



# THE HEART AND ART OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

PRACTICAL IDEAS AND RESOURCES  
FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS



ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION OF ONTARIO  
FÉDÉRATION DES ENSEIGNANTES ET DES ENSEIGNANTS DE L'ÉLÉMENTAIRE DE L'ONTARIO



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**The Heart and Art of Teaching and Learning:  
Practical Ideas and Resources for Beginning Teachers**

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*The Heart and Art of Teaching and Learning: Practical Ideas and Resources for Beginning Teachers*

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# Introduction

Welcome and congratulations! You have chosen a career full of challenges, wonder, and joy.

As a Beginning Teacher, you bring many gifts to your classroom. Your enthusiasm for learning and commitment to meeting the diverse needs of the students you work with are tremendous assets to your school.

Our goal in writing this book is not only to provide a practical resource for the many “firsts” you will encounter, but also to encourage and enhance your personal learning journey. As we begin this journey together, please accept our sincere thanks for the difference you will be making in the lives of your students.

## Co-Authors



**Joanne Language** is an Executive Staff member in Professional Services – Professional Development with ETFO. Her two daughters teach her about life and learning every single day.

*Joanne believes that every child is a world of possibilities. It is the educator’s job to discover how each student is “smart” and to build on that knowledge.*

*\* Picture courtesy of Joanne’s six-year-old daughter Paige*



**Jim Strachan** has been working with (and learning from) children for 27 years as a social worker, classroom teacher of grades 2 to 8, and instructional leader. For the past seven years, he has been the Program Coordinator: Beginning Teachers in the Toronto District School Board (his dream job). By modelling caring, compassion, co-operation and humour, Jim believes we can contribute to the success of all children.

*Jim starts each day in his kayak watching the sun rise over Lake Ontario.*



# The Voices of Your Colleagues

We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to all our ETFO colleagues whose ideas and insights form the heart of this resource. The contributing elementary teachers have a wide variety of experience, and teaching background. This book is written for teachers by teachers who have a current understanding of teaching in today's classrooms.

As you read the book and “meet” each person, you will feel their genuine commitment to living the heart and art of teaching and learning each day with their students and colleagues.

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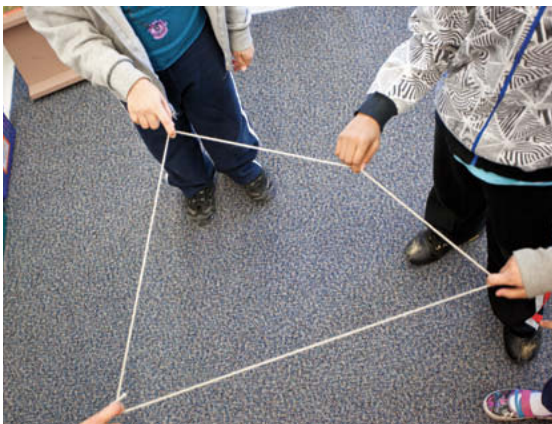
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# Chapter 1



**The Heart and Art of Teaching and Learning - Themes of Success**





As you begin your teaching career, we are excited to share with you the voices of over 2,500 Beginning Teachers and Mentors who set this task:

***As you think about your commitment to making a difference for students, tell a story about the best experience you have had so far this year.***

Below you'll find the powerful themes that emerged as your colleagues reflected on what contributes to their success as teachers and how they can best have a positive impact on the lives of their students. These voices reflect the "heart and art" of teaching and learning.

## Themes of Success

### Connecting with Students

- Establishing an authentic personal connection with students (currency)
- Modelling caring, patience, and humour
- Building inclusion to promote acceptance of and among students
- Developing a classroom community

### Passion for Teaching

- Harnessing personal experiences/passions and connecting these with teaching
- Trying something "new" (risk taking)
- Drawing upon internal resources and applying them to the classroom
- Bringing personal excitement and passion to the classroom

### Attributes-Based Approach

- Empowering students by seeing their attributes (not their deficits)
- Using students as a resource by accessing their strengths
- Listening and responding to students' needs
- Recognizing the rewards of seeing a challenging student progress

### Importance of School Culture

- Collaborating at school with administration, colleagues, parents, and students
- Sharing /celebrating success
- Developing positive relationships with colleagues
- Creating an environment that supports risk taking and experimentation

## Connecting with Students – Ideas from Jim

*What we teach is curriculum but who we teach are students.*

Often teachers feel tension between our innate desire to build an inclusive classroom culture and the pressure to get on with the curriculum. But this is not an either/or proposition. When we build a learning-focused classroom culture where the thoughts and contributions of all students are valued, we have more time for teaching and spend less time managing student behaviour.

Intentionally structuring opportunities for teachers to learn about their students, and for them to learn about each other and about us, builds currency. We can trade in that currency when we need collaboration and co-operation from our students.

How do we do this? Chapter 3 is devoted to practical inclusion-building strategies, but here are some reflections based on my own learning journey.

If you are a teacher working with the same students every day, authentic personal connections are easier to foster. But many of you may find yourselves working with a number of different classes. Even if you can't get to know all of your students, you can build inclusion by letting them get to know you.

I could model building inclusion right now by sharing with you that I have a cat (his name is Clayton, if you were wondering), and that until recently I had two. Or I could tell you that I start every day kayaking and watching the sun rise over Lake Ontario.

A couple of years ago, I had the privilege of seeing the students I taught in grade 5 graduate from high school. After the ceremony I spoke with many students I hadn't seen in almost eight years. Everyone had pretty much the same questions: "How are the cats, Mr. S?" and "Do you still go kayaking and talk to the swans?"



Notwithstanding the wonderful unit on Early Civilizations or the innovative way we learned long division, what the students remembered was who I was as a person and how the classroom felt – yet another reminder that what we teach is curriculum, but who we teach are students.



## Passion for Teaching

*It is difficult to expect our students to be excited and passionate about their learning if we're not.*

I live in the real world and I know that you will not feel passion for every unit, topic, or lesson that you teach. When I taught grade 4 one of the science units was Rocks and Minerals, a topic that interested me not at all. My students, on the other hand, loved rocks and minerals. They brought all manner of samples (even pieces of concrete from a balcony) and asked if they were igneous, metamorphic, or sedimentary. Their excitement ignited mine, and when I gave each student a tiny rock from the beach as a present you would have thought that I had brought them gold nuggets. Sometimes the passion will come from us and sometimes (if we're lucky) it will come from the students we teach.



One of the great privileges I have in my current role is visiting Beginning Teachers in their classrooms and seeing first-hand how they are bringing what they are personally passionate about into their teaching. Recently, I met a teacher who played the guitar semi-professionally and was using the instrument in community circle to help his students learn their multiplication facts. I also got to spend a morning with a colleague who'd been a photographer for seven years before entering teaching. She was using her wonderful, funky photos of building and objects to help the students classify whether the angles were acute, right, or obtuse.

Bringing our personal strengths, interests, and passions into our teaching inspires our students and ourselves.

## Attributes-Based Approach

*We can empower students by seeing attributes they possess.*

The attributes-based approach is a lens through which we can choose to view our students. We can look at our students and note all their deficits, weaknesses, and labels, or we can look at those same students and purposefully identify their strengths. If we believe that our students have strengths and positive attributes, we will intentionally structure opportunities for them to learn from and with each other – and for us to learn from them.



There are two often-used words I would like to eliminate from every staffroom and board office: “those kids.” Nine times out of ten, the words “those kids” are linked with a lowering of expectations, often based on culture, gender, race, socioeconomic status, or even the intersection or apartment building where “those kids” live.

My first experience teaching “those kids” was early in my career, when I taught grade 8 summer school (back when students still failed grade 8). I challenged myself to find one



personal strength or interest that each student possessed and to provide every student with a chance to shine by connecting their strengths to their learning. Was I successful with every student? No, but this way of thinking transformed my approach to teaching. My students became the source of my learning, and the sharing of knowledge and practice became the goal of our classroom community.

This attributes-based approach doesn’t mean ignoring deficits, labels, or challenges; rather, it provides a “glass half-full” mindset that leads to purposefully seeking out the strengths of every student.

## Importance of School Culture

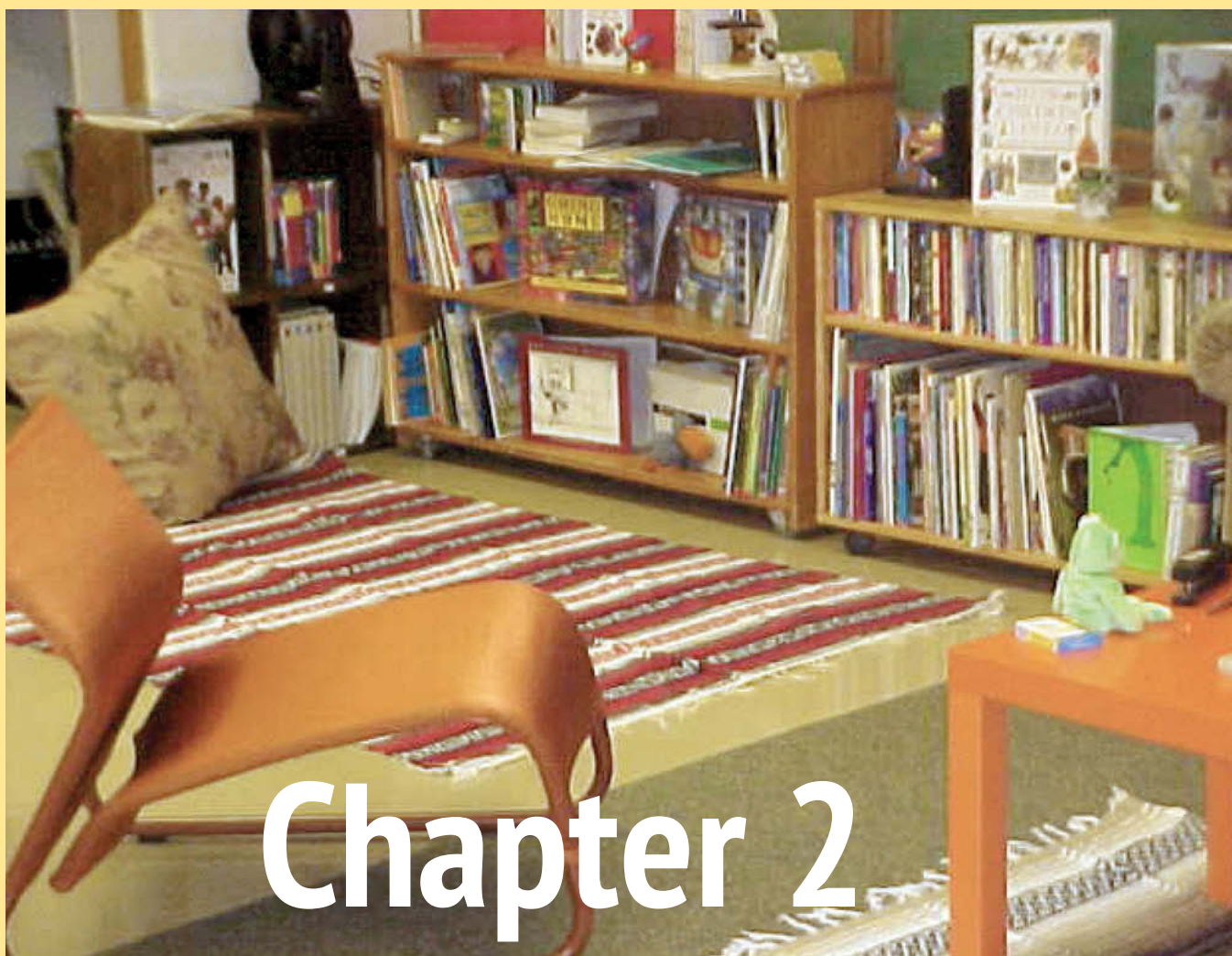
*We come to work for our students, but isn’t it nice when we get along with the adults?*

School culture or school cultures – many schools have more than one – can have a tremendous influence on personal and professional well-being. Teachers report success when they feel valued and supported by colleagues, administration, support staff, parents, and students. A positive school culture encourages risk taking, experimentation, and growth.

In Chapter 2 we highlight the importance of mentorship. While you may be assigned a “formal” mentor, I encourage you to connect with as many colleagues as possible. Focus on colleagues who bring you strength, and who help you feel more positively about yourself and your practice. These colleagues will be your true mentors.

Wishing you all the best as you seek to live the “heart and art” of teaching and learning with your students!





# Chapter 2



**Before School Starts**





## Big Ideas for Before School Starts

- Teaching is a profession of tremendous challenges and tremendous rewards. Savour this exciting time as you anticipate your year.
- Mentorship is a powerful form of support: connect with as many colleagues and supports as you can as you begin your career.
- How you set up your classroom is flexible and may change over time as you get to know your students and their learning needs, and begin to build a welcoming and collaborative learning environment.

You have chosen a profession where you will have the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of your students. As you think about your first day of school, no doubt excitement and nervousness will be running high!

In this chapter, contributors share some ideas and strategies to help you prepare for the arrival of your students. Knowing that the time between when you are hired and when you actually begin teaching may be as long as a few months or as short as a few days (or even one day), the ideas in this chapter are not meant to act as a checklist but rather as a series of “check-ins” to consider.

## Hope and Inspiration

**Leah Kearney** is an Instructional Leader for the Early Years Department of the Toronto District School Board. She loves travel, music, film, and spending time with her family.

*Leah believes that our work with students begins with teachers defining their own core beliefs about teaching and learning.*

Teachers matter. If we believe the latest findings in educational research, we must accept and acknowledge that we are instrumental in the lives of the students we teach.

Our impact on the children we are asked to educate is enormous. This may sound like a lot of pressure, but another way to think about teaching is as a profession of possibilities and dreams. The excitement and buzz of a successful classroom are infectious. You may have dreadful moments and challenging days, but they will be outnumbered by the many joyful moments and the wonderful days that remind you why you have chosen to teach.

You will learn about your strengths and weaknesses and about the multifaceted students who look to you for direction, support, and advice. In many ways, the journey that you are embarking on is the same one that your students begin each year. Scary at the start, but over time less so.

Teaching is a wonderful profession, but one that demands a lot. In your first years, you will find yourself thinking about your students as you try to fall asleep, as you drive home, as you fold laundry, or watch a movie. This is normal! As the year progresses, the job will feel less “all-consuming.” Maintaining a healthy work/life balance is important and becomes easier as you become more accustomed to the profession.



You are part of a community of dedicated teachers who are ready and keen to support you. Just ask! Socialize with colleagues and mentors who enjoy change, who re-evaluate what they do, who are always seeking ways to improve their practice. They will be an invaluable resource in the years to come. Lean on them when you need to.

In addition to school-based support, your board may have an organized induction program for Beginning Teachers. Find out how you can access such support. Others on your staff who are also at the beginning of the careers may have information about what programs your board offers recent hires. Although you will be

learning more than you ever thought possible every day, keep your ears and eyes open for more professional development opportunities. This will pay off in the long run.

## Mentoring at Your School

As a Beginning Teacher, mentoring is one of the most potentially powerful supports available to you. A key goal of Ontario's New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) is to provide you with onsite mentorship and support.

### Who Are Mentors?

Mentors are your colleagues. They do not evaluate or judge your performance; rather, their goal is to develop your internal capacity for learning and growth. They do this via consulting (offering support and providing resources), collaborating (creating challenge and encouraging growth), and coaching (facilitating professional vision).

### What Do Mentors Do?

For any mentoring relationship to work it is essential that you feel trust and support. Perhaps the most powerful attribute skilled mentors exhibit is the ability to listen to your thoughts, worries, successes, challenges, and insights. Based on your learning goals, there are many possible activities you and your mentor(s) can share. Release time may be provided for you and your mentor(s) to engage in professional learning. Even though it is always a challenge to be away from your students, the benefits of this collaboration can make a real difference in your classroom.

Below are some examples of the types of activities and supports mentors can provide. Use it as a starting point for your own thinking about your personal learning goals. Mentoring relationships that flourish are reciprocal – you and your mentor(s) learn and grow together!

**Direct Assistance**

- Your mentor(s) provide a “tour of the school,” sharing key information about logistics and introducing you to colleagues on staff.
- Your mentors share practical “getting started” ideas (e.g., classroom set-up, first-week ideas, planning resources, etc.).

**Demonstration Classroom Learning**

- Intentional, guided, and focused observation of teaching and learning in your mentor’s classroom or the classroom of a colleague with the same assignment as you.
- Follow-up debriefing, action planning with your mentor(s) for how to implement in your own classroom the ideas and strategies you’ve observed.

**Co-planning/Co-teaching (Lesson Study)**

- You and your mentor(s) collaboratively plan and teach a lesson (or a series of lessons) followed by debriefing, reflection, and continuing collaboration.

**Collaboratively Assessing Student Work (e.g., Moderated Marking)**

- You and your mentor(s) assess student work together to help develop a consistent understanding of the standards of achievement and to inform your instructional practice.



## Models of Mentoring

Below are some possible models of how mentoring could work for you. As a Beginning Teacher, you are an active participant in the mentoring process, and I strongly encourage you to approach your administration and your colleagues about the mentoring supports that best meet your needs.

---

### Broker-Mentor

#### Role

- Mentor provides orientation to school logistics and culture.
- Mentor brokers involvement of colleagues as needs arise from Beginning Teacher.

#### Considerations

- Consultant-type relationship, fewer opportunities for collaboration and coaching,
  - May be initial support until other mentoring relationships are established or ongoing throughout the year.
- 

### One-to-One Mentor Matching

#### Role

- Mentor is matched on an individual basis with a Beginning Teacher.
- Mentor adopts consulting, collaborating, and coaching stances based on the needs of the Beginning Teacher.

#### Considerations

- Mentor/Beginning Teacher relationships that flourish are reciprocal – both parties learn and grow.
  - Greater “ownership” occurs when the mentor has volunteered and the Beginning Teacher has been involved in the choice of mentor.
- 

### Group Mentoring

#### Role

- Mentor works with two or more Beginning Teachers or Beginning Teacher may have two or more mentors.
- School’s mentoring committee plans formal support and professional learning opportunities for mentors and Beginning Teachers.





### Considerations

- This model provides flexibility if school has large number of Beginning Teachers (or mentors).
  - This model is often embedded in a school wide “mentoring culture” where all staff are Mentors or Beginning Teachers (or both).
- 

### Informal Mentoring

#### Role

- Beginning Teacher informally connects with a variety of staff members as needs arise.
- Mentor/Beginning Teacher roles are fluid. Often referred to as “peer mentoring” because informal mentors may be Beginning Teachers themselves.

#### Considerations

- Spontaneous, informal nature of relationship lends itself to collaboration.
  - Beginning Teacher may feel isolated and/or “disconnected” if not part of any formal relationships.
- 

### Online Mentoring

#### Role

- Using online conferencing, Beginning Teachers participate in discussion and sharing with experienced teachers and other Beginning Teachers.
- 

#### Considerations

- Enables access to a variety of resources and perspectives outside the school.
  - Not all Beginning Teachers feel comfortable sharing issues and concerns in a “public” online forum.
- 

Multiple models of mentorship may exist at your school. While you may be assigned a formal mentor, you are wise to connect with as many colleagues as possible. Keep connecting with those colleagues who bring you strength, and who help you feel more positive about yourself and your practice after you’ve spoken with them. These colleagues are your true mentors.

Wishing you all the best on your mentoring journey!

## Asking Questions and Building Relationships

**Sangeeta McAuley** is an Instructional Leader working with Beginning Teachers. Music motivates and inspires Sangeeta and she enjoys dancing with her husband and two kids in the kitchen!

*Sangeeta believes that each student has something special about them and that finding and nurturing those attributes is what makes teaching so rewarding.*

While the relationships you build with your students and their families are very important, the time before school starts presents opportunities to build relationships with your colleagues, administrators, office staff, and caretakers. At first you may be filled with questions. Whom you approach for support may depend on the type of question you have. No question is too small (or too big!) to ask.

Possible Question	Whom You Might Ask
• How do I obtain a key for my classroom?	caretaker, office staff
• Where can I get a copy of my class list and timetable?	office staff, administrator
• Is there a stock room with classroom supplies and/or how do I order supplies?	colleagues, office staff, administrator
• How do I access student information?	colleagues, office staff, administrator

Your school probably has some form of staff handbook containing practical information (e.g., staff list, yard-duty schedule, what to do in the case of a fire alarm, the school's lockdown procedures, etc.).

Here are some additional "good things to know" before school starts:

- your class list(s) – who your students are and, if they are young, where they go after school (home, daycare, etc.)
- specific information regarding allergies/medical concerns
- timetable and supervision schedule
- school schedule (e.g., entry and dismissal times, lunch, recess, etc.)
- general layout of the school and where specific rooms are located (e.g., gym, library, music or French)
- how attendance is reported
- school policies and procedures (may be found in the staff handbook).

If your classroom program involves collaborating with a designated early childhood educator (DECE), educational assistant (EA), child and youth worker (CYW), or special needs assistant, connecting with these people will build the reciprocal relationships that will benefit your students.



## School/Community Walk

To start your year off on the right foot, do what you can to familiarize yourself with your school and its environs. If possible, meet with some of your colleagues before school starts and learn what you can about the school and its community. Going for a walk in the neighbourhood will acquaint you with local landmarks (e.g., public library, grocery stores, community centre, parks, and other schools), giving you ideas for field trips and for places where you can develop partnerships with other educators and community resources.

## Summer Postcards

A simple “summer postcard” can be a great introduction to parents and guardians. You’ll need access to your class list with students’ mailing addresses. Also, check in with your principal, as in some schools the students don’t find out who their teacher is until the first day.

Send students and parents a simple postcard introducing yourself. Address the postcard to the student (he or she will be excited to get mail!), and tell him or her things like:

- what you’ve done over the summer
- how much you are looking forward to meeting him or her
- what to bring on the first day of school.

*Dear Faizal,*

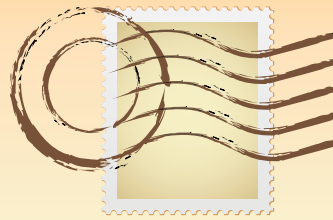
*Hope you are having a great summer.  
One of the first topics we’ll be learning  
about in grade 4 is Canada, so that’s why  
I’ve chosen this postcard of a Maritime  
fishing boat for you.*

*I am excited to be your teacher this year  
and am looking forward to seeing you on  
the first day of school!*

*All the best,*

*Mr. Strachan*

POSTCARD POSTCARD POSTCARD POSTCARD POSTCARD





If you will be using a class blog or website to connect with students and their families, you may want to provide this link. (Caveat: While the web can a powerful way to connect, it's always wise to exercise caution about the personal information you choose to share. You can't be too careful when it comes to maintaining professional boundaries with students.)

## Learning About Your Students – Some Ideas to Consider

When you receive your class list, it may contain only the students' names. If you can, it is always prudent to have a peek at each student's Ontario Student Record (OSR) to see if there is any essential information that you might need to know before school begins. Some students may have particular needs; for example, priority seating is important for a child with hearing loss.

You can be proactive rather than reactive: knowing your students' learning preferences, interests, and need for additional supports will give you a head start on Day 1 of school.

Consulting with your school-based special education staff will tell you which students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs), so that you can begin the year by understanding their needs and making the necessary accommodations and modifications.

For kindergarten students, a great source of information is the form that parents filled out when they registered their youngster for school.

Whatever information you collect about your students, it is important to consider how it will inform what you do with them the first day/week/month and beyond. Even the smallest piece of information, such as which students remain at school for lunch, can affect your classroom. By using what you know wisely, you can create an atmosphere that honours all students and makes them feel respected.

