



The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher

Harry K. Wong , Rosemary T. Wong

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The best-selling book ever on classroom management and teaching for student achievement with over 3.3 million copies sold. The book walks a teacher, either novice or veteran, through structuring and organizing a classroom for success that can be applied at any time of the year at any grade level, pre-K through college. The book is used in thousands of school districts, in over 100 countries, and in over 2,000 college classrooms. It's practical, yet inspiring. But most important, it works! The new 4th edition includes updated research, photos, and more examples of how-to along with an implementation DVD, Using THE FIRST DAYS OF SCHOOL featuring Chelonnda Seroyer. This is the most requested book for what works in the classroom for teacher and student success.

The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher Details

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From Reader Review The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher for online ebook

Alex Templeton says

This was the textbook for the seminar that accompanied my student teaching this past semester. It was, perhaps, not written for me, as by the time I was student teaching, I had already been in the classroom for a number of years. I did find some of the information, particularly on classroom routines and organization, very helpful and look forward to implementing some of them in my next classroom. However, much of this book erred on the touchy-feely, chipper "ALL students can succeed!" side. Particularly irritating to me was how much of the "ALL students can succeed!" message was based in the idea that success would automatically come if the teacher was effective. Of course I'm not knocking effective teachers (I would like to be one, obviously) and am not saying that teachers shouldn't try and be the absolute best they can, but after awhile there are factors outside of the classroom that teachers just can't solve: poverty, family issues, available resources, etc., that contribute to student success. I think while books like this are trying to be encouraging about the power of teachers, they can also perpetuate the myth that it is mostly teachers who are responsible for the success of schools. My experience and reading tells me that it is a roughly partnership between teachers, community, and government systems, and we forget the responsibility of the last two parties at our peril.

Greg Garcia says

This book came highly recommended from several sources. I had received a copy as a gift when I began teaching at the high school level, but I hadn't bothered to open it until recently.

After reading it, I'm glad that I didn't adopt Wong's methodologies as a first-day secondary teacher. My classes would have eaten me alive. It's not that the book is necessarily poor, but I believe that it is best-suited for K-5 teachers, who deal with students at a much earlier point in their development. Many of the suggestions presented in this book would have been dismissed as childish and condescending by teens.

The book is organized more like a magazine than a text, with numerous sidebars with tangential information and testimonials from teachers who felt relieved from some of the suggestions that Wong provided. Perhaps a portion of my less-than-stellar review stems from my general distrust of books that contain an infomercial about itself as part of its primary content.

There are some useful tips, but this manual could have easily been reduced from its unwieldy length of 352 pages to a 20-30 page pamphlet. It is unnecessary to devote a full-length chapter to convey the benefits of dressing professionally. Furthermore, it is equally unnecessary to devote a section of the book to the topic of "how to take attendance".

As previously stated, perhaps this book would be best for elementary school teachers. In my opinion, it is not the best book for secondary educators, although admittedly my experience may bias my judgment.

sydney says

UUUUGGGH. All signs pointed to 'yes': an administrator I respected recommended this book as a good manual on how to approach classroom management from the beginning of the year, it was referenced often as a good starting point for new teachers, it was the same size and shape as Fred Jones' Tools for Teaching.

But Harry K. and Rosemary T. Wong might be a little bit crazy. They self-published this book so they could have complete control over every aspect of it, which means that it's full of their weird adages, rhetoric, and platitudes about being an "effective" (versus an "ineffective") teacher.

Some of the stuff in here is good, solid advice, mostly in the middle three chapters (classroom management, lesson mastery, and something else I can't remember). I found the "lesson mastery" stuff most helpful-- tips for how to set up a gradebook, how to sync tests to objectives, etc. A lot of the advice in the middle chapters, though, is more suited to teachers of younger kids (K-8, maybe even K-5) than high schoolers.

But the first and last chapters were chock full of crazytalk. The first chapter was so vague that I found it almost completely useless. They talked a lot about what teachers should be sure to do without actually giving any advice on how to accomplish those things. The last chapter and the Epilogue upped the ante-- they went after "pitiful" teachers, "worker-teachers," teachers who dislike in-service meetings, with no mercy. They railed against the American family falling apart and the lack of family suppers. They tried to inspire but just left me feeling like I'd perused an inspirational wall calendar catalog.

