



Center for the
SUPPORT of
Beginning
TEACHERS

TEACHER TIPS

A Collection of Ideas, Plans, and Strategies for New Teachers by New Teachers



A Message from the Dean

Welcome to a new and timely publication for beginning teachers published by Western's Center for the Support of Beginning Teachers. *Teacher Tips* is a collection of teaching tips posted by Western North Carolina first-year teachers participating in the Center's online support program to share with one another and with other new teachers.

Teacher Tips: A Collection of Ideas, Plans, and Strategies for New Teachers by New Teachers invites us to look into the classrooms of first-year teachers as they face the challenges of becoming accomplished teachers. Through suggestions, strategies and stories, they share their dedication, commitment and overwhelming desire to make a difference in the lives of the students they teach. This is a resource that can be revisited often by both experienced and beginning teachers as issues and events surrounding planning, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities unfold.

Please know that Western's College of Education and Allied Professions, the Center for the Support of Beginning Teachers and our school partners are committed to providing a variety of opportunities for beginning teachers to network, collaborate, and support one another—to help you stay connected and avoid the feelings of isolation that drive some from the profession. The children of Western North Carolina will be the beneficiaries.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Michael Dougherty".

A. Michael Dougherty

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Submitted by first-year teachers participating in Western Carolina University's Center for the Support of Beginning Teachers 2006-2007 online support program:

Alleghany County

Cherokee County

Clay County

Graham County

Haywood County

Jackson County

Macon County

Mitchell County

Swain County

Yancey County



Acknowledgements

We would first like to take this opportunity to thank the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation for their very generous support. Our first Z. Smith Reynolds project, the Beginning Teacher/Teacher Leader Program (2002-2004), became the seed that led to the establishment of Western's Center for the Support of Beginning Teachers. In May 2006, Z. Smith once again provided funds for a two-year beginning teacher support program—Project START: Supporting, Training, and Retaining Teachers. The goal of Project START is to establish an online network of support, bringing together beginning teachers in Western North Carolina outside the constraints of geography.

We extend appreciation and thanks to the beginning teacher coordinators and public school and university e-mentors whose efforts and talents have made this project possible. It is a true privilege to work with this extraordinary group of individuals who are committed to beginning teachers. Over the course of the year, these seasoned professionals encouraged new teachers to build on what they were already doing well, supported them as they tried new ideas, and helped them see the positive in their students and profession.

The 131 beginning teachers in this project are amazing—generous and patient in responding to our requests for information and feedback. Thank you for opening your classrooms and teaching lives to us and to each other. We are fortunate you are working with the children in our region and sincerely hope you never lose your passion for teaching.

Special thanks must go to Kristy Nickles, CSBT research assistant, for working tirelessly to format the multitude of tips included in this booklet. And special thanks to Neil Torda, Digital Media Lab technician, WCU Coulter Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, for without his knowledge, patience, support, and time the CSBT portal would never have become a reality.

Janice and Kirsten



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Planning and Preparation

Organizing: Day-to-Day

Benicia Kennedy—BK

This is my second year teaching preschool. I have learned a lot from my first-year of teaching. My first-year I spent a lot of my time at work. It was my first-year, and I was learning all of the paperwork, regulations, preparing my lessons, etc. It was a very difficult year as far as me learning everything I needed. The most useful thing that I learned as a beginning teacher is learning the routine of school (paperwork, meetings, IEPs, etc.) and how to use my time wisely. I use my naptime as a planning period. I try to get my next day ready while the children rest. There are days when things happen unexpectedly, but for the most part I do not spend as much time at work. I just want to let other first-year teachers know that your first-year is the hardest, but it does get easier.

Coral Litzau—K

I have picked up a few useful tips to save time and be better prepared for the day:

1. Instead of using a traditional grade book, I have created my own in Word using a table. In K there are so many things that you do EVERY day, such as calendar, naptime, centers, etc. that I have found it much easier to have it already set up and saved. This way, I only have to fill in a few slots to finish the day/week planning. This saves SO MUCH TIME!!!
2. Have a folder for every day of the week on hand and easily accessible. (Mine are on my desk.) This way, I simply have to reach for the day's folder and all of my papers are waiting for me. This tip is courtesy of a 1st grade teacher here at East.
3. Take Home Folders are your friend. These are so useful and handy, I don't know what I would do without them. You can communicate with your parents on a regular basis (well, most of them), and it is easy to relay materials back and forth. I also have a calendar (behavior chart) stapled inside of mine where I have drawn smiley faces on each day. If they flip a card that day, that is the color their face will be. Underneath, I write what that child did to have to flip a card. In a perfect world, the parents would look at the folders daily and sign that they saw it. At the end of the month, I keep the behavior charts and put them in the student folders so that I can refer back to them as needed. This is a good way to document behavior patterns. Also, you can easily keep parents informed of upcoming events or deadlines.

Chelsea Yearick—3rd

Stay organized!! I am a very organized person, and I think that has really helped me with my planning. I have folders for each day of the week and any materials that I might need for that day are in the folder. I also have binders for every subject with dividers in each for all the objectives. When I find a lesson plan or an activity for any subject, I put it in the binder so it will be easy to find if I need it again next year!

Laura Terry—MG SCI

For me, I am always easy to get up in the morning and fully functioning as my feet hit the floor. For me, I go to school 45 minutes before I am required to be there....this time is sacred to me! Without kids or other distractions, I get so much work done. I am no good at the end of the day and get nothing done those last 30 minutes that are required.

By knowing how I work best, I do my plans on Sunday nights, grades and daily prep in the mornings, and in the afternoon I do the easy stuff like clean up, write on the board, check email—stuff that takes no brain energy.

Find what system works for you and play with it. Once I developed this routine, I had a better sense of security that I would get all my planning done on time.

Lauren Allen—HS SCI

When I design my lesson, I frequently color-code according to my color-coded pacing guide. Example: Ch. 1 is on blue paper, 2 on pink, 3 on yellow, etc. I also have a place on my lesson plan for reflection so that when I go back the following semester to revise/re-teach I will have made myself notes for what worked and what didn't—a tool that has been VERY helpful this time around.

Alicia Owens—HS SS

It is essential to overplan. If you overplan, you have a variety of tasks to choose from if one of your activities were to bomb or not be as good as you thought it would be in class. This way, especially in EOC classes, you make sure to cover the content and not lose a day of important content.

Gwen Smith—HS SS

When planning, I always plan more than I will use on a daily basis. That way if we run into extra time, I don't have to think, "Oh my gosh, what am I going to do for 15 minutes?" I have a backup plan ready to go!

Additional Notes from E-mentors

Jenny Lytton—HS E-mentor

My biggest piece of advice is to organize all of the resources that you are making and finding from other places. This will make your life easier and easier each year. You'll be able to readily access these materials year after year.

Tiffany Smith—HS E-mentor

Anytime I try a new activity, I especially try to have a backup activity just in case. I still have to remind myself to gather a few extra resources and plans for the unexpected. I've had plenty of activities that I thought were going to be spectacular turn out a completely different way in class. You can't just say we'll try again tomorrow; you have to take advantage of class time. Overplanning is a great skill to learn.

Organizing: Year-to-Year

Affie Hightower—BK

Already this year I have accumulated a couple of filing-cabinet drawers, notebooks, and boxes full of planning materials, that I plan on using year after year. In an effort to organize some of this material, I am going to make monthly lesson plan boxes. This way I will be able to store safely those materials that will not fit into a filing cabinet or notebook and also keep everything together that I will need for the months ahead. In order to carry out this plan, I am going to purchase 8-10 fairly large Rubbermaid containers. I am going to label each container with a different teaching month. I will then place the materials that I have accumulated for that month in the box. I hope next year, as I begin to plan for a particular month, I can pull one of the boxes and have a good base to begin my planning.

Julia Norman—K

This year—being a 1st-year teacher—I have had a lot of work to do: coming up with all new lessons and activities for my students. However, as I have been going along I have been saving my activities and work in a weekly folder. So now I have 24 weeks worth of lessons that I can use next year. Also, all plan books are different; therefore I made a table in Word to type out my schedule. This way I can cut and paste, I can take out days easily, and I can edit as I go without having to white out and erase. In this table I place my daily schedule (put in the SCOS), Homework, Show & Tell List (for each day), and the Spelling Word list. This is very effective for me—so much so that my entire team has switched over to it. Also, it is handy for years to come because you can just edit the already-made document.

Lisa Burch—PK

I have been saving all my lesson plans from this year and putting them in a notebook. I'm hoping that next year I can pull from some of the lesson plans and not have to start from scratch. Also, I find my co-teachers a great resource in planning. They all have great ideas and don't mind if I borrow from them!

Karen Thompson—PK

This year has been so much easier for me in regards to planning and preparing materials for my lessons. I am in my third year of teaching in NC and 5th year overall, so I have five years of lessons from which to pull. I began my first year like many first-year teachers. I had to start from scratch. I saved my lessons online and all materials in a folder arranged by themes. I am in the process of becoming even more organized by using the under-the-bed storage boxes to store all materials, books, etc. according to themes/months. By doing this, next year will be even better and all materials are neatly stored.

