# NLTA Handbook for Beginning Teachers

# Teacher's Affirmation of Professional Responsibility

I, _____,
hereby affirm that as a teacher:

**I ACCEPT**
my professional responsibility to provide quality educational opportunities and experiences to my students.

**I WILL UPHOLD**
the professional and trusted relationship between myself as a teacher and the students who are entrusted to my care.

**I WILL WORK**
to establish positive professional relationships with my teacher colleagues, parents and guardians and the community to serve the best interests of my students.

**I WILL ALWAYS SEEK**
to maintain the honor and dignity of the teaching profession.

**I WILL RESPECT**
the rich traditions of the teaching profession and strive to contribute to the continued enhancement of education for the betterment of communities and society in general.

Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Education

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*Excellence is possible if you –*
*Care more than others think wise.*
*Risk more than others think is safe.*
*Dream more than others think is practical.*
*Expect more than others think is possible.*

# WELCOME

Welcome to the teaching profession. You have chosen a career that is filled with challenges and opportunities, a career with the potential to change people's lives. There is no doubt that your life will change this year as you make the transition from being a student to becoming a teacher.

Many people may have shared in your decision to become a teacher, and there will be many others who will assist you along the way. However, as you start out on your first day of teaching, it is really up to you. You will have to make many important decisions leading up to and during that first day. There will be so many people and so many things to deal with that it would be easy to overlook some detail that could make all the difference. The purpose of this handbook is to help you make the best of those early days so that you will have a healthy start to what we hope will be a long and successful career as a teacher.

This handbook is meant to provide you with some guiding direction and, while it is by no means an exhaustive coverage of the topics, it should alert you to some of the issues you need to consider in the first days and weeks of your career.

No matter how talented you are, no matter how many education courses you may have taken, there is a certain amount of learning that can come only from experience. This first year of teaching will expose you to many new experiences and provide lots of opportunity for learning. Remember to keep that perspective and not to judge yourself too harshly. If you need some inspiration, think about a teacher you have admired, one of those exceptional professionals who seemed to have it all figured out.

All the good experiences you will have this year should be reasons for celebration. All the plans that do not go as you had wished should be chances to reflect, learn and improve. Have a wonderful first year and may it be the beginning of a successful career in this exciting profession.

Your feedback on this booklet is welcome.
Please contact:

Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association
3 Kenmount Road, St. John's, NL A1B 1W1
1-800-563-3599 or 726-3223
mail@nlta.nl.ca

# I. GAINING PERSPECTIVE

Your first few days and weeks can be extremely exciting but don't worry if you feel overwhelmed at times. All good teachers normally feel this way – you are in good company. It is important that you recognize that the experiences you will have professionally and personally during the first year of teaching are not entirely unique to you. Research on the experiences of first-year teachers is summarized in the chart below which indicates a cycle of five phases which characterize the new teacher's emotional and professional path: anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation and reflection toward renewed anticipation.

Many first-year teachers have suggested that these phases occur many times over during that first year and, furthermore, that this is not always just a one-year cycle. It is important that you see your reactions to this first year as "normal" as long as the cycle continues to progress. What is troublesome is getting stuck in survival mode, when you are constantly struggling to deal with each day. If this happens, it is time to seek the assistance of more experienced teachers or other trusted colleagues.

## Phases of First Year Teaching

**1. ANTICIPATION**

Occurs before the new member actually joins the organization and involves a feeling of excitement.

**2. SURVIVAL**

Occurs as the new member begins teaching and experiences problems and situations not previously anticipated.

**3. DISILLUSIONMENT**

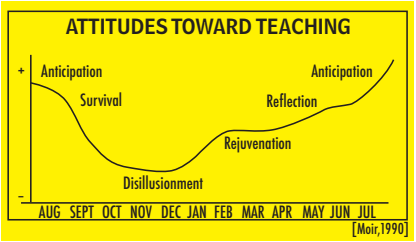
Occurs as the new member experiences concern about competence and commitment.

**4. REJUVENATION**

Occurs as the new member experiences an acceptance of the realities of teaching and begins to feel a sense of accomplishment.

**5. REFLECTION**

Occurs as the new member reflects over the accomplishments of the past and experiences renewed anticipation.



## II. GATHERING INFORMATION

Once you have accepted employment as a teacher, your homework starts! Before you even set foot in your school or your classroom, you should gather as much information as possible. The fewer the surprises the more confident you will feel and the more able you'll be to handle what you may not have anticipated. (And yes, there will be some things you will not be prepared for … it is impossible to predict everything you will need or every situation which could arise!)

The following lists detailed information you might want to consider gathering prior to that all-important first day in school.

**Logistics**

Be familiar with:

- the physical layout of the school
- where students will go for classes other than your assigned room
- emergency and fire exits
- fire evacuation plans and secure school/lockdown procedures
- school arrival and dismissal times
- the location of key areas such as the staff room, resource room, computer room(s), copying room(s)
- parking arrangements at the school – for staff, students, parents
- staff room protocols – "unwritten" practices

**Personnel**

Meet as many of these colleagues as you can or at least be familiar with their names and roles in the school:

- Assistant or Vice-Principal
- Custodian
- Department Heads
- Guidance Counsellor
- Learning Resource Teachers
- Principal
- Secretary
- Student Assistants
- Teaching and Learning Assistants
- Team Leaders or Grade Level Leaders
- Volunteers

If there are other new teachers in the school, make a point of meeting them. You will find that you share something very important, and you may be an excellent resource for each other as you make discoveries about policies, procedures, etc. While most of the people on staff will be helpful, a fellow new teacher may be more understanding of your particular circumstances, and you may be more comfortable asking questions of each other or seeking information together.

