

Everything a New Elementary School Teacher REALLY Needs to Know: (But Didn't Learn in College)

Otis Kriegel

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Veteran teacher gives valuable lessons to rookies on what to really expect in the classroom trenches.

Teacher preparation programs across the country impart future educators with the latest theories on how to teach state and national curricula. But what happens when novice teachers find themselves covered in glue, standing beside a pool of vomit, welcoming a new student in the middle of the school year, or surprised by a principal's drop-in observation (though hopefully not all in the same day)? Often feeling like he was just trying to keep his head above water during his first year of teaching, Otis Kriegel has written this invaluable guide to help other new teachers navigate their first year and beyond.

The veteran elementary school teacher and adjunct faculty member at New York University fills in the gaps left by many college and university programs. Rather than espouse more educational theories, Kriegel offers readers a manual for creating their "own blueprint for managing the day-to-day challenges of being a teacher." He divides the book into four main sections: "Before the School Year," "During the School Year," "Your Students' Families," and "Your Life as a Teacher." Throughout these sections, the author uses a conversational tone to cover such topics as setting up a classroom, learning the school culture, organizing student work, discipline, getting to know parents, managing the hefty workload, and establishing a work-life balance.

The book not only offers advice left out of some teacher preparation programs, such as purchasing a padlock to store valuables in the classroom or taking the time to talk to all students at least once each day, it also gives practical tips; for instance, new teachers should value the school custodian as highly as the principal. In addition, Kriegel encourages new teachers to think outside the box: If the teacher's desk becomes a clunky piece of furniture, get rid of it. If the beloved morning meeting keeps getting interrupted by tardy students, make it a little later in the morning.

The author accents key topics with anecdotes from his own and his colleagues' experiences, while "BTW boxes" give even more relevant tips. Numerous sample charts, letters, and illustrations add further clarification to Kriegel's suggestions. One of his final suggestions—don't beat yourself up over a bad day—remains good advice for novice and veteran teachers alike. Whether readers take in the guide from cover to cover or dip in as needed (which will be often), they will leave with a greater sense of confidence.

ANGELA LEEPER (Summer 2013)

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