

Student Teaching:

*The Inside Scoop
from a Master Teacher*

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WELCOME

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF EDUCATION!

Student teaching will be a stressful but exciting time in your life. In no other job can you find the fever pitch of anticipation and exhilaration that you experience on the first day of school. Teaching is different from any other job in the world, and if you think your only job will be to teach, you will find that you are wrong.

In the thirty-seven years I was in the classroom, the role of “teacher” changed dramatically. At some time in your career, you will find the same thing I found: you will have to be a psychologist, a parent, a nurse, a friend, a mentor, a mediator, a confidante, a counselor, and a role model, just to name a few.

The most important thing to remember is this: you are not teaching a subject, you are teaching human beings with feelings and problems and inadequacies who only want to belong and do well in school. I do not believe any student who fails really enjoys failing. You are going to have to develop relationships with your students as people, and when you do, you will discover their hopes and fears, their dreams and failings.

Many of the students in your classroom will bring baggage with them from home: divorced parents, abusive parents, alcoholism/drug addiction in the family, low self-esteem issues, blended family problems, health issues, sibling problems, financial troubles; the list goes on and on. Sometimes these issues will cloud the educational process; just remember that your students are human beings with feelings. Do not be afraid to show empathy and let them know you are willing to help, and they will be on your side because they know you are on theirs! Caring about my students never hindered my classroom performance.



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Over twenty years ago, one of my favorite principals, John Schwoebel, uttered a poignant comment on the first in-service day of the school year. As all of the teachers looked at our class lists and groaned, Mr. Schwoebel reminded us that “the parents are sending us the very best they have to offer.” So many times throughout my

career, I reflected on some of the less-than-excellent students I knew or students with major disabilities, and I thought to myself, *What if this student were **my** child?* The answer was simple: I would want my child to be happy in school. That answer guided my actions throughout my career. Of course, the answer is that all parents want their children to have the very best possible experiences at school, with caring and nurturing teachers. You would want the same for your own children. No matter how much trouble you have with a student, remember that he or she is someone's child, and that child is the best the family has to offer to your classroom.

Have you thought about your philosophy of teaching? You will develop a philosophy early in your career, and that philosophy will shape and guide your thoughts and actions through the years. A former principal at my school, Dr. Charles Erdeljac, once told the faculty an interesting story that I would like to share with you. First, you need to know that my school was an intermediate high school containing grades 9 and 10. (It is the best of all worlds, as the students are more mature than those in middle school, but not as supercilious as those in grades 11 and 12, who often think they have no more to learn. Of course, that is just my opinion.) Dr. Erdeljac always said it took true master teachers to teach grades 9 and 10, because the students were “diamonds in the rough” that needed to be shaped and polished. It was then that Dr. Erdeljac shared a story about a carver who was looking for a piece of jade. He wanted the piece to be uniquely beautiful; he was searching for a specific piece of jade, one that he would instinctively know to be the

“right” piece. As the carver looked through all the offerings, he made his choice, but the jade he chose had a flaw. The jade seller told him he was surely mistaken, because the flaw would ruin his creation! But the carver assured him that the only piece he wanted was the one with the flaw. When asked why, the carver told the jade seller that with creativity, work, and polish, the flaw would cease to be a flaw; instead, it would become the focal point of the piece, thus giving the carver the unique and lovely art work he desired. Dr. Erdeljac likened our faculty to the jade carver. He told us that we each had the ability to mold students into unique works of art, through our creative teaching and caring and careful mentoring. The next year Dr. Erdeljac moved to another school district, but on the first day of the new school year a hand-addressed card to each faculty member awaited us in our mailboxes. Inside each envelope was a simple note to “Remember the jade.” I still have that note.

You, too, will be faced with some “diamonds in the rough,” whether kindergarteners or seniors. The thought of shaping and influencing a child’s life can be frightening, intimidating, challenging, and overwhelming. I want you to think about the responsibility you have to each child entrusted to your care. So much of what each child does and how much each child learns depends on **YOU**.

I was introduced to the following quote by my friend and colleague Dr. Ed Sarver in a staff development class years ago. This quote, from Haim Ginott’s *Between Teacher and Child*, captured my true feelings about teaching, and

it guided my philosophy throughout the years. Please take a few moments to read and reflect on these words, and post them in your classroom so that you, too, may be reminded of your personal power and influence on every child, every day:

I have come to a frightening conclusion.
I am the decisive element in the classroom.
It is my personal approach that creates
the climate.
It is my daily mood that makes the weather.
As a teacher I possess tremendous power to
make a child's life miserable or joyous.
I can be a tool of torture or an instrument
of inspiration.
I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.
In all situations, it is my response that
decides whether a crisis
will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child
humanized or de-humanized.

And now . . . presenting all the practical information you will need to know as you embark upon your student teaching experience.

—Dede Faltot Rittman

chapter 1

Dressing for Success

You cannot climb the ladder of success
dressed in the costume of failure.

