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"Who dares to teach must never cease to learn."

—JOHN COTTON DANA

Loving Your Job at Every Stage

What challenges, frustrations, and silver linings await you at each point in your teaching career? Take a closer look at three different stages in an educator's experience to get insight into what you can expect and what you'll need in the years ahead.

STAGE ONE: THE NEW GENERATION

When Veronica Rodriguez started college, she had a plan. Pre-med, or if not, pre-law. Then she took a part-time job as a volunteer in a 3rd-grade classroom, and her plans changed completely: "I fell in love with teaching," she says. Like Veronica, if you are a new teacher (0–5 years experience), you are far more likely than your more experienced counterparts to have weighed a number of career options than to have considered yourself "born to teach." You passed through those school doors with your eyes wide open. Still, it was a bit of a shock, wasn't it?

As a new generation teacher, you are more likely to view teaching as one of several careers you will have over the course of your working life. A quarter of you entered teaching through alternative certification, such as Teach for America or second-career programs. You are likely to support merit pay (as long as it's not tied to test scores). You enjoy collaboration, care about job flexibility, and embrace technology.

The hardest part of your first couple of years, experts and new teachers agree, is classroom management. According to a study from Public Agenda, the top areas where new teachers need more help is "handling discipline" and "helping struggling students." Here's a big surprise: Only 9 percent say that new teachers need "more theory."

What advice do fellow teachers and experts recommend? Ask for the help you need. Use that mentor. Or if your school's mentoring program is not up to par, find help on your own. Choose a teacher in your school who speaks your language and then brain-pick. If that doesn't work, troll

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Have Teen Drivers in Your House?

Here's how to help them become a better driver.

As a teacher or a parent, does the thought of teen driving make you nervous? You're right to be concerned. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens (Center for Disease Control). Here are the risks:

New research shows that teenage brains are still developing, especially in the area associated with higher-order thinking and decision making. Teenagers are more likely than older drivers to underestimate a dangerous situation or fail to recognize hazardous conditions.



Teenagers are also more likely to engage in risky driving behaviors, such as speeding, running red or yellow lights, following closely, and not wearing seat belts. Compared with other age groups, teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use. According to the Center for Disease Control, 10% of high school students reported they rarely or never wear seat belts when riding with someone else.

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Author Visits

Would you like to bring a favorite children's author to speak at your school and work with your students? Here is the What, When, Where, Why and How of planning a successful author visit!

Daniel Pinkwater is the beloved author of over one hundred children's books and a popular NPR commentator. But his most memorable audience was on an elementary school visit. "When we pulled into the parking lot," says Pinkwater, "a bunch of fifth-graders with horns piled on the front door. A brass choir! The kids played a fanfare as we made our way into the building!"

"As if all that wasn't enough, I was escorted to the playground where the kids introduced me to a red hen they had trained to do tricks, using the very techniques described in the chicken-training chapter of my book, *The Hoboken Chicken Emergency*."

"The librarian and the teachers had done an incredible job—my appearance was just the cherry on top of an amazing series of lessons, exercises, projects, and reading, reading, reading. Now, that is what I call a school visit."

While training chickens is not a mandatory element for a successful author visit, learning the "who, what, where, when, why and how's" can make the prospect less daunting and ensure your school gets the most bang for their buck.

WHO

Perhaps the most intimidating aspect of planning the visit is picking the author you'd like to visit your school. With so many talented authors offering visits, it can be a tough choice. School librarians can be great resources since they are on the front line and know the authors that excite the students. Many authors have their school visit program description and fees listed on their web site for easy preliminary research.

"Talk to fellow teachers, librarians, administrators, and booksellers," suggests Alexis O'Neil, author of *The Recess Queen* and SCBWI column, "The Truth About School Visits." "Talk to parent leaders at other schools. Make a list of authors they have seen in action doing outstanding presentations. Look for authors with terrific books that relate to your curriculum goals."

Budget-wise, scan your state awards lists for quality local authors. Authors beyond a certain geographical distance need to have transportation, hotel, and meal costs covered. Some publisher Web sites list their school-visiting authors by region. You might be surprised to see who lives right around the corner.