(To be fair, the Wongs don't recommend reading the book cover-to-cover, like I did. They intend for it to be used as a manual, pulled out and referenced when a teacher is having a specific problem.)

If you're a new teacher, borrow this from someone and read the middle chapters alongside Tools for Teaching. Then go talk to a veteran teacher about some of the main techniques you think you want to implement in your classroom and see what they think. That's one piece of advice this book gets right: the best support system for teachers is other teachers.

Not really recommended for experienced teachers, unless you want to amuse yourself and teacher friends by reading aloud from the frenetic, boldfaced "inspirational" sections.

Tristan says

I'm drafting up a lawsuit against my teaching college for not exposing me to this book. Possibly class action, on behalf of my first-year students.

These are insights that I could easily have come up with on my own, if left to my own devices for 20 years or so. I'm glad I didn't have to do that. The book doesn't beat around the bush. The important parts are in bold, with pictures and diagrams. Any teacher can benefit from reading this book, or even just flipping through it for the key points.

Irene McHugh says

You shouldn't read this book cover-to-cover. It's not meant to be "the solution" for every situation that arises in the first few days of school. It's meant to get the educator thinking about what's going to happen in those first few days. How will you prepare for these different situations?

Anyone who's taught for at least five years in the public school system knows that your school year will be smoother and students will learn more if you establish clear procedures in the first days of school. That's the heart of this book.

I re-scan this book every August. I pick and choose my inspiration based on the current classroom reality I'm dealing with as a teacher.

I would recommend this book to any teacher who knows the power of reflection. Additionally, I'd recommend this book to new teachers, especially those who are content-knowledge rich, but pedagogically poor (the new teacher who has a master's degree in history, but has never taken a methods class or a classroom management class).

Phil Jensen says

A veteran teacher's perspective

I have been teaching for 16 years, and most of those were spent in grades 6-8. I read this book because I have heard it mentioned by other teachers and it is the #1 education book on Goodreads.

Classroom Management and Discipline

Unit C on classroom management is great. Wong's emphasis on previewing procedures, setting the tone, and making effective use of class time is correct. I wish I had read this unit 16 years ago when I started teaching. I attended the IU school of education in the late '90s, and I speculate that they did not use Wong's book because it was already old-school by that point.

Harry K. Wong is controversially old-school by modern standards. He is progressive compared to some of the teachers I grew up with, in regards to speaking respectfully to students and making it his job to help the ones who fall behind. However, he's not much into inquiry-based learning or student-centered teaching.

As luck would have it, I am also reading *Engaging Children: Igniting a Drive for Deeper Learning* by Ellin Oliver Keene at the moment, and there is a stark contrast between the two authors. Keene recommends a classroom that is always buzzing with low-level chatter and features lots of nooks and alcoves for students to work in. Harry K. Wong is having none of that. All desks face the front, all students and areas in the classroom are visible to the teacher, and students speak only with the teacher's permission. Wong does strongly encourage cooperative learning, but it is very structured and heavily previewed. The difference between Wong and Keene is the difference between a person who teaches for a living and a person who writes about teaching for a living. Keene has some good ideas, but only Wong can give you the practical advice to make them work.

I have been and continue to be a huge Responsive Classroom fan. If I were to recommend one book on teaching to a first year teacher, it would be from their catalogue- probably The Morning Meeting Book: K-8. However, Wong has some good counterpoints to that. In RC, the class generates the rules together. Wong points out that this can be kind of a trivial activity because many rules are already set by the school or the teacher. Furthermore, a well prepared teacher already has all the classroom procedures laid out, and concrete procedures are arguably more important than broad rules of conduct. Personally, I modify the RC beginning of year activity to having the students brainstorm what their classmates can do to help them learn. Then I consolidate and post the list. We review it periodically, and I usually refer to it as "group expectations," but it's not really the same as class rules.

Please and Thank You Mistakes

Harry K. Wong has a lot of opinions, and the only one I would call flagrantly wrong is his use of please and thank you. I strongly agree with the Responsive Classroom take on these words, as explained in *The Power of Our Words: Teacher Language That Helps Children Learn*.