### How Much Information Is Too Much?

You may find the information you receive about your students a bit overwhelming. Deciding how much you want to know in advance of meeting your students is a personal choice, but here are some questions that may help:

- Do you want to know as much as you can before you meet your students or do you prefer to wait to get to know them?
- Do you feel the information sets up a bias or provides perspective?
- Is there some information that is critical to know beforehand and some that can wait until later?

Whatever you decide, your students will benefit when you take an interest in them, even before school begins.



## Classroom Set-Up

Before you begin setting up your classroom, close your eyes and envision how you want it to look. Don't be put off by the way it looks now; imagine that anything is possible. Think about how you want the classroom to work for you and your students. A maxim my dad taught me comes to mind: "Start as you mean to go on." In the context of teaching, that advice means that you have to figure out what you believe in, what will guide your work, and know where the students and you are going.

It is a worthwhile exercise to think about your own beliefs about teaching and learning so that they act as a roadmap for you and as a reference point as you make countless decisions during your first years.

### Sharing Spaces – Guiding Ideas

While much of what you'll read on following pages is based on the premise of you having your own classroom, you may have multiple assignments (e.g., kindergarten in the morning and special education in the afternoon) and find yourself sharing a space. Or you may be a core French teacher teaching "à la cart," taking your materials with you as you travel from class to class.

Here are some guiding thoughts that may be helpful as you adapt the ideas in this chapter to your teaching context.

- While organization is important in any classroom, if you're sharing a space it becomes a necessity. Simple things like clearly labelling materials and sorting them by day of the week or morning and afternoon can save both time and energy. You might also consider labelling shelves for materials with as "personal" or "shared" if several staff are using the same space.
- If you are teaching French or another subject in multiple classrooms, consider asking the homeroom teacher if it would be possible to set aside a space for notebooks or texts and thus "lighten the load" of your cart. This space could also be used to display the work your students do with you in their "regular" classroom.
- Sharing a space is about building relationships. Establishing communication and trust can go a long way toward overcoming any challenges that may arise. In addition to enriching your program, working together models for the students the importance of collaboration.

## Environment

The Reggio Emilia approach to teaching puts the natural development of children as well as the close relationships that they share with their environment at the centre of its philosophy, and refers to the classroom environment as the "third teacher." I can't agree enough.

Not only should the classroom represent your beliefs and values about teaching, it should also support them. In order to make the classroom engaging and inviting, consider what you want students to feel when they come in and how you might communicate this in a non-verbal way. Before classes start in September, consider recruiting a friend or family member to help you in this task. The more people involved, the quicker it will go!

Before you begin to arrange your furniture and unpack and organize your materials, take a long, hard look at what you have in your room. If you have an entire shelf of grade 8 science textbooks and you are teaching grade 2, box them up. Classrooms can easily become the repositories of all sorts of strange items, and often there is someone in the building who needs what you don't want. The same applies to furniture. If you are teaching grade 6 and have Primary-sized chairs in your room, there is a good chance that there is a grade 3 teacher complaining about her Junior-sized chairs! Let your colleagues know what you need and what you are keen to discard. Be sure to check with your administration before discarding furniture, supplies, or resources.

When sorting items, consider using these categories:

Things you know you will need	Things that you know no one will want	Things that other teachers may want	Things you aren't sure of

Organization and set-up are time consuming, but doing it before students arrive is easier than after. That being said, it can be done at any point in the year. The importance of this step to the success of your program cannot be overstated.

### Beyond the Laminated Kittens – Some Advice From Leah

Resist the desire to put up fadeless paper and fancy borders that are just window-dressing. Don't waste your money on laminated posters of kittens hanging on a fence, with cute captions.

Rather than telling students to "Dream Big" by putting up a commercial poster of a random mountain climber, show them through your example what "Dreaming Big" looks like, sounds like, and feels like.

We want children to walk in our classrooms on the first day of school and feel happy about being there. I would suggest, however, that the room can be sparse and bare the first few days. Within a few days, the work and drawings of the students will be posted for all to see.

I encourage you to walk around your room and try to imagine what the environment will look like if it is to truly reflect what you believe about the heart and art of teaching and learning.



## Questions to Consider

- Where will I put my desk? Do I need one? How much space should it occupy? Is a worktable more useful?
- How might the children's desks or tables be set up?
- Do I want to have a large-group meeting area? Do I need a carpet? Can the area serve several purposes?
- Does the set-up accommodate traffic flow and be safe for all students?
- Does the seating allow everyone a sightline to the chalkboard (or chart-stand, easel, whiteboard, smart-board)?
- How will I organize materials and supplies? Will they be gathered in one specific area or placed throughout the room? How can I make materials accessible for my students and easy to put away?
- What learning centres will I have? How can I place them to maximize student learning?
- How will I organize books? Will they be in one specific area or throughout the room?
- How will I use the classroom set-up to showcase and support student thinking and learning (e.g., student work samples on bulletin boards, anchor charts, etc.)?

The room you are assigned may not be perfect, but with thought and ingenuity you can create a warm, inviting, and welcoming space for your students.

You may want to begin by thinking about the “musts.” For example, if a large-group meeting area is essential to the classroom, look at your space to determine where it would best be situated. When creating small-group areas, you may want to measure how many round tables your room has space for. Depending on the number of desks or tables that you have to accommodate, you may have to think creatively.

If space and set-up are problematic, connecting with colleagues can help. Visiting other teachers' classrooms can spark ideas and provide you with creative ways to make the most of the space you have.

Keep your personal safety in mind when beginning to set up your room (e.g., use a ladder to access high places rather than a student desk or chair).

While your classroom may *look* lovely before your students arrive, it's possible that an aspect of your set-up will not work as planned, for them or for you. Keeping the classroom set-up flexible helps students see that they are an important part of creating the learning environment.



## Classroom Layout Ideas – What Could It Actually Look Like?

Below are some examples of a variety of classrooms. All these pictures were taken before the first day of school and are intended as starting points for your thinking.

### Alison's Kindergarten Classroom

**Alison Board** teaches kindergarten. She attempts to practice mindfulness while performing a balancing act between her kindergarten classes and her life at home with family and pets.

*Alison believes that an inviting learning environment and a positive classroom community are the starting points for teaching young children.*

Art Area



Reading Area





## Aaron's Grade 1 Classroom

**Aaron Chan** teaches grade 1. His favourite animals are cows, especially Holsteins.

*Aaron believes that every decision and action in the classroom is purposeful and must be tied to best practices in educational pedagogy and child development.*



**Classroom Layout**



**Student Mailboxes**

**Reading Area**



**Bins with Labels**



### Stephanie's Grade 4 Classroom

**Stephanie Cini** teaches grade 4. Every morning, she laces up her running shoes and engages in physical activities to keep her mind active, her soul engaged, and her body healthy.

Stephanie believes that providing differentiated, authentic learning experiences that are valuable and personal to students is the key to capturing their attention and allows them the freedom to show their unique personalities through endless possibilities.

#### Classroom Jobs



#### Reading Area



### Michelle's Special Education Classroom

**Michelle Thompson** teaches *Special Education Home School Program (HSP)*. Her greatest passion is her family, cats included, and she enjoys taking long walks, reading, boating, and swimming at her cottage.

*Michelle believes that every child has the potential for greatness and it's up to us as teachers to tap into that greatness through differentiated instruction.*



Writing Area

Reading Area





**Paul's Grade 6 Classroom**

**Paul Offor** teaches grade 6. He is still discovering how little he knows, but he's having lots of fun learning as a husband and a father.

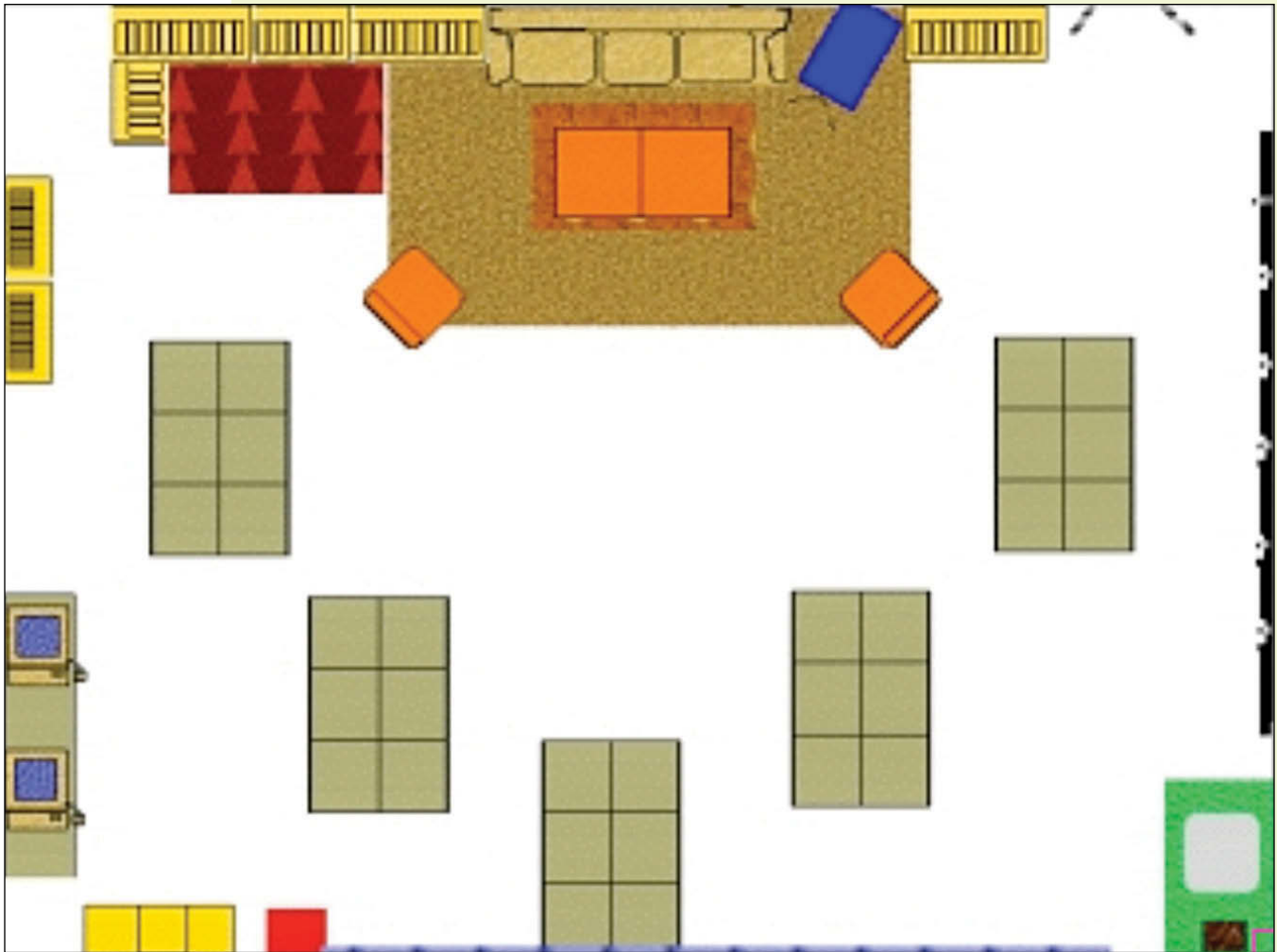
*Paul truly believes that the best way to teach the mind is to touch the heart.*

**Classroom Layout****Class Moto**

**OUR CLASS IS A SAFE  
PLACE TO:  
LEARN,  
MAKE MISTAKES,  
HAVE FUN,  
AND BUILD  
RELATIONSHIPS.**



### Floor Plan – A Model from Jim



- I used this layout in my grades 2, 4, 5, and 8 classrooms.
- Open-concept arrangement of desks allows for ease of traffic flow and for daily community circles.
- Each day of the week a different table group has its turn on the couch and chairs.
- Whiteboard is used for “events” (e.g., agenda of day) and charts are used for notes to be kept over time.
- Teacher’s desk is against back wall to save space.

### Planning Resources – Ideas from Jim

While there is a wealth of resources to be found on the web, a challenge as you begin mapping out your year is finding those that are relevant to the Ontario curriculum and useful to you in your classroom. The links cited here are current as of publication; if you encounter a non-functioning link, try searching using a keyword.

The Building Futures site contains all of the Ontario Ministry of Education K-12 resources in one place: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/buildingfutures/resources.html>

The Ontario Educational Resource Bank (OERB) contains a searchable database of resources directly connected to the curriculum for each grade and subject:

<http://resources.elearningontario.ca>

(Ask your colleagues for the user ID and password for your school board.)

The Toronto District School Board's public site contains outstanding Inclusive Curriculum resources: <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/equity>

The BTinTDSB site contains blogs, podcasts, videos, and lots of resources that may be useful to you as a Beginning Teacher or mentor: <http://web.me.com/btintdsb>

Avon Maitland DSB's "Getting Students Connected" site features links for both students and teachers, sorted by grade level: <http://www.gsc.amdsb.ca>

Link to Learning's site also directly connects web resources to the Ontario curriculum:

<http://www.linktolearning.com>

A great website for French teachers is: <http://www.atelier.on.ca/edu/core.cfm>

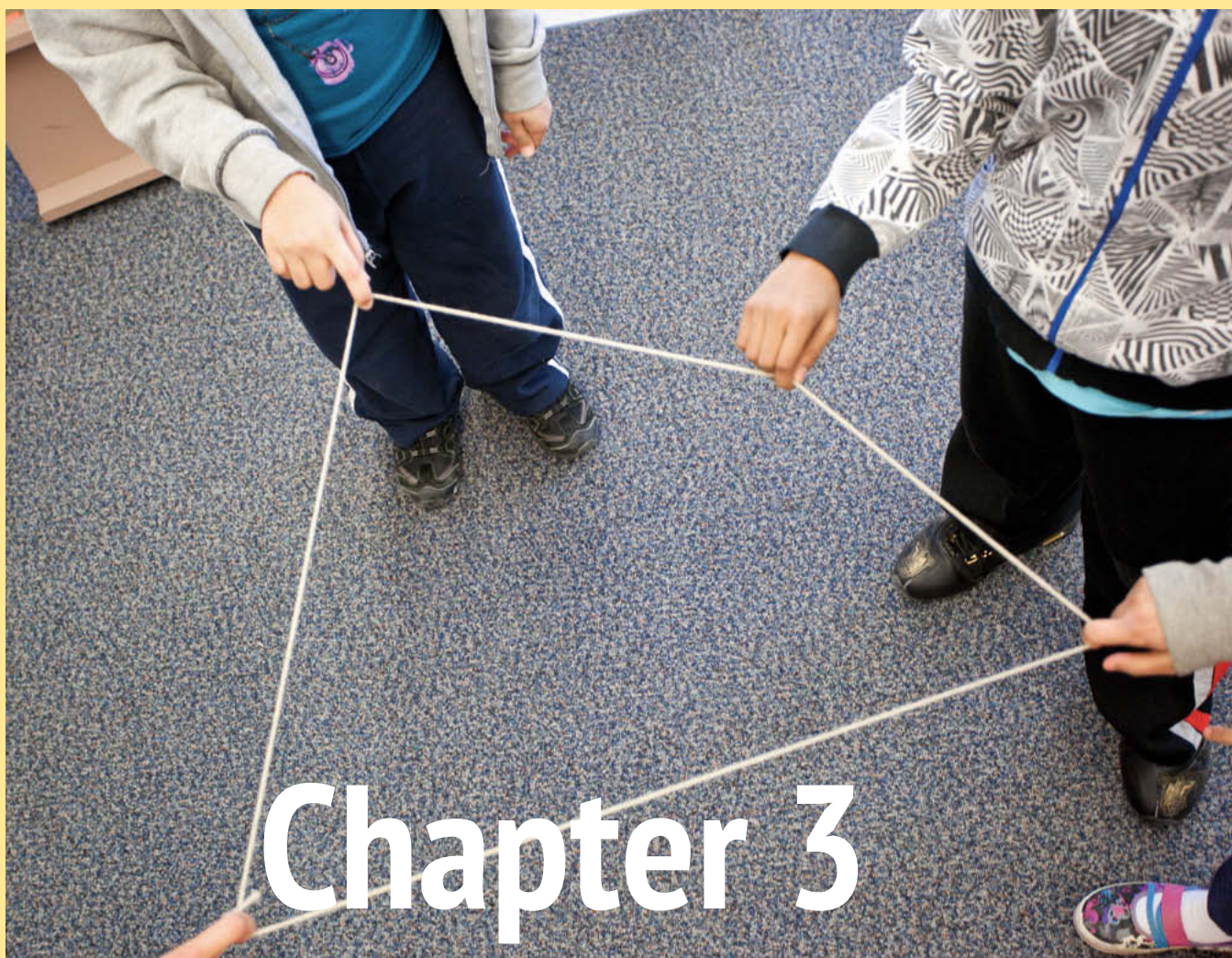
While the web can be a great planning resource, remember that planning is a collaborative process of authentic sharing of knowledge and practice with colleagues. Simply put, the more we share, the richer we become



### Additional Resources for Before School Starts

- *Learning Together: A Classroom Teacher's Guide to Combined Grades*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2009
- *Mentoring Matters: A Practical Guide to Learning-Focused Relationships* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)  
Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman, with Carlette Humbard  
Arlington, MA: MiraVia, 2003
- *Starting with Comprehension: Reading Strategies for the Youngest Learners*  
Andie Cunningham and Ruth Shagoury  
Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2005
- *Teaching with Intention*  
Debbie Miller  
Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2008





# Chapter 3



## **Building Inclusion: Practical Ideas for the First Hours/ Days/Weeks of School**



## Big Ideas for the First Hours/Days/Weeks of School

- Getting to know your students is a big part of your success as a teacher.
- Building classroom community is an ongoing process throughout the year.
- While there are lots ways to build inclusion, directly involving your students is a key element to consider in your planning.
- Take care of yourself. Teaching is a marathon not a sprint, and safeguarding your long-term mental and physical health is vital.

Inclusion is a sense of belonging. It is the feeling that the classroom is a safe place, where the contributions of all students are valued. Opportunities for students to learn about each other and about you as their teacher help foster this sense of inclusion and build a classroom community.

This chapter shares practical activities to use in the first weeks of school. These ideas help to create a community of learners. As with so many aspects of teaching, there is no one “right way,” but our hope is to provide some useful ideas that you can adapt and modify based on your teaching context and the needs of your students.

Inclusion is a process, not an event, and while the first days of school provide an opportune time to foster an inclusive classroom atmosphere, any time is a great time for building inclusion!





## Encouraging and Valuing Personal Responses

### Step-by-Step

1. Have each student sit at his or her own desk or on an individual space on the floor.
2. Tell the class that you are going to play a song and that you would like everyone to listen quietly to the music. It's worthwhile to discuss as a group that people have different musical preferences and often respond to music in different ways. Tell students that you would like them to think of how the musical selection makes them feel as they are listening to it.
3. Play the song (I have used "One Heart, One Love" by Bob Marley). At first, students may continue talking or be inattentive. Insist that they practise quiet, reflective listening.
4. Play the song a second time and ask students to think about what colours they would use to reflect the feelings and moods they experience as they listen.
5. Before repeating the song a third time, provide each student with a sheet of white poster-size paper. Have as many colours of markers as possible available for students to use. Encourage students to select colours that represent the feelings they associate with the song. Ask them to begin to draw freely while the song is playing. Their drawings may respond to the lyrics, tempo, beat or any other responses the song evokes. Emphasize freedom of expression and risk taking to encourage creativity and individuality.
6. Play the song at least one or two more times to allow students to continue to reflect and add to their free-form creations.



7. Process the lesson in a community circle. One at a time, students could hold up their creations and explain the feelings and the reasons behind their work.
8. Facilitate a discussion around the uniqueness of everyone's contribution: "So often in school we have right or wrong answers; wasn't it nice to do an activity where the response was so open-ended?"
9. Display students' works in a collage or ring them around the classroom walls. They are a visual reminder of the diversity in your classroom community.

### Possible Reflection Questions

Content	What did you notice about the personal responses we each had to the music?
Collaborative	How does this activity reflect the diversity of our classroom community?
Personal	How did it feel to complete an activity where there was no right or wrong answer?



## Goals/Strengths/Beliefs

### Step-by-Step

1. On a large piece of paper, model an activity that you would like students to participate in. Create a chart outlining your personal, social, and academic goals, strengths, and beliefs, as they relate to your life at school. You can generate more than one entry for each category – the more the better. This activity is great to do on the first day of school.

NAME	
GOALS	STRENGTHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personal</li> <li>• social</li> <li>• academic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• personal</li> <li>• social</li> <li>• academic</li> </ul>
BELIEFS (about life and learning)	

Your sheet could contain entries something like these:

MR. STRACHAN	
GOALS	STRENGTHS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To keep my desk from being a disaster (personal).</li> <li>• To really get to know all of my grade 5 students (social).</li> <li>• To learn more about early civilizations (academic).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I love kayaking (personal).</li> <li>• I'm a good listener when people are upset (social).</li> <li>• I love reading and using technology to help me learn (academic).</li> </ul>
BELIEFS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life's too short.</li> <li>• All students can learn in a classroom filled with life, laughter, and caring.</li> </ul>	

2. Have the students work on their individual charts. Circulate, ask questions, and comment on how everyone is working diligently. Stress that this is a personal exercise, so there are no right or wrong responses.
3. Share both informally and formally. You can do this sharing in a community circle, or by having three or four students share their charts each day. I like to bind the charts together, using rings from the chart stand, and hang them in a place where students can flip through at their leisure throughout the year. They're handy for students to reference when they're filling out the Learning Goals section of their report cards later in the year.

**Possible Reflection Questions**

Content	What goals/strengths do you have in common with other students in our class community?
Collaborative	How does this activity promote mutual respect in our classroom?
Personal	What next steps that might be helpful in order to accomplish your goals for this year?

**Map of the Human Heart**

1. On a blank paper students draw a heart shape to represent their own hearts.
2. Inside the heart they use pictures to represent what is important to them in their lives (e.g., a parent, brother or sister; their school; the country where they were born; a sport or hobby; friends; teachers). Older students can use their knowledge of fractions and mapping to apportion space while younger students may simply want to fill their heart with what they care about. You might begin this activity by drawing and sharing some of the things that are in your heart.
3. Students pair up and then share with their partner two or three things that are in their heart and why they are important in their lives.
4. Display the hearts prominently at the front of your classroom, perhaps in a circle to symbolize connectedness.
5. Perhaps have a sharing circle or informally share by asking students to describe their hearts throughout the following week at opportune moments. This is also a great Valentine's Day activity.

**Possible Reflection Questions**

Content	How did you choose what to put into your heart?
Collaborative	How did you know your partner was being an attentive listener?
Personal	How does it feel to share what is in your heart with someone else?





### Beginning to Build Community – Thoughts from Karlo

**Karlo Cabrera** is an Instructional Leader of Equity for the Toronto DSB. His ideal teaching assignment is family studies with 100 percent focus on culinary arts (i.e., eating!).

*For Karlo the heart and the art of teaching lie in understanding that each day we teach students and not a curriculum.*

Part of building inclusion and community for you, the teacher, is to understand the students in the classroom – their strengths and interests, what challenges them, and what dreams they may have. The narratives of themselves that they bring into the classroom play a large role in how they are going to interact with this new environment and with the other people (including you) in the community.

All are welcome in this new place, but each will need his or her own entry point. As their teacher you play an important role in understanding what that entry point is and how to engage each student.

### ETFO's Statement and Definition of Equity

*It is the goal of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario to work with others to create schools, communities, and a society free from all forms of individual and systemic discrimination. To further this goal, ETFO defines equity as fairness achieved through proactive measures which result in equality, promotes diversity, fosters respect and dignity for all.*



## Class Database

1. To create a class database, think of five or six categories/fields of information that you would like students to share with you and each other. You might determine these categories by brainstorming ideas with the students or choose the categories in advance. On a large (several metres long) piece of butcher's paper, create the database template and record the titles of the chosen categories. Choosing categories the students will be comfortable with will encourage everyone to respond.