WHAT

What happens during the visit is largely dictated by your school needs. Many authors have several choices of programs and will tailor their visit to what works best for the school. If reading interest is down, an animated reading with lots of opportunities for the children to participate can offer a boost. If there is high interest in the writing process or artistic aspect of children's books, hands-on workshops can be combined with larger assembly style discussions about being an author or illustrator.

Authors with multiple non-fiction titles are often willing to showcase different books during their visit day to provide a good match for current math, science or history curriculum.

WHERE

Planning the location of the presentation involves more thought than simple logistics. Some authors are very comfortable speaking to large assemblies and can handle the challenges an auditorium or gym venue might present. Others insist on smaller classroom spaces.

One thing to consider when breaking students into groups is to avoid varying the age range too far, or it will be difficult for the author to capture the attention of the group. What interests a Kindergartener might not appeal to a third grader. In order to reach the most students, an author who writes for a wide range might work well by featuring different books for different grades

WHEN

Start planning early to not only secure your top choice of authors, but to have the option of filing for grants or donations to defer the cost of the visit. Many authors have a limited number of pro bono or discounted visits available per year for schools that lack access to funds. Ideally, students could also come away from the author visit with a tangible piece to remember the experience.

Some authors send a prep pack which includes related reading lists, activity sheets and discussion leads or lessons. This allows the excitement to build, and ensures students feel the impact of the visit.

HOW

If funds are an issue, consider teaming with other schools in the area to split transportation costs. Some authors will even split their full day rate between two nearby schools. When all else fails financially, allow the possibility for authors to do what they do best, get creative. Consider a video visit or phone call visit. Alternatively, look online for video interviews with the authors you love.

WHY

Making a personal connection to an author not only excites kids about reading, but encourages them to pursue their biggest goals in life.

"My high school creative writing teacher was Frank McCourt, author of *Angela's Ashes*," says Jordan Sonnenblick, award-winning author of *Zen and the Art of Faking It*. "I always knew I wanted to be an author, and that I wanted to write books that really moved people, but seeing a real person achieve that made me believe it was possible."

"I think of that feeling during my middle school visits, and try to give the kids a real-life example of writing for the right reasons. It would be amazing if, twenty years from now, some newly published novelist came up and thanked me for something I said on a school visit in 2008."

SOURCES:

www.authorsinschools.com
www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr374.shtml
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/authorsand-books/visitkit>

continued from page 1

Have Teen Drivers in Your House? Here's how to help them become a better driver.

Teaching teens to be careful and safe drivers and setting clear expectations for independent driving can make the difference in their survival behind the wheel. It's an effort that will take time and patience on your part. Here's what you can do:

SET A GOOD EXAMPLE. It's likely that your teen will drive similarly to the driver they know best: You! So do your best to follow good driving practices as you drive with your teen as a passenger. If you are impatient with fellow drivers, they will be too. If your lane changes are too impulsive, theirs will be too.

SET DRIVING RULES. Even if your state law doesn't set graduated rules privileges for teen drivers, create your own. Always insist that safety belts be worn at all times by all occupants of the car. Consider only allowing new drivers to use the car for specific destination trips, such as to the library or to the store. You may also want to wait until your teen has been driving six months or even a year, before having friends as passengers. The more teenage passengers—the greater the chance of a car crash.

TEACH RESPONSIBILITY. Consider having your teen shoulder part of the expense for gas and maintenance on the car he or she drives. This will help your teen to understand that while driving is a great new freedom, it is also a tremendous responsibility.

SOURCES:

www.teendriving.com
www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/teenmvh.htm
www.parentingteendrivers.com
www.nsc.org/issues/teendriving/guide.htm



Nominate a teacher for Teacher of the Year

Every year, Teachers' Insurance Plan™ recognizes great teachers with our Teacher of the Year Awards.

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www.teachers.com/toty

Deadline: April 30, 2008

Loving Your Job at Every Stage

the teacher blogs and find your workplace soulmate. They're out there, and many of them are as funny as they are wise. Here's the good news: Your school needs you. They are lucky to have you, and as boomer teachers start retiring, they're going to have to start showing it.

"My advice for new teachers? Relax a little bit. You have to find balance. I'm trying to find it right now. When I pick up a book that is not related to my teaching, I feel guilty. But I'm working on it."

