The Teacher’s First Day of School: What to Do Before Walking into Class
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Abstract: The focus of this paper is to outline important tasks that new teachers should complete before entering the classroom on their first day of the job. The key points include: discussing technology in the classroom, deciding the layout of the classroom desks, how to find a mentor, and how to promote parent or guardian involvement before school even starts.

As future educators anticipate their first day in the classroom, they typically have an idea of what to prepare for. They need to find ways to incorporate technology in lessons (Smart Boards are fun but what else is there?), set up their classroom (desks should always be in rows, right?), think of creative ways to engage parents and more. In order to become a prepared future teacher, it is vital to consider classroom decisions like those listed above and create an educated foundation on how to accomplish them promptly.

The majority of today’s future educators have grown up in a world dependent upon technology. We use it to set our alarms, keep a scheduled planner, communicate, research, and that is not even scratching the surface of what we can do. Therefore, it makes sense that teachers would be required to use technology in the classroom with their students who have had a similar, if not more prevalent experience with electronics. Technology should be used to enact common teaching practices like collaborating with other students in a way that exposes children to the global advancements at an early age so that kids can be able to command commonplace devices and grow up with technology instead of catch up (Groff, Haas, Klopfer, Osterweil, 2009, p. 1-2). For example, kids can have a global or national classroom by FaceTiming, Skyping, or Google Video Chatting with fellow students from other states or countries. The idea of video chatting in the classroom has become the modern-day pen pal where students can meet and learn about education, language and culture in other parts of the world. However, through the improvements of using video, students can laugh together and chat with the other students of the classroom in live time. Technology is also used to present lessons so that they are organized, interactive, and visual via powerpoint, such as a Prezi or Google presentation. It also allows for students to study online through resources such as Quizlet, where teachers can create online practice quizzes. Websites like Schoology or Remind101 can also keep students on schedule with homework, test dates and other crucial upcoming deadlines through an app or a text (which students can easily download and open on their phone). As a teacher, it is imperative to learn about these resources and how they can be applied to the classroom. However, it should be noted that some websites require a fee or a user profile, so it is important to set this up before class.

Although technology is essential to incorporate in the classroom, another consideration is how to arrange the desks in the room. First off, it is necessary to recognize that there are many different ways to set up a classroom in order to accommodate a class’s unique students. Allowing students to freely discuss the class environment can be beneficial to the students’ productivity. Kids typically know how they work best. Students with ADHD may want to sit towards the front of class in individual desks where there are less distractions. Some students may learn better through group work however, and suggest making the desks into pods. It is also important that educators do not feel “locked in” to the set-up that they choose. Teachers can change around the desks for certain lectures, tests, or in order to keep their classroom focused. In fact they may realize that they have to change the set-up in order to
regain their students’ attention and participation (Sommer, 1977, p. 174-175).

Teaching is tough, especially for first-year educators. Therefore it is beneficial to find a mentor, someone who has been working at the same school and has a class of a similar grade level or subject matter. Research has shown that educators who have a mentor are more likely to continue teaching than those who do not (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 23-25). Approximately 15.7% of teachers leave their job positions each year, which is quite a startling percentage (Riggs, 2013). In order to help increase the retention rate, it is important that new teachers find co-workers from within the same school to ask questions and relate to. The first year will be a year of transition, and with all change there will likely be mistakes made. New teachers will be less likely to quit due to feeling deficient, frustrated, or exhausted as long as there is a caring mentor who has been in the profession long enough to understand how to troubleshoot common problems. Learning communities are also great for teachers to swap ideas of what works in the classroom and what does not (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 23-25). This communication will help the school create a positive working environment.

It is also necessary to get parents involved in the school, and specifically their child’s work in the classroom. Research has found that children whose families are involved in their academic lives excel in the classroom at greater rates than those who do not have involved families. A study from 2004 also showed that most parents are genuinely interested in learning about their child’s school and how they can support their child. Some common ways that parents “support their children at school” is by volunteering, helping their child with homework, keeping in touch with school staff, and going to PTA meetings, as well as conferences. However, it was addressed that schools in wealthy areas have better rates of parent involvement than schools in poor areas, which correlated with the fact that schools in wealthy locations try harder to get parents involved (Hill, & Taylor, 2004, p. 161-164). In order to start the year in high hopes of family involvement, new teachers can send a friendly E-mail to parents or guardians before the first week of school with information such as the classroom philosophy, office and homework help hours, ways to contact the teacher, a student supply list, and crucial dates that they should keep in mind.

In conclusion, future educators preparing for their first year of teaching will start the year feeling more confident after their summer preparation. Teachers can finish up their classroom websites, create Quizlet accounts, arrange desks, E-mail parents, and seek out great mentors during the summer in order to relieve the stress from the anticipation of the first day of school. The first year will be a year of transition, and it will be best to prepare ahead of time to review plans and change them if need be. In order to prepare for a great year with these tools however, new teachers must balance the act of applying unique teaching strategies to their classroom and keeping their energy up for the kids to promote lifelong learning.

References