

Your First Year

Learn all the essentials for making your first year of teaching a success! In this exciting new book, internationally renowned educator Todd Whitaker teams up with his daughters—Madeline, an elementary teacher, and Katherine, a secondary teacher—to share advice and inspiration. They offer step-by-step guidance to thriving in your new role and overcoming the challenges that many new teachers face. Topics include:

- ◆ Learning classroom management skills such as building relationships and maintaining high expectations and consistency
- ◆ Setting up your classroom and establishing procedures and rules
- ◆ Planning effective lessons and making your instructional time an engaging experience
- ◆ Managing your own emotions in the classroom and dealing effectively with misbehavior
- ◆ Working with peers, administrators, and parents to build support and foster collaboration

The book is filled with specific examples and vignettes from elementary, middle, and high school classes, so you'll gain helpful strategies no matter what grade level and subject area you teach. You'll also find out how to make tweaks or hit the "reset" button when something isn't going as planned. Things may not always go perfectly your first year, but the practical advice in this book will help you stay motivated on the path to success!

Bonus: As you read the book, get even more out of it by discussing it with others. Free study guides for practicing teachers and student teachers are available as eResource downloads from our website (www.routledge.com/9781138126152).

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Your First Year

How to Survive and Thrive as a New Teacher

Todd Whitaker, Madeline Whitaker,
and Katherine Whitaker

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Contents

<i>eResources</i>	viii
<i>Meet the Authors</i>	ix
<i>The Most Special Profession</i>	xi
<i>How to Use This Book</i>	xiii
 Section I Before the Students Arrive:	
Structure, Structure, Structure	1
1 Setting Up and Organizing Your Classroom	3
Furniture 4	
Materials 5	
2 Developing Your Procedures	7
3 Developing Your Rules	11
4 Classroom Management: Prepare Your Mindset	16
Relationships 16	
High and Specific Expectations 19	
Consistency 21	
5 When Students Follow the Rules ... Or Don't.	25
Stay Focused on the Real Goal 32	
6 Lesson Planning and Instruction	33
Lesson Planning: Down to the Minute 33	
Instruction: Focus on Engagement 39	
But What About Curriculum? 42	
 Section II The Students Are Here ... Now What?	
7 Explaining and Practicing Procedures	47

8	Managing Your Classroom.	53
	Managing Yourself 53	
	Subtle Steering 54	
	Direct Redirection 57	
	Implementing Consequences 60	
	Individual Case Study 64	
	The “What If” Situations 66	
	Repairing and Rebuilding 67	
	A Final Note 68	
	Section III Working with Adults	71
9	Working with Administrators	73
	Administrative Support 74	
10	Working with Peers	77
	Peer Support 77	
11	The Empowerers.	80
	The Empowerers and Navigating the Waters 80	
	Finding Your Empowerer 81	
	What About Everyone Else? 83	
12	Don’t Be Afraid to Repair: Students, Co-Workers, Principal	85
13	Parents: Friend Not Foe.	89
	The Best They Know How 89	
	Build Relationships Before You Need Relationships 90	
	What Do I Say When I Call a Parent? 91	
	Section IV Continuing to Reflect, Refine, and Grow on Your Journey	95
14	Mid-Flight Corrections	97
	Tweaking: Be Your Own Control Group 98	
	The Reset Button 99	

15 Be a Sponge.	106
Soak It Up	106
Observing Others	106
Attending Meetings	107
Be Observed Yourself	108
Don't Be Afraid to Say No	108
 16 It Always Starts with You	 111
Trust Your Gut	112
 17 What's Next?	 114
You'll Start Year Two Undefeated	115
 <i>References</i>	 <i>117</i>

eResources

This book is accompanied by two free study guides—one for practicing teachers and one for student teachers. Go to the book's product page, www.routledge.com/9781138126152. Click on the tab that says eResources and click on the study guide you'd like to read. It will begin downloading to your computer.