—Veronica Rodriguez, 6th-grade science teacher

STAGE TWO: I TEACH, THEREFORE I AM

Mid-career is often seen as the calmest part of the teaching journey, a time of uninterrupted flow. In reality, that's very unlikely! Experienced teachers may have it down day-to-day in the classroom, but chances are now that you're an old hand, your school's finding more and more for you to do. Signed up for the new curriculum committee and prospective parents' night? Does the chess club have your name on it?

While the prep time of mid-career teachers (thankfully) declines, many of you find it quickly replaced with new responsibilities around the schoolhouse. At the same time, you may have a lot to do at home. It can be an incredible juggling act, and sometimes it's hard to keep all those balls in the air.

As a mid-career teacher (6–20 years experience), you bring a tremendous amount to the party — experience, expertise, confidence and, of course, sparkling personality. You know who you are as a teacher and what works for you. You carefully track which teaching strategies work best and which ones don't. Already, you've seen trendy ideas in education come and go. You do what works for your kids.

The challenge you face now is deciding what you want to do next. Should you revamp your teaching for those digital kids? Change grade level? Take on a new role as a mentor, staff developer, or administrator? Go back and get that master's degree? Whatever you decide, it's time for your second career as an educator. Only you can decide what that's going to be.

This can be a time of stress, but also of great satisfaction and achievement. Your classroom library rocks, your salary is on the rise, and you've probably even outlasted an administrator or two or three. You've earned the right to get that grant and ask for that better classroom or choice assignment. Go for it.

"I've never considered leaving teaching, but I would like to do more mentoring. I'd like to see new teachers see themselves as professionals and demand that teaching be treated as a profession."

—Sanford Cargile, 7th-grade teacher

STAGE THREE: AT THE TOP OF YOUR GAME

Yes, you're old school — but you're certainly not old-fashioned. As a teacher with 21+ years of experience, you've seen a generation of your students hit adulthood (and at least a few follow in your footsteps). Because of your lifelong commitment to educating kids, you know there were standards, before there were "Standards" — after all, you helped to set them.

There's a reason they call you a veteran. You've been through NCLB in all its incarnations, the whole-language wars, and the disastrous parent-teacher conferences of 1989. Not to mention the daily battle to keep 24 or more kids learning and on track.

Nearly a million of you veterans are planning to retire in the next decade. Yes, that's right, the teachers we count on for nearly everything. Your challenge? Mentoring. Help those newbies out! They need you — your expertise, your wisdom, your pats on the back. "Being a mentor is just one more way of leaving your mark," says Bonnie Shatun, a teacher in Burbank, California.

The other questions you wrestle with: When should I retire? And when I do, what am I going to do next? Retired teachers are an original bunch. They don't sit around. You'll meet them on the Appalachian Trail, on cruises to Alaska, and working in schools everywhere. (Some of you just can't get enough.) Only you know when you are ready to retire. Education professor Michael Dougherty says, "It's when you get up and that bell doesn't ring." North Carolina teacher Peggy Wheeler thought she was ready after 34 years in the classroom. She went back after a week. "I missed the kids," she says.

As a veteran teacher, you have so many reasons to feel proud and satisfied. You are at the top of the game and the top of the pay scale. Your influence is felt beyond your classroom, throughout your whole school. You will never know how many lives you've touched.

SOURCES:

New Teacher Survival Guide
www.ed.gov/teachers/become/about/survivalguide/index.html
 Teachers Network www.teachersnetwork.org
 NewTeacher.com www.newteacher.com
 Teacher Leaders Network www.teacherleaders.org

Defining the Role of the Teacher Leader
http://cep.terc.edu/ra/publications/Alliance_Access/Vol4-No2/defining.html
 Teacher Mentoring Resources
www.middleweb.com/mentoring.html

Pop Quiz

Q: What age group has the lowest rate of seatbelt use?

answer on page 4.

Sharing the Road

Every year as spring arrives, the weather turns warmer, flowers come out and so do the bicycles! Whether you are the one dusting off your helmet and taking your bicycle to the street, or firmly committed to your four door, knowing the rules for sharing the road keeps us all a little safer.

IF YOU'RE A DRIVER:

Be Courteous. Just like you, cyclists have a right to the road. Slow down when near a cyclist and allow them extra time to cross intersections.

