

Teaching in the real world

Things they don't teach you in HED

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1. *The most important knowledge for the novice teacher is what NOT to do. Lack of this knowledge has been known to scuttle the most promising pedagogical career. For example:*
 - 1.1 Do NOT park in the only (shady) parking bay left open when you arrive, somewhat late (having lost your way twice and entered at the wrong gate), before school on the first morning. This will be the space reserved for the guest of honour who will shortly arrive to open the school. It is preferable to be given a parking ticket. Vastly.
 - 1.2 Do NOT sit down on the nearest seat in the staff room at tea time. It will probably be the hallowed seat of the Head of your Department. Sitting down in it may earn you an enemy for life. In fact, do not sit down anywhere until invited to do so.
 - 1.3 Do not assume that, just because you are qualified to teach English First Language, this is what you will necessarily be doing. Especially if you are teaching on the *platteland*, where the lack of a particular teacher cannot immediately

be remedied, you may find yourself teaching English Second Language, Afrikaans First Language, Afrikaans Second Language, Career Guidance, Biblical Studies, and Phys. Ed. The secret of survival when teaching a subject you last encountered during your first year is to keep one week ahead of the class.

- 1.4 Likewise, do not assume that, just because you have a degree (cum laude) in Drama, you will therefore coach the debating team or produce the school play. Some senior member of staff has probably been doing these things for decades. Successfully. The trick is a) shut up about your qualifications b) offer, humbly, to assist c) keep a low profile and then d) knock the spots off them.
2. *Here are some facts of pedagogical life:*
 - 2.1 There is always less time than you think. This applies to everything. It takes longer to mark scripts than you anticipated. It is harder to set tests and exams than you thought. You are given tasks you had not bargained for. You lose class time because a) there is a pink-eye epidemic b) the Head takes up half of the first period every Monday by stretching Assembly c) you forgot about public holidays d) half the class is absent on an educational tour for Biology e) the whole class is absent for school photos. Bear this fact in mind when working out your term plan.
 - 2.2 You are not as good a teacher as you think you are. This dreadful truth is revealed after the first test. The fact that you explained everything so beautifully does not cut any ice. Children must not only be led to understand what they are taught, but actually to remember it. Discovering how to do this effectively may well take the rest of your career.
 - 2.3 You are going to work harder and feel more tired than any of your contemporaries who are not teachers, regardless of what they do. But they will remain convinced that you are

doing a lightweight job which ends at two every day and that they could have done it better themselves, without training, had they so wished.

3. *Some survival tactics:*

- 3.1 Get the right troops on your side. This means the school secretaries, whoever runs the Xerox machine, whoever runs the computers, whoever works out the timetable, and the head of the Resource Centre. These people have the power to make your life a misery if you should antagonise them. On the other hand, if you have their support, you can weather many a storm.
- 3.2 Keep a diary whether or not instructed to do so by the school. In this you enter the work you plan to do with every class every day. You also tick off the work actually done. Quite often the twain do not meet. This diary enables you to know exactly where you stopped last week and will ensure that you do not, as prompted by the class, start on page 15, Chapter two, every week for a month. Of course you will remember having done that bit before, but since you are doing it with four different classes, repeating it will not seem strange. In this diary you also enter punishment work given so that you can demand it from the culprits on the due date. However, the main advantage of the diary appears when you are absent from work. Your replacement can then check to see what work you have done. If this information is demanded of the class, your replacement will be back on page 15, Chapter two. Or the class may even claim never to have done this work at all. They may actually *believe* this.
- 3.3 Should you be required to keep an Attendance Register, find a child in your class with a neat handwriting and the soul of a bookkeeper. Make him/her sole custodian of the book. A bar of chocolate once a term will not come amiss.

- 3.4 Should you be instructed to coach some game you know nothing whatsoever about, do not despair. Remember that a) Caruso's voice coach couldn't sing a note and b) if you can read, you can coach anything. There is one infallible secret of success in coaching: show the children that you care. Be there. Sacrifice your time, your breaks, your week-ends. Weep with them. Exult with them. They will deliver the goods.
- 3.5 Be prepared to find your new job the most exasperating, maddening and infuriating activity you have ever undertaken in your life. It can also be the most rewarding, although the only thanks you are likely to get will probably be a limp rose on Spring Day : 'This is for you, Miss.' Said after you have spent the whole year up to September teaching them to call you Ma'am. With a smile.