Summer Passmore—HS Math

As a high school math teacher, I know that my classes will vary from semester to semester. However, as I plan for a new class, I type the notes and keep an extra copy of quizzes and tests to put into a binder for that class. I know that when I teach the class the next time, I will add to my binder and have different options, but the fact that I will have a basis each year is comforting. Last year, during my internship, I taught Algebra I. I have a 3-inch binder full of materials that were used in that class. However, as I began teaching it this year, I have noticed that I have already begun to add to my collection. This is a good way to cut down on the amount of time spent planning each year. Don't get me wrong. I still plan daily, but it is no longer a four- to five-hour job. My planning period is long enough.

Gloria Murdock—HS SCI

With my biology class I have found that keeping all of my resources together in notebooks has really helped. Every chapter's notes, activities, labs, and readings are all put together, and any time I need to make copies it isn't difficult to find it. I find time on the weekends to put things together. I still haven't found out if I want to do it on Saturday or Sunday.

I always read chapters before I start teaching them and take my own notes. This way I feel prepared and comfortable with the material. I always keep my notes and keep them in the same folders with student notes, labs, and activities. This way it doesn't take so long to read the material next time I teach it

Additional Notes from E-mentors

Gianna Carson—MG E-mentor

Keep notebooks and/or folders with everything you do so the next year you can better your plans. Write on your lesson plans if something went well or did not go well so you can fix that the next semester or year.

Knox Hardin—HS E-mentor

When I began planning with the "binder" technique, I would reflect about what worked well or needed to be modified. I did this with a "red" pen so that it would "stick out" the next time I used it.

Dennis Hembree—WCU Math

I encourage you to be organized electronically. Computer-generated documents are so handy to modify or to print for individual use, and it's frustrating not to be able to find something you really need. You should get your school to purchase some sort of software for creating mathematical text, such as MathType. If you use Word, then you may already use Equation Editor. MathType is the parent software for Equation Editor and much more powerful and customizable.

Planning for "Next Week"

April Woody—K

I created a plan on the computer that helps me in writing my weekly lesson plans. I have a time-slot schedule that I just copy and paste from. My language arts is basically the same time each morning such as calendar time, weather, welcome song, morning message, and the predictable chart. Other areas that change little are music, PE, lunch time, and snack. This way I can spend more time on my other areas like units and crafts. It also helps me in my weekly report that has to be turned in to the principal.

Amanda Sutton—K

I plan for my entire week on Thursday or Friday of the previous week. By that time, I can pretty much tell where we will be by the next week. I make all my copies and place them in folders labeled Monday through Friday. I also put a list of materials I will need for hands-on activities, etc. This way, I can just go to the hanging folder for that day and pull it out to see what is going on. I can gather all the materials and be prepared.

Dixie Shore—4th

For me, planning helps keep me and my classroom environment organized. I try every Friday to have next week planned with all I need for the lessons. I quickly pencil in a planner book the topics, then I complete a word file that contains an empty planner. I attach a copy of everything needed in the event a student loses a copy. Everything is kept

in pockets of a hanging thing that is easily accessible each day. At the end of the week, the planner and attachments are filed away for next year. This isn't to say I don't change my plans sometimes; when a teacher shares a great idea with me, I may change to that, which means I scramble the night before preparing, but it is usually worth the effort. Also, my classroom has a small white board where only homework assignments are written each day. It is the responsibility of each student to write this info in their planners. A few of my students need help with this, which I try to do at the end of the day before they pack up. There are a few cubbies in the room where they are to pickup homework sheets if it isn't a workbook sheet. If sheets are in the cubbies, they know to pick one up then we will discuss it later when we go over the homework assignments.

Students take a morning work sheet, which I lay out before I leave in the evening, to begin the morning. They file their homework in their homework folder, which hangs in a file crate. When I am not prepared, my students catch on and they become rowdier. My problem is sometimes picking up something, walking around with it, laying it down, then forgetting where I put it. I arrive at school early enough to see everything in place and ready for each day. This assures me it is going to be a great day. I know many of you have already figured all this out, but I am still trying and learning, and planning and preparation make teaching much easier.

Dixie Shore—4th

Since I posted, I have implemented, not a contract, but a chart with three columns: date, homework assignment, reason homework was not completed. At the end of each week I mail this to the parent. It doesn't need to be returned because I make a copy for my files. This is even done for their reading log. Of course this didn't seem to help the student for whom I was aiming, but at least it gives me a record, in addition to the homework check-off sheet, as to what has been done. Before I mailed the first ones I passed them by the principal, and he thought it was a great idea. When students are slack with homework, I begin keeping them in during bus play time. This seems to cut the deepest.

Kellie Chapman—5th

I like to do my planning one week before I teach a lesson. I have been going by this idea for a long time and it has worked. I taught Pre-K before 5th grade and it also worked in my Pre-K classroom. It is easier to teach a lesson if you know what you are going to teach. Making my lessons one week in advance helps me to pull resources that I might not be able to find if I were to plan a lesson and teach it that day. This idea also helps me to be organized.

Robbie Metcalf—MG LA

For me, there is no getting around the fact that I have to use my weekends to plan. (I also find it hard to do all I need to do in my planning period at school). If I have spent some time over the weekend setting out my objectives for the entire week, things go so much more smoothly. I also did quite a bit of work over the summer putting together a unit on fairy tales. I picked out and read fairy tales and wrote a general framework for my lesson plans. I am hoping once I get these frameworks in place for each unit, next year all I'll have to do is some fine-tuning.

Kim Fletcher—MG Math

Once a week, the seventh grade math teachers get together and we discuss where we are. This has proven to be very helpful because we will often come up with different activities to share with one another. I keep my lesson plans about a week ahead. I found that I spent more time adjusting if I did any more than a week, and there are even times I am still going through the constant process of changing throughout the week.

Additional Notes from E-mentors

Sherry Maney—PK/2 E-mentor

I plan several days in advance (usually by Wednesday of the week before). I usually use Thursday to gather materials and make lists for my assistant as to what things I need for her to help prepare. As I am gathering work or materials, I write each child's "magic number" on any individual work to be done. This helps me when a child forgets to write his/her name, someone is absent, and when I am putting completed work into take-home folders. I simply put the work in number order, check for any missing work and then it is easier to fill folders (which are also placed in number order). Another planning strategy that works well is the use of pacing guides. Our kindergarten team has a common pacing guide for each subject area that we write at the beginning of each school year. I regularly review this guide to help with planning for SCOS goals. With input from informal and formal assessments (K-2 assessments), the pacing guides keep me on track.

Trudi Gunter—3/5 E-mentor

I do something in my class that helps my students stay organized. I have a weekly contract that I use to help them see what they are supposed to be doing everyday. At the end of the week, my students have to take it home to let their parents see what work was not completed. It is a good method for keeping the parents informed and for keeping the students on track. If you ever get a chance to use a contract, I highly recommend it. It takes a little while to get the students used to the routine, but it really pays off after they get it down. It also cuts down on the number of questions we have from our students. All they have to do is look at their contract to see what they need to work on next.

Long-term Planning

Laura Hyatt—MG Math

I sat down over the summer and did a yearly plan in a table that I made in Microsoft Publisher. I didn't use a calendar because it was too spread out. Anyway, I included workdays and holidays, etc. and all I did was put the curriculum I wanted to teach that week and an SCOS objective. I was able to stretch things out, like I want to do multiplying decimals for two weeks, etc. This seems very similar to just going by the pacing guide, but I made it my own and I think that this planning has really helped me stay on course for getting the things done I needed for do this year. It helps me in my planning because I can tell an approximate time limit and fill in enrichment and extra support when needed. I know it seems repetitive if your district has a pacing guide, but I have really found it helpful in sitting down to do my weekly plans.

Ron Koppenheffer—HS Math/SCI

I use an Excel spreadsheet to plan out pacing guide. I set up the school calendar allowing for weekends, early dismissals, work days and holidays. Then I can enter the number of days that I would like to allocate for each topic I plan to cover. Once these are added, you can tell whether you will have extra time or need to adjust the length of some topics. As part of the guide, I also add in the daily schedule of what needs to be covered, what classwork will be done, and homework. (With the homework slotted in, it is easy to create a homework assignment sheet for the class.)

Because Excel will allow me to add rows, I can add in snow days or any other planned activities and any other unplanned happenings. By inserting these, you can see how that will affect your overall pacing guide and see what needs to be adjusted. Also, if you find you are spending too much time on a topic, you can insert the extra time and then adjust as needed to still complete the year.