Stay Alert. It can be easy not to notice a cyclist. Scan for bicycles as well as pedestrians in traffic and at intersections. Be especially careful when opening your car door in on-street parking spaces.

Watch for Children. Bicycle crashes affect all age groups, but the highest injury and fatality rates are associated with younger riders. Kids, of course, are unpredictable. Unlike adult cyclists, you can't expect that they will know the rules of the road. Slow down and expect the unexpected.

IF YOU'RE A CYCLIST:

Always Wear a Helmet. Every time, no exceptions. No matter how short the trip.

Go With the Flow. Unless there is a designated bicycle lane, it is almost always safer to ride with the flow of the normal traffic pattern. You'll get where you are going faster and be much less likely to get into a traffic accident.

Ride on the Right. Sometimes bicyclists think they're safer on the left, where they can see cars coming, but riding on the left is actually one of the biggest causes of car-bike crashes.

Ride Responsibly. The same laws that apply to motorists apply to you. That means: Obey all traffic signs just as you would if you were driving. Use hand signals to indicate stops and turns.



SOURCES:
 How to Not Get Hit by Cars—Important lessons on Bicycle Safety
<http://bicyclesafe.com>

Share the Road
www.share-the-road.org

Bicycle Street Smarts
www.bikexprt.com/streetsmarts

Building Strong Bonds between School and Home



Imagine an elementary school where more than 300 limited-English proficient students speak 18 -19 different languages. Now, imagine kids eager to translate invitations for special school events that bring parents together with teachers. On these nights, teachers model activities that parents can use to help their children build important skills, and bilingual support staff speak to parents in their own language, giving them tips on how to get more involved in their children's learning. This is "Family Night School" at Randolph Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, where teacher communication with immigrant parents is strong and grows stronger each year.

FIVE EASY STRATEGIES

Linda Smith, an ESL specialist, and Sharon Schafer, a reading specialist, developed the program at Randolph Elementary. While their program is school-wide, Smith and Schafer say it is possible for individual teachers to create their own smaller efforts to successfully reach out to immigrant parents. They recommend the following strategies for successful teacher-parent communication.

- 1. Make yourself as visible as possible.** Try to touch base with parents when they drop off or pick up their children. Greet parents and make them feel comfortable.
- 2. Enlist children to translate.** Ask bilingual children to help translate during any special program with performances that bring parents to the school. Have students make invitations for their parents that they can then translate aloud at home. Or perhaps the students can also write the invitations in their first language.
- 3. Recruit bilingual staff as parent liaisons.** They can be invaluable in making personal contact with parents by phone. Likewise, if parents know when a bilingual parent liaison is at school, they can call with questions during those hours.
- 4. Explain the value of educational activities.** In different cultures, field trips such as a trip to the zoo are seen as an extravagance and not a necessity. As you send home permission slips, you might need to send a flyer which students can translate explaining why the trip is more than just a fun outing.

5. Try to schedule meetings when parents can come. Many immigrant parents work at jobs with hours that conflict with parent-teacher conference times. Try to schedule meetings on parents' days off and, if possible, schedule a monthly time to meet individually with interested parents so they can learn about their children's progress and what they need to practice at home. This may take a bit more of your time at first, but the payoff—committed parents who are eager to be a part of their child's learning—may just be worth it.

A LASTING IMPACT

By the year 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau predicts that one in every 10 children in the U.S. will be foreign-born. While this may seem daunting, you can take comfort in the fact that teachers and schools around the country with large immigrant populations have been working successfully to connect with the parents of their students. They have discovered the richness of cultural differences and have used those differences to work with parents.

For many parents, the benefits of strong ties to their children's school have empowered them to get their own GEDs, go on to college, or become involved in other parts of the community. Your work with immigrant parents can have a lasting effect.

SOURCES

Connect With Immigrant Parents

www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/298-connect-with-immigrant-parents

Parent-Teacher Communication-Helping Children Succeed in School

www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/succeed/09-communication.html

Parent-Teacher Communication Advice from Veteran Teachers

www.teachervision.fen.com/teacher-parent-conferences/teaching-methods/6482.html

Pop Quiz *A: While senior drivers may remember the days before seatbelts were required, it is teens who are most likely to skip buckling up. 10 percent of teens report that they rarely or never wear seatbelts. (CDC)*

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