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Beginning Primary Teaching

*An Essential Manual
for New Teachers*



Sample



By Veronica & Mark McNeil



Title: Beginning Primary Teaching

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Note to New Teachers

A great teacher makes a difference in each child's life and affects each family and the future of us all.

– Barbara Cage

As a new teacher, many thoughts are probably racing through your mind. How do I set up my classroom? How will the children react? How will staff and parents view me? And, most importantly, will I be a success? We all want to be good at what we do and earn the respect of others. All new teachers face these concerns and many more. You would have learned a lot of valuable information at university and on your teaching practicums. However, it is impossible to experience and remember everything to do with the practical aspects of teaching during your time as a student. Many of you would have watched your supervisors or mentors deal with the challenges of creating an enjoyable learning environment, manage behaviour, deal with parents, open nights, reports and planning. Now it is your turn.

Yes, teaching can be a demanding profession, but it is very rewarding, especially if you are organised, seek help, take short cuts when appropriate and act confident (even if you do not feel it). Every teacher looks back with amazement at his or her first years. As long as you continue to learn and do the best that you can, you will be well on your way to making many worthwhile differences in the lives of many children.

This book was written with new and establishing teachers in mind. It will explain what you need to do before the new school year starts, and provides practical pointers about teaching, planning, handling parents, working with colleagues, assessing students, writing letters and motivating students. It is packed with helpful resources, such as blackline masters that will help you to save time and appear professional and organised straight away. This book is designed so that it can be either dipped into or read from cover to cover.

Much of education is about people learning from others. Through the years, our colleagues have graciously passed on what we are sharing with you today in this book. We hope that you find this knowledge as valuable as we have.

Good luck, good learning and have fun!

About the Authors

Veronica and Mark have taught in Australia and Canada and have over 25 years teaching experience between them. They have two daughters and reside in Geraldton, Western Australia where they continue to help learners from 5 to 65 years old.

A black and white photograph of four children (two girls and two boys) standing in a row, holding a large white rectangular sign. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The sign is the central focus of the image.

Section 1
Before the
First Day

© Jani Bryson

Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things.

Peter Drucker

You've Got the Job - What Now?

When you secure your first teaching job, it is a good idea to make an appointment to visit your new school again before you start work. If you did not meet the principal during your interview, phone the school, introduce yourself to the secretary and ask if you can make an appointment to meet with the principal or with any other member of staff who can answer your questions and hopefully provide you with relevant year level resources.

Even though your appointment is not an interview, dress in neat clothes, because first impressions often form the basis of how others treat you. When meeting the principal, or any other staff members, shake their hands, thank them for their time and make eye contact. Listen to everything that the principal or other staff members have to tell you about the school or your new class and then ask relevant questions.

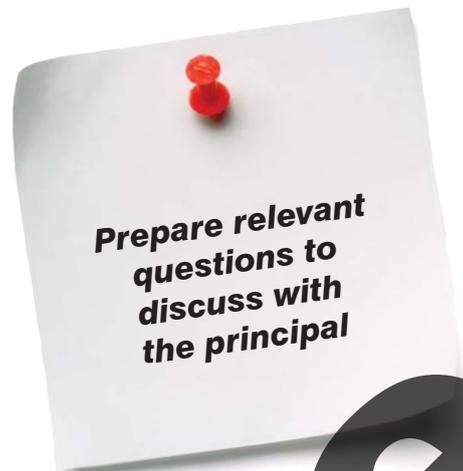
I remember my very first teaching job. My only concerns at the time were how many children were in my class, how many of them were boys and how many of them had behavioural problems. Although I thought I was being discreet by keeping the behavioural question until last, my narrow focus was probably pretty apparent to the principal. Inspiring and helping to bring out the best in children was the reason that I got into teaching, but to the principal, it may have seemed that I was focused on simply making my own life easy. If I had prepared some other relevant questions, I am sure that she would have seen me as well prepared, confident and professional.

Just a few requests chief ... can we move some of these boys into another class, have lunch at eleven and what time does school finish again... ?"



