

AVISO

THE MAGAZINE FOR NOVA SCOTIA'S TEACHING PROFESSION
LA REVUE DE LA PROFESSION ENSEIGNANTE DE LA NOUVELLE-ÉCOSSE

FALL 2008



NEW TEACHERS — BUILDING THE FUTURE



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Art and the Global Classroom

Terri Vernon



In its eighth year of operation, deviantART (link: <http://www.deviantart.com/>) is an online artist's community, home to eight million users from 190 countries. There are countless art galleries and art collections on the web, but deviantART is one of the largest and most active virtual art communities currently in existence. I was introduced to the site by my students who use it for ideas, tutorials, and raw materials. Many of my graphic design students maintain profiles on deviantART and they regularly upload their artwork, drawings, and photos. I wanted to know why this site appealed to my students and I knew that I needed to learn whatever I could from the site. So, in the summer of 2006, I created a profile on deviantART and began uploading my own artwork.

I was curious to understand what my students and their peers were learning from this site. As a teenager in the seventies I learned about art from attending class, looking at art books, visiting art galleries, and drawing in my sketchbook. My students, who grew up with cellphones, computers and the Internet, have had a very different experience. They are learning about art from looking at websites and, by the time they get to college, most of them have been using digital cameras and computers to create art for years. For centuries, art teachers were sure that the techniques and skills they learned as apprentice artists were entirely appropriate to pass onto their students. Thanks to the radical changes in culture and technology in the last 20 years, I began to wonder what skills, knowledge, and assumptions I needed to help my students negotiate this fast moving, global, competitive, electronic marketplace.

Originally, I created a deviantART profile because I felt it would help me better understand the site. However, instead of maintaining a disinterested researcher's stance, I quickly began to watch my page views. The number of times your artwork is viewed is logged and displayed on your profile and gallery pages. After a few years on the site, I find it fascinating to look at

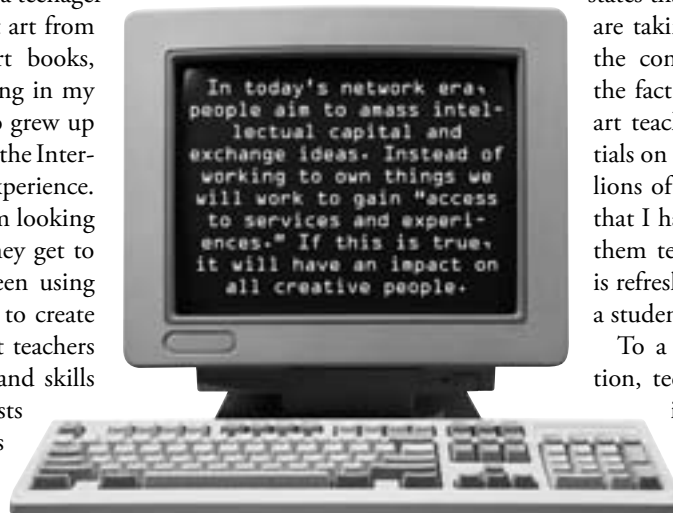
the page views of different pieces in my gallery. Certain pieces, which I personally like, have very few page views; this indicates to me that they are not as popular as other pieces in my gallery. Thanks to deviantART, I know that some of my pieces have been viewed thousands of times by people from all over the world.

On the web you can decide what to look at, and what to participate in. You can formulate and state your opinions with a lightning fast reaction time. I learned this myself when I uploaded a painting to my gallery on deviantART. A few people liked it and I got some instant feedback. One teenager stated that she loved the image but gave suggestions on how I could improve it; I replied that I agreed with her critique. Don Tapscott, a writer who has researched what he calls the "net generation",

states that "for the first time ever, children are taking control of critical elements of the communications revolution." I like the fact that even though I am a trained art teacher with well established credentials on deviantART, I am just one of millions of artists worldwide. The feedback that I have received from artists, many of them teenagers from different countries, is refreshing and exciting. I feel like I am a student in a global classroom.

To a member of the Internet generation, technology is as natural as breathing. Baby boomers can learn technology and become very adept at it, but for boomers the technology is not a natural extension of their beings. The

young learn to manage whatever computer tasks they are doing quickly and intuitively. I have noticed this while teaching software in the computer lab. The younger students usually learn computer operations easily, while mature students sometimes struggle. Based on my experience from browsing the site, most deviantART users are teenagers. They are comfortable with the technology and they are not shy about showing their artwork to the entire world.



Tapscott suggests that the values inherent to the net generation include independence, strong opinions, collaboration, and participation. He feels that the new technology offers wonderful opportunities for learning compared to the numbing effect that TV had on baby boomers. According to the research Tapscott undertook with 300 young people over the course of one year, "the children of the digital age appear to be smart, accepting of diversity, curious, assertive, self-reliant, high in self-esteem, and global in orientation." After participating in deviantART, I would agree with these observations. I observed collaboration, tolerance, articulate debate, energy, and enthusiasm, most of which was coming from 16-19 year olds (if their profile information was correct).

On deviantART my academic credentials and occupation carry very little currency. My work is displayed in the same manner as every user and if people like it they visit my page and leave a comment. Young people have given me insightful criticisms about some weaker aspects of my images. I have learned from deviantART members and hopefully they have learned something from me.

Jeremy Rifkin claims that our economy is in the process of dematerializing, and that all remnants of world culture are being co-opted and "commodified." In the historic market era, people worked to amass physical capital and exchange goods. In today's network era, people aim to amass intellectual capital

and exchange ideas. Instead of working to own things we will work to gain "access to services and experiences." If this is true, it will have an impact on all creative people. What Rifkin is saying about the economy certainly applies to deviantART. A great deal of the artwork on deviantART exists only as computer information, not as a piece of paper or canvas in the real world. In addition, although it may appear to be just a huge online art gallery, as an online community deviantART is very effective as a supplier of experiences. I learned this vividly during my participation on the site. I began to look forward to checking my page views and reading comments people had made about my work. I even scanned some old drawings and touched them up because I wanted to make my gallery look as good as possible. I find that the community experiences supplied by deviantART keep me coming back to the site.

The many online encounters and events that our students experience are a force to be reckoned with. After participating in deviantART, I truly believe that teachers should start an account on the site, upload their artwork, and let the fun and learning begin.


Terri Robin Vernon is a faculty member at the Nova Scotia Community College, Middleton Campus. Terri's deviantART page: <http://robincanada.deviantart.com/>

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Planning a School Musical

Gary Ewer

The lights dim, the orchestra plays, the curtains open, the show begins.... There is nothing quite like a musical to generate excitement in a high school. You will find that a musical can be a marvelous way to draw students into the musical life of your school. You will witness with every show you do that students who have previously been shy and withdrawn suddenly find confidence and a creative proficiency. A musical is one of those tremendously valuable activities schools can offer that will provide memories for students which will remain with them for their entire lives. Musicals require students to work together to achieve a goal in a noncompetitive environment, and they provide opportunities to bring in professionals from the artistic community to lend expertise and experience to budding musicians and actors. In all, musicals represent one of the most practical and valuable experiences for enhancing students' training in the fine arts.

Musicals take much work, with planning beginning a full year before the performance dates. Your school's financial position may be a concern; to perform a Broadway show can cost several thousands of dollars, depending on the extent of your preparations. But they can also generate a great deal of revenue, and yearly productions can pay for themselves if the finances are handled prudently.

Since mounting a show can be an expensive enterprise, plan on doing more than one performance. A minimum of three public performances is optimum.

Pre-planning a Musical

If you have never done a musical in your school before, there are four details you will need to consider before proceeding with the idea of mounting a show:

- administrative support
- funding
- a performance venue
- staff and student interest and their support.

In terms of administrative support, there is no sense in proceeding with the plans if your school's administration does not

support the idea. If you suspect that your school's administration will be skeptical about the idea, put together a short (1-2 pages) essay outlining the benefits of doing a show. You may want to include testimonials from students of other high schools who describe their positive experiences with participating in a show.

Funding will be a serious consideration because shows can be expensive. It is impossible to state the cost with any accuracy here, because it really depends on what materials you have and what other resources you will need. You will need to pay for the performance rights of the show and hopefully you will need to find volunteers to fill the positions such as director, producer, stage manager. Keep in mind that if your school does not have a proper venue, you may need to rent a local hall. Also, there

is always the need for various props, costumes and publicity. The advice here is to get a handle on how much money your particular show will cost as early in the process as possible.

Your first and most important resource for obtaining information about any show is to consult the Internet. Rental companies will be able to furnish synopses, available orchestration, plus important contact information.

The Pit Orchestra


If you have an instrumental program within your school, most of the pit orchestra can be auditioned from your concert band. You may want to consider hiring professionals for three key positions: piano, bass and drum set. These three players will form the backbone of any pit orchestra, and it is vital that the music be rhythmically tight. Momentary inaccuracies in your flutist may not cause a serious problem in a performance, but problems with the drum set could be disastrous, particularly for the singers.

A musical will provide lifelong memories for you and your students. It will provide a unique opportunity to bring together various aspects of the fine arts in your school. You will also find that musicals will engage people in an artistic endeavor who might not normally involve themselves in the arts. Enjoy the experience!




A MUSICAL TIMELINE


12 Months:

	Create production team (producer, stage manager musical director). Choose show.
	Hire a director and negotiate price. Meet with school administration. Obtain performance venue.


6 Months:

	Contact rental company to obtain rights.
	Arrange to obtain piano/vocal score right away.
	Reserve performance venue and organize a design meeting.


5 Months:

	Announce auditions. Hire rehearsal pianist for auditions and rehearsals. Choose audition music and make it available.
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4 and a 1/2 Months:

	Hold auditions/call-backs. Choose main characters. Post cast list. Advertise within school for backstage crew (building sets, painting scenery, assembling props).
--	--

4 Months:

	Read through script with entire cast. Props crew: begin constructing sets. Begin onstage and music (singing) rehearsals.
---	--


3 Months:

	Form the following committees: Costume/Make Up, Publicity/Ticket Sales, Lighting/Sound. Contact extra musicians for pit.
---	--


9 Weeks:

	Hold pit orchestra auditions.
---	-------------------------------


8 Weeks:

	Begin advertising campaign. Cast should now have costumes or know where to get them. Post pit orchestra member list.
---	--


7 Weeks:

	Begin pit rehearsals. Production meeting (communication between production team and all committees).
---	--


4 Weeks:

	Production meeting – plan final week of rehearsals, stage use by various teams. Acquire necessary permission to excuse students from class for any schedule conflicts. Invite area schools to preview show.
---	---


2 Weeks:

	Rehearsal with pit and cast (Sing through). Pit rehearsal(s) of dance music with dancers. Run-through of show with onstage cast and piano.
---	--


1 Week:

	Props and scenery complete and ready for use (earlier if possible). Run of scene changes with stage crew. Complete run of show with pit orchestra and cast.
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5 Days:

	Final pit rehearsal to iron out problem spots. Cue-to-cue: work out lighting cues.
---	--


4 Days:

	Technical run of show with sound, all props, light cues, and scene changes.
---	---

3 Days:

	Complete run of show with orchestra. Provide notes after run.
---	---

2 Days (or day before show):

	DRESS REHEARSAL
	Allow one day before public run as a day off to rest the cast.