Meet the Authors



From left to right: Katherine, Todd, and Madeline Whitaker

Dr. Todd Whitaker has been fortunate to be able to blend his passion with his career. Recognized as a leading presenter in the field of education, his message about the importance of teaching has resonated with hundreds of thousands of educators around the world. Todd is a professor of educational leadership at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana, and he has spent his life pursuing his love of education by researching and studying effective teachers and principals.

Prior to moving into higher education he was a math teacher and basketball coach in Missouri. Todd then served as a principal at the middle school, junior high, and high school levels. He was also a middle school coordinator in charge of staffing, curriculum, and technology for the opening of new middle schools.

One of the nation's leading authorities on staff motivation, teacher leadership, and principal effectiveness, Todd has written over 40 books including the national bestseller, *What Great Teachers Do Differently*. Other titles include: *Shifting the Monkey*, *Dealing*

with Difficult Teachers, The 10 Minute Inservice, The Ball, What Great Principals Do Differently, Motivating & Inspiring Teachers, and Dealing with Difficult Parents.

Todd is married to Beth, also a former teacher and principal, who is a professor of Elementary Education at Indiana State University. They are the parents of three children: Katherine, Madeline, and Harrison.

Madeline Whitaker is currently an elementary teacher in Springfield, Missouri. She was raised in Terre Haute, Indiana, and attended Vanderbilt University to pursue her undergraduate degree at the Peabody College of Education. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education and Child Studies. Additionally, upon graduating, she received the Dorothy J. Skeel Award for Outstanding Professional Promise in Elementary Education. After moving to Columbia to begin her teaching career, she enrolled in a degree program at the University of Missouri. She will be graduating in 2016 with her Master of Education Degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis as well as her elementary and secondary principal certification.

Katherine Whitaker is currently a high school math teacher in Kansas City, Missouri. She was raised in Terre Haute, Indiana and attended the University of Missouri to pursue her dreams of teaching. In 2012, Katherine received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Secondary Mathematics Education. Her first three years in the classroom were spent at the middle school level teaching 8th grade math, algebra, and reading. She is now teaching Algebra A, Algebra I, and Algebra II Honors at the high school level. Katherine will be graduating with her Master of Science in Educational Leadership K-12 from Northwest Missouri State University in 2016 and plans on starting her doctorate in the near future.

The Most Special Profession

Congratulations! If you are reading this book, you have chosen to make a difference with your life and career. Just think about that. You have decided that you want to take your skills and abilities and help others better themselves. Wow. If you ever forget to feel goosebumps when students walk into your classroom, just remember the influence and impact you have on so many others. Every day you will make a difference. That's hopefully why you chose education and now it has become reality.

You will quickly realize that other things have also become reality. What do I do if the students stop listening to me? How do I deal with an upset parent? How can I get enough sleep? And most importantly—When do I have time to go to the bathroom?!

Every day is different. Every day is special. Every day is a challenge. But, you are up to the challenge! Of course there will be special moments that touch your heart, times you wonder what you got into, and occasions where you want to (or most likely will) cry. You knew that when you chose to be a teacher. That may be part of the reason you chose to be a teacher.

But you don't just want to be "a" teacher. You want to become "the" teacher. You want to be the teacher who inspires others because you had teachers who inspired you. You want to be the teacher who the students come and visit the next year and the ones after that. You want to be the teacher who makes a difference in the lives of the young people in your classroom. And, you know what? You can be. Now it's up to you.

You will have students who have unlimited potential. They are the ones who can change the world, invent the newest technology, maybe find a cure for cancer. It's always fun to work with students like this. Every day with them is amazing. You can even take a little credit for how smart and gifted they are. And you should.

Additionally, you will have some students who have more challenges. Maybe it is their home life, maybe it is their skill set, maybe it is their attitude. Maybe it is their fault. Maybe it isn't. These students will really be the ones to test your patience and abilities. The teachers who can reach all students are so different than the ones who can reach some students. And though it may be frustrating at times, when you see that glint in the eyes when there is new understanding, a smile on their face when they finally catch onto a concept, or a newfound dedication because they realize they can do it after all, you will realize that you really have chosen the right profession.