Heather Roper—HS SS

I try to go ahead and plan out my entire semester on a calendar that we were given at the beginning of the semester and I set goals for myself, like be through the Legislative branch by a certain date. Now this plan does not have everything that I am going to do all semester written on it, but it gives me a guideline and helps me stay on track. I then try to take it one unit at a time and lay out what I will be doing; that way I can see exactly what I am doing and will be doing. It just helps me, and it may not help anyone else but I have been able to stay so much more organized this way. It also helps me to prepare the kids that know ahead of time they are going to be out on a certain day; that way I can give them an idea of what they will be missing.

Erin Tapley—WCU ART

Plan activities for the first week of school/semester so that you can assess what students are strong/deficient in. It is tempting as a new teacher to want to relax by planning out the whole year, but one usually has to redo this later anyhow!

Robert Jessup—HS Music

What I have found works for me when I'm getting ready for a concert and could apply to other subjects as well is to set a date for a concert or when your testing is and then plan from there. Count back the weeks from your date and set what you want to get accomplished those weeks. I have two concerts scheduled for this semester with my larger ensembles as well as a few for my smaller group, and this process has helped out a lot. We are getting a lot more accomplished in a short period of time, and my students have an idea of where we are heading and what needs to be done.

Additional Notes by E-mentors*Knox Hardin—HS E-mentor*

After making a yearly plan, you should make notes and reflect on the objectives that might need more or less time than you had previously expected. This way you can easily adapt your plans and be ready to start again next year. Be sure to keep all your activities, handouts, etc. organized in a good manner so you will be able to readily access them next year.

Chris Ulery—Music E-mentor

I plan in reverse. I start with what they need to learn for the semester and then break this into various units. Most all units need to be continuously reinforced and will be touched on throughout the year. Finding materials/pieces that can be used to teach these and others to reinforce them is the hardest part for me. I always uncover things that need to be taught through the year and have to change my plan, but having a good plan to begin with is a good start.

Miscellaneous*Kimberly Dixon—K*

Be flexible. Make a lesson plan for the week, but then feel free to make modifications as necessary. Don't make school your life. At the beginning of the year I spent 99% of my time at school or at home working on projects for school. Now, I set aside time to do work, and when that time is up I quit. I'm a better teacher now that I have time for myself and my family.

Audrey Tipton—1st

I have designed my own planning sheets with room to reflect. On my desk I have folders for each day of the week. Being prepared for the following week keeps me from taking work home.

Dan McKinney—HS SS

Make sure to have written records on your students for proof that they are either doing well or failing. Having these records to pull up at a parent/teacher meeting will save you hassle and show the parent that you are organized and wanting the best for their child.

Amelia Inman—MG SS

I use a daily schedule, a “Do NOW” for when they come in, etc. I also do each thing in a different color to help the students differentiate from the other. Always be ahead of the game. I try to stay at least two-three weeks ahead in my planning. This helps when there are snow days, extra meetings in a week, or anything else that might happen in my life.

Additional Notes from E-mentors

Kate Birthright—Spanish E-mentor

I felt that as a beginning teacher it was very important that I kept thorough notes. Lesson plans needed to be very detailed—as painstaking as it seems, I believe it really pays off both in the immediate future and when going to teach the same lesson again in a new year.

Perhaps the most important part of my note taking/record keeping was how the lesson went: What worked and what didn't, how would I change it, etc. Even if you can only jot down “needs more work” or “change wrap-up,” it helps because as much as I thought I would remember things—I wouldn't! The next time I taught the SAME lesson I might be half way through it and remember that it really didn't work well the first time. It is much harder to regroup in the middle of class than it is when you have time for planning! While we get better and better at thinking on our feet, we and our students are much happier if we can prepare ahead of time for these things!

I kept a 3-ring binder for each chapter I taught and kept all lesson plans and materials utilized in that notebook. Always having a few extra copies of materials was very handy. While I liked having all my plans typed up, I wouldn't go back and redo them—I would just jot down notes on the plans to show changes needed. How many times have I planned a lesson for one day that took two or three? SO many!

Kelly Pace—HS E-mentor

Although this is not a strategy, it might be useful for some of you. We know that all successful teachers plan, and plan, and plan! However, do not be afraid of changing your plans. As you become more experienced and comfortable with your curriculum, you might also become more open to trying different approaches and projects. While you're explaining an assignment, a student might ask a question that sparks an idea. At times, this might lead to a different twist or desired outcome for your assignment. Don't be afraid to embrace this change, even though it was not in your original plan. Of course, this is not always practical or desirable. But as teachers, we should always be looking for new ideas. Only you know the dynamics of your students and classes, and you should feel free to modify your plans for individual classes.

Classroom Environment

Community and Behavior

Cassie Bryson—2nd

I think it is important to create a community in your classroom—this includes sharing supplies. I have a bookshelf in my room where we all share crayons, markers, even pencils. We have a pencil cup of sharpened pencils, then a cup for pencils to be sharpened. These are little things, but it really helps create a community of sharing. Also, this does away with some children having ridiculous pencils, notebooks, etc. and other children not having anything. We also have a class meeting to discuss what was great about the week and what we need to improve on.

Pam Gunter—2nd

In our classroom we have a reward for positive behavior—for the whole class. I put up blanks like for hangman, and the students earn letters to find out what they get. They can earn letters for things like walking down the hall quietly, getting a brag from a specials (music, art, etc.) teacher, having excellent behavior during independent work, etc. The kids love trying to figure out what they are going to get.

However, the students can also lose letters if they have a really bad day. This is as a whole class. I can see a huge difference in class behavior since we have started this. Everyone is working to be their best so that they can earn a letter. We also have a clip system for individual students.

Christy Pruett—1st

I think that it is important for children to always be able to start over their day. I have a behavior chart where you can move up or down. If you started out having a bad morning, you can always change the day around and be able to move up by the end of the day. This way a student will not feel that they are going to have a bad rest-of-the-day.

Julia Norman—K

First: I like to start out each day as a new day. I have a system to pop a balloon each day to get rid of all of “yesterday’s troubles.” My students know that those problems aren’t mentioned any other day. The children love this and they know they get a fresh start.

Second: Community in the classroom is important. I have my children sitting four at a table, and they have to share materials like markers, scissors, and glue.

Third: Family. In my classroom we are a family. Therefore, when some of our family are fussing or fighting with each other, we have a Family Meeting. In this meeting the kids get to say whatever they would like and no one gets in trouble. We talk about what is happening and how to solve our problems. This is very effective for them, and it gives them a time to tell their friends that they hurt their feelings and they are sorry.

Kimberly Dixon—K

Have clear rules and do not bend them. *Actually listen to what the students have to say.* Give LOTS of hugs.

Jessica Adams—1st

I think that a comfortable environment is really important in a classroom. As a mother and a teacher, what has really helped me in working to create and sustain a comfortable environment is having the mentality to try and teach/treat each child the way that I would want my own child taught/treated.

Laurie Newell—4th

The two best strategies that generate a positive classroom climate would be our singing and games. We have a class theme song—"Love in Any Language." We even made our own music video. When we play board games (educational, of course), we have more cooperation and harmony.

Charlotte Rhoden—5th

These are the two most valuable concepts I learned at WCU. I feel that if I respect my students the way that I expect them to respect me, I will continue to enjoy my teaching career. I understand that they're the students and I'm the teacher but at the same time, I think I balance the teacher/student role by letting them see me as a learner too. I feel that I have a very sweet and respectful class, and I wonder if it is the group of children or is it something I have done. I really try to stick to the "golden rule" and encourage/demand an environment where everyone is included. I do this by stating and restating that it is okay to be "risk-taker," etc. I did role-playing at the beginning of the year on why it is important to be a "respectful listener," why we shouldn't hurt feelings. Recently, I had my students write down two things that were going well at school and one that wasn't. I had several come to me to ask if they could put two of each. I said no. When we finished sharing and making suggestions for the things that were not going well, I explained to my students that it is easy in life to focus on the negatives. I explained that we should try to keep a positive perspective and listen to our friends. This activity was very beneficial for the climate of my classroom. (I also did the same assignment, which helps them see me as a person who is learning with them).

Christie Sovie—5th

I feel that my classroom environment is most successful simply when "love" is expressed. Fifth grade is the year in which kids really start preparing themselves for middle school. Throughout this preparation they learn how to bully, tease, form cliques, and exclude certain individuals. While I think we are doing well so far this year with all of that, there are definitely instances when those things occur. Therefore, when these kids experience a classroom environment in which none of those "middle school attitudes" are present, they are most successful. For example, when we do group or partner projects and everyone is getting along, helping each other out, and/or expressing "care" and "love" for one another, the classroom environment is so much more effective, the students' work input and output is great, and ultimately the kids are happier. This also is the case when I show obvious love and nurture to them. They respond in a positive way and in return show love and care towards me and each other. All of this creates a great classroom environment that will hopefully produce great student success.

