

THE FIRST DAYS OF SCHOOL

by Katherine Schultz, Schaeffer Academy

How often has a teacher new to the classroom—whether fresh out of university or transitioning from another career—been fully ready for what happens in the first few days, or even hours of school?

Though nothing can replace a colleague or principal who can answer questions, a very useful resource for help with organizing and planning instruction is Harry K. Wong and Rosemary T. Wong's *The First Days of School*. One suitable subtitle could be "Stating The Obvious For People Who Haven't Had Time to Figure It Out Yet." So often, new teachers lack the practical tools they need at the very beginning of a school year, and the rest of the school faculty and staff is desperately trying to get ready themselves at the same time. The authors preview for new teachers the four phases they believe all effective teachers will experience in their long-term careers: (1) the fantasy world of new idealism and a belief that all they need to be successful is to be their students' friend and to do fun activities, (2) the survival phase that is reality in the first year or more of teaching, (3) becoming master teachers who solve problems and grow professionally, and (4) making a deep and lasting impact on their students and schools.

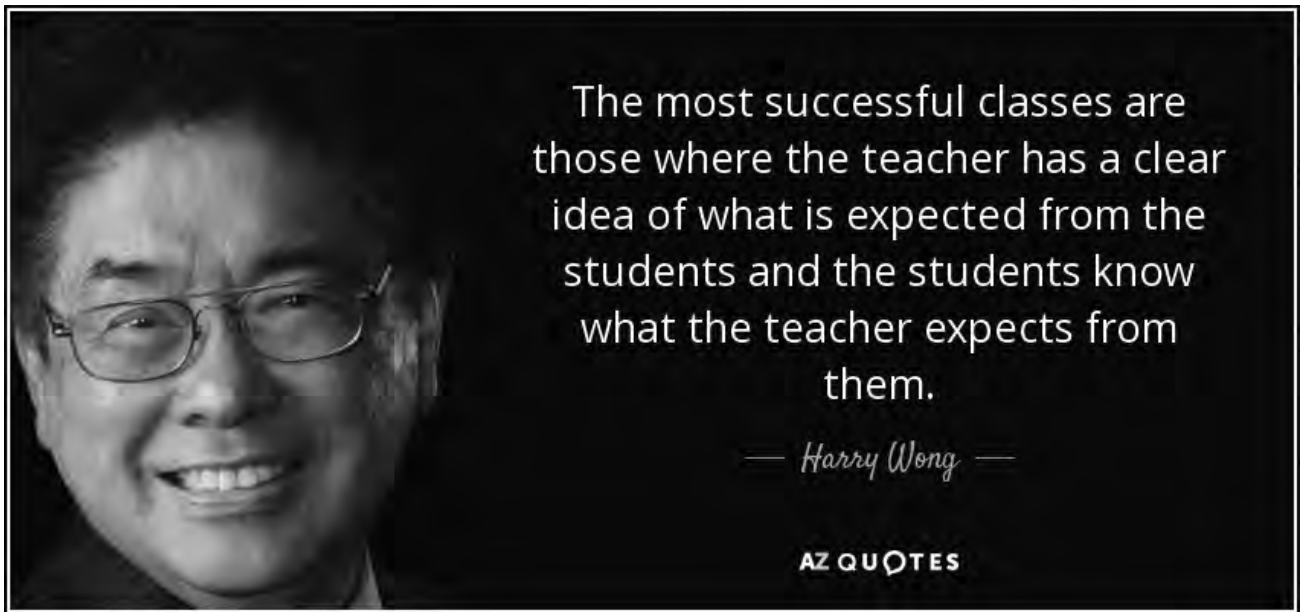
Wong and Wong's advice for the first days of school

BOOK REVIEW: *THE FIRST DAYS OF SCHOOL*
HARRY K. WONG AND
ROSEMARY T. WONG
(ANY EDITION, THOUGH THIS
REVIEW IS BASED ON THE
1998 1ST EDITION)

is consistent with the pedagogical model of classical Christian education as it addresses having positive expectations, being a good classroom manager, and helping students reach learning mastery. Having positive expectations involves the teacher's confidence in his or her own knowledge and skills as a teacher, and confidence in the students' ability to learn—and to learn very challenging content. Classical Christian educators can set a positive tone from the first day by how they prepare their classrooms, plan their lessons, and welcome their students and parents. They have the added benefit of being able to acknowledge the role of the Creator in making students who can learn.

Being a good classroom manager means investing time at the beginning of the year learning routines so

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The most successful classes are those where the teacher has a clear idea of what is expected from the students and the students know what the teacher expects from them.

— Harry Wong —

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that all through the rest of the year there is less need for correction and discipline. Good habits maximize learning time. Orderly environments support deeper thinking and learning because they reduce distractions. Classical Christian educators can exercise proper authority in the classroom through effective but simple rules and procedures, and can hold students accountable for their behaviors so that the class has minimal distractions to learning.

Wong and Wong's ideas of lesson planning, instruction, and assessment are consistent with John Milton Gregory's *Seven Laws of Teaching*. Helping students reach learning mastery means the teacher needs to know the subject well enough to identify what is to be mastered (1st Law: Law of the Teacher), and the students clearly grasping what is to be learned and being able to communicate that effectively with the students (3rd Law: Law of the Language; 4th Law: Law of the Lesson). It means the teacher directs what is happening in the classroom toward those specific learning goals, demanding students' attention (2nd Law: Law of the Learner) and arousing students' minds (5th Law: Law of the Lesson). But it also means that the students, rather than the teacher, are doing most of the work in the classroom because they are the ones who need to learn

(6th Law: Law of the Learning Process).

As much as the ideas are helpful in a classical Christian school classroom, *The First Days of School* is not the whole of what such schools want their teachers to understand. Classical Christian school instructional supervisors will want to work with their new faculty to assure they are teaching and assessing all the tools of learning (grammar, logic, and rhetoric), deeply integrating Scripture, and exercising wisdom directly dependent on their own relationship with God. Nevertheless, as a starting point for some of the logistics of the classroom, it is a useful resource.