

# **10 LESSONS EVERY NEW TEACHER SHOULD LEARN**



by

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Welcome to teaching!!! You are now part of a profession solely dedicated to helping students of all ages learn. It is a profession where the more you give of yourself, the more you get in return. Most famous people are eventually forgotten. Teachers live on in the hearts and minds of their students for a lifetime.

The absolute first thing you need to learn is the rules and operating procedures of the building/district to which you are employed. Once you have that down it will be time to grow into your occupation.

Below is a list of ten lessons every new teacher should learn. Do not expect yourself to learn them all at once. But as you gain experience you will find these lessons valuable.

## 10 LESSONS EVERY NEW TEACHER SHOULD LEARN

### 1 - Be Yourself

One of the hardest things to do as you begin your career is to feel comfortable being the teacher of your classroom. You are not alone. Many of your colleagues have also felt the shock of going from being a student in a college classroom to suddenly being in charge of a room full of students. The biggest mistake you can make at that moment is to try to be somebody you are not.

While it is beneficial to reach out to fellow veterans educators for advice, be careful of losing who you are as a person. Comparing yourself to others is very stressful. Trying to be somebody you are not will not work. You need to find what works for you with methods you are comfortable with when dealing with your students.

This will take time. Day by day, semester by semester you will adapt to your new surroundings.

You will learn to discard what doesn't work for you and keep what does. Each year you teach your anxiety level will decrease while your confidence level increases. Using your gifts and talents you will grow into the teacher you were born to be. Don't rush the process.

More and more you will begin to feel the rewards of being a teacher. It will become clear to you that you are truly learning to make a difference in the life of a child. That is the greatest reward any teacher can ask for from their profession. You don't want to miss that feeling. Give yourself time to grow into that moment.

While the school district has provided you a classroom filled with children to teach, how learning happens in your class is what makes you so important. You set the tone and atmosphere in your room. Over time you will discover what works best for you. If you become uncomfortable, don't be afraid to change to a technique that is a better fit for you and your students. That experience is what will make you the true expert in your classroom.

## 2 - It Is About the Student (Get to Know Them)

It is very normal for a beginning teacher to ask, "How am I doing?" What new teachers learn over time is to be more concerned about "How are my students doing?" To grow as a teacher the focus must come off oneself and on to the students in the room. The only true way to know how your students are doing is to get to know them.

The natural growth progression of an experienced teacher was once put in the following terms:

The first ten years one teaches the curriculum. The second ten years one teaches children the curriculum. The last ten years one just teaches children.

During your tenure as a teacher you will find that everything changes but the students. Curriculums, standards, expectations, teaching practices, rules of behavior, educational theories, as well as you will all change over time. Yet somehow students always remain vessels of hope waiting for you to spark their curiosity with knowledge. How well you satisfy their expectations depend a lot of how much you know about them.

Albert Einstein once said, "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life thinking it is stupid."

Every student comes to your room with different abilities. They are not all the same. If you have the opportunity, drive by the homes of your students to see the environment from which they come. That could explain why your students may feel your room is the best place they see all day.

What experienced teachers know is that not all students learn to develop their abilities in the same way. Some students learn by listening. Some learn by doing, etc. There are many factors that affect a child's ability to comprehend a subject. What you will discover is the more you know about the different abilities of each student the wiser you become in your selection of how best to teach a lesson to your class.

### 3 - Understand the Importance of Readiness

Physical and emotional readiness is a tremendous factor in predicting student success in school. A student's maturity is something that cannot be measured simply by age. It is human nature for a child to stop playing a game they never can win because of readiness.

That is where the compassion and understanding of a wise teacher becomes so important. Students do not need criticism for not being able to do what they are not ready to do. Instead, encouragement and patience are necessary. Flowers bloom when they are ready. Children are much the same way.

There once was an elementary school physical education teacher who loved to reinforce movement skills thru relay races. One of the skills was skipping. The teacher noticed that first grade while all the girls could skip, many boys had trouble switching legs. Their skip was more like a trot.

When a veteran teacher of many years asked why little boys in first grade had so much difficulty with skipping. The response was both simple and enlightening.

“Because they are not ready to skip. Give them time to grow up. By third grade they will all be skipping just fine.”

The teacher watched those boys the next two years and sure enough by the time those same boys reached third grade they could skip with no problem just like the girls.

If your students are struggling with something right now, encourage them to don't give up. Don't let them see themselves as a failure. Explain to them the importance of giving themselves more time to grow and mature. Support them with a little patience until they are ready to bloom.