Kelly Nassis—3rd

As I have read from the previous discussions, I too, try to promote a loving and caring atmosphere in my classroom. My children all understand that we are all friends and part of a "family." I made it very apparent at the beginning of the year that I love it when my students are encouraging and kind to other students. When we play games, they know that it is important to cheer on their classmates and to have good sportsmanship. It is just wonderful whenever I see the kids motivating one another and being good sports. At first, some students were sore losers whenever they did not succeed. Now, they are eager

to cheer for another student who beats them in a competition, game, etc. This makes playing games so much more enjoyable. They also know to show concern for their peers. If somebody gets hurt or is upset about something, they have all learned how to show compassion for that student. We have built such a wonderful rapport in my classroom and it makes everything so worthwhile. It is important to train your students from day one how you want them to be. Once they learn your expectations of them, they will continue with these behaviors for the rest of the year, as long as they are continually reinforced.

Galadriel LaVere—HS ENG

One of the most effective classroom management strategies (if you'd call it that) I've accomplished is having "real" relationships with my students. I try to let them know I'm human and really care about them. And I'm honest with them about myself and what I think, if it's appropriate. They really respect being dealt with on a more mature level and in turn respect you for treating them that way.

Casey Kruk—HS ENG

One thing I have found success with is letting students know I am human too. I remember talking about how good the food was at a restaurant and having a student say, "Teachers go out to restaurants? I didn't know that." It is funny, but at the same time a little sad that students don't think of teachers as "normal people." I try to keep a relaxed, comfortable (but not too comfortable) environment in my classes that lets students know that it is alright for them to ask questions that might be a little "out there." I think it helps them to know that people sometimes have questions or concerns that a lot of other people have also. As long as the conversation goes in a direction I feel is appropriate in relation to class, we can run wherever we want.

Jennifer Payne—HS Math

I love for my students to interact with me and with each other so I try to leave time for them to do just that. I give them certain problems at the end of the class to work on in small groups, and I walk around and help each of the small groups. The kids love that they aren't listening to me the entire class time! If the students have difficulty staying on task, I make it into a game and give extra "points" to the group that have the most correct when they are completed.

Laura Terry—MG SCI

Knowing my students and letting them know me sets the tone for my classroom. Everyday I am in the hallway (not to "watch" them but to talk, hug, high-five, joke, or tease) greeting my students and I let my students know me.

Let your students know you and get to know them. I have such a connection with many of my students I am anxious that the year is already ending!...then I HAVE to get new ones. I love mine.

Amelia Inman—MG SS

I always try to end my class with at least a minute left for my sixth graders to talk to me, each other, or just relax and prep for the next class. They enjoy that time. If they are a little too talkative during the class, they will lose that time. It kills them!

Alicia Owens—HS SS

It can be tricky to maintain discipline within a class; you must always address things immediately to make sure that there is an understanding of the expectations in the classroom. Students are good at bullying, and they will try to use it on everyone—including the teacher—because that is how they feel better about themselves.

Gwen Smith—HS SS

When you have rules in your class, don't bend them for one person. Just because you may like Student A more than you do Student B, always give every student the same consequences. If you tell your students that you are going to do something, then do it! Don't try and back out of it; they will lose their trust in you. Consistency is a must in the classroom!!!

Judy Wilson—Health Occ

One of the important things I've learned in teaching is the importance of being consistent. If you are consistent, you then will be fair. Students really tend to watch this in teachers. They want to be treated consistently and fairly. Treatment of unfairness can have an impact on a student's self-esteem and attitudes regarding education in general. Sometimes this is not as easy as it may sound, because we also have to be aware of individualities. Also, it is sometimes not easy to watch a student fail in a task because you are having to maintain consistency and fairness within the group.

Kelly Pace—HS E-mentor

The classroom environment has a large impact on the success of students. As teachers, we do need to be very consistent and fair. Students pick up on these concepts very quickly. Also, it is important to me that students consider me "approachable." I encourage questions and suggestions, and as my students learn that I will respond in a supportive manner to them (remember that this does not necessarily mean "yes"), they become more open to discussions and trying new methods. A positive environment can produce some amazing student work.

Ashley Burnett—ESL

I have honestly struggled with creating and maintaining an effective classroom environment at the middle school. This age is very difficult, and I have a variety of ages and levels of English proficiency in one room. However, I have succeeded by changing the way I view my classroom. At first I was trying to get all the students to learn in the same way and at the same pace, but I realized that I have such a diverse classroom that the traditional ways of teaching were not going to work. I now look at each student as an individual and I try to conform to the needs of each student. It is a lot of work; however, students who feel appreciated and worthy are much harder workers than those who feel that they are not good enough or smart enough.

Chris Ulery—Music E-mentor

Consistency would have to be the most important. If the students understand the expectations and rules, and they are the same each day, most all of the students will follow them most all of the time. Making these clear for the students and parents at the beginning of the year and holding the students accountable is the most important part. This, of course, does not mean that you will not have to deal with problems and have students not follow the rules of your room; but if they know the expectations are the same each day, it will make your expectations easier to follow.

Chris Reynolds—PE E-mentor

This works best at the beginning of the year but can be implemented any time. I have a definite routine that I teach my classes on how to enter the gym. I try to make all of my rules related to safety so the kids don't think they are being limited unfairly or too strictly. I have very strict guidelines in the gym, but all of my kids can tell you the rules we have are for their safety. This helps greatly when enforcing rules and helps the kids learn respect for others as well.

Melanie Galliers—SPED

I wonder everyday what my classroom will be like. Everyday is something different. I never have two days the same. To make my day go smoothly, I stay consistent in things that I do. I also try to stay as patient as I can. If things do not go as planned, I take a breather and just keep going. The best thing to remember is to realize that everyday is different. If you are positive throughout the day, then your students will be the same.

Cristy Passmore—EC K-2

In my classroom I have 10 five-year-olds all with developmental delays in various areas. Several of the children are behavioral. If I notice that the children are “not with me,” I like to take a music break. I choose a song that is fun to sing along with and has movement. Another idea that I have been trying and seems to be working well is yoga—for kids, of course. Which one you choose is determined by whether you have a lot of energy to get out or if the children need to be calmed. Regardless, it really seems to help on those especially tough days.

Sarah Weresuk—HS SCI

As a first-year teacher, I have battled with discipline and wanting to be receptive to students. I went into my first-year knowing that I could not be a sucker and let students run over me, but that is exactly what I found myself doing. I didn’t want to be the “mean” teacher that everyone hates, but I have realized that you don’t have to be mean, just consistent. Expectations are made and so are consequences. I am not mean to discipline a kid who has acted in a way that they know is inappropriate. I have also realized that the students who are not misbehaving also expect this from me as a teacher. How are they to learn if I am not in control? How can I expect them to show respect to their classmates, me, or even themselves if I don’t know how to demand it? I like to have a lot of fun in class, but without order, it is pure chaos. That is not fair to other students or myself. To conclude, it goes back to what I have always believed and am finally beginning to practice: A good teacher should be firm but friendly!

Additional Notes from E-mentors*Trudi Gunter—3/5 E-mentor*

I agree that students respond so much better to us if we let them know that we care about them. Even when I have to give students consequences for inappropriate behavior or inadequate academics, I explain to them why I am upset or disappointed. I feel my students deserve to know why I am upset with them. I also find that if I take the time to talk to my students in a mature way, they feel that I am wanting to talk with them more than I am wanting to be angry at them. I do have the benefit of having a partner teacher in the classroom and it helps, especially when I am really upset with a student. It is nice to be able to take a moment to breathe before I talk with a student about something that has upset me. My best recommendation for teachers is to remember to breathe, and it never hurts to laugh. Humor is one of the best medicines I know about. Keep your classroom light and funny, and your students will enjoy being there and you will enjoy having them there.

Tiffany Smith—HS E-mentor

I prefer to discuss incidents with students privately instead of giving up my instructional time or giving them the satisfaction of additional attention or distracting the class even further. Try to be consistent, fair, and honest and students seem to respect what you are trying to accomplish. Classroom management is a skill that takes time to figure out; you have to find your own style (I’m still working on mine.).

An Efficient Environment

Pam Gunter—2nd

I was running myself crazy for the first few weeks in the classroom trying to do everything. Then I realized that my kids could do these things. So I made a job chart with clips. Now the students do things like hand out and take up papers, clean the room, pass out the snacks, anything that they can do. It helps me feel less frazzled by the end of the day, and the kids love doing it. It also gives students who finish work early things to do so that they don't get in trouble.

Karen Thompson—PK

I feel it is very important for children to feel comfortable in their classroom. I have many needy children in my class and have made their environment feel homey and inviting. I feel children, even at the Pre-K level, should have responsibilities during their day. We have a job chart, "Helping Hand." I have 14 students; 10 have jobs each day. These jobs range from line leader to cot helper. My students love it!

