

Survival Tactics – the first lesson

Taken from “How to Survive Your First Year in Teaching”, written by Sue Cowley

Here are some ideas and tips to help get you through this nerve-racking experience:

Remember you are ‘the mystery teacher’

No one knows who you are; you are an unknown quantity and, consequently, you have an air of mystery that you can exploit.

If a student asks “Are you a new teacher?”, you might answer “I’m new to this school”.

Aim to cultivate the sense that you have a wealth of experience behind you – no matter how inexperienced you are, remember that your students are younger and less experienced.

‘They’re more scared of you ...’

Most students will give you a window of opportunity in which to prove yourself – a few lessons during which they are checking you out, unsure of how far they can push you.

The key is to appear relaxed; if you look calm, confident and in control of yourself, the children will probably behave perfectly well for you – if you get flustered, defensive or aggressive, they may well strike out in self-defence.

Have a sense of style

Think carefully about your teaching style before your first lesson.

‘Start off as hard as possible – you can always relax, but you can never get a class back once you’ve lost them.’

Set the boundaries now – and stick to them

Your boundaries should be fair, realistic and achievable, focussing on positive – rather than negative – behaviour.

Wait for them

‘Never, ever talk to a class until every single student is sitting still, in complete silence, looking directly at you.’

Hands up!

Get them into good habits from the start, by starting every question with “Put your hand up if you can tell me ...”

Relax

Try to relax, and never worry if there are slight pauses while you are considering what you want to do next – if your mind does go blank, look around the class with a confident air, making eye contact with some individuals.

Admin, admin, admin, names

Checking registers, explaining rules, giving out books etc. will take some time – don’t feel that you have to rush into delivering the curriculum.

Have a key focus of learning names, perhaps by playing some games with the class.

Who wants a job?

Whenever you have anything to be given out or collected in, ask one of the class – you will find that your students are happy to help you, and you will save yourself unnecessary work.