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SO, YOU WANT TO BE A TEACHER !

** Ken Darvall*

1.INTRODUCTION

Congratulations, you are halfway there!

Undertaking teachers training through schemes such as **AREP, ANTEP**, or this commendable scheme through the Catholic College system has required dedication and commitment to get you through the workload as well as overcoming the frustrations that seem to increase as your studies have progressed. Frustrations due to time (or rather lack of) , difficulties with assignments (first, trying to make sense of them and then trying to write something that does make sense, while you are wondering how this is actually going to help you to become a teacher) and absences from the family (when you are required in Sydney or doing a practice teaching session away from home) are very hard to overcome. Therefore, the support network that has been put in place must be regarded as effective, otherwise you would probably be watching the footy instead of satisfying course requirements.

Frustrations, especially in relation to the work load and the difficulty of some assignments, tend to make some students procrastinate about the future. Is teaching really worth all of these hassles? Will it get any easier when or if I become a teacher? Will I be a good teacher? Will I be able to handle some of those 'cheeky little brats' that are always teasing my son/daughter? (Remember, you won't be able to physically handle these 'brats' when you are a teacher, so you had better resolve the matter now!)

2.NOW

In actual fact, training becomes one of those remarkable experiences of life. In years to come, I am sure that you will reflect, in amazement, about how easy and enjoyable training was for you, especially in comparison to teaching. So my first point is: **if you think that life will become easier once you finish training, then think again.** What you are going through now is the easy part!

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I am pleased for those of you who have full-time jobs. In times of recession, the gloom and doom of the media should make us thankful that some of us do have employment. It is my own personnel belief that students of this program or any other teacher training program should be employed in school as A.E.A.'s. Such an initiative would bring you closer to future reality, especially if you haven't worked in the classroom and school environment before. The overall lack of commitment to Aboriginal education by both federal and state governments is highlighted by this fact. One must continue to question about the sincerity of any deadline to reach 1000 Aboriginal teachers.

Myths seem to surround many things in life. Moree is a classic example. For the outsider, national headlines of the past have created a notorious reputation for the town. However, those of us who live in Moree know otherwise. Similarly, myths exist about the teaching profession. The terrific pay and holidays dissolve very quickly into the reality once you become a teacher. Find a rich teacher and you have probably found a lucky teacher who has won the lotto, the lottery or a generous inheritance. As for holidays, you will earn every hour of your vacation when you are working in the classroom. I have not mentioned working hours because as students who have undertaken some practice teaching sessions you will already know that teaching and its preparation go well beyond the nine to three image.

3. FUTURES

Teaching is all about children.

Teaching is about children learning and developing. Those of us who have children can vividly recall those moments... when our children were born... when they first began to talk and walk... when they had their first stint in hospital... when they first went to school. From these experiences we realise that each child has been different in some ways. This fact is amplified within the classroom. As teachers, you will soon realise that Johnny can't read because phonics doesn't work with every child and Mary requires an individual program in physical education due to her cerebral palsy.

Teaching is about caring for children so that barriers to learning can be removed for them where possible. Children of today are a far different breed than our own generation. As technology rapidly changes the way of everyday life, parents appear to be having extreme difficulties of coping, understanding and communicating with their children. Families are drifting apart. Television and

videos are confusing a lot of people who are unable to differentiate between reality and fantasy. Consequentially, there are massive welfare issues to confront at the school level. Unfortunately, as teacher, you must become the expert in areas that really go beyond a job description. Besides the teaching role, you are also ...nurse, dentist, cleaner, counsellor, mum/dad, banker, repairman, comedian, plumber, all-round sporting coach, tutor, bus driver and so on.

Teaching is about the responsibility for all children under your care. You are unable to pick and choose whom you would like to assist. As a teacher, your duty of care is a legal responsibility. My second point is: **you have this legal responsibility for every child in your class.**

Teaching is about all children

4. BARRIERS

While the completion of this course is probably regarded as the main barrier to teaching at present, there will be many other barriers that emerge especially as you commence your training. Two of these with which you are familiar will be.

- racism; and,
- bureaucracy.

These will be evident as you progress as a teacher. However, you have coped and overcome these barriers before, so you will not be surprised when they do emerge from time to time.

However, according to Ryan (1986) , there will also be at least six other general barriers that are faced by all beginning teachers

1. The Shock of The Familiar

Teachers have spent a great portion of their lives in classroom. Besides the unexpected demands of the individual's stamina there are other surprises such as paperwork (from the Principal!) .

2. Student

Understanding students (not recognising behaviours and attitudes of kids)

Social distance (Some new teachers consciously work to be different from teachers they knew who were too remote from the lives of the students. Often this desire to be close to students comes from the best intentions, but also it often comes from insecurity and the desire to be liked. In any event it confuses students who do not want the new teacher to be a friend but simply an effective teacher!)