Possibilities include: Hair Colour/ Favourite Food/ Peaceful Place/ Favourite Subject/ Favourite Animal/ Favourite Book or Movie or TV Show. It's a good idea to avoid categories like Best Friend or people's physical characteristics, which may build exclusion not inclusion.

2. Upon completion your database could look something like this:

NAME	Mr. S.	Sri	Ahmed	Dana	Ana
FOOD	Lasagna	Pizza	Burger	Fries	Pizza
PLACE	My kayak	Beach	My room	Mall	School
ANIMAL	Cat	Dolphin	Cat	Whale	Panda
HAIR	Brown	Black	Black	Red	Blonde
SUBJECT	Writing	Computers	Art	Music	Math

3. Generate questions that students will be able to answer by using the database (e.g., How many people like pizza? What are the favourite subjects of students at the beginning of grade 3?) With older students, you can ask more sophisticated, co-relational questions (e.g., Are students who like music likely to be cat lovers?)
4. As an ICT (information communications technologies) extension students could input the data using spreadsheet or database software and use the Find command to answer their questions. It's best to start with an actual database (on paper) to ensure greater understanding.

### Possible Reflection Questions

Content	What do you have in common with other members of our class?
Collaborative	Why is mutual respect important in this activity?
Personal	What are some other things about me that I'd like to share with my classmates?



## Appreciation Fans

1. After the first couple of weeks at school, the following activity is a great way to cement and celebrate the inclusion you are building in your classroom. Before the activity, you could read or tell the students a story involving appreciation and put-downs.

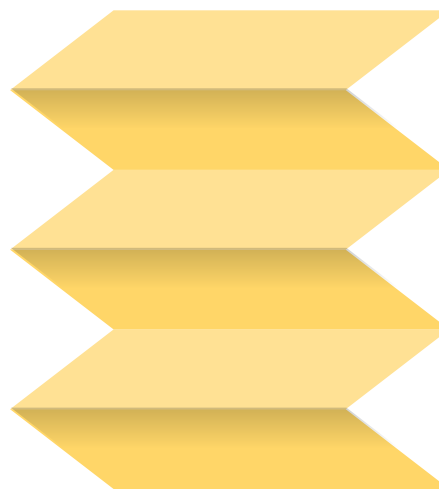
### The Frog and the Scorpion

Below is the outline of a story I have adapted and used often as an introduction to the Appreciation Fan activity.

- The Scorpion wants to cross the river but he can't swim so he asks the Frog for a ride on his back.
- The Frog wants to trust the Scorpion but is afraid he'll sting him.
- The Scorpion promises to not sting the Frog so the Frog agrees to give him a ride.
- About halfway across the river the Frog is seized with doubt and worry so he again asks the Scorpion, "Do you promise you won't sting me?" The Scorpion again promises that he won't.
- About three metres from the far bank the Frog feels the pierce of the Scorpion's sting go through his spine. Now they are both sinking under the water.
- The last words of the Frog are, "Why, why did you do this?"
- The Scorpion responds, "I can't help it – it's my nature" and with that they both drown.

Some people would say there are two kinds of people in this world: Frogs who give and care, and hope and love, and Scorpions who take and hurt, and kill and destroy. But I would say that it's not that simple. Inside each of us is a little bit of Frog and a little bit of Scorpion. Each day we make a choice – and today we choose to be Frogs.

2. Have each student write his or her name on the top of a blank piece of paper. Have students then fold the paper over and back several times (like an accordion or fan). The paper will look like this:
3. Model for students how to write appreciation statements. Encourage specific statements that are relevant to the student being written about. For example, "You are kind and patient with me when I get stuck in math" or "When you smile it makes my heart feel warm." These statements are more meaningful than a vague statement like "You're nice."



4. Make it clear to the students that they are to write only positive statements; no “put-downs” are permitted.
5. Ask students to exchange fans with their classmates. Each person writes an appreciation statement on the other’s fan. The students may choose to sign or not sign the appreciation statements they write for others.
6. At first, many students will choose only fans that belong to their close friends (their Frogs), but if a positive classroom atmosphere has been created, they will soon reach out to others. Students often set a goal of getting everyone’s signatures on their fans. It’s a great idea for you, as the teacher, to have a fan as well and participate by writing appreciation statements to students on their fans.
7. Students may want to take their fans out at recess time to get friends from other classes to write an appreciation statement and sign their fans. They also enjoy taking their fans home to share with their family. Younger students could keep their fans as part of a scrapbook and read them when they need a boost. This is a great activity to revisit throughout the year.

#### Possible Reflection Questions

Content	What is one statement on your fan that you would like to share in community circle?
Collaborative	Why are Appreciations/No Put-Downs so important for this activity?
Personal	How did you feel when you read the appreciations that people had written on your fan? How did it feel to write appreciations on other people’s fans?

### More Inclusion Strategies at a Glance

#### Ideal Classroom

- What does the ideal classroom look like, sound like, and feel like? On chart paper divided into these three categories, students work in groups to brainstorm ideas for each column.
- As a class, use the ideas generated in groups to make a set of classroom norms/agreements. Or together classify what the students have said under your classroom agreements. (e.g., Mutual Respect, Listening)
- Post the completed chart for future reference and as a visual reminder for all.

#### Community Circle

- Coming together in a circle provides a great opportunity for sharing, reflection, and community building.
- The class sits (or stands) in a circle, and as you go around the circle students take turns speaking, keeping in mind the importance of listening, mutual respect, taking turns, etc.



- Topics to discuss should initially be neutral (e.g., favourite food, favourite movie, something I learned today).
- You can ask reflection questions (content, collaborative, personal) to consolidate the sharing and also use community circle as a vehicle to teach curriculum.

### **Rate Your Day**

In addition to using a planner to record their homework, students rate their day from one to four, in light of how their words and actions contributed to the success of the classroom community.

This self-reflection tool can also promote dialogue with parents and guardians and provide you with insight into your students' attitudes and emotions.

### **Building Inclusion in Kindergarten – Ideas from Leah**

#### **A Classroom Contract**

With kindergarten students the first weeks are really all about building a community within the classroom. Many kindergarten classes craft a list of rules or “promises” that act as a guide for how they interact with each other.

The teacher can offer some sample ideas and jot down the children's contributions. Once all the promises are recorded, the children sign their names on the paper. These class promises will be referred to often throughout the year, and when issues arise you will find yourself drawing attention to what the class talked about back in September.

As the year progresses you may find that you forgot to include some important points, which need to be added. Rather than phrasing things negatively (no running, no shouting, no hitting) use wording like “We take care of our friends,” “We try to speak nicely to each other,” “We use words when we get frustrated.” This models for the students that you confidently assume that they are always trying to be at their best.

The tone becomes one of collaboration, and the students realize that the “class promises” act as a guide for much more than just learning. The culture you create sets the tone, reflects who you are, and expresses how you want to interact and learn with the children.

### **Welcoming Families**

Kindergarten is the first step into the formal school system and a huge event in the lives of families. Value your students' families by encouraging the connection between home and school. Ask for pictures of parents and siblings so that you can create a family board in the room. We want children to feel at home at school and a board of familiar faces goes a long way toward helping anxious JKs remember that they will see mum or dad very soon. Most children love to talk about their families, and drawings of themselves and their families can be used as prompts for discussion: “I noticed, Jaheel, that you drew six people in your family picture. Can you tell me who is who?”



Another option is to create a variety of T-charts with two headings, such as I have a baby sister and I do not have a baby sister. Through their observations of these charts over time, students begin to see how they are similar to their classmates (“Hey, we are both the oldest child in our family!”).

Think about the ways in which you could make sure parents feel welcome and valued in the classroom. Recognize that learning doesn’t start at school, but at home with the children’s families. Relationships are two-way streets. How can you extend yourself so that children and their families get to know you as a person? What gestures will encourage them to share their lives with you?

### Names

Kindergarten students begin their school career confidently knowing their names. Some can already recognize their name in print and write it independently. During the first weeks of school, use the students’ names to build on their knowledge of letters and their sounds.

Have them find their name card when they enter and put it in the right spot; on other days have them write their names on a big sign-in sheet. A sign-in not only acts as an aid to assessment, you can use it as a tool to get students to notice features of names (“We have lots of children whose names begin with the letter A” or “Only four students have seven letters in their names”). The children will find this focus on their names fascinating, while at the same time they are developing the shared understanding that you are striving for.

### A Room of Experts

In her book *Starting with Comprehension: Reading Strategies for the Youngest Learners* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2005), Andie Cunningham shares a wonderful strategy for building community with her kindergarten students. In September, she begins a discussion about the people in our lives who are experts and what they do that makes them experts. She asks the students what they are expert at, with the goal of uncovering personal strengths and possible directions for her curriculum.

This is the perfect prompt for kindergarten students, highlighting passions (Brendan is an expert on owls, Bridget is an expert at writing and drawing, Jake is an expert at looking after babies) you can draw on in the weeks ahead. Displaying a list of “Classroom Experts” gives the students someone to turn to when they need information or advice. Include photographs and pictures for beginning readers who are still figuring out text.





## Building Inclusion in the First Days of Kindergarten – Ideas from Alison

### Entry Routines

The first days of kindergarten can be overwhelming for many children. Take your time in the first weeks to get to know the children and develop a sense of community in the classroom. To achieve a sense of community the students need to have a relaxed entry, allowing them time to say hello to each other and to you as they change their shoes or take off their coats. Rushing their entry into the classroom may make anxious students more uneasy or withdrawn.

### Community Circle

The circle is a wonderful starting point of the day. We sing a song together, and for the first weeks we share enjoyable stories, without setting any expectations by asking questions about the book, etc. We often play a game of passing a beanbag to friends in the circle and saying their names. The game continues until everyone has had a turn. The children look forward to this game and have fun learning each other's names.

At the end of the day we return to the community circle for another shared reading or song. We then do an activity modified from Tribes Learning Communities (see Additional Resources for this chapter) that provides each child the opportunity to share something specific. We start with something simple such as, "What is your favourite colour?" Children take turns telling their favourite colour or passing on the invitation to share. Some children want to listen and be part of the circle but are not yet comfortable speaking in front of the group. As the game continues over the weeks and months, it is amazing to see the similarities children recognize about their shared interests or how some children will recall what others said and make a connection during another activity.



**Week One in Grade 1 – Ideas from Aaron****Name Game**

Students sit in a circle. Each student says their name and pairs it with their favourite activity and an action associated with that action. First student says, “My name is Erin and I like soccer” (pretends to kick a ball). Second student says, “Her name is Erin and she likes soccer (pretends to kick a ball) and my name is James and I like reading” (pretends to read a book). This continues around the circle until every student says everybody’s name. To make it easier, I split up this activity into two days, so only 10 students go at a time.

**Why Do This?**

Great way to see who is shy and who is outgoing, and to observe memory recall. Are students able to sit and wait their turn? What activity interests them?

**Name Cheer**

I model writing a student’s name as the student tells me the letters. We do a cheer for each letter. Student says, “Give me an A!” (Class responds “A!”) etc. until we get the end of the name. Then the student says, “What does that spell?” three times. (Class responds with student’s name). We clap for the student and the name is added to the class word wall.

**Why Do This?**

Great way to see if students know how to spell their name, to teach conventions (capital letter on the first letter), and to model printing.

**All About Me Bag**

Students are provided a large paper bag to take home. Students bring it back to school with five items about themselves to share with the class. Some general categories could include: family, favourite toy, favourite colour, favourite book, etc. Three or four students share each day.

**Why Do This?**

Provides schema of student interests and builds inclusion.

**Giant Self-Portraits**

Students draw gigantic portraits of themselves on cartridge paper. They are painted, outlined in black marker, cut out, and then laminated. The portraits hang in the classroom for the year.

**Why Do This?**

Great way to observe dexterity/fine-motor skills, colour choice, figure drawing development (do they draw all the body parts?).



### **First Day in Special Education – Ideas from Michelle**

#### **Setting Goals**

During the first day that I see my Home School Program (HSP) students, I take them up to the computer lab and we work together to make posters outlining our personal goals for the year. I give a quick tutorial on the basics of the software so that they can complete the assignment. I believe that it is really important at the beginning of the school year for all of us to think about what we want to accomplish, even if it is just one thing. I expect my students to do a full-page poster that includes a picture and statement of their goal. When they are finished, we talk about our goals and put our posters up in the hallway.

#### **Interest Surveys**

I like to connect early with my special education students, and a great way of doing this is through interest surveys. I want to find out what they like, what interests or hobbies they have, what they see themselves as being good at, what they think they need more work on, what they like to read, and their attitudes towards various things such as reading and writing. I want to provide an environment that will stimulate their interests and imaginations and have available a variety of reading materials they will want to read. I want our classroom to reflect them, not me!



### Inside/Outside Circle in a Grade 4 Classroom – First-Day Idea from Stephanie

I have half the class form a large circle facing inwards. The other half of the class forms a circle inside the other circle facing outward, toward their partners. I ask each pair to answer a question or discuss a topic (see below) for a minute. Then the inside circle moves clockwise to face a different person, and I pose a different question for discussion. Repeating this sequence several times gives the students an opportunity to meet and learn about several of their new classmates.

#### Possible Questions/Discussion Topics:

What makes you really happy?	Name and describe your favourite place.
What is your favourite season?	What is your favourite TV program?
What is your favourite subject?	What is your favourite book?
What do you want to be when you grow up?	If you could be any animal, which would you be and why?
What makes you really angry?	If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?
What do you like to do for fun?	If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be, and why?





### **Inclusion in Grade 5/6 – Ideas from Carmen**

**Carmen Oliveira** teaches grade 5/6 and takes baking as seriously as teaching. It is her moment of Zen.

*Carmen believes that learning is about making sense of the world we live in and working to understand our role in the big picture.*

#### **Time Capsules**

Time capsules are an activity that students really enjoy working on during the first week. Students are given a paper towel tube to decorate using stickers, drawings, etc. to represent their personality, loves, dislikes, and dreams. Students then work on a writing sample (using writing prompts such as, “My goal this year is . . .” and/or “If I had to describe myself in 200 words . . .”). In addition, students create a collage using cutouts from magazines or drawings that reflect their favourite things, hopes, dreams.

Their writing samples and collages are put in the decorated towel tube and sealed with a note saying “Do not open until June 27, 2011” (i.e., last week of school). At the end of the school year, students have a lot of fun looking at their thoughts and artwork from the beginning of the year.

#### **Friend Venns**

Students have a blast making friend Venn diagrams at the start of the year. They are paired with a classmate (someone they do not know or seldom work/play with). The pairs make a Venn diagram on a 12-by-18-inch piece of construction paper and title it with their individual names in the circles and both their names in the overlapping centre.

Students then have a conversation with their partner to find out each other’s likes, dislikes, favourite food, subject, sport, and so on. They fill in the Venn diagram with the things that make them different and those they share in common. The diagrams can be displayed on a bulletin board entitled “Friend Venns” and pictures of each pair of friends added to the board (the students love this).

#### **Math Art**

One of the first math activities my students engage in is thinking about math as art. Each student chooses from one of the prompts below. They imagine math as a food, animal, or place and draw their vision. It is fascinating to look at how creative their visions can be and students enjoy using math as a vehicle to making art.

- If math were a food, it would look like . . .
- If math were an animal, it would look like . . .
- If math were a place, it would look like . . .

**Are You French (and Don't Know It)? – Erin's First-Day Quiz for Grades 7 and 8 Core French**

**Erin Grewar** teaches grades 7 and 8 Core French and ends each day by reading a good book.

*Erin believes that as a teacher she must find a way to make learning relevant and inspire a creative and imaginative response from their students.*

Put a checkmark beside the statements that are true.

1. Your biggest meal of the day is at noon.
2. You consider the Volkswagen Beetle to be a medium-sized car.
3. You think it is necessary to learn foreign languages (one at least) to be able to travel and do business.
4. You don't consider insects, dogs, cats, monkeys, or guinea pigs to be food, but snails, frogs and horses are.
5. A bathroom does not have a toilet in it. Toilets are to be found in the room called « *Toilettes* » or « *W.C.* » (water closet).
6. You seldom eat fast food and prefer fresh foods, and shop at smaller stores and farmers' markets in your neighbourhood.
7. You love the *baguette française* (« French stick ») and are willing to travel out of your way to buy the best and freshest bread.
8. You like *le football*, which is strangely called soccer in North America, where "football" is a sport resembling an ugly version of rugby and players are allowed to attack players who don't even have the ball!
9. You think the rules of cricket and baseball are too hard to understand. Instead you prefer Formula One racing. You are convinced that the F in F1 stands for French, because they have the best engines!
10. You enjoy being able to choose from more than 600 different types of cheese.

*Please reflect on the following: Has learning French been a positive or a negative experience for you? How come? Did you learn something new and interesting today? What do you hope to achieve in French class this year?*



## Group Scavenger Hunt in a Grade 6 Classroom – Paul’s First-Day Idea

### NAMES OF THE PEOPLE IN THE GROUP:

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Look around the room and try to find the answers to the following questions:

1. There are stuffed animals hiding around the class. How many can you find?
2. Where is the blue bin for recycling paper?
3. How many posters are in the class?
4. What is the title of the math book we will be using this year?
5. By looking around the room, can you name three things that Mr. Offor enjoys?
6. Name two places in the class which are off limits to students.
7. What are we doing at 10:30 today?
8. What games would you like to add to our games shelf? Name two.
9. As a group, come up with three questions you want to ask Mr. Offor about himself or school.
10. As a group, come up with three rules you think we will need to follow to help the class run smoothly.

Bonus:

What time does our school day end?





### Celebrating Diversity in Jessica's Grade 6 Classroom

**Jessica Nip** teaches grade 6. She is a food lover and you can find her on most weekends somewhere in the city trying out a new restaurant or a new recipe at home.

*Jessica believes that a key ingredient of good teaching is being authentic, not only in the learning experiences we provide but also in how we present ourselves and interact with our students.*

Students create a replica of themselves using various art materials (e.g., markers, felt, pencil crayons, fabric). They may choose to dress themselves in an outfit that best represents them, such as a basketball jersey, swimsuit, or karate uniform.

Students label the “mini me” replicas with their names and display them around the perimeter of a world map posted on a bulletin board. Students use coloured yarn to connect their replica to their country of birth.

Some students may have been born in one country but moved shortly afterwards and identify more strongly with where they've grown up. These students could choose which country they'd like to be connected with or even connect to more than one country.





### Ten Things About Me – First Day Inclusion Idea for Grade 7/8 from Shernett

**Shernett Martin** teaches grade 7/8 and spends a great deal of time trying to promote the Golden Rule.

*Shernett believes fervently in reaching a common ground with students that is built on genuine care, and using that common ground to chart a personalized path to excellence for all students.*

### Ten Things About Me

(Choose a playing card from Ace to Ten. Answer the question that corresponds with the number on your playing card.)

- Share ONE book you read over the summer that you really enjoyed reading.
- What TWO personal achievements are you most proud of?
- Name THREE things that people like most about you.
- Name FOUR leaders from the past or present that inspire you.
- What are your FIVE favourite things that you have at home?
- Name SIX things that you wish we had that would make the perfect classroom.
- If you could travel back in time to when you were SEVEN what words of advice or wisdom would you share with your younger self?
- What are you usually doing at EIGHT o'clock in the evening?
- If someone gave you NINE hours to speak with the prime minister about any issue that is important to you and the prime minister promised to grant you whatever you asked for, what would you discuss?
- What would you like to be doing TEN years from now?

### My Life in Six Words: Building Inclusion in Shernett's Grade 7/8 Classroom

I used this lesson last year with grade 7 and 8 students. It was an instant hit! Students were intrigued about writing an autobiography in six words. In the age of Twitter and texting, students are becoming more experienced at communicating using as little text as possible. This activity is a great way to build inclusion by introducing students to each other and allowing them to write honestly about who they are.



You can also have students create a video or use photo story to create six slides with their six words and attach a picture, if they wish. Students can present their words to the class and the completed activity can be used to decorate the classroom.

Who are you? What are you most proud of? How would you describe your life to a stranger?

### **Background**

Everyone has a story to tell. Six words are all they need.

That's what editor Larry Smith discovered when he posted a six-word memoir challenge on his website <http://www.smithmag.net> in November 2006, asking readers to write their life story in precisely six words. Within the first two months, the site received 15,000 replies. The best have been reproduced in a book that has become a bestseller, aptly titled *Not Quite What I Was Planning*.

Read some of the examples that I have printed from the site with your table group.

What do the six words tell you about the person? Consider the following:

- Male or female?
- What age?
- Any challenges?
- Would you want to know this person? Why or why not?
- Is this person's life in six words inspirational?

Once you have discussed the examples with your group, it's time to do some thinking and reflecting.

### **Think About:**

- What are you most proud of?
- What has brought you great joy in your life thus far?
- What role do your family, friends, pets, mentors play in your happiness or lack thereof?
- What goals do you have for the future?

### **Task:**

Using the paper provided, draft your autobiography in six words (no more, no less). Your work will be scattered around on the tables for your classmates to view. Use creativity and colour to add some flair to your lettering. Have fun!

To present or NOT to present . . . that is the question! If you are comfortable sharing your work by presenting it in front of the class, Please let me know.

STILL TRYING TO FIGURE IT OUT

**Ms. Martin**



### The First Five Minutes as an Occasional Teacher – Thoughts from Elizabeth

**Elizabeth Radoykova** is an Occasional Teacher in Toronto. She likes reading, browsing the Internet, and group travel tours.

*Elizabeth believes teaching enriches lives and that students deserve our perseverance.*

#### What's in a Name?

Classroom teachers usually leave name tags, a class list, or a seating plan, but sometimes I find myself in a classroom where none of these are available. Before the day starts, I copy the names of the students from the attendance folder into my own notebook.

When the students come to class, I write a brief description of them across their names; for example, "Peter – green sweater." Calling students by name helps in maintaining good classroom management.

While I am taking attendance I sometimes ask students what are the origin and the meaning of their names in the language they speak at home. For example, Elizabeth is Elizaveta in Russian, Elisavet in Greek, Isabella in Spanish. Showing interest in students' names helps build a positive learning environment.

If I mispronounce a student's name, I apologize and make an effort to pronounce the name properly. Students like to see that I care about how they feel and I am willing to admit my mistakes and make changes.

## Wellness

As you plan for what you'll be doing during the first few days in your classroom, it's also important to plan what you'll be doing outside the classroom for your personal wellness.

An example of a long-term wellness goal might be to find out what are the aspects of your work and life you enjoy the most and then intentionally seek out the time to do these things as often as possible.

Building Blocks of Wellness	
Physical Activity	Nutrition
Laughter	Reflection

Regular physical activity is not only good for our bodies; it benefits our minds as well. A simple walk is something you can work into your daily routine. Physical activity can also provide “thinking time” for reflection about the day before and the day ahead.

Nutrition is something we can directly control. While time is often a challenge when you're starting anything new, making time for a healthy breakfast and lunch (and snacks) can provide the energy you will need during the course of the day.

There is a growing body of research around the power of laughter. When we laugh our body releases feel-good chemicals called endorphins. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain. Imagine if you laugh each day how healthy you'll be!

Sharing with colleagues, friends, and family about your work can be a powerful form of reflection and growth, but also comes with a caution. Thinking back to my first year, I was

very quick to play the movie over in my head about what went wrong that day in my classroom and I was not always able to see what went right or was working well. If your best friend came to you with their teaching challenges, you would probably be understanding and empathetic, but you may not always give this same level of understanding and empathy to yourself (I call this the “best friend test”).

