



NC Beginning Teacher Newsletter



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Being A Teacher

By Carol Forrest,

2020 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Central Region Teacher of the Year

College is done, your degree is in hand, the applications have been filled out, your interviews are over and you are looking at your very own classroom. Where do you start? What do you do with all of the old teacher's stuff? How will you arrange your room? How will you connect with your students? And then the questions become personal! What will my students be like? Will they like me? Will I have the classroom management skills I need? Do I really understand how to differentiate instruction? Do I have a clear understanding of my standards? Do I know what data to collect and what to do with it? Do I even know how to collect data? Will my teaching team listen to me? Will I survive the Coronavirus and Flu Season?



Wait! You have already started and you already have answers to so many of those questions. You have figured out solutions to many obstacles and should feel like you have moved part of the mountain. You are now the most important person to guide, facilitate and teach those students in front of you every day. What are the secrets to becoming the teacher you have in mind? What will help you make the difference in the lives of each of your students? How will you make meaningful connections with students, colleagues, parents and administrators? Well, the answers to those questions are as individual as the lessons that we all work to create and teach. All of us (as both beginning and veteran teachers) work to answer those questions every year. It is worth the work and I have just a few tips to offer.

Commit to excellence. You are in charge of the instruction, the opportunities, and the environment you create for your students. Be committed to excellence in all three of those areas. It takes time to plan great instruction with ample opportunities for students to explore, create, practice and learn. Take and make the time. Use the expertise of your team to plan for this critical component to be the teacher you want to be. Listen to your students for clues about their learning styles, preferences, strengths and ways to help them reach their potential. Be flexible so that what didn't work one day is not thrown away, but adjusted, modified and tried again. "Monitor and adjust" were the words used in the educational literature when I was an undergraduate student. It is useful advice so that what you create are excellent opportunities for your students as they learn in your class.

Building relationships is central to knowing your learners and planning for them. It really goes beyond the relationship with the class as a whole. It digs a little deeper into the individual; the one who may need the recognition, understanding, empathy and ready teacher to tailor lessons, assignments, questions and partners that will truly benefit them in their educational journey. Recognize the fact that each student has a very unique story that shapes them. Knowing part or parts of their story will equip you to meet their needs as learners in your class. Take time to hear and know their story.

Make time for the people you work with and for. The people that you work with are those who are doing the same thing that you are doing, teaching. They might have some insight, materials, suggestions, understanding or even experience with something you are struggling with. When teachers work together, they are not only stronger, but they also contribute to more equitable opportunities for all students. The people that you

work for are both administrators and families. They both make incredibly important partners. The relationship you have with both of these groups of people can make you a stronger, more effective teacher or it can make your life very hard. Both families and administrators have a different perspective than you do. All perspectives are valuable as you serve and teach your students. Hear what they have to say and what they have to offer. You will be stronger knowing that you have partners both in the office and at home.

I want to include these great words from Deanna Ciampa, a third-grade teacher and the Beginning Teacher of the Year for Wilson County Schools. She gives this advice to you, her peers and colleagues.

“They say you can’t pour from an empty bucket, yet teachers do this on a daily basis. My first year of teaching was revolutionary and yours will be too. There are just some things that Harry Wong left out of his book. What they don’t tell you (well maybe they do but it is hard to grasp) is that many things will take the place of your college work; things like emails, meetings, planning, duties, trainings, school events, interventions, data tracking and the overwhelming feeling that you will never be good enough for your students. The pressure of being a teacher is undeniable, it seeps into every part of your life. You spend hours trying to stay on top of it all, but the work never gets done. Eventually your bucket empties.

“I am sure you have dreamed of a perfect classroom, seamlessly designed lesson plans with differentiated instruction for every assignment and Jan Richardson small group plans for six reading groups every day. I wanted this too and I did everything in my power to make it happen, but it was at a cost. [So] I stopped prioritizing “looking” like a great teacher externally and I started prioritizing “being” a great teacher. Interventions and small groups took priority over meticulously designed plans. This is where the real learning occurs. Any spare time I had in the day, students surrounded me, getting in an extra 5 minutes of one-on-one math instruction, or working on IEP goals. Maybe we didn’t have the cutest pumpkins to hang in the hallways, but we were growing in our reading skills. Figure out which students are in danger, whether that be academically or emotionally and prioritize them. The emails can wait, the lesson plans don’t have to be perfect, it’s okay for your classroom to get a little messy. Let your teaching and the data speak for you.

“There will be times when your bucket is empty, yet you continue to pour into your students in ways that

you didn’t think possible. There will be times when you just show up because you think that all you have left to give is your presence. On these days, please remember you are not alone, remember that there is an army of educators who have gone through the exact same thing. Be kind and gentle to yourself. There will also be days when your bucket runs over with student laughter, caring words from a colleague and the joy that you carry knowing that parents have trusted you to educate their precious child. It is an honor to be a North Carolina Public School teacher, and as my bucket empties and fills again I will take care, knowing there is still work to be done and students to teach.”

I agree, Deanna! When your bucket is empty, fill it again with the learning and laughter of your students. Fill it with time spent working with inspiring colleagues. (Or inspire them!) Fill it with a commitment to excellence, all for the sake of your students. Fill it with the great satisfaction of **Being A Teacher!**

