



Helping New Teachers Through Their Hardest Days

Education Week Teacher by [Teaching Ahead Contributor](#) Roxanna Elden on October 19, 2016 9:27 AM

During my first year of teaching, I would never have written an *Education Week* post about **the first year of teaching**. Especially not in October.

For one thing, I wouldn't have had time. My first set of report card grades was rapidly approaching and I was behind on grading. There was a long list of parents I needed to call. Meanwhile, **I was barely clinging to the treadmill of preparing the next day's lesson**. Every day I stayed at school later and got less done, slowed by exhaustion, pumped back up by panic. I knew if the kids got confused or bored, the class would get chaotic again, and I'd end the day the way I ended most days: Yelling.

I didn't know it at the time, but I was right in the middle of what the New Teacher Center [calls](#) *The Disillusionment Phase*. This is the time frame between mid-October and Thanksgiving when many beginners hit their low points.

Rookies with supportive administrators and high quality mentor teachers are the lucky ones. Yet this season is no picnic for mentors and administrators, either. In October and November, energy throughout a school is in short supply. It also doesn't help that one symptom of disillusionment is defensiveness. Well-meaning guidance can be rewarded with attitude, or a series of dejected uh-huh's.

This hesitation to open up is not personal.

For better or worse, there is no good way for struggling teachers to out themselves during the first year. Even meetings meant to support new teachers can feel competitive, with participants more eager to share success stories than confess mistakes. As a result, beginners spend lots of time comparing their unedited footage to other people's highlight reels, each secretly worried that they are the weak links.

By October of my first year, I, too, had learned to put a positive spin on any stories I shared. And yet, what I needed most was for someone to be straightforward about how tough teaching can be. Especially when you feel like the weak link. Especially when everyone around you is sharing success stories.

Rather than repeating that terrifying catchphrase about how the first year of teaching "makes you or breaks you," I needed someone to reassure me that the great teachers of the future know they are not great yet. New teachers need to know that they can bounce back from their worst moments and still go on to become successful. And then, they need to know the next manageable step to being a better teacher tomorrow morning.

Comment Doug51 on November 3, 2016: I agree, **schools and districts could certainly do more to support novice teachers, particularly when they have new assignments**. In fact, 100% of teachers have new assignments when they are first given a classroom. Added to the problems of novice teachers, particularly secondary teachers with the hardest subject assignments is the fact that there is a lack of a well-developed instructional support and mentoring system. This, on top of teacher shortages and resulting teacher quality issues relating to the unequal distribution of highly-effective teachers aggravates the student achievement gap. What school districts and principals can do for teachers with new classroom assignments is to provide not only subject-specific mentoring teacher access, but along with that, sustained professional development training, providing on-the-job training "just-in-time" for new class assignments that includes subject-specific instructional support. This is the most practical, economical way of addressing the needs of the new teacher and, additionally, experienced teachers of new subjects. Such a program of support will not only will save hundreds of hours of prep time, but will better prepare teachers for their classroom assignments leading to improved

student achievement. Such a program will demonstrate school leadership and fulfill the need for teacher support and training. Specifically, the instructional support materials in the *Expert Systems for Teachers* Series include everything a teacher typically needs to prepare for each day and for the entire school year, everything that doesn't come with a textbook: a pacing guide, detailed daily lesson plans, editable class lecture notes in Power Point form, complete labs and activities and editable assessments along with a subject-specific mentor, not just a generalist. The suggested instructional material can be used as is in the classroom or taken as a course through a participating university for credit toward license renewal with study guide and fees paid for state subject-area certification exams when necessary. Now with over 120 subject-specific titles in 17 subject areas, the *Expert Systems for Teachers* series. You can find details at the Teaching and Learning Foundation web site page http://www.thetlf.org/TLF_Universities.html. The program already serves schools in all 50 U.S. states and 87 countries and offers, beyond instructional materials, courses for credit toward license renewal through participating universities where necessary.

Comment: NJB, on October 20, 2016

This is possibly less of an issue with elementary teachers as opposed to High School (although elementary has it's own unique challenges) but I think an enormous issue is that (due to the 'parity' imposed by Union regs) the newest teachers get the hardest classes.

Because pay, perks & any other considerations are taken out of the admins hands & every teacher is equal, about the only benefit that seniority conveys is the "right" of first refusal. So the vets take the more senior students, the more academically advanced/ selective courses & thus get the more mature, more focused, more motivated students.

And who gets the less plum classes, the 'for graduation credit only' courses that every High School offers in 1 form or the other? The newest, least experienced teachers.

This is NOT to say that there aren't benefits & rewards to teaching these classes - there are, I've taught'em. But they're more difficult; more behavior issues, more learning issues, often less engagement.

In other words, the kids that need the most help get the teachers the least able to deliver it. Disservice to the students, demoralizing & exhausting to the teachers. BUT...given that there is no acknowledgement that some classes are more challenging to manage & no benefit or incentive for the teacher. I understand that a pay differential would be tough to get thru a Union or a School Board, but there is no extra prep time, no lessening of other duties, no additional assistance. So, when 'your time' comes & you have enough seniority to qualify for the easier-to-teach courses . . . most of us go for it.

And let me add, because I had to create all of my teaching materials for the 'lower level' science classes when I started teaching, I opted to keep teaching some of them, even as I gained years. So, I'm not speaking from a place of bitterness or failure...but I will say I lessened by load, I opted out of teaching 3 preps of these classes so quickly as I could.

I hear or read of this occasionally, so I know it's not only my experience. But it is the elephant in teacher lounge, or School Board meeting - it's there but we don't acknowledge it to our detriment.

About the author: *Roxana Elden made it through her first year of teaching and another 10 years after that. She attained National Board Certification and wrote [See Me After Class: Advice for Teachers by Teachers](#), which has helped thousands of new teachers make the transition from training to the classroom. Most recently, she created the [Disillusionment Power Pack](#), a free, one-month series of emails meant to help new teachers through their toughest days. You can sign up [here](#) to receive the emails.*

Article source:

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_ahead/2016/10/helping_new_teachers_through_their_hardest_days.html?cmp=eml-enl-tu-news2