**Student**

Some teachers would recommend that you access student cumulative records and try to get as much advance information as possible. Others advocate getting to know students without the prejudice of information on file. No matter what your personal philosophy about the amount of student information you should have, it is still appropriate to have the following:

- ✔ a complete list of your home room students
- ✔ class lists for students you'll be teaching
- ✔ indications of any students with special needs who may be in your class(es) (including ESL students)
- ✔ a list of students who have particular medical conditions, including allergies, which may require special attention either from you or from fellow students
- ✔ a list of students with special programming and the details of the exceptionalities/needs of these students.

**Procedures**

Hopefully, you will have met with the Principal or Assistant Principal and some of the key organizational leaders in the school. Others who will be invaluable in pointing you in the right direction to find information and supplies you will need are the school's secretary and custodian. Try to review or get copies of the following:

- written procedures for opening day
- any forms that you may need for enrolment, including parent information forms
- student supply lists
- curriculum guides
- school and/or district handbooks or policy manuals. While there may be extensive lists of all policies, you cannot be expected to know everything all at once; be sure to prioritize and focus on learning what you will need immediately.

## III. GETTING READY FOR THE FIRST DAY

Assuming you have been able to get most of the information suggested in the last section and you have a mental image of how the day will unfold, it is extremely important that you prepare a plan for that first day. Remember, the impression that you create on this day will likely follow you through the rest of the year. Do whatever you can to ensure that it is a positive one.

Here are some ideas you might consider:

- Prepare a welcoming note for students and have it waiting for them on their desks. (Say that you are looking forward to your year together, and/or have a brain teaser or mini puzzle to get their attention!)
- Prepare an introductory note to be sent home to parents/guardians telling them who you are and how they can reach you. Indicate your enthusiasm in working with their children and with them. This will be a welcome addition to some of the forms that would normally be going home with the regular school start up.
- Make your classroom a welcoming environment. You may want to consider decorating it or bringing decorative materials so that you and your students can do this together. Something as simple as creating individualized name tags to place on student desks or hanging a few well-selected posters can make all the difference. (If you choose an activity, be sure it is one that can be well controlled and age appropriate!)
- As you prepare for your first "lesson," consider an activity which will engage students and assist you in getting to know them. You might consider doing a simulation exercise or some team-building activities.
- Prepare a list for yourself of all the important things you want to say to them, including your own expectations for quality of work and for some of the classroom routines and procedures. This will be discussed in more detail in another section.
- A warm and welcoming environment is important to all students, not only to those in primary/elementary classrooms!
- For grades 7-12, it is always good to consider seating assignments; you can always revisit at a later date, but it will allow you to get to know student names more quickly.

In addressing students on this first day, keep in mind that your knowledge of them is fairly limited at this point. As you get to know them, you will no doubt tailor your lessons and activities to mesh with their abilities and interests. Do not box yourself in the first day with plans that are too specific and from which you may later have to backtrack. As you come to know your students, you will find that their educational

needs will inform your plans and the structures you will provide for them. Maintain some flexibility until you are more sure of what will work for you and your students. Preparing for the first day may take longer than preparing for any other day in your career, but it may also be the most important preparation you will ever do. Use that first day to set the tone for the rest of the year. Establish yourself as their teacher but also remember to let them know that you are a learner with them. Engage their interest and by doing so you will have engaged their support for the learning process.

*In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility anyone could have.*

**~ Lee Iacocca**

# IV. PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

*Let your "advance worrying" become advance thinking and planning.*

**~ Winston Churchill**

It has been said that people do not plan to fail, they just fail to make plans. There is nothing wrong with a response like, "Let me think about that and get back to you." You should always try to anticipate situations before they arise and consider how you might respond to them. As you gain in experience, this will become easier to do. In the meantime, the suggestions given in the following lists might help you to deflect problems that may confront you early in your first year. It's a good idea to check with experienced teachers within the school. There will probably be accepted school-wide procedures for dealing with issues such as the use of technology, the wearing of caps, and so on.

These lists are by no means exhaustive and certainly some of the points raised do not apply to all classroom situations. They do, however, alert you to some of the issues you should consider before meeting your students.

**Daily Routines and Procedures**

Consider your routines and procedures for things such as

- using washroom facilities
- dismissing the class
- calling the class to order
- getting students' attention
- having resources/supplies ready
- providing direction to students who have finished their work
- distributing and putting away supplies and materials

**Giving Assignments**

Plan how you intend to

- post assignments
- explain assignments to various groups
- indicate what rubric you will be using for evaluation
- explain how assignments will be assessed

**Receiving Assigned Work**

Make decisions regarding

- when/how students should hand in their work
- how you will keep track of whose work is and is not turned in and expectations around this

- how you will give specific feedback
- what criteria you will use for displayed work
- how and when to return student work
- how you will check and return corrections
- how to track completed stages of long-term assignments
- how to handle student self-assessment and peer-assessment

**Monitoring of Student Work**

Decide how and when you will

- make sure you get around to all students, not just the distracting or demanding ones
- ensure you look carefully enough at students' work in progress to guide them for improvement
- achieve total class participation in activities

There are numerous sources – even your curriculum guides – with suggested templates or models for all of these ideas. A selection of resources you may find useful is given at the back of this handbook. It is important that you make your own professional decisions, in keeping with school policy, as to how you want your classes to operate. As you gain in experience, you will hone these procedures and will find that well-defined routines will bring order to your classroom. Students like to know what is expected of them and will respect structure that is fair and consistent.

