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Introduction

It was my first year of teaching, and I was sinking. I had several degrees and credentials, yet I couldn't seem to get my students to pay attention or remember any of the mathematics I had just taught them. At the same time, I realized that my students could remember every word to every rap song on the radio.

One day, while teaching (or, what I thought was teaching) my class to add and subtract decimals, I decided to create my own rap song, which I named "The Itty-Bitty Dot," after the decimal point. I practiced it all night (I admit, in front of the mirror) and performed it in front of my class the next morning.

It was a complete disaster.

My middle school students laughed hysterically at me. Then they couldn't run out of the room fast enough to tell their other friends about what was sure to be the end of my short-lived teaching career. *Oh, well.*

But then, a funny thing happened as I was walking to the teachers' lounge for lunch. I walked by the students' lunch tables, and they were all singing "The Itty-Bitty Dot." The next day, they entered my room with the same level of excitement usually reserved for when the bell rang to end my class. They were saying things like, "Yesterday was the best day ever in math class. Are you going to rap again?"

As their interest in mathematics seemed to skyrocket (along with their test scores), my students insisted that I start creating rap music videos about the mathematics concepts I was teaching. And with their help, we posted them all over the internet. "The Rappin' Mathematician" was born, and those videos have now been viewed hundreds of thousands of times in homes and classrooms around the world (and eventually featured on the *CBS Evening News*).

I also started getting emails and calls from students in other countries, letting me know how their teachers were using the videos to teach them in class.

That's when my online teaching career began.

Since we filmed that first video, I've been busy recording videos and creating online programs that help students do everything from master their times tables to higher-level algebra concepts. These videos have been incredibly well-received and effective. But I always longed for one more dimension of them—a live component.

When schools across the globe abruptly shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I knew there would be many students who might struggle to stay engaged in mathematics—and many parents who would struggle to help their kids understand the concepts. Wanting desperately to help, I quickly created “Wacky Math Hour,” a free, weekly, live Zoom class that anyone could join. Being one of the first teachers to offer something like this, I had the terrifying pleasure of working out some major kinks early on. (Who knew, at the time, that students would figure out how to draw on the teacher's screen?)

Even with the early Zoom mix-ups, thousands of teachers and parents from around the world signed up to join us and enthusiastically asked for more. Each week of those early pandemic months, I—along with a few of my amazing teaching colleagues—delivered engaging, effective mathematics instruction directly into the hearts and minds of students around the world.

And that's when I realized the true power of online teaching.

I've watched my own children take online classes over the years, with mixed results. I've seen them completely engaged and engrossed in their online class, and I've seen them half asleep and utterly disengaged as the teacher struggles to command the online environment.

So, I set out on a journey to learn from amazing teachers who are teaching online. (Yes, I am a trainer of teachers around the United States, and some people like to know that I was California Teacher of the Year and a top-four finalist for National Teacher of the Year. But I still look to learn from other teachers every day.) I sought out highly effective online teachers who are not merely taking the traditional ways of teaching and transporting them into online classrooms but rather building a new reality—taking advantage of the unique qualities of the online environment to engage and educate students in a multitude of ways that work for them creatively and successfully. Now, I've

combined my own experiences with online education with what I've learned from these highly successful online teachers and condensed them into this book for you, the next generation of online educators (no matter where you are in your teaching career!).

About This Book

101 Tips for Teaching Online is an easy book to read. It's filled with practical tips for teachers, from teachers, that you can implement immediately to be highly effective in your online classroom, while still doing the critical work that teachers do. It draws on the wisdom (and specific experiences) of teachers, some of whom have been teaching online for many years and some who've jumped in with fresh ideas in just the past couple of years. And it draws on the commonsense ideas that some of us quickly discovered as we pivoted to online learning at the beginning of the pandemic.

This book is divided into eleven chapters, each containing several tips relating to the following topics.

1. Looking good on camera
2. Building relationships with students
3. Engaging students
4. Managing your classroom
5. Pulling in parents and guardians
6. Creating a community
7. Organizing your lessons
8. Assessing students
9. Ensuring equity
10. Differentiating learning
11. Taking care of yourself

Each tip in this book will help you do what you need to do to explain things to students, engage them in learning, and help them feel safe, loved, and confident as a member of your class.

Throughout the book, you'll find Teacher Feature and Advice From Students feature boxes. The Advice From Students feature boxes have quotes from real students about the different ways they find learning online helpful. In each feature, I've sculpted my conversations with the students down to just one thought, with the hope that it's something that you can implement immediately in your own work—because as teachers, we're masters at adopting and adapting our colleagues' ideas, right?

As you read each chapter, reflect on how you might use the chapter's tips in your own teaching. At the conclusion of each chapter, a Where to Go From Here section provides a quick self-assessment, with space to jot down notes on your reflections. In addition, this section includes suggested resources to consult if you want to dig deeper into the chapter topic.

Before we get to chapter 1 (page 5), let me start us out with the first important tip—a foundation for them all: remember what teachers do.

TIP 1

Remember What Teachers Do

I'll never forget something my first principal, David Geck, said to me during my very first week of teaching. He said:

"A truly great teacher can teach with a plot of sand and a stick."

That was over twenty years ago, and over those years, I've used a lot of tools to teach students. From word walls to hundreds charts, and from cutouts to SMART Boards, I've used 'em all.

And yet, what unlocks the learning isn't the tool—it's our ability, as teachers, to explain things to students.

As teachers, we've been trained to explain. Of course, inextricably linked to that ability is the need to build relationships with students, the need to monitor and assess their learning, the need to . . . well, you know how long this list goes on. But at the core of it all is our ability to explain things.

When schools across the world closed their physical doors due to the pandemic and switched to remote learning, many teachers had to scramble. A move to remote learning meant new online platforms, new apps, new classrooms (like our kitchen tables), and of course, new struggles. But what did we discover at the end of all that? Simply this: all the tools required to deliver online learning are just technologically evolved versions of a plot of sand and a stick.

Our ability to explain things to our students is what sparks in them the true ability to think, learn, and grow.

Let's do this.

TIP 29

Set Your Expectations High

In any class, at any level, regardless of the topic or age of students, it is critical that teachers set their expectations high. As Harry and Rosemary Wong (2018) state in *The First Days of School*:

The expectations you have of your students significantly influence what they are capable of achieving in class and in life. (p. 48)

When creating and communicating your expectations for students in your online classroom, remember that your expectations for students are not just what you want them doing and saying in class, but also characteristics of the kind of people you want them to be. Expectations go far beyond the technology you'll be using and the content the students will be learning. They help students to live in a world where they are safe, confident, and loved.

Only you can determine the expectations that you have for your students, but here are three tips to incorporate them into your practice.

1. Write them in a positive way, letting students know what they should be doing (as opposed to what they should *not* be doing).

For example, expecting that your students will “Always arrive prepared” communicates a positive expectation, as opposed to communicating that you are expecting forgetfulness when you tell students, “Don't forget to bring everything.”

2. In an in-person classroom, many teachers choose to post their expectations in large letters on the wall as a constant, visible reminder for all to see. While this might not work in an online class, here are a few creative ways to make sure your expectations are visible and communicated.
 - a. Begin class by reviewing the expectations with your students (how often you review them depends on how often it's needed). Coming up with a brief, call-and-response way to review them can be helpful.
 - b. If you have a class website, make sure the expectations are clearly visible on the home page.
 - c. Create virtual backgrounds that the students can use, each displaying one of the expectations.