Gary Ewer is a music educator currently on leave of absence from the Halifax Regional School Board. Currently, Gary Ewer is a full-time instructor in the Dalhousie University Music Department.

Asia Field School 2008

Deborah McVeigh

There are many different professional development opportunities for members of the Nova Scotia Community College. One such opportunity is the NSCC Field Schools offered each year. This past spring, Raylene Langley, Faculty - General Arts & Science, and Lorraine Pye-Varnes, Training Coordinator at the NSCC Marconi Campus, attended the Nova Scotia Community College Field School that consisted of spending approximately four weeks in Southeast Asia.

What is the purpose of the NSCC Field Schools?

According to Bill Howse, 2008 Field School Leader, the Field School was established to "...create a global outlook in our curriculum, student learning, and employee experiences. The Field School creates the opportunity for the whole NSCC community from students to staff and faculty to have an international experience. This experience will become part of the person's approach to their studies, their students, and their job."

Who attended, and when and where did you go?

Raylene: Eleven NSCC employees participated, including the Field School leader. We left Wednesday, April 30, 2008, and returned Tuesday, May 27, 2008 after visiting Thailand, Vietnam, and China.

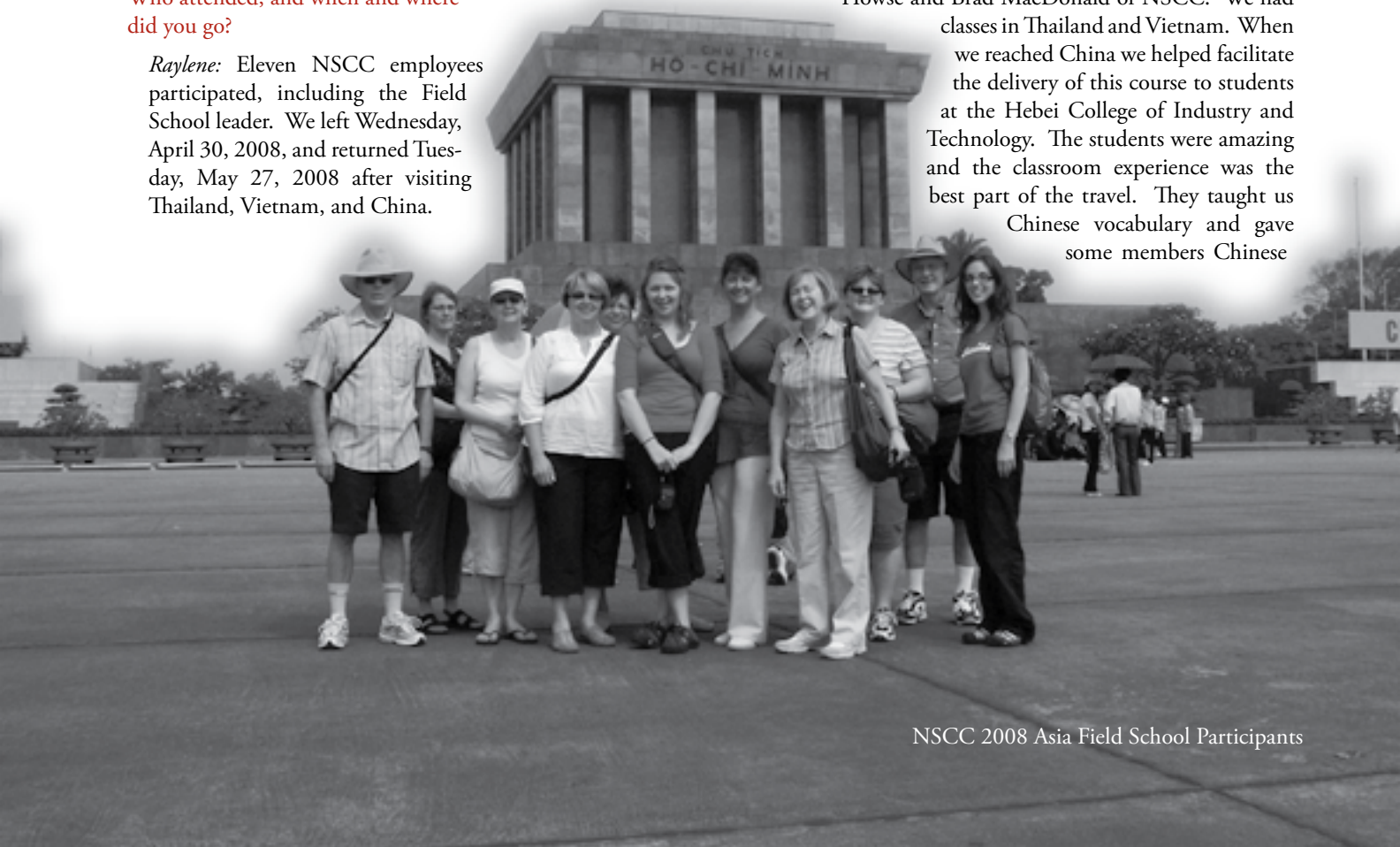
What preparation was involved in getting ready for this experience?

Raylene: Once our application was approved, we were responsible for attending a one-day orientation session in Halifax, completing visa applications, and getting the required immunizations. The orientation session was valuable because it gave us an opportunity to meet each other, be briefed on the expectations, and to be introduced to some of the cultural norms.

Lorraine: The Centre for International Studies organized the orientation that included the many forms and information supplied to us. We would like to thank Shannon Hines, Program Assistant, NSCC International, for sharing her expertise in helping us prepare for our Field School.

What educational experience was involved for both of you?

Lorraine/Raylene: The NSCC course that we were involved in was International Business Culture delivered by Bill Howse and Brad MacDonald of NSCC. We had classes in Thailand and Vietnam. When we reached China we helped facilitate the delivery of this course to students at the Hebei College of Industry and Technology. The students were amazing and the classroom experience was the best part of the travel. They taught us Chinese vocabulary and gave some members Chinese



NSCC 2008 Asia Field School Participants

I became more aware of communication barriers and issues that present themselves in the classroom.

I learned how different we are, but how much the same we are.

names. The students were young, extremely attentive and respectful, and very interested about life in Canada. In essence, we were learning how to communicate effectively within other cultures.

How much travel was involved in this trip?

Lorraine/Raylene: We left by plane from Halifax, and it took us approximately 20 hours to reach our first destination, Bangkok, Thailand. Once there, we travelled by boat, cab, or tuktuk (motorized vehicle). This mode of transportation was extremely fast and exhilarating. The amount of traffic in each country was a big culture shock. In Vietnam, travel was by bus, cab or we walked. Between countries, air was the means of transport. In China, a bus was used to take our group to various venues.

How were the meals?

Raylene: The food was very good and also beautifully presented. It was very different in each country, but overall we enjoyed the variety of food and if you desired western food, it was readily available.

Lorraine: I tried a lot of traditional food and thoroughly enjoyed it — Thai food was my favorite. There was a lot of personal service in restaurants/stores.

How did you communicate?

Raylene: Language was not as great a problem as I had anticipated. You could always communicate somehow, and often we had our guides to help.

Lorraine: Thailand had the most English speakers because tourism is an important part of the economy. However, in Vietnam the second language was often French. That was challenging because our understanding of French was somewhat limited and the dialect was different. In China, there were many places where English wasn't spoken, so we used sign language and laughter to communicate if we didn't have our guides with us.

What learning experiences did you take back to your classroom/job?

Raylene: The experience to share this wonderful adventure of a written culture that is more than 4000 years old really opens your eyes to different values. I became more aware of communication barriers and issues that present themselves in the classroom. I learned how different we are, but how much the same we are.

Lorraine: An appreciation for what we take for granted in Canada as well as an appreciation for other cultures, religions and beliefs. A broader understanding of other cultures will be beneficial to my role with NSCC and this will augment my portfolio learning.

What was your most memorable experience?

Raylene: One of my most memorable experiences was being in China during the official three days of mourning for the victims of the 2008 earthquake. Witnessing all traffic stop for three minutes and hearing the sound of car horns symbolizing the wailing of Chinese people through this tragedy was very moving and something I will never forget.

Lorraine: To witness a closed society, like China, publicly mourn for the first time in history was very astounding.

Would you recommend this experience?

Raylene: Yes, I would recommend it to anyone, but it is a very big commitment to be away from family, home, and your workplace. Also being away from things that are familiar to you is a challenge. You will definitely have memories that will last a lifetime. One of the best things was sharing the experience with our group who were great travelling companions!

Lorraine: I certainly would without hesitation. The more I reflect on the trip, the more amazing it becomes. It was certainly a life-changing experience. There was much preparation and a lot of learning that took place getting ready for the trip. However leaving my children for a month was easier with their support. The group realized during the trip that email was the easiest way to communicate with our families especially because of the different time zones.

What was the cost for the Asia Field School?

Lorraine/Raylene: There was a personal financial commitment by the individual but also support from NSCC. Credit must also be given to our Chinese hosts from the Hebei College of Industry and Technology who undertook all necessary arrangements during our time in China to make our learning experience a memorable one.

Deborah McVeigh is a faculty member at the Nova Scotia Community College, Marconi Campus.

10 Ten Things You Need To Know About Gifted Students

Janine MacAuley

Few students leave an impression in the way James did. Within days of entering my grade seven classroom he was a standout. He was genuinely engaged in my lessons, citing documentaries and journal articles related to whatever topic the class was discussing. His vocabulary was sophisticated and he had a heightened appreciation for puns and satire. He excelled in every subject (with the possible exception of physical education), but his social awkwardness prevented him from being embraced fully as a member of the class. One would think that his classmates would have done him his greatest injustice that year, but it was, in fact, his teacher.

It was not from lack of genuine concern for James that I let him stagnate in grade seven. It was a lack of knowledge about what he needed from me. I knew he was gifted, but that knowledge was more a curse than a benefit as I – apologetically – handed him back assignments with perfect scores week after week.