Upfront detailed and clear instructions to students will save you time and potential frustrations.

*I like a teacher who gives you something to*
*take home to think about besides homework.*
~ **Lily Tomlin**

## V. MANAGING YOUR CLASSROOM

If we don't model what we teach, we are teaching something else. Maintaining a positive classroom environment while dealing with disruptions from students can be a challenge. There is no doubt that this causes more anxiety for beginning teachers than any other aspect of their new career. However, you should not equate classroom management with discipline. In fact, if you have effective classroom management strategies and appropriate procedures and routines, discipline should not be a problem.

Try to develop a secure and inviting classroom atmosphere based on respect and dignity for all – students and teachers. The object is to motivate students and to engage them in purposeful learning activities, not to exert control over them.

It has been said "you teach some by what you say, you teach more by how you say it and you teach most by who you are." By modeling preparedness and appropriate behaviours, including self control, you will help your students come to understand that they too must be prepared and that they must exercise self control. Teach by who you are as much as by what you do and what you say.

Although there are many resources on this subject, the following excerpt from a publication of the Alberta Teachers' Association outlines some of the basics of what works and what does not work.

**What Works**

Discipline is a teaching process. For effective results, tell students what you expect. Provide a model for good behaviour, check for understanding and allow for practice and follow up. Don't assume students know how to act appropriately – they need to be taught and coached to manage their own behaviour.

Create a classroom environment which provides structure and support and reinforces positive behaviour. Set your standards high; be clear and realistic in your expectations.

Classroom conflict is more likely to be reduced if you

- arrive in the classroom before students
- organize and prepare before each lesson
- insist that everyone be treated with respect
- listen to students' opinions and consider their feelings
- maintain a sense of humour and a tolerant attitude
- assist children to make appropriate choices
- teach students decision-making skills
- help students to live with mistakes and take them in stride

- use a quiet, friendly tone of voice
- show faith in the children and build on strengths
- help children to increase their feelings of self-esteem
- believe that all children are capable and lovable
- have a low-key, consistent and matter-of-fact manner
- use realistic, logical consequences and enforce them

**What Does Not Work**

Even with the most tactful and careful preparation, students will test you. Let students know that while you may sometimes disapprove of their actions, you still value them. If you are going to show you are angry, do it because you have decided it is appropriate, not because you are "out of control." Be aware of the legal rights and responsibilities of both teachers and students.

For effective classroom management teachers should not

- preach, nag, criticize or shout
- use excessive praise instead of encouragement
- punish as a way to teach appropriate behaviour
- accept excuses, bargain or blame
- use sarcasm, or try to embarrass or humiliate
- rescue children, rather than teaching problem-solving skills
- act hastily without knowing the implications of their actions
- punish the whole class for the misdeeds of a few

Dealing with power struggles can be difficult for beginning teachers. When this happens, try to

- ignore the student's attempt to engage you in a power struggle
- insist that the teaching and learning needs be met
- describe to the student, in objective and explicit terms, the behaviour which you cannot accept
- give a warning, stress the consequence, and then follow through
- arrange for time out from the classroom or school
- seek intervention by appropriate school personnel
- communicate with the parents/guardians to draw up further action plans

*Treat people as if they were what they ought to be,*
*and you help them to become what they are capable of being.*
**~ Johann Wolfgang van Goethe**

## Guidelines for Effective Classroom Management

In order to provide maximum time for learning and to reduce minor behaviour problems, there are some strategies that you can employ that deal with behaviour in the least amount of time, with the least disruption and the least negative feelings.

### *Monitor Student Behaviour*

- Use an "active eye." See what is going on. Don't become preoccupied with someone or something and ignore the rest of the class. It's said that one teacher on their feet is worth two in the seat. This benefits your classroom management program as well as being an effective teaching strategy.
- Simply looking the student directly in the eye for prolonged contact while you continue your lesson sends a non-verbal message that says, "I saw what you did, and I want it stopped."

### *Be Consistent with Expectations… Be Fair with Consequences*

- Have the same expectations for appropriate behaviour for all students. They should know that you will enforce rules consistently and determine an appropriate consequence. Your goal is to be fair, but that might mean differing consequences for students. If one student frequently fails to return homework, you may choose a different consequence than you would for a student who forgets their homework for the first time. Your students should understand that the "same" treatment is not always fair treatment. Be consistent, in that the consequences for student behaviour are reasonable and appropriate.

### *Promptly Manage Inappropriate Behaviour*

- Effective classroom managers know that misbehaviour must be handled immediately or there is a risk of a snowballing effect. Instead of one or two students involved, soon there may be several.

### *Use Proximity to Your Advantage*

- Continuing your lesson while you move about the room, pausing near "trouble spots" can let students know that even though they aren't near the teacher's desk, they are still expected to demonstrate appropriate behaviour. Getting "boxed in" behind your desk encourages misbehaviour in the far corners of the room.

### *Pause to Focus Students*

- The continuous sound of "teacher talk" can provide students with a noise screen for their own conversations. An occasional pause – just a few seconds of silence – can bring an off-task student back in focus.

