

42[™]
Rules
for
Elementary
School Teachers

2ND EDITION

Real-life Lessons and Practical Advice
on How to Thrive in Today's
Classroom

SUSAN GUERRERO




**SECOND
EDITION**

“42 Rules for Elementary School Teachers (2nd Edition)” Book Excerpt

Real-Life Lessons and Practical
Advice on How to Thrive in Today's
Classroom

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Intro

I am proud to be a teacher. No matter what title in education I hold or what position I take I am a teacher and as such I am also a learner. I wrote this book to celebrate some of the things I've been lucky enough to learn through experience or from interactions with great teachers.

The most important people in my life have all been teachers. I have loved teachers from a young age. This started with my parents who were not only my first and best teachers but who have always been models for educational and personal excellence. As the first members of their respective families to finish high school, go to college, and receive advanced degrees they took pride in their accomplishments. My mother and father conveyed the joy of learning and a deep commitment to growth and service. As reflective and caring parents and educators their life example was my first introduction to best practices in teaching and learning. Their example continues to be a measure by which I evaluate myself as a person and as an educator.

The teachers I grew up with were also phenomenal. Maybe I was lucky but I had really great teachers who worked very hard to make learning interesting, relevant, fun, and accessible. I did not always appreciate them completely and quite honestly at times they did not always appreciate me. Kids can be difficult and I was certainly no exception. In the polite acronym of local educators I could be a real PITA, which stands for "pain in the ass." My teachers however were endlessly patient and completely amazing and with each year that passes I have an ever-deepening respect for them. Teachers really do change lives and my life has been changed by every teacher I have known.

Some of the teachers that changed my life and the lives of countless children including my own are

celebrated in this book. Teachers like 1st grade teacher Anita Sanchez and 5th grade teacher Joe Romagna from Pleasanton Unified School District are outstanding teachers I have experienced as a parent whose child was transformed by their thoughtful and loving practices. Many of the other teachers cited are friends and colleagues that I had the privilege of working with as a teacher or as a school site administrator. Although moving from teaching to school administration is sometimes seen as a shift to the dark side I feel that making the move gave me a unique opportunity. As a teacher I was able to personally live and learn from engaging in my experiences and as an administrator I was able to observe and learn from an array of amazing teachers at all levels of experience. I am so grateful for having had this opportunity.

The rules in this book are not mandates; they are reflections on best practices that I have seen succeed. As sharing is part of the elementary school experience I want to share with each of you. I hope that you will enjoy reading these 42 “rules” and that they will resonate with you in the same way that they touched me.

Please share these rules with friends and colleagues and also feel free to contact me to share your own best practices. The more we all collaborate, the better we all become for ourselves and the communities we serve.

2 Teaching Is All About Learning

The passion for teaching must be a passion for learning. It is work of the heart as well as the mind.

How did someone like me end up an educator with a book on the rules of teaching and learning? It's really only natural. I have always been a student and even now at the ripe age of 92 (If you count principal years like dog years), I am still a student both formally and informally. I study the schools I'm at, attend classes and academies, participate in on-line learning, forums and pod casts and go to conferences. I learn from students, parents, teachers and colleagues. I have an open heart, open hand and open door.

Being fully open to learning allows you to be an expert teacher because you will continue to grow, change and evolve as a person. This quality allows you to reflect on and improve your practices but it's not as easy as it sounds. To truly be a learner it's necessary to examine yourself, your ideas, theories and practices. It's important to recognize that if you're a learner you don't know everything, can't know everything and need to critically question what you think you know and what you actually already do.

The passion for teaching must be a passion for learning. It is work of the heart as well as the mind. This is what I call open heart and open hand learning. An open heart desires expansion, change, growth. A flat open palm can receive or release. It does not grasp, hold on to or close itself off to possibilities or ideas. When these two things include an open door whether it is a metaphorical

door or an actual door you can create the best conditions for your learning and thus the learning of others.