Tracie Holden—4th

I started the year off passing responsibility off to my students. Instead of me checking off homework for every student that walks through the door, I made a check list, laminated it, and my students use a dry erase marker each day to check off their own completed assignments. Granted, if they're caught cheating, marking off work that isn't completed, they suffer a consequence of some sort. However, I don't find that I have late work very often. I also use a similar chart for restroom/water breaks. The students simply put a check next to their name as they exit, and upon returning, they put a / through the check. I allow one boy and one girl out of the room at a time, and my students are excellent at keeping track of their classmates. Emergencies are an exception, of course. I have found these two strategies very helpful, and they save me valuable teaching time.

Karl Kastelberg—MG SS

In my seventh grade class, I typically have several students (not always the same ones) that are absent. Absences can be a huge problem for students for a number of reasons, and I have frequently had students raise their hand once class has started and ask, "What did I miss?" I have a calendar in my room that tells what we did on each day in class and what assignments need to be completed. I also have a shelf in my room with a different cubbie for each period, and three columns labeled "This Week," "Last Week," and "Extra Credit." Whenever I use a handout in class, I put it in the "This Week" shelf, and move all papers to the "Last Week" shelf on Friday. Every student knows what they need to do and where they need to find it when they are absent.

Natalie Manget—Art

I have many strategies for keeping a successful classroom environment that I have worked on in the few years I've been teaching. I have learned that by keeping students' attention right from the start, I have less discipline to deal with. Here is what I do: Every day I have a sketchbook assignment posted on the board that they complete in 15 to 20 minutes. On Fridays this sketchbook assignment is replaced with a writing assignment. This is established from the first day and they expect it. This allows me time to set up for the studio part of the class. There is never down time between transitions because while they are working on their sketchbook, I'm busy setting up.

After sketchbooks we do 20 minutes of art history. I have been lucky in that I have a projector that I use for this. The kids take notes on PowerPoint presentations that I make on the art history lessons. Every other day we have a quiz over the information.

And the remainder of class, about 50 minutes, we work on the studio portion, which is the project of the week(s). I use music as a way to keep them on task. If they are quiet they get to listen to it. Allowing the students to contribute a favorite song to a burned class CD makes them want to stay quiet and on task to listen to it. If it gets loud or people are off task I can take that away...but I've never even had to threaten that. I also keep the overhead lights off and the shades wide open. The natural light is calming and something different. I think my class is successful and a nice place for them to be. I've heard from many that this is by far their favorite classroom environment to be in....it just works.

Beth Ross—HS VOC

Sometimes if students are working together in groups or if we are working outside, it can be really hard to get everyone's attention when I need it. I have found that using a cow bell works really well because it is loud and the sound carries well. Everybody knows what it means when they hear the bell.

Physical Environment

Tammy Lowe—Title I

In my classroom I have tried to make it extremely user friendly. I have two tables pulled together that can seat 8-10 if we squeeze. I like that we are all together; it gives me a sense of family. So many of our classrooms are set up with individual desk arrangements. Some teachers try and pull them together and make a "table" area out of them, which is great. But I feel that when students come to my room, I would like them to have a sense of security. Some of these children do not know what it is like to sit down at a family table for dinner or even to do their homework. I hope that in my room they will develop that sense of family.

Marlean Machado—Spanish

I have recently moved from a cart in one school that I teach at to a classroom for two of the three days I am there. I was excited about it at first. I admit it is a lot easier for me to keep up with things and be more organized for my students. However, the classroom I am in used to be a spare room where teachers would place old textbooks and furniture they no longer wanted. Therefore, I am trying to organize and teach in a cluttered and messy room.

There has been a tremendous difference in my students' behavior. Before, in the classroom, they were loud when working in groups and walking around and quiet when asked to be. Thus, now I believe since there is a mess in the room, they are messy with the room. This might sound a little strange, but I honestly believe it has to do with their change in behavior. We have slowly taken items out of the room, and the students are getting a little better, not like before, but better. So my advice or strategy in the classroom environment would be to make sure the room at least looks organized and prepared because otherwise the students will connect you to the room and believe they can be unorganized, messy, and chaotic.

Additional Notes by E-mentors

Debbi Madill—PK/2 E-mentor

I have found over the years that the physical layout of my classroom impacts my kindergarteners' learning (and behavior) in so many ways. The past few years I've found what works for me and my students and have kept the room arranged pretty much the same way. A lot of it is just common sense and seeing how things work out. When I teach small groups at my table, I am facing out so I can monitor the rest of the class while

they do Center activities; my assistant's table is on the opposite side of the room—she faces out also and can monitor the class too. I have well-defined centers so the children know the boundaries (lots of low shelving), and they know how many children can be in a center at a time. I rotate materials so there's not a ton of stuff out at a time—the children can pick up easier when there's a place for everything. During the first weeks of school, I have seen too many teachers put out too much stuff thinking the room is inviting, but it's usually overwhelming for the children. (I've heard those stories about teachers who put all their puzzles on open shelving and the first day of school every puzzle piece gets mixed together.) I have areas where children can be active (blocks, housekeeping, etc.) and passive (reading, easels, computer, etc.). I “divide and conquer”—which means I use all my space so the children are spread out and busy. When I have group time on the carpet, there is room for all, and every child can see what's going on. My classroom furniture is positioned so no child is out of view. A well-thought-out environment can prevent a lot of problems!

Kate Birthright—Spanish E-mentor

Creating the environment that reflects how you want your students to feel and act is so important, and I think it is often overlooked! Small things like changing bulletin boards, decorating your door, using colors and patterns that reflect different feelings, etc. It was easy for me to become lazy with this because there is so much to be done! However, I know that every time I did something different and put effort into the appearance of my classroom, I felt so much better! It was more fun to look at the walls and see those new pictures of exotic places or see the new bright fabric on my bulletin board or have the new door decorations to greet me early in the morning!

And certainly the physical arrangement of the room is so vital. I cringe when I see the desks so neatly in rows—because to me it feels too rigid and unfriendly—and from what I have learned it is not the most effective layout for student learning either.

I think peeking in at other teachers' classrooms and seeing what they are doing—asking questions, observing, etc.—and working on developing our own classroom environments should be an ongoing challenge we give ourselves!

Instruction

Julia Norman—K

In my kindergarten class, we started the use of tallies at the beginning of the year to add up how many days we have been in school. This also helps them count by 5's and add. After Christmas break, my class has started counting down the days and counting money, therefore during math we substituted in dimes, nickels, and pennies for the tally marks. Now my students are still counting 10's, 5's, and 1's and we are having to exchange money each day. This is reinforcing my money lesson. They are having fun with it and getting really good!

Nichole Mathis—K

In my kindergarten class, we have started using learning contracts during center time. These contracts provide a structured way for each student to manage their own work in an independent way. At the beginning of the week, I introduce the contract for the week. On the contract, there are activities that they must do each and every day that week. There are also activities that must be completed by Thursday. Due to our specials on Friday, we only have a limited amount of center time. This week I also provided "choices" on the contract because I had some centers that the students rarely ever went to. The students have really enjoyed the contracts. They have a clipboard, and they keep their contract and a pencil clipped on the board. The contracts are very easily managed, and the students are responsible for getting their work done in a timely manner. The contracts also help manage the behavior and activity in the classroom. I have really enjoyed doing the learning contracts.

I like to have the children act out things as they are learning—for example, after reading a nonfiction book on penguins, I had two little boys pretend to be daddy emperor penguins and stand still keeping their plastic egg warm while two little girls (the mommy penguins) flopped on their bellies and pretended to slide into the ocean to catch fish, etc. Two other kindergarteners curled up small and pretended to hatch from their eggs and so on—the kids have a blast and come up with their own parts to do. Next week we will read a great picture book on the underground railroad and the freedom quilts. They will color quilt squares (each one has a special meaning) and pretend to escape like the slaves did by following the secret meanings from the quilt squares. The more involved children can be in their learning, the more they retain. Sometimes my big group time can go on for awhile, but I always make sure the kids do some kind of movement after 15 minutes or so of sitting, and then quiet down again—it helps get that oxygenated blood back to their brains.

Another great instructional strategy is using "Thinking Maps." Our school has provided training in this, and if you ever have the opportunity to get trained, do it!

Kimberly Dixon—K

Interactive activities...get those kids up and moving! :) Try to make smooth transitions. I have found that singing a song in between makes the change in subject much easier. Have activities and games that can be modified to different ability levels. For example, if one group is sounding out words another might be identifying the beginning sound.

Karen Thompson—PK

I use a lot of music and movement along with rhymes in my class to help my students learn. It's a lot of fun and the kids love it!

Jessica Hughes—K

I have found in my classroom that everyone pays attention and learns faster when we have a movement activity or a song that goes along with a topic. Also, I have used many poems in my class throughout the year. Periodically we go over the poems and they can still say every one of them by memory!

Heather Hyatt—4th

Vocabulary! Ten vocabulary words are introduced on Monday. The students get out their vocab books (composition book) and open it to show facing pages. On the first page, the students write the word and definition. The words are used in a sentence and then written on the board. Then the class discusses the word meaning. The teacher writes the definition on the board and the students copy it into their book. For homework, the students write a sentence on the opposite page using the word correctly. On Tuesday, the class shares their sentences, and words are discussed. Then the students take a vocabulary test on the words. The same process is repeated on Wednesday and Thursday. The vocab words are taken directly from our reading, science, social studies, math, or even the EOG words to know.