### *Ask for a Response*

- Hearing your name can be an attention getter, even if you're not paying attention. Working an off-task student's name into a question can often bring the student back into the lesson. Remembering the student's dignity, it would be appropriate to say the student's name first, in order to allow the student to hear the question expected of them. The purpose is to get the student back into the lesson, not to cause embarrassment.

### *Actively Involve Students*

- Sometimes having the student respond to a question or become involved in an activity can eliminate the undesired behaviour. Asking for a show of hands, having students perform a physical activity, or having each student write a quick answer to a question can make all students accountable for an immediate response.

Make it a practice to keep notes of incidents that may occur in your classroom. If a student uses inappropriate language, for instance, find time that day to record the behaviour and date it. Clear examples like this will prove invaluable at parent-teacher conferences or if the student's behaviour escalates to a more serious level.

*The teachers who get "burned out" are not the ones who are constantly learning, which can be exhilarating, but those who feel they must stay in control and ahead of the students at all times.*

~ Frank Smith

## VI. BEGINNING TEACHER CONFERENCES

The NLTA, in partnership with the Faculty of Education at Memorial University and School Districts, holds a conference for teachers in their first year of teaching. This conference agenda is designed specifically for teachers to share experiences, reflect on successes, identify challenges and practice collaborative problem solving.

To take advantage of their experiences, the conference is held in November/December when teachers have had the opportunity to complete one full term of teaching, assessment, parent and community contact, etc.

Look for communications from your district and/or the NLTA and take advantage of this "made for you" experience.

*Every artist was at first an amateur.*

**~ Ralph W. Emerson**

# VII. BEING PART OF A PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

You are part of the school staff, part of the school district's professional team, and you are also a member of a larger professional organization, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. Within these educational communities, there are people you can look to for support and for knowledge to assist you in dealing with some of the challenges you will face. Be sure to seek assistance whenever you need it. If you aren't sure where to go for help, it is natural to look first at the school level. Certain other inquiries would be naturally addressed to school district personnel. This would be the case for board policies.

If, however, you need assistance in interpretation of the Collective Agreement or information on NLTA programs, you should contact the Association at 726-3223, 1-800-563-3599, or visit the NLTA website at www.nlta.nl.ca or mail@nlta.nl.ca.

NLTA programs and policies are also outlined in various brochures and publications. While not all of these may be of immediate importance to you, one policy you should review as you become part of the professional community is the Code of Ethics, which should guide your conduct as a professional.

## Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association Code of Ethics

The Code of Professional Practice shall apply to all members and the term "teacher" as used in this code includes all members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. This statement, arrived at by consensus of the Association, does not attempt to define all items of acceptable practice, but rather to serve as a guide. Both individual and collective actions taken by members of any professional group may enhance or detract from the status of that profession; NLTA members are expected to be aware of this and to observe general principles of professional practice.

(**Note:** *The Code of Professional Practice shall not apply in the case of a teacher who, in good faith, provides statements or evidence to a Court of Law, an Arbitration Board, the NLTA Professional Relations Commission, the NLTA Disciplinary Committee, or any body or official duly authorized by the NLTA.*)

***Teacher-Pupils***

(i) A teacher's first professional responsibility is to the enhancement of the quality of education provided to the pupils in their charge.

(ii) A teacher regards as confidential, and does not divulge, other than to appropriate persons, any information of a personal or domestic nature concerning either pupils or their homes.

(iii) A teacher keeps teaching as objective as possible in discussing with the class the controversial matters whether political, religious or racial.

(iv) A teacher does not knowingly misuse their professional position for personal profit in the offering of goods or services to pupils or to their parents.

(v) A teacher does not accept pay for tutoring their own pupils in the subject in which that teacher gives classroom instruction.

(vi) A teacher accepts that the intellectual, moral, physical and social welfare of their pupils is the chief aim and end of education.

(vii) A teacher recognizes that a privileged relationship exists between the teacher and their pupils and shall never exploit this relationship.

(viii) A teacher who has reason to suspect that a child has suffered, or is suffering, from abuse that may have been caused or permitted by any person shall forthright report the suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities. [This section applies notwithstanding section (ii) under Teacher-Colleagues.]

***Teacher-Employer***

(i) A teacher does not disregard a contract, written or verbal, with a school board.

(ii) A teacher does not apply for a specific teacher's position that is not yet vacant.

(iii) A teacher does not accept a position with an employer whose relations with the Professional Organization have been declared in dispute.

***Teacher-Colleagues***

(i) A teacher reports through proper channels all matters harmful to the welfare of the school. They do not bypass immediate authority to reach higher authority without first exhausting the proper channels of communication.

(ii) A teacher does not criticize the professional competence or professional reputation of a colleague, except to proper officials and then only in confidence and after the colleague has been informed of the criticism.

(iii) A teacher notifies any other teacher whose pupils they propose to tutor on a regular basis.

(iv) Teachers do not take any individual or collective action which is prejudicial to the Association, to other members of the Association, or to the profession generally.

(v) A teacher does not knowingly undermine the confidence of pupils in other teachers.

(vi) A teacher submits to the Association disputes arising from professional relationships with colleagues which cannot be resolved by personal discussion.

(vii) A teacher, before making any report on the professional competence of a colleague, provides that colleague with a copy of the report and forwards with it any written comment that the colleague chooses to make.

