

Dear First-Year Teacher

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There are so many things that I wish I could go back and tell myself during that first year as a new teacher. I had known since the age of eight that God was calling me to teach. It was what I imagined as a child and played with my friends, but my journey to the classroom was long and laborious.

Somewhere along the way, I lost sight of God calling me to the classroom and ended up with a college degree that I did not expect: a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish. As God does, though, He used my Spanish degree for His glory and led me to the world of TESOL through a graduate program that also offered initial teaching certification. While this extended my journey to the classroom, there is no doubt that TESOL education is where God had been leading me all along. Even though I took the scenic route to my calling, He foresaw my steps and opened each appropriate door along the way.

While in my graduate program, I was completing assignments to equip me in my future role as a teacher, and before I knew it, I was there in my classroom. I was standing in front of a sea of young faces who did not just see me as their teacher. I was also their counsellor, role model, mediator, cheerleader, voice of reason, nurse, surrogate parent on occasion, confidant, cultural liaison if they moved from a different country, and even their translator at times. As a teacher of linguistically and culturally diverse students, many times I served as the one-person welcoming committee to a new school, a new culture, and a new language.

If I could send a message to the first-year teacher I once was, this is what I would share with her:

Dear First-Year Me,

I know you are excited to finally have your own classroom. You are excited to pick out your classroom materials and arrange your students' desks. However, I also know that you are nervous from the expectations now resting upon your shoulders. You are slowly realizing that teaching encompasses more than just providing differentiated instruction, assessment, and data analysis. You are seeing that as teachers, we do not only teach content; we change lives. During one school year, you are only allotted nine

months with a child. It is during this time that you have the opportunity to speak life and positivity in their hearts and minds. Sometimes your smile may be the only one they see that day, and your words of affirmation may be the only ones they receive. Don't take a day with your students for granted.

In the midst of that first year, you will also struggle, and this profession will be difficult at times. Remember that this classroom and these students is where God has been leading you since you were a child. Each year, God handpicks every single student who enters your classroom, and you may need to repeat that to yourself on those difficult days that you will most assuredly encounter. If you begin to doubt yourself or your role as a teacher, remember that God has called you to this work, and He will equip you to fulfill your role. This calling on your heart has excited your soul since childhood; do not let the difficult days deter you. Yes, it will be hard. Yes, there will be times when you question if teaching was the right profession. During those times, though, cling to the One who will carry you through the doubts. You were made for this! **TEACH**

Author information:

Holly W. Arnold teaches undergraduate and graduate teacher education courses in the field of TESOL at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia, United States. Most recently she was selected by the U.S. State Department to work with the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine as an English Language Specialist. She served as the plenary speaker for TESOL-Ukraine and trained teacher-trainers from all over the country. Dr. Arnold has worked in teacher training and professional development in the public-school system, at the college level, nationally, and internationally. Her academic interests and publications address: teacher education, support, and preparedness in culturally responsive pedagogy for linguistically and culturally diverse students; the achievement and experiences of English learners in the online learning environment; and English learners in innovative delivery models and classrooms. Dr. Arnold resides in the mountains of Blairsville, Georgia, U.S.A. with her husband and two children.

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