Your real learning begins when you are teaching in your own classroom. Academic programs prepare you with theory but your own classroom is reality. It's one of the reasons reality shows have captured the imagination of the masses. There isn't anything more compelling than a real life drama. There is no script but there are strategies. Successful strategies include that you:

- Learn about your school's history, mission and future vision
- Know your community: parents and guardians, students, colleagues and support systems
- Understand how to collaborate with everyone and add value through your unique contributions
- Integrate standards, the approved curriculum and the best methods for teaching
- Embrace training and action research opportunities
- Reflect on what's working and what needs improvement or change

The best teachers are students of learning who constantly search for answers to every individual situation that presents itself concerning helping students to succeed. Decide now to take complete responsibility for every student you serve. This means you don't get to make excuses. You can't blame students or their circumstances. You must fully commit to every child's success.

I wish someone had told me this when I first started teaching. When I think back on my first year class I'm embarrassed to think about how badly I failed some of my students. There was one child in particular that received several F's. Would you believe in that first year I thought he was the one that failed? It wasn't until later, when I had more experience and training that I could reflect back and admit I had not taken full responsibility. I was under the impression that because I taught something, my student should have learned it. I had not yet reached a point where I evaluated myself and my teaching based on my students' achievement results. Instead I evaluated the student, found him wanting and gave him the grade that he "deserved." I should have given myself an F.

Promise yourself to keep searching, learning and growing. Be better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of being an effective learning leader by constantly examining and reflecting on your practices. Celebrate your success and admit and learn from your failures.

4

Meet, Greet, Remember and Repeat

When you meet someone follow the process of being fully present for the introduction...

You're not even in your classroom yet. You've just been hired and everything and everyone is new. Take notes. No really, I mean it. When you meet someone follow the process of being fully present for the introduction, greeting them by name following the meeting, locking the name and face into memory and repeating their name as you are leaving. You're going to be meeting a lot of new people. You need to know who they are, what they do and how they can and do affect you.

It's easy to be overwhelmed when you're first hired to teach or when you've joined a new team. First impressions are very important and often the last thing a new educator is thinking about is the people who are running things. I'm not suggesting you get in tight with everyone you meet but acknowledging people by name, knowing who to go to when you have a need and how to approach them appropriately is crucial to having and maintaining successful support systems and great personal and professional relationships.

Many districts will have an orientation for new hires and may even have a tour where they will take you through the departments and introduce you to staff. Use the opportunity to begin establishing a relationship or at least a knowledge base. Make it a point to make a meaningful connection even if it is just to say "It was nice to meet you _____. Have a great day." No one who works on the front lines of a school district ever gets too many pleasant contacts. Be memorable by being positive and

appreciative. Start the relationship cordially, maintain it with courtesy and you will become someone people like to see coming rather than someone they celebrate leaving.

There are often organizational charts available as handouts or on district websites that give the names and titles of different key staff members. The really helpful ones also have pictures. Use these to integrate who you have met into your consciousness so you can greet them by name the next time you see them. Everyone appreciates being acknowledged and remembered.

At your site do the same thing and observe the people you meet to identify key cultural leaders. The given members of this group are your direct supervisor, the office manager and the custodian. Treat all of them respectfully. Each deals with garbage, complaints, facility issues, students, parents, teachers and other managers and supervisors.

Ask for a staff group photo or a leftover yearbook to help you remember the names of your new colleagues. If you've already met them the pictures will help you remember names and if you haven't yet met them approaching a colleague by name and introducing yourself shows you care and want to be part of their team. Even though you may or may not be the only new hire make it easy for your colleagues to remember your name by reintroducing yourself whenever necessary. I am always grateful when someone says "Hi, Susan, It's _____ we met last week. It's good to see you again." The impression you leave by doing this is that of a supportive colleague who cares about other people. It costs nothing and pays off in establishing you as a great new addition to the team.

When I moved to Alaska earlier in my career being socially forward helped me enormously. As a native Californian I was feeling out of place in "America's Last Frontier." I didn't know anyone, was 3 months pregnant and feeling sick. It was an effort to turn on the charm. I visited each of my colleagues to personally introduce myself and committed to having as many positive interactions as possible with each one. My colleagues quickly made me a part of their learning family. If you, meet, greet, remember and repeat you will become known and valued in no time at all.

