

Advice for New Student Teachers From Beginning Teachers¹

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At the end of the semester, during the last session of the weekly seminar that accompanies the student teaching experience, we asked our student teachers to think about the one piece of advice they would give to beginning student teachers. In the following article, we share our informal findings.

Introduction

At the end of the semester, during the last session of the weekly seminar that accompanies the student teaching experience, we asked our student teachers to think about the one piece of advice they would give to beginning student teachers.

We went around the circle and everyone took a turn to express an idea. They listened carefully to each other. In some cases they complemented or expanded on previous advice. In other cases they took the thinking into a different aspect of teaching. Their poise and thoughtful advice confirmed that one of the most amazing transformations had taken place before our eyes in less than one year.

The group of students—enthusiastic about math but somewhat naïve about teaching and learning mathematics—we met the previous fall at the beginning of the methods course had transformed itself into a group of beginning teachers with wonderful experiences and valuable insights about teaching.

We thought that what they said would be worthwhile to collect and share, not only because it was indeed very valuable

advice for future student teachers, but also because such a list would be good for them to have available at the beginning and during their first year as new classroom teachers. Furthermore, we thought that even for experienced teachers it would be a good list to have in mind. We both have long experiences teaching, the first author as a high school teacher, and in teacher preparation programs, and the second author as university professor and in professional development of teachers. As we were listening to what each of the student teachers was emphasizing, we realized that much of what we had found effective in teaching over the years had been encapsulated succinctly and to the point by our students.

As we were compiling their comments, we noticed three distinct classifications seemed to emerge: connections with students, classroom procedures, and personal survival skills. These are the suggestions our students offered to new student teachers.

Connections with Students

- Get to know your students.
- Talk with your students about their outside activities and interest.

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- Attend a variety of student activities outside of the classroom.
- In the beginning while you are still observing classes, target disruptive students and work with them individually.
- Coach, if possible.
- Remember that students are just kids you are trying to mold into adults.
- When students make negative comments to you, don't take them to heart.
- Don't assume students know too much. When you first begin, you will expect students to know a lot more than they actually do.
- Avoid making negative comments about a student or criticizing a student, especially in the faculty lunch room.

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Classroom Procedures

- Plan ahead. Work on something every night even if you don't need it for the next day.
- Don't sweat the small stuff. If you make a mistake on the board, don't stress about it.
- Stay consistent (rules, grades, etc.).
- Know the limitations of your responsibilities when it comes to students.
- Stay organized, especially with records such as student absences and students who are missing a test.
- Make copies of handouts prior to when you need them. If you wait until the morning of the day you plan to use them, the copier may not be working.
- Have a backup plan. For example, you may plan to use the overhead projector but the bulb burns out.
- Don't be afraid to deviate from your lesson plans. Students may ask a question or make a comment which is relevant to the topic but which takes your lesson in a different direction than originally planned.

Personal Survival Skills

- Enjoy your students. Show enthusiasm.
- Be yourself. Don't copy someone else's teaching style.
- Interject humor.
- Laugh at yourself.
- Relax and enjoy student teaching.
- Student teaching is a learning experience. Don't get down on yourself.
- Relax. Things will fall into place.
- Ask yourself, "Would I want my own kid to be in my class?"
- Clear up your schedule. Teaching is a lot of work and very time consuming.
- It was clear that the recommendation of interjecting humor was that it was meant never to be at the expense of students. The teacher needs to be sensitive and avoid using sarcasm and humiliating students.

Final Remarks

We noted that none of the comments had any direct reference to mathematics. In part this could be due to the fact that secondary mathematics students at the University of Delaware do have strong backgrounds in mathematics. They are quite skilled in high school mathematics and go through a rigorous program of content courses. During the mathematics methods course they realized that much of their knowledge was procedural, and that often they had learned the how, but not the why of many procedures. However, in that course they developed the ability to figure out on their own the reasons for much of what they had learned and were able to fill any missing gaps in their knowledge of high school mathematics. Because of this, most of our students felt quite confident with respect to their mathematics knowledge at the beginning of their student teaching experience.

In contrast, the opportunities to active-

ly interact with secondary students before student teaching at Delaware may not be as abundant or systematic as in other programs. Opportunities to develop classroom management skills, as well as getting to know adolescents closely were plenty during student teaching, rather than before. As a result, the advice our students provided focused on the aspects they themselves had to pay the most attention to at the beginning of their own student teaching experience. Ω



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Think About It!

SELF INFLICTED LOBOTOMY FROM NOT LEARNING

“... most myelination takes place in the first five years of life, the process continues into early adulthood. ... This last region of the brain to myelinate is the area of our cerebral cortex critical for judgment and complex reasoning. This is the same area of the brain disconnected by surgeons in prefrontal lobotomy. Lobotomy renders patients unable to make complex decisions, to plan or show forethought. If the transmission lines to these regions of the brain are not fully formed, adolescents do not have the full circuitry that enables the adult brain to make rational decisions in complex situations.”

Fields, R. D. (2009). *The other brain*, 282. Simon & Schuster, NY.

“Advancing alternative thinking in any human endeavor is always a challenge, but in science truth is not determined by majority vote.”

Fields, R. D. (2009). *The other brain*, 127. Simon & Schuster, NY.