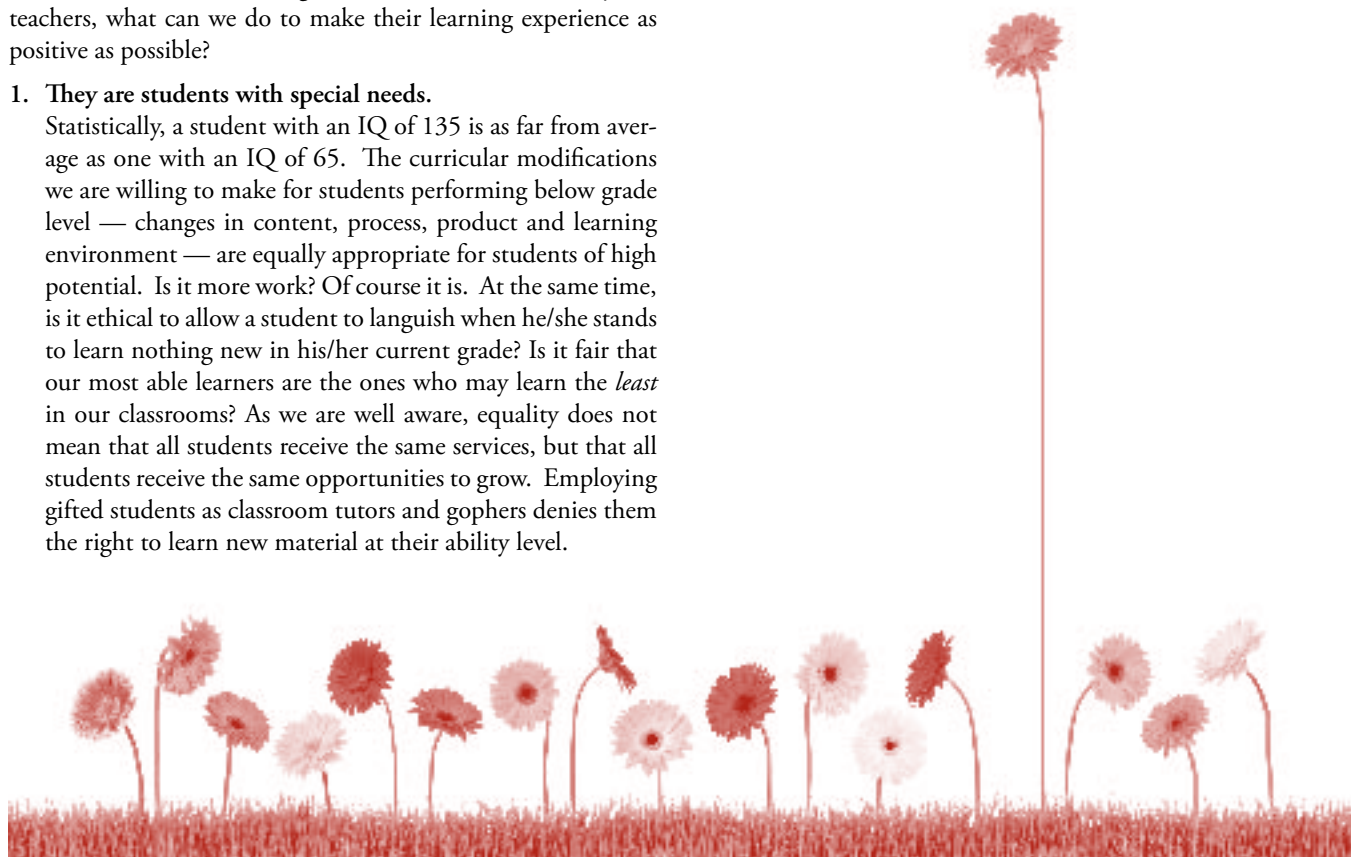
My experience with James and others like him set me on a course to learn more about gifted students. Who are they? As teachers, what can we do to make their learning experience as positive as possible?

1. They are students with special needs.

Statistically, a student with an IQ of 135 is as far from average as one with an IQ of 65. The curricular modifications we are willing to make for students performing below grade level — changes in content, process, product and learning environment — are equally appropriate for students of high potential. Is it more work? Of course it is. At the same time, is it ethical to allow a student to languish when he/she stands to learn nothing new in his/her current grade? Is it fair that our most able learners are the ones who may learn the *least* in our classrooms? As we are well aware, equality does not mean that all students receive the same services, but that all students receive the same opportunities to grow. Employing gifted students as classroom tutors and gophers denies them the right to learn new material at their ability level.

2. Gifted students do not necessarily know they are gifted.

Gifted students do not necessarily have all the knowledge they need to reach their full potential. Many teachers may find gifted students threatening or feel they have nothing to teach them. The reality is that classroom teachers are gifted students' best chances for having their gifts recognized. While gifted students may know more than we ever will in areas like astronomy, music or ancient history, they still need guidance in learning skills, such as organizing information, time management, using reference materials, and seeing tasks to completion. They also need help in affective matters, such as dealing with perfectionism and the feeling of being different from their peers.



3. They may require a range of services.

Gifted students generally benefit from two types of curriculum modification. The first is *acceleration*. Through acceleration the student completes the prescribed curriculum in less time. Acceleration strategies such as early entrance to primary, skipping a whole grade, within-subject acceleration, curriculum compacting, telescoping, challenge for credit and early admission to college or university increase the pace at which gifted students learn. *Enrichment* strategies may be employed when the student keeps pace with his age peers but has blocks of time available for in-depth study of a topic of interest. Independent studies, mentorships, study contracts, levelled assignments, extension activities, summer and weekend programs, and school-wide enrichment activities are all options to provide gifted students with the depth of knowledge they crave.

4. They are not all teacher-pleasing apple-polishers.

Gifted students are typically portrayed as high-achieving, polite, model students who go on to become doctors. Some of them, like James, are our favorite students. They seem to absorb all that we teach them and engage us in delightfully intelligent conversation. However, while many gifted students find school very satisfying and stimulating, others fly under the radar, troubled by common demons such as boredom, oversensitivity, disorganization, perfectionism, self-doubt, antagonism, sarcasm, and immaturity. Some of our least-engaged students are expertly hiding gifts in one or more areas. After years of not being challenged in the regular classroom, many gifted students believe that people who are smart do not work hard. In fact, they may purposely hide their ability lest their true efforts reveal that they really aren't gifted at all. Others may simply be uninspired. To quote Susan Winebrenner, author of *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom*, "I have rarely met gifted kids who won't do their work, but I have met scores who won't do the teacher's work."

5. They need opportunities to be with other students like them.

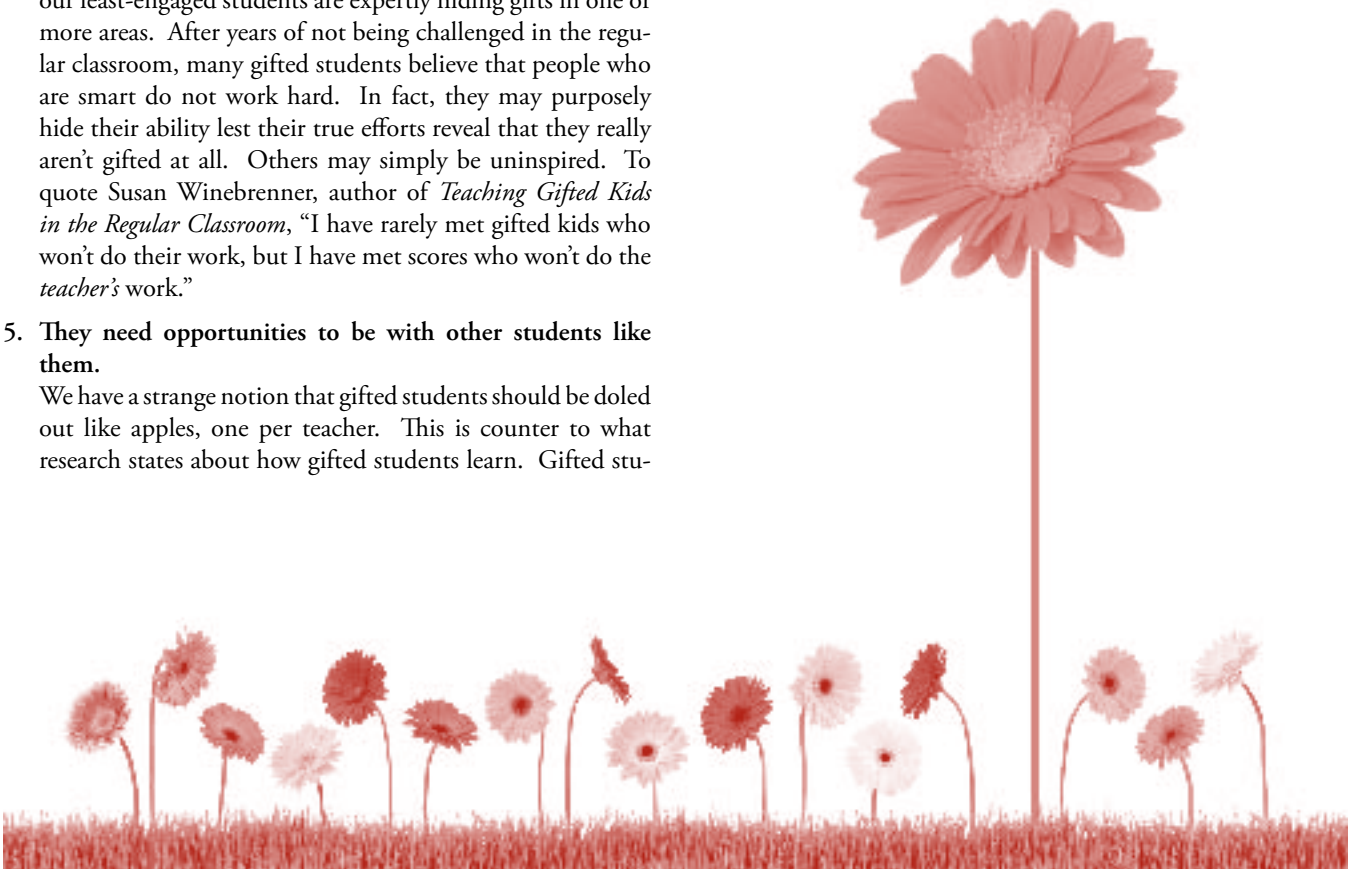
We have a strange notion that gifted students should be doled out like apples, one per teacher. This is counter to what research states about how gifted students learn. Gifted stu-

dents need time to be with their same-ability peers. In fact, the typical approach to cooperative learning (mixed-ability groups of 3-5 students) does an injustice to gifted students. An extensive meta-analysis on ability grouping recently conducted by Karen Rogers has revealed that: advanced students benefit from being grouped together; like-ability groups are academically beneficial to all students when compared to mixed-ability groups; pairing a low-ability student with a high-ability student academically benefits the low-ability student only; and grouping of any sort without curricular modification does not produce academic gains.

A strategy that is growing in popularity in inclusive classrooms is *cluster grouping* in which all gifted students in the same grade are placed together in an otherwise mixed-ability class with a trained teacher who differentiates curriculum for the gifted group.

