

## Why I Could Never Be an Elementary Teacher

*I can plan a good lesson for an elementary classroom, but I used to live in fear of having to actually teach there. This is an old article. I overcame my fear.*

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*You need to understand that I have the utmost admiration for Primary teachers. I was married to one, and I know all about the job they do. I just don't know how they can do it day after day and stay sane. I once spent forty minutes looking after the grade 1/2 class, and I'm still shaking!*

### **Intelligent Conversation**

Can you have one with a grade one kid? I don't think so. After "Look at the picture of the one-legged purple rabbit I drew!", what is there to talk about?

I like to spend my day talking to people, and like it when meaningful conversations happen. Even about skateboarding. I may not understand it, but it's always fun listening to someone tell me about their passion. Sometimes they even show me their scars.

I think that, by the end of the day, elementary teachers must be starved for rational conversation. They probably look forward to calls from telemarketers.

### **Bulletin Boards**

Elementary teachers spend half their out-of-school hours planning and setting up amazing bulletin board displays in their classrooms and in the hallways. I know this for a fact. And they seem to enjoy it. Sometimes the displays are only up for a week, and then another holiday comes around, or another unit begins, and they have to start all over again. When do they have time to plan their lessons?

Do they teach bulletin board display techniques in college? Or maybe it's just something you're supposed to learn on the job ... like how to run the photocopier machine without breaking it (don't ask!), or how to sneak a visit to the bathroom between supervision and meeting with a parent.

### **Stickiness**

Little kids are sticky. You pick up their pencil to show them something, and it's covered in ... some unknown substance. And you don't ever want to know where that pencil's been!

## **What? You're still not done?**

I used to teach art to the grade one class once in a while. Back when I was young and foolish. (Last year). I remember very clearly spending time planning a lesson about how to draw elephants.

It started off pretty well. Every student got out paper and a pencil, and seven erasers. After I showed them how to start with a big circle, I went on to show them how to make a circle for the head, and ovals for the legs ... and ten minutes later I looked at what they were doing.

Most of them were still on the first circle. They'd draw one, and erase it, and draw it again, and erase it again.

I asked one student why he kept erasing his circle.

*"It looked funny".*

Meanwhile one kid in the corner had already drawn three elephants and a Bengal tiger, and his elephants were way better than mine!

## **Orifices**

Grade one students leak. Everywhere. Their noses run. They slobber a lot. They occasionally have accidents. I don't want to deal with it.

*(Upon reflection, the above description could apply equally well to my Math 30 class. But Danny can't help it ...).*

## **Unexpected Behaviour**

Little kids like to stick things up their noses and in their ears. Crayons. Play Doh. Erasers. What's the teacher supposed to do? Do they keep a pair of pliers handy? I don't remember Emily ever doing this when she was in grade one. Although there was that time in grade eleven ...

*(I stuck a crayon up my nose when I was five. It eventually appeared several days later. Don't ask where.)*

## **Crying**

Grade one kids cry at the drop of the hat. The kid sitting behind them calls them a 'silly doohickey'? They cry. They aren't first in line to go to the library? They cry. Their mother forgot to put ketchup on their bologna sandwich? They cry. It's too much!

(Again I am reminded of some Jr. High classes. But let's not belabour the point).

## **Lessons**

How do you plan a lesson for little kids who can't read blackboard notes yet, and have the attention span of a sardine? I think it's magic. How does the teacher do it? All I know is, don't ever plan a grade one lesson involving jelly beans. I'm still embarrassed!

## **Talking About Anything**

Honestly, does the teacher really *need* to know what little Brenda's mother and father do on weekends ... never mind that they would probably be very embarrassed to learn that Brenda is telling everyone in school about it?

I don't want to know. It's bad enough that I have to hear what Becca did on the weekend.

## **Lunches**

I don't want to have to check students' lunches to make sure they're eating their sandwich *before* eating those three chocolate bars and the bag of chips. What were those mothers thinking? And I've seen what's in *my* students' lunches ... I prefer to mind my own business.

## **Reading and Writing**

I can't fathom the miracle that occurs somewhere in grade one, when students who barely knew their letters at the beginning of kindergarten can now read and write stories. I don't understand how grade one teachers accomplish this ... but they have my undying admiration! Compared to that, teaching high school math is simple. Even logarithms.

## **Going to the Bathroom**

OK, that's probably not a big deal. But I don't think I could handle helping the boys do up their zippers five times a day. I'm lucky if I remember to do up my own.

## **'Telling'**

I have no idea how Primary teachers handle this. On the one hand, you *want* someone to tell you that Johnny is in the bathroom setting a fire in the garbage pail. But you *don't* need to know every time Kenny made a funny face at Kathy and stuck his tongue out. Where do you draw the line? *Is* there a line?

This topic is just begging for some research. I may have to write an article about it.

## **Smells**

I'm sorry, but most grade one kids smell bad. I'm not sure why. Perhaps it's excessive gas. You would think I would be used to that, as a Jr. High teacher. But in Jr. High, it only happens once in a while. Not all day long. And mostly just in grade nine.

Maybe I'm just too sensitive.

*I hope the above passages don't make you think that being a Primary teacher is an impossible job. I know many excellent Primary teachers ... we have some of the best in our school. I just don't know how they do it. And I know I never ever could do what they do.*

*If you can read this, thank an Elementary teacher. And your mother.*