Teach Well And Maintain Your Sanity

Advice from a teacher who has been around the block.

By Devon Ferguson of
TeachWithFergy.com

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This eBook is dedicated to loving Steph, Jake and Connor; you guys are my everything!
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I'm so happy you're here!

I wrote this book because I love teaching but through my years of experience, I've come to realize that it can be a brutally difficult, soul sucking experience at times. No wonder so many amazing people leave the profession when they first start. Teaching is really hard but the joy you get from it far exceeds any difficulty you could ever experience during your career. To help, I wanted to share my experiences with everyone who would listen. The lessons and examples I give in this book have arisen from my own failures and successes, which I have learned from over the years. Use my knowledge to save yourself valuable time, mental strain and premature grey hairs.

I am not an English teacher nor do I deem myself an exceptional writer. I am your average person who simply loves teaching and has been around the block a few times.

If you have any questions at all, please contact me. I can be found on Facebook – http://www.facebook.com/teachwithfergy, at my website – http://www.teachwithfergy.com and by email, which I will respond to usually within a few hours – devon@teachwithfergy.com. This book is chalk-full of resources you can use in your class. Each resource will be listed by chapter in the appendix at the end of the book for easy reference.

If you would like some of the resources I've developed over my career, please visit my teaching store at https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Teach-With-Fergy.

The following chapters are included in the full eBook

Chapter 1: Teach well and impassion your students so they enjoy learning

This book isn't about textbook pedagogy or curriculum. I'll leave that for the bureaucrats and other educational policy makers. Instead, it will:

- be straight to the point.
- provide you with ideas and tips I wish I had received earlier in my career.
- give you something that you can take away and use immediately in your classroom.

Let's start with a question for you. Look at the quote below and think about what it means to you as a teacher.

> "You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he will continue the learning process as long as he lives." - Clay P. Bedford

Take as much time as you need.

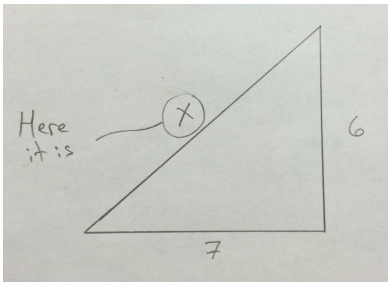
Okay, we are back. What do you think? I think most will say, Of course, it's like that "Teach a man to fish" proverb. We need to teach them to fish so they can feed themselves for a lifetime rather than simply giving them a fish to satisfy their immediate hunger. But I'd say that's half the answer. I think what Bedford is really getting at is that, yes, it's better to teach the person to fish than to simply hand him one. But if he doesn't care about fishing or has no interest in expanding his knowledge past the ability to catch one type of fish in one particular spot at a certain time of day, he will never actually succeed as a fisherman.

We need to impassion our students so that they want to learn. To be successful in this goal, teachers need to keep one key thing front and centre: the difference between the

subject specialist and the beginner. Teachers love their subject, of course they do. They are passionate about it. They've spent their whole adult lives honing their knowledge of it and they want to teach this important body of material to the next generation. So teachers try their best, but it can be frustrating—lots of kids just don't seem to care. In response, the teacher may double down, trying harder and harder to get the information through to the kids. It can seem sometimes as if they are beating their heads against a brick wall. Sound familiar?

Meanwhile, some students may think the subject is useless, asking, "When am I ever going to use this?" This question comes up at the start of every year, especially for subjects such as math, which I teach. So this is how I prevent the question from ever arising. I tell the students that their first assignment is to play the part of the teacher and answer the question, "When am I ever going to use this." Students must structure their answers in order to convince even the most sceptical individuals who, coincidently, just might be them. I elaborate on the criteria by telling students that they don't need to explain why specific concepts will be useful—simply the general ideas and/or skills. I tell them that this assignment will be graded and will be an oral submission where we will discuss their answer one-on-one. Their grade depends on their ability to convince me why I should take this course.

In a nutshell, your job as a teacher isn't just to teach facts; it's about teaching your students how to learn and inspiring them to want to learn.



Will they ever need to find x? Maybe, maybe not. But the most important thing we can help our students acquire is how to ask questions, how to go about finding answers to those questions, how to evaluate the answers—in short, how to learn. It's those skills that will survive long after they have forgotten what color is made when you mix yellow and blue paint or names of the

important Generals in WWII. Do you remember studying all night for that test and having the facts nailed down to perfection allowing you to crush it the next day? How much of that content do you still remember?