Some possible questions for you to ask are:

- Can I have a key and the alarm codes so that I can access the school during the holidays and prepare work?
 - Is there a student book list that I can look at?
 - Are there set texts that I will be using and if there are, can I have copies of them?
 - How many students will be in my class?
 - Are there any students in my class with special learning needs?
 - Is there a supply room, or will I be given a budget to order my own supplies?
 - Will I have a teacher aide?
 - Will I be assigned a mentor?
 - How supportive are the parents of the school community and of the work done in the classroom?
 - Is there a school policy book which outlines rules and procedures?
 - What is the school's behavioural management policy?
 - Are there computers in the classroom? Is there a specific computer room that I can book and use?
 - Are there specialist teachers to teach Information Technology, LOTE, Music and Physical Education?
 - Does the Learning Support Teacher work with any of my students?
- May I take home relevant resources for planning and assessment?
 - May I have a look at my classroom and around the rest of the school?
 - Is there a set amount of time that I am expected to teach certain subjects? For example, one hour a day of Mathematics and two hours a day of English?
 - Does the school have a buddy system?
 - Do teachers plan together? If so, is there someone who I could contact?



Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

– Margaret Mead



You are now part of a team, all working towards achieving the same goal – educating children. Like any family or team, the degree to how well it functions, is often determined by how well people get along and carry out their responsibilities. Remember, that professionalism is really a way of doing things that takes into account the interests, needs and feelings of others. As a teacher, you are the most important person to your students. A look, a word, a smile or a sneer can lift their spirits or affect them in a negative way. The same is true for adults. It is not often mentioned, but to be a very good teacher is to treat others with respect, courtesy and dignity. Understanding the roles in a school will help you to create genial relations with all members of staff.

Principals

Depending on the size of the school, you may or may not see much of the principal. In a bigger school you will probably speak to the heads of junior, middle and senior schools when you have concerns, queries, requests or want to gather some student information. In smaller schools, you will probably contact your mentor (if you have one), an assistant/ deputy principal or the principal depending on your needs. Roles are often divided, so for instance, you may need to see the assistant principal for behavioural issues and a curriculum coordinator for planning concerns. Administration staff are often busy, but it is advisable to approach them with your concerns or queries, as problems have a way of getting bigger and harder to

rectify the longer you leave them.

I was very young in my first year of teaching and saw the principal as an authority figure and made sure that I didn't have much to do with her. I learned however, that principals see themselves as professional peers and realised that new teachers, while having many modern and exciting ideas, also need support and ongoing practical help. School principals' main aims are the same as yours. They want what is best for the students.



Assistant/Deputy Principals

Some schools have one to three assistant/deputy principals who are often easier to approach and more accessible than principals. You may feel daunted or embarrassed when you cannot solve a challenge, but the odds are that assistant/deputy principals have experienced similar problems themselves in the past and are happy to work with you to solve them.

Secretaries

Many people believe that secretaries really run schools. They certainly know who to ask, where to get things, the ins and outs of money matters, absenteeism details, medication procedures and they often know vital family information. Treat secretaries with respect. They are not your employees and they can offer great assistance and make your life much easier if you take the time to build a positive relationship with them.

I always assumed that secretaries were part of the staff and were to be treated as professionals, so I was very surprised when one secretary told me how much she appreciated me saying good morning to her each day and taking an interest in her life. She let me know that many secretaries felt that teachers ignored them until they needed something and some teachers often spoke down to them. I know that this secretary always went out of her way for me and made sure that I always had enough supplies and information to make life easy. Even though she was twice my age, we became very good friends and I learned a great deal about the intricacies of school life from her.