Your challenge is to use reflection as tool to celebrate your successes and to address your concerns. In all of your interactions, you can directly influence 50 percent of the equation – your half! Forgive yourself if days/ weeks/or months into your career not everything is exactly as you would like it to be. You have a long and successful career ahead of you!







### Additional Resources for Building Inclusion

- *Discovering Gifts in Middle School: Learning in a Caring Culture Called Tribes*  
Jeanne Gibbs  
Windsor, CA: CenterSource Systems, 2001
- *Reaching All by Creating Tribes Learning Communities* (30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition)  
Jeanne Gibbs  
Windsor, CA: CenterSource Systems, 2006
- *Thinking It Through: Teaching and Learning in the Kindergarten Classroom*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2010
- *Voices of Experience: Practical Ideas to Start Up the Year, Grades K–3*  
Caren Cameron, Kathleen Gregory, Colleen Politano, and Joy Paquin  
Winnipeg: Portage & Main Press, 2004
- *Voices of Experience: Practical Ideas to Start Up the Year, Grades 4–8*  
Caren Cameron, Kathleen Gregory, Colleen Politano, and Joy Paquin  
Winnipeg: Portage & Main Press, 2004



# Chapter 4



## **Building Effective Classrooms – Ideas, Tips, and Strategies for Classroom Management**



## Big Ideas for Building Effective Classrooms

- Model the strategies and norms you are trying to encourage in your classroom.
- Think about how to deflate rather than inflate any conflicts that occur.
- Seek opportunities to observe and learn about and from your students.
- Talk, share, and laugh with your colleagues.

No matter how thorough the preparation for teaching is at a faculty of education, the experience of inheriting an established classroom culture as a student teacher is very different from the experience of creating a caring, inclusive, and learning-focused classroom environment for the first time. If you are concerned about classroom management, you are not alone. Beginning Teachers report that classroom management is the biggest challenge they initially encounter.

The term “classroom management” is itself problematic. People manage objects, inventory, or production quotas, but teachers build classrooms. That said, the voices of your colleagues reflect a desire for both proactive structures (e.g., building inclusion) and reactive strategies (e.g., dealing with conflict).

In this chapter, ideas and strategies are shared as a starting point for your own thinking about what personal beliefs about building a classroom community you will live with your students.

### A Signal

Having a consistent and peaceful way (e.g., chimes) of focusing the attention of the class is a simple, effective tool to create a positive classroom environment. At the beginning of the year it's a good idea to explicitly teach and have the students practice listening to the signal you choose.

A big learning for me as a teacher was realizing that I talked too much! Limiting my “teacher talk” to things that were funny and/or relevant encouraged greater attentive listening from my students. Often I would have one of my students ring the chimes and give instructions to encourage attentive listening by all members of the class.



### Talk Time

Our students come to our classrooms with an innate desire to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Strategies like Think-Pair-Share, Four Corners, and community circle can provide opportunities for meaningful student communication and increase interest and involvement in learning. A discussion topic or “focus question” written on the board as students enter your classroom can also help engage students in learning from (and with) each other.

## Choices

Often you'll hear the concept of choice applied to classroom management. When I think of choice I think of something more fundamental. Simply put, does every student in your classroom always need to be working on the exact same thing at the exact same time, or can students choose from a variety of learning tasks? Providing choice can increase student ownership of and responsibility for learning. This approach honours the different learning styles and learning needs that exist in your classroom.

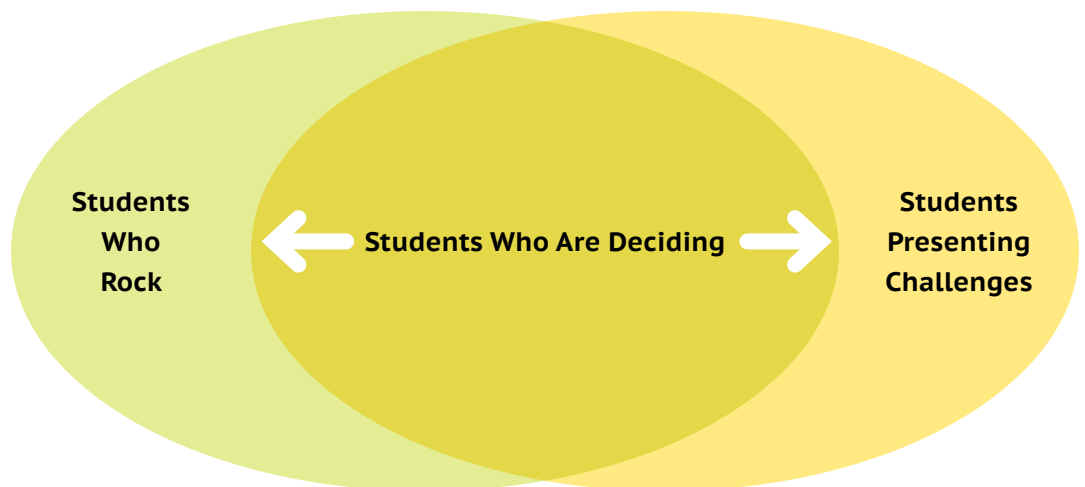
## Positive Consequences

Often we associate consequences with negative behaviour but you might ask yourself two questions:

- What are the *positive* consequences for students in my classroom?
- How do I acknowledge the strengths and positive attributes of my students?

Shifting the focus to positive consequences doesn't mean ignoring misbehaviour; rather, it helps reinforce a positive classroom culture consistent with creating a learning-focused classroom environment.

The Venn diagram represents makeup of your classroom. Often we focus our attention on the students at either end of the spectrum and forget about “the kids in the middle” who are deciding each day where they align with the classroom culture we build. If we're not careful, we risk ignoring these students.





Here are some simple, yet powerful, examples of the positive consequences approach to classroom management:

*“Harwaa, I really like the way you were listening this morning. It made me feel respected and as if you were really valuing your learning. Do you mind if I let you get your coat and line up 29 seconds early for recess?”*

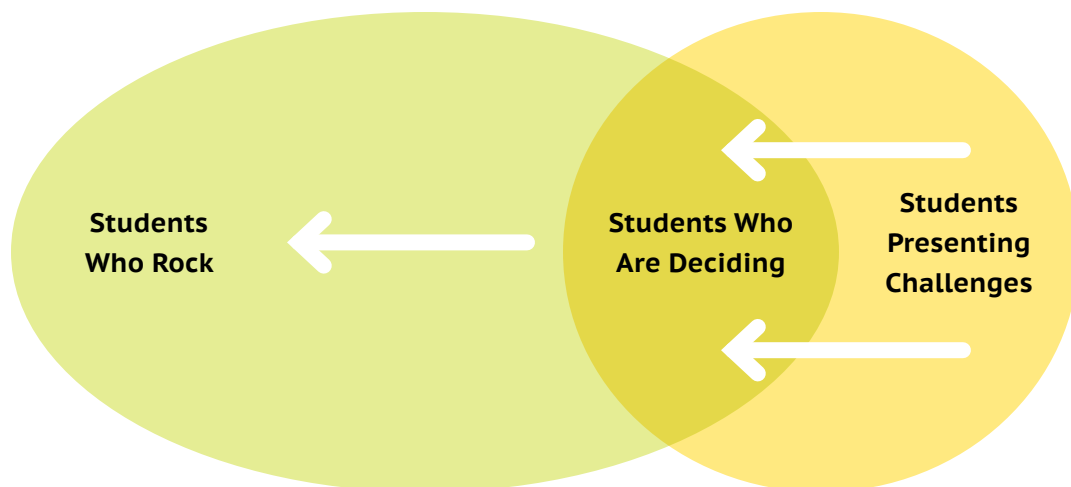
Guess what? Harwaa doesn’t mind and you’ll hear many other voices saying, *“But I was listening too!”* Your response: *“Yes, you were, and maybe tomorrow I’ll notice you for the recess line.”*

A variation of this approach useful with older students makes use of their agendas/planners: *“Emmitt, can I please have your planner?”* If previous requests to see his planner were linked to notes home detailing misbehaviour, Emmitt’s response might be, *“But I didn’t do anything wrong!”* Your response: *“Actually, I just wanted to write a note saying how helpful you were today to your group during our building activity.”*

Suddenly Emmitt doesn’t mind handing over his planner. A thank-you sticky note citing positive behaviour placed on a student’s desk for their return from recess or lunch is a strategy that works for all ages.

“Sunshine phone calls” are another example of a positive consequence. For some students a phone call from the school usually means bad news. A short call or even a message on an answering machine citing a specific positive action (e.g., *“I just wanted to call to let you know how co-operatively Kim worked this afternoon during visual arts”*) can be powerful.

By intentionally recognizing how the positive words and actions of our students contribute to the success of our classroom community our “students in the middle” find their voice and our classroom begins to look like this:



While there still are students presenting challenges, the audience for these students has shrunk and the majority of students are now on board with classroom expectations and norms. Because most of the students have now “bought in,” you now have more time to support individually the students you are most concerned about.



## Inflating vs. Deflating

No matter how many positive, proactive strategies we use, conflicts will occur in our classrooms. The half of the equation that we can influence is our reaction to the problem or challenge: we can choose either to inflate or to deflate any situation with our words and actions. Speaking in a calm voice rather than yelling is a simple example of how we can control our responses, while acting as a model for our students.

A student kicks over a can of red paint (on purpose), which splatters all over your beautiful classroom carpet. At this point you have a choice: you could inflate by yelling:

*“You spilled paint!”*

or you could deflate by saying calmly:

*“Hmmm, that’s too bad, do you think you could get some paper towel and see if it wipes up?”*

Your reaction is important not only for the student you are addressing but also for the other 20-plus pairs of eyes watching you.

Deflating is not always as simple as the example above. Nine negative things may happen in your classroom but you react only to number ten, because it is the one that “inflates” you. It is at these moments that using some of the same strategies we encourage our students to practice is appropriate, like taking a deep breath or counting to ten. Colleagues can be a great source of suggestions, ideas, or simply an understanding ear to help you to “deflate” and be the best model you can be for your students.

## Conflict Mediation – One Approach

In addition to deflating your personal responses, here are some other steps/strategies to help resolve conflicts between students. The language is geared toward Junior students but could be adapted to younger or older students.

### What Is a Mediator?

- A Mediator is someone who keeps things fair.
- A Mediator’s role is to help people solve a problem or conflict.
- A Mediator does not tell anyone what to do. A Mediator helps people talk in a way that will help.

### Step-by- Step

1. Meet in a quiet area with the people who have a problem or conflict. Ask each person the following questions before beginning the mediation.



*Do you agree to:*

- solve the problem or conflict?
- tell the truth?
- speak when it is your turn only?
- respect each other with no name calling?
- take responsibility for your part of carrying out the agreement that is reached?

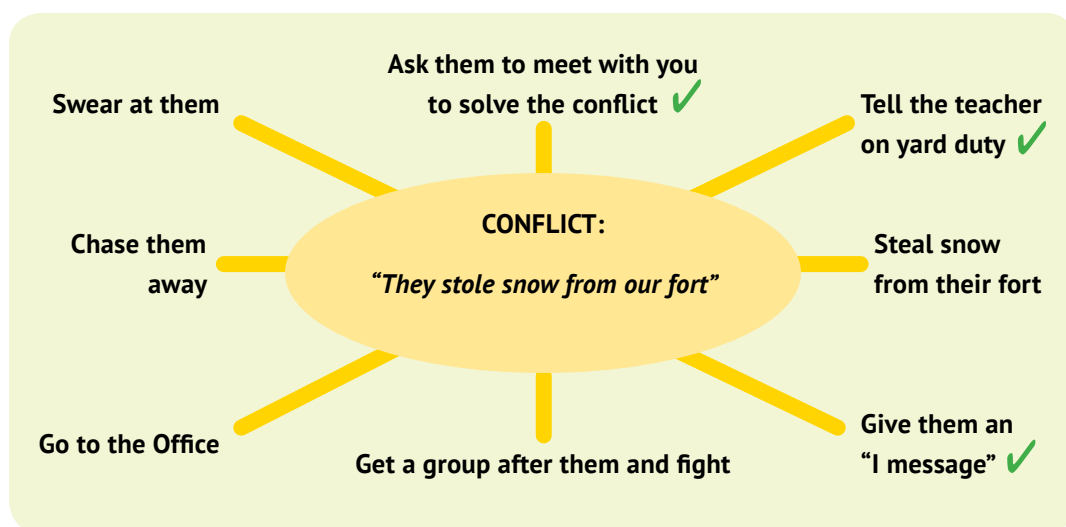
If the students involved in the mediation do not agree to each of these conditions, the conflict cannot be mediated at this time. Often we try to mediate a conflict while the students are still angry and we end up reviving it. One idea is to acknowledge the conflict, allow each student some quiet time, and approach them regarding mediation after they have cooled off.

2. Choose one person to speak first. This person is invited to briefly tell his/her side of the story without being interrupted. Before beginning, remind the other participants that they too will get an equal turn to speak. Deal only with the students directly involved in the problem or issue. Encourage each participant to use “I messages” like the following, rather than blaming phrases (“He/she ...”):

- *I want or wanted ...*
- *I feel ...*

Each student involved gets a turn. Intervene (if needed) to remind participants of the agreements they agreed to follow during the mediation.

3. After everyone has spoken, ask each person in turn to suggest an idea about how to solve the problem. Your job is to write down all of the suggestions, whether you agree or not. Your paper might look something like this:



Read aloud all of the strategies that were written down and discuss the appropriateness of each suggestion with respect to school safety expectations. You may want to add an idea or two to the brainstormed list after this discussion.

Everyone in the conflict group then discusses the solutions and selects the most appropriate ones to solve the problem. Check off the chosen solutions that all participants agree to and write them down.

4. At the top of the page you could write “We agree to . . .” and list the strategies where consensus was reached.
  - Have each student sign the paper.
  - You (as mediator) also sign the paper.
  - Each student should shake hands or give a cheer to acknowledge the mediating of the problem.
  - As mediator, congratulate each student.
  - Ask each student to tell his/her friends that the problem has been mediated so that rumours are not spread.
5. Photocopy enough agreement sheets to give a copy to each student involved, and to the school principal or vice-principal (if appropriate).

While this process won't make conflicts magically disappear, it models good conflict resolution skills because it focuses more on finding consensus and solutions than on assigning blame. After the mediation, it's important to continue to “check in” with the parties involved to make sure that the solution is working. Students who have used this process often comment that it is fair and that they appreciate that their concerns and ideas were heard.





### Introducing Conflict Mediation – Idea from Jim

Before beginning to teach the process described above I introduced and modelled for the class how conflict mediation works.

I usually chose to use an issue that did not directly involve my students so that they could evaluate the situation more abstractly. For example, I might have said to my grade 4 students:

*“Today when I was on yard duty in the Primary playground there were lots of conflicts over taking turns on the tire swings. Some of the students were yelling at each other to get off the swings and there was even some pushing and shoving. What ideas do you have for me that I could use to help the Primary students successfully share the tire swings?”*

I recorded the ideas that the class brainstormed and together we reached a consensus on the best strategies.

Often the students’ ideas were directly applicable to their own challenges and I would prompt with a question like:

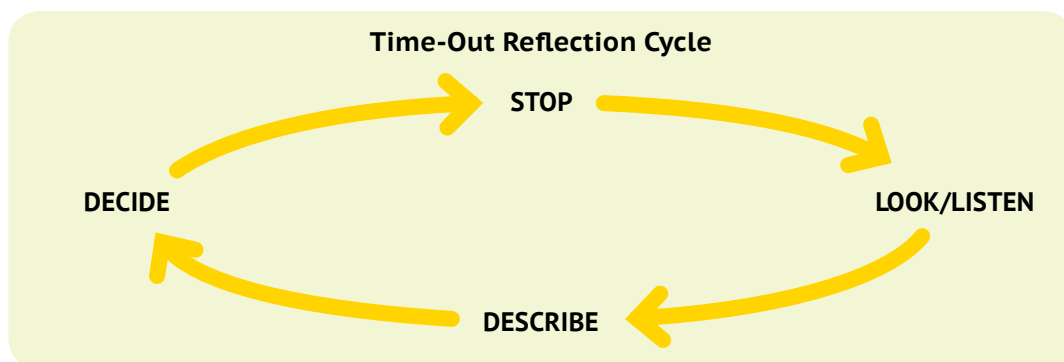
*“Let’s take a look at what we suggested for the Primary students; could any of these ideas apply when we have a conflict?”*

Finally, I posted the students’ web of ideas as an “example” that we could reference down the road when conflict occurred in our own class.

### Time-Out Reflection Cycle

Here is a situation that happens frequently in most classrooms. You’ve just finished teaching a wonderful patterning lesson and are working with a small group of students on the carpet. The rest of the students are working “independently” and the noise level steadily rises to that of a jet airplane taking off.

At this point you have a choice. You could further increase the noise level by yelling something like, “It’s too loud in here!” or you could deflate by using the time-out reflection cycle outlined in the diagram:



**Step-by-Step**

1. Stop the action by ringing the chimes (or using the signal you have established, taught, and modelled with your students).
2. Ask the students to look and listen around the classroom and describe what's happening. Ask a simple question like "Why do you think Mr. S rang the chimes?" The students will usually have a good idea and might say things like:

- *"It's too loud in here."*
- *"We're not using our indoor voices."*
- *"People are throwing cubes."*

3. If you don't feel the descriptions from the students accurately reflect the situation, you could model the use of a calm "I message" (e.g., "I feel upset when it is so loud in this classroom I can't hear what the students I'm working with are saying").
4. Deciding what to do next is the key part of the process. Again, solicit ideas from the class by saying something like, "Okay, we have 23 minutes before lunchtime – what are we going to do to be successful?"

Using the word we signals that arriving at a solution is a shared responsibility. As you await responses, you might refer to the posted chart you made with your students about what "Our Ideal Classroom" looks like/ sounds like/ feels like. The students may suggest solutions like:

- *"We could use our indoor voices."*
- *"If we're stuck on a question we can write the number on the whiteboard so somebody else can help us."*
- *"We can use the cubes for math and not for basketball."*

5. Now that you have all have decided together how you will work to be successful, the learning can continue. Thank the students (in advance) for their commitment to creating an environment where everyone (yourself included) can learn.







### Our Students' Voices – Reflections from Karlo

Setting expectations is one thing but talking about why they are important is just as important. The reasons for some guidelines may not be apparent to students at first glance.

Providing the opportunity for students to express what they feel and think about classroom expectations allows them to learn how boundaries are set and why they are necessary, and about coming to consensus, finding a balance, and differentiating between needs and wants.

Knowing a student's life story gives you an understanding of the whole child and what he or she brings to the learning process. Everyone's experience shapes their lives differently and informs how they see the world and interact with it. This understanding plays a huge role in classroom management and curriculum development, to name only a few aspects. The more we know about the students in our classroom the more we are able to respond (vs. react) to the needs of the individuals so that they can engage positively with the learning process.



## Practical Strategies and Ideas for “Real World” Challenges

While all these ideas sound great on paper, in the real world things don't always go quite as smoothly as planned. The chart below contains practical ideas and strategies that may prove helpful as classroom management challenges arise.

A sincere thanks to all the TDSB's Beginning Teachers and Mentors for sharing insights, ideas, and inspiration from their “real worlds.”

Issue	Strategies/Ideas
Establishing Community Circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to prompt/remind students of your classroom agreements during circle.</li> <li>• Model the length of time for sharing by each person by giving an example.</li> <li>• Remind students that there will be reflection questions at the end of circle.</li> <li>• Give students a focus question to listen for.</li> <li>• Use table circles (sharing in their small groups) in addition to whole-class circle.</li> <li>• Provide “talk time” (e.g., Think/Pair Share) prior to circle.</li> <li>• Respect the students’ right to pass during circle; let participation evolve over time rather than making an issue of it.</li> <li>• Use “popcorn style” sometimes to determine whose turn it is next (e.g., have students toss a Koosh-type ball to the next person).</li> </ul>
Living your Classroom Agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use real incidents (e.g., Saturday class defacing classroom desks) to help students understand how negative actions affect other people.</li> <li>• Brainstorm group solutions to specific problems (e.g., Lumpy Rug – instruct students to make “snowballs” by writing their concerns on pieces of paper, crumpling the papers up to make snowballs and then placing the snowballs under a rug. As you discuss solutions to the concerns as a class, gradually the snowballs are removed and the rug is smoothed out</li> <li>• Use conflict mediation with students when problems/issues arise.</li> <li>• Reinforce positive behaviours of “kids in the middle.”</li> <li>• For younger students, use an inanimate object (e.g., a stuffed animal) as another set of eyes to communicate observations and reinforce positive values. (e.g., “Scoop is so pleased with how everyone is listening”).</li> </ul>
Creating Co-operative Learning Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build toward creating groups (e.g., task-specific groups where success is likely, sharing needs/materials in a group, etc.)</li> <li>• Remind students that they don't have to do everything in their home groups. Continue to use other co-operative grouping strategies.</li> <li>• Some students may need time away from the group; allow them to withdraw in an atmosphere of mutual respect.</li> <li>• Allow time for reflection and group processing. (What worked well? What things should we consider next time?)</li> </ul>



Issue	Strategies/Ideas
Dealing with Challenging Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a safe place.</li> <li>• Praise their positive attributes.</li> <li>• Take an interest in/make a personal connection with/search for their strengths.</li> <li>• Start with the audience (i.e., the other students) then work on the challenging students one by one.</li> <li>• Show that you're human and make mistakes, and that your feelings can get hurt too.</li> <li>• Make expectations/routines clear.</li> <li>• Persevere and take small steps (progress may be one step forward, two steps back)</li> </ul>
Rotary/Special Education Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start small and simple.</li> <li>• Reinforce classroom agreements consistently and often.</li> <li>• Be committed to modelling the agreements yourself.</li> <li>• Collaborate with other school staff to ensure consistency.</li> <li>• Apply co-operative learning strategies to teach curriculum and to review learning.</li> <li>• Make building inclusion part of your classroom routine, so that it becomes part of your classroom culture</li> </ul>

## Celebrating Community

Believe or not, before you know it June will be here!

We are sometimes so caught up in all the end of the year "stuff" that it's a challenge to reflect on our year and celebrate our successes and the successes of our students. Here are some practical ideas to support student reflection, appreciation, and classroom community.

## Mind Map of the Year

### Step-by-Step

1. Students are divided into groups of two or three.
2. Each group takes a specific subject (e.g., visual arts, social studies, etc.) and mind maps on large chart paper everything they've learned. This activity engages the students in looking back and reflecting upon their year, and the mind maps are often very revealing (and surprisingly detailed).
3. Display the completed mind maps and (if appropriate) invite next year's class for a presentation by your students of what they'll be learning in your classroom.
4. As an optional ICT (information communications technologies) extension, the students can create slide shows or even DVDs of their year with presentation or movie software using their mind- maps as storyboards.

## Golden Frisbee Awards

### Step-by-Step

1. This activity is ideal for the last day of school. Begin with enough yellow Frisbees for each student in the class. Using a felt marker to inscribe a personal appreciation to each student. The inscriptions could be things like “The Making Mr. S. Snort Award,” “The Mutual Respect Award,” and so on.
2. At the class ceremony, present each student with the appropriate Frisbee and explain why he or she was chosen. To the applause of their peers, the students have a choice whether or not to make an “acceptance speech,”
3. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the class might go outside to play with the Frisbees.
4. Everyone receives a Frisbee and everyone has an opportunity to feel appreciation, from you and from their peers. (This ceremony made my classroom feel like a community – and made me feel like crying ... but that's another story!)

### Your Voice

While this chapter has some practical strategies and resources about the why and how of building effective classrooms, the intention is that you will personalize and adapt these ideas to suit your context and the needs of your students.

Like so many things in teaching and learning there is no one right way. My goal is that you will find your “voice” as a talented and caring educator. We are all here because we share a deep belief in children. We can support each other. Everyone, children and adults alike, has so much to give.