As educators, we understand that course content and subject knowledge is vital, but it isn't the only thing or even the most important thing we teach. We need to create passion, show them how to work well with others, how to problem-solve and, in the end, how to learn so that they may become life-long learners. As William Arthur Ward put it, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." Let's choose to inspire.

From this book you will learn:

- about the hiring process so you can land that job. What do administrators look for in a candidate? How can you make sure they see why you are the right person for the job?
- about the process of effective teaching. Whether you are completely new to the profession or someone who has been around for a few years, the learning and improving never stops, there's always something you can become better at to increase your students' success.
- how to be a more effective communicator to your students. You can have all the knowledge in the world but if you can't get your students to listen and become engaged in what you are saying, they'll never take anything away from your class.
- about specific techniques I use to help students overcome their misconceptions so that they may acquire knowledge more efficiently.
- how to hook your students interests from the start, thus spending less class time getting your students engaged in the lesson.
- how to deal with classroom issues when things go wrong because they will. Computers stop working halfway through a lesson, fire alarms go off during your

tests and sometimes you forget to buy that thing you absolutely needed for your demonstration which now can't be done.

- the most effective ways to deal with behavior problems as well as students who just don't care. How do you motivate these students to do their best and not disrupt everyone else? How do you peek their interests when they don't want to be there in the first place?
- that pencil and paper tests aren't always the way to go. They have their place, but assessing student performance properly requires a multitude of tools. I'll review the tools I've developed and utilized over the years.
- how to effectively and easily, utilize technology in your classroom even if that isn't a strength of yours. I provide a general overview of classroom technology as well as 8 simple ways you can implement it right now to better your students understanding and teach to their strengths.
- how to maintain your sanity over a long career and avoid the burnout which affects so many teachers early in their career and unfortunately, causes them to leave the profession.

Chapter 6: Dealing with students' misconceptions

Before they reach your classroom, students have spent their entire lives making guesses about why things happen, checking out these guesses in the real world, and refining their theories about how the world works. Generally, this process works. But sometimes, students can end up with misconceptions. These misconceptions can become resistant to change and can present a serious challenge to educators. Here are two examples of student misconceptions that I have encountered over the course of my teaching. Each one can seriously cloud the student's view of the world and their understanding of how it works. The consequences of these misconceptions can cause anxiety, poor communication skills and in the second case, can lead to very poor decisions that could cost someone their life.

1. "*Ninety-three percent of interpersonal communication is nonverbal*." I first heard this misconception from a female student who was inquiring about how they were to be marked on a presentation that they were preparing. Manpreet had heard that 93% of our person-to-person communication is nonverbal and so I—as her teacher—should heed this information and reconsider the mark allocation. I then explained to her and the class that I wanted to conduct a test. Everyone was to partner up and explain what he or she had for breakfast without speaking. They could use body language, make noises and change their facial expressions as much as they wanted, but they could not speak. Needless to say, no one was successful. We followed this up with a class discussion on the importance of speech and a brief history of the Mehrabian Misconception. Mehrabian stated that about 93% of our person-to-person communication was based on body and facial expressions. These studies have since been debunked, but unfortunately, their presence is still felt. The problem with this belief is that people will focus too much of their time and energy on how they present the material and not enough time on the information that is actually presented. Imagine teaching a new course, grade, subject, etc. and only spending 7% of your time

prepping the content portion of your lessons and 93% of your time, planning the body and facial expressions you plan to display for your students. Not only is this questionable from an education standpoint, it puts a great deal of pressure on someone who may already feel uncomfortable presenting. Equally misconceived is requesting that students should do a presentation where 93% of their grade will depend on their facial and body expressions, and only 7% of their grade mark will be based on the content of their presentation.

Please click here to view a video that provides additional information on the Mehrabian Misconception

2. "*Vaccines cause autism.*" I was speaking to my class about vaccines and Angelo asked about their connection to autism. He had heard a celebrity speak about it and wanted to know if what he heard was true. This learning opportunity was too good to pass up so I asked my students to log on to the Internet using their cell phones or the class computers. I charged them with the task for 'searching' for the name Andrew Wakefield and reading the top three articles that emerged from their search. While they were doing that, I moved around the room and asked them about what they had found. After about ten minutes, I brought everyone's attention back to me and we discussed as a class what they had found. Everyone had read that Andrew Wakefield was a disgraced scientist who had manufactured results that connected vaccines and autism. I explained how unfortunate it is that this horrific claim is still talked about and believed today. More specifically, I shared with them that Wakefield's manufactured research results have led many uninformed parents to choose to not vaccinate their children and some select celebrities, such as Jenny McCarthy, Jim Carrey and Charlie Sheen, to publically denounce vaccinations. These 'celebrity proclamations' led to further anxiety and misconception about vaccines amongst parents and in turn, has precluded additional parents from seeking vaccinations for their children. I shared with the students that unvaccinated children are at much higher