7 Establish Relationships

Although you may feel you have a lot of students, remember each of them is the most important person in your classroom to their parents.

Relationships are central to teaching and learning. Establishing a real relationship with every student, their parents, your colleagues and supervisor is the foundation for a successful learning partnership that will make teaching a joy.

Do you remember a teacher who connected with you as an individual? Maybe they took the time to listen, find out about your interests and give you opportunities to incorporate your passions into your learning. I bet those teachers were your favorite people and that because of it you worked harder to succeed in school.

To establish yourself as an important learning leader to your students take the time to get to know them. Since you're the adult be a "roll" model and get the ball rolling by sending out introductory letters or postcards to students before the year begins. Tell them who you are, what your interests are and how exciting it is that you will be working together. Gear your communications appropriately for your grade level. Do a quick welcome to school postcard for Kindergarten, adding information as you move up in grades and even moving to cards or a letter for upper grades. Be prepared to get mail back and when you do, answer it!

Writing back and forth is a great way to have a private dialogue that lets students know they are valued. This can be carried on throughout the year in different forms such as continued correspondence, e-mail, student learning reflections and teacher validation or two-way journals.

Although you may feel like you have a lot of students remember each of them is the most important person in your classroom to their parents. As you are getting to know students and their parents make sure you are sharing who you are with them. Be visible and available before and after school and use every opportunity to share your commitment and vision for learning. Unless you are in a job share situation, each of your students only has one teacher and they want to know who you are, what you stand for and what to expect from you. If you start out letting everyone get to know you, you can't fail to succeed with students and get their parents to support you.

I experienced a master at work one year when I went to my son Chase's Back to School Night. The teacher, Anita Sanchez met each parent at the door with a gracious handshake and welcome. Her beautiful classroom was set up for each of us to sign in and find our child's desk which had the 1st grade standards, class policies and procedures and a note from each child on it.

Mrs. Sanchez got up in front of the class, smiled at everyone and began a power point presentation by saying:

"I'd like to share the twenty reasons I love getting up and coming in to teach each day."

The slides showing every child in the class experiencing their first week of first grade made every parent sigh and fall in love with Mrs. Sanchez. With one graceful action she conveyed how she felt about our kids, shared what their activities and learning looked like in action and she showed us that she valued each and every one of them.

As you're connecting with students and parents make sure you also spend quality time with your teaching partners and talk with your supervisor regularly. Ask for feedback and be prepared to actually listen to it and use it. Offer your opinion when asked and practice diplomacy.

It's easy to get super involved in your classroom and forget that you are part of a larger learning community. Tend to each part of your learning community by making sure you know and understand your students, parents, colleagues and supervisor. Your work to create relationships will result in positive relationships that sustain and enrich you and your teaching.

9

Be Professional

Every moment you are in the presence of your students you are teaching them through your example.

As a role model to your class you have to be prepared, proactive, positive and have a clear plan for leading every student to success. You also have to create, maintain and nurture a great home/school connection with parents and guardians, collegial and collaborative partnerships with grade level partners and other colleagues including your supervisor.

How do you do this? Try utilizing some norms that students are often asked to use in interactions:

- Be open, honest and kind
- Assume positive intent
- Act with positive intentions

Although these strategies are stated positively each can also be a directive to avoid:

- Gossiping, speaking negatively of students, parents, other teachers or your administrator
- Assuming purposeful negative behavior
- Reacting to issues or situations negatively

There is no place in a professional learning culture for gossip and trash talking. The negativity it causes hurts everyone. Students are especially sensitive to both real and perceived slights from their teachers. Sarcasm is especially deadly and shouldn't occur in class. An off-hand remark can ruin a child's whole day and consistent use can cause serious emotional issues.

I maintain an open door policy for students to come to my office when they need to talk. It would surprise you to hear what they sometimes have to say

about what's going on in classes or remarks that are made. While you are teaching State standards to your class, students are holding you accountable to standards of behavior based on what they think is fair, right and reasonable. Every moment you're in the presence of your students you are teaching them through your example.

