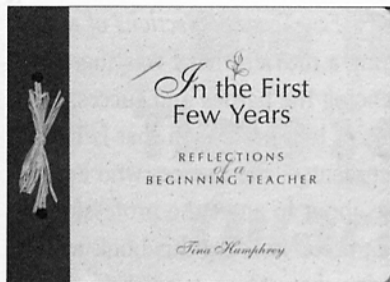


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**In the First Few Years:
Reflections of a
Beginning Teacher**

Written by Tina
Humphrey. Newark,
Delaware: International
Reading Association, 2003.
\$12.95; 108 pages. ISBN 0-
87207-000-X

As a teacher educator, I am continually seeking textbooks and other resources that can be useful to the young teachers in training who are not only entering a profession but who are also engaging in the life struggles of becoming self-reliant adults. Tina Humphrey's book *In the First Few Years: Reflections of a Beginning Teacher* is a resource that I am adding to my list. I am considering this book akin to a textbook—even though its format and content are far from what is traditionally considered a textbook—for a college course. Like the traditional textbook, this book is packed with information that fills the survival pack of a new teacher, but unlike the textbook, this book is written in a personal and friendly style. The most significant benefit of Humphrey's book is the most obvious one—this is written by a

teacher who has recently completed the first three critical years of teaching, the time period when, according to statisticians, teaching begins to make sense for the 63 percent who decide to stay and sign a contract for a fourth year.

Information is not vacuum-packed in chapters labeled with topics like “Curriculum” or “Assessing Student Outcomes.” Humphrey's book has chapters with topic-driven titles, nonetheless, but they are less connected to content and more connected to the context of teaching. Each chapter addresses a different struggle, feeling, or essence tied into teaching and offers advice on how to deal with different situations. The way in which this knowledge is shared provides a comforting environment for the reader. “You are valuable and precious, and your students need you to be well,” writes Humphrey (40). In another chapter, “Becoming a Mother to Many,” Humphrey describes her personal experiences and sympathies as she embraces her students and becomes “a single mother of 120 kids” (82). All the titles suggest this refreshingly personalized perspective as she weaves in the concepts covered in how-to-teach textbooks.

The chapters, all between four to six pages in length, are easy to read because she writes as though she is the reader's assigned

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mentor. Perhaps most valuable to the reader is the list of concrete tips, tidbits of advice that can be jotted down on paper or engraved in memory. While providing lots of guidance in the classroom, Humphrey also reminds the reader that there is more involved in teaching than what is happening in the classroom—“[Make] parents a priority right off the bat” (55); find a school or district that “provides [a mentor] who is . . . caring and supportive” (99); “be open with your administration. If you’re having trouble, ask for help or ask who can help you” (103). By offering advice, consolation, and humor to relieve tense thoughts, and generally sprinkling comforting words, Humphrey lessens the nervousness and anxiety that seem inescapable components of the new teachers’ experience.

In many ways, reading *In the First Few Years: Reflections of a Beginning Teacher* is like watching a movie: I felt I was there in Humphrey’s classroom, experiencing the battles and successes, the agony and joy, the commitment to a profession that is like no other. This is what I want my students—the novices who are in their mid-twenties and who are about to enter the professional world of schooling—to know and feel. Reading this book will undoubtedly help them to imagine themselves as teachers.

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