You will never forget the students you have your first year. Others may fade in and out of your memory, but these students will never leave your memory and they will never leave your heart. There is something special about your very first group. They are unforgettable. And you want to make sure you are the kind of teacher who is unforgettable too. That is the reason we wrote *Your First Year*. Strap in, because it will be the ride of your life. You will go on the most energizing and exhilarating journey. It will be like nothing you could imagine and everything you could hope for all at the same time. Thank you for choosing to teach. Thank you for choosing to make a difference. Thank you for choosing to matter.

How to Use This Book

Your First Year is designed to be usable in multiple ways. You can pick it up and read it cover to cover while you are still in college or use it as reference guide during your first year of teaching. Hopefully it can provide a guide for you as you anticipate things you want to have prepared before the first day of school, as well as be used in a stand-alone fashion so that if you are facing a particular challenge (or crisis!) you can immediately turn to that as a resource or refresher.

Your First Year is written for elementary, middle school, and high school teachers, providing you with multiple examples in differing contexts. We have attempted to include the specificity needed so that you will know precisely how to set up expectations, communicate with students and adults, and prepare your classroom. We are also aware that every reader has different backgrounds and experiences. Some of you have always enjoyed school, were raised in a family with educators, and have or will student teach with a master teacher. Others of you may not have had such opportunities. Either way, this book will help you navigate your way to a successful first year.

It may seem that a disproportionate amount of the book is centered on student/classroom management. We have learned from new teachers that this is the number one concern they have heading into their first year and the number one challenge they face during the first year (and sometimes many beyond that). We felt it is essential to provide a richness in the area to support new teachers in what many consider to be the most challenging aspect of teaching. If a teacher has good classroom management they still may not be effective, but if they do not have good classroom management they can never be effective.

We also wanted to provide some guidance in working with adults in and outside your school. Finding peers who you can

share with and learn from can be so rewarding. Being able to effectively communicate with and receive support from parents is very valuable. But at times we may work or interact with adults who may not always have an altruistic purpose. Making sure that we navigate these, at times challenging, waters can be an important part of enjoying our first year in a school.

Lastly, we would love to hear from you! If you would like to share your stories with us and other readers on Twitter, just add the hashtag #YourFirstYear. It will be a chance to learn, laugh, and grow together. Enjoy the book and have a wonderful First Year.

Section I

**Before the Students Arrive:
Structure, Structure, Structure**

1

Setting Up and Organizing Your Classroom

Teaching is a complicated profession, and there are many facets to being an outstanding educator. As a beginning teacher, however, it is imperative to have one main focus for the first few weeks before and after school begins: managing the classroom. In a large-scale meta-analysis, Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) studied the effect of a variety of influences on student achievement, and they found classroom management to have the greatest impact. Also, research has shown that the majority of teachers consider discipline issues the most stressful part of their job (Wasicsko & Ross, 1994). In your first year, there are many things that you won't know or you won't get right—but your structure and procedures should not be one of them.

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How spacious, attractive, or modern the classroom, portable, or pod that you will get the keys to is out of your hands, but what you turn it into is entirely in your control. Many different

researchers and educational experts, including Fred Jones in *Tools for Teaching: Discipline, Instruction, Motivation, 3rd Edition* (2013), defend the critical importance of classroom arrangement. While you are setting up (and possibly cleaning up from how it was left after the previous year), you will need to think about two major aspects of your classroom: the furniture and the materials.

Furniture

With regard to furniture, it is important to focus on classroom flow, functionality, and structure. Many of the basic classroom management issues can be addressed even before students enter the classroom by making sure the furniture is set up in a functional way (Jones, 2013). Thus, begin by thinking through these major questions: How many students will you have? Do you have enough desks or tables? What configuration will help you be most successful from day one? Your class size will largely determine how your class will be set up. Let's look at two different examples of teachers who arranged their classroom before the first day of school.