Teacher Aides

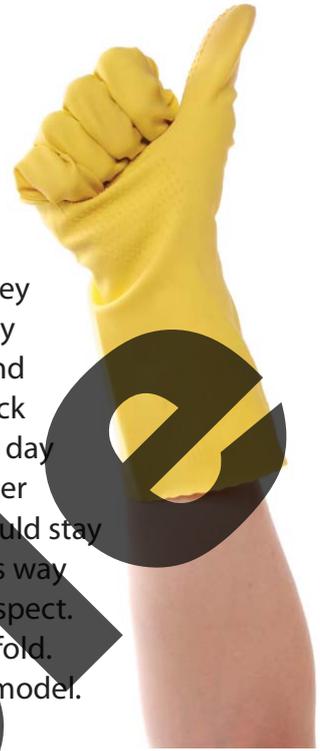
Used wisely, teacher aides are invaluable. From my experience, teacher aides prefer to be busy and made to feel useful rather than standing at the back of the room watching the teacher. This takes planning on your part, but they can lessen your load substantially if you take the time to plan their tasks as well as your own. Get them to work with advanced students, weaker students, reading groups, set up and monitor centres, run writing conferences, photocopy work, set up class displays, cut up art supplies and so forth. Again, treat them with respect and they rarely disappoint.



Staff Members

Cleaners and Grounds People

These people have an important job to do in keeping the school neat, tidy and safe from hazards. Their role is very important to the overall culture of the school. Like all people, they want to be recognized and appreciated for the work that they do. One cleaner decorated my room the night before my birthday as a surprise, another left coffee coasters on my desk each day and another offered to teach a small group of my students how to rock and roll at no charge! One of our daughters is a diabetic and one day she left her medical kit at school on the teacher's desk. The cleaner recognized it as Ellie's and phoned us at home saying that he would stay at school until we got there. We were sure that he went out of his way for her because Ellie was always friendly and treated him with respect. Offering little acts of kindness and value will often be repaid tenfold. Teach your students to treat all people with respect. Be the role model.



www.istock.com/Shantell

Fellow Teachers

As in all professions, there are special people willing to help you and willing to share their knowledge and expertise. As much as possible, seek out the teachers who have good control and rapport with students and who have a good knowledge of the many facets of education. If you have not been assigned a mentor, ask your principal or assistant principal if there is a teacher who would be willing to take on this role, or ask the teacher directly. They will be flattered and the value to both you and your mentor will be immense.



Many teachers in multi-stream schools plan together which is an advantage to you, especially if they listen to your ideas and are flexible enough to try new things. Planning with someone else is a great way to learn short cuts and understand curriculum requirements for your year level. It will also provide you with some strategies to assess and report on students.

I first taught Year 7 in a large school which had four to six streams in each year. I was very nervous, but my fellow Year 7 teachers were willing to share their resources and we all planned together. The teacher with whom I shared a double classroom, even stayed after school each day to work through the following day's Maths program with me. I had never taught this level before and needed guidance and I will always be grateful for her kindness. She had only been teaching a few years herself and I had been teaching over ten years, so I had to swallow my pride and ask for help. Don't worry about appearing unintelligent - you can only improve by asking questions and watching what others do well.

At times, you may come across teachers who are controlling and insist that you do everything their way, even if their way is outdated and uninteresting. This happened to a new dynamic teacher who I knew. Luckily she was able to present research to persuasively justify her teaching methods and win over grudging respect. If you meet with a controlling and stubborn teacher, you will find the situation tricky.



Always remain professional and think about some of these solutions:

- *Go with the flow, but do your own thing once the door closes in the classroom. Sometimes, things have a way of getting out and eventually you both might need to deal with the situation.*
- *Meet the challenge head on. Ask your mentor or another staff member for his or her advice. They may offer a different perspective and offer a solution that works for everyone.*
- *If it looks like you may be on a collision course with others, look carefully at different options. Is there a way for both of you to win?*
- *Try to approach the person in a congenial manner, be prepared to listen and understand the other person's position first.*
- *Look for solutions that will give you both what you want and if you still disagree, express your points logically and calmly.*
- *Be prepared to adjust your position to help the other person "save face".*
- *If all else fails, talk to your mentor, a senior teacher or member of the administration staff for possible solutions.*