6. The "gifted" label does not really matter.

Labelling a child "gifted" does not change the learning needs that she had before the label; the learning needs are what require our attention. In fact, some theorists in gifted education argue that the label can be damaging because it leads to a "who's in and who's out" mentality about gifted services. It causes students who are 'identified' to be treated differently. It creates unnecessary anxiety in the student and parents.



7. They mature at different rates in different domains.

Asynchronous or uneven development in physical, emotional, social, and cognitive domains is more pronounced in gifted students because their intellect invites more adult treatment. In other words, the eight-year-old who is preoccupied with World War II may also excitedly anticipate the arrival of Santa Claus. The twelve-year-old future lawyer may cry when he loses a debate. The fifteen-year-old who is enrolled in university math courses may not be ready to date.

8. They exist across cultural, gender and socio-economic groups.

Many of the students before us are commonly overlooked when teachers identify gifted students. Students of African Nova Scotian or Mi'kmaq heritage may not display their gifts because they conflict with their cultural norms and self-image. Gifted girls still face social expectations that they hide their intelligence and put others before themselves. Twice exceptional students — students possessing both gifts and learning/physical disabilities — face internal and external obstacles to revealing their talents. It is the responsibility of teachers to consider each child individually and not against a hypothetical image of a typical “gifted child.”

9. They need strong advocates.

Gifted education is not without controversy. The world is not sympathetic to the plight of the gifted child. Gifted education is seen as elitist. Gifted students are believed to be able to take care of themselves. Ability grouping makes people uncomfortable. Teachers of the gifted are believed to have it easy. Parents of the gifted may be considered braggarts or possibly delusional. Yet, despite these obstacles, gifted students need administrators, teachers, and parents who believe in their potential and seek to have their talents developed. Gifted education is not a frill — it is the nurturing of our future leaders.

10. They do not need teachers who are gifted, but they need gifted teachers.

Teachers of the gifted do not need to have high IQ scores and mile-long resumes. Instead, gifted students need teachers who are cheerful, enthusiastic about learning, value student discovery, employ flexibility in their classroom approach, and have a sense of humour. Most importantly, they need teachers who are genuinely interested in teaching gifted students with all their quirks, challenges, and diverse needs.

Janine MacAuley is English Language Arts Consultant P-6, Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board.



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Ten Things New Teachers Should Know to Make their Professional Careers Easier

David Ritchie



I am from a teaching family. If you had asked me at 20 what I thought about becoming a teacher, I probably would have laughed long and hard. Ten years later I was home for a visit and was asked to consider joining an experimental class of teachers in training who had work experience in other fields. My father, the person who had encouraged me to consider being part of the experiment, was the same person who held the belief that you should never give advice. My conundrum at the time was that I was involved in city planning and strongly disliked the thought of urban life. Nice career planning, eh?

More than thirty years later, I can say without hesitation that I cannot imagine a more satisfying or better life choice for myself. I have had, for the most part, a truly wonderful run as a classroom teacher, an active co- and extracurricular advisor, and an involved union member. Since I did take my father's advice to join the education class, I will hazard to make ten suggestions for new teachers starting their educational careers. These are not meant so much as advice as they are meant as things to consider from someone who has spent a very satisfying career in the trenches. No pie and no sky here!

1

COLLEGIALITY

The very best teaching situation is the collegial school setting. Because of the danger of misinterpretation, I will define exactly what I see as being collegial. A collegial situation is one where all are equal. If it were a diagram, it would be a circle. If it were a consultation model, it would be a talking circle. It is not a top down management pyramid where a person at the so called “top” feels that he or she must manage those lower down. That model belongs buried in the distant past with some long dead Victorian taskmaster - a model clung to by the ignorant and the misguided. In order for systems to work everyone must be encouraged to feel confident that they are being heard and that they are being valued. Collegiality requires trust and commitment. What fool would think that he or she could match the hundreds of years of education, life experience, and professionalism that a whole school staff represents?

The collegial setting allows for productive growth, wonderful work experiences, and, ultimately, the very best schools possible for everyone. Push to make your teaching situation collegial.

2

CURRENT RESEARCH, BEST PRACTICE, AND SUBJECTS

One of the most valuable lessons that I have learned is that success in the classroom means keeping current with what is being discovered about education through extensive brain research. What is being exposed about current best practice in the classroom through objective examination and continuing developments in the subjects that we teach?

One example would be in the teaching of history. Today's students have access to a vast range of primary documentation in every form of media. When I first started teaching history we relied primarily on texts, maps, and lectures. This gave way to collections of primary documents and seminars that in turn stood aside to a whole wealth of primary, secondary, and tertiary documentations that allows for a much more educated approach to the particular history being studied. Students can now practice history as an historian does. The scope of history has changed just as significantly. We now recognize that we live in a global world and need to understand it though an examination of the global context.

In my art history classes I have direct access to some of the greatest art collections in the world. At the click of the mouse my class can visit India or Peru. The insular world has vanished. We are no longer a classroom that is isolated within a single narrow textbook.

3

THE LIE

One of the great joys of teaching is when there is a positive relationship between home and school. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The worst scenario is the parent-teacher consultation that starts off with a parent making the assertion that his or her son or daughter does not lie. Unless that parent is talking about some very special student displaying certain forms of Atticism, they are probably creating some form of defence by going on the offense. I would not recommend a teacher-initiated discussion on the reality of the human capacity and compunction to fabricate, or that the teacher present the Jesuit classification of untruths. Rather, I think it would be wise for the teacher to nod and smile and hope that the rest of the conversation develops in a much more productive manner in the best interest of the student. The parent's “my child doesn't lie” hill is one that is very difficult to climb. Often, it is best not to try. Whenever it is possible to establish a good working relationship between the home and the school it will benefit the whole process of education. A positive working relationship results in the home and the school becoming partners in the education of the student. Avoid “my child doesn't lie” discussions.

4

HEALTHY LIVING

Teaching is a very demanding profession. It requires a healthy mind and body. I can say without reservation that the very best thing you can do to sustain a wonderful career in teaching is to maintain as healthy a mind and body as you can manage. Proper diet, proper exercise, proper rest, and proper recreation are the sound building blocks that keep everyone in tune. Teaching is a very stressful profession. Trying to meet the many and varied educational demands that face the average classroom teacher in Nova Scotia is a truly daunting task. Each school year significant demands are made on the whole education system, and specifically, on the classroom teacher who is working directly on the front line. If you hope to make it to the end of 35 years in the classroom, you need to do specific personal activities.

Adherence to guidelines for healthy living is something that will assist in maintaining a lifestyle which will help battle stress. It is no accident that the teaching year is ten of the twelve months each year. The danger of trying to stretch it beyond those boundaries lead to significant complications. Teaching should never become 24/7. Many beginning teachers need to learn to balance the time spent in the classroom, in the school after hours and at home marking and preparing. It should be supplemented with other undertakings and commitments outside the classroom.

5

ACTIVE UNION INVOLVEMENT

One of the very smartest things I did in my professional life was a very early, active involvement with our Teachers Union. Aside from the great number of very positive, professional experiences that I have had from my union associations, I have established life long friends within a very caring, supportive, and collegial organization. Ask not what the Union can do for you, but rather what you can do for your fellow teachers and yourself through the Union. It is remarkable what the Union has achieved, and that achievement has been the result of dedicated teachers working for the benefit of the profession. The joys of accomplishment through collective action are very positive for the participants.

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You are only one person.
You cannot solve all
problems, meet all needs and
be everything to everybody.
If you try you will fail.

6

EXTRA, And CO-CURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT

Just as Union involvement can brighten your life so can the positive support that comes from involvement with students outside the classroom experience. The reality for many students is that these extra and co-curricular activities make their academic achievements possible. Every teacher should try to find a hobby, a sport, an activity or a club that would allow him or her to assist student development beyond the four walls of the classroom. Yes, our prime concern must be the academic progress of our students, but we owe it to ourselves and to our students to help create activities that will make them, and us, better as whole persons. By exploiting a personal passion for a particular sport, art or activity, the teacher can build a valuable recreational component into his or her life. The benefits are extensive. The neat thing here is that by helping others, we help ourselves. A cautionary note: do not overextend.

7

BOUNDARIES

Know your limits. There are only so many hours in your day. It is critical that as a teacher you learn to manage your time. Effective time management will show definite paybacks to the equilibrium of our personal, family, and professional lives. Overdoing leads to upset and illness. As teachers, we need to know our limits and the limits set for us. As professionals, we need to know what our responsibilities are under the Nova Scotia Education Act and the very specific written policies of the Department of Education. Continuously educating yourself as to Departmental announcements is essential. That is a professional responsibility. You must be current.

You are only one person. You cannot solve all problems, meet all needs, or be everything to everybody. If you try you will fail, so know your own limits. One quick way to know the extent of your strengths is to take time to focus on your weaknesses and to be fair to yourself in your expectations. One thing that upsets me is when I see new teachers who do not have contracts being forced to volunteer for far more activities than they should be expected to undertake. The new teacher is often battling a very steep learning curve to acquire classroom skills and curriculum insights. All too often overloading a new teacher will lead to early disillusionment and burn out — negative effects that may diminish a whole career. As a new teacher, find a mentor who can help you define your limits early in your career.

8

NEGATIVITY

I decided years ago that the very worst thing anyone can bring into a school is negativity. It sucks the life and energy out of everyone and everything. I remember going into a staff room on more than one occasion and having to crawl out before the very essence of my being was destroyed by the negative attitude and atmosphere created by some very unhappy people. My suggestion is that if you are in a negative state of being, find another profession.

The negative, in any form, should always be the subject of some very serious criticism. The worst form of negativity often raises its head during staff meetings. All staff meeting contributions should be stated in the positive. The meetings will go much faster and will result in feelings of good will. I am not suggesting that we need to constantly hang rainbows, making crystals in sunlight in a Pollyanna fashion, but I am suggesting that the purely negative does not help most of us perform our tasks, or assist us in helping others perform their tasks.

9

SHARE THE LOAD

There are always more tasks and undertakings around the school than there seem to be people ready to take them on. Experience has taught me that there are those who share the load and they are the very same people who are the happiest in the school community. The busiest people are often the ones who are ready to take on more responsibilities. I remember working in a school where there were only a small number of teachers willing to do dance duty. This meant that the same teachers supervised all dances. If every staff member had been willing to supervise two dances there would have been more than enough to cover all the dances. When students behave themselves, we owe it to them to provide them with social opportunities like dances, sports teams, arts, and music activities and clubs. We all want to be happy, so share the load. Schools that offer a broad range of extra curricular activities often produce very happy school climates and cultures.

If everyone shares a portion of the burden then no one is left to carry more than they should and everyone can share the joys of participation, commitment and a balanced life.

By exploiting a personal passion for a particular sport, art or activity, the teacher can build a valuable recreational component into his or her life.

