



RCCSD Novice Teacher Education

The Slump Revisited

By: Paula Rutherford, Just ASK Publications

It's that time again. In the life cycle of new teachers, this is the time of year when their moments of frustration, doubt, fatigue, and anxiety crescendo and they ask, "What was I thinking? Why did I ever think I wanted to be a teacher?"

As I wrote in 2006, one of the most important actions mentors can take is to acknowledge the reality and significance of these feelings. We need to explicitly let new teachers know that they are doing a great job, provide clear examples of that good work, and that we all go through these stages of self-doubt. We also need to make plans to support new teachers proactively and reactively as they move through these trying times.

One support strategy that has proven very successful is **You've Got Mail!** In a new teacher support session participants describe a situation with which they are struggling on the outside of an envelope. Other new teachers, mentors, or colleagues write suggestions on index cards and place them inside the envelope. If they do not have suggestions they write empathy messages. After several people have had the opportunity to provide suggestions, the envelope is returned to the new teacher. Complete directions for organizing this exercise are attached at the end of this newsletter.

Another strategy that establishes the norm of asking for and providing one another assistance is **On My Mind**. At a new teacher support session, provide new teachers several index cards and have them write a question or describe a problem, one to a card. After issues are listed, have the participants circulate the cards around the room. As other new teachers read the cards, if the question or situation is one that is of concern to them, have them put a color dot on the card. As the cards circulate some will end up with lots of dots. This way, consensus about the issues of most interest is reached and the group can then take several approaches to identifying ways to address the concerns. One popular approach is to write the issue or concern at the top of a piece of chart paper. Place the new teachers in small groups and have them engage in a **Graffiti** exercise to generate possible ways to handle the situation. Once the charts are completed, collect them, create lists of the suggestions, and email them to all the participants.

At this time of the year, new teachers often report that they are struggling with planning, feel lonely, and are unable to find the time to plan or collaborate. One way to maximize time and build a collaborative culture is to engage in parallel planning as suggested by Leslie Vecchiotti of Palmyra-Macedon CSD, New York. Since both new teachers and the mentors need to plan, in this approach they simply sit side-by-side and do their own planning. As questions or great ideas arise they can share them with one another. One regularly scheduled hour after school each week spent planning together can really make a difference.

Two other recurring issues are mentioned by new teachers at this time of the year: paper work and recognition. They find the amount of paperwork overwhelming. One of the best gifts we can give someone who is buried in piles and piles of disorganized paper is an hour of our time working with them, digging through the papers, tossing what does not need to be kept, and sorting the rest. Arrive with a big garbage bag, file folders, and a crate for sorting to support this effort. In fact, a three-hole punch and a couple of old binders might be useful as well.

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- December 18: Conflict Resolution for New Educators
- December 22—January 1: Winter Break
- January 16: DPAS Training for New Elementary Teachers
- January 17: DPAS Training for New Secondary Teachers
- January 21: MLK Day



THE SLUMP REVISITED

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The need for recognition comes amidst all the support and suggestions mentors and coaches are providing. New teachers sometimes bemoan the fact that they receive far more suggestions than they can possibly absorb and little feedback on what they are doing well. It is essential that we monitor the quality and quantity of the suggestions we make and that we are purposeful about including acknowledgement about performance in our interactions with our protégées. Appropriate recognition could be based on the teacher performance criteria. Use the stem "I noticed that..." and complete the sentence with phrases like: you accessed prior knowledge, you paused for processing, you surfaced misconceptions, students made real world connections, or students asked each other clarifying questions. Statements like these are empowering because they note important teaching and learning practices without moving into the realm of "I liked it when you..." Use of the "I noticed that..." stem provides a perfect introduction to follow-up reflective questioning. The truth of the matter is, sometimes we need to simply provide a pat on the back. As Grant Wiggins says, "Praise keeps us in the game; feedback helps us grow." Let's be sure that we focus not only on helping new teachers grow but also on keeping them in the game. This is especially true at this time of the year.

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Instructions for You've Got Mail! are located on page 7.

"Praise keeps us in the game; feedback helps us grow."



