

## Keep Up the Good Work!

By Jan Richards

[published in *New Teacher Advocate*, Spring 2007]

Learning to handle the challenges of teaching is not easy. Just taking the required teacher education courses and participating in discussions on classroom management or the effects of poverty on children's academic performance does not prepare you for the realities of the classroom. It is quite natural to feel inadequate! No one told you that you would need the skill of a magician in order to simultaneously take roll, collect absent notes, and cajole 30 self-absorbed 4<sup>th</sup> graders into listening to the intercom announcement about an unexpected assembly. Or what to do when your lesson is over and the bell is not going to ring for 15 more minutes. Or what to do with a student who refuses to treat anyone—including you—with respect.

Learning to teach—like learning to be a juggler—is a talent that is strengthened with practice. Jugglers, however, are allowed to perfect their timing and coordination skills in solitude and only appear on stage when ready to amaze the audience. Teachers, on the other hand, are expected to learn their craft *while* they are “performing” and are continually under the watchful gaze of children, parents, and administrators! Teaching is not a job for the faint hearted! There is so much to learn, so much to know. Be patient with yourself! Persevering teachers are the ones who do not get sidetracked by irritations, trivia, or minor setbacks but stay focused on the big picture. They just keep taking one step at a time.

As a new teacher, you need to allow for mistakes and view them as part of your growth. You will have days when you are cranky or don't feel well, when your well-planned lesson falls flat, or when you lose your temper because the class is out of control. You will also have those shining moments when a grateful student smiles in excitement because a math concept suddenly makes sense. Reflect on both days of disaster and the

joyful times. Keeping a journal helps. How will I change that lesson to make it connect with my students' lives? Why isn't my classroom management plan working? What is the best way to arrange the class, walk to the library, or implement cooperative learning groups?

Learn the art of “anticipating” student behavior and take preventive measures. Perhaps you brought your collection of shells and carefully arranged them at learning centers for a wonderful lesson on descriptive writing. Will you (a) let students come into the classroom after lunch and choose to sit with friends (and perhaps squabble over which of your collected shells they most prefer)? Or (b) tell them what behavior you expect of them and what they will be doing during the period *before* entering the classroom? *The art of anticipation* is what the mother of a two year old demonstrates when visiting a friend's home. She immediately observes the candy dish, a nervous long-tailed cat, and kitchen cupboards that open easily! Her eyes are ever watchful, and she springs into action *before* disaster happens. The art of anticipation is what teachers learn from the mistakes they made the first time they tried something new.

Maintaining your emotional well-being is critical because your moods, your attitudes, your humor, and your morale spill over to your students. They are watching. Your students depend on you and often reflect the attitudes you project. No job requires more flexibility, patience, tolerance, and desire to make a difference in the lives of so many as that of a teacher. And no job offers a deeper sense of satisfaction and reward.