10

MAINTAIN A SENSE OF HUMOUR

The ultimate key to success and happiness in the teaching profession is to be able to laugh at yourself. The very best way to balance oneself is to develop a good sense of humour. Never take yourself too seriously. A sense of humour will carry you through the worst that can befall you in a professional life that can be the most rewarding in service to students and the community.

I am sure that as you continue within this marvellous and demanding profession you will develop a series of suggestions for maintaining a happy and successful career. Happy educating!



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Classroom Management Tips for New Teachers

G rard Cormier

It is the beginning of another school year and new teachers are anxiously getting ready for what they hope will be the start of a long and successful teaching career. They have already begun to deal with the numerous tasks that present themselves to all educators; establishing their classroom, communicating with parents, and planning the delivery of the curriculum. Unfortunately, establishing a positive classroom climate (with discipline included) can take precious time away from a teacher's already very busy schedule. The following article contains a list of seven important tips that can help new teachers establish a well-managed classroom. As one size does not fit all, teachers will have to allow for variations depending on the grade level and subject they teach.

DRESS LIKE A PROFESSIONAL

Teachers should be dressed appropriately for the level and courses they teach. This is not to say that they all must dress the same way as this would not be appropriate. For example, physical education teachers are expected to dress differently from elementary classroom teachers. A good rule of thumb is to dress differently from the students so that if a parent arrives in a classroom, they can differentiate between the teacher and the students. When students were asked in a survey what makes teachers professionals, many students answered that teachers were professional if they dressed like professionals.

ESTABLISH A SEATING CHART

Some believe seating charts to be a negative thing because they picture students being forced to sit in the same seat all year long. This does not have to be the case at all. Once attendance has been taken, students can group themselves in a variety of ways to accomplish the work at hand. A seating chart serves two useful purposes. First, it allows the teacher to take attendance in 30 seconds. Without a seating chart, taking attendance could take several minutes, giving students time to exhibit disruptive behaviour. Second, it is a subtle message to the students that they have entered your classroom that you are in charge. New teachers need all the help they can get in establishing themselves as professionals in charge of their classrooms.

SHOW OFF YOUR QUALIFICATIONS

Think about what you see when you enter the offices of other professionals such as doctors, dentists, and administrators. You probably see diplomas, etc., hanging as proud reminders that you are in the presence of a professional. Teachers are professionals too and they also should think about ways to let the people who enter their classroom (office) know it. Besides diplomas, business cards can also be used as some teachers do not have their own classroom. Teachers want to be treated as professionals, therefore they must find ways to show off their professional side. This will go a long way in establishing a positive classroom climate.

BE CAREFUL WHAT STUDENTS CALL YOU

We live in a world where formalities and general politeness seem to be on the decline. I do believe, however, that there are some formalities that should remain as they are conducive to a positive classroom climate. One of these is the way we have students address us as professionals. Teachers can help to create a positive teacher/student rapport by having their students address them by a title, keeping in mind that there are differences depending on the situation. For example, an elementary teacher may ask her students to address her as Miss Pauline, while a secondary teacher may ask her students to address her as Miss Fraser. Shakespeare once said, 'What's in a Name?'; believe it or not there is a great deal in a name if you're a teacher trying to establish a well-managed classroom.

CLASSROOM AESTHETICS COUNT

A teacher's classroom is his/her office; as a result, setting up a well-organized classroom becomes very important. The teacher's desk should be placed in such a way that he/she can see what is happening in the classroom. Try to allow for adequate walking space whenever possible as this will minimize students running into each other. Walls should not be left blank, although rules about how much wall space can be covered up can be restrictive. Whatever you are allowed to put on the classroom walls should be inspirational and educational in nature. I often put up posters with inspirational messages and at times found these same messages quoted by students in their written work. Students read what is on the walls! Make your classroom as welcoming as possible.

CLASSROOM RULES

Classroom rules are necessary; however, be careful of the number of rules you have. A general rule of thumb is to have between four and seven. Make certain that they are shared with students, parents, and administrators at the beginning of the year. If you make them general in nature you will be able to cover a lot of territory. For example, a rule which states that all students are to be treated with respect in your classroom says a great deal. Students can be asked for their input about rules; this sometimes helps as they feel as if they have some ownership of the rules. As a teacher, you are responsible for your rules and their consequences and may be asked to answer for them with parents or administrators. Make certain that you are comfortable with them.

TEACH YOUR STUDENTS PROCEDURES

With regard to behaviour, teachers must show students the way. It is essential that procedures are put in place that will allow for a well-run classroom at the beginning of the school year. For example, procedures can be put in place for the distribution and the collection of student work, for the handling of all the money that arrives in a classroom, for the way late students enter the classroom, for what students should do during the first two minutes of class, and the list goes on. Remember that procedures must be repeated so that students will remember them. If it takes you several days or weeks at the beginning of the year to establish your procedures, it will be well worth it. Their implementation will allow you to be able to teach for the rest of the year.

In the end much comes down to the perception others have of us. Do the people who enter our classroom (students, parents, administrators) perceive us to be professionals who are in charge? The seven tips mentioned in this article will go a long way in helping educators exude an air of confidence truly worthy of the teaching profession.

Gérard Cormier is Executive Staff Officer, Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

Meeting the Challenge

Jeannie Stone

One of the biggest challenges that educators face today is testing and assessment accountability. It seems the old cautionary saying about losing sight of the forest for the trees may need to be revisited, at least in education. For example, today spreadsheet calculations provide us with instant reports that show how a specific grade level is meeting projected outcomes using individual school, entire board, or even province-wide results. These numbers are gathered from generalized testing conducted among students at targeted grade levels. We have seen these results reported in the media and commented upon by government and school board administrators. As a result, administrators feel pressured to improve the overall numbers and we, as educators, feel that pressure as well.

By focusing on how well Grade Three students across the province are faring (the forest) we could lose sight of how each individual Grade Three student (the tree) fits into our system and our classroom. Educators must both facilitate and guard against the push to improve school or grade scores. We must be on guard for any move or language that treats all students, or even individual students in one grade level, as a block or single entity. We must therefore, make an even greater effort to accommodate the individual child. Individual success leads to group success and higher overall scores. How can educators remain focused on the individual in such a way that still allows their students to soar?

We must look at the whole child. Two or three decades ago we spent the whole year studying curriculum. Curriculum con-

tent was everything, and all students studied the same content, at the same time, and in the same way. We tried to fit, or maybe even force, each child into the curriculum. Today we know better than to try to force a student into a program — one size does not fit all.

When we first meet our students we need to get to know them as individuals, each with unique strengths and challenges, and as we do this, we must get to know the whole child. We know a student will not improve in reading unless we are able to meet the child exactly where he or she is reading now; hence, “guided reading.” We do this with our entire curriculum today.

Really understanding a child is about more than assessing reading level or basic comprehension skills. It is about recognizing where the child is in his or her life. The child will succeed when we look at the whole child. This means understanding and accepting the baggage a child brings to school each day.

The education system is a great deal more exciting than it was decades ago, but children have much more to deal with today. Now we have cyber-bullying, drugs, anorexia, homophobia and much more. Children are dealing with adult problems at a very young age. How do we accept and understand that while still working to meet curriculum goals and help each student achieve?

One successful way is the Challenge Day program at Mountainview Elementary School. It allows staff members to recognize the individual challenges faced by their students, and allows students to realize that they are not alone in being chal-



lenged by the complications that life offers. Initially the idea was to help Grade Six students deal with social issues that they would face in junior high. It was quickly discovered, however, that these sessions help us as educators just as much — or even more — than they do the children.

More than 100 students have taken part in the annual Challenge Day activities during the past two years. The students gather in large groups, as well as smaller more-focused groups, to listen to guests who discuss their own challenges and how they overcame them. Guest speakers range in age from 17 to 26. It is well known that young people relate to other young people. Speakers share very painful intimate stories about their lives that deal with addiction, eating disorders, and depression. One guest who was cyber-bullied. Another was a victim of sexual abuse and shared a remarkable story. Yet another was bullied because of his sexual orientation.

Each speaker told the children how their troubles started in school, more often in junior or senior high school. They explained how these experiences almost destroyed their lives. Most of the guests were involved in various forms of treatment and explained how they wanted to prevent their pain from happening to the students in the audience. On one occasion, a young girl returned from junior high to thank the speaker who had discussed his drug addiction the year earlier. The student explained how she had an incident and she had been able to handle it mainly because of that presentation.

On the surface this may seem to be another preventative program aimed at helping students avoid risky behaviour. It is that, but it is much more. Staff members who attend the sessions listen to the stories shared by the guest speakers as well as those shared by the Grade Six students. Some of our students shared their own challenges and asked for help and guidance from the

guests even when they never hinted at facing such serious problems before that point.

Staff members started to see their students in a different context. They were seeing these children as people first, people facing very tough challenges. A slight paradigm shift can lead to wonderful changes in the classroom. If you see a child as a person first and a student second, it is difficult to then look at a child as a “below grade level reader” or a disruptive force. In short, we are recognizing the strengths of the tree as we work to improve the health of the forest.

Teachers need to network. Witnessing the enormity of the problems faced by our students forces us to seek each other’s counsel. Closing the door and spending our time isolated and focusing only on curriculum will not work. We need a more modern definition of the word curriculum. Curriculum no longer refers merely to content, but it encompasses the child as a whole. Teachers need to share with other teachers, parents, community members, and everyone involved in a child’s life.

This seems an impossible challenge since we are often overwhelmed by our day-to-day challenges. Just remember, if we are overwhelmed by workplace challenges imagine how our students feel when they are faced with a curriculum they do not always understand. Often they feel trapped in a life they cannot control. Seeing and understanding each student as a person, a unique complex person, will make us better teachers and will help make our students stronger. Little things such as a Challenge Day may have unexpected benefits for your class and for your career as a successful educator.

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Programming for Today's Diverse Classroom

Miranda Page-White

Today's educational system is diverse, intriguing and very challenging. It is not as easily maintained or as well structured as was the case in the past. Today's students come from various backgrounds and have unique needs and levels of sophistication. In order to enjoy teaching, and to be effective and prepared, new teachers must be knowledgeable, flexible, and conscious of the individual learning profiles of their students.



Having the available tools and knowledge is not entirely adequate for today's teachers. Educators must have a professional demeanor at all times. This is vital for the general persona of educators. It is easy, as a new educator, to be excited and to want to give advice quickly and spontaneously to parents and colleagues; however, being fully prepared for meetings and parent teacher interviews is very important. Having a professional image and demeanor makes those around you see you as a competent individual and they will value your position and professional responsibility.

Possessing sustainable, valuable data is extremely vital because today's educational focus demands accountability and personal student-based findings and information. Teachers should always attend meetings prepared, whether the meetings are formal or informal. Let others speak, be an effective listener, and always have the best interest of the students at the forefront.