(viii) A teacher who is in an administrative or supervisory position makes an honest and determined effort to help and counsel another teacher before subscribing to the dismissal of that teacher.

(ix) A teacher does not actively oppose the presentation to higher authority of matters duly agreed upon by fellow teachers, except by formal minority report.

***Teacher-Professional Growth***

(i) A teacher acts in a manner which maintains the honour and dignity of the profession.

(ii) A teacher assists in the professional growth of colleagues through the sharing of ideas and information.

(iii) A teacher makes a constant and consistent effort to improve professionally.

***Teacher-Professional Organization***

(i) A teacher, or group of teachers, does not make unauthorized representation to outside bodies on behalf of the Association or its local branches.

(ii) A teacher does not refuse to follow Association directions under a legitimate job action.

(iii) A teacher adheres to collective agreements negotiated by their professional organization.

(iv) A teacher recognizes, as a professional responsibility, service to the Association at the local and provincial levels.

(v) A teacher who has requested representation by the Association honours commitments made on their behalf.

(vi) A teacher recognizes the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association as the official voice of teachers on all matters of a professional nature.

***Teacher-Parents***

(i) A teacher seeks to establish friendly and cooperative relationships with the home and to provide parents with information that will serve the best interests of their children.

*Be decisive! Take action!*

*Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.*

**~ Will Rogers**

## VIII. NLTA SPECIAL INTEREST COUNCILS

Special Interest Councils are professional learning communities dedicated to life-long learning and the ongoing professional growth of NLTA members. Their mandate includes offering a range of professional development programs, including conferences, institutes, focus groups, teleconferences, and e-learning initiatives. Councils communicate with their membership using a variety of current technologies. As part of their mandate, the councils will respond to curriculum and program concerns, develop position papers on critical issues, work with government on curriculum development and advise the NLTA on matters of importance.

Currently there are 14 special interest councils as follows:

- Council of Special Services (COSS)
- English Language Arts (7-12) Council
- Gender and Sexual Diversity (GSD) Council
- Health Education Council
- Math/Science Council)
- Newfoundland and Labrador Counsellors' and Psychologists' Association (NLCPA)
- Newfoundland and Labrador Music Educators' Association (NLMEA)
- Physical Education Council (PESIC)
- School Administrators' Council (SAC)
- Second Language Council (SLC)
- Small Schools Council
- Speech Language Pathologists (SLP)
- Teacher Librarians Newfoundland Labrador (TLNL)
- Technology Education Council (TESIC)

If you are working in one of these specialized areas, you may choose to join the appropriate council (visit **www.nlta.nl.ca/sics** for more information). By participating in Special Interest Council programming, you can avail of the latest information on methodologies, trends in particular disciplines, and changes in curriculum as they develop and emerge.

Special Interest Councils advertise their programs through *The Bulletin*, the NLTA website, school boards, schools and media.

If you are a member of a Special Interest Council, you will be automatically notified of professional development opportunities. Since helping our membership become more effective teachers is always an overriding goal of this Association, the activities of our Special Interest Councils are geared to improving classroom practice.

Please make every effort to be an active member of special interest councils that are of interest to you. If you wish to become a member of one of the existing councils, you have only to contact the president of that council, and you will be sent the necessary membership information. Opportunities also exist for you to become an executive member of one of the councils, thereby allowing you to take on a valuable leadership role within the Association. As a council member, you will be kept current on exciting new learning and discoveries in your field.

If you have any questions, concerns or ideas re the NLTA Special Interest Councils, contact Programs & Services at teh NLTA at mail@nlta.nl.ca or by calling 726-3223 or toll-free at 1-800-563-3599.

# IX. PLANNING FOR INSTRUCTION

Since you are a recent graduate of a university education training program, you are no doubt well versed in the various learning theories and teaching strategies which have been popularized over the decades. We are currently undergoing what could be considered a revolution in teaching strategy as we respond to new and ongoing research on how the brain learns. The literature is now replete with articles from the field of neuroscience which explain the intricacies of information processing, retention and recall, meaning-making, motivation and constructing learning.

Teaching is a complex activity. On any given day you may respond to more than a thousand personal interactions with students, parents and colleagues. There is little time to reflect on what you do as you are doing it. That is why up-front planning is so important. Then, when the day is over, reflection is equally important.

Teaching is working with the curriculum and, more importantly, it is working with people. When these two dimensions overlap in a meaningful way, effective instruction takes place.

## *Strategies for Teaching*

As was suggested earlier, there are many excellent resources which can help you develop your repertoire of teaching strategies. Whatever strategy you use, you must put into practice the basic principles of learning:

- Learning requires the active participation of the learner.
- People learn in a variety of ways and at different rates.
- Learning is both an individual and a group process.

With that in mind, you can begin to design your lessons using a variety of strategies. Here are some of the more common categories:

***Direct Instruction***

- The teacher talks about or demonstrates knowledge or skills.

***Experiential Learning***

- The students experience or experiment and become actively involved in the learning.

***Independent Study***

- The student interacts more with the content than with other classmates or with the teacher.

***Indirect Instruction***

- The teacher sets up strategies but does not teach directly.

***Interactive Instruction***

- Students interact with one another and with the content. The teacher organizes and facilitates.

When you are deciding which strategy to use, you should consider the topic, the resources available, the age, maturity and learning styles of the students as well as your own teaching style. Remember that your lessons will be more successful if you structure opportunities for your students to be involved and to apply the information they have learned. The literature on multiple intelligences, cooperative group learning, brain compatible learning and quantum learning would be good places for you to start your research on teaching strategies.

