

## All The Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me As A First Year Art Teacher ... or Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About A Successful First Year But Were Afraid To Ask ... or How To Survive Your First Year Of Teaching

Diane Fogler, Visual Arts Coordinator, Rockaway Township Schools, Rockaway, NJ

No, you can't learn everything about how to be a good art teacher in four years of college or in the first year of teaching. I just wish someone had told me a few of the suggestions below when I began:

### Students:

1. Familiarize yourself with the student population—culture, heritage, religion, etc.
2. Respect your students; listen to them. Show them you value their opinions.
3. Learn their names.
4. Engage students in conversation; remember personal interests, pets, etc.
5. Read your I.E.P. folders; talk to guidance personnel and Child Study Team members.
6. Meet with a student privately as soon as any difficulty arises and assure the student that you will be in contact with their parents because you are concerned about their achievement, as well as the achievement of others in the class.
7. Let the students know that you make a practice of ongoing communication with their parents.
8. Let students know your expectations. Outline the criteria and objectives for each lesson/unit at the beginning so assessments will match what you are asking the student to learn or be able to do. Let them know that to study the body of knowledge that is art is to read, write, conduct inquiry, create and reflect on questions which arise.
9. Remember, each day starts with where your students are, not where you think they should be.
10. Vary your teaching strategies to involve all types of learners. Use individual and group experiences.
11. A simple question can help you decide if an experience you planned for your students is worthwhile: "Will this experience facilitate individual problem solving, conceptual or skill development, judgment or awareness about art?"

### Parents:

1. Make a beginning contract, such as a letter introducing yourself, which includes school and district objectives, and lets the parents know your expectations and your commitment to student learning.
2. Make a handout for "Back-To-School Night" that explains in more detail the philosophy of your department and tells parents how they can help you help their children. (This is a good time to ask for volunteers with displays and exhibits, "student/parent art nights," cataloguing resources, arranging field trips, etc.)
3. Contact parents early when you encounter a difficulty with a student. Find something positive to say about the student and then be straightforward about the problem. Ask for their input concerning behavior or learning difficulties you have observed, and for their cooperation. Assure them that you believe that together, you can help their child to more positive outcomes. Assure them that you will communicate with them continuously to monitor student improvement.
4. Send a positive note to parents of students who are staying on task and showing definite learning outcomes. Do not make your only contact with parents because of negative behavior.
5. Form an "Arts Parent Sponsors" organization—Remember, parents can be your best resource to understanding your students and your greatest supporters.

### District:

1. Firmly ground yourself in the "overall concepts" of your curriculum. What are the larger concepts your district wants students to understand? Are there any specified goals for this year? Know your state and national arts standards and use them.

2. Attend local school board meetings. This is a great way to meet the policymakers and see the "workings" that affect you. Get to know the politics and players in your community.
3. Volunteer for district committees. They are an avenue to network with outstanding colleagues in other disciplines. Call on them for interdisciplinary units, etc. It will reveal to you the "power players" in the district.
4. Attend district staff development. This will broaden your expertise and provide more resource contacts.
5. Be familiar with and conscious of school law. Do research; take additional classes; contact the teacher's association representatives. Today, students and parents are aware of their rights—you should be also.
6. Learn the state and federal Special Needs Education laws and how the "inclusion" laws have an impact on your classroom. Seek the help of school or district personnel to meet these requirements and provide your students with supportive tools, materials and the required aide personnel in your classroom.
7. Understand the "Right-To-Know" federal and state laws.
8. Familiarize yourself with all the resources available to you: People—special needs staff, supervisors, curriculum heads, guidance counselors, psychologists, administrators, audio/visual technology, maintenance, etc.; Materials—visual resources, audio/visual technology materials, media centers in the district, school and community, science collections, community resource directories, museums, speakers, field trip opportunities, etc.
9. Call or visit the other art teachers in the district.

### **School:**

1. Ask your administrator about the "mentoring program" in your district and request two, one in your school and another art teacher in the district.
2. Familiarize yourself with all staff including lunchroom workers, aides, custodians, secretaries and maintenance. Besides being appropriate, you will need their support and assistance. Let them know how important your position is to the students and they will be supportive. Let them know that you realize how important their position is with the students to their total education.
3. Set up a safe environment for you and the students and ask about your district's "Right-To-Know" implementation and representative.

4. Get to know your teacher association school representatives and district officers.
5. Attend a PTA or PTO meeting and introduce yourself.
6. Discuss professional issues with your administrators on a regular, informal basis. Make your professional commitment clear on a daily basis. Ask their advice.
7. Make notes about concerns at the end of the day and seek help.
8. Don't delay.

### **Professional Commitment:**

1. If you are the only art teacher, contact others in other districts through your local art teachers' association and set up a "share" group that meets once a month.
2. Join your county and state art education association, in addition to "national." There is no better networking vehicle to remain current in art education and to alleviate feelings of isolation. Make use of their publications. Attend state and national conventions.
3. Subscribe to contemporary art periodicals and READ THEM!
4. Go to exhibits, museums and read reviews, etc.
5. Continue working as an artist and support artists' organizations. Exhibit.

### **In Conclusion:**

1. Be organized. Your room, units, assessment method, supplies, storage of student work, cleanup procedures and teaching strategies should facilitate learning for your students.
2. Be flexible; respect seniority. You don't know it all yet. You can learn from the more experienced!
3. Be punctual. Keep to required hours, duties and paperwork; it is part of the job.
4. Be discreet. You will hear a lot about a lot. Repeat nothing.
5. Follow the "chain of command." Nothing bothers some people more than you going over their heads, even if you think it might expedite your concerns.
6. LISTEN!
7. Maintain your sense of humor.
8. Remember, you are getting paid to do what you love.