Communicating with parents on a regular basis makes a significant difference. Whether it is an informal phone call or a short e-mail, parents or guardians greatly appreciate the effort and feel as though they are involved and respected in the educational development of their child. No surprises need to be sprung during meetings or at parent teacher interviews. If you have taken a few short minutes throughout the term to communicate with a child's caregiver, then the academic achievements of the student should be understood by all those involved and at all times throughout the school year.

Due to the diversity within today's classroom, all teachers need to be prepared to teach children with various needs such as learning disabilities, English as a second language, behaviour disorders, autism and giftedness (to name only a few). These unique profiles often result in students receiving resource support or those who are working toward achieving individualized outcomes and goals. These plans are better known as Individual Program Plans or IPPs.

Each school board in Nova Scotia has a Student Services Department that hires professionals and specialists in the above areas and other areas such as speech, psychology, and assistive technology. The role of the Student Services Department is to aid in the professional development of all teachers and to provide professional support and services to those in need. As a new classroom teacher, one should be knowledgeable about what student services resources are available within your board. In many school boards, the Student Services Department not only provides professional development for teachers, but it also has specialists who can be accessed to support teachers in programming for students with specific needs.

Classroom teachers should collaborate with their Resource or Learning Centre teacher when programming for students with specific needs. It is important to note that when you have a student in your classroom who is on an Individual Program Plan or who needs to receive adaptations, it is your responsibility as the classroom teacher to ensure that the programming is in place and that the adaptations are being provided. Resource and Learning Centre teachers are there to support the classroom teacher and to help them to implement the student's program.

Some teachers may not fully understand the roles and responsibilities of classroom teachers with regards to the Program Planning Process. The Department of Education website has many excellent reference documents including *"The Program Planning Process: A Guide for Parents"* that was created by a group of professionals from across the province. It is a quick, legal re-cap of the program planning process and it informs parents of the rights

and responsibilities of all parties involved in student programming. This is an excellent source of information for any new teacher, and since it is a provincial document, it applies to all educators across the province. It is comprised of key points taken from such documents as the Education Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Special Education Policy. Every teacher may have at least one student who needs diversified programming so a clear understanding of the Program Planning Process is very important.

Teaching is an extremely rewarding profession that inspires all participants each day. Being consistent within the classroom, staying focused, and being approachable are qualities that we need to possess in dealing with, and teaching, today's children and youth. Setting standards and informing students of your expectations from the beginning is very helpful and

positive. Continuing to maintain contact with administration, parents or guardians, and colleagues makes learning and working much more manageable and creative.

Attending professional development sessions on a regular basis and continuously informing yourself of the most recent and current expectations within your board and province, all lead to an enriched work experience. Asking questions and seeking help when needed does not signify failure, but rather empowers you as an educator and demonstrates your persistence and competence.

Enjoy everyday that you have the opportunity to enrich and invigorate someone else's life, and your own!

Whether it is an informal phone call or a short e-mail, parents or guardians greatly appreciate the effort and feel as though they are involved and respected in the educational development of their child.

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Belonging and Becoming: Conditions for New Teacher Success

Terry Doucette

Over the past half-decade, school administrators have been renewing and replacing teaching staffs due to retirements, transfers, and program changes. At my current school two thirds of our staff has been replaced within this time period.

Whenever we replace teachers it is essential that we maximize the conditions for the success of new teachers. Administrators have a responsibility to protect and guarantee what defines a school and what makes it successful. This includes school vision, collective educational philosophy, history, and traditions. All of these make up the school's culture. The faster that teachers who are new to a school buy into the school's culture, the more successful they will be. The challenge, then, is to create opportunities for new teachers to learn about our school and what we represent.

Initially, I strive to create a sense of belonging for new teachers. Professional connection with colleagues is essential, and the first significant opportunity for this is Orientation Day in September. I find it difficult to initiate a new school year without reviewing the highlights of the previous school year. Our "Look Back" presents a collection of many activities our teachers coordinated that enhanced our successes and image within the community. We review "Exit Surveys" where our graduates have the opportunity to rate the quality of their school, the quality of instructional staff, the quality of school administration, and the level of safety, and comment on what they liked best and least, suggest improvements, and relate which staff members had the most significant impact on students. In addition, we review data from our school accreditation and annual reports.

Basically, this process allows new teachers to witness a celebration of the positive, and to see a strong sense of contributing and belonging by our teachers. Our school strives to create a strong sense of family and teamwork that is reinforced by recognition of their commitment. Commitment is contagious if there is recognition. Presenting new staff with a shirt or sweater with the school's logo contributes to identity and the feeling of being part of a team.

Having staff define who we are is also effective. Everyone has the opportunity to answer the question, "What makes our school an effective place to be?" School accreditation results can also be used to reinforce what schools are doing well. Hearing others speak in positive tones inspires new teachers.

In addition to the sense of belonging, the need to feel welcomed and valued is critical. We, as more experienced teachers and administrators, must create a sense of approachability and a sense of trust for new staff. By generating such an atmosphere, new teachers will hopefully feel comfortable in asking questions, and in making and learning from their mistakes. We need to recognize that being an effective, quality teacher takes many years of professional growth, development, and experience.

The stability of a school environment is also essential to a new teacher's growth and commitment to a long healthy career. Classroom management expectations need to be clearly established by and with the teacher. As well, the administration must ensure a clearly defined code of discipline for the school as a whole. There is nothing like a high dosage of discipline-related stress, or not feeling supported, to end or sour a teaching career.

New teachers benefit from knowing their community. This concept includes the community of teachers, students, parents, and the community that is served by the school. The best way to ensure community awareness is for new teachers to get connected and the easiest way to get connected, is to volunteer with extra-curricular activities. Giving something extra before or after school is certainly not mandated by any provincial legislation; however, by not participating when it is the school norm serves as a disconnect. So, get involved!

Professionalism includes the setting of standards and expectations for oneself. Needless to say, the Code of Ethics of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union is a sound starting point for a discussion on professionalism with new teachers. Not reviewing professional expectations for new teachers is irresponsible.

Our school strives to create a strong sense of family and teamwork that is reinforced by recognition of their commitment. Commitment is contagious if there is recognition.

PROFESSIONAL TRUST

- ✓ Preparing quality lessons for each class;
- ✓ Bringing positive energy to the school each day;
- ✓ Recognizing and being sensitive to student diversity and individual differences;
- ✓ Establishing fair, consistent, and routine assessment and evaluation strategies;
- ✓ Establishing an effective communication plan with both students and parents;
- ✓ Having a focus on literacy growth at all times;
- ✓ Committing to both short and long term professional growth;
- ✓ Arriving and departing at appropriate times;
- ✓ Sharing with and supporting colleagues;
- ✓ Creating, assisting, and/or leading extra-curricular opportunities for students;
- ✓ Marking and providing constructive feedback in a prompt manner;
- ✓ Addressing school-related duties effectively;
- ✓ Establishing and maintaining effective classroom management routines;
- ✓ Treating colleagues with respect and value;
- ✓ Participating in professional learning committees.

The expectation of professionalism of new teachers is what I refer to as the “Professional Trust.” If followed, it enhances the potential for a successful and rewarding teaching career.

Dressing in a professional manner merits its own discussion because of its sensitivity. My expectation for new staff is that they will conform to the professional level of dress of their colleagues. We tend to dress in a comfortable manner and in a way that sets us apart from our students. I encourage new teachers to recognize that we dress for work in such a way that reflects and represents our instructional team. The bottom line is that we are considered professionals and must appear as such. Our communities have expectations for us, whether we like it or not.

A significant struggle for new teachers is time management. Conscientious professionals conclude rather quickly that there are not enough hours in the day, week, month or year to address all of the professional obligations that are expected and that we impose upon ourselves. Preparing detailed lessons, preparing for learning exceptionalities, assessing and evaluating, attending assorted meetings and being involved in extra-curricular can dent even the thickest skin. Administrators need to communicate with young teachers on the need for balance between professional work and personal wellness. Experience and need are the best motivators for maximizing time. Having “how are you doing meetings” with new teachers throughout the first several months is good practice and may serve to prevent early burnout.

It would be wrong for school administrators to assume that all new teachers have sufficient technological expertise to be as efficient as they would like. We can eliminate any embarrassment by offering after school professional development sessions on how to use current technology such as Microsoft Office software, LCDs, SmartBoards, and school administration software packages such as WinSchool.

In education student training, cooperating teachers play a significant role in new teacher development. This professional arrangement can easily be extended through mentorship programs at the school level. The coaching of new teachers through regular assistance of quality teachers has the most potential to ensure quality teacher development. Looking back, I would have valued a mentorship experience both as teacher and as an administrator. Call it guidance for success. What a great way to transition from the theoretical to the practical art of teaching!

Certainly as active teachers and administrators, we are in a powerful position and our potential impact to assist new teachers is enormous. We all have a vested interest to ensure our new teachers develop to their fullest potential. We need to cultivate a sense of belonging for new teachers and to pave the road for their becoming the ideal teacher they envision.

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What can I do to help New Teachers?

Wally Fiander

I have often heard the term: mid-life crisis. Just the other day, I met a friend, who retired from teaching a few years ago. In his last few years at my school he was a great mentor of mine. He asked me if I was getting to the point where I must be beginning to “feel” my age.

It seems a very short time ago that I was the new teacher on my staff. My first days were very uncomfortable for so many reasons. On a staff of 64, everyone seemed to have a little circle in which they fit; everyone except me, that is. A group of senior teachers were quick to adopt me and gave me pointers and advice. As I sit here now, however, I realize that they are almost all gone and only a small few remain. Am I now a senior teacher? I haven't reached mid-career yet. Is this time for my mid-life crisis? Even so, I am now the teacher the new teacher is looking

to, hoping that I might be as accepting of them as those before have been of me. So, how can I help?

With a little reflection, I realize that perhaps the best thing experienced teachers did for me was to accept me for who I am. While they laughed and poked fun at the things I tried, it was all in good fun. They laughed because they had been there. They offered advice and often I was not smart enough to follow it. I think deep down they got some enjoyment in seeing me attempt some of the same ventures that they, long ago, tried and failed. A little sadistic, perhaps, but I think I gained some respect; I even succeeded in doing some of the things they had not been able to achieve.

The best thing anyone can do for a new person in a strange place is to be friendly and welcoming. Provide them with a



“place.” Accept them and their ideas even when you think you know that they are wrong. A young teacher comes with different experiences and different skills and is likely to have different successes. Young teachers are likely intimidated by the newness of their positions and unsure about most everything. What they need is a friend to work with them. Don’t wait for them to approach you. Walk over and offer your hand.

I think back to some of the advice that was offered to me from outside the “circle.” It seems as though many wanted to help in their own way and some were more helpful than others. I recall some of the most helpful things and I remind myself that these are the things that I should be doing for the newer staff in my school.