"Thank you" is reserved for personal favors, such as picking up my pencil when I drop it. To acknowledge positive (but expected) behaviors, say something like, "Good work. I noticed you waiting until it was your turn." The student is not doing me a personal favor by showing respect to another student; they are meeting school expectations.

"Would you please" should never be used unless you're willing to get "no" in return. I was brought up to use please, so I put it on the front of directions, such as, "Please hand me your homework." That is not an open question, and I lower my voice on the period to show that "no" is not an acceptable answer.

It's kind of dated

We all need to cut Harry K. Wong a little slack. The first edition of this book was in 1990, and my copy, purchased new, seems to have been lightly updated in the early 2000s. Most of this book was written before white boards or email. Many schools still had rotary phones and mimeograph machines. Typing was done on typewriters. If there was a computer in the classroom, it had a greenscale screen and no modem.

Parts of this book are quaint. Society is more accepting of "excessive jewelry" than it used to be. Most people don't use paper grade books anymore. And then there's Harry K. Wong's obsession with calling roll. I imagine this was a real problem in his school, but I haven't seen it be a problem in any school I've been in.

That format, though.

I am shocked that some people dislike it. Personally, I found it extremely reader-friendly. Harry Wong gets right down to business with lots of chapter headings, subheadings, and short, direct paragraphs. Quotes, anecdotes, examples, and other supporting material go into clearly marked sidebars in the margin. Harry Wong puts the most practical things in the center and makes them easy to find. By contrast, Ellin Oliver Keene spends four pages of her book describing a plane ride she took one time. I wish Heinemann would hire Harry K. Wong to edit their books.

I got through about 200 pages of Wong's book in one afternoon, and I have the formatting to thank for it.

The Other Stuff

The classroom management portion is dynamite. The parts around it range from okay to kind of kooky. I think a lot of the lesson planning and positive mindset portions is either common-sense or gets learned quickly by new teachers. The last two chapters are meant to be inspirational, and they come across kind of shouty. They remind me most of a famous business essay from the early 1900s called A Message to Garcia.

I recommend that new teachers read Unit C and maybe give a quick browse to the rest.

Ross Bussell says

This book is given to new teachers in my school district, to help them start the school year. That's a scary thought for me, because I've never been a big believer in Wong's ideals about what teaching is.

He largely stays on the surface here, with how to dress, what to put on the walls, how to make a strong impression, etc. He definitely advocates a perpetuation of traditional schooling, with desks in rows, strict adherence to straight lines, no talking unless spoken to, and stringent homework practices. For the more liberally minded educator (such as myself), this book flies in the face of what I believe makes a strong, well rounded classroom.

I gave it two stars because it's not without some good ideas. I can't give it more than two stars because it is, like Harry Wong, somewhat short minded in its process. The sad thing is that many teachers treat this book like its their bible, and they don't really think critically about it, it's simply because this is what teachers think they're supposed to be doing, and that's why I can't recommend it.

Ayacalypso says

This book taught me several things that were not taught in my teaching courses, for example:

- How spending time at the beginning of the school year, teaching class procedures instead of content will actually maximize instructional time for the rest of the year.
- How to use a predictable daily routine to get students to begin working right away and minimize transition time.
- When is the best time to take role.
- Stressing the element of student choice in managing behavior ("You chose not to turn in your homework, therefore you will earn a 0 for the assignment.")
- The importance of telling students why they are learning something or why they are doing a particular activity.
- How to avoid being brought down by the negativity, low morale and energy level of other teachers.
- How to portray friendliness while still being professional to the students.

Amanda says

Extremely repetitive and full of self-promotion. I am not sure why it takes 300+ pages to say that your class will run smoothly if you have routines in place. There are a few chapters in the classroom management section that are worth reading but the the rest of the book is not. I felt like this book places 100% of the responsibility for learning on the teacher and claims that the only factor which affects student learning is the

teacher's "attitude." Way too much behaviorism in this book.

Elizabeth says

As other reviews have noted:

This isn't a book you "read". Skim, yes. Read, no.

This is very "old school". And while I certainly wouldn't advise throwing the baby out with the bath water there were some suggestions in here that I just couldn't get behind.