risk for experiencing and dying from preventable diseases such as polio, measles, and diphtheria. In addition, unvaccinated children have a higher probability for transmitting these diseases to toddlers and infants who are not eligible to be vaccinated, individuals with health-related conditions who cannot receive vaccinations for medical reasons, and medically fragile individuals who may be more susceptible to communicable and infectious diseases. Through this discussion and exercise, I was able to allow the students to come to their own conclusions through research that I knew as an educator, was credible. Thus, we quickly squashed this misconception in my class.

Click here for an entertaining take on the anti-vaccination movement from The Jimmy Kimmel Show.

Believing in these two misconceptions can have serious consequences for negotiating the world because it can lead to unsafe and uninformed choices or imprudent behavior.

So how do you help students reframe their misconception? I utilized the method in my two examples above, but here it is step-by-step. First we need to challenge their ideas, creating doubt in their minds about these faulty conceptions, and open up the possibility of another way of thinking. Second, we need to, slowly and carefully, help them acquire the experiences or additional evidence that will allow them to revise their initial misconception. To do this, provide your students the opportunity to take ownership over their own learning and use an inquiry-based activity that will allow them to do the following: 1) state their initial thoughts; 2) seek appropriate empirical or experimental evidence for their thought and a thought that they had NOT previously considered; and 3) come to a conclusion based on evidence.

Case Study: I had a room full of grade 10's and what do 16-year-olds think about—well two things are getting their driver's licence and talking/texting on their phones. Unfortunately, they also think they can drive and talk/ text at the same time. The

misconception that the human brain can multitask, or do two things at the same time—is widespread. In fact, like computers, the human brain can perform only one task at one time. Up to a point, the human brain can switch back and forth between tasks, giving the appearance of doing two things at once—but in actual fact, you are only truly completing a single task at any given time. Some misconceptions may not matter much, such as the idea that you can see the Great Wall of China from the moon. But others, such as the multitasking belief, can be fatal—especially in the case of texting/talking and driving.

So, how did I combat this misconception? Here is what I did: First, I asked the class what they thought about multitasking, if they knew what it was, and if they felt they were good at it. My students said that they could indeed multitask and that for the most part, they were excellent at it. I then asked them if they felt that driving and talking hands-free on their cell phone was okay or if their driving would suffer. They said that driving while using a hands-free cell phone was safe because by using hands-free calling, you avoid the distraction of holding the phone. They were in for a huge surprise. In order to give students a chance to experiment with their multitasking abilities, class members were asked to complete the following exercise in pairs.

Task Part 1 - Find a partner and answer ten, second-grade addition math questions for which the answer is never greater than ten (e.g., 4+5). Have your partner time how long it takes you.

Task Part 2 - Answer a similar (but different) set of ten questions while singing Happy Birthday over and over until the ten questions have been answered. Once again, have your partner time how long it takes you to answer the ten questions.

Task Part 3 – Complete a third set (different questions again) of ten grade 2 addition questions. While you answer the ten questions, tell your partner everything you have eaten during the day, followed by the previous day, and etc. Start with your most recent

snack or meal and work backwards in reverse, chronological order. Again, have your partner time how long it takes you to answer the ten questions.

Once each task was complete, one person from each group wrote the results on the board. What did we find? The average time to answer the ten simple math questions went from 9 seconds in the "no distraction" condition to 14 seconds in the singing Happy Birthday condition (a 55% increase in time required) to 38 seconds in the 'meal recall' condition (a 322% increase in time required). The kids were floored when they saw the numbers. Why was there such a drastic increase in the time required for the multitasking conditions? The reason is that when you are focussed on the math, your brain devotes almost all of its attention on the actual math problems. When we added the very easy Happy Birthday song, the brain needed to divide its attention, dedicating, say, 70% of its attention to completing the 10 math problems, maybe, 25% to singing and 5% to other distractions. Singing Happy Birthday doesn't require much attention because it is so familiar and can be done by rote. However, the added task of recalling daily food consumption was more complex, requiring concentration and recall. Attention is a limited resource. The more attention that was required to complete the Happy Birthday and recall tasks, the less attention that was available to complete the math problems.