Ms. George is a middle school science teacher with 30–35 students in each class. She was placed in one of the smallest classrooms in the school, and this, paired with her large class sizes, limits her options on how to design the space. She is also a bit nervous about managing a class that large, so she is looking for a classroom set-up that will be beneficial as she introduces her classroom expectations and procedures with students. The best option for Ms. George is to start the year off with her desks in evenly spaced and orderly rows. This will allow movement between desks to be seamless and help limit student interaction. Even though Ms. George really wants her desks in groups so students can collaborate during labs, she knows that she can introduce a different desk arrangement at any time. Her main goal at the start of the year is seamless implementation of structure and order. Once she establishes her procedures and routines, she then can move the desks into groups because it is always easier to become less structured instead of more structured.

Mr. Grant is an elementary teacher with 25 students, and he has a fairly large classroom. Because of this, he can be more flexible

in how he designs his set-up. He feels confident about placing his desks in groups because most of the whole-class instruction will be done on the carpet. Thus, he decides to group the 25 desks into pods of five, keep the area in front of the board open for his carpet, and then reserve the back corner by the window for the classroom library. Even though Mr. Grant has more flexibility to be creative, his main focus is still flow, functionality, and structure—it just looks dissimilar to Ms. George’s because his classroom, students, needs, and comfort level are different.

When you are setting up your classroom furniture, the final, and maybe the most important thing to think through is making sure that you will be able to monitor all students at all times, no matter where you are instructing from. If Ms. George has one desk hidden behind a file cabinet, or if Mr. Grant’s reading nook is nestled behind the technology center, both teachers have set up a situation that could turn sour quickly. There would be places that students could go in the classroom and be “hidden.” Now, there is a chance that Mr. Grant and Ms. George could have a class of perfect angels who would never ever take advantage of those “hidden gems,” but as a new teacher we would not take that risk. It would be much easier to be proactive about those possible issues than to be reactive and have to deal with the behavior later.

Materials

The second aspect of classroom set-up and organization is the materials that you will be working with. Make sure that necessary and regularly used materials are easily accessible, while less-frequented materials are stored away in an organized fashion that allows you to retrieve them when the time comes. What are things that you and your students will need on a day-to-day basis? Pencils? Notebooks? Textbooks? What are things that you and your students may not need as regularly, but should still be accessible? Scissors? Calculators? Math manipulatives? It is also likely that you will end up with materials that you have absolutely no clue what to do with—like the previous curriculum guides. Feel free to ask your teammates or administrators what to do with the items. If they tell

you to keep them, then put them somewhere that will be out of the way since they won't need to be accessed regularly.

When Ms. Smith, a 3rd grade teacher, was preparing her classroom, she made sure each student had a dry erase board and a clipboard in his or her seat pocket because in her mind those were going to be used regularly. She placed binders, however, in their locker cubbies, because those would probably be used less frequently. When it came to notebooks, she was entirely unsure if she would use them at all at the beginning of the year, so she put them neatly in a cabinet that she could easily reach when the time was right.

Although Mr. Jenkins is a high school English teacher, he too thought through placement of materials. He knew that most students would come in on day 1 with a spiral notebook, but he has many extra near his desk just in case. He also placed spare sharpened pencils in a cup on his desk so students could get one if they forgot, but also placed a sign-out sheet to keep track of them so at the end of the period he could collect those that he lent out. Finally, on the cabinets below his window, he stacked up the textbooks by class, and had them organized in number order so they were ready to be handed out efficiently.

By preparing as much as you can prior to students arriving,

By preparing as much as you can prior to students arriving, you increase the likelihood of success when school starts.

you increase the likelihood of success when school starts. One of the best places to start this preparation is with your furniture and materials. Once the students arrive, this planning minimizes the time

you will have to deal with things other than what is most important: students and teaching.

