

A Letter to Myself as I Start a New School Year Teaching English to Young Learners

Dear Me,

You love this job! You are good at it! You are enthusiastic! You are well-prepared! You have experience! But, if you are to survive yet another school year, please remember:

1) IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU!

You will be innovative, patient, cool, interesting, inclusive, creative, a “master”. However, when it comes down to it, it's not about YOU, but about what your students learn! So, step back, evaluate, change, modify, adapt, think out of the box, and find new (and old) ways of teaching that promote learning!

2) YOU ARE THE TEACHER (not the parent, psychologist, social worker, coach, etc.)

You can make a difference in the life of your students by just doing your job! (And that's enough in itself!) As a teacher you will model respect, hard work, self-control, sense of humor, empathy, and a host of important things that parents and other professionals also model. Plus, you will be the number one source for English language and culture. If you feel a student needs extra support, ask for it, but don't get burnt out trying to be more than you can be. Know your limits!

3) Take work home, BUT LEAVE THE PROBLEMS AT WORK!

This is really important!! You will need to remind yourself of this often! Get a good night's sleep in order to face the challenges of the day with a clear head and endless energy! There will always be countless issues waiting to be dealt with every morning!

4) THINK (and study carefully) before you jump on the bandwagon.

You always want to innovate, and you make changes and additions to your curriculum, methodology, classroom routines, evaluation, etc. every year, but remember to proceed with caution. Ask yourself these questions: Will this help your students to learn more? Will the quality of their educational experience be better? Will you be provided with the tools and support necessary to implement this? If so, go ahead! Try it!!

5) Change takes time...BE PATIENT!

You have decided that a change needs to happen, so remember that convincing students, colleagues, administration and parents may be difficult. Baby steps are important here! Be patient! Stay positive! Keep trying! Show people that you yourself have the ability to try new things if you want others to do the same!

6) Plan, plan, and plan some more, and then BE INCREDIBLY FLEXIBLE!

Write it down! Know what you want to teach and when you want to teach it! Plan yearly, monthly and weekly! Refer to last year's (last term's) planning. If not, you can and WILL forget something! If you are trying something new, think it through carefully so that you are well-prepared. However, if you remember to be sensitive to the mood in the classroom and adapt your activities accordingly you will not only be a more successful teacher, but a more relaxed and happier human being. This year, be a bit wiser about choosing your battles!

7) IF THEY CAN DO IT THEMSELVES, DON'T DO IT FOR THEM!

You complain about lack of autonomy, respect and responsibility among 21st century students! So, DO something about it! Make them accountable! Have them try (and FAIL) in a supportive environment! Reward them for speaking, trying and participating! Welcome mistakes! Be a part of the solution, not the problem!

8) MIND YOUR BODY LANGUAGE!

Your young learners copy you! All the time! They repeat not only what you say, but what you do. So, smile and speak softly! Relax your face and body! Model calm, respectful movement and speech!! Try not to lose your cool this year!

9) There is never enough time, so SPEND YOUR TIME ON WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT!

Good planning will help you with this! Prioritize. Don't forget to schedule time for paperwork, meetings, correcting, etc.! And take your coffee break!!!! There are only 24 hours in a day! Don't forget this! And please, do try to say "NO" more often this year! It will do you good!

10) IT'S ALL ABOUT RESPECT! Once you respect each other, you might even like each other!

Everyone deserves to learn. However, remember that at school you are not the parent! You do not need to love your students unconditionally, or even like them! But, you need to respect them!! This goes for colleagues and administration too!!! You are surrounded by wonderful, imperfect people, much like you, who have a lot to offer! If you create the right environment, everyone wins! Don't ever forget this!

Work hard, be creative, and have a wonderful year!

With great respect and admiration,

Me

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