

Best Practices for Novice Teachers

Welcome to the life of an educator! This is what you've trained so hard for: the sleepless nights studying for exam boards, the overtime hours spent planning, your student teaching time, it's all been to prepare you for this moment in your career. You are a teacher! In order for you to hit the ground running, we put together this concise document to give you the quick-and-dirty hacks to keep in mind for this school year. We will cover issues that have increasingly gotten more attention over the last few decades within curriculums around the country, which you are undoubtedly familiar with: culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and cultural diversity. Enjoy the journey as we coast through these handy tips, distilled by our veteran teachers, to keep in mind when setting up, and running, your classroom.

The journey starts on day one by getting to know your students and letting your students get to know each other better. Keep in mind that forming a meaningful relationship with students will help to connect with them and can positively affect student confidence and performance. Think back to the best teachers you've had. Did they take an interest in your activities? Did they ask about, or talk with, your family members? Did they follow-up with something that you were proud of and praise you for it? Chances are that if you remember a teacher, they did something like this. The point is to first establish a relationship based on mutual respect so that they will listen to what you have to say. Why not have them create something about them and share it with you and the class? We can encourage questions and draw connections between students to create a comfortable and supportive atmosphere.

Now that we know our students, why not get them to know each other better through some group work! Alternating between whole-class, small-group, and individual activities breaks up class time and allows learners to create constructively with their peers. By working towards

common objectives, learners can have leverage a team-spirit that can be used in perspective-taking. This dovetails in creating an effective environment for cooperation. Set high expectations at the beginning, as for all class behavior, and follow through with your expectations. Students know when they can take an inch, and they're always inch-ing for a mile. Allow time for learning reflection. Have learners think about their learning process, or metacognition, and do this often so that they get in the habit of reflecting on how they learn.

Cultural projects can allow learners to describe both similarities and differences. Because this is standardized in our curriculum, let's focus on how to leverage this in the best way possible. From Marzano, we know that describing similarities and differences is the most sure-fire and effective hack to 'up' students' higher order thinking. Connect students' cultures to others and allow them to describe differences and similarities. Open it up as a whole-class discussion or a small-group discussion, but bring it together and draw out some commonalities of responses. Talk about it explicitly! Do we do something for the same reason, but in a different way? How similar/different are we really? What's another way people can do...?

The best way to teach all this is through empathy, and the best way to show empathy is to point it out when it happens. Children at this age react best to raw experience, although they are capable of making more theoretical connections, the most effective way to explain it is to show it. Maybe someone didn't get to play with their favorite toy at recess and we have to guide students to think if they were that person, how would they feel? Sometimes the perfect storm hits and, if a student shows that they are experiencing the feelings that another student is having at the same time, we can point this out and explain that this is empathy.

But what if I do all this and there's still conflict? Not 'what if', but when it happens, what should you do? Have a plan in place for conflict resolution. Remember those high standards you

put into place at the beginning of the year? This is the time to lean into them. Create a respectful place for students to step outside of themselves a bit to allow for other perspectives. Students are capable of thinking of others at this age, so use reasoning and make your point with examples. It might be necessary to get the parents on board if the behavior is serious enough. Perhaps the behavior is part of their heritage culture, which takes me to our last point...

ABL: Always be learning. We ask our students to have open minds and respect cultures and diversity, but oftentimes we can become so focused on student achievement that we lose sight of our own cultural education. There is so much that you can learn from your students! Let me repeat that. **There is so much that you can learn from your students!** Take this school year as an opportunity to broaden your own perspectives while broadening your students'. You might just find that they were the "real" teachers (wink, wink). Each year, reflect on this idea, in addition to your teaching practice more generally, and together we can work towards the best opportunities for our students!