

Reading Horizons

Volume 11, Issue 1

1970

Article 3

OCTOBER 1970

A New Teacher Looks Toward That First Memorable Year

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Abstract

As I look ahead to the approaching school year, many thoughts cross my mind. Like many new teachers, I feel a bit overwhelmed with the immensity of the impending task. The desire to be a successful teacher is mixed with nervous anticipation and a few worries. Will I be able to establish and maintain rapport with my class of fifth-graders? Will I be able to motivate my students and promote a desire to learn? Will it be possible for me to meet the needs of the individual children in my class? Will I be a good teacher of reading? In an attempt to relieve my anxiety as well as to build a strong foundation for my first-year teaching experiences, I have endeavored to formulate some personal goals based upon how I perceive my role as a teacher. Hopefully, these goals will guide me through my first year in the classroom and help me in my quest for quality teaching.

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First and foremost, the primary objective must be to know my students. Becoming sensitive to their needs, interests, ambitions and frustrations is of vital importance. This will not be easy by any means. Yet it will be well worth the effort to try because sensitivity and insight are the basic keys for success as a teacher. If I can develop, even partially, this ability of seeing with the third eye and hearing with the third ear, I will be a better teacher for it. It is my duty to discover each child's strengths, weaknesses, interests, aims and self-concept, take him at that point and build from there. Being able to rely on such a number of helpful bits of knowledge about one's students does much to reinforce a healthy and stable atmosphere for learning. For example, it enables the teacher to establish and maintain rapport, and it is even possible that situations may be avoided before they lead to more serious problems. If the teacher especially realizes the interests and frustrations of the classroom leaders, she may gain the confidence of the others more readily.

My first thought was that this would be much easier said than done. I asked myself, "How can one *really* get to know a child?" Certainly not just by seeing him in the classroom. There, one sees only a few of a child's many sides, and not always the best sides at that. However, both the novice and the experienced teacher can make valuable use of available information which includes school data, histories, test scores and conference reports. Following that, the

teacher may decide to use creative writing as a means of “discovering” the inner child, or in order to reach a better understanding, the teacher might even decide to invite each child to have lunch with him; not en masse but in ones or twos. I find this last idea especially appealing because it would seem to provide an opportunity for children to share the thoughts and questions they’d never had a chance to discuss in the classroom. We all realize that in a large classroom it is difficult, if not impossible, to get to know one’s students thoroughly. A simple thing like a lunch together has the potential of doing a world of good, especially with the “problem” children, who thirst for the spotlight and who are often the hardest to reach. If the teacher learns to communicate her interest and concern by means of good listening, a tactful word, a significant gesture and an interested attitude, soon, the child will learn that here is someone genuinely interested in him and his problems.

My second objective is to provide a plan for learning which includes activity and variety. I stress this point because even though children may be able to concentrate for longer and longer periods of time by the time they reach fifth grade, there is still a basic need for these two ingredients in the learning situation. Many discipline problems may be prevented by coming to class well prepared and armed with many purposeful and exciting activities, for busy and interested students have few opportunities to misbehave. I plan to take my own advice and work for variety of approach, using “props,” planning activities that INVOLVE students and capitalizing on their built-in interests. Flexibility is the watchword here.

Thirdly, I recognize a necessity to set up attainable goals for my pupils as well as myself and to give praise and recognition for good work or exceptional efforts. After all, there is much truth to the maxim that nothing succeeds like success. However, it is not enough to establish attainable goals and stop at that point. As a child must learn to read in order to make ideas his own, so must he be able to relate to what is being taught in order to make the classroom goals his own personal goals. I truly believe that the incorporation of a goal-oriented program, based on the needs of the children, with a built-in plan for success, can make all the difference in the world between a disastrous, a mediocre, or a fruitful first year in the classroom.

The fourth goal is a personal plea that I never take myself or the events of my teaching day too seriously. Knowing this, if I can keep my sense of humor through the small crises, when the table leg col-

lapses or the hamster gets lost, hopefully, even the most horrendous of experiences can be reduced to the propitious thought that, "This too, shall pass." After all, if the teacher laughs and makes a valiant attempt to make the most of a bad situation, the class will laugh with her and all will make it through with laugh wrinkles instead of scars.

As I have been considering these approaching months of teaching, it strikes me that I will be like my students in many ways. If I may generalize for a moment and speak for most new teachers, I believe we have a sincere desire to succeed in the classroom and to advance in the profession. Students have these same desires to succeed and advance on their own merits. We are all striving for security, satisfaction and recognition. A teaching novice, like myself, will continue to need and want guidance and understanding. The same is true of students. Finally, as a beginning teacher, I am eager to accept the challenge of being an educator. While I will, no doubt make mistakes, I would like to believe that I have what it takes to be a good teacher and that as I gain experience, I will learn to channel my energies so that I may contribute more and more to improving the quality of public-school education. May I set a good example for my students and direct their energies so that they may become well-rounded, responsible individuals.

There is a famous aphorism which I have adopted as my philosophy for the ensuing year.

"God grant me the serenity to accept those things I
cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And wisdom to know the difference."

Good luck to me.