#### 4 - Value of the Teacher/Student Connection

A young teacher was having all kinds of trouble with her classroom. Frustrated to tears, she sought the advice of a popular co-worker. For nearly an hour the panicked

teacher explained how nothing she tried seems to help in controlling her class. All the threats seemed to fall on deaf ears almost as if the students were daring her to carry out her threatened punishment. The teacher dreaded walking into her room each day. It was so bad that she was beginning to think of leaving the profession she had just joined.

Finally the co-worker took out a piece of paper and instructed the teacher to write down everything she knew about each student. The teacher was at a loss for words. Besides the names of the students she couldn't describe anything else about them.

The co-worker then gave the teacher an assignment. She was to interview each student individually to learn as much about them as she could. The result was that during each interview the teacher began to make a connection with the student. Almost immediately the atmosphere in the room changed. The teacher learned that her real source of power with the students was through her connection with them and not threats.

Many studies have found that a strong teacher/student connection brings very positive results.

Test scores increased, discipline referrals decline significantly and the overall atmosphere in the classroom is improved. The wise teacher learns that power does not come from the student discipline code. Real power comes from the positive connections they enjoy with their students.

President Theodore Roosevelt once said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." The same applies to students. The personal connection a teacher has with the student is the most influential factor in student success. Always remember, the more you give of yourself, the more you get back in return.

## 5 - Make it Interesting and Understandable to All

Students cannot learn what they cannot understand. Forget about what they should know. The only thing that matters is what they do know. It is easy to place the blame in education on someone else. As if someone had done their job better the student would know more. While that may be true it is completely meaningless to the student's future. Their future is now in your hands and it is up to you to move their education forward.

New teachers need to learn that just because a lesson is understandable to them doesn't make it so for their students. Successful teachers find ways to make the lesson simple and relevant to all their students. This takes lots of experimenting but once achieved the benefit for the student is enormous. It is exciting to see all the light bulbs in their eyes light up as their confidence from mastery is born. Instead of boredom momentum grows as the students look forward to what they will learn next.

Sometimes accommodations must be made for special needs children but that must not be seen as a roadblock. All students celebrate learning as one. No one is left behind.



Everyone is pulled forward to a new exciting level.

Teaching is more than passing out information. Teaching is helping students understand. One of the goals of great teachers is to teach in a way that all students understand easily. This eliminates a lot of tension and stress in the classroom. It shows the teacher cares about the student. It places the burden for learning more on the teacher and less on the student.

It is the mark of a true professional.

## 6 - Be Organized but Flexible

Nothing is worse in a classroom than chaos. Students love structure. The sense a teacher is in charge calms anxiety. That is why organization is so important.

If time is not filled by you the teacher it will be filled by the students. As little as sixty seconds is enough to lose focus for some children. Sometimes a little free time is necessary but even then students will look to you to establish control if chaos starts to arise. A well structured classroom does not waste time necessary for student learning.

Have a plan, stick to the plan, always have a back up plan is a good motto to adopt.

Experienced teachers have learned that preparation for a lesson is half the battle. Too

much changing of directions is confusing to the students. It becomes unsettling to constantly go back and forth in one direction or another. Classroom leaders know to not deviate from a plan unless it is apparent to all the plan is not working.

The other half is being flexible enough to change course should something go wrong. Murphy's Law states that if anything can go wrong, it will at the worst possible moment. At any moment there could be a distraction from an announcement, a fire drill or technology glitch that makes the lesson plan of the day impossible. Be prepared.

The same holds true for substitutes when you are absent. Keep in mind that the person filling in for you will not have your expertise to answer your students questions. When leaving lesson plans for substitutes do not expect them to be able to come in and teach a lesson like you. First of all they will not have the student/teacher connection you have established with your class. Second classroom procedures you take for granted like attendance, lunch count or discipline procedures differ from building to building. Last, they may not come from the same educational background as you. Imagine a retired elementary teacher being asked to sub in a high school classroom. Veteran teachers know not to expect too much from substitutes therefore, they will leave plans that are suited to the situation.

## 7 - Recognize, Value and Accept Each Student

Confidence is essential in one's abilities to take on new challenges while growing. The more challenges conquered the more confident the student becomes in his/her abilities to be successful. Confidence comes when students do things they have never done before. When students overcome obstacles in the classroom, their confidence levels start to grow.

Worth is the value that students place on themselves, how they feel about themselves. Worth comes from the feedback the student receives from others and the feedback he gives himself during self talk. What makes self worth so important is that if students don't feel they are worth anything, they will never try anything. If a student never tries anything, he can't get the confidence boost he needs to try and learn other things. Educationally speaking he or she becomes doomed for failure.

