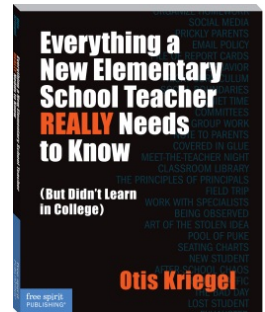


Five Things New Teachers Don't Need to Learn the Hard Way in the K–5 Classroom

By Otis Kriegel, author of *Everything a New Elementary School Teacher REALLY Needs to Know (But Didn't Learn in College)* (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com)



I was one of those rookies who struggled to find his way. My many mistakes led me to become a better teacher, but there were hours of trials and tribulations wasted along the way. I remember watching veterans run their classrooms with half as much effort and wondering, “How did they learn how to do that?” It doesn't need to be that way for new teachers. Here are a few practical tips that will improve your teaching—without learning them the hard way.

Be Comfortable

Don't ruin your favorite pair of pants by sitting on the rug with your class, leading small group lessons on the floor, doing art projects, cleaning up classroom messes, or playing outside with your class. Should you wear jeans with rips, tight tank tops, or half shirts? Of course not! But dress so you feel like yourself and like a respectable professional. You'll teach that way, too. One hint: keep an extra set of clothes at school in case of a disaster (you get covered in paint or glue, you sit in gum, or worse) and keep a pair of “work shoes” in the classroom to change into.

Bring a Padlock

It may seem trivial—maybe even paranoid—but do you have any idea how many people come in and out of a school in one day? Or even into your classroom? Find a small locker, closet, or file cabinet in your classroom and lock up your cell phone, purse or wallet, sunglasses, keys, and digital music player. It will save you the stress and discomfort of being the victim of a theft, and you'll always know where your valuables are.

The Daily Schedule

Never leave the classroom at the end of the day without writing the schedule for the following day on the board. It won't take more than five minutes, and it will help you and your students feel grounded about the coming day when you arrive in the morning. After a certain point in the year, have your students write it up for you. It will serve as a pleasant reminder of what you planned for the day.

Share Good News

Principals are burdened by responsibilities that are beyond your wildest imagination. A little good news in the middle of their day about an event, lesson, activity, or breakthrough from your classroom can lighten their load and remind them of why they are doing the job: to be involved in the joy of teaching and learning.

Create Activities to Involve Parents

Many parents don't participate because they either don't know what to do or feel intimidated based upon their own negative experiences in school. Create clear, simple roles for parents to follow so they know what they can do, when they can do it, and how it will help their child's class. For example, helping set up an art project or clean up afterward, walking with the class on a neighborhood field trip, or helping during a morning work time. No need to drag them on a full-day field trip. I'd take even 10 minutes of volunteering if it meant parents began to feel comfortable in their child's school. Get them in the classroom for short spurts, having fun and feeling like they're helping out, and you'll have a roster of parents who feel they are more able to help.