

Ten Teaching Tweaks for New Teachers

To say that the first year of teaching is challenging would be an understatement. There are so many moving parts to manage and so many new things to learn that it's sometimes difficult to know where to start. Keep it simple and start with these small teaching tweaks.

1. Reset and reteach.

The beginning of the new year is the perfect time for a new start. Your students will benefit from practicing classroom routines and procedures. This time of year also makes for a natural opportunity to shift routines and practices that haven't been working. If you discover, for example, that your pencil sharpening procedure isn't going as well as you'd hoped, reset and create a procedure that works better for you and your students.

2. Watch your wait time.

Wait time is the time you give students to think after you've asked a question or given a prompt. It sounds simple, but it might take a little extra awareness and effort to really put it into practice. This article lays out the incredible benefits that result from giving students only 3 seconds of wait time after asking a question.

3. Turn a new habit into a common practice.

I read somewhere that it takes at least 28 days of conscious practice to make a new habit stick. When there's something in your instruction that you want to make more effective, or something you want to happen consistently in your teaching, treat it like you're creating a new habit. Try writing your goal on a sentence strip and hang it in the back of the classroom where you'll see it as a daily reminder.

4. Take time to take care of yourself.

I was a solo lunch eater for years, trying to cram in a few extra minutes of planning and grading. Over time, I learned to find the value in taking a few minutes to eat lunch with colleagues and shift my thinking. I've learned that the more you take care of yourself and fill your own cup, the more you'll have to share with your students.

5. Breathe.

In his classroom management book ***Tools for Teaching*** Fred Jones describes how teachers might experience the "fight or flight" reflex in the classroom when faced with certain stressful situations. One of his suggestions for confronting a negative adrenaline rush is to breathe. Slow, deep breaths calm the body and like Jones says in his book, "If you are calm, you will have a calming effect on those around you." Not sure where to go next with a lesson? Take a few seconds to breathe and collect your thoughts. Not sure what to do about a student that's acting up? Take a few seconds to breathe so you can make a decision from a calm and grounded place. Those few nurturing seconds of breath can have a big impact on your well-being and on the state of your classroom.

6. Listen with intention.

I know from experience that it can feel hectic when you're rushing from one lesson to the next, but I'd encourage you to slow down, and listen to your students whenever you have the opportunity. Ask your students what they did over the weekend. Ask them about their extracurricular activities. The relationships you build with your students matter, and the more you know about your students, the more you can make your teaching relevant to their lives.

7. Set goals with your students.

Engage your students in the process of planning for the year. Math and reading are good places to start. With your students, brainstorm the aspects of math and reading that they might need to work on. Next, have them discuss the ways they might work towards those goals, and write them on notecards. Then, have students tape the notecards to their desks where they will see them every day.

8. Be purposefully positive!

Practice 4:1 positive to negative redirects and comments. It can start with something as simple as greeting a student at the door with an enthusiastic, "I'm so glad you're here today!" When you give a student positive encouragement and smiles throughout the day, it's like making a deposit into the student's emotional "bank." Then, when it comes time to make a "withdrawal," when you have to give a consequence, it doesn't have the same emotional impact. Positivity is powerful!

9. Own your objective.

When planning, make sure your learning targets are clear. Write them in your plan book so you remember where you're going with the lesson, and let your students know exactly what you're hoping they'll learn.

10. Bring your lessons to a close.

Eight years into my career, I still had to remind myself to properly bring my lessons to a close before moving on to the next thing. It's easy to forget, but it's also powerful when put into practice. Closure can look really different depending on what you hope to accomplish. You might bring students back together after a small group and have them reflect on how well they self-managed. You might give the class feedback based on what you saw while students were working. You might ask students to turn and talk with each other about what they learned, coming back to the objective. You might also check in by asking what questions they still have. Whichever way you choose to wrap it up,

give your students and yourself a sense of closure, and honor what you've just accomplished.

Which teaching tweaks will you try this year? Which have you already tried?

Topics: Professional Learning, New Teachers, Class Culture

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