2

Developing Your Procedures

While you are organizing your classroom and preparing for the year, you also need to think extensively about classroom procedures and expectations. These are the basic routines that you and students will use to help the classroom “run,” almost like a well-oiled machine. Research has shown that procedures are a critical aspect of preventative effective classroom management that positively affects students’ learning and behavior (Marzano et al., 2005). Thinking deeply about procedures in a proactive manner can be a huge make-or-break with regard to student management and overall classroom climate.

The tighter your procedures are, the less misbehavior will occur and the calmer and more productive the environment will be. Listed below are many of the common classroom procedures that teachers of a variety of grades must think through:

The tighter your procedures are, the less misbehavior will occur and the calmer and more productive the environment will be.

- ◆ Pencils: How will students get them? How will they get sharpened? What if a student forgets one? What if the student needs an eraser?

8 ♦ Before the Students Arrive

- ♦ Notebooks/textbooks: Will students come into the classroom each day with them? If not, how will you get them handed out each day? What if a student comes one day without them?
- ♦ Homework: Where will it be turned in or how will you collect it? How will you return it to the students after grading?
- ♦ Late work: How will students learn about what information they missed? What system will you use so they have access to the make-up work?
- ♦ Bathroom: How often can students use the bathroom? How will they let you know that they need to use the bathroom? Will you need to keep track of how many times a student has used the bathroom?
- ♦ Technology: How will classroom technology be stored? If portable, how will it be distributed to students? Will devices need to be charged overnight?
- ♦ Phones, tablets, personal devices: What is your school's policy? When are the times students can access them? When are the times they should be put away?
- ♦ Entering the classroom: Should students remove hats? Are they to be quiet? Should they go straight to their seats? What work should they get started on?
- ♦ Exiting the classroom: Will you dismiss students? Do they leave when the bell rings? Is there a line order they must learn? Should they line up quietly?

In addition to overall basic procedures that apply to almost all teachers, there will also be some that apply to just you and your classroom. For example, 1st grade teachers will need to think through where their students will store their backpacks and lunches after they walk into the classroom, while 11th grade chemistry teachers will need to think through how students will retrieve and use the beakers for experiments. Take time to walk through your classroom and think through your day—make a list of what procedures you should be proactive about.

On the next page is a more extensive list of possible things that will require procedures. Although this may not be an exhaustive

list of everything you will need to prepare for, it should be a strong base that can help you begin to process your procedural expectations. Keep in mind that once students arrive, adjustments will most likely need to be made based on your students and unanticipated situations. Thus, use this list to prepare as best you can, knowing that there will be mid-flight corrections.

Kleenexes

Students asking questions

Checking out books from the school library and/or your classroom library

Eating food in the classroom

Storing and distributing materials that may not be used daily (crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue, etc.)

Taking attendance

Fire drill

Beginning of the day/period routines

End of the day/period routines

Tornado drill

Lost items

Throwing away trash and/or recycling

Classroom jobs

Unfinished work

Technology availability and utilization

Earthquake drill

Late work

Make-up work

Seating arrangement

Students who are tardy

Acceptable noise levels

Talking and participating during lessons

Getting into/choosing groups

Lockdown drill

Sudden illness

Dismissal

This list of things you will need procedures for may seem overwhelming at first. Fortunately, there may be others who have

already solved this issue for you. For example, your school may already have procedures for walking down the hallway, checking out books from the library, and even emergency drills. For others, you may ask a mentor teacher, a trusted colleague, or even look for different ideas on the Internet.

Always remember that it is better to be over prepared than under prepared when it comes to procedures. As a matter of fact,

Always remember that it is better to be over prepared than under prepared when it comes to procedures.

it is almost impossible to be over prepared. For example, if you are unsure of whether or not you will need to keep track of when students use the bathroom, be safe and start out with a system. If you find

out that it is a non-issue, then you can taper away from that structure. If it turns out to be a huge help, though, then you will be very grateful that you began that structure on day 1! As mentioned previously, it is much easier to loosen structures after school has begun than to tighten them once the students have arrived.