

B.10.- Back to school guiding Principles



Ten Guiding Principles for the Beginning of the Year

We have already provided a specific menu of first-day activities, so now we want to give you the basic ingredients and a dash of confidence to compose your own plan. Here are the Ten Guiding Principles, the corresponding messages they convey to students, and suggestions for implementing each principle.



- 1. Be Prepared** Messages to Students
- 2. Motivate Kids** School is exciting.
- 3. Establish Routines and Schedules** School is safe and predictable.
- 4. Establish Classroom Rules** I will learn self-control.
- 5. Orient Students to School/Room** I am comfortable and belong here.
- 6. Preview the Curriculum** I will learn new things.
- 7. Let Students Decide and Choose** We are all in this together.
- 8. Include a Literacy Experience** Reading is wonderful!
- 9. Acknowledge Every Student** I am special!
- 10. Review and Assign Easy Work** I can succeed!

1.- Be Prepared



Arrive at school very early. You will feel more confident if you can spend time checking out the room and feeling comfortable in it. Make sure that your name is on the board along with the schedule, there is a welcoming sign on the door, all your name tags are carefully prepared, the desks are arranged to your satisfaction, all your instructional materials are ready, and your plans are summarized on an index card for easy reference. Go to the classroom at least 15 minutes before each class session. Laying out materials and writing the schedule on the board conveys to students that the teacher is well prepared and well organized and will help them pass from a state of uncertainty to a state of knowing and understanding.



2.- Motivate Kids

Capitalize on anticipation this very first day. Provide a variety of highly motivating experiences. Keep the pace moving and over-plan so you never drag anything out to fill time. Kids need to go home that very first day with the message that school/class is exciting. The first day can either reinforce good feelings about school or turn around bad ones. In middle or high school, a short demonstration or experiment serves this purpose. Make this a day that students will remember and talk about at home later that day.

Make sure, whatever your activities, that kids will respond to the traditional question "What did you do in school today?" with a glowing smile and excited report, instead of a bored "I don't remember," or worse, "Nothing much."

3.- Establish Routines and Schedules



Begin to establish a set of daily routines that first day. Routines are a management tool for saving time and ensuring smooth functioning of the classroom. But they also provide the structure and security that help kids meet a basic need. We all make certain predictions about our environment, and when our predictions are verified in reality, we feel good. But when even one of our expectations goes awry (the car won't start, or the alarm doesn't go off, or the shower water is cold instead of hot), we can become disoriented. We need to do certain things by rote so our energies can be spent in more creative endeavours. Introduce some routines on that first day as they are needed; others can be introduced as the week progresses.

In addition to established routines, kids (and adults) appreciate a fixed schedule. We are creatures of habit, and when our schedules are disrupted by travel, or by house guests, or by any one of a number of outside factors, we become cranky. Students like to see if an exciting activity is coming up, or a videotape, or a simulation game, or maybe they want to mentally check off how much time there is until break. While you don't always stick to the schedule, it's always there as a guide, and students can predict the order of the session. Your students at all grade levels will also want the security of a schedule, and since it is in your head and on paper already, why not let them in on it by writing it along with the allotted times on a special part of the chalkboard?

Your first day/class should be planned within the context of your eventual daily schedule. While the first day will not be typical, neither should it be so different from a usual day that kids later are surprised and resistant to a new schedule that seems to

come out of left field. Surprises are best introduced and most welcome within predictable routines and an established schedule.



4.- Establish Classroom Rules

Begin to implement your discipline strategies and create a positive class climate that first day of class. This is the time to talk about and model a discipline system based on mutual respect, responsibility, and dignity. At no time will the students be better behaved than on the first day of class. Capitalize on their first-day formality. Collaboratively establish rules and then show the students you are consistent and fair in enforcing rules. This might be a time to explain the classroom meeting and have your first go at it. Middle school students can brainstorm the rules in small groups. Hopefully they will include some of these, but they may need your subtle (or not so subtle) suggestions:

Be in your seat when the bell rings.

Bring required materials, texts, and homework to class on time.

Raise your hand to speak and listen to others.

