

Eighteen Thoughts for Elementary Teachers Starting Their Careers

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Introduction

Mary Bruce, my neighbor and friend, is a retired Milwaukee public school teacher with 37 years of experience. I have a young friend who is majoring in elementary education at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. My conversations with my aspiring elementary teacher friend motivated me to ask Mary: “What advice would you give newly graduated elementary school teachers starting their careers?” Mary’s advice follows.

Jack McHugh

- It’s wise to review class guidelines for the first few weeks; as final enrollment can take that long in a large city school system.
- Set class guidelines and rules so that you can comfortably and successfully teach.
- In large city schools it is necessary to address some children, no matter how young, as you might direct a middle or high school age student.
- Be firm, nurturing, and kind; fun will be had when everyone follows guidelines and when there is no interrupting.
- Be creative with interactive or individual relaxation activities.
- Almost every elementary public/city school student (especially prior to third grade) shows *unconditional* love for adults in charge—especially teachers!
- When a child is misbehaving or has behavioral concerns, you should either ask the child to draw or write about what is going on in their life.
- Young children are *resilient*. Should uncharacteristic and negative behaviors surface, either consult with the social worker or contact the parent.
- Try including group activities during lessons to help students reflect and express and know their feelings and know that it’s always O.K. to share. If not with the class, encourage the child to write a note or draw a picture and give it to you.
- Parents may be unmarried, separated, and not biological. *Families are not all the same* and that’s what makes the world an interesting place.
- Learning is the road to success; encourage students to ask when they don’t understand something.
- We are all different; and each one of us is just as important as everyone else.
- Many of us learn differently; that is O.K.
- Figure out what children like to do; for example, some children don’t like sitting, maybe they don’t like recess, maybe they like art but not reading or sports but not singing.

- Students must always try to sit, learn and follow instructions. If it is difficult or students do not understand or don't feel good about it, encourage your students to ask for help.
- Elementary classrooms are often more populated than junior and senior high classrooms for a variety of reasons.
- Classroom supplies in the elementary school may be more limited than in the higher grades. Many elementary teachers spend their own money on classroom supplies.
- Elementary teachers are *among the hardest working professionals* that one could imagine! For example, many teachers spend lunch recess with the children in their classrooms.

Reaching the heart, soul and abilities of elementary students and their parents is among the most rewarding experiences you can ever have!

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Comments? Feel free to share any comments with Mary Bruce at marybruce5767@gmail.com.