

Spring Ahead, Fall Back?

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer

Most days, I pride myself on being a “glass half-full” kind of girl. As I sit down to try and write something worth teachers taking a precious moment to read, I must confess right off the bat that today isn’t one of them. I am frustrated. I am impatient. I am tired. I think I am getting a cold. I have way too many things on my “to do” list and not even close to enough time to do them, and on top of all that, someone on Facebook just posted a Santa that claims there are only 12 more Saturdays before Christmas! How is this possible?!?

Next week, it will once again be time to change our clocks to daylight savings time. “Spring ahead, Fall back,” I can hear my father’s voice in my head, reminding me of the long dark winter evenings ahead. Although meant as a guide to give clear direction on which way to change the hands of my clocks, I hear a double meaning. Hmm... I wonder...in my harried efforts to “spring ahead”, am I really “falling back”?



Could this be “Disillusionment”?

Having been in several meetings with teacher leaders around this province this past week I don’t think I am alone. Could we all be experiencing the “Phase of Disillusionment” that we know can occur for early career teachers about this time in the school year? (Moir, 1990) Possibly.

It has been said that change is inevitable, growth is intentional. There is no doubt that we certainly are experiencing change on a regular basis in New Brunswick education. Just in the last couple of years we have had the amalgamation of Early Childhood and K-12 Education Sectors, amalgamation of Districts, new Ministers of Education, new Deputy and Assistant Deputy Ministers, a new contract, and new policies. My list could go on about changes at the provincial level in education, but I think one of our principals voiced it best in a recent meeting, “Everything has a new form.” Compound that change with all of the efforts identified in District and school improvement plans and

then consider teachers’ own professional growth plans. **Yes, change is inevitable; yet, is our growth intentional?**

Overcoming the “Winchester Mansion” Effect

The Winchester Mansion is known for being the “oddest mansion in the world”, built in San Jose, California by Sarah Winchester – young widow to the inventor and owner of the Winchester Rifle Company. It is said that Sarah was haunted by visions as she directed carpenters round the clock to build the mansion. Sadly they worked

without benefit of a blueprint to guide them. As a result, the mansion has stairs that disappear into ceilings, rooms that are inaccessible and doors that open to bare walls. “The result of all of this ceaseless labour and investment is a labyrinth structure adorned with some of the finest architecture, furniture and decorations that money can buy”¹. Over 600 rooms were said to have been worked on but only 160 actually exist as many were replaced or rebuilt during construction.

Many days, I feel like I live much of my professional life in a very Winchester-like labyrinth.

In their book “*The 12 Touchstones to Good Teaching*”, Bryan Goodwin and Elizabeth Ross Hubbell suggest that I am not alone. “Over the years, teachers will encounter a ceaseless barrage of books, workshops and guidance from administrators asking them to build new practices into their existing repertoire of strategies. A few that come to mind include response to intervention, differentiated instruction, learning styles, culturally responsive teaching, universal design for learning (UDL), backward design... There is nothing wrong with any of these approaches. In fact, some might be fine additions to the teacher’s practice. However, they may come at teachers with such regularity that teachers are never able to master one approach before being asked to move on to the next. Moreover, without a blueprint or vision of what great teaching looks like, teachers are often left to figure out for themselves how - or IF - the different approaches fit together.”²

Avoiding “Fall Back”

In order to avoid becoming overwhelmed and “falling back”, the authors go on to suggest “12 Touchstones” that teachers and educators can focus on when the demands pile up. Their thinking is much the same as the theory behind the intensive training that pilots, the military or emergency response workers receive on emergency checklists. Essentially, focus on the checklist and it will see you through any challenge or emergency. Likewise, they present their “12 Touchstones” (divided into 3 categories - Be demanding, Be supportive, and Be intentional) with the belief that they contain enough of a cross section of great teaching practice and pedagogy that will meet the challenges that any teaching context can provide:

Be Demanding: Articulate and Maintain High Expectations for Learning

1. I use standards to guide planning
2. I help students set personal learning objectives for lessons
3. I peel back the curtain and make performance expectations clear
4. I measure understanding against high expectations

Be Supportive: Provide a Nurturing Learning Environment

5. I engage student interest in lessons
6. I interact meaningfully with students
7. I use feedback to encourage effort
8. I create an oasis of safety and respect in my classroom

Be Intentional: Know Why You’re Doing What You’re Doing

9. I make the most of every minute
10. I help students develop deep knowledge
11. I coach students to mastery
12. I help students do something with their learning

Final Thoughts

Maybe we can all take a minute, breathe and just BE...in THIS place! (Author is not responsible for any thoughts readers may have as they are possibly reminded of former provincial tourism ad campaigns or license plates.)

Could it be that my sense of humour is back? Maybe I am still a “glass ½ full” kind of girl after all!

Take care,



SOURCE: Goodwin & Hubbell, *The 12 Touchstones to Good Teaching: A Checklist for Staying Focused Every Day*. McRel 2013.

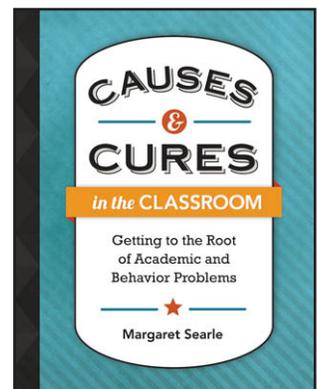
May I Recommend?

The entire September issue of *Educational Leadership* was devoted to Resilience & Learning and counts as one of my favourites to date. If forced to pick just one article to suggest to you it would be, **Getting Beyond “I Hate Math”** by Lisa Medoff (p. 44-48). Through an exploration of a reluctant learner called “Millie”, Medoff provides eight strategies to most effectively support struggling students in any subject.

The September issue of *Kappan* included **Learn More – Show What You Know** by Bergin, Bergin, Van Dover and Murphy (p. 54-60). This article explores the merits of using public performance to motivate student learning. Certainly worth a read!

Book Give-Away!

Congratulations to Lucy LeBlanc of Glen Falls School in Anglophone South on winning last months draw for *Role Reversal* by Mark Barnes. This month’s give away is for **Causes & Cures in the Classroom: Getting to the Root of Academic and Behavior Problems** by Margaret Searle



Sound intriguing? Send me an email with the subject line “Book Draw” before November 28th.