### Additional Resources for Building Effective Classrooms

- *Beyond Monet: The Artful Science of Instructional Integration*  
Barrie Bennett and Carol Rolheiser  
Metairie, LA: Center for Development and Learning, 2001
- *Classroom Management That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Every Teacher*  
Robert J. Marzano, Jana S. Marzano, and Debra J. Pickering  
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008
- *I Am the Teacher: Effective Classroom Management for Occasional Teachers*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2007
- *Reaching All by Creating Tribes Learning Communities* (30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition)  
Jeanne Gibbs  
Windsor, CA: CenterSource Systems, 2006
- *Discovering Gifts in Middle School: Learning in a Caring Culture Called Tribes*  
Jeanne Gibbs  
Windsor, CA: CenterSource Systems, 2001





# Chapter 5



## **Communicating with Parents and Guardians**



## Big Ideas for Communicating with Parents and Guardians

- Using both formal and informal communication with parents and guardians provides valuable insights into the students you teach.
- Experimenting with a variety of communications tools allows you to discover what methods work best for you, your school community, and the parents and guardians with whom you collaborate. Maintain a professional demeanour in all interactions with parents and guardians.
- Reporting to parents and guardians (and students) should be ongoing so that all are well informed of progress and next steps.
- You and the parents/guardians of your students all share the common goal of helping every student achieve to their fullest potential.

Education is a responsibility shared by parents and guardians, the community, students, and schools. Our shared goal is the success of our students, and collaborative professional communication can play a huge role in achieving this goal.

Often when we consider communication we think of ourselves as the speaker or provider of information. While this role is important, the power of simply listening to the thoughts, feelings, and ideas of others cannot be overstated. Every interaction we have with parents and guardians (and students) represents an opportunity to listen and learn.

In this chapter many practical and proactive strategies are shared to foster and encourage this collaborative learning partnership.



### In a Million Words or Less – How Paul Connects with Parents/Guardians

Below is a letter that Paul Offor, a grade 6 teacher, sends to involve parents and guardians at the beginning of the school year.

*Dear Parent/Guardian,*

*Because it's been a while since you were in grade 6, I thought I'd start your year off with a little "homework assignment": telling me what you think I should know about your child.*

*The reason behind this assignment is that it will take me a while to get to know the students in my class. This activity gives you a chance to tell me what you think I should know about your child. You can brag, you can warn me, and you can inform me. You decide what to tell me, just please keep it under a million words! Of course, unlike your child's homework assignments, this one is optional and it won't be graded.*

*I will read every assignment and I will not share your comments with any other person, including other teachers (unless you give your permission). If there is any information that I feel another of your child's teachers might need to know, I will not share it unless I speak with you and get permission. At the end of the school year, I will destroy these assignments.*

*Take your time, but there must be a deadline. Please get this assignment to me by <insert date>. You can either send it with your child in a sealed envelope, or email it to me at <insert district school board email>. Or feel free to hand-deliver it or leave it in my mailbox in the office.*

*Thank you for your involvement in your child's success. I look forward to reading your entries. Please have fun with this.*

*Sincerely,*

*Mr. Offor*

### Initial Communication – First Newsletter Home

In Chapter 2 we mentioned the idea of summer postcards as a great way to introduce yourself to your students and their parents. An introductory newsletter that you can send home with students on the first day of school will help acquaint parents with you and your classroom routines.

Your first newsletter could include:

- a little bit of personal background about yourself (e.g., a favourite sport, hobby, or interest)
- your beliefs about teaching and learning and goals for your students
- a "heads-up" about upcoming September events (e.g., parents' open house)
- a simple summary of your class schedule (e.g., what days are phys ed)
- the best ways for parents/guardians to contact you (e.g., school phone, board email).



Here are some examples of what the newsletter could look like:

### **Room 14 Nutshell - Aaron's First-Day Grade 1 Newsletter**

#### **Welcome Back**

I hope everyone had a restful and enjoyable summer. During the first few days of school, I look forward to hearing about all the things that have happened over the last two months.

I am thrilled to be back at school again and have the opportunity to teach your child this year.

#### **About Me**

This will be my third year at Bedford Park. My previous teaching assignments include kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2.

My interests include reading, computers, technology, photography, musicals, art, cows, and swimming.

I spent many hours in August setting up the classroom in order to host 30 Beginning Teachers before school started. Room 14 was used as a model classroom for what a grade 1 classroom could look like.

#### **Parent Homework**

Please take a few moments to write me a short note.

#### **About your child:**

It can include anything important about your child you would like me to know. Tell me about your hopes and expectations for this coming year.

#### **About you:**

Tell me a little bit about you and your family. Include any skills and areas of expertise you have that may be of interest or value to our learning community in Room 14 this year.

#### **Student Homework**

Your child is to bring in five items that tell us about him/her. These will be shared with the rest of the class. I brought in a sample to share with the class. Instructions will be attached to the paper bag provided.

#### **Class Schedule**

Monday: Library (a.m.)

Tuesday: Physical Education (a.m.)

Wednesday: Music (p.m.)

Thursday: Physical Education (a.m.)

Friday: Physical Education (a.m.)

Please be sure your child brings appropriate attire for physical education activities.

#### **School Activities**

Over the next few weeks, there are several activities and events scheduled to happen at the school that will involve you. Please keep an eye out for upcoming dates in the Bedford Park Newsletter.

I'm looking forward to meeting you at the school BBQ Thursday night from 5 to 7 p.m.

#### **Email**

I will be sending future newsletters via email to save on printing and paper. Please send me an email with your child's name in the subject heading from your email address of choice.

If you do not use email, please let me know, so I can send you a paper copy.

#### **Communication**

Please feel free to write a note in your child's agenda for me at any time if you have something you need to share with me.

I know that by working together to form a strong school-home connection, we will be able to ensure the continued success and academic growth of your child.

Sincerely,

**Mr. Chan**



## The French Connection – Erin's First-Term Newsletter for Grade 7 Core French



### Reminder!

Levelled readers and comprehension activities are also available for extra practice or enrichment and can be signed out to take home.

### Useful Websites for Enrichment

[www.french.about.com](http://www.french.about.com)  
[www.bbc.co.uk/languages/french](http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/french)  
[www.laits.utexas.edu/fi](http://www.laits.utexas.edu/fi)  
[www.didieraccord.com](http://www.didieraccord.com)  
[www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/ontheline/](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/ontheline/)  
[www.edu/departments/french/french.html](http://www.edu/departments/french/french.html)

### Suggested Strategies for Oral Presentations

- Go over difficult words before your presentation (even write out how they sound to you).
- Practice in front of someone.
- Speak loudly and clearly.
- Add expression to give meaning to what you're saying.
- Try to have eye contact with the audience.

### Unit Description

In the introductory unit, students will learn to describe physical traits and characteristics using a wide variety of adjectives. Through a range of spoken and listening activities, students will be able to describe and compare the celebrities from their own class to those on the red carpet at the Toronto Film Festival. They will also learn to conjugate the irregular verbs *vouloir* and *pouvoir* and use them in authentic contexts through questioning, surveys, and dialogues.

### Curriculum Links

- Use compound sentences in conversations and dialogues
- Use language appropriately in a variety of rehearsed, routine, and open-ended situations
- Read simple texts, identify main ideas and some supporting details, and produce simple responses
- Write in a variety of simple forms, following a model and making substitutions/adaptations

#### *Specific Language Expectations*

- adjectives that precede the noun
- agreement of verb with compound subject
- present tense of irregular verbs *vouloir* and *pouvoir*

### Assignments, Tests and Projects

Write and present a detailed description of a missing person in the form of a dialogue.

Draw in characteristics of a person based on written details and write a full description of famous movie stars from their photographs.

Read text incorporating verbs *vouloir* and *pouvoir*, sequence events and answer questions in full sentences.

Create a dialogue based on the story *Vouloir, c'est pouvoir* making substitutions/adaptations to the model and incorporate a range of theme vocabulary.





## Ongoing Communication – Strategies to Consider

**Rosaleen Geridis** teaches grade 5/6. She makes it a goal to try one new adventurous activity a year. Last year she tried surfing!

*Roz believes that teaching is a growth profession that allows us to learn something new each and every day alongside our students. Teachers make a difference in their students' lives.*

The chart below summarizes communications strategies you might use. Using a balanced combination of these strategies will lead to positive ongoing communication throughout the year.

Whatever personal balance you strike among the various methods, you can keep a written record or log of your classroom parent communication inside your daybook binder or as a separate document folder.

Due to language/cultural barriers, some parents may have difficulty understanding how Canadian schools operate and what is taught in classrooms. To help meet their needs and include them in the process, consider having your communications translated (either in writing or orally), and perhaps helping parents connect with settlement networks to support their transition to the community.



Type of Communication	Some Examples	Some Thoughts
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction letter</li> <li>• Class or subject handbook, including classroom expectations</li> <li>• Class or subject newsletter written by yourself and/or students</li> <li>• Good news report (could be a certificate designed by you)</li> <li>• Written notes in student planner/agenda</li> <li>• Quizzes, tests, or homework signed at home (and returned back to you)</li> <li>• Report cards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careful editing (e.g., spelling and grammar) of what you send home is always a good idea</li> <li>• Keep a copy of communications you send home</li> <li>• Check with your principal about school newsletter policies and process</li> </ul>
Phone Calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting good news (e.g., “sunshine calls”)</li> <li>• Responding or informing parents/guardians of a concern</li> <li>• Asking clarifying questions or requesting further information (e.g., allergy restrictions)</li> <li>• Inquiring about a student who has been absent over an extended period of time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping a record or log of phone contacts can assist with tracking</li> </ul>
Face-to-Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student/Parent/Teacher conferences</li> <li>• Personal interviews</li> <li>• Informal dialogue when parents/guardians are dropping off or picking up students</li> <li>• Parent volunteers in the classroom or on excursions</li> <li>• School wide functions (e.g., plays, concerts)</li> <li>• School council meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing informal dialogue is a proactive tool for relationship building and for addressing concerns as they arise</li> <li>• If a difficult situation arises, seek the support of your administrator</li> </ul>
Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class or subject folder on the school website</li> <li>• Calendar of assignments/homework</li> <li>• Class blog or wiki</li> <li>• Email listserv to distribute online class newsletter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computers may not be accessible to all parents/guardians</li> <li>• Check ETFO's guidelines and cautions re: online communication</li> </ul>



## Online Communication Tips\*

### General Tips

- Always maintain a professional demeanour in all interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators.
- Save a copy of the original message.
- Your messages may be forwarded to a much wider audience – deliberately or unintentionally – and they may be manipulated.
- Use spelling and grammar checks on materials that you plan to email or post on a website/blog.
- Signatures should include your name, assignment title, and school name.
- Do not comment on student-parent or student-student relationships or other colleagues.
- Do not invite students or parents to be members or “friends” of any social networking sites that you are part of.
- Treat every email as though it were a written letter.

### Communicating with Students

- Avoid an overly casual, familiar tone that can erode boundaries.
- Do not communicate with students via instant messaging services.
- Always maintain professional boundaries and avoid communications that could be interpreted as overly personal.

### Communicating with Parents/Guardians

- Be aware that your email can be used as evidence of your conduct.
- Avoid lengthy email exchanges that consume a lot of time. In addition to increasing your workload, protracted exchanges may be prone to misinterpretation.
- Respond to messages from parents by telephone or face-to-face meeting whenever possible.

*\*For more advice and articles about issues related to online communication and other topics go to PRS (Professional Relations Services) Matters Bulletins on the ETFO website:  
[www.etfo.ca](http://www.etfo.ca)>Advice for Members>PRS Matters Bulletins*

## Michelle's September Letter for Special Education

*Dear Parents and Guardians,*

*Welcome back to everyone! I hope that you all had an enjoyable summer. It is now time to look ahead to this school year. I'm looking forward to having your child in my Home School Program and to being part of their educational experience. Your child's IEP (Individual Education Plan) will be coming home within the next few weeks. If there is any information, academic or otherwise, that you think would be useful for me to have while I'm completing their IEP, please fill in the attached form and send it back to me as soon as possible.*

*This year, I will be doing a few things differently, beginning with implementing a 20-minute independent reading time first thing every morning. According to the research, if children are to become proficient readers, they need a lot of uninterrupted time to read. Children are free to choose books from my room or bring some of their favourite books from home. I have a wide variety of novels available for use this year as well as picture books. At the beginning of the year, I will be emphasizing how to choose books that are "just right" to read. Much of the time, students choose books that are either too easy or too difficult, which works against improving their reading skills.*

*Secondly, I will be working in conjunction with the classroom teacher to ensure that your child is receiving appropriate homework assignments and that any assignments are understood before they are taken home to be completed. I am going to ask that all of my HSP students check in with me before leaving each day so that we can go over their homework together. If your child comes home without homework, please have them read for approximately 20 minutes or have them write about anything that interests them for the same amount of time.*

*My room is located in the front hallway beside the nurse's office. My door is always open to students and parents. I hope that you will feel free to come and visit anytime you have a question or concern. You can also communicate with me through your child's agenda. Again, welcome back and I am looking forward to the coming school year.*

*Sincerely,*

*Michelle Thompson*

## Homework

Homework is defined by ETFO as a teacher-assigned learning experience that takes place outside of the classroom. It is up to the teacher's professional judgment and discretion to assign homework. It is important to communicate homework expectations clearly to students and parents/guardians. Check to see if your school or district school board has a homework policy in place.



## Homework Dos and Don'ts

### Do:

- Remember that students have a wide variety of personal and family extracurricular activities/involvements/obligations outside of the school day.
- Share expectations for homework with students and parents/guardians early in the school year.
- Ensure students understand what is expected of them before they leave at the end of the day.
- Differentiate homework to reflect the unique needs of students.
- Carefully plan homework in partnership with other core and rotary teachers.

### Don't:

- Require the use of materials, resources, or technology to which the students may not have access.
- Assign homework that requires a high level of assistance or supervision from parents/guardians, as students may not have that level of support at home.
- Assign homework that involves the teaching of new concepts by parents/guardians.

## Four Types of Homework

There are four types of commonly assigned homework, each having a different intended outcome.

Type of Homework	Definition	Intended Outcome	Application
Completion	Any work assigned during the school day not completed in class.	Helps students keep up to date with the classroom program.	The classroom program should be differentiated if a student has completion homework on a regular basis.
Practice	Any work that reviews and reinforces skills and concepts taught in class.	Helps students practice newly acquired skills to develop fluency.	To be effective, practice homework requires students to already be able to independently perform the skills required.
Preparation	Any work that prepares students for upcoming lessons or classes	Encourages students to acquire background information or to bring their prior knowledge and experiences to upcoming units of study.	A key consideration is the access to resources and information available at home
Extension	Any work that explores and refines learning in new contexts or integrates and expands on classroom learning.	Encourages students to problem solve, and to think creatively and critically.	To be effective, extension homework does not require students to learn curriculum content independently. Instead, students deepen understanding and relate learning to the real world.



## Assigning Major Projects as Homework

- Communicate with parents/guardians the purpose, expectations, timelines, due dates, criteria for assessment, and suggestions for their support for the project.
- Establish realistic timelines and due dates; shorter due dates (e.g., two weeks) are better for teaching time management skills.
- Divide the project into smaller components, building in checkpoints along the way.
- Ensure the students have learned the skills (e.g., paraphrasing, labelling, creating a table of contents, creating cue cards) in class before you expect them to apply them independently.
- Build in class time for students to work on the project components. This provides opportunities for them to ask questions, and seek clarification and support.
- Remember that not all students have access to materials, resources, or a high level of support at home.





## Homework Explained to Parents/Guardians: Newsletter from Carmen (Grade 5/6)

### Homework Program

The purpose of homework is to act as a meaningful extension of what was learned and practiced in school.

We are all responsible for ensuring the success of each child and following a policy allows us to stay on the same page.

### The Policy

#### *Students:*

- Write their homework in the agenda.
- Complete assignments on time and to the best of their abilities.
- Bring a note signed by a parent/guardian if homework is not completed.
- Complete the unfinished work as soon as possible.
- Let the teacher know about any difficulties.

#### *Parents:*

- Create a comfortable environment at home for the child to work.
- Set aside time and oversee that work is completed.
- Sign the agenda and write a note for incomplete work.
- Monitor the child's stress levels in relation to homework and report to the teacher about concerns.
- Talk about school work and school events.

#### *Teacher:*

- Clearly explains homework and expectations.
- Makes sure students know how to do the assignments.
- Communicates with parents regularly.
- Checks and signs the agenda, reads parents' notes.
- Checks and assesses homework regularly.
- Sends home reminders of incomplete work and due dates.

**How It Works** Starting this week, students will take home the following:

### 1. Math Folder

- Students will complete math problems (usually in real-life contexts) or meaningful tasks in order to practice and extend their learning of concepts covered in class.

### 2. Language/Independent Reading Log

- Students will take home assigned activities and any incomplete classroom work. An independent reading log will be sent home daily. Students are to fill out the log each night and parents are asked to sign it. Reading logs are checked each Friday.

### 3. Incomplete Work

- Work assigned in class that was left unfinished must be completed and returned the following day. It is important that students keep up with activities and assignments to further their learning and allow me to properly assess their progress.

### 4. Projects

- This year students will be working on projects for their science, social studies, and media subject areas. A planning letter and rubric will go home two to three weeks prior to the due date outlining expectations and detailing general information. It is a good idea to keep the planning letter easily accessible for students and parents to follow and refer to.

*If you have any questions please feel to contact me at school or through the agenda.*

Regards, C. Oliveira

### Homework Hotline – An Idea from Jim

Many Junior/Intermediate students (and even some in Primary) have a school-issued planner or agenda to record and track homework and assignments. While for some students this is a great tool, for others the planner always seems to be where they aren't (i.e., when they are at home, the planner is at school and vice versa).

To solve this problem I set up a “homework hotline” with my grades 4, 5, and 8 classes. I chose two student volunteers each week and taught them how to use the answering machine that I installed on an extension of the school's phone that was not used at night. They recorded a brief message of the night's homework at the end of the school day. It was one of the most popular classroom jobs, and often the students themselves would call the homework hotline if they “forgot” what the homework was or just to hear their own voices!

Here's the explanation I included in our first class newsletter to parents:

*We are very fortunate to share a phone line with Mr. Anderson's grade 4 class. Nightly homework assignments can be accessed by dialing 395-\_\_\_\_ and listening to a student-recorded message. These messages will be updated each day after school. In addition, each student will soon receive our school planner in which to record all homework.*

Of all the things I did in the classroom to communicate with parents and guardians this simple idea was one of the most successful. Parents and guardians felt more directly involved in their children's learning, which promoted greater accountability for my students and even increased the use of their planners!

### Fall Open House or “Meet the Teacher” Evening

Your first formal introduction to many of your students' parents/guardians could be a “Meet the Teacher” event, which is usually held in late September or early October. Schools use various formats for this type of event such as a barbecue, food drive, a drop-in evening, or a formal event where parents come into the classroom and talk to you. Whatever the format, this is an opportunity to introduce yourself and to begin to establish a positive relationship with parents/guardians.

Many parents/guardians will be coming to meet you with one question in mind: “How is my child doing?” A caution when answering this question is that it may be far too early in the year for you to really know, especially in regard to academic progress.

Focus instead on the positive personal qualities or attributes of the student and highlight that you'll have more detailed academic assessment information as the year progresses. Remember, this may be your first conversation with parents/guardians, and sharing positive qualities is a great way to develop rapport and build a professional relationship. If there is a need to discuss a concern, perhaps call the parent after the event with an invitation to come in for a private meeting.



If part of your Fall Open House involves a “presentation” in your classroom, one idea is to invite and involve your students. If students are allowed to attend, you can make a checklist with them before the meeting and have them show their parents around the classroom, using the checklist as a guide. This allows students to be part of the process and lets parents feel part of the classroom community.

If you are doing a presentation, you can still incorporate aspects of what students want to share with their parents by having them write a message or a class letter that parents can read when they enter the classroom.

- Here are some ideas and “talking points” that may be helpful to include as part of the information you share with parents/guardians:
- Outline the topics (social studies, math, science – referring to the curriculum) you will cover during the year.
- Invite parents/guardians to participate in class activities, field trips, etc.
- Include classroom routines, classroom schedule, expectations for students, assessments/evaluation strategies, and homework policies.
- Identify how, when, and where you can be reached.
- Share ideas about how the school and home can work together to support the child’s learning in and out of school.

The open house is also an opportunity for you to listen to the parents/guardians and learn more about the students you teach.

## Assessing Student Learning and Reporting to Parents

While you will be informally assessing the progress of your students every day, it is worth noting some key points about the formal reporting process. Beginning in September 2010 Ontario elementary students receive a fall “progress report” and two full report cards (late January/early February and June).

While report cards may seem like a long way off, it is amazing how fast time flies and how suddenly it’s time to write them. With that in mind, thinking backwards will help you stay on top of the process:

- Report cards will be due to the office approximately two to three weeks before they go home.
- In September talk to your classroom teacher colleagues or support teachers and come to a decision on who will be reporting on each section of the report card.
- At the beginning of the school year, work collaboratively with colleagues to develop long-range plans.
- September is the time to get to know your students: what they can do well and the areas of growth or support they may require.
- Discuss with your colleagues, including the special education teacher, beneficial resources, instructional strategies, and suggestions regarding ways to support your students in the classroom.

- Find out if your report card comments are supplied by your school (i.e., grade team) or if you are responsible for writing your own.
- Check with your administration regarding contacting parents of any students who are receiving a Level 1 or below.
- Find out what report card software is at your school and who can support you in learning it.
- At the beginning of each term, decide how you will address the expectations (from your long-range plans) . . . think integration of subject areas (e.g, Language and Social Studies connections).

### Assessment and Evaluation Resources to Support You

Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools is the newest Ministry of Education document that provides guidelines for the assessment, evaluation, and reporting process, along with detailed information about the assessment process.

It can be downloaded from: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf>

In addition, school districts may have different policies and guidelines about how to assess and report students' achievement of grade-level expectations. It is a good idea to ask about what school district documents and policies are in place to guide common practice.

Mentors and other colleagues are a great source of support. One idea is to assess students' work together to help you develop a consistent understanding of the standards of achievement and inform your instructional practices. This ongoing dialogue and sharing of ideas will be helpful throughout your entire career but especially so during your first reporting process.

### Assessment for and as Learning in Kindergarten – Practical Ideas from Alison

Kindergarten is a two-year program that covers a broad range of development in children. There are a few forms of assessment that I have found invaluable while observing and assessing child development in the classroom.

#### Monthly Self-Portraits

Starting in September and every month until the end of the year, I ask children to look in a mirror and draw themselves in the frame provided on paper. There are spaces for them to print their names, and to encourage them to write something about themselves. As the children are completing their self-portraits, I make observational notes about comments that they make, such as "I need to draw two ears!" The self-portraits are hung on the wall and their work becomes a gallery for visitors to admire and parents to see. Each month when the next self-portrait is completed it is placed on top of the last one. During reporting time, these self-







portraits demonstrate the progress the children have made in fine-motor development, with use of detail, printing their name, use of colour and space, and so on.



### **Sign-In Books**

In September, children are directed to find their names on the carpet each morning. When most of the students are able to recognize their names, they are directed to print their names in a sign-in book. Some children copy from their name cards, while others are already confident and may be encouraged to add their last name or work on improving formation of a particular letter. This routine provides the students with daily writing practice, yet never remains static. Once the majority of children are confident

with their first names, we repeat the same process with last names, phone numbers, street addresses, etc. The sign-in books provide a record of their development over time and show which children may require extra practice in a small group or one-on-one setting. Also, the sign-in books can be shared with parents at interviews or referred to during reporting.