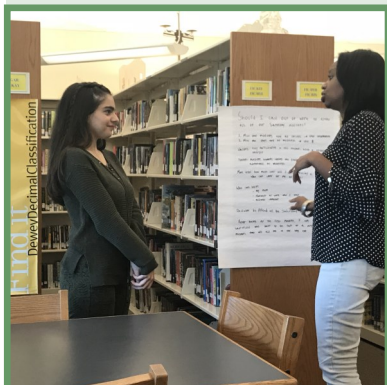
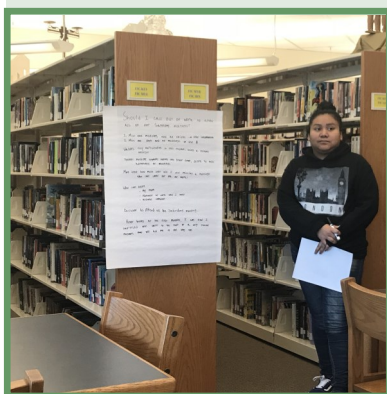
SATURDAY ACADEMY

SATURDAY ACADEMY

Two years ago, the Red Clay Consolidated School District received a grant to help to recruit our own students to become future teachers in the district. As part of the grant, we have instituted a program where students explore education careers and prepare for college through innovative activities facilitated by Stacie Zdrojewski, RCCSD Lead Teacher for Novice Teacher Education. This is the second year for the program and this year's cohort of students met for the first Saturday Academy session on November 10th.

As part of this program, the students will receive mentoring from current college education majors, as well as district staff, to ensure a successful transition from their senior year to the college campus. The students in the cohort are also eligible to apply for the district's Appleseed Scholarship to be used toward the cost of tuition at either Wilmington University, the University of Delaware, or Delaware State University. Scholarships will be awarded to select participants who successfully complete the Future Educators Saturday Academy. Participation in the program is not a guarantee of a scholarship; however, the students will have the opportunity to interview for a position within the Red Clay Consolidated School District upon successful completion of college and all required teacher certification assessments.

The Saturday Academy sessions are held in the library at Cab Calloway School of the Arts. The sessions run from 8:30–12:00 and the remaining sessions will be held on January 26th, February 23rd, March 9th, and April 13th.





MENTOR SHOUT OUT

Baltz Elementary School's Quatina Hattley is serving in her second year mentoring novice educator, Diana Munoz-Romero. The two have developed a very strong mentoring relationship. Diana has this message for her mentor and friend, "Thanks for guiding me towards the right path. You are a fantastic mentor who is worthy of emulation. You deserve a big thank you from me."

STUDENT TEACHER SPOTLIGHT: STEPHANIE SWAIN, YEARLONG RESIDENT

Tell us about your school experience. What was school like for you as a student?

As a student, school was very enjoyable for me. I went to Red Clay schools from K-12. I started at Linden Hill Elementary school where I was fortunate to have teachers who took an interest in my learning style. Since I am a very hands-on learner, I enjoyed doing projects and was able to keep my focus on what needed to be done. I was also driven to do well in school by extracurricular activities. In middle school and high school, I was a member of the band and choir. I also played soccer through middle school and high school. My favorite subjects were math and science. After high school, I continued my education at Delaware Technical & Community College, and I am currently a student at Wilmington University.

Who or what inspired you to be a teacher?

The person that inspired me to become a teacher was my cousin, Lori Cain. She is a Gifted and Talented elementary school teacher in Texas. After high school, I was set on being a dental hygienist. I started taking classes at Delaware Technical Community & College for that major. A couple years in, I decided that it wasn't for me. I felt lost and didn't really know what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Lori told me to come out to Texas and shadow her in the classroom. I spent one week with her in her classroom and fell in love with teaching. The relationships she built with her students made me feel like I, too, could make a difference in the lives of children.

Why did you choose to participate in the WilmU YLR program instead of completing a traditional student teaching experience?

I chose to participate in the Wilmington University Year Long Residency (YLR) program for the teaching experience. Former YLR students came into a practicum class to inform us about the YLR benefits. Once I heard what they had to say about the program, I was sold. I visited three of the YLR sites and fell in love with Richey Elementary. Since I am a kinesthetic learner, I figured I would learn best in a year-long, hands-on experience. As a practicum student, I had other experiences in the classroom, but realized that it was difficult to build strong relationships with the students through a couple of weeks of teaching. Through the YLR experience, I have been able to build the kind of meaningful relationships with the students I was hoping for. It is so helpful to get to know the students' personalities as well as their learning modalities. I get to use what I know about my students to make my lessons fit what they need. I am so excited to be a part of this YLR program and to continue learning and preparing for my first year of teaching.

What has been the most surprising thing about teaching so far?

The most surprising thing about teaching so far is the relationships that you build with your students. Students are looking for someone to look up to and learn from. Professors in the past have always stressed the importance of the relationships you build with your students. I now understand why it is so important to build those relationships. It is a great privilege, and such a wonderful thing about being a teacher.

What is one piece of advice that you would share with another student teacher?

One piece of advice that I would give is that teaching is not easy but it is very rewarding. There are going to be really good days and then days that are not so good. Every day is a new day and you need to go to school every day with an open mind and a smile on your face!