The opposite of hope is hopelessness. The dictionary definition of hopeless is one who feels unable to be helped or improved. In a real sense that is directly contrary of the mission of a teacher to help students learn. Great teachers know they are not in the business of taking away a students hope.

That is why you as a teacher play such a powerful role in lives of your students. You have the power to value, recognize and encourage every student that comes into your room. It is hard to imagine any other profession that can have such a powerful influence on so many

people. Unlike a curriculum on a computer, only you as a teacher can develop confidence, worth and hope in each child. That is a precious gift they carry with them the rest of their lives. Confidence, worth and hope are why people try. It is what makes them life long learners. They are gifts teachers have passed on for generations.

## 8 - Never Fear Mistakes

No one wants you to fail. But understand that you as a new teacher will make mistakes while learning your craft. It is normal. While frustrating the learning curve for new teachers is something everyone experiences. Many veteran teachers look back on their first few years in the profession and wonder if their students learned anything at all. Most likely you will feel the same way.

What you will learn is that mistakes are not fatal. They are nothing more than an opportunity to learn. Wise teachers remember that lesson when dealing with students. Like you students should not fear making mistakes. If they do they become reluctant to try for fear of making another mistake. How to handle mishaps is what distinguishes success and failure.

It is said experience is a hard teacher. It gives the test first then teaches the lesson. The best teachers are those who have turned mistakes in the past to wisdom in the present. That is the value of experience. That is not to say experienced teachers never make

mistakes, but when they do happen the instructor knows how to handle and learn from the situation.

This is also an area where having a sense of humor can be a big advantage. A sense of humor makes you and those around you more comfortable. Compared to a temper, laughter lowers students resistance to you. It makes you more human in others eyes. Your sense of humor will be a great coping method for you to improve your mood while dealing with stress. Finally, a good sense of humor helps you to be more patient with your students when they make mistakes and become frustrated.

#### 9 - Look in Every Face, Every Day

One of the great responsibilities of a teacher is to reflect back the hope they see in their students eyes every day. It is impossible for a caring teacher to spend a whole career looking into the eyes of students and not be changed by what they see. This is where the true professional draws their inspiration.

At the same time eye contact with your students tells them you care. They become aware that you are paying attention to them. Attention is a powerful human need that drives behavior. Unfortunately, many children today come to school having received very little personal attention elsewhere. Eye contact as well as a calm encouraging voice are extremely powerful in building rapport with those children.

Keep in mind the big picture is not today but the future. Not all of your students will be good students. Most of your students will not graduate from a four year college like their teacher. But they are still students who need a caring teacher like you. If you don't care, they will stop caring also. This may seem like a huge responsibility but welcome to the world of teaching. It is why many people when asked to name a person who most influenced their life will list a former teacher.

The longer you teach the more comfortable you will become in this role. It is what brings you cherished memories that fill your heart. It is the sense of purpose you fulfill to make a difference for others in this world. It is why teaching still remains one of the most trusted professions.

## 10 - Don't Ignore Stress!!!

You are teaching in a very stressful time for educators. Increasing demands add more and more to your plate with nothing ever being taken off. There just aren't enough hours in the day. Many teachers live their lives in survival mode rather than self satisfaction from their job. Young teachers may think they can be superhuman but veteran teachers know better.

A common complaint from teachers who are too busy is that everybody wants something

from them. People want them to join their group, committee or organization. The only problem is every group, committee or organization one joins requires a commitment of time and energy. This is adding unnecessary demands to a day that is already time stretched. More responsibilities is something most educators don't need. No matter how worthwhile these commitments may seem, they are just adding more stress to your life.

Learn to say "No". By not joining you may feel some guilt at first, but in the long run you are looking out for your best interests. No one can blame you for that. Think of yourself as your own booking agent protecting a valuable client. Making sure that you are rested, focused and at your best for your classroom is important. It is easy to say "yes", but the busier you are the more you must say "no". Many problems in home life occur when teachers put their job before their family. Set your priorities with family and health at the top of the list.

When young there is a tendency to take one's health for granted. But as time passes we all come to the realization that that is not wise. Investing in your health will pay off dividends in the long run. The other option of ignoring your health until a serious medical occurs – will not end well.

Don't just give up on your health. Eat regularly. Stop skipping meals because you are too busy. Skipping meals only lowers your energy, which you need to accomplish your teaching load effectively. You are only going to get out of something what you put into it. Most school districts allow personal leave days. Don't be afraid to use them if needed. Remember you

time off task to reenergize is just as important than your time on task. The benefit of a well timed personal day may prevent the necessary use of many sick days later on.

Good Luck!!!

PS - Give yourself roughly 30 years to learn above. LOL.



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