### **Observation Charts**

There are many formats of observation charts that you might use. I use a four-by-six-square grid, with each box labelled with a child's name. I photocopy this template, double-sided, and keep the copies on a clipboard. Observations can be organized in ways that benefit your assessments, such as writing an expectation on the top of the page and making anecdotal notes regarding the children's progress in demonstrating that expectation. During interviews and reporting, these notes provide unique examples of each child's development that support the ministry's requirement of anecdotal reporting in kindergarten.

### **Photos and Media Clips**

Many of the ministry's expectations for kindergarten students are more easily recorded with a camera. For example, a photo of a completely symmetrical one-metre structure will capture a child's skill, focus, and pride in their work. This photo can be placed in a portfolio for future reference, or displayed in the classroom or on a class website. Conversations that take place in the drama centre can be captured on video and used for assessment of language development or social development during reporting. Also, a video clip of a child demonstrating understanding of sequence or patterning at the math centre may be far more effective than an observational note.

There are many forms of assessment that are effective in kindergarten. The most important thing is to use a variety of assessment tools each day, ensuring that you are recognizing each child's demonstration of learning.

## Report Card Comments

Below are some ideas to consider as you strive to make the comments you write on the report card meaningful to parents. Before you start writing the actual report cards, it's a good idea to connect with your colleagues and your principal regarding specific expectations at your school. (e.g., point form vs. sentences.)

### Big Picture Questions

- Who is the audience (parent or guardian/student/administrator)?
- If I removed the letter grades would the comments alone provide a clear picture of the child's progress?
- Would a parent or guardian reading the report card understand the essential points I wish to communicate about this child?
- Have I used the Learning Skills section to describe what the student is like in my classroom?

### Characteristics of Meaningful Report Card Comments

Comments that parents/guardians, students, and educators will find useful share these features:

- They are individualized; mention the student's name and specific work done/skills demonstrated.
- They relate child's progress to Ontario curriculum expectations.
- They match the grade assigned to the student.
- They start with strengths.
- They state areas of growth in a clear and professional manner.
- Next Steps provide specific strategies to support areas of growth.
- They are as free of jargon as possible.

Students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) require the qualifying statement in the comments section:

*"The grade for strand/subject is based on the achievement of the expectations in the IEP, which vary from the grade \_\_\_ expectations."*



## Individual Education Plans at a Glance

Individual Education Plans, commonly referred to as IEPs, are an important document created by teachers in consultation with students and parents, outlining the individual program required by a student with special needs. These students may be identified as exceptional through an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) meeting, or may simply require special education services and programs and receive them without the formality of an IPRC.

Each district school board has created its own version of the IEP, and its content must meet the standards set out by the Ministry of Education. These standards state that the IEP must include relevant assessment information, the student's strengths and needs, accommodations, modifications, and parent/student consultation, to name just a few.

### How long are IEPs in effect?

IEPs are in effect for one school year. By legislation they must be developed within 30 school days of the start of the student's program (typically the first day of school), and must be reviewed and updated each reporting period. The June IEP is used as a foundation to create the new IEP for the following September. IEPs are meant to be a working document throughout the school year – a place where teachers indicate adjustments to program based on ongoing assessment and evaluation practices.

### Who develops the IEP?

The IEP is typically developed by classroom teachers and/or special education teachers. It is important to consult with all teachers who instruct the student when developing the IEP. For example, core French teachers and planning time teachers need to provide input into the IEP and also are responsible to ensure the IEP is followed when they are instructing the student.

### Are OTs responsible for following IEPs?

Occasional teachers are also responsible for following the IEP and ensuring the student with special needs receives the appropriate accommodations and/or modifications as outlined. For example, if a student has an accommodation that allows for additional time for written tasks, the OT should be aware of this accommodation and provide it for the student. It is important for classroom teachers to have a process in place (e.g., a package of information for the OT) to inform the OT of students with special needs and the accommodations and/or modifications that are to be available to the student based on the IEP.

An IEP is a critical document in the educational life of a student with special needs. It is essential that classroom and occasional teachers develop an understanding of the importance of this document and appreciate the significant weight it carries in the student's education. There are several sources of information teachers may want to access to learn more about IEPs. These include *The Individual Education Plan (IEP): A Resource Guide*, Ministry of Education, 2004.

Sample IEPs from the Ministry of Education are online at <http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/IEP-PEI/index.html>.

## English Language Learners

Being open to a variety of ways to demonstrate understanding gives students who are developing their use of the English language more opportunities to share with you what they have learned or know.

If you have students receiving formal ESL support, it is important to connect frequently with the ESL teacher to discuss their development in the area of English acquisition. The ESL teacher's support in writing specific report card comments will be beneficial. Moreover, their support in understanding how to accommodate the student in other core classes will help the student further engage with the ideas, skills, and concepts you are teaching.

## Learning Skills at a Glance

Here are brief explanations for each of the Learning Skills found on the current Ontario Report Card.

- **Responsibility:** Completing and submitting class work, homework, and assignments according to agreed-upon timelines
- **Organization:** Prioritizing and managing time to achieve goals
- **Independent Work:** Using class time appropriately to complete tasks
- **Collaboration:** Sharing information, resources and expertise, and promoting critical thinking to solve problems and make decisions
- **Initiative:** Approaching new tasks with a positive attitude
- **Self-Regulation:** Understanding one's strengths, needs, and interests

### Learning Skills Comments – Examples from Jim

Below are comments I used for the Learning Skills section of the report card when I taught grade 4. They are meant as samples and starting points only, as you consider creating comments that reflect the growth and progress of the individual students you work with (and learn from).

#### Mostly E (Excellent)

Student is able to share his thoughts and participates fully in community circle and in class discussions. He puts forth a positive effort to complete assigned work in class and his homework is consistently done on time. In his relationships with his classmates, Student is respectful, helpful and co-operative. He is an outstanding model for our Tribes Mutual Agreements of Attentive Listening, Mutual Respect, Right to Pass, and Appreciation/No Put-Downs. His kindness and warmth are valued gifts he brings to our classroom community.



**Some G (Good) and S (Satisfactory)**

Student's insightful nature is a genuine asset to our classroom community. As the term has progressed she has become a more self-motivated and self-directed learner. She is now using her time in class more efficiently. Her homework is still not consistently done on time but an improvement in this area has been noted as the term has progressed. I encourage Student not to rush her work in class or at home. In her relationships with her classmates, Student needs to work on consistently following our Tribes Mutual Agreements of Attentive Listening, Mutual Respect, Right to Pass, and Appreciation/No Put-Downs. I congratulate her on her positive start in grade 4.

**Addressing N (Needs Improvement)**

Student has been working more efficiently in class but his homework is not always done on time or to the best of his abilities. He needs to continue to work on his organizational skills (e.g. planner, completing important assignments). I encourage Student to seek my assistance if he is unsure about an assignment or topic.

A positive development has been Student's increased social awareness. He is learning to "stop and think" about what is happening and to express his feelings in words rather than actions. I wish to congratulate Student on his progress in these areas.

**Parent/Guardian-Teacher Interviews**

Interviews are an opportunity to augment your ongoing communication with parents/guardians. An interview affords greater depth of discussion, and a chance for questions and dialogue about any issues of concern. It is also an opportunity for you to listen.

Remember that you are there to receive as well as to give information. A good interview is an open and focused conversation about the child and his/her progress. Listening attentively can really open people up and lay the groundwork for the collaborative relationship you want to have with every parent/guardian.

**Questions to Consider:**

- What ongoing methods will you use to comment on your students' progress to parents/guardians? (See the Ongoing Communication – Strategies to Consider chart earlier in this chapter.)
- What materials will you use as evidence to support the student's evaluation? For example, assembling individual portfolios is a powerful way to focus the interview. (See Portfolios and Involving your Students section in this chapter for more ideas.)
- What new information have you learned about the student as a result of the evaluation and reporting to parents/guardians?
- How you will use this information to develop plans to support learning?



**Logistics to Consider:**

- What is the process used at the school for you to schedule your interviews?
- Consider in advance if there is an interview where you require an administrator and/or additional personnel to be present (e.g., for a safety concern), and ensure their commitment to the scheduled time.
- Determine how much time you will allow for each interview.
- How to coordinate interview times with other teachers (e.g., for siblings in the school or with a support teacher for a specific student).
- Invite other staff to be present (French or prep teachers, administration, special education or ESL teacher) if beneficial.
- Will you be using translators to facilitate the communication process for families for whom English is not the home language.
- Will students be involved in the interviews?
- Be aware of any family situations where parents/guardians may not have access to their children and the information about their school progress. (Check the OSR for court orders.)
- Make accommodations for physical disabilities.
- Anticipate potential questions about the child's behaviour, ability level, and achievement in certain subjects.
- Perhaps set up an information centre in the hall with samples of resources, curriculum documents, newsletters, field trip information. etc.
- Remember that you and the parents/guardians share the common goal of helping students achieve to their fullest potential.

**During the Interview:**

- Begin with a positive statement about the student and his/her involvement in the classroom.
- Emphasize collaboration.
- Listen to what the parents have to share; provide an open and focused conversation.
- Ask if there is anything you should know that might be affecting the child's school work and life.
- Avoid educational jargon.
- Focus on the child's strengths and begin to share the areas of growth.
- Ask for the opinions of the student and parents/guardians.
- If the interview is not going well, for whatever reason, it is appropriate and acceptable to end it and reschedule when an administrator and/or additional personnel are able to attend.
- Consider parents/guardians as part of the support for mutually agreed-upon directions for their child.
- Summarize the discussion and next steps.
- End on a positive note.

**After the Interview:**

- Make notes of the discussion and agreements.
- Summarize the points covered.
- Maintain contact and follow through with your actions on the agreed plan.
- Keep your principal informed about students'/parents' concerns.

**Example of an Interview Organizer**

**Parent/Guardian–Teacher Conference for** .....

**1. Thank you for coming!** (In attendance).....

**2. Positive qualities of the student** (Check any that apply.)

- ☐ exhibits leadership
- ☐ accepts responsibility
- ☐ works independently
- ☐ polite
- ☐ works well with others
- ☐ sensitive/understanding
- ☐ listens well
- ☐ makes good use of time
- ☐ is organized
- ☐ a good storyteller
- ☐ enthusiastic
- ☐ eager
- ☐ artistic/creative
- ☐ takes pride in accomplishments
- ☐ helpful
- ☐ good sense of humour/cheerful
- ☐ really enjoys .....
- ☐ does well at .....

### 3. Main Discussion

1. Begin the meeting with sharing the strengths of the student.
2. Acknowledge improvements (academic, social, organizational).
3. Review a selection of student's work.
4. Areas for growth: Discuss opportunities for further improvement.
5. If needed, develop an action plan.

### 4. Action Plan: Goals for Next Term

As a way of summarizing and moving forward, you can create an action plan, which might look something like this:

TEACHER	PARENT/GUARDIAN	STUDENT

**Concern:** List the issue (e.g., assignments not being completed on time)

**Goal:** List what we want to accomplish (e.g., homework always completed)

**Actions:** List what you will do and what the parent/guardian and student will do to ensure progress with this issue as you all work collaboratively toward the stated goal.

Once an action plan has been agreed upon, have everyone sign it and provide copies to the student and parents/guardians. Keep the original and file it for your records.

The action plan format is a powerful reminder that you are all working toward a common goal: the success of the student.



### Portfolios and Involving Your Students - Ideas from Jim

Having a portfolio for each student is an effective way to focus the interview on the student's work. Including a wide variety of items enriches the interview portfolio (e.g., reading assessments, writing samples, tests, assessment rubrics, mind-maps, paintings). Some of the portfolio items may already be hanging on the walls in your classroom. Leave them there and direct attention to them as you're discussing progress in the relevant area of the curriculum.

I always invited my students to the interviews. To begin, I had the student choose one item from the portfolio that he or she wanted to share with the parent/guardian and tell what learning it represented. This gets the interview off to a positive start and focuses the conversation on the work of the child. (Note that the student had already looked through their portfolio and made a choice prior to the interview.)

### Student-Led Conferencing

Student-led conferencing is a deeper extension of involving students, where the students themselves guide the entire conference with parents/guardians. Students independently share a portfolio of their work while referencing specific success criteria and documenting their learning goals for the next term. While lots of in-class practice and preparation are essential for the success of student-led conferencing, the result is that students take greater ownership of their learning.

### Additional Resources for Communicating with Parents and Guardians

- *ETFO Special Education Handbook: A Practical Guide for All Teachers*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2007
- *Making Classroom Assessment Work* (second edition)  
Anne Davies  
Courtenay, BC: Building Connections Publishing, 2007
- *Parent-Teacher Relationship: Putting the Pieces Together*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2004



# Chapter 6



## Meeting Diverse Learning Needs





## Big Ideas for Meeting Diverse Learning Needs

- Viewing student differences as positive attributes enhances learning for all students.
- Who we are and where we come from have a direct impact on student and teacher relationships.
- We can help all students understand themselves as learners and as unique, competent, and valued members of the diverse learning community we create in our classroom.
- The learning environment plays a significant role in how we support students and how well students learn.

We have all heard and for the most part believe that “one size doesn’t fit all,” especially when it comes to our approach to working with (and learning from) the students in our classroom.

In this chapter we go beyond the buzzwords of differentiated instruction to share with you what meeting the diverse learning needs of students might look like in your classroom.

**Tina Ginglo** is currently on secondment from the Toronto DSB, teaching pre-service at York University’s Faculty of Education. She takes 20 minutes for herself each day for a little cardio workout and to reflect on the day’s events and plan next steps.

*Tina believes that getting to know our students as individuals is important for programming, and that by doing so we are modelling caring and good citizenship.*

## Have You Ever ... ?

Have you ever arrived significantly late for a class or missed a class and then found it difficult to understand the flow of the discussion once you settled in and were ready to learn?

Have you ever sat down in a lecture hall or classroom and quickly discovered that you didn’t understand one thing the lecturer is talking about? After a few more minutes you realized that you were in the wrong class. You thought you were in third-year Canadian history, but you were in fourth-year biochemistry!

Even if you have never experienced this kind of situation, can you imagine how you might feel? Lost. Out of place. Incompetent.

Now imagine a student who may have come to Canada a few months or weeks ago. This student misses her friends and family back home. She may have fled her country under traumatic conditions. She doesn't understand the language of her teacher or classmates. How might this student feel about school and about herself as a learner?

Another student likes class discussions because he can express himself well. This student speaks with confidence in large and small groups. But when it comes time to sit quietly and write his opinions in his journal, he struggles. His confidence disappears as soon as he tries to put his ideas on paper. He knows that it is his written work that will be graded. How might this student feel about school and about himself as a learner?

On any given day, many students will enter your classroom with similar feelings.

***Can you describe one or two students in your class who have unique learning needs? How might you address these needs?***

## Viewing Student Differences as Positive Attributes

As teachers and students discover and learn to understand who they are as individuals and as members of the different groups to which we all belong, we become better able to communicate with each other and work together in and outside of the classroom.

As we share who we are and where we are from with each other we will discover our similarities and differences and learn to appreciate our own and each other's strengths. Only then can we begin to capitalize on each other's attributes for the common good.

Ideas to consider for your classroom:

### What's in a Name?

- Have students research the meaning of their name by asking family members why they were given their name or by researching the meaning of their name on the Internet.
- Students create a "bumper sticker" of their name and decorate it with symbols and words that represent who they are.

### That's Me!

- You call out a question such as: How many people like apples?
- Students who like apples stand up and say, "That's me!"
- Continue with different questions to build awareness of commonalities in the classroom.

### Life Map

- Students create a visual map or timeline illustrating important events that have taken place in their lives.



### T-shirt Slogans

- Students design a T-shirt with a slogan that says something about who they are or what they believe in.

### Unpacking Suitcases

- Students pack a suitcase or backpack with artifacts that represent who they are and what is important to them.
- Students share their suitcases in small group or take turns, one person each day sharing the contents of their bag.



### Assumptions We Make

Assumptions are dangerous! Be very careful not to make assumptions about your students based on criteria like socioeconomic status, ethnicity, age, or gender. When we stereotype students we interfere with authentic teacher-student interactions and student learning.

***What assumptions might you make about certain students in your room? How might you check to see if you are right? For example, you might assume that all the boys in your class like superheroes or sports. How might you determine whether this assumption is correct?***

How you respond to students from culturally diverse populations will influence what students learn and how they learn it.

***How might a student's culture (gender, economic status, ethnicity, sexuality) influence what and how he or she learns? How might you support this way of learning? Does your program or learning environment create an obstacle for some students' learning?***

Ideas to consider for your classroom:

### Assumption Cards

- Have students record on index cards assumptions they might have about people – males, females, different ethnicities, different professions, poverty, wealth, etc.
- In small groups, students stack all their assumption cards, shuffle the deck and take turns reading the assumptions and discussing whether they are accurate or not.
- Alternatively, you can record assumptions that you devise on index cards – some common assumptions, some ridiculous – and have students discuss their accuracy and the consequences of acting on these assumptions.

### Children of the World

- Research the lives of children from different parts of the world.
- Have students compare their lives to those of others.

### E-pals

- Arrange for your class to partner with a class of students in a different community. Through exchanging email messages, students can learn more about themselves, their classmates and children in other communities.

## Helping All Students Understand Themselves as Learners

It is important to recognize the role community plays in teaching and learning. Your students are members of a community outside of school, and this community plays an important role in the way students perceive themselves as individuals and in the values, attitudes, and beliefs they bring with them into the classroom.

Begin to think of authentic ways to involve members of your students' communities into your classroom. As you and the students learn about the community that your school is a part of, the better you will be able to appreciate each other as individuals and as members of a group.

### Currency

Currency is a name for what we value. It is the mindset we bring with us when we approach new learning.

***What are your student's currencies? Do they value good grades? Do they value parental, teacher, or peer approval? Do they value competition or collaboration?***

If students feel that we don't understand or value their currencies, they often assume we don't care or that they are misunderstood or that they don't belong. For example, a student may have a different way for organizing his or her work or a student may prefer standing



when writing rather than sitting at a desk. A student may prefer talking about issues or ideas rather than recording the same ideas in writing.

***How might you build your students' currencies into your classroom program?***

Carol Ann Tomlinson, in her book *The Differentiated Classroom*, states: "As we increase our understanding of who we teach and what we teach, we are much more likely to be able to be flexible in how we teach."

As a teacher you can build currency by:

- learning early on what your students know and are able to do
- intentionally gathering information about how your students learn best
- asking students about their interests
- telling students what they are learning, why they are learning what they are learning, and how they will learn
- providing opportunities for students to choose what they will learn
- providing opportunities for students to decide how they will demonstrate what they learned.

**Using a Choice Board – An Example from Sangeeta**

A choice board is a differentiation structure that allows students to demonstrate what they know using their interests or learning preferences. Their choices address the same learning goal or "big idea."

**Big Idea:** Society relies on plants and animals. (Ontario curriculum, science, grade 4, Habitats and Communities, page 84)

Create a comic strip to show the relationship between plants, animals, and human beings.

Make a model that represents how we depend on plants and animals in our daily lives.

Use a Venn diagram to show similarities and differences between habitats for humans and habitats for animals.

Write a letter to convince someone why we need to protect a species from becoming extinct.



Truly knowing your students goes beyond playing get-to-know-you games at the beginning of the school year. It will take time to understand their likes and dislikes, their interests and hobbies. Sure it is great to be able to talk to your students about game seven in the NBA championship series, but will this help them to think about the class novel you are reading or help them learn in a way that is best for them? Establishing rapport, gaining trust and acknowledging students' currencies are important parts of meeting diverse learners needs, but stopping there would be stopping short.

Ideas to consider for your classroom:

### **Class “Yellow Pages”**

- Have students record their names and tasks or subjects they are good at on a yellow sheet of paper.
- Compile a class resource book for students to refer to should they need to seek help or advice from their peers.
- In a tech-savvy classroom, this book could be turned into a database for students to do topic searches, such as finding students who are good at geometry.

### **Student Interviews**

- Build in time for one-on-one interviews with students throughout the day, perhaps one week during independent reading, another week during math period, etc.

### **Morning “Check In”**

- Find out about a student's day before school starts in creative and non-threatening ways. Ask, for example, Who is the most tired?
- Have students list all the verbs they did from the time they woke this morning until they walked into classroom (woke up, washed, ate, took little sister to daycare).

### **Observation**

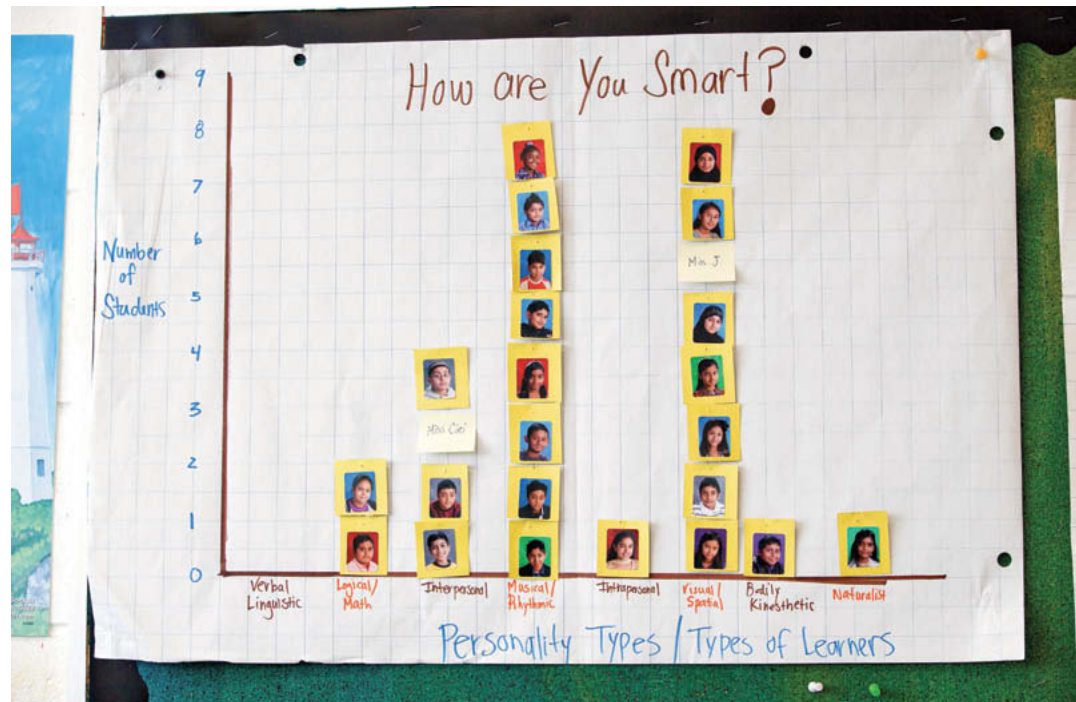
- Pay attention to what triggers negative behaviours in certain students.
- Can you see a pattern? What proactive strategies might you use to avoid the triggers?
- Apart from the different inventories (e.g., learning styles, interests) you might have older students complete, you can also directly observe the learning styles individuals use.
- While on yard duty, pay attention to how students build relationships with each other – who plays with whom? This knowledge will help you identify students' social strengths and needs.
- Build on these strengths by pairing students with complementary strengths and needs together for collaborative and co-operative learning.

### **Informal Dialogue**

- Take a genuine interest in your students' lives by asking questions like: How was your birthday party? Did you get to play baseball last night or was it rained out? Did you find your cat?



Find something that you like about each student. This is very important, especially if you have a student who is initially hard to like. Students quickly figure out if you are just pretending to like them. For example, a student may act disengaged in class, but he may have an incredible sense of humour. Find something you can laugh about together.



To make learning more engaging and relevant, try to find ways to integrate 21st-century communication tools in your teaching.