Remember that teaching is complex and difficult but also very rewarding. You may want to experiment to find your most effective teaching style. It's worth reflecting on your successes and your failures; both can be used to help you improve your teaching abilities.

## *The Reflective Practitioner*

Donald Schön, philosopher and author of "The Reflective Practitioner", proposes reflection as a means of developing competency in teaching. He suggests that this take place on three levels: reflection for action, reflection in action and reflection on action. By reflecting, professionals build up a repertoire of ideas and actions that inform future decisions, thereby increasing confidence and strengthening competence.

Here are some ideas to help you identify when you are most effective and to keep you building on your strengths:

- Take the time to reflect. Ask yourself what was the key that made a lesson work.
- Determine the connections that were made to other learning or to real-life situations.
- Determine what unexpected connections were made.
- Determine what might work even better with some changes.
- Ask yourself: "If I did this again, how might I do it differently; how might I do it better?"
- Discuss your ideas with your colleagues and share your questions and experiences.
- Make a note of some of the good resources you found which you can use again.
- Make note also of gaps in your resource list so that you can collect for next time.
- Try different methods of grouping for instruction.
- If you do this on a continuous basis, if you identify your successes and build on them, you will find that you will soon develop a repertoire of effective teaching strategies.

*Plan… Focus… Set Priorities*
*If you chase two rabbits, both will escape!*

# X. COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

**The First Important Contact**

Although the first week of school will be extremely busy, you should find time to do one important task which will probably make all the difference in your future communications with parents and also in your future effectiveness as a classroom manager. Make one phone call to the home of each homeroom student during this time. This call need only be brief. Introduce yourself and provide basic information as to how you can be contacted. Verify that you have contacted the appropriate person at the home should you need to be in touch again. This does two things: it gives parents or guardians an understanding as to how you will approach their children's education; it also sends a message to the children that you are prepared to make the home connection should you need to do so. Assuming you may have 25 - 30 students, you will want to make a few calls each night in that first week. Remember to keep them brief. The contact will be worth the time it will take. Following this you may want to do this again once every few months. Just call home to say, "I am touching base; your child had a great day or great week, etc." That makes it somewhat less intimidating for everyone – you, the student and the parent – when you might need to call to enlist parent support should a difficulty arise.

**Curriculum Night**

Your first face-to-face meeting with parents is likely to be on meet-the-teacher night or curriculum night, which usually occurs in the first month of the school year. The purpose of this time is to introduce yourself to parents and to introduce the year's curriculum to them. Here are some considerations to keep in mind to ensure a successful first encounter.

- This is the time to let parents know a little bit about you. No matter how old their child, parents realize that you will play an important role in their life over the upcoming academic year. Present yourself professionally, and let the parents see your enthusiasm.
- Discuss your expectations for assignments, classroom conduct and so on. Be sure to let parents know if there are extra considerations for the year, such as extra resources or special school supplies that need to be provided by them.
- Have a presentation prepared in which you provide parents with a written summary of assessment plans, rubrics, curriculum outline, homework expectations and the classroom code of conduct. Let them know about the learning outcomes for the year and how you will create activities to enable them.
- Let parents and guardians know how they can support their children's education during the year. This might be anything from asking parents to read to their children nightly, to ensuring students get enough sleep. This is a great time to let parents know if you will require volunteers for future trips or projects.

- Let parents know how they can contact you. More schools are communicating with parents through e-mail by website pages such as Google Classroom that are updated daily or weekly. Some teachers post homework on the web. Let parents know if you plan to do this and how they can access the information. Be sure parents realize their contact with you will be professional. If possible, call from school so that "call display" does not reveal your personal home phone number.
- Most of the parents will want to say hello to you and introduce themselves. Do not let one or two parents monopolize your time! As this evening usually occurs in the first month of school, it is not an appropriate time to discuss student progress. Let parents know that you will be in a much better position to discuss their children at reporting time, when you have had time to conduct a fuller assessment. Position yourself so that you can move about; don't get stuck behind your desk!

The most important part of this night is to build confidence in your parents that you are there to support their child.

**Parent-Teacher Conferences at Reporting Periods**

These conferences follow each reporting period and are often organized by appointment. If so, you will know in advance which parents you are about to see and can prepare appropriate material. If you will not have this advance notice, you must prepare your files so you can quickly access relevant information on your students. Whatever the case, make sure that you are well prepared for this session.

Remember to always do your best to be comfortable and relaxed. Below are some planning tips that you might consider before, during and after the conference to make sure that everybody gets the most out of it.

**Before the Conference**

- Before your first meeting with parents/guardians, review the academic record of the student and collect any incident reports you may have made.
- Be well prepared. Collect dated samples of student work completed throughout the term to show improvement or decline in quality. These will substantiate your evaluation, providing parents with clear examples of current work habits.
- Have on hand rubrics or scoring guides for any assignments which may be discussed.
- Ensure privacy.
- Have appointments posted outside the door and keep to the schedule; parents/guardians needing additional conference time should be invited to come at a later date.
- Provide chairs for parents who are waiting outside your classroom. Reading material is also appreciated by parents – a student newsletter or recent school newspaper, for instance.

- Prepare a conference form for record keeping to focus the discussion and to aid future conferences.
- Successful conferences deal with only a few issues because of time constraints; make sure you know what points you want to cover.