- Zig Ziglar

YOU HAVE ENJOYED the casual lifestyle of college dress for four years or more; and now, suddenly, you have to look “professional” for your student-teaching experience. The entire time you are standing in front of the classroom, your students will be noticing everything about you—your clothes, your hair, your nails, your make-up, your jewelry, your shoes, your voice, and your behavior. Whether you are ready or not, you have just become a role model! How can you look professional when you’re broke? Do you really have to throw away all your T-shirts and jeans?

For both men and women, looking professional begins with good grooming. If you could have seen some of what I have seen through the years, you would know why I am beginning with this chapter. One of the scariest parts of teaching is the knowledge that you are a role model, so make sure your influence is positive. Invest in a good haircut and

style. Wash your hair often; never go to school with dirty hair. Be sure your hair is not only clean, but also neat, and get it back from your face.

Here is a big red flag: Knowing that you will be working *closely* with others, be sure to shower or bathe daily, and use a good deodorant (you won't believe how much you will sweat when you are in front of the students, and even more when you are being observed!) Wear a light fragrance or aftershave, but nothing too powerful or overbearing. Be aware that many students have asthma, and the aroma from a strong perfume or aftershave can trigger an attack.

Remember what your mother always told you: first impressions DO count! Students who are young and immature WILL judge you by your appearance, at least until they get to know you. Adult teachers will also judge you, at least partially, by your appearance. Your clothes should be clean and neat, which means ironed, or neatly pressed. It is difficult for a student teacher to be taken seriously if he or she looks as ruffled as an unmade bed.



**first
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You do not have to wear a new outfit every day. You should invest in some simple, but workable pieces. Women should buy a few basic skirts (not too short!) in good fabric, like lined lightweight wool.

Pair the skirts with blouses or sweaters (not too tight!) and a blazer. You could hit the department stores during the half-off sales, or shop at the discount stores that carry many

perfectly good but inexpensive closeouts. Check out the consignment shops and/or thrift shops near your home. You will be stunned to see what terrific things you can find for a few dollars, as someone's fashion mistake can become your wardrobe staple. Of course, you will have to wash or dry clean these items before you wear them, but you will still save money.

Males can make a great impression by wearing a clean and pressed shirt every day, with a tie. Long sleeves look the most professional; to be honest, a short-sleeved shirt with a blazer looks dorky. White or light-blue shirts are always acceptable, but stripes and other patterns can make a nice fashion statement. Students enjoy brightly colored ties or some of the "theme" ties—ties with pictures drawn by children, Dr. Seuss, holiday ties, sports themes, etc. A navy blue blazer will complete a professional look. Invest in a few pairs of lightweight wool or gabardine dress slacks and some new casual cotton slacks.

If casual days are permitted, men can still maintain their professional look with a pair of crisp cotton slacks and a nice golf shirt and sweater or vest, or a turtleneck and a blazer. Women may want to choose a nicely tailored pair of slacks with a shirt or blouse and perhaps a crew neck sweater. If your school has a sports jersey day or another theme, ask your mentor teacher about participating.

Invest in a lint brush and make sure that your clothes are free of dust, pet hair, and lint. If you do not have a lint

brush, make your own with a loop of sticky masking tape. It works great.

You won't believe how much your feet will hurt after standing and teaching all day, so I recommend that you have a pair of comfortable shoes with you. (Keep them handy in a canvas bag in the faculty room—I promise you will thank me for this!) If you have any extra money to spend for student-teaching essentials, spend it on a comfortable pair of shoes. (The majority of female teachers I know have foot problems, including me. Now you know why your old Latin teacher always wore ugly black “grandma” shoes! I wore high heels and suits for the first twenty-five years I taught; after ruining my feet, I switched to low shoes, like Clark's.) Sandals and flip-flops are not appropriate. Men are fortunate to have flat shoes as their only choice. Penny loafers and/or tie shoes are comfortable and professional looking, but men might consider buying a pair of rubber-soled shoes. Women have the choice of wearing heels, which is all right if the heels are not too high. You will be amazed at the fatigue that you feel at the end of the day after standing all day. Comfort is key. Whatever shoes you choose to wear, be sure they are neat and polished, and never scuffed.

Since time is always important in every lesson, wear a watch. You cannot count on a clock being in every classroom. Keep jewelry to a minimum. Too much “bling” is not a good thing. Women should keep their makeup on the light side. Hands and nails should be clean and well groomed. Women

who want to paint their nails should have a good manicure; do not go to school with chipped polish or broken nails.

If you smoke, students will pick up on the odor of cigarettes very quickly. All schools have a no-smoking policy, so you will not have a chance to smoke in school. It would be an excellent time to quit smoking completely. No smoking leads to better health, which leads to more years to enjoy teaching! This is a win-win situation for both you and your students.

~~Too much~~
Too much
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thing.



Have your teeth cleaned professionally twice a year. Use a mouthwash every day. I kept a toothbrush and small tube of toothpaste in my desk drawer, which was a godsend on many occasions. It is a good idea to have some dental floss available, too. Also, have some strong peppermints in case you eat garlic or onions for lunch. You want to make all communication with students and staff members as pleasant as possible.

Remember, you are communicating who you are, not only through what you say and do but through the way you look. Make that communication positive.