

The Portable Mentor

Quick ABCs for the New Elementary Teacher

By Marian Brovero retired teacher, Waldrick, New Jersey

Hello new teachers. May your teaching future always hold the caring and excitement you feel your first year. I hope you have had a mentor to ease the rough spots and laud your successes. But perhaps you have not. Here are some ideas to guide you in those times when a mentor is not available:

- **Acknowledge**—Always recognize someone's help. Be generous in your thanks.
- **Administrative manual**—Look at it, usually in the library.
- **Association**—Join it. You need support. Experienced teachers will advise you and stand beside you.
- **Attitude**—Consider yours and the class's. The only attitude you can truly control is yours. Start each day with a short mantra, "Today will be a good day."
- **Audience for writing**—All writing is created with an audience in mind. Invite the class next door to come and listen to your students' writing. What a fun way to fine-tune writing and editing skills.
- **Bathroom breaks**—Can consume more time than you'd like. Devise a simple plan so each child can have that time. You might use a pass or a sign-out sheet. Always have a colleague cover your class when nature calls you.
- **Beautify your room**—Put up as much educational stuff as you can get your hands on, including tempting hints of what's to come.
- **Board of education**—Your boss. That's why you want to read the Administrative Manual.
- **Bulletin boards**—Are learning tools. Use them several times in various parts of the room. Build on them for your lessons.
- **Calendars**—Save them all. Take all free ones you can. Use numbers for math. Hang as pictures to decorate or motivate creative writing.
- **Charts**—Make one for each skill you teach. Large, laminated chart paper works well. A chart gives the class a quick reference and provides a good reinforcement of what you've taught. Want to review in the spring? Use one of those charts a day. (Great for next year! A ready-made collection of skills charts.)
- **Child study team**—Keep them informed and ask they do the same. This group of guidance counselor, social worker, learning disabilities specialist, and school psychologist plays a vital role in assisting any student that may need help.
 - **Curriculum**—Know the curriculum for the grade above and below yours. Copy yours to cross out goals as you accomplish them.
 - **Custodian**—Your best pal. Treat him well and you

will have no problem getting necessary repairs done.

- **Diplomacy**—A blanket in which to wrap yourself. As you approach a problem, try to rise above emotions. You will be proud that you did.
- **Directions**—Make them clear, write them on the board, and have a child repeat them. Highlight directions on all written work.
- **Education**—Continue yours. Become a spokesperson among your friends.
- **Evaluation**—Scary for the teacher to be evaluated? Yes! But, all you need to do is to prepare the same way you do for any other day. Plan ahead. Select and set aside one good lesson for this time. A lesson where the children participate, goals are stated, and you feel comfortably in control.
- **Field trips**—Make them worthwhile. Invite the parents of students who need a lot of attention. Free yourself up to lead. Have all kids with chaperones.
- **Files on each student**—Read about a child's history and keep good records. Add notes that will help the next teacher.
- **Geography**—Use a map all the time. The neighborhood, the town, the United States, and the world. Show students the locations of places mentioned in class. For many, a sense of direction requires development.
- **Gossip—No!** About your kids, never. Same about fellow teachers.
- **Hall**—Keep it decorated. You have lots to show off. Make sure every kid's stuff gets up.
- **Home**—Your success rests on the attitudes from home. Cultivate communication.
- **Homework**—What do you want it to do and what is school policy?
- **Imitate**—Check all the good qualities of other educators and their classrooms. Borrow a bit.
- **Investigate**—Check best ways to teach. Be content only by being better and using workable methods.
- **Involve others**—Families, grandparents, senior citizens. Many people are right down the street—with talents and an interest in schools. Take advantage. They become advocates.
- **Journal**—This year, especially, but every year record the facts of every day. It will become your bible for the next school year.
- **Kits**—Summer is the perfect time for inventing and assembling kits and learning centers. Also it's

a good idea to give out a summer kit to keep young minds exercised.

- **"Lazy" label**—Before accusing a student of being lazy, investigate. The student may have a learning problem. Consult with others to help you understand the possibilities. Learn more about addressing diverse learning needs.
- **Librarian**—Meet the one in the public library. Become a good friend with the one at school. True sources of valuable information.
- **Masters**—Go for it. Make yourself invaluable plus earn more.
- **Meetings with administrators**—Keep your words to a minimum. Prepare a clear and well-stated speech. Record these meetings.
- **Music**—Play it in the background. Allow the class to listen to a wide variety. Great for creating an ambience.
- **Names**—Learn all as quickly as you can, especially spelling and proper pronunciation.
- **National Board Certification**—Think about going for it in a few years. Talk to NBC teachers about what they learned from the process.
- **Nurse**—Your second best pal (after the custodian). He or she knows every kid in the school. Use your nurse's expertise even for minor scratches. It's best to be safe. Extra sympathy heals a lot of pains.
- **On time**—Minutes matter at school, especially when picking up the class from a special teacher. Modeling being on time is also important for students.
- **Parents**—Keep them informed. It will turn them into your allies. But you run the classroom.
- **Photograph**—Everything, especially this year. Make an album for kids to see next season. Appoint someone the Photographer of the Week or Month.
- **Plan book**—It's usually a requirement. I have two objections to plan books: teachers write the same lessons year after year, which causes stagnation, and planning ahead is tricky as it is difficult to gauge the learning distance your students will travel each week. My plan book usually reflected the week that was and I made nightly plans for the next day's work. Plan books are very helpful for a substitute.
- **Principal**—Let him or her be the boss. You can handle your own problems. Report only things the principal must know.
- **Quiet**—Peace and quiet make a room comfy, but soft whispering may actually help the learning process. Aim for order and a respect for those

who require quiet to keep focused. You will achieve that balance and the kids will appreciate the cozy feeling.

- **Relax**—Conduct your class in a relaxed atmosphere. Rest and eat well. You are under a lot of pressure. Keep it all out of your mind while you're in the classroom. For staying power, free your mind at the start of each day.
- **Secretary**—Keep her on your side. She knows everything and how to get anything.
- **Teachers' lounge**—The teachers' lounge can be a place to take a minute for yourself. Or to say hello to colleagues. Please don't alienate yourself or fail to make friends. Leave when the conversation turns critical toward the children or other staff.
- **Teachers' manuals**—Xerox the curriculum section for your grade, but read the ones for grade before and after.
- **Union**—Your union does a lot for you behind the scenes and will be there for you to help with problems. Join it!
- **Variety**—It IS the spice of life. But do the basics first. Then re-ignite interest with a new approach.
- **Victories**—Whatever size, celebrate them!
- **Walk**—Go for a walk with your class, as a science and social studies activity, and have the class write down observations. (Cardboard is a cheap clipboard.) Note taking will begin spontaneously. Let everyone share their writing and record their observations. You now have a new chart and an exciting lesson.
- **Weekly report**—Use one sheet, in chart format, to record all that happens in a week. Record something for each student. Add to your grade book and send notes home. Keep copies for yourself.
- **Writing**—Have students write stories, letters, poems, lists, how-to paragraphs, and journal in every subject. Your class will be able to write at the drop of a pencil! Join them.
- **You**—You are the force of energy that fuels your class. How confident you have grown over the past few months. You're all set for Year Two of teaching.
- **Zip it!**—As in the chatty mouths of your class. Teach your students the director-of-the-band method of getting quiet. When you bring your hands down, the noise stops. Or the silent treatment: write what you want to say on the board. Everyone will stop to see what's happening. Sometimes, the mere clearing of the throat or a soft voice is the best signal for quiet.

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