**During the Conference**

- Greet the parents/guardians at the door.
- Introduce yourself with a friendly voice, but keep opening comments to a minimum to allow for more discussion time.
- Be clear and concise in your comments; be an attentive listener.
- In discussing a problem with parents, be sincere, truthful and objective.
- Keep the parents/guardians involved by encouraging them to share pertinent information with you.
- Maintain the focus and keep the discussion on track.
- No matter how many problems a student has, find some positive things to report.
- With the parents/guardians' help, develop some goals for the rest of the year.

**Concluding the Conference**

- Check that the parents/guardians have a clear understanding of what was discussed.
- Highlight the conclusions and the agreed-upon actions.
- If needed, set another date for further discussion.
- End as you began – on a positive note.
- Thank the parents/guardians and walk them to the door.
- Summarize the points covered and add them to your files.

**Follow Up**

- Send a note home the next day thanking the parents/guardians for their time and interest.
- After a few weeks, phone the parents/guardians with a progress report.
- Keep your principal informed.

In the unlikely event that a parent becomes volatile during such a conference, try to stay calm. Suggest that a different type of meeting take place at a later date when tempers have cooled, one with other professionals who are also in contact with the parent's child, such as other teachers, the guidance counsellor, learning resource teacher and/or principal. Explain to the parent that more information from others could give a clearer picture of the situation. Stay open to future discussion, but bring this one to an end. Conclude the session by opening the door and firmly ending the session. Document the incident immediately and give a copy to your principal.

## Problem-Solving Conferences

Over the course of the year, there may be concerns about particular students which prompt the need for home contact. It's a good idea to approach these conferences with a plan in mind so that the focus of the meeting stays on the issue. If the concern is fairly serious, parents should be invited into the school for a scheduled, formal meeting. If the issue is less serious, a telephone discussion may suffice.

### *Face-to-Face Conference*

If the conference is not a regularly scheduled parent-teacher interview but rather a problem-solving conference which you have initiated or which has been initiated by the parent, the following format may prove useful.

**Introduction**

- cite purpose – statement of concern
- update the situation

**Description of the Problem**

- describe the problem, present documentation
- describe what has been done
- seek parent/guardian input on their view of the problem

**Problem Solving**

- seek parent/guardian input and suggestions for solving the problem
- propose your own suggestions
- discuss various alternatives
- agree upon a best solution for the situation

**Action Planning**

- develop an action plan for improvement
- identify specific actions

**Closure**

- plan for follow up
- close on a positive note

### *Phone Call Conference*

You may want to attempt to deal with an issue through a problem-solving phone call.

- Begin with a statement of sincere concern which will set the tone for the conversation, so carefully phrase your remarks.
  For example, instead of "Ms. O'Neill, I'm calling because I am not pleased with Elizabeth's behaviour," say, "Ms. O'Neill, I'm calling because I'm concerned about Elizabeth and how she gets along with other students."

- Describe the specific behaviour that necessitated the call.

Describe the behaviour in observable terms (such as hitting, shouting or refusing to participate) and the number of times the problem has occurred. Rather than saying, "Wayne treats others cruelly," say, "Wayne hit three students over the course of the day."

- Describe steps you have taken to solve the problem.

Let the parent know that you are not calling in lieu of solving the issue yourself. Explain specifically what you have done to address the problem. "Last week I discussed the rule with him, and I had him write down a commitment not to hit other students. Today, I sent him to the principal's office and later spoke with the principal about how to help him address this problem."

- Get information from the parent.

Ask for any information they can add that might help solve the problem and discover what may be troubling the student and exacerbating the behaviour.

- Present your solutions to the problem.

Prepare to tell the parent exactly what you will do and what you would like the parent to do. Ask the parent to let the child know that you called and that both you and the parent feel concern about the problem.

- Express confidence in your ability to address the issue.

The parent may feel anxious and want to know that you have the ability to work with the child to correct the problem, just as a parent would want to know that a pediatrician could make a child well. Rather than saying, "I don't know how to handle this, but I'll try," say, "Don't worry. Other students have had this problem. We can help Eric."

- Plan for follow-up contact.

Promise the parent that you will follow up on this conversation. Commit to follow-up contact. Say, "I will contact you on Friday and let you know how things went."

As a beginning teacher, you are no doubt going to find your first year or two to be extremely busy. Protect your private time. Parents can be anxious about their children and may want to discuss their progress in unlikely places, such as parking lots and supermarkets. Let parents know you are available and that they should call the school to make an appointment to see you there.

# XI. BEING PREPARED… EVEN WHEN YOU ARE NOT THERE

There will be occasions when you will need to be absent from school. You should check with your principal about the protocol for teacher absence. If the absence is planned, such as in the case of a scheduled meeting or a professional development day, then the principal will know well in advance and be able to call in a substitute teacher. However, if the absence is unplanned, if you fall ill or are faced with another unforeseen circumstance, there should be a system in place whereby you notify the school and a substitute is called for you. In this event, you will need to have a contingency plan for your classes for that day. It is your responsibility to ensure that a quality education program continues in your absence. Advance planning on your part will help to maintain a consistency of routine and will, in the long run, make it easier for you upon your return.

## Substitute Teacher Information

It is recommended that you prepare some basic information for the substitute teacher. This should be in a folder in an easily accessible place, either in your desk or in the main office. Basic information might include details from the following list.