Jonathan Burnette—4th/5th

Using the activ-board in my classroom has helped a great deal with motivating and involving students in a lesson. I have also recently started using webquests more than the first half of the year. My kids love these, and it helps them improve their technology skills also.

Serena Herter—MG LA

I have let students have choices for weekly project work. Once they have shown they can do the work under guided circumstances, then I let them choose what topics they want to sign up for, and finally they think of the weekly project topics and formats they will be creating for that week—and the rubrics that will be used to grade the projects for that week. So far they've been very consistent and responsible in their work this year.

Robbie Metcalf—MG LA

This tip is for both effective instruction and management of classroom. The best thing I have done this year is to have a classroom library. I have a small collection of my own personal chapter books, but I increase that number to about 200 by checking out books at Haywood County, Buncombe County, and the school library. I also use picture books. I have done a fairy tale unit, a nonfiction unit and a fiction unit so far. If my lesson is shorter than I planned or just did not go well, I have the students pick out a book and read. (Some days there is planned independent reading.) It gives the students an opportunity for movement in the classroom and increases student motivation to read because they are all allowed to choose their own books rather than being assigned something from the textbook.

Elaine Hyatt—MG Math

I begin each of my classes with four problems. These problems are a review of something we did the day before. The students work out the problems on their white boards. This enables me to see where they made a mistake. They write their answers on their 4-Problem sheet. I let a student "teach" each problem. This helps me see where they are confused or where their strengths are. I also find that the other students listen well to their peers. My students are always eager to "teach." I am teaching Title I Math. This has been a great confidence-builder for my students.

Jennifer Oetting—MG Math

I like the idea of having the students do some of the teaching. I, too, start each class with a few “warm-up” problems, which we review as a class, but I find the same group of students participating. I have to really pull to get other students to respond, so maybe having the students act as teachers would help.

Megan Cogburn—MG Math

I love for my students to interact with the materials and the concepts they are learning. For each lesson or each new concept that we learn, I try to have an enrichment activity for after the lesson or a fun, exciting activity for the students to do before we learn the concept. Presenting an activity before the lesson I have found really makes the kids interested in what you are about to discuss. I know it is hectic and much more time-consuming to plan for these daily activities, but when the students are smiling and interested in what they are learning, your hard work has really paid off.

Caleb English—HS Sci

I always try to incorporate some type of technology in my lessons. It keeps the kids engaged and sometimes can make the day go by easier.

Amelia Inman—MG SS

I am on a sixth-grade inclusion/pull-out team. I use read-aloud, hands-on activities, “picture-walks” to introduce a topic, thinking maps, PowerPoint, etc.

The kids enjoy learning and then applying their knowledge to something and allowing their other classmates to see their finished product.

Gwen Smith—HS SS

I use a variety of games that the kids love! Most high school students are competitive. Ninety minutes in a chair is boring to them, so I use games to get them up out of their seats and moving around. Mostly I use them for review. There are tons of games out there. They stay awake, are all engaged, having fun, and learning at the same time!

Pam Pattillo—Voc

In an effort to improve VOCATS scores, I begin each class period with a five- to ten-minute review of the previous day’s material. I either throw a koosh ball around the room or use the eggs that come with the Promethian board; this type of hands-on learning engages my students, and when they take the unit test, the apathetic student seems to score better.

Brittany Coleman—HS ART

I have found with my art classes that the less I talk, the more the students learn. I am an advocate for hands-on learning. In an hour-and-a-half class, I only talk for about 15 minutes to explain an assignment. Then the students are busy and learning as they go. I also feel it is important for students to learn through large projects. Large projects allow for the students to learn about every aspect of the topic discussed. Large projects are easy to do in the art classroom and can easily be done in other subject areas. Too many times, math, science and history teachers try to teach through worksheets and lecture. I don’t remember any information in high school that was learned from a worksheet. But I do remember large, hands-on projects. So don’t take the easy route by copying worksheets and talking with a PowerPoint. Allow the students to explore and experiment in any subject area.

Additional Notes by E-mentors

Debbi Madill—PK/2 E-mentor

I'm fascinated by some of the "Brain Research" that's out there and wish I had time to learn more—I try to incorporate some of it in my instruction. I find the children retain so much more when rote things (days of the week, letter names and sounds, names of the seasons, body parts, etc.) are put to music and acted out. Dr. Jean's CDs have been mentioned a lot, and they are great for this.

Kathy Proctor—MG E-mentor

Research shows that using a word at least three different ways will ensure that students learn the word and use it effectively in the future. By using words from the context of their classroom reading, you will help them be more successful in all of their subjects. I would suggest a fun activity or game to give students added motivation for really making the words a part of their vocabulary. I have found that students will learn difficult terms in order to succeed in the games.

Dennis Hembree—WCU Math

I've tried to encourage some organization along these lines, with little success. It makes sense to me for teachers to share these ideas and activities, but beyond that, why not organize? I would like to see all the mathematics teachers at a school agree on activities for selected lessons. That way, when a 7th-grade teacher begins a topic, he or she knows that in the 6th grade, students not only studied topic X, but also that they all did activity Y. The 7th-grade teacher can then ask students to remember that activity and perhaps build on it or connect it to a new topic or branch of mathematics. I've only worked at the high school level and have never seen a group of mathematics teachers take this step that, to me, makes so much curricular sense.

Kathy Stamey—HS E-mentor

To improve VOCATS scores and to aid with retention of material, I make most of my tests comprehensive. I also allow students to rewrite test questions and answers after each test to bring up their scores and help with retention. I have students write the question and correct answer twice and then write a positive statement about the question. It's a really good way to bring up test scores for students who do not do well on tests. I give them one point for each question they do the three step re-write on.

Chris Ulery—Music E-mentor

The most effective part of the instruction for me is having the students understand the importance of what they are learning. If they understand the value of what they are doing they are more engaged and will work toward the goals you have set. Setting clear goals and having the students understand the steps to achieving their goals will also have them understand the importance of what you are trying to accomplish. There is also no more effective method that shows them the importance of what they are doing than being prepared everyday.

Professional Responsibilities

Administrative Tasks (paperwork, meetings, etc.)

Julia Norman—K

Have a meeting with your team members at least once a month. This is great at BRS because we can talk about what is happening, get help, and share ideas with the other teachers. At my school the PK-2 grades meet as an elementary team and we discuss; this keeps us in check with what is going on and things we all need to work on.

Karen Thompson—PK

At the school where I teach, we have four Pre-K classrooms. We meet weekly for grade-level meetings to determine what our themes are going to be and to share any ideas. We also send home monthly newsletters and communicate with each parent on a daily basis.

Julie Waldroup—3rd

From my first-year of teaching, I have learned that it is crucial to keep good records. During the school day it is so hectic. It is hard to have time to write every note you need to write to parents. In my classroom my students all have planners in which they write their homework down. I also write notes home in them. Lately when the students have behavior problems, I make them sign the classroom conduct book and also sign their planners themselves writing what they got in trouble for. I have the record of the conduct book pages for my records, then they have the note home to their parents in their planner. This saves time and makes the day a lot easier. It is so important to keep copies of all of the notes you send home to parents and the notes you get from parents. Another tip is to make a section on every letter that you send home for the parents to sign and date it. This gives you a record showing that they have seen and read the letter and on what date they read it.

Sandra Davis—Art

First of all, it is good to know what is expected from your principal and what the school considers your professional responsibility. Know your own definition of professional responsibility and how it relates to that of your principal and school community. Professional responsibilities include respecting your administrator, parents, and students; knowing the guidelines of the school, knowing your extra-curricular activities and duties.

Kim Hargis—Music

The last thing I would like to talk about is going to meetings throughout your career. Sometimes when I go to a meeting and I realize some of the older teachers are not attending, it makes me feel like “Why do I have to do this if they don’t?” I realize going to faculty and team meetings is sometimes the ONLY way I have a say in what it going on at our school.

Everyone going into the teaching profession realizes that it is not just an 8–3 job and that you have to put in that extra time even when you do not feel like it.

Additional Note by E-mentor

Trudi Gunter—3/5 E-mentor

It is really important for all new teachers to know all the paperwork that is expected of them. Remember the PEP's, the absences, the parent meetings and phone calls, and when necessary always keep a copy of students' work (especially the ones that may need to be tested or retained). I have always been good at keeping good records and I have found that it is nice to pull out what you need and not have to struggle to find things you need when confronted by a parent or your administrators. Keep in mind all the paperwork that has to go into a student's permanent record. I hope this helps because I did not know about all the different kinds of paperwork my first year, and it was a hard lesson learned when I was struggling to get it all completed before the end of the year.

Parents

Christy Pruett—1st

I have found that it is very helpful to send newsletters home every week. This really helps me keep my parents informed and it helps me be able to communicate what the children are learning.