Completing this exercise lead us into a discussion about the risks of driving while distracted and the dangers it presents. After all, recalling meals isn't that much different from recalling events from the weekend that you're telling your friend about. At the end of the discussion, I handed out a recent news article and gave students their third and final task, which was to read the article and summarize its findings. The article reports a study in which neuroscientists use brain imaging technology to observe what is happening within the brain during a simulation of distracted driving. Subjects, who were set up in a driving simulator, were asked to execute common driving manoeuvres such as making a left hand turn while simultaneously being asked not-so-hard questions such as, "A triangle has four sides. True or false." What happened? When the drivers were being

asked the questions as compared to when they could concentrate on driving alone, "The visual processing part of the brain started to shut down, so resources could be allocated to the prefrontal cortex, which controls decision-making . . . . it was almost a 50 percent drop." Check out the article here:

http://www.cp24.com/mobile/news/talking-on-cell-while-turning-left-risky-experts-say-1.1175317

Some misconceptions, such as the belief that people are good multitaskers or that the MMR vaccine causes autism in children, can have fatal consequences. Other misconceptions might not kill you, but still are problematic all the same, because they prevent holders of these views from forming evidence-based pictures of the world and how it works. In 2014, a National Science Foundation (NSF) study involving 2,200 adults in the US asked this question: "Does the Earth go around the sun, or does the sun go around the Earth?" More than one in four (29 percent) of American respondents got it wrong. Somehow these respondents have missed out on the massive shift in thinking about our world and its place in the universe, a shift that began with Copernicus and Galileo in the sixteenth century. Even more problematic, almost half, or 46 percent of American responders in the NSF study, gave the wrong answer to the question, "Antibiotics kill viruses as well as bacteria—yes or no." So what? Well, there are behavioral entailments: if you believe antibiotics kill viruses, you are likely to take them for illnesses such as flu, where they can't do any good and are likely to do harm. We know that on the global scale, overuse of antibiotics leads to the now scary development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. On an individual-level, unnecessary antibiotic use doesn't make the sick person better, but it can kill off beneficial bacteria in the gut, providing the opening for harmful, opportunistic bacteria such as C-difficile to take over. You can check out the other seven science questions asked by the NSF study and how well they were answered at: **http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/seind06/append/c7/at07-10.pdf**

So how are teachers to address misconceptions that students may have? It can be difficult because we have our own ideas that we take for granted about how the world works. In addition, we often make the assumption that people share our values and beliefs. For example, we know that the earth is not flat, that you don't get AIDS from toilet seats, and that it would not be a good idea for absolutely everyone to give up gluten and eat only non-gluten products. Moreover, we don't have the time or training to probe our students' knowledge, identify the full spectrum of misconceptions, and then somehow fix them. We also know that it doesn't work to just say, "Take our word for it. You are not nearly as good at multitasking as you think you are. Suck it up." But one thing that I think we can do is model a questioning approach that scrutinizes beliefs, asks for evidence, and checks out faulty statements against other things known about the world and the way the world works. The goal here is not just to set students 'right;' but rather, the goal is to give them a toolkit that they can use over their lifetime to think critically about statements. So if someone tells them, "There is just as much protein in two peanuts as there is in a 10-ounce steak," they will know to ask: "How do you know this?" or "Why do you think this?" and have some ideas about how they could go about finding out the truth of this claim.

You can model this questioning approach as a separate lesson—for example; see the distracted driving case study discussed above. But you can also pause when a misconception is aired in the classroom, perhaps in the context of another lesson. Suppose that a student says that the reason it is warmer in the summer than in the winter is because the Earth is closer to the sun in the summer. You could say that this explanation is a good attempt, consistent with our experience, for example, of standing near a fire: the closer we stand, the hotter we feel. But it doesn't account for some other things that we know about the world. Students may be able to suggest some facts not accounted for by the distance-from-the-sun explanation. For example:

When it's winter in the Northern Hemisphere, it's summer in the Southern Hemisphere.

The temperature is fairly consistent all year long at or near the equator.

Daylight hours are fairly consistent throughout the year at the equator but vary dramatically from winter to summer, the closer you get to the poles.

If time permitted, you could get them to go onto a weather website and look up the average temperature of three locations at sea level: one in the Northern Hemisphere (New York City, U.S.A.); one in the Southern Hemisphere (Sydney, Australia); and one near the equator (Pontianak, Indonesia). From this, I would lead the discussion to the implications of the weather data. At this point, students are ready for an explanation that accounts for annual variations in temperature and daylight at different latitudes: the 23.5-degree tilt of the Earth's axis of rotation.

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