Respect each other's space, person, and property.

Be responsible.

Don't let infractions slide that first day. The kids will be checking you out carefully.

You can always lighten up as the year progresses, so start out a bit more firm than you plan to be by midyear. Pass all of their tests with flying colours by using your own good sense. This is also the day to send home the note to parents (in translation) that describes the class rules and procedures for enforcing them.

5.- Orient Students

We all need to get our bearings in a new situation. And even though a change of scenery can be broadening, it is also very scary. On most vacation tours, no matter how tightly or loosely scheduled, a quick orientation tour of every new city encountered is the first order of business. Students are no different in that they need to quickly get their bearings in a new school or classroom. The easiest way to orient new students, second language learners, and returning students to their school is to take a walking tour that first morning, pointing out such places of interest as the restrooms, water fountains, principal's office, and nurse's office. You may need to point out school bus stops, places to line up after lunch, the cafeteria, assigned fire drill locations, and appropriate exits. Let the students know what the bells or other signaling devices mean. With older children you can construct a school map together or organize a treasure hunt to help old-timers orient new children to the school plant. In middle and high school, review a map of the school site.

In the classroom, schedule a walk around the room using just eyes that first day.

Students can make a mental note of where storage containers are located, where games for free time are stored, and so forth.

Lesson Objective

- To think about other areas
- To identify where countries

Activity

Children should have a good countries which benefit from from ours. Children can use geographical differences. Use an Atlas to locate the co

6.- Preview the Curriculum

On that very first day, let students in on some of the exciting things they will be learning this year. Preview some of the topics they will cover and introduce them to at least one of their textbooks that first day. Begin work early in the first week on a science or social studies unit and provide opportunity for student input by asking them what they already know about the topic and what they would like to find out. Motivation will be very high. Let kids know it's going to be an exciting year and that they will be learning many new things. Telling kindergarten or first grade children that they will learn to read this year, or third grade children that they will learn cursive writing, or sixth graders that they will have pen pals from a foreign country can send them home that first day brimming with high expectations and great anticipation for the coming year. Tell middle or high schoolers about a highlight of their year.

7.- Let Students Decide and Choose



Share responsibility for decision making with your class from the outset. Let them know they will be encouraged to make choices and participate in classroom processes. For younger students, participatory experiences that first day might include choosing seats, deciding what game to play, deciding what song they prefer to sing, choosing a library book, writing classroom rules, and so forth.



8.- Include a Literacy Experience

Let the kids know that very first day that you value reading by incorporating some simple reading or reading-related activity into your plans. You might visit the school library, introduce the librarian, and let each child choose a book. Or you might read a favourite picture storybook to younger children or read to older students the first chapter of a book that is related to your subject matter. Additionally, you might engage kindergarten children in their first language-experience activity and have them read back a story they have dictated and committed to memory. Or you might have a sustained, silent reading period of classroom library books after lunch on that first day. Whatever you choose to do about reading that first day, make it fun! Perhaps you can turn the tide toward reading by showing great wonder and enthusiasm for the world of books yourself.



9.- Acknowledge Every Student

On that first day (and all others) enable each student to feel unique. Let each one know with a verbal or nonverbal response from you that she or he is welcome, valued, and special. It can start with an individual greeting to each one on the way into the room. A greeting in the primary language of second language learners will make them feel welcome. It continues when you listen to their introductions and learn their names. It is reinforced by your positive remarks and smiling demeanour. It is expanded when you ask them to help you write the rules. It ends with a special good-bye to each student at the end of the period or class day and begins again the very next day.



10.- Review, Assign, and Post Easy Work

Prepare work for the first day that is slightly below the anticipated level of the class. Why? Students should go home that very first day feeling successful, feeling that they have accomplished something. For younger students, a few papers can be sent home that very first day with an appropriate happy face or comment by you so parents can see the results of their child's initial efforts. Step in when you see that a given task is too difficult or frustrating. You have the whole year to challenge students and encourage them to work beyond their capacities. But during the first week, make success your sole criterion for work given. Encourage students for all of their small steps as well as for their giant leaps.