But as a more "touchy-feely" kind of person (I'm INFP) I appreciate a different perspective (my guess is ESTJ) on how to be a good teacher. The school I will be teaching at thoroughly embraces many of his suggestions (all the teachers stand at the door when classes change). This was a very practical book with clear examples of what you should and should not do.

I did not like the layout. Also I thought way too much time was spent on each point. This book could probably be 1/3 to 1/2 the size with a better layout and getting to the point.

Carolyn says

Highly patronizing of students and will be more than likely to develop reactive behaviour, especially from children who are old enough to recognize when they're being treated as inferior and immature. This establishes the teacher as the central authoritative figure and attempts to give them control over the classroom via various manipulative strategies. Though the teacher is typically the centre of the classroom, a learning-focused method of teaching (rather than maintaining organizational structure as is suggested in Wong's methodology) is more successful at educating students. This extends into the framework of modern Western education, but regardless of a teacher's position in a school district full of rules, treating children as human beings, rather than unruly pests to be tamed and controlled, is what should be sought.

Yair Ben-Zvi says

Gutless, bloodless, gormless, sophistry. Honestly, I am amazed that a book that describes itself (relentlessly) in such helpful (some might even say arrogant or dogmatic) terms can (and does) offer so little in tangible help for new teachers. Really, this book almost doesn't require me to be impressed with it as it seems to be ineluctably self-satisfied with itself, almost daring you to see a flaw in its perfect pedagogical methods...of which there are MANY. I will say that there is merit in some of this nonsense, namely the bromides to consistency....but the complete disregard for students (that border on the sociopathic) who flip their nose (and other body parts) at any school, teacher, authority and simply enjoining teachers to use more procedures or (I'll just preface with some vomiting) more LOVE, are nothing short of laughable. And the book refusing to give teachers the authority or, God help us all, the ability to use discipline (IN ALMOST ANY CIRCUMSTANCE) while simultaneously shifting any and all blame away from parents, students or the poor put upon administrators (the most obviously useless of the bunch though heaven for-fend you question why THEY earn more) is, honestly, disgusting and the proceeds are more than a little Orwellian concerning language (the digression between DECIDING and CHOOSING is at once hilarious and chilling as someone

with title 'Doctor' actually helped to conceive this and some of the gullible are actually buying this...).

So, as someone who more than likely will lose his teaching position let me just say that this book is in service to exactly NO ONE but its authors and their coruscating circle of yes men and yes women. The fact that this paean to conformity actually has the balls to bring up Rosa Parks and Jim Crow as as a 'pre'-example to its own methods....well, presumptuous comes to mind as does laugh and vomit inducing...

Read this for laughs and then bemoan the state of American education, in that order.

Drew says

If Harry Wong tried these strategies with my students, he'd get shanked.

dirt says

Some administrator at a job interview mentioned this book... I was kind of hung up on the male teachers should wear ties part and couldn't go much further. I can't think of one good idea I found in this book.

Kathy says

Harry and Rosemary Wong have set out to streamline classroom management (versus "discipline") in this easy-to-follow guide. They posit that a smooth-running classroom is the responsibility of the teacher and the result of the teacher's ability to teach procedures.

Following procedures helps students do their work with less confusion and thus help them succeed. Knowledge of classroom procedures tells them:

How to enter the classroom
What to do when they enter the classroom
Where to find the assignment
What to do when you want their attention
Where you want finished assignments placed
What to do if they want to sharpen a pencil
Where to find assignments if they have been absent
What to do at dismissal of class

The teacher must use 3 steps to teach procedures: Explain, Rehearse, and Reinforce correct procedures (or reteach an incorrect one).

Wong provides concrete advice for some daily classroom procedures, such as predetermined hand signals students use to silently signal the teacher:

If they wish to speak, they are to raise the index finger.
If they wish to leave their seat, they are to raise 2 fingers.

If they need a teacher's help, they are to raise three fingers.

The important thing is that the class is not disturbed.

I can appreciate that this guide is too simplistic for those who have long teaching careers already under their belts, but as a new teacher I have found a number of interesting and informative ideas I plan to bring into my classroom.