Discipline (Discipline problems to the new teacher are like skin problems to the adolescent. Few get through the period unblemished!)

3. Parents

Many parents are often the significant source of the new teacher's satisfaction and sense of worth. However, parents are a great source of discomfort for beginning teachers for a number of reason although new teachers bring fresh energy and new ideas, parents often focus on inexperience;

- parents not showing up for requests to see the teacher;
- critical, abrasive parents (my child can do no wrong!)

Parents and teachers should be natural allies, but even allies sometimes have trouble learning how to cooperate.

4. Administrators

The principal has multiple roles in a school including making policy decisions, dispensing rewards and punishments, acting as a teacher's shield. The principal will have different perspectives from the beginning teacher due to differences in experience and possibly to different value systems. Because of different styles of leadership displayed by principals, beginning teachers may have difficulty in coping with the particular leadership styles in place in the school.

5. Fellow Teachers

Although staffs develop into close-knit groups, many don't know how to cope with the first year teacher. The new teacher may change the status system and reward structure of the school (jealousies and petty concerns) . Often new teachers are warmly greeted by their new colleagues and then ignored and forgotten. Social differences can work to separate new teachers from older teachers.

6. Instruction

Teachers are expected to know what to teach and how to teach it. When beginning teachers realise that they are having difficulties with instruction, they may experience a sense of deep, personal failure. Pre-service teachers receive a generalised professional program. It is left to the new teachers to apply what they have learned to particular classrooms. Much of the craft of teaching can be learned only on the job. Frequently new teachers discover that whole areas of knowledge and skill have been left out of their preparation. New teachers also have difficulty finding appropriate material to teach.

5. CONCERNS

A major concern I have is that nearly every time an Aboriginal teacher graduates, he/she spend minimal time within the classroom (if they get that far) before they are lured out of the classroom into some other position. While I have been pleased to see them attain higher positions and status, I have felt disappointment at the experience that children, whom they have taught, have missed. Will we ever reach that hoped for 1000 Aboriginal teachers in classrooms.

6. EXPECTATIONS

According to Bage and McCormack (1987) , three major expectations of teachers have emerged over the last twenty years. Teachers are expected to:

- teach every child the 'basics';
- meet children's individual needs; and,
- develop their own teaching programs and be accountable for them

At first glance, these expectations seem simple, reasonable and realistic, until we try to understand what they mean and what their implications are for teachers. On examination, these expectations reveal an unexpected complexity.

During their first year of teaching, beginning teachers are placed on probation. This requires a report by the Principal on the performance of this developing classroom teacher. This probationary report will be written in conjunction with the teacher's supervisor.

The following check list has been circulating within New South Wales Department of School Education for many years and is useful guide for Principals in the assessment of probationary teachers.

CRITERIA FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF PROBATIONARY TEACHERS

1. Teaching Skills

- (a) Thoughtful & adequate lesson preparation ;
- (b) Methods for catering for individual differences;
- (c) Development of suitable class standards;
- (d) Adequacy of teacher's class records;
- (e) Continuing critical evaluation of pupil progress. Development of sound follow- up techniques.
- (f) Appropriate variety of teaching methods;
- (g) Ability to create and maintain pupils interest and stimulate responses;
- (h) Capacity for effective classroom control, generation of pupil respect for teacher ;
- (i) Development of pleasant learning environment.

2. Interpersonal Relationships

- (a) Cooperation & responsibility in implementing school & subjects policies;
- (b) Ability to work harmoniously as a member of a team;
- (c) Ability to accept and implement advice;
- (d) Punctuality - to school, to class and to duties;
- (e) Rapport with pupils, staff and others (including parents) ;
- (f) Cooperation and involvement in extra-school activities.

3. Professional and Personal Qualities

- (a) Commitment, enthusiasm and general attitude;
- (b) Initiative, resourcefulness and self-reliance;
- (c) Creativeness and flexibility;
- (d) Self criticism and self discipline;
- (e) Loyalty and dependability;
- (f) Personal presentation, dress and speech;
- (g) Positive potential and scholarship.

7. CONCLUSIONS

It was George Bernard Shaw who once said:
"He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches."

Teaching requires very special people as teachers. We all have our own views on what makes a good teacher. In all cases, children should be highlighted as the top priority.

As you continue with your studies, you will need to determine your priorities. Importantly, you will have discovered along the way that teaching requires commitment and dedication. As a beginning teacher you will need to:

- to separate private and professional lives;
- develop the ability to learn from each other;
- be prepared to accept advice;
- be treated as a professional regardless of status;
- appreciate the need for uniform and consistent discipline;
- program effectively;
- attend professional development courses;
- organise the classroom for effective learning;
- participate in school-community activities.

Finally, please remember my previously stated concern. Hurry up and complete your training as we need you in the classrooms.

References

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