My first teaching assignment was tough, but I was very thankful to have it. Teaching six different high school courses, all for the first time, was a challenge. I remember all of the documents that I had to read just to get familiar with the course outcomes. Of course, the more you ask for help, the more texts and documents you will receive. A fellow teacher brought me a binder complete with assignments, evaluations, reading references, class notes, and more. The binder was so organized that I could simply start on the first page and go, much like a substitute plan for a whole course. I did thank that teacher, but I am willing to bet that she has no idea how much she helped me to survive those first few years. Now I attempt to keep my course organized in the same way, and when a teacher is assigned one of my courses I always offer my binder.

Two of the greatest challenges for me over the last decade or so has been the size of classes and the diversity of the students in them. These two factors create an entirely new set of challenges, with classroom management as one of the biggest. For example, a new teacher, teaching for the first time in a Grade Primary classroom, would face a more diverse student population with a wider range of social experiences, as well as a wider range of ages. This new teacher could probably use as many hints, pointers and positive advice as he/she could get.

Classroom management aside, time is precious for new teachers. All teachers find time to be a valuable contributor to school life, but experienced teachers often have more time than new teachers. As a more senior teacher you could be a great help on lowering stress levels merely by offering to make photocopies on their behalf. By multi-tasking you can make a huge difference for someone else.

Sometimes I think new teachers forget to balance their lives. Do not be afraid to invite some of these new teachers out for social events. Some people will actually be timid to go to a staff get-together by themselves, but an invitation from a colleague might help them to join in. What we do not need are teachers who forget to enjoy life and then burn out in just a few years.

Looking at salaries, we live comfortably, but obviously we do not teach for the money. We become teachers for many reasons, but deep down we truly enjoy the students we teach. For many, the joy of the job is the kids. Each year I encourage my students to get involved in school life. “That is what I remember about my High School,” I tell them. It is true that I remember my social time more than any class I attended.

Teachers who seem to constantly complain about teaching seem to be the same ones who are not involved in their school. Perhaps there is a connection. Encourage new teachers to become involved in the school through committees, extra-curricular activities, parent groups, the NSTU, Professional Associations or whatever captures their interest. This is what keeps our passion going, and gives us the drive to continue to enjoy our job, as opposed to dragging ourselves in to teach for 30 years, only to end up counting down to the day we can retire.

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Solution-Focused Counselling

Erin Postle

Years later I still remember the look on my weary principal's face as I walked into the main office that fateful day in October. He looked tired but hopeful that this new young counsellor from the city was going to provide him with answers for "that" Grade Five class with "those" misbehaving boys. I was just as hopeful that my new graduate degree in counselling was going to arm me with the right questions, tools, and tricks to help those 10 year olds feel inspired, drop their spit balls and comply at every request the teacher made. After a week in this rural western town, however, I was ready to go EAST.

How could six little boys create such frustration and resignation in all of the adults around them? We were trying everything in our proverbial toolbox to help inspire change in their attitudes and behaviours so they could get on with learning. Yet, all we were doing was spinning our wheels, providing them with funny stories to tell at recess, and opportunities to roll their eyes behind out backs.

Fast forward twelve career enriching years with many hours of training and experience, and I can now see where we were off the mark. I went into the classroom that day looking at all the "problems," listening to the "problem story," and seeing the "problem children" No wonder I wanted to run the other way! Needless to say, I didn't bring the answers with me that day. We did manage to create some changes in the classroom setting and in the boys' behaviour, but I believe these changes were based more out of the boys' fear of suspension rather than inspiration.

What are many schools doing now that it is so fundamentally different (and, I might add, a great deal more fun) than what we did in the past? What do we know now that we didn't know before? Today there are two philosophies that are the cornerstone of any effective and efficient school counselling program: Solution-Focused Counselling and Positive Effective Behaviour Support.

First of all, we work as a team and we start right off the bat to look for solutions rather than problems. What is working? Where is the student being successful? What are his/her strengths? What do we need to teach? How can we motivate this child daily to continue to demonstrate success? What is truly wonderful about these approaches is that it creates a sense of possibility and hope to some of the serious challenges our students and teachers face today.

Our students come to us with an arsenal of challenges these days: high levels of family separation and divorce; dual working parents; increased special needs; poverty; and information overload. Many of our schools have just as many challenges: large class sizes; increased numbers of students requiring additional support; lack of funding for extra support; time restraints; the list goes on. Despite these "challenges" we can approach our students in one of two ways — from a place of hope, or from a place of defeat. By looking through the lens with an eye on solutions and possibilities and by looking for exceptions to the "problems" we can begin to move forward in a positive direction.



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Solution-focused practices in schools are effective because they get to the issues in a brief, pragmatic way that allows counsellors to look for exceptions to problem behaviour. All team members have a role in the program planning process, in this approach. Everyone can find some exceptions to challenging behaviours. Take a moment and reflect on your past week: what was the lesson that captured your students attention; what was the intervention that made a difference with your most challenging student; what lesson did you finish and say to yourself: “Hey, that was really good!” What if all we needed was more focus on exceptions — times when these “problems” are not as evident — and less focus on problems?

One especially helpful tool in Solution-Focused Therapy is to reframe and externalize the “problem” so that the problem behaviour is not the child. There are many ways to do this, including using a narrative approach with older students. Often with elementary students I use the “trouble cloud” analogy. Students describe how this cloud of trouble follows them to certain classes and always gets them into trouble. From that perspective we can look at exceptions, at how things are different when this trouble cloud is not around and how to let go of “the trouble” in order to get down to work. Once a student can notice and describe the exceptions of “trouble” they can move toward the possibility of creating more positive change. I have had many students over the years pass me in the hall and say, “Hey, Mrs. Postle, no trouble cloud today!” It’s amazing how students put their guard down and look for solutions once that they see they are not the prob-

lem but rather their behaviour is the problem. I might add that it’s easier on a parent once we externalize challenging student behaviour; they begin to see many exceptions to the behaviour and are able to participate in the solution talk.

Many teachers naturally teach with this philosophy in mind, but over time, and with daily stressors, we can drift away from this positive path. Imagine how your students would react if you noticed more of their small successes rather than their problems. What if the leaders in our schools took more notice of what was working rather than what was lacking?

If we change our focus on, we change what we create around us. As you reflect on your career, who were your most inspiring leaders? Who motivated you to work even harder than you do, to go the extra mile? I imagine that it was someone who noticed the positives in your work and who saw the exceptions to the challenges, someone who possessed that sense of hope and possibility. As you recall their direction, notice how it inspired your work and commitment. You are that person for your students; you bring the hope and possibility to the table for them!

I think the sentiments of one student sums up this approach when he describes the impact that these positive interventions have had on him: “Now a good day is an ordinary day for me.” (Kyle, Age 6).

Erin Postle is the former Counsellor at Kingston and District Elementary School, Annapolis Valley Regional School Board. She can be reached at www.refinelifedesign.com.

Including Diverse Learners

Chris Boulter

Having “diverse” students in your classroom ultimately comes down to semantics. Scientific and/or medical “labels” that accompany students with exceptionalities can seem foreign and somewhat intimidating to the average classroom teacher. Teachers are asked to meet specialized needs of individual students within already busy and challenging classroom settings. There is an ever-increasing number of labels to identify exceptional students in our classrooms. How teachers adapt to this expanding bank of terms is key in creating an effective learning environment.



A Case Study

Mr. Schofield has had Theodore in his Grade 7 Science class for five months. He has worked diligently in developing an Individual Program Plan (IPP) for him, aimed at meeting his academic and social needs. He worked with the Learning Center combing through Theodore's IPP from the previous year, identified new outcomes to add to it, and developed ways to assess progress. Mr. Schofield often stays after school to create special work for Theodore. Sometimes he feels as if he is planning two different courses. He realizes he is ultimately accountable for the IPP, however, and wants to make sure he is doing it right. The Resource teachers have been a great help in assisting him, but developing the IPP and maintaining it has still been stressful. After all, he has 26 other students in the class to teach.

Mr. Schofield is aware Theodore's parents have pursued some “private testing” for their son. He is called to a meeting by his principal to discuss the results of these latest tests. The principal, the Resource/Program Support teacher, a psychologist from the School Board, the private practitioner who administered the tests, and both of Theodore's parents are present. Mr. Schofield is representing Theodore's classroom teachers.

During the meeting, Theodore's previous psycho-educational assessments are discussed. An assessment done by a children's hospital two years ago is passed around. The assessment is written by a pediatrician in “medicalized” language that Mr. Schofield has trouble understanding. Finally, it is time to hear about the latest test results. They indicate that Theodore has been identified as having a specific cognitive challenge which Mr. Schofield has never heard of before. Mr. Schofield remains quiet when talk turns to how Theodore's newly-identified needs will be met. He experiences a sinking sensation and feels like an outsider to the language being used. Mr. Schofield knows the Resource/Program Support staff is more than willing to help, but he cannot help but feel stressed out about being accountable for meeting these new “needs” that he knows little about.

Just as psychologists and pediatricians have specialized knowledge about children, so do classroom teachers.

This case study fictionalizes a predicament that occurs all too often. Classroom teachers truly want to be inclusive, and to meet the needs of all students in their room. This frequently involves gaining an understanding of terminologies or conditions of which they have little prior knowledge or experience. It is not that teachers resist learning new ways of identifying student needs; it is that they have multiple subjects to plan and teach, many other student needs in their classrooms, and a multitude of additional responsibilities within the school (not to mention fitting in a home life). Creating inclusive classrooms is challenging work!

How can classroom teachers cope with this ever-expanding list of labels for which they are accountable to adapt instruction for? Here are some suggestions that Mr. Schofield may find effective in breaking down the language barriers and help him avoid feeling like an outsider to the process.

Let's stop pretending to be familiar with terms we don't understand.

The role of the classroom teacher is constantly evolving, with an ever-increasing knowledge-base to learn. Professionals working with students outside of the classroom may assume that teachers have some basic understanding of their field of expertise (and the terms that accompany it). Mr. Schofield could take a risk and admit that he does not comprehend some of the specialized language that others seem to understand. He should not be embarrassed about this lack of understanding. My guess is that an honest discussion of classroom teachers' trepidations regarding new and foreign labels would generate fruitful discussions around the meeting table. Like classroom teachers, professionals dealing with special needs students are there to help kids. It is okay for us to admit that we do not always speak the same language.

Utilize the Resource/Program Support teachers in your school.

Resource/Program Support teachers are in a unique position. They are "insiders" to classroom settings; they started out as classroom teachers and are well aware of the unique demands busy classrooms present. At the same time, they are "insiders" to the specialized language that can accompany diverse learners. Resource/Program Support teachers can become a vital link between these specialized, diagnostic languages and how they im-

pact classroom instruction. Mr. Schofield could have "meeting after the meeting" with his Resource counterparts, asking how they can assist him in understanding the terminologies/conditions and their effects on his instruction practices. He should use their knowledge to his full advantage!

