

Twice a First Year Teacher

Last year I took the bold step of entering the classroom. Perhaps I should say re-entering the classroom since I have taught before, but that was 14 years ago. It seems so long ago that I honestly cannot remember much of it, except that I resigned by February and ran away screaming in May. This year when the last day of school arrived, I was thinking, "Oh, already?"

I doubt that I was really a better teacher this year. In fact, I'm sure fresh out of UT that my command of Latin was significantly stronger than it is now. But, I was smarter this time around, and far more practical in facing the realities of the classroom.

So, take notes, you future first-time teachers. Here's how to do it the wrong way and how to do it the right way.

1987-1988 WRONG WAY

- designed all of my quizzes, tests, and all other materials from scratch
- made students write complete Latin and English answers on all quizzes and tests (more difficult and time-consuming to grade)
- spent hours and hours at home grading and preparing materials, quizzes, and tests
- I never asked for help or advice
- tried to do it all; became extremely dissatisfied when I didn't live up to my own expectations

2000-2001 RIGHT WAY

- mainly used materials from my former Latin teacher or from the publisher; creating only a few special things that were all mine
- made students write complete answers only on portions of quizzes and tests, but otherwise most were multiple choice, matching or some other objective form
- made my personal/family life my priority; I probably only spent a couple of hours of prep time at home daily (one hour before school and one hour after the children had gone to bed); all else was graded/prepared at school
- I often asked for help from fellow teachers at my school, my former Latin teacher, and the teachers on the Latinteach list on a variety of topics from grading and grade books, to classroom management, to teaching certain grammar concepts to 12 year olds
- realized I probably still won't be able to do all that I want to in my 1st five years of teaching but am satisfied in knowing that it takes years of experience to become a good teacher

As a successful college student of Latin, I learned the importance of diligence and routine, and above all self-reliance. Success to me was a simple equation of effort=grade, an A being success.

In some way I'm sure I applied this same formula to teaching-if I worked really hard, I'd be successful. In 1987-88, when I taught at Roosevelt High School in San Antonio, I worked extremely hard, constantly grading or creating materials until very late at night and was then

back up early in the morning to finish. I caught up on sleep on the weekends when I was lucky. I was stressed, depressed, and unenthusiastic from the level of work I was creating (unnecessarily) for myself. By the spring semester classes were predictable, lacking creativity and spontaneity. I was totally burned out in under a year and left teaching thinking I was too young to die in the classroom.

This year was different. Admittedly I was only part time and at a middle school, but I still had three preps plus the behavioral challenge of prepubescent students. But my expectations were vastly different from before. My time away from the classroom would be monopolized by my two sons who expect and demand mom's attention and involvement constantly. Other free time would be filled with things I enjoy doing (though some might consider it work) such as my TCA Editor duties, not to mention website duties for TCA, NCLG, and Lindsey Davis, as well as commitments to CAMWS. Perhaps I do too much. I even play soccer, and I always have a book that I'm reading, even if I have a stack of papers to grade. Point is, I have a life outside of the classroom.

This time around I wasn't afraid to ask Doris Kays, my former Latin teacher, for materials to use with the Cambridge Latin Course. When I taught at Roosevelt the idea of asking someone else for their materials struck me (foolishly) as being lazy or unprofessional. I also was not afraid to *not* do Junior Classical League or certamen my first year. I *refused* to try to do it all. Next year, now that I know my students and they know me, we will compete.

Your first year of teaching is survival. It is getting to know the textbook you teach from, your students' abilities and deficiencies, your own abilities and deficiencies, your school, your colleagues and everything else. It's about establishing a career you can grow in and enjoy, and establishing plenty of time outside of school for the things you enjoy, whether they are related to classics or not.

The best advice I can give a new teacher is to make time for yourself. Put yourself and your interests first. Take up a hobby, play a sport, make time to read, sign up for a fun class--anything that will force you to take a break from your teaching duties. And if you are feeling overwhelmed, ask for advice. You are probably overdoing it as I did my true first year.

We are suffering from a teacher shortage, as everyone knows. Often new teachers only stay in teaching for a year or two and I think this is in great measure due to premature teacher burn-out from overwork and misplaced self-reliance. Pace yourself, don't try to do it all the first year, and ask for help. If there are no Latin teachers in your area, subscribe to the Latinteach list and reap the benefits of over 500 teachers online from all across the country and around the world. Just don't run away screaming!

GL, July 2001.