Gathering Together Resources

Planners and Assessment Records

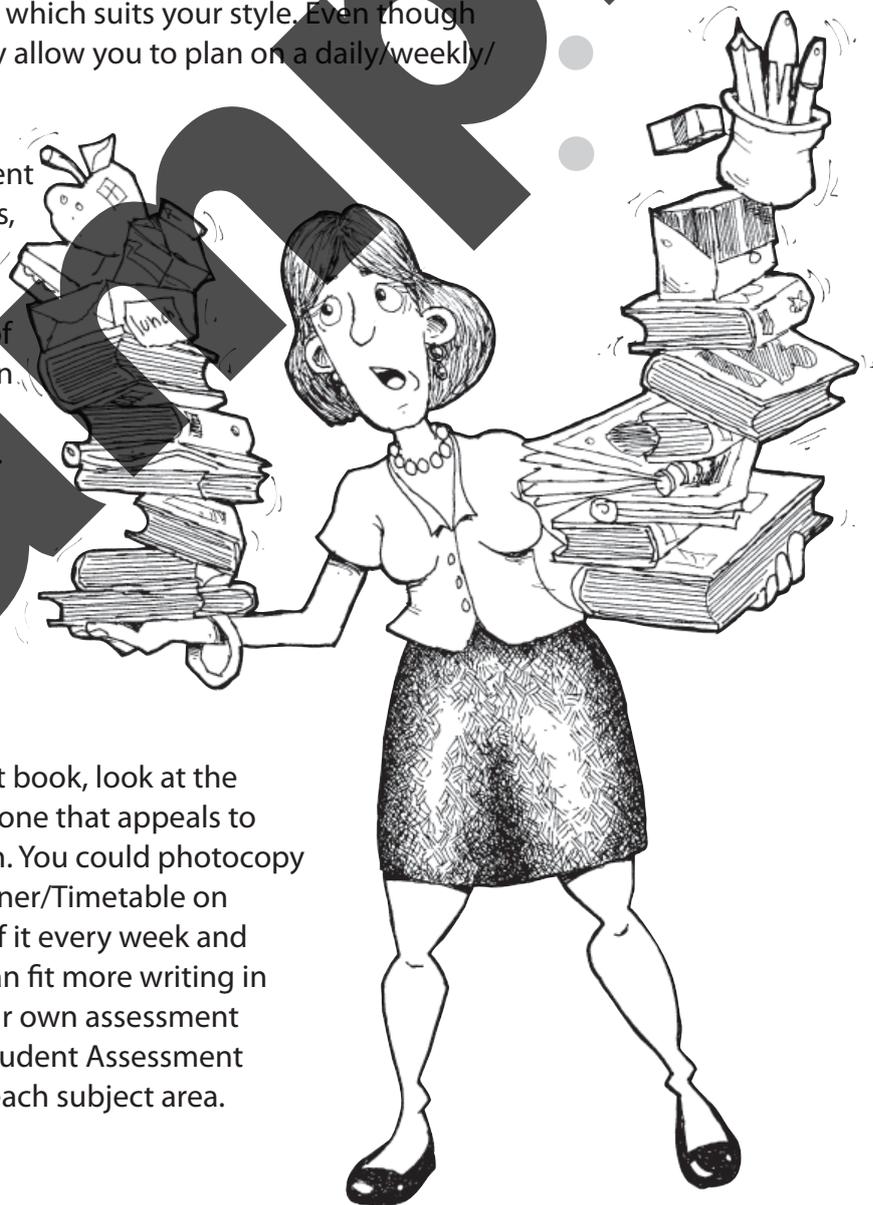
Before you begin teaching you need to make sure that you have a planner and somewhere to record the children's results.

Visit an educational bookstore or library and if you cannot afford to buy, spend as much time as possible scanning through relevant books for ideas.

Buy a teaching planner which suits your style. Even though they are expensive, they allow you to plan on a daily/weekly/term basis and keep track of calendar days, professional development days, holidays, meetings, supervision duties and to keep reminder notes on things to do. Some of them also have a section at the back for tracking assessments and marks.

If you do not buy a planner that includes a marking section then you will have to buy a separate marking book.

If you cannot afford a planner or assessment book, look at the different styles, choose one that appeals to you and make your own. You could photocopy the Weekly & Daily Planner/Timetable on page 15. Make a copy of it every week and enlarge it so that you can fit more writing in each box. To create your own assessment book, photocopy the Student Assessment Record on page 16 for each subject area.