### About the School

- location of staff room and staff washrooms
- name of Principal
- name of Assistant Principal
- name of secretary(s)
- name of custodian(s)
- names of others you may need to talk to
- map, if your school is large, highlighting key locations and fire exits

### Where to Find

- lesson plans, with one or two activities included for substitute teachers who may not be specialized in your content area
- class lists, with phone numbers
- a list of bus students if applicable
- details of students' special educational and medical needs
- seating plans
- class rules, expectations and responsibilities
- teacher texts
- A/V equipment

**School Schedule**

- weekly timetables
- all bell times and what they indicate (e.g. homeroom/change of class)
- timetable rotation
- supervision schedule and guidelines

**Procedures**

- attendance taking
- bathroom/hall/other procedures for in-class time
- dismissal procedures
- class rules/routines
- management routines
- quiet signal
- emergency procedures

**Get Help From**

- teacher(s)
- reliable students

Ask the substitute to leave you a note describing their day and to place it in a specified location for easy retrieval. Substitute teachers really appreciate all the help you can give them and will be happy to relieve you again if they know they can rely on your guidance.

# XII. PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Preparing for the future means looking after yourself today. There are two important aspects to this: looking after yourself personally and looking after yourself professionally.

## Personal Care

As a new teacher, you will quickly discover why this profession ranks high on the list of stressful jobs. You will need to consciously take care of yourself to achieve a healthy balance between the natural anxieties and challenges of work and the satisfaction that can come from a job well done and a well-balanced lifestyle. Here are some basic tips to help you keep a proper balance.

### Avoid Isolation

- Take time to share with others. Even though you may feel pressed for time, make sure that your schedule allows you to collaborate and interact with colleagues. Ask for help if you need it. Take time to visit the staffroom to develop some personal as well as professional relationships. Particularly if you are in a subject area where there are few people working, join a group outside of school where there may be others who share your interests or expertise.

### Balance Your Personal Life and Work Life

- Work can consume you in your initial year as a teacher. It's a huge transition in your life, and like all transitions, it can be painful. Recognize your emotions. You can express them appropriately rather than at times when they just spill over. Your idea of what teaching would be like, and the reality you face each day, may confuse and upset you. Maintaining a balance between your work and personal life can ease this transition. Keep in contact with your friends, and if you have moved to a new community, seek friendship apart from professional ties.

### Request Support When You Need It

- This can come from family, friends or it may be professional support from your Association. Make sure that you seek this from people who can appreciate the challenges of your profession and the significance of your role and who will not dismiss your need for support as trivial. Every teacher has had a first year and can relate to the overwhelming workload and fatigue that often accompanies it. It is not a sign of incompetence when you ask someone for advice: it's a smart move that will save you time and grief.

### Keep Fit and Healthy

- Make sure to have a well-balanced diet and exercise regularly. Make it a habit to eat breakfast as this will fuel you with the energy necessary to get through the day. Enjoy recess with your colleagues, allow time for bathroom breaks (not

always easy to do!), have a snack and re-hydrate yourself. Wash your hands often. Exercising your body and seeing friends will maintain your energy.

**Practice Time Management Skills**

- Organization is the key to effective time management. If you are naturally organized, then use this skill to the maximum. If you are not, seek help in getting organized. Make a habit of setting priorities each day. If necessary, use tools such as plan books and daily "To Do" lists to make sure that you get the most important things done.

**Keep a Personal Journal**

- This first year will offer many significant first-time events for you in your profession. While you think you may never forget them, there are simple moments in those first days which could be treasured memories. Record your successes, record your challenges, record the solution and record your feelings. This can both be a source of information for you later but, more importantly, it will be a source of inspiration. A journal can serve as a means of self-evaluation as well as a keepsake. Through the process of writing, you will find that you will come to refine your values and teaching strategies and identify insights that will help you through your career.

***Pace yourself … the journey of a thousand miles begins with just one step.***

## Professional Wellness

As a professional, it is up to you to continue to learn. Here are some tips to help you do this:

**Reflect on Your Experience**

- As referenced in the last section, developing this habit of reflecting on your practice will allow you to analyze your strengths, needs and to become a better professional.

**Associate with Other Professionals**

- Whether in your staff room, in some other professional association such as a Special Interest Council of the NLTA, or through other organizations, make sure that there are opportunities for professional dialogue.

**Maintain Currency**

- Seek opportunities for contact with professionals through professional development activities such as conferences or seminars. You must be current on educational practices. Subscribe to a professional journal, not only one related to your particular subject or grade area but also one in general educational research and current themes and topics. Journals such as *Educational Leadership*, a journal published by the Association for Supervision, Curriculum and Development

or *JSD*, published by the National Staff Development Council, would make an excellent addition to your library.

**Develop a Professional Portfolio**

- Select artifacts, documents or other evidence of your work and your reflections and plans for the future and keep them in a portfolio which you or others can reference when looking at your career. Create a professional growth plan for yourself that will describe goals, action plans and activities for your ongoing career.

**Enroll in University Courses**

- Whether you are in a university town or not, with the increased offerings of distance education, it is possible for most people to enroll in university courses or even begin post-graduate studies off campus. These may be credited towards further upgrading and certification. You may want to check with the NLTA or with the Registrar of Teachers at the Department of Education to verify which programs qualify.

*A final word of advice, and one you will*
*come to understand after day one, week one, year one…*

***BREATHE!***

**For more information or suggested resources contact:**

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