Julia Norman—K

Provide parents with newsletters to keep them up-to-date on what is going on and what is coming up within your classroom, school, and community. Also, let them know the concepts you are teaching so that they can reinforce these concepts at home.

Additional Note by E-mentor

Richard Harvey—3/5 E-mentor

A big idea that caught me by surprise was understanding custody issues. For students from a divorced, split, estranged, or abusive home, there may be court ordered limitations on visitation, phone contact with a child or teacher's child, or pick-up. Often these court orders are attached to the inside front cover of the student's main school file. At the beginning of the year I write a quick note about any issues I'm required to follow. For example, a student may have a parent that was only allowed to visit them at school during the lunch hour on Friday. Lunch must be in a supervised location. Sometimes it can be that specific. If you have questions about some court orders, then you may ask the principal how to deal with it.

“Extra” Duties

Lauren Allen—HS SCI

So frequently I catch myself dreading lunch duty or parking lot duty or whatever the duty is that day, but in retrospect I remember that it is during this time that I am frequently able to socialize with the students to get to know them and watch how they interact with one another. So although the duties seem tedious and mind-numbing, try to think positive and see all that you can gain during the duty.

Gwen Smith—HS SS

There are many responsibilities as a new teacher. Keep a planner to remember certain dates as bus duty, parent-teacher conferences, faculty meetings, athletic events, etc. Keep up with your grading; this makes it easy to get your grades in on time.

Kim Hargis—Music

I know sometimes having to work cafeteria duty in the morning or at lunch and doing bus duty can feel like an extra chore. But I feel that it is very important for everyone to do their part. I also realize that it gives me time to talk to the students that I may not always get to converse with in my class. Since I am the music teacher, I also know every student by name, which helps for order, and these other responsibilities give me a chance to meet parents that I would not normally get to meet.

I also feel it is really important to attend after-school activities. Students really like to see you at their games and even practices. It's an easy way to show that you care, so work an after-school game every once in a while.

Miscellaneous*Beth Ross—HS VOC*

In order to keep track of all of the things that have to be done outside of class (like meetings), I always try to keep my calendar updated. I'm sure everyone else does that also, but there is something else that I do. Each day after my last class is over, I search my calendar for the next day's activities and write them down on a post-it note. Coming in the next morning to find my list of things to do makes for an easier start to the day.

Additional Notes by E-mentors*Dennis Hembree—WCU Math*

What are "professional responsibilities?" I could get into dangerous territory here. There are certainly professional responsibilities to your students: To have them see themselves as mathematical beings in a mathematical world; to prepare them to create and meet individual goals, as well as those imposed on them from outside; to protect them from administrative or political decisions that are harmful; to have them see and use mathematics to understand their community and its effect on their families and lives, etc. Your list may be completely different than mine, and I have no issue with that.

There is also professional responsibility to the profession. Mathematics education is a field of study and a field of employment. There are serious questions as to whether teachers in general are professional in the same sense that lawyers or doctors are considered professional. What it means to become a licensed lawyer or doctor is determined by organizations controlled by the profession and not by government agencies. The operational rules of conduct of lawyers and doctors are determined by professional organizations rather than being legislated by non-lawyer or non-doctor politicians. I believe we are under some obligation to work toward similar goals in which people who understand teaching are in control of teaching.

I'm not trying to be controversial here. I'm really serious that one of our professional responsibilities as mathematics teachers is to take mathematics education out of the hands of people whose only expertise in mathematics teaching is to have attended school for 12 or so years. We can begin by being active members of local, state, and national organizations in mathematics education.

Kate Birthright—Spanish E-mentor

I think of involvement in the community, active role in sports, clubs, etc. and it can be overwhelming to think of taking any of that on as a beginning teacher. My advice would be to take on additional responsibilities at a slow pace! Be sure you have good support, and count on it taking up twice as much time as you think it will! Doing things to support your students and your school can be incredibly rewarding. For me, going to dinners, seeing plays or musicals, going to sports events—these were all I took on in

my second year and it was great because I could work it into my schedule without being overwhelmed. I hated saying no to coaching or taking on a club—but it felt like what I needed to do for me. Listen to yourself, be sure you don't get burnt out—but also know that any time you see your students outside of the classroom will be incredibly important to your students (and anyone who attends your school) and will also bring you closer to them—which is awesome!

Kathy Stamey—HS E-mentor

I believe it is very important for vocational teachers to interact and become acquainted with their local community professionals. My classroom is filled with donated equipment from our local hospital, nursing home, pharmacy, and physician's offices. These individuals are also a great help with presentations, fundraisers, competitions, etc.

Chris Ulery—Music E-mentor

There are so many professional responsibilities that have so little to do with actually teaching that it's tough to pick just a few. Doing your "extra" duties as expected (open house, bus duty, lunch duty, IEP conferences, PTA meetings, etc.) is important and is difficult sometimes to juggle with all of your other responsibilities. For administrators, these are all safety and parent-relation issues and are very important. While these are not things that directly impact what goes on in your classroom, they are very important to being involved in your school. The other problem I see new teachers getting themselves into is not being involved in their state organization and not meeting deadlines and reading the rules for students to participate in state events. Having students disqualified because a teacher does not understand the requirements does happen and is very embarrassing and tough to explain to parents.

Other Tips

Priorities

Kathryn McConnell—4th

I have heard so many people tell me “Don’t sweat the small stuff” or “Pick your battles.” Both of these statements have greatly affected my first-year of teaching. I try not to get bogged down by the constant paperwork or the incessant whining from my students. These two things help me to be less stressed, if possible, than I feel I would have been otherwise. “Just take it one day at a time.”

Tenisea Griffin—3rd

I realize that the kids are the most important. There have been days where I begin to stress over little “petty” things that in the realm of things, don’t seem to matter when it comes to the success of the kids in the classroom.

Tenisea Griffin—3rd

As a new teacher, I believe that I realize now that I HAVE to have a life! I started the year working until 5:30 or 6 every single evening, then I would spend all day Sunday preparing for lessons. I realized quickly that I was getting burnt out way too fast. I realize that there has to be a happy medium with time spent preparing and working, just to keep your sanity! If I am happy and less stressed, my classroom climate will reflect that.

Roberto (Robbie) Robles—HS ENG

One of the most useful things I’ve learned in this past year of teaching has been to learn when to be a teacher and when not to be. I use the term “teacher” to mean the person standing up in front of the room and keeping, or forcing as the case may be, control over the classroom (as many a stereotype of a teacher goes). Sometimes the students, or more in particular a student, needs the teacher to step back slightly and just listen or be kind. In many occasions, when I could tell that this really is a different situation than the normal occurrence, I’ve done this and it has helped tremendously in the student(s) willingness to both listen to me when I’m having to keep people quiet and when I’m teaching.

In a teacher’s personal life, I’ve found it is imperative that you find something that you do at least three times a week that has nothing to do with students or school, and actually make sure that you do it. Every time I get into that funk of “I can’t wait until (fill in the blank with next school break) comes,” it has been when I’ve been 85% or more focused on just school in my life. There is more to our lives other than school, and while it is an important part of each of our lives hopefully, I’m a strong believer that extremes are bad and that if you spend all of your energy in one place, you will eventually condition yourself to not like, or even despise, that which you do.

Gwen Smith—HS SS

Keep enthused about your subject. Your students will see it and they will enjoy it as well. Always hold high expectations for your students!!! You will stay late at school, come in early, and will do work at home. It will get easier as time goes on. Remember, teaching is what you make of it!

Additional Note by E-mentor

Kate Birthright—Spanish E-mentor

Take time to listen to yourself. Hear your personal social/emotional needs. Feed your soul with what makes you grow. Take care of yourself! I was so tempted to veg out after a rough day—and still am!—but I have to remind myself that MOST of the time reading a book, doing a devotional, going for a walk/run—doing other things that feed my soul—will leave me much more refreshed and relaxed than an hour in front of the TV. It's hard to hear yourself when the TV is on! Now this does not mean TV is all bad—just think about how you spend your down-time (however little it may be!) and be sure it's really what is best for you!

Humor

Robbie Metcalf—MG LA

The most useful thing I have learned this year is to allow myself to make mistakes and laugh at myself when I make them. I have been a perfectionist all my life, and I am tired of beating myself up for things that are not such a big deal to others. So this year I decided I was going to go into teaching with the attitude that I would definitely make some mistakes, but I would not agonize over them—I would just laugh at myself. This has helped de-stress my first-year of teaching beyond what I could have hoped for. The other teachers laugh along with me, and it just doesn't seem that bad.

Brandy Kiger—HS ENG

The most useful thing I learned was that you HAVE to have a sense of humor. You have to be able to laugh at your kids even when they drive you crazy, and you most certainly have to be able to laugh at yourself.