Filling out the Planner

Some schools stipulate when classes take place, but generally, teachers choose how they'd like to work around specialist subjects. Specialist teachers may take Music, Religion, P.E., LOTE (Languages Other Than English), Art, Computers and Library Studies. Specialist subjects may be broken into 30, 40, 45 or 60 minute blocks and these schedules will determine your other options. It is important to do Maths and English before lunch as children generally concentrate better and there are fewer interruptions. Maths should generally take about one hour (longer in the upper years) and English, which should include reading, spelling, speaking, viewing and writing, should take about two hours per day or more if you are integrating it with other subject areas. You will need to be flexible to ensure that these two very important subjects are done every day, especially if there are disruptions to the schedule. Generally, Art and P.E. are better left to the afternoon, because they are self-motivating subjects (for most children) and are seen as a reward for their earlier hard work.

Gathering Together Resources

With an overcrowded curriculum, integrating different subject areas, (especially in the older years) is essential, as there are too many subjects and initiatives to cover adequately in the time allowed. Most, if not all teachers choose which areas they will cover in depth and which get less attention. By integrating subjects well, you can cover a wide variety of areas and very high levels of work are possible if you give enough time and focus to integrated learning. The inquiry-based approach caters for a variety of learning styles, content and presentation formats in a more in-depth research based learning environment.

You will have to wait for your specialist teachers' schedules before you can complete a permanent planner for your class. Write a plan for the first few weeks in pencil. Colour code subjects to make it easy to identify your schedule and enlarge it to A3 size to use as both a weekly and daily planner.

Example of a Completed Planner

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8.40 9.00	• Fitness	• Fitness	• Fitness	• Fitness	• Assembly
9.15	• Greeting/Roll/ Community circle	• Greeting/Roll/ Community circle	• Music/Drama	• Greeting/Roll/ Community circle	• Greeting/Roll/ Community circle
	• Literacy	• Literacy	• Literacy	• Literacy	• Literacy
10.30-10.50	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
10.50 11.50	•Maths •Physical Education	•Maths •Integrated Studies	•Maths •Integrated Studies	•Maths •Integrated Studies	•Maths •Integrated Studies
12.30-1.10	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
1.10 1.30	•Silent Reading •Science	•Silent Reading •Computers	•Silent Reading •HSIE/Society & Environment	•Silent Reading •HSIE/Society & Environment	•Silent Reading •Sport
2.30-3.00		•Art	•LOTE		•Community circle

Before the First Day

Supplies

The school will usually provide you with basic teacher supplies that the previous teacher has ordered in Term Four. Check with the secretary what you can expect to receive and when. You may need to order or purchase additional items. Make sure that you keep the receipts for tax purposes. Listed on this page are some items that you might want to start collecting, if they are not already part of your class supplies. Remember, not everything has to be new, so ask friends, family and parents to collect them for you. Visit second-hand shops and gradually build up your own children's library and dress up box. Purchase empty containers, pillows and cushions and other items suited to the year that you will be teaching. Remember to collect items for girls and boys to maintain their interest.

**Photocopiable
Weekly & Daily
Planner/Timetable
on page 15**

**Student Assessment
Record on page 16**

Gathering
Together
Resources

Suggestions

- Bottle tops, jars, foil
- Wool, string, cotton
- Toys and puppets
- Ribbon, buttons, material scraps
- Shop items, play money, etc
- Storage tubs/containers
- Butcher or computer paper
- Newspapers and magazines for art
- Tracing paper
- Blocks
- Games
- Safe tools for a building centre
- Objects to take apart
- Music of various kinds
- Cushions and pillows
- Children's furniture
- Children's books
- Children's magazines
- Posters
- Colouring pencils
- Highlighters
- Stapler and staples
- Hole punch
- Drawing pins
- Scissors
- Stanley knives
- Sticky labels
- Glue stick
- Paperclips
- Note-books
- Stickers
- Calculators
- 30 centimetre rulers
- Stick-it notes
- Self inking stamps
- Blu-Tack
- Memory sticks
- Alphabet and number desk strips for younger students

Weekly & Daily Planner/Timetable

<i>Time</i>	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Recess					
Lunch					

Weekly & Daily Planner/Timetable

<i>Time</i>	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Recess					
Lunch					