### Using Information Communications Technologies (ICT) as a Teaching and Learning Tool – Ideas from Jim

*I believe one of our primary goals is to prepare our students to face an increasingly complex world. The ability to think critically, relate effectively with others, and adapt to the changes that will surely mark our future will be crucial to our students' success.*

*ICT has a potentially huge role to play in developing these skills but it must be embedded into a classroom culture that respects divergent thinking and makes each student feel listened to and valued. By modelling caring, compassion, co-operation, and humour, I believe we can contribute to the success of all children. It is my daily challenge to live these beliefs.*



I wrote these fancy words almost 20 years ago and I still believe them. Computers aren't inherently good or bad for our students. They are just a tool, like a pencil. You can use a pencil to sketch the Mona Lisa or to poke someone's eye out. Many students come to school with a tremendous interest in information communications technologies (computers, iPods, cell phones, blogs, wikis, etc.) Our role is to provide a meaningful purpose, to connect these tools to the authentic teaching and learning that happens in our classrooms. With that in mind, here are some practical "real world" ideas that might be useful as a starting point.

### **Access to ICT in the Undersupplied Computer Classroom**

During many of my school visits, I see that access to computers is a recurring "real world" issue (a handful of machines for 30 students).

When I started teaching I was told (and believed) that the computer(s) in my classroom should be on and in use 100 percent of the time. So I set up a schedule where students went on in 30-minute shifts. While this guaranteed "equal access," I soon began to notice a few issues:



- Faizal was always on when I was teaching math.
- When I was reading to the class or having community circle or teaching something "important" I wanted everyone's full attention, and I'd have to ask students to leave the computer or turn down the sound.
- Students often "missed" their assigned times (field trips, Monday holidays) and they remembered missing them (even if they didn't remember where their pencil was!).

Over time I came to teach (and live with my students) a different model. Students' access to the computer was on a "need to use" basis. In a nutshell, they made a proposal to me and if I said yes, that's how they got on. Here's how this system worked for me (and could work in your classroom).

### **Start of the Year**

You provide the purpose and do some direct teaching of the skills the students will need to know.

- Kid Pix example – Create a picture in Kid Pix of all the things you like
- Comic Life example – Create a one-page comic that illustrates your interests





In both cases I'd provide a realistic due date (knowing I had 30 students and x number of computers). Each day, students would make proposals. *"Mr. S. can I use the computer to begin my comic?"* My answer would (usually) be *"Yes, and track yourself on the chart."* Beside the computer I'd have a large chart with each student's name. Beside their name they'd place the abbreviation for the software (or task) they were doing, C for Comic Life, K for Kid Pix, etc.

After a few days, use/access patterns became pretty apparent. Say, Christie had nine Ks, Jamie zero. The next day, I'd encourage Jamie to begin the task. By the end of a month the chart would be full so I'd put up a new one (and keep the old). It provided a clear record of how the students were using computers and what they were doing.

### **Beyond Google – Focus Questions**

When researching, students could begin with "wonder questions." They simply write down on yellow stickies all the things they'd like to know about a particular topic. (e.g., in a unit on Ancient Civilizations: What were the names of the Greek gods and goddesses? or How were the pyramids built?) Post the stickies all around your classroom and have the students sort them, either by topic (e.g., education, food) or by civilization (e.g. Mayan, Greek, etc.) You could also provide students with focus questions linked to the expectations for the unit.

As the students are researching on the Internet, have them take a sticky (or a few) to focus their research. You could have them share with the rest of the class not only the "answers" but how they searched and what techniques they used. In advance of the unit you could also bookmark key sites in several ways (e.g., class blog, links from a Word or Adobe Acrobat document, a list of sites sorted by topic on chart paper near the computer) to avoid the "Google and print" syndrome.

Focus questions greatly reduce the tendency of students to press "print" as soon as they find a site remotely linked to their topic. They encourage more careful reading and critical distilling of information.

### **Jot Notes**

Making jot (point form) notes is a skill that needs to be taught and modelled. Practice with students by giving them a short printed passage and highlighter. Provide some focus questions, (e.g., How were schools organized in Athens? What was taught in them?) They read the passage and highlight the relevant information. After completing the task they make jot notes that answer the focus questions. Students can also do this online by highlighting text, pasting it into a word processing document, and citing the source URL. Again, this technique focuses the students on actually reading the information on websites.



**Mind Map**

Once the students have gathered a large body of information they can use a mind map to record what they know. Using pictures, symbols, and words they organize and present their information on a large piece of chart paper. This non-linear method lends itself very well to putting their research into a website. Each branch of the mind map represents a link to a different page. The lines connecting different topics represent the links that the students will use to link the website together. Using the original mind map on paper helps students to keep from “getting lost” in the process.

Similar to the cooperative learning strategy jigsaw, this technique is very efficient for conveying information. Each group can research and become expert on one aspect of a topic and then present and share their knowledge with the rest of the class using presentation software and/or a class website.

**Starting Points for Student Research**

<http://www.gsc.amdsb.ca>

Avon Maitland DSB's site geared specifically to elementary students and teachers. Many relevant links for all areas of the curriculum (K–8).

<http://linktolearning.com>

Contains web links and resources for many areas of the curriculum. Especially useful as a starting point for Junior/Intermediate students researching specific topics in science and social studies.

**Electronic Portfolios**

Everybody (especially Primary students) loves to see their work in print. Even if it's just a few squiggly lines there's something about seeing their work on paper that is powerful for students, but printing does consume a lot of ink and paper. To cut down on printing, I had my students save their work to their own folders on the computer(s).

If my grade 2s wanted to print, I said, “Sure, see me on Friday afternoon.” Come Friday afternoon it was amazing how many students could live without seeing their work printed. For those that wanted to print, we did one big print run. Eventually, every second, then every third Friday became print run day. I also reminded them that their work was still there on the computer and that they could “visit” it any time they were on.

Meanwhile, the work the students did accumulated in their personal folders. Come report card time, I had an electronic portfolio of each student's work on the computer (e.g., their personal essay in Word, personal cartoon in Kid Pix, etc.) When parents came for their interview this portfolio complemented the paper portfolio I had for each student.







For my grade 5s and grade 8s, at the end of term I had them select (and print if needed) one piece of work they accomplished on the computer during the term. After selecting, they wrote “portfolio reflections” about why they had chosen this particular piece and what learning(s) it reflected. This process was powerful for both students and parents.

To celebrate their work we created class CDs, DVDs, or websites. The content was work-related to a specific assignment or topic from every student.

The common element of all of these ideas is that they acknowledge and celebrate the fact that the computer can be used as part of the learning environment in the classroom, and is connected to the curriculum and to the assessment process we engage in for every student.

## The Learning Environment

*Take a look around your classroom. Do you see anything that might be considered an obstacle for some students in your classroom? Can you describe any obstacles? What might be getting in the way of students experiencing academic, social, emotional, and/or physical success in your classroom? What effect might these obstacles have on their learning and feelings of success?*



**Example 1:**

Perhaps you feel you have a very strong literacy program. You are passionate about reading and talking about books. You love novels and enjoy sharing favourites with your students. Anyone who walks into your classroom would say, “You’re a literacy teacher!”

*What about the students who see themselves as budding mathematicians or scientists? Do they see themselves in your classroom?*

**Example 2:**

You have arranged student desks into groups of four or six. You feel it is important for students to learn from and with each other. Are there any students in your class who might see this arrangement as an impediment to their learning?

*How might you organize student desks so that no individual students feel marginalized, while still providing opportunities for collaborative and individual work time?*

When you know more about your students, you can create a learning environment that supports them.

Ideas to consider for your classroom:

- Create space in your classroom where students can be comfortable being who they are rather than who we think they should be.
- Create a safe space so students are comfortable to bring with them their skills, strengths, culture, and previous experiences.
- Show students how to use these attributes as they acquire new knowledge and skills.

The chart below illustrates some of these ideas in action:

What I Have Learned	Strategies That Might Help
Some of my students prefer to work alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning centre that includes headphones</li> <li>• Special “Work or Study” desks</li> </ul>
Many students choose non-fiction books to read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting with your teacher-librarian or literacy coach to gain access to a variety of non-fiction texts</li> </ul>
During large-group instruction, I notice the majority of my class seems less engaged after 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning lessons in 15-minute blocks</li> <li>• Using frameworks such as a writing workshop model or a three-part lesson structure (e.g., “Minds On/Action/Consolidation”)</li> </ul>
Some of my students excel at presenting their ideas orally or by showing what they know visually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using a choice board structure that allows for students to determine how they can best use their strengths</li> </ul>



## **Beyond the Four Walls – Resources and Ideas for Field Trips**

Field trips can be rich educational experiences that expand children's learning through active hands-on engagement with the resources of the local community. Field trips increase students' knowledge and understanding of a subject and add realism to the topic of study. You should consult with your grade/division partner/team, administrator, and district school board policy when considering planning a field trip.

Student Safety is Priority #1- Ensure you have sufficient supervision so students are safe and supervised at all times. Frequently counting your students is a must.

### **Before the Field Trip**

#### **Selecting a Field Trip Location**

Investigate possible locations that correspond to the classroom learning of your grade(s). If possible, go on a pre-visit to familiarize yourself with the site. Take photographs to share with students prior to the visit. Explore the exhibition(s) you plan to visit to get ideas for field trip activities.

#### **Logistics Planning**

Apply for approval for the trip through your board's field trip process and prepare the parent permission form. Schools typically have a process to accommodate students who are unable to pay the field trip cost. No student should be excluded based on an inability to pay.

Make sure to let parents know all trip details including what is expected in terms of:

- appropriate clothing
- lunch arrangements
- money needed,

Make necessary arrangements for special needs students (e.g., education assistant attending). Provide alternative arrangements for pupils who will not be going on the trip. Submit a list of students who will be attending the field trip to other teachers if their schedules will be affected.

#### **Preparing Students**

- Discuss the purpose of the field trip and how it relates to the current unit of study.
- Lead a session to determine what the students expect to see and learn during the field trip and to assess students' prior knowledge and interests related to the field trip. This can be done as a brainstorming exercise, a discussion, or an introductory lesson.
- Show photographs or posters of the field trip site or that are related to exhibits they will be seeing.



- Explore the website of the location you will be visiting.
- As a class, brainstorm a set of standards of conduct for the trip and discuss suggested spending money, lunch plans, appropriate clothing.
- Discuss with students how to ask good questions and brainstorm a list of open-ended observation questions to gather information during the visit.
- Record questions on chart paper or in student field trip journals.
- Go over the field trip schedule.

## **During the Trip**

### **Field Trip Activities**

Depending on your field trip location, and the educational programs offered, you may need to plan activities for students to do at the field trip location. Some ideas:

- scavenger hunt where students look for particular objects and record them in a field book or on an observation sheet
- mystery with clues provided
- sketch pads for students to draw found or exhibited objects
- field notebooks for students to record observations, ask questions, describe favourite displays, make sketches, and record key words, ideas, and phrases.

## **After the Field Trip**

### **Post-Field Trip Activities**

Just as prior planning is essential to the success of a field trip, planning for appropriate follow-up activities will facilitate student learning and increase the value of hands-on experiences outside the classroom. Suggestions for follow-up activities include:

- providing time for students to share observations and reactions to field trip experiences
- sharing specific assignments students completed while on the field trip
- creating a classroom bulletin board displaying materials developed or collected while on the field trip
- creating a short news report about what happened on the field trip
- publicizing the trip in your class newspaper, school bulletin board, class web page, or a trip presentation for the school's open house.

## **Reflect on the Field Trip**

Reflect on the entire field trip process. This will provide a good reference for future planning.

- What was of educational value in this field trip?
- Was there adequate time?
- Were there adequate staff and adult supervision?





- What would improve a visit to this site in the future?
- What problems should be addressed in the future?
- What could be done differently to make this a better experience?

### Virtual Field Trip

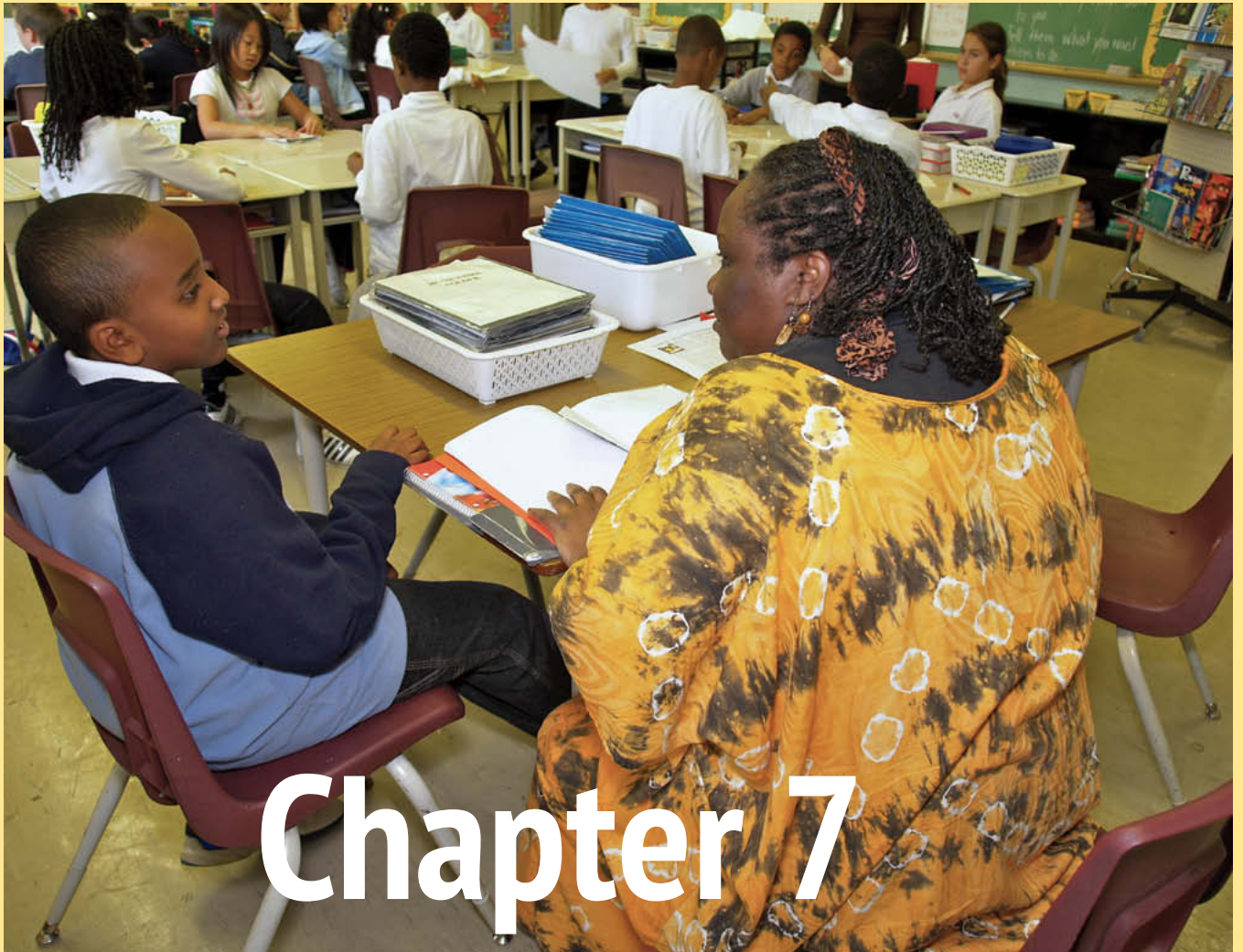
A virtual field trip is a guided exploration through the World Wide Web that organizes a collection of pre-screened, thematically based web pages into a structured online learning experience (K. Foley, *The Big Pocket Guide to Using & Creating Virtual Field Trips* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), Seattle: Tramline, 2003).

There are a number of different formats for virtual field trips and if you do a search on the web, you will find thousands of trips. Some trips simply consist of a list of links, while others use some type of navigator (or buttons) to move through the tour. Real-time virtual field trips involve the use of video conferencing and audio conferencing technologies to permit students in one location to visit and learn about people or places in another location.

### Additional Resources for Meeting Diverse Learning Needs

- *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades*  
Mary Cowhey  
Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2006
- *Connections*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2008
- *ETFO Special Education Handbook: A Practical Guide for All Teachers*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2007
- *Social Justice Begins with Me*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2003
- *Start Where They Are: Differentiating for Success with the Young Adolescent*  
Karen Hume  
Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2008
- *Teaching Fairly in an Unfair World*  
Kathleen Gould Lundy  
Markham, ON: Pembroke Publishers, 2008
- *The School That Equity Built*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2000





# Chapter 7



## **Preparing for or Being An Occasional Teacher**



## Big Ideas for Preparing for or Being an Occasional Teacher

- Preparation and communication are key components of success for both the classroom and occasional teacher.
- As an occasional teacher, you can turn to many people at each school who can provide support (teaching colleagues, office staff, administrators, students).
- As an occasional teacher, you can proactively create a positive and respectful learning environment in the classroom.
- Flexibility is a useful trait for the occasional teacher.

“Back in the day” when we began teaching, our first few months of classroom experiences were as occasional teachers in a wide variety of K – 8 assignments. Chances are you will begin your teaching career in the role of OT as well. Looking back, we think of all the learning we were privileged to do by being a guest in so many different classrooms. We also clearly remember wondering how the students and staff at each new school we taught at would receive us.

In this chapter tips and strategies are shared that might be helpful whether you’re preparing for an occasional or if you actually are the occasional teacher. We wish that “back in the day” we’d had access to these great ideas!

### Preparing for an Occasional Teacher When You Are the Classroom Teacher

There will be days that you will be unavoidably absent. To ensure that a quality education program continues in your absence, advance preparation for an occasional teacher is necessary. Qualified occasional teachers are ETFO members. They are professionals who can continue to implement your regular program.

Many schools have specific expectations about preparing for an occasional teacher. Ask your administrator about the process at your school.

Assemble a folder for occasional teachers to use in your absence. Include enough detail for a teacher who does not know your students or your schedule. Suggested items to include in your folder:

- class rules, routines, and expectations
- a class list identifying special needs and health issues
- a seating plan
- a map of the school
- supervision schedule and guidelines
- fire and emergency procedures
- daily and weekly schedule
- timetable for student supports
- lessons and materials
- a “where to find” list (e.g., attendance book, art supplies, guided reading books)
- other staff information (e.g., names of administrators, teachers in the classrooms next to yours)
- other helpful information (e.g., structure of your literacy block, parent volunteer days).

## Sample Information Page for an Occasional Teacher

Welcome to Room 8. I hope this information will help make your day go smoothly. Please leave me a note letting me know how the day went.

Ms. T.....

### Staff Information

- Principal: Ms. W.
- Vice Principal: Mrs. H.
- Helpful Teachers: Mr. D. (next door in Room 9) / Ms. G. (literacy teacher-in the office right outside the classroom)
- Classroom volunteer: Ms. A. (Tuesday and Friday a.m.)

### Daily Schedule

8:40 - Student Entry:  
 8:50-9:40 - Period 1  
 9:40-10:30 - Period 2  
 10:30 - Recess  
 10:40-11:30 - Period 3  
 11:30-12:25 - Lunch  
 12:30-1:20 - Period 4  
 1:20-2:10 - Period 5  
 2:10 - Recess  
 2:20-3:10 - Period 6  
 3:10 - Student Dismissal

### Student Information

- Student with an EpiPen (peanut allergy): Brandon
- Student with an assigned EA: Olivia
- Students who are picked up at 2:20 for resource support: Connor, Hiba, Kayleigh
- Helpful students: Divya, Lucas, Aleksandra
- Weekly student helpers' names: posted on the front bulletin board (attendance, notes, etc.)

### Our Classroom Agreements

- Attentive Listening
- Appreciation/No Put-Downs
- Right to Pass
- Mutual Respect

We use Tribes in our classroom. If you are not familiar with Tribes, the students can explain how we work together as a co-operative group/community.

### Other Helpful Information

- Please check the daily folder (labelled with the day of the week that you are in my class) for my duty schedule, specific plans, and activities. If for some reason I have not left a folder, please check my daybook for basic plans and/or in the office as I may have emailed plans to school.
- During our literacy block our students rotate to different classes. Please have the students switch immediately following announcements.
- I share the library position with Mr. W. He teaches a number of my classes while I teach some

### Where To Find

- Attendance book: in mailbox in staffroom labelled Ms. T, upper right-hand corner (fill in a.m. entry and after lunch)
- Seating plan: top right desk drawer
- Art paper: in the cabinet in the coat room
- Markers: in the buckets near the blackboard; markers are labeled for specific purposes
- Crayons/scissors/glue: on the side of teacher's desk
- Quiet reading books: in labelled buckets on shelves between the windows







groups in the library. Please see the daily plans/schedule at a glance to know what classes you are taking when.

- The students really enjoy music and stories.

- Math workbooks: in bin at front of the room
- Class list/schedule/seating plan: attached to this information
- Favourite books: Geronimo Stilton books (they'll let you know which one we are reading)

Thank You!

**Ms. T**

## When Few or No Plans Are Left for You

If the minimal amount of information is not available from reviewing the daybook, you can ask the school secretary and other staff; once the students arrive, you can ask them too. Students will be especially helpful in answering your questions about classroom procedures around attendance, washroom use, collecting money, etc. Helpful students are a valuable resource and will identify themselves quickly to you. Be sure to use them.

Come prepared with high-interest, grade-appropriate materials based on the current curriculum. It is worthwhile to develop engaging learning experiences for each division/grade level that are easy to take with you to a new occasional teaching assignment.



### Practical Ideas from Connie

**Connie Tschipner** *is an occasional teacher. In her spare time she enjoys watching cooking shows and trying out new recipes.*

*Connie believes that by demonstrating every day our enthusiasm and passion for teaching we inspire our students to learn.*

#### No Plans or Students Finish Early

- My bag of tricks is more mental than bringing along physical materials but does include items for more than one grade in case I find myself covering a variety of classes.
- I find students respond well to drama activities and games.

#### Tips for Success

- Before I get to the classroom I try to know learn routines of the school by asking other teachers or administrators (e.g., where do I meet the students, how are students dismissed, location of attendance folder).
- I check to see if there is a seating plan.
- I try to be flexible, prepared for anything, and calm.
- I take into account that students don't know me.
- I ask the students what their teacher normally does in a given situation.

### Being a Proactive Occasional Teacher

- Arrive early.
- Review lesson plans.
- Gather the necessary materials required for the lessons (e.g., photocopy a class set of worksheets).
- Identify potential times for off-task misbehaviour, such as transitions or when work is completed. Try to make transitions quickly and smoothly by planning ahead and knowing what comes next. Also, have some prepared activities appropriate for the grade and/or division. These may include puzzles, trivia, and word games. When students are busy and on-task, there will be a lower rate of misbehaviour.
- Check the daybook, calendar, or memos to see if there will be any alterations to the regular school day (e.g., assemblies, drills).
- Write an outline of the day's activities on the board for students to see.
- Locate a seating plan or be prepared to make one.
- Familiarize yourself with students who have special needs (e.g., behaviour plans, medications). This information should be in the daybook. If it isn't, check with the school administration or secretary.





- Review classroom rules, routines, and expectations.
- At the start of class inform the students that the regular classroom rules, routines, and expectations will be followed.
- Inform students about what you need them to do, rather than what they need to stop doing.
- Provide clear instructions before an activity begins and offer students an opportunity to ask questions.

### **Practical Ideas from Elizabeth**

#### **Introducing Myself to Other Teachers**

I introduce myself to other teachers, usually first to the ones who are the closest to the classroom I will be working in. I introduce myself confidently and with a smile, and tell them whom I am supplying for.

They may give me some important information about the class I will be working with or a heads-up about the students I need to pay close attention to. These brief contacts help my day to go well.