Remember that classroom teachers are experts too.

Mr. Schofield needs to realize that, in representing Theodore's classroom teachers, he is as much an expert in his field as anyone at the table. Just as psychologists and pediatricians have specialized knowledge about children, so do classroom teachers. It's a fact — good classroom teachers create effective environments for exceptional students. Though some of this is due to understanding new terms, my guess is that most successes can be attributed to sound teaching practices, intuition, and sound judgment. Classroom teachers have multitudes of experiences to draw from that are just as relevant to being "inclusive" as scientific terms used to identify specific areas of concern. Just because Theodore has been identified with a specific challenge does not mean Mr. Schofield should drop what is going well in his classroom. It becomes a balance between trusting his own expertise and adapting to the new information that will add to his effectiveness.

Teachers have a wide array of student needs in their classrooms. There is no getting away from the unique challenges inclusive settings present. One such challenge is dealing with diagnostic and medical labels that accompany students with exceptionalities. These can create stress and uncertainty for classroom teachers because they feel accountable for addressing needs they sometimes know little about.

The first step in working through these new terms successfully is acting as your own advocate. It is important to be open about your comfort level with diagnostic terms and how they affect your classroom practices. Talk to your Resource/Program Support staff and use their site-based expertise in navigating through these seemingly new languages. Most of all, remember that you are an expert in working with students of all ability levels. Your own expertise should not be discounted in planning for diverse classrooms.

Chris Boulter is Principal at West Pictou Consolidated School, Chignecto Central Regional School Board

In Auschwitz... Crying

Steven Van Zoost

So there I was in Auschwitz with Bill, standing in the rain. I had gotten to know Bill Glied over the previous ten days as part of the *March of the Living for Educators* program. On our travels together, Bill's abundant energy was contagious and I had to frequently remind myself that he was seventy-eight years old. From the way he interacted with teachers from across Canada it was obvious to me that he loved to discuss critical issues in today's world and to challenge people to think about their humanity. Up until this moment at Auschwitz, I had learned about his wife Marika, their three daughters, and his construction business. I had learned about his childhood in northeastern Yugoslavia, his Jewish upbringing, and his generous spirit. But then, as the heavens opened and fell down upon us at Auschwitz and we ran from the train tracks through puddles to a barrack, I learned about Bill's life as a Holocaust prisoner, about his strength as a survivor, and about his hope for our students.

I have come to think that Holocaust Education is much less about the staggering numbers of victims and much more about individual lives and responsibilities. Bill's accounts of his life during the Holocaust remind me of how we, as teachers, need to help students understand and reflect upon human behaviour

during the Holocaust — how we had (and have) the capacity for such cruelty. At the time of the Holocaust, human cruelty wasn't the exception — it was what mainstream society accepted. Canada's immigration policies before, during, and after the Second World War reflect how widespread this cruelty prevailed. It was human cruelty that took Bill from a small Yugoslavian town to the death centre of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944. It was human cruelty that transported his family by train in a boxcar. It was human cruelty that separated him from his mother and sister upon arrival. And it was human cruelty that left him in the living conditions of the death centre of Auschwitz.

"All of us, including me, had only one thought in mind: How do I save myself?" Bill recounted. "After two months, even this becomes shadowed by another motivation: How will I get something to eat?" Bill described how prisoners had to divide one-kilo loaves of bread into twelve pieces to share. This involved multiple decisions among the prisoners: how the bread would be cut, who would cut it, and which spoon would be used. The ideal spoon would have been one that had an edge sharp enough to act like a knife so that the bread could be cut leaving the fewest number of crumbs on the table because crumbs would prompt disagreements among the prisoners. Bill



"If you are prepared to take a risk, you can save lives. We, us humans, have to take personal responsibility for what we do.... I will not abandon this idea; I will not let it die.... In spite of all the horror, life goes on. I have to speak up."

explained that he was able to survive because he had his father with him. His dad would say, "I can't eat this last piece of bread — do you want it?"

After a few weeks as a prisoner, Bill was moved from Auschwitz to Dachau, which was mostly a political prisoner centre and headquarters for labour "camps." Bill was sent to a labour centre that his group built themselves: a dug ditch with a roof on top, earth piled on top of the roof, and inside, tree boughs on the floor for sleeping. Each day at four in the morning, the prisoners would stand in a square to be counted. Bill explained what he would do with his prisoner uniform when it rained and they were expected to stand outdoors for roll-call: he would take his shirt and roll it tightly and keep it under his arm, so that later there would at least be some of his uniform that would remain dry. After the roll-call, the prisoners were marched to a worksite by six o'clock where they were expected to build an underground airplane factory. Bill and his fellow prisoners would march to the factory through town day after day visible to the local people. No local ever smiled, acknowledged them, or threw them a piece of bread.

Bill's task in the factory was to help create concrete for twelve hours a day. A human chain was used to transport bags of cement. His job required the use of a knife to slit the bags open and pour the cement into a funnel. This, despite the noise and dust, was considered a privileged job, especially for its opportunities: when distracted officials toured the facility, Bill could steal a cement bag and when you cut two holes in the bag, it could be worn under your shirt. This was a risk prisoners would take for additional warmth. For Bill, a cement bag could be traded for a slice of bread.

A routine inspection was used to determine if prisoners were fit for work: prisoners were expected to be able to walk up to a wooden chair and stand up on top of it. With 600-800 calories per day and twelve hour work days, this quickly became a problem for prisoners. If you could not stand up on the chair then you were sent to "sick camp." No one ever came back from sick camp, often because of typhoid fever, dysentery, or tuberculosis. One day, a Sunday in the spring of 1945, Bill's father couldn't stand up on the chair. Bill was the next in line and he started to cry. He was fifteen years old.

In the spring of 1945, the prisoners could hear the guns of the allied forces approaching. Nine days before they were liberated Bill's father died. Three days before liberation the prisoners were told that the camp would be burned and that they would be marched away from the camp. After the allied bombing and the defeat of the Nazi guards, Bill was taken to a German

hospital. He weighed 68 pounds. A month later, he was transported back to Serbia where he could find no family. Eventually, through the Red Cross, he was connected with his uncle in Canada.

What haunts me about Bill's story is that well-educated people were responsible for the hatred that killed Bill's mother and sister, his father, peers, neighbours, and community. Will our education system fail us again? What haunts Bill is the number of people who must have known about the death centres. In April, 1944 Jews were rounded up and marched to the centre of Bill's town for deportation to Auschwitz; Bill remembers the townspeople who watched them march — throwing tomatoes, potatoes, and calling names. His former soccer team mates were there watching. Bill still wonders about the people who came from town to work at the death centres: when they went home for dinner, what did they say? Bill remains troubled by these questions: Why did no one help? Why did people not feel guilty? How can people think that obeying orders can be an excuse or absolution of guilt? For Bill, Holocaust Education is about individual lives, ethics, responsibilities, and decisions.

Although many of our schools in Nova Scotia integrate Holocaust Education into their current curriculum, I'll be curiously watching the Toronto District School Board's new implementation of a specific Grade 11 Genocide Curriculum this year. Regretfully, genocide and Holocaust education is needed in our schools to create citizens who will demand acts of humanity from our governments. For example, Bill Clinton's National Security Advisor, Tony Lake, in response to why the US did not respond to the Tutsis massacre in Rwanda said, "Because the phones didn't ring." We cannot afford the risk of apathetic citizens.

Bill Glied left me with a strong message: "If you are prepared to take a risk, you can save lives. We, us humans, have to take personal responsibility for what we do.... I will not abandon this idea; I will not let it die.... In spite of all the horror, life goes on. I have to speak up." Hearing Bill tell his story in a barrack at Auschwitz where he had been a prisoner made me want to hug him and tell him that everything will be okay in the future. His story will not be forgotten. Our capacity for both good and evil will not be overlooked. We, as teachers, have responsibilities. At the time, I didn't tell him any of those things. Instead, I could only cry.

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Supporting New Teachers

Greg O'Keefe

The first day of school: is there a more powerful phrase to awaken memories? Most students vividly recall their introduction to the school system that occupies thirteen years of their life. Those teaching them can recall equally as clearly the day they entered the instruction side of their chosen profession, a day that for some could lead to as many as 35 years in the profession. Is there a retired teacher who does not remember that early September day when the school bell was ringing but not for them? First day: a time for looking ahead but also a time for looking back.

What we do, where we do it, and why we do it is shaped largely by the days following those first days. Many years ago a topic I attempted to cover as a global studies teacher was demographics. At that time the curricular focus was on different world nations and their interaction with each other. As part of the study, the students and I discussed Demographic Population Change Transition Models. I always stressed that in their conversations at the supper table with their parents they slip in that phrase. I assured them that their parents would be very impressed that their child would use such vocabulary with understanding. Demography, as our dictionaries inform us, is merely vital statistics, illustrating the condition of communities. But,

demography also had the side benefit of making me seem like a great teacher for introducing such a topic, even if the parents themselves were not completely sure what it meant.

If we see our school's population as reflecting the population of our community, we realize that we have seen a transition in its age distribution.

One factor is a change in the date when students start that "First Day." School administrators and their staff realize that this shift is felt not only at the Primary level, but in many cases in all grade levels within the education system. With this "change" comes challenges. Teachers have enough on their plates right now struggling to cope with their present students, outcomes, and expectations. The only thing constant in education is change!

We all know that there have been massive changes that have swept over our society during the past two decades. As a supervisor of teacher interns from Cape Breton, I continue to have the opportunity to view first hand how principals, cooperating teachers, and many teachers maintain the ability to take on each change and to make it work for the betterment of their students.

I have yet to meet a teacher who has not confirmed that the most helpful, useful part of those two training years was the time spent in practice teaching (internship as it is now called). These soon-to-be members of our profession are eager, well prepared academically and do not fear change. The knowledge they have gained and attitudes they have accepted, combined with their all-important desire to work with today's youth, puts today's and tomorrow's educational system on a strong footing. To those of us whose teaching careers have moved on to retirement years, and to those who will be joining us over the next five years, just remember the song "Don't worry — be happy," as we look to the future of the education system in these times of change.

The whole issue of change is well beyond our classrooms and school communities. This has seen the season of elections in both the United States and Canada at the national level, and of municipal and school board elections in our province. From these political contests a new "in word" has emerged: change. We need it in government, in our education system, in our taxation system, in our military role in foreign lands, in our health care system, and in our immigration policy. It is something that is to be sought at times and fought at other times. It has reached the stage where all political parties distribute one or both of two signs: (1) I will fight for changes in "fill in the blank"; or (2) I will fight against changes in "fill in the blank."

Change has always been with us — in all areas of our lives. Education is not unique to both its positive and negative results.

Greg O'Keefe is a retired teacher and former President of the NSTU.



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