

NBTA Council Days: Our Rights and Responsibilities

by Ardith Shirley, NBTA Staff Officer

I realize that it is only February, but before we know it, our May Council Day will be upon us. Your three Council Executives have been working hard throughout the school year to put together three distinct programs that are chalk-full of wonderful professional learning opportunities for our teachers. By the time you return from March Break, the posters will be up and the details of the programs will be posted online so that you can begin to think about how you wish to spend this day of learning.

I have to confess, that when I began my career, I had many misconceptions about the background behind Council Day as well as my own professional rights and responsibilities related to that day. Some of you have heard me sheepishly speak of my own (mis)behaviour at my first Council Day and my thankfulness that a seasoned colleague took me aside and helped me understand (in no uncertain terms) their disappointment in my lack of appreciation for having complete individual choice for my own professional learning for a full day – while being paid by my employer. I continue to be grateful that I had a colleague who cared enough about me and my profession to help me reflect and self-correct.

In honour of that very respected colleague, I share the following in hopes it may provide you (especially those who are new to the profession) the background needed to make more informed choices:

RIGHTS:

What are Council Days? Why do we have them?

There are three days in the school calendar that have been bargained and are defined in the Collective Agreement as Council Days. On these days, the employer agrees to pay teachers to embark on professional learning opportunities that they identify as meaningful and useful. Your professional association (NBTA) is responsible for organizing and funding the content of these days of professional learning “by teachers, for teachers”. Two of these days take place in August – this past year the 26th and 27th. One of those fall days is expected to be school-based and the School-Based PL Committee is responsible for activities.

The remaining day occurs annually on the first Friday in May. This day is special in that it is the only day in

the school calendar when it is guaranteed that teachers have the right to define their own professional learning by **individually** selecting learning experiences organized for them by volunteer colleagues who sit on our three Councils. Or, if unable to travel to one of our council day programs, by submitting an alternate proposal to their local School-Based PL Committee for approval. (See Collective Agreement Article 36.02)

What if I am a member of one Council (Ex. High School), but REALLY want to experience a learning opportunity that is offered at another Council (Ex. Middle or Elementary)?

Even though our Councils organize themselves by level and create programs accordingly, *ANY teacher member is free to register for ANY one of the Council Day programs – regardless of which Council they belong.*

I am unable to attend Council Day this year – What are my options?

Over the course of a career, it is understandable that there may be some years that it is difficult or impossible for a teacher to travel away from home for their professional learning opportunity on Council Day. That said, it is also not expected that a teacher would submit an alternate proposal every year of their career.

I have decided to submit an alternate proposal for this year – How do I go about it?

Look for the alternate proposal submission form that should be posted in your school staff room shortly after March Break (also available at www.nbta.ca). Briefly, outline your **individual plan** for a LEARNING goal for the day. (Be mindful it is your learning that is the purpose, rather than the multitude of other “to do’s” that are already on your list that you could be working on.) Submit your proposal to your School PL Chairperson **by April 1st**. (Please note that your school PL Committee is charged with making sure that the guidelines surrounding alternate proposals are honoured. It is they who will approve or deny your application.)

I am a supply teacher – Can I attend Council Day?

Absolutely! Just like regular teachers, our casual members are encouraged to register and attend whichever program appeals to them. Our annual Council Day Conference is a benefit of membership for all NBTA members.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

I must be absent from work on Council Day – Who do I need to contact?

If it happens that an individual must be absent from work on Council Day or any portion thereof, they are expected to treat the day as though it were any other school day by notifying their principal (or if you are the principal, your Director of Schools) of the absence and filling in the appropriate documentation associated with such absence for submission to your District Office.

It is our belief that all NBTA members (regardless of role) should be able to answer the question, “How was your May Council Day?” with one of the following three options:

1. I attended one of the NBTA Council Day Programs and learned....

2. I embarked on an individual learning plan as a result of my approved alternate proposal and learned....
3. I was absent from work that day and have filled in appropriate documentation.

In closing, it is important to be mindful that these rights and responsibilities have been negotiated over time, in good faith and partnership by the profession and our employer. It is the responsibility of all parties to honour the positive intentions that were foundational in achieving the right we enjoy of having three days of professional learning in service to our students and our NB Educational System that is planned by teachers (the profession), for teachers.

Closing Quote:

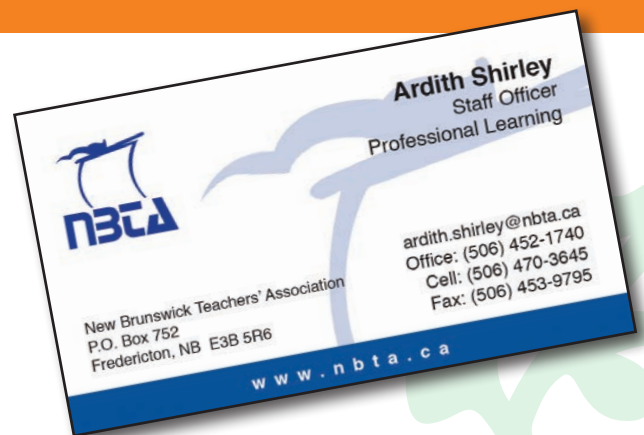
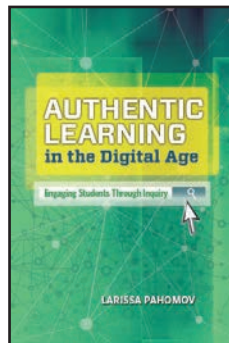
*“Every right implies a responsibility;
every opportunity, an obligation;
every possession, a duty.”*

— John D. Rockefeller

Book Give-Away!

Congratulations to Chris Jones of Bliss Carman Middle School who is the winner of our last draw for Susan Brookhart's, *How to Design Questions and Tasks to Assess Student Thinking*.

This month our draw is for Larissa Pahomov's *Authentic Learning in the Digital Age*. Sound intriguing? Drop me a quick email with the subject line: BOOK DRAW before March 15th.



Save the Date!

CONTACT
(Conference on New Techniques and Classroom Teaching)
August 4 -7, 2015 at UNBSJ
Theme: Waves of Change – Oceans of Opportunity!

This conference is designed for teachers of any stage or role from the four Atlantic Provinces.

Developing Successful Schools Conference (DSS)
July 6 – 9, 2015
Mount Allison University

This conference is designed for educational leaders from the four Atlantic Provinces. Join us for significant professional learning and networking among current and aspiring administrators.