Imagine every student in your class is Sponge Bob or Roberta Square Pants. Know that each student is soaking up every spoken thought and witnessed action. All eyes are on you at all times. You have to be impeccable. This is true on the playground and in the Teacher's Lounge as well. Parents notice who is on duty and whether they are watching the kids or chatting with another teacher. Teachers often want to take a real break at recess or lunch and find they can't do it in the Teacher's Lounge because it has been turned into a whine bar. Don't become part of "Unhappy Hour" at lunch.

You've probably heard of "The Golden Rule." which basically means "Treat others the way you want to be treated." You will want to upgrade this to platinum by instead treating others the way they want and need to be treated. Although on a basic level being fair, consistent, caring and helpful will work for students, parents and colleagues remember that each has different wants and needs.

Students want to learn and all need an approach that will work for them. Don't believe students who say they don't care. Their words are often a cover for insecurity. Your commitment to earning and honoring their trust through your professionalism is key to your students succeeding. They need to believe in you and know that you have faith in them.

Parents want to know their children are getting a good education and need help in understanding how they can support them. Provide a professional ear and give advice to help parents support students at home. Let them know how you can help each other.

Colleagues want to collaborate and sometimes may need to commiserate as well. Make it a point not to dwell on the negative especially in the teacher's lounge during break times. Suggest scheduling time in a grade level meeting to discuss student issues and make it a point to also share the successes. Focus on student data and avoid getting into personal opinions. Remember every student is someone's child and imagine their parents are in the room when you are discussing them.

About the Author



Susan Guerrero is passionate about teaching and learning. A K-12 teacher, specialist, staff developer, university instructor, principal, and educational ambassador, Susan is an advocate for parents, students, and teachers. She is the Executive Director of The Heart of Learning Foundation and lives in Pleasanton, California with her son and daughter.

Getting “42 Rules for Elementary School Teachers (2nd Edition)”
(<http://www.happyabout.com/42rules/elementary-teachers.php>)

“42 Rules for Elementary School Teachers (2nd Edition)” can be purchased as an eBook for \$14.95 or tradebook for \$19.95 at <http://www.happyabout.com/42rules/elementary-teachers.php> or at other online and physical book stores.

Please contact us for quantity discounts sales@superstarpress.com or to be informed about upcoming titles bookupdate@superstarpress.com or phone (408-257-3000).

"This book of rules would make Dr. Phil smile. The precise, practical and child centered volume is perfect for the new teacher. By incorporating research, common sense and big doses of humor, this quick and dirty read should be on every new teachers' (and veteran teachers' as well) professional library shelf."

**Dr. Michael O'Laughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services,
Union School District, San Jose, CA**

Written by an experienced educator, *42 Rules for Elementary School Teachers* is a collection of personal and practical professional advice on how to thrive as an elementary school teacher. These guiding best practices promote clear connections to successfully creating a learning community that supports students while keeping teachers sane and successful. Here are the rules that will help teachers rule the school. Whether it's your first year teaching, your last, or somewhere in between, *42 Rules for Elementary School Teachers* will give you easy to implement strategies for being an outstanding and effective educator.

Susan Guerrero shares the rules she has learned and lived in over twenty years in education. Her experiences as an educator are varied and diverse giving her a full understanding of the personal and professional challenges teachers face. As a supporter of teachers Susan brings the insights she has gained from being both inside and outside the classroom.

42 Rules for Elementary School Teachers is for any teacher who wants to stay connected to the joy of teaching or who wants to learn:

- What you need to do to be successful before students ever enter the classroom
- Why we need to ask important questions
- What PREP really is and how it will help you reach every student
- Why you can relax and still be a phenomenal force for learning



SUSAN GUERRERO

is a second generation educator who is passionate about teaching and learning. A K-12 teacher, specialist, staff developer, university instructor, principal and educational ambassador, Susan is an advocate for parents, students and teachers. In working with each Susan has come to know, experience and appreciate the many ways in which teachers can create caring and effective classrooms. Susan is the Executive Director of the Heart of Learning Foundation which supports professional growth for teachers and scholarship opportunities for students. She lives in Pleasanton, California with her son and daughter.

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