#### **Connecting with the Students**

Throughout the day I look for opportunities to connect with the students. I call these “soft moments.” During classroom activities, I show interest in their actions and discoveries. I also ask students questions about who they are, what they are thinking, or what they do outside of school.

These soft moments may happen in many different situations; for example, students may be changing classes, moving between exercises, coming back from lunch. Showing interest in students’ lives lets me connect with them individually. I try to remember the information that the students share with me.

If I go back to supply in this class, I will have already built a foundation for more conversations and discussions with the students. Also, these students will be the first ones to give me some support if I need it. They simply want to know that teachers are genuine and care about them.

## Occasional Teaching – Frequently Asked Questions

### Should I take anything with me to the teaching assignment?

It is important to maintain the continuity of the classroom teacher's academic program by following the teacher's lesson plans as closely as possible. However, you may arrive in a classroom where it is not possible to implement the planned lessons for that day. If you were called in with little warning, there may not even be any lesson plans.

To ensure you are prepared to handle any situation, you need a tote bag full of materials that you can use to enhance an activity or for time between activities, or to assist in creating a lesson. These high-interest activities should be linked to the Ontario curriculum and provide students with meaningful and purposeful learning experiences. You may want to keep three bags of materials, one for Primary, Junior, and Intermediate classes.

### What do I do when I arrive at school?

- Check in at the office to announce your arrival.
- Introduce yourself to the school secretary and administration.
- Pick up keys to the classroom.
- Locate the classroom and other rooms you may need throughout the day. A school map may be provided or there may be one in the classroom. Be sure to locate the staffroom, the workroom, and the staff washroom.
- Unlock the classroom door, find the daybook, and prepare for the day.

### Once I have familiarized myself with the lessons, what else should I do?

It is to your advantage to learn as much as possible about the school, the schedule, and the students. The degree to which you are able to do this depends on the information the classroom teacher has left. Following are some suggestions that may help you prepare for your assignment prior to the students' arrival.

- Perform any tasks necessary to execute the lessons (e.g., photocopying, cutting, reading information in a textbook).
- Find the seating plan; if there isn't one, be prepared to make one.
- Familiarize yourself with school safety routines (e.g., fire drills), school timetable, yard duty supervision schedule, and discipline policy.
- Find a class list and prepare name tags.
- Review any behaviour plans to ensure you maintain consistency for those students.
- Identify (ideally, as soon as they enter the classroom ) students with high needs or allergies, and those requiring medications.
- Review the in-school support program timetable (e.g., special education, ELL).
- Find out if you need to collect anything from the students (e.g., money, homework).
- Find out if there are any special events happening in the school (e.g., pizza day, special visitor).



### **How do I maintain classroom continuity?**

Review the established classroom rules, routines, and expectations. Encourage students to take ownership of their classroom by having them explain the rules and expectations to you. Try to follow the rules and routines as closely as possible to maintain consistency.

If you believe a temporary rule should be instituted, provide the students with an explanation for why it is needed. Students are more likely to adhere to a new rule when they understand why it is necessary. Rules should be short, concise, and stated in a positive manner. It is helpful to write the rule on the blackboard or to post it as a reminder. You may need to review rules and expectations several times during the day, especially after high-energy activities such as recess or physical education class.

### **What do I need to do at the end of the day?**

At the end of the day, follow this useful checklist:

- Ensure that students have completed their usual end-of-day activities (e.g., fill out planner, homework review).
- Distribute newsletters or notes that need to go home with the students.
- Ask students to assist with tidying the room.
- Tell the students how much you enjoyed working with them.

Once students have been dismissed, complete these tasks:

- Finish tidying the room, if necessary.
- Write a note to the classroom teacher.
- Mark any work completed during the day.
- Collect all your own teaching resources and personal effects.
- Thank staff who assisted you during the day.
- Check in at the office to return the classroom keys and to find out whether the classroom teacher is scheduled to return the next day.
- Maintain confidentiality about the students and the school.

### **What should I include in the note to the classroom teacher?**

Classroom teachers need to know what happened during their absence and where to pick up when they return. It is very helpful when a clear and detailed outline of the day is provided. The note to the classroom teacher could include:

- anecdotal comments about the day and the students (be truthful but positive)
- a list of helpful students
- a list of absent students
- an explanation of what work was completed and what still needs to be finished
- a review of material with which students had difficulty
- an explanation of any disruptions to the day (e.g., unexpected assembly, fire drill)
- if you were unable to follow the prepared lesson plans, an explanation and a copy of the lesson you gave and your name and the date.

**What is a positive classroom environment?**

A positive classroom environment is a reflection of the sense of community shared by the students and the teacher. It involves an understanding of and agreement with classroom rules and routines. It incorporates the methods used to motivate students as well as the physical organization of furniture, materials, and space. Basically, a positive environment is the warm and welcoming feeling you ought to get when you walk into a classroom.

As an occasional teacher you cannot control the physical arrangement of the classroom and materials, but you can foster a sense of community.

**Why is a positive classroom environment so important for an occasional teacher?**

Students are creatures of habit. They become comfortable with established routines and the familiarity of their own classroom teacher. The absence of their regular teacher can disrupt everything to which the students are accustomed. This is especially evident when the arrival of an occasional teacher is unexpected. Students need to feel welcome and comfortable in their own classroom and to have as much continuity as possible in their everyday activities.

**How do I create a positive learning environment and establish a respectful relationship with the class?**

Successful occasional teachers have compiled the following tips for creating a positive learning environment:

- Greet students while standing in the doorway so you can monitor both the hallway and the classroom.
- Smile.
- Introduce yourself.
- Write your name in a clearly visible location.
- Tell the students something about yourself.
- Explain why you are there.
- Allow students an opportunity to introduce themselves or each other.
- Allow students to take ownership of their classroom by asking them to explain the established rules and routines.
- Adhere to these rules and routines as closely as possible.
- If a temporary rule or routine is required, provide the students with a reason for it and record the rule on the board as a reminder.
- Treat each student with respect and dignity; you will receive the same in return.
- Call each student by name (use name tags or cards).
- Be an active, attentive listener.
- Be fair and consistent.
- Use a sense of humour; be open to laughing at yourself.
- Maintain a confident composure.
- Encourage appropriate behaviour by acknowledging it.
- Do an icebreaker activity or have a thinking challenge ready as they enter the classroom.



### **What can I do to encourage appropriate behaviour?**

First and foremost, be proactive. Preventing discipline problems is easier and more effective than responding to them. When a well-planned, stimulating learning environment is created, most behaviour problems can be avoided. Student behaviour may appear to be more disorderly when an occasional teacher is in the classroom because some students may take advantage of your lack of familiarity with the rules and routines. In other words, they try to test the established limits.

### **What does “professionalism” mean for an occasional teacher?**

- Be punctual.
- Dress professionally.
- Familiarize yourself with board policies.
- Familiarize yourself with school and class routines and policies.
- Be a role model for how you want the students to conduct themselves.
- Be flexible.
- Be respectful.

Your collective agreement may identify specific items of information that each school should supply to you. Many schools have occasional teacher packages outlining important information about the school and individual classrooms; check to see if one is available for the schools where you work. Remember to support the collective agreement by following its provisions. If in doubt, contact the local.

Adapted from: ETFO, *Head of the Class – Making it Work!*, 2002.

### **Additional Resources for Occasional Teaching**

- *Classroom Management That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Every Teacher*  
Robert J. Marzano, Jana S. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering  
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2008
- *I Am the Teacher: Effective Classroom Management for Occasional Teachers*  
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2007





# Chapter 8

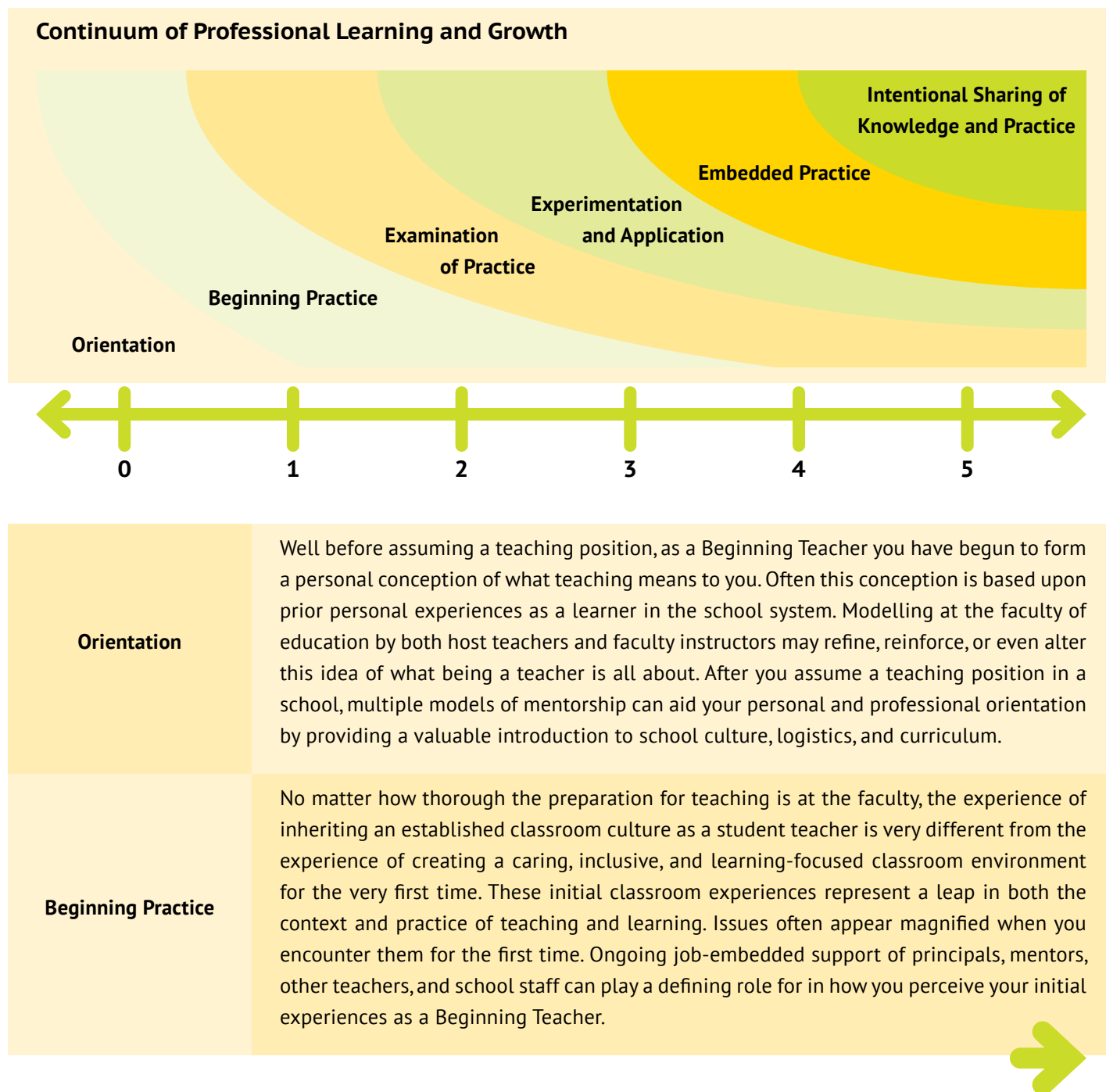


## **Continuing Your Professional Learning and Growth**



## Thoughts from Jim

You are at the beginning of a “learning journey” and your learning (just like your students’ learning) will be continuous and ongoing. This continuum has a structure, shown in the diagram below. I have had the privilege of teaching and learning from children for about 27 years and am still navigating this continuum and learning as I go!



**Examination of Practice**

Specific teaching challenges (e.g., classroom management, assessment and evaluation, and diversity of learners) may provide the impetus for reflection on practice and a purposeful seeking out of both formal and informal supports for professional learning. Often the focus of examination of practice is around what isn't working. Reflecting on and acknowledging the practices that are contributing to the success of students is just as or even more important. While skillful debriefing and coaching can assist in self-reflection and in the identification of areas for professional growth, it is critical that ownership of this process resides with you. Opportunities for both formal and informal observation of colleagues can assist in this personal examination of practice.

**Experimentation and Application**

Both formal and informal learning experiences may provide motivation for you to experiment with a variety of approaches to classroom practice. Classroom strategies are adapted and adopted (and in some cases discarded) to suit the diverse learning needs of students. Classroom application is also based upon whether these practices align with your emerging beliefs about teaching and learning. Continuing job-embedded opportunities to share and refine professional practice can assist in your developing personal values about what effective practice looks like, sounds like, and feels like in the classroom.

**Embedded Practice**

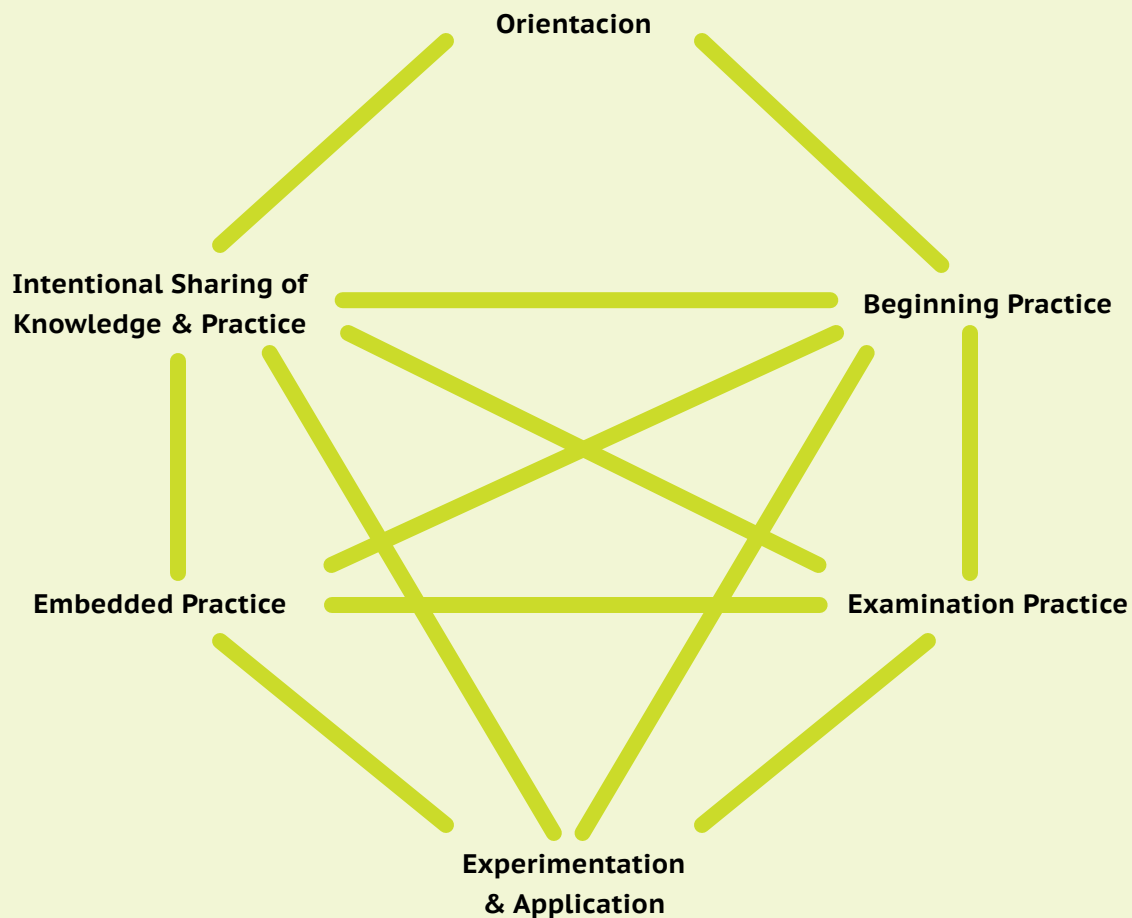
At its core, embedded practice reflects the unique answer of each educator to the question Who am I as a teacher? This personal voice reflects deep beliefs about teaching and learning and is embedded in all aspects of the classroom environment. Classroom practice reflects your identity as a teacher and a personal vision for the human development and learning of students. Opportunities for continuing self-directed professional learning in a variety of contexts and settings may deepen understandings or even alter classroom application of embedded beliefs.

**Intentional Sharing of Knowledge and Practice**

Classroom practice is "deprivatized" and opportunities for intentional sharing of knowledge and practice with colleagues are provided through job-embedded learning structures. These teacher leadership experiences broaden perspective beyond the classroom and provide informal and formal mentorship opportunities, not just for Beginning Teachers, but for all members of the school community. Ongoing consulting, collaborating, and coaching opportunities model examples of effective learning-focused environments for both teachers and students, and stimulate a desire for continued personal and professional growth.



### Interactions Along the Continuum



By embedding formal and informal learning opportunities into the daily experiences of Beginning Teachers, experienced teachers are giving them and their students a tremendous gift. Students will be in classrooms where their teachers are not only provided with resources, but are also part of a learning community where challenge is created and professional vision is encouraged.

Providing you, the Beginning Teacher, with ongoing consulting, collaborating, and coaching opportunities models the very learning community you aspire to create and promote in your own classrooms. Together we come full circle: Beginning Teachers who receive support become the mentors for the next generation of new hires and ultimately of the students they will teach.

## How ETFO Can Support Your Professional Learning

ETFO is a great resource to support you on this learning journey. ETFO offers a wide range of professional learning opportunities to support you throughout your career, in whatever role you are in.

- ETFO provides Additional Qualification (AQ) courses, some face-to-face, but mostly online. These courses are developed by teachers for teachers.
- ETFO has developed a Book Club Program for several professional resources.
- The ETFO Summer Academy Program offers members a wide variety of three-day courses held across the province throughout July and August.
- ETFO Credit Courses may be recognized by QECO for category placement. They are offered at locations across the province throughout the year.
- ETFO conferences on diverse topics support ongoing learning.
- Many high-quality, low-cost curriculum resources are available through shopETFO: [www.etfo.ca/shopETFO](http://www.etfo.ca/shopETFO).

Additional and current information about ETFO professional learning can be found on the website [www.etfo.ca](http://www.etfo.ca). Check out the online calendar of events. Your ETFO steward receives regular mailings with application forms for many programs. Your local's professional learning chair is an important source of information, as is your local president. Additionally, these professional learning activities are highlighted in the ETFO electronic newsletter. You can sign up for this newsletter on the ETFO website.

Many locals have a professional learning fund that you can access to offset the cost of courses and conferences. Check with your steward for details.

## The Heart and Art of Teaching and Learning Revisited – What Our Students Remember

It is fitting to give the last word to our students. Here are the voices of the students I taught in grade 4, who are now about to enter high school. Their words reflect the “heart and art” of our continuing learning journey.

### ***What do you remember about our classroom?***

- *I remember that everybody was respectful to each other.*
- *Every morning we'd go into a circle and we'd talk.*
- *Our whole class was always having fun; you were always smiling.*
- *All of my classmates we're great. They helped me through the year.*
- *The tables all had group names; it was kind of like a big family.*
- *At the end of the year, you gave us those Frisbees that said something good about us all.*





***What attributes or qualities do you hope your teachers will possess?***

- *Be caring towards the students*
- *Encourage us to learn; not discouraging us from anything*
- *Understanding to the students*
- *Help us out whenever we're stuck*
- *Making it so you want to come to school and enjoy being with your teacher and friends.*

The words of our students echo our hopes for you as you embark on this incredible learning journey called teaching.

So thank you for your commitment to building a classroom culture of inclusion, of support, of caring, and for living "the heart and the art" of teaching and learning. The optimism, passion, strength, and caring that you bring to our classrooms will touch the hearts of the students you teach (and your heart too!).

**Heart and Art Website**

This book is meant to be the beginning of sharing our learning with each other. We invite you to join us at [heartandart.ca](http://heartandart.ca) to continue this learning journey and interact directly with educators like yourself who are living the heart and art of teaching and learning with students.

### Matrix of Ideas (A–E)

Idea or Resource	Before School Starts	Building Inclusion	Building Effective Classrooms	Parents/ Guardians	Diverse Learning Needs	Occasional Teaching	Page
Appreciation Fans		✓	✓		✓		40
Are You French (and Don't Even Know It?)		✓					49
Assessment for and as Learning in Kindergarten		✓		✓	✓		85
Assumptions We Make		✓			✓		98
Being a Proactive Occasional Teacher		✓				✓	115
Beyond Laminated Kittens	✓						23
Beyond the Four Walls – Resources for Field Trips				✓	✓		108
Celebrating Diversity		✓			✓		51
Choice Board					✓		100
Class Database		✓			✓		39
Classroom Contract		✓	✓				42
Classroom Layout – What Could It Actually Look Like?	✓						25
Conflict Mediation			✓				61
Currency		✓	✓		✓	✓	99
Encouraging and Valuing Personal Responses		✓			✓		35
Example Floor Plan	✓						30



## Matrix of Ideas (E–I)

Idea or Resource	Before School Starts	Building Inclusion	Building Effective Classrooms	Parents/Guardians	Diverse Learning Needs	Occasional Teaching	Page
Example Information Page for an Occasional Teacher						✓	113
Example of an Interview Organizer				✓			92
Fall Open House or “Meet the Teacher” Evening				✓			83
French Connection Newsletter				✓			75
First Five Minutes as an Occasional Teacher		✓	✓			✓	54
First-Day Grade 1 Newsletter		✓		✓			74
First Day in Special Education		✓			✓		46
Friend Venns		✓			✓		48
Goals/Strengths/Beliefs		✓			✓		36
Golden Frisbee Awards		✓			✓		69
Group Scavenger Hunt		✓					50
Homework Explained				✓			82
Homework Hotline				✓			83
In a Million Words or Less		✓		✓			73
Inclusion in Kindergarten		✓	✓		✓		42

### Matrix of Ideas (I–P)

Idea or Resource	Before School Starts	Building Inclusion	Building Effective Classrooms	Parents/Guardians	Diverse Learning Needs	Occasional Teaching	Page
Individual Education Plans (IEPs) At A Glance				✓	✓		88
Inflating vs. Deflating			✓			✓	61
Information Communications Technologies (ICT)					✓		102
Inside/Outside Circle		✓			✓		47
Learning Skills Examples				✓			89
Map of the Human Heart		✓			✓		37
Math Art		✓			✓		48
Mentoring At Your School	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	15
Mind Map of the Year		✓			✓		68
My Life in Six Words		✓			✓		52
Occasional Teaching – Frequently Asked Questions		✓	✓			✓	117
Ongoing Communication				✓			78
Parent/Guardian/Teacher Interviews				✓			90
Planning Resources	✓						31
Portfolios and Involving your Students				✓			94
Positive Consequences			✓		✓	✓	59



## Matrix of Ideas (P–W)

Idea or Resource	Before School Starts	Building Inclusion	Building Effective Classrooms	Parents/Guardians	Diverse Learning Needs	Occasional Teaching	Page
Practical Ideas for “Real World” Challenges			✓				67
Preparing for an Occasional Teacher						✓	112
Rate Your Day			✓	✓			42
Report Card Comments				✓			87
Room of Experts		✓			✓		43
School Community Walk	✓	✓					20
September Letter		✓		✓			79
Sharing Spaces	✓						22
Signal for Listening			✓				58
Summer Postcards	✓	✓		✓			20
Talk Time		✓	✓		✓		58
Ten Things About Me		✓			✓		52
Themes of Success	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Time Capsules		✓					48
Time Out Reflection Cycle			✓				64
Tips for Success as an Occasional Teacher		✓	✓			✓	115
Viewing Student Differences as Positive Attributes		✓	✓		✓		97
Welcoming Families	✓	✓		✓	✓		42
Wellness		✓	✓			✓	55
What’s in a Name?		✓	✓			✓	97









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