



IT'S THE KEY TO SUCCESS.

Linda N. Thompson, a member of the Education Association of Norfolk, has spent more than 10 years in the classroom. Here, she offers some hard-earned insight into what can help a new teacher get off to a smart start.

Every year, eager students graduate from college enthusiastic to begin a fulfilling career in education. They've taken classes and completed student teaching under the guidance of master teachers. However, while the institutions and master teachers may guide students in the process of teaching facts, they often fail to mention one important thing: knowledge of the material is not enough. To be a successful, productive teacher, you must learn to be organized. This doesn't mean to make neat little piles all around your new classroom, but entails orderliness in every aspect of your teaching experience.

I've collected some basic ideas that will help you run your classroom more smoothly. To make the list seem a little less overwhelming, it's divided into three main areas: your classroom, your students and your curriculum. Please remember—you have to make your room your own, so do what works for you.



▲ Linda Thompson

Your Classroom

- > Make your classroom happy and bright. Remember, your students will spend a lot of time here. Start with some posters placed around the room and continue to add material with each topic you cover. Leave plenty of room to display student work—this helps them develop a real connection to the classroom.
- > Keep your classroom countertops and tables free of clutter. If you don't have time to put materials away as you go, have a designated spot to put them. At the end of the day you can put everything back, and if you need to put your hands on something fast, you'll know where to look first.
- > Always know where everything is. Periodically browse through any stacks on your desk, your drawers, closet, etc., to refresh your memory. Often, you'll find things you forgot you had.

- > **Purge! Purge!** You must dispose of extraneous papers at least weekly. This will help to alleviate clutter and free up space for the next week's activities. It's surprising how much you accumulate in just one week.

Your Students

- > Spend time at the beginning of the year teaching your students the rules and routines of your classroom. Be patient: It takes a few weeks for them to become completely acclimated to their new environment. Make sure you practice what you preach. Students will be watching your every move, so take the opportunity to model everything you want them to emulate.
- > Teach your students to keep their workspace clear, keeping out only materials that are necessary for the current activity. Once they get used to the idea, it will become a habit and will also help you monitor them to ensure that they are on-task.
- > Teach your students to be flexible. Sometimes you just have to go to Plan B. Once again, practice what you preach: Plan B happens more than you think.
- > If possible, assign each student additional storage space to put his or her things. There's never enough room for all their extraneous "stuff" in their desks. This will help prevent students from being distracted while you're teaching.
- > Another way to help keep elementary students organized is to hold periodic desk clean-outs. Some students are natural packrats and start to have difficulty during transitions because they have to weed through all the trash. Additionally, if students see you consistently straightening the room and returning items to their proper places, they will follow suit quickly. They actually do like a clean environment.
- > Create a fair discipline plan that is realistic and enforceable. The most important thing to remember about discipline is to be consistent and avoid making idle threats to get students to behave. The students know you better than you know yourself. Remember, if you lose your temper you lose control.

sparks catch fire

The first few years of teaching are especially challenging, so it's important for new teachers to form a social network of colleagues sharing some of the same experiences.

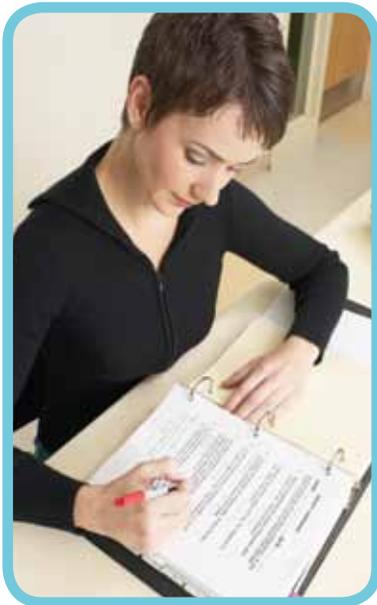
That's the idea behind "Sparks," a program conducted by the VEA that brings together groups of young teachers in a retreat setting to discuss their issues, become oriented to life in the classroom, and learn about VEA.

Sparks graduates say the program has helped rejuvenate them and they feel less isolated after they return to their schools.

Sparks programs are organized based on demand from members, so ask your VEA-NEA UniServ director if Sparks training could be offered in your region. For more information, contact VEA's Tami Sober at tsober@veanea.org or Sonia Lee at slee@veanea.org

Your Curriculum

- > First and foremost, become very familiar with what you'll be teaching. Get any and all information you can from the other teachers in your grade level or subject area. Don't try to re-create the wheel at first. It's great to come up with new and innovative ideas, but save the flashy stuff until you really feel comfortable with your students. You don't want to appear like you don't know what you're doing.
- > Always plan your day. It's extremely important to be ready before you start a lesson. Have all your supplies and copies ready to distribute so you have as little down time as possible. It doesn't take long for the students to find other things to spark their interest.
- > When transitioning to a new subject, always explain what the lesson is before beginning. Let students know what your expectations are and provide any instructions they might need. This helps put students in the right frame of mind and gives them an opportunity to ask questions.



- > Keep a binder for your daily lesson plans. Use page protectors to keep each day's plan and supplemental pages. If you have a binder for each quarter, using the page protectors will help you locate information to use in the future.
- > Create a quarterly road map for all content areas to help in pacing what you teach. This will help you plan ahead and gather necessary materials.
- > To cut down on stress, do your best to stay current on grading papers. They can pile up quickly.

As a new teacher, you'll soon learn that time is in short supply. It can be overwhelming trying to figure out how to get everything accomplished. Being and staying organized is essential in helping you become successful in achieving the goals you set for yourself when you entered the classroom.■