Jennifer Oetting—MG Math

Finding the opportunity to laugh with the students has been very important to me. I find myself becoming very focused on the SCOS, getting through all of the material, staying on top of paperwork, etc. and then I have to stop and just relax a little with the kids. I really like my kids, and I don't want to become so wrapped up in classroom lessons and activities that I forget to enjoy getting to know them.

Additional Note by E-mentor

Dennis Hembree—WCU Math

For me, laughing with students is what makes teaching fun. Just interacting with so many fascinating minds is like being in at a carnival (or zoo). It was just great fun for me to realize that, for pretty much any topic I could think of, there was some kid around who was willing to think about it with me. The downside is, after 25 years in classrooms, I don't relate to adults very well. So keep some life outside and separate from your school life.

I used to have a rule that students could say whatever they wanted in class (with school guidelines, of course), as long as it was funny without being demeaning. I got to decide what was funny. I'm not suggesting that this is a good idea or would work for other people, but one of the primary discipline techniques became for me to simply stop and say, "Sam, what you are doing (or saying) is not funny. Please stop." Silly, perhaps, but at that point in my career it worked.

Help!

Julia Norman—K

The most useful thing I have learned as a beginning teacher is use my resources. There are a number of teachers around me who are ready and willing to help me if I will ask them. And they are my experts.

Also, if you want stuff done, be nice to your janitors. I don't know how many things I was able to get for my room over the summer because my janitors knew where it was and if it was being used or getting ready to be thrown out. Always show them your appreciation.

Karen Thompson—PK

During my first-year of teaching a few years ago, I spent a lot of extra time at school. I'd arrive very early and depart well after everyone had left for the day. I felt I had to do everything perfectly. I soon realized I needed to slow down and find time for myself. Spending a lot of extra time at school can cause burn-out. Always make time for yourself and use resources available to you.

Tenisea Griffin—3rd

I have also learned that you must learn how to ask for help and that there are absolutely NO stupid questions. A lot of seasoned teachers take for granted all that they know. The only way to tap into their wealth of knowledge is to ask, ask, ask!

Lauren Kincaid—MG/HS ENG

I have only been in the classroom for two months, but I have quickly learned that my fellow teachers are an invaluable resource! I am a rather shy and reserved person by nature, and I very rarely thrust myself into social situations, but I found that making a point of eating lunch with my co-workers each day and spending at least a few minutes before and after school visiting with my co-workers has been so helpful. It often seems like they have the answer to any question I could ever ask. They offer constant support and guidance and, when I need it most, being able to socialize and joke with my co-workers can take the edge off of the roughest of days.

Brandy Kiger—HS ENG

Begging and borrowing from other teachers is another essential must-have. Beg, borrow and steal all you can. You'll never make it if you can't ask for help. I've been to my department head's room every day since I started, and she has been the most amazing resource I could have ever hoped for, along with my mentor. Thank God for them both. Always take advantage of the resources at hand. The teachers who have been teaching for 20+ years are the ones who've seen it all and can give you the best advice.

Alicia Owens—HS SS

There are several things I have learned during my first-year. One thing is to not be afraid to ask for help. It is good to debrief at the end of the day and just reflect on what was accomplished through your lessons.

Martha Burrell—Voc

I think one of the things that has helped me the most is the relationships I have developed with the other teachers at school. There is at least two or three times a week when we have an opportunity to get together and just talk—sometimes about problems at school and sometimes about other things. Because of this, I know there is always someone I can go to for help, advice or just a shoulder to lean on.

Erin Tapley—WCU ART

A harrowing day or a misadventure in it will be amplified if you share in the teacher's lounge because everyone has these moments. On one hand, one can feel not so alone when these are shared, but in mass dose you can easily get discouraged by the profession in general. When a day strikes when you completely feel "not cut out for it," talk to an upbeat non-teaching friend who will listen and most of all get you to laugh.

Sharon De Grasse—ESL

One of the biggest things I've had to learn is to not be too proud to ask for help. At first I thought that it was admitting failure or defeat to ask for help on something I didn't understand or needed more practice at, but I'm coming to see that everyone has to do it! If I just ask, most teachers, secretaries, and other school personnel are so eager to help out! This has been an extremely valuable lesson for me.

Additional Notes by E-mentors

Sherry Maney—PK/2 E-mentor

And...as far as the help from janitors...I couldn't do my job without them! They are wonderful at our school! In the past, I have had an appreciation day, where my students helped make a special snack and made cards/gifts to give to our special helpers in our school. We invited the janitors, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, secretaries, etc. The students served the snack, handed out the cards/gifts, and sang songs for the entertainment. This event was so enjoyable by all. Our helpers in the school need to feel appreciated as well.

Chris Ulery—Music E-mentor

Those first couple of years are often the toughest. Having a mentor or two to offer support and serve as a sounding board is important. These are often not your officially assigned mentor, but a teacher in your department or someone that you are comfortable talking to. Talking with your peers and sharing the everyday trials and tribulations of the job has a great therapeutic effect. Try to keep from isolating yourself from the others in your school. It's very easy when your subject area is very specialized and you are the only one in your school that does what you do. Keep in touch with those you graduated with. They are going through the same things everyday that you are. Last, create some time away for yourself. It's so easy to burn yourself out in those first couple of years. When you are away from work—be away.

Reflection

John Greene—MG Math/Sci

As I have navigated the halls of first-year (lateral-entry) teaching, I have been reminded how very similar my experiences have been to my plebe year at one of the five federal service academies (in my case, the US Merchant Marine Academy). I started this past summer in the NC TEACH program with a big time of indoctrination, in which I was immersed in a whole new culture (the culture of teaching) and given a lot to learn in a very short amount of time. Then, there was the beginning of the school year, which brought more to learn and prepare for than was humanly possible, which taught me (again) how to discern what is really important and what can wait, how to budget time, how to manage stress, how to always be ready for surprise inspections, how to handle different groups of people who made different demands, how to be “first-year” at something again, and on and on... Throughout it all, there is a great need to maintain a sense of humor, and maintain a very tough desire to succeed—without that desire, it would be very easy to throw in the towel for a number of reasons. However, I am finding that my first plebe year experience has well informed my “second” one, and I can now see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel with June somewhere out there! Of course, another thing that is helping is that baseball season has begun, and my coaching gives me two hours a day of sanity and a break from everything else.

All in all, I know that when this year is over, it is something which I will be very proud of, and something that will help inform me for many, many years to come as I seek to grow and improve as a classroom teacher. Of course, the growth and learning will not stop when the second year begins, as it will present its own set of challenges, and maybe just a few more privileges. For anyone contemplating following in the footsteps of we who are first-years, I would say really make sure you are as prepared as possible, then jump in with both feet!

Zack Stockbridge—HS SCI

One of the most important things we can do as educators is to reflect on what we’ve done. A practical way to reflect with an aim towards future improvement is to simply make an extra copy of each assignment you do with the students. As you go through the assignment, make notes on your reflection copy. The most important thing, I’ve discovered, is jotting down what changes I need to make to the assignment before I do the assignment again with students next year/semester: re-wording questions, adding or changing pictures, changing formats, etc. Other important notes to write down are what specific things you’ll need to be more clear on during instruction next time, what mistakes to watch out for, look for what went well, areas for discussion, etc.

Another good habit is keeping a journal. Write notes to yourself every day about every period; write about what went well, what you’d do differently next time, clarify important thoughts, etc.

Reflection is a habit that, yes, takes some time when time is already short. However, when the next semester or year comes around, you will already have specific notes written down for yourself as you go through the planning/preparation for individual lessons or entire units. You will not have to rely on just your memory—you will have already told yourself exactly what must be done to improve your teaching and assignments.

Project START

The goal of ***Project START*** is to build an online network of support where beginning teachers working in similar settings can come together virtually to discuss issues and seek coaching and guidance from their peers, mentors and university faculty. New teachers can share resources, lesson plans, instructional strategies and classroom management tips with colleagues from Western North Carolina public school systems.

This booklet is a collection of tips that beginning teachers and E-mentors shared with one another during the 2006-2007 school year. Building on the work of Catherine Le Maistre and Lauren Small at McGill University, ***Project START*** teachers used Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (2007) as an "organizing structure" and posted tips in one of four domains: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. A fifth category was also available for tips that did not naturally fit in the domains.

We are happy to make this treasure trove of ideas available to you and hope that it will enrich your teaching.

For more information on ***Project START*** and the work of the Center, please visit our website: <http://www.ceap.wcu.edu/csbt>.

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Mission of the Center

The mission of the Center for the Support of Beginning Teachers is to address the need for an adequate supply of highly qualified teachers by supporting the professional development of beginning teachers and their transition to the classroom. Induction activities include face-to-face meetings complemented and enhanced by an electronic network developed for beginning teachers; ongoing professional development for mentors; and opportunities for principals to focus on their role in new teacher development. The Center provides a comprehensive approach that includes support, practice, feedback, and evaluation collaboratively delivered by the school systems and the university.

Center for the
SUPPORT of
Beginning
TEACHERS

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