Contracts
- ▶ Severe Behaviour: Getting Assistance

Establishing a Sense of Community

- ▶ Class Meetings
- ▶ Traditions
- ▶ Celebrations
- ▶ Greetings
- ▶ Character Education

Keeping Things Together Even When You're Not There: Effective Substitute Plans

Getting Back Control When All Is Lost

Starter Survivor Tips

- ▶ Use Your Signals
- ▶ Have a Backup Plan
- ▶ Rethink and Revise When Necessary

A Last Look at the Teacher as a Manager of the Classroom

Recommended Readings

Questions for Self-Reflection

“How Do I Create
a Classroom That
Runs Smoothly?”





Think back to your own education and try to remember the classes in which you had wonderful learning experiences. Perhaps it was your year three class or your secondary school mathematics class. What do you think made the difference between these classes and others?

Chances are that the teachers of your favourite classes were masters not only of the *content* they taught, but also in the overall *management* of their classroom. In addition to making the content interesting and relevant, your teacher most likely made sure that things ran smoothly and efficiently. They made your learning a priority and structured the classroom based on that priority. If clear expectations for classroom behaviour had not been established, or if the management of the environment had not been effective, the amount of learning you achieved in these classes would have been drastically reduced.

As you may have experienced firsthand, there are some content experts whose classroom teaching is less than effective, because these teachers lack management skills. *Clearly, knowing subject matter is important, but the overall success of any teacher depends upon their ability to anticipate, plan, and respond to events that occur throughout the day.* As a beginning teacher, your mission is to realize both aspects of teaching – content and management. You must create an effective learning environment through which you can deliver meaningful content instruction.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Within the first fifteen minutes of a new school year or semester, students develop an impression about who you are and about what type of learning experience you will offer them. You can proactively prevent management difficulties and set the stage for a successful classroom experience by thoughtfully planning and establishing a structure from the beginning. This signals to students that you have prioritized their learning.

As you can probably guess, your students do not enter your classroom with a clear understanding of your expectations and management procedures. Students need to learn your rules, routines, and procedures within the first several days or weeks of school. During these days or

weeks, thread your lessons with clarification, instruction, and practice of the rules, routines, and procedures. By doing so, you establish a classroom management system and you “grow” students’ awareness and ability to function within the classroom structure. Through this ongoing development of structure, students become familiar with your teaching style, your expectations for behaviour, and the procedures they must follow to complete the simplest of tasks.

KNOW YOUR TEACHING CONTEXT

Before you can design an effective classroom management plan, you must understand your teaching situation, your students, and your school. The minute you sign your contract, begin seeking answers to the following questions:

- * Who are my students?
- * What is my class size?
- * What is the schedule of the school (including breaks, transitions between lessons, lunches, etc.)?
- * What is the educational background of my students? Is this their first year in a new setting? Is there a high rate of transience?
- * What are some of the students’ interests?
- * What information is available on my students through their school files? (See First Week Flag.)
- * What are the rules and policies of the school?
- * What is the culture of the community?
- * What subjects am I responsible for teaching?



Brain Bits



By nature, individuals are wired to seek new information, to look for connections, predictable patterns, and expectations within the classroom. Therefore, students seek predictability and structure in their environment. When you provide a well-organized management system within your classroom, students can more easily attend to the important task of learning (Wolfe, 2001).