Diana and Quatina during a recent mentoring session.



Novice Teacher Education Lending Library

The Office of Novice Teacher Education currently has copies of professional books available for lending. If you would like to borrow a book, please contact: Stacie Zdrojewski.

Available titles include:

- 21st Century Mentor's Handbook: Creating a Culture for Learning
- Classroom Instruction that Works
- How Children Succeed
- Mentoring New Teachers
- Ordinary Magic
- Research-Based Strategies: Narrowing the Achievement Gap for Under-Resourced Students
- Smart but Scattered
- Teach Like a Champion
- The Cage-Busting Teacher
- The First Days of School
- The First-Year Teacher's Survival Guide
- Understanding Poverty
- Why Didn't I learn this in College?
- Working with Parents: Building Relationships for Student Success
- Working with Students: Discipline Strategies for the Classroom



FIRST-YEAR TEACHER, SHORTLIDGE ACADEMY'S JULIANNA HYNSON, TALKS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCE WITH RETIRED MENTOR, CAROLYN MARTIN-MCGHEE

What have you gained as a result of having a mentor from the retired mentor program?

Having a mentor has provided me with a tremendous amount of support and feedback. Being a first year teacher, I struggled a lot with my confidence in the classroom. Having Carolyn as my mentor has allowed me to grow, not only in my teaching, but also in my self-confidence. She is always giving me encouragement, bringing a positive attitude, and providing new ideas and feedback to allow me to improve as an educator.

What makes the relationship between you and your mentor so special?

What makes my relationship with Carolyn so special is that she understands me and my students. We have a lot of similarities in our teaching styles and I respect all of the experience and advice she has to offer. Aside from providing feedback, Carolyn has been a great support system. Whenever something is bothering me or I am unsure what to do, I know I can always turn to her for guidance. Her positive energy is infectious. Even on a bad day, she helps me find the positives.

What is the most valuable part of the retired mentor program?

The most valuable part of the retired mentor program is just being able to work with someone who has so much experience and advice to offer. The first year of teaching is hard but having a person who can observe you and share their wisdom with you is crucial!

What advice would you give another new teacher about mentoring?

The advice I would tell new teachers about the mentor program is to always be honest about your struggles and open to feedback. At first, I would feel embarrassed if Carolyn observed a lesson that did not go well but I quickly realized that my mentor is only here to support me. The only way to improve is to be honest about what you are struggling in and do not hold back when it comes to asking for help. I believe allowing myself to admit my flaws and keep an open mind to all the feedback Carolyn has given me has allowed me to grow tremendously this year already!

MENTOR SPOTLIGHT: CAROLYN MARTIN-MCGHEE TALKS ABOUT HER EXPERIENCE AS A RETIRED MENTOR

What have you gained as a result of being a retired mentor?

I was a mentor for several years during my active teaching years and felt the new teachers appreciated having a colleague to listen to their questions and concerns. Now, as a retired mentor, I have a thorough appreciation for the drive and tenacity of new educators. It's amazing to see individuals who are new to the profession develop endearing relationships with their students.

What makes the relationship between you and your mentee so special?

When my mentees realize that I understand how it is being a new teacher, a special relationship occurs between us. Mentees relax and open up a little more after each meeting. Gaining the mentee's trust is very rewarding.

What is the most valuable part of the retired mentor program?

The valuable elements of the retired mentor program are the experience of the retired educators and the amount of time being offered to new teachers.

What advice would you give another mentor about successful mentoring?

The advice I would give to another retired mentor is: Use the time during the meetings to truly listen to what the mentee has to say.

NEW TEACHER SPOTLIGHT JENNA ALBRIGHT, AUTISM SUPPORT, SHORTLIDGE ACADEMY

What were you like as student?

As a student, I was definitely the teacher's pet. I was always so excited to go to school everyday and I loved being a part of the school community in every way I could. As a learner, I definitely succeeded when I had the opportunity to engage with the materials and participate in hands-on activities.

Who or what inspired you to be a teacher?

Growing up, I always wanted to be a teacher. However, there were two educators (my first and fifth grade teacher) in my life that truly left an impact on me and are ultimately who inspired me to follow my dream and pursue a career in education. My first grade teacher was always so kind and took the time to build relationships with each and every one of her students. My fifth grade teacher made sure that each lesson she taught was exciting and engaging. I always keep in the back of my mind that, no matter what curriculum I'm teaching, what grade I'm teaching, or what population I'm teaching, that the most important thing is making an impact on my students just like my previous educators made an impact on me.

What have you found to be the most rewarding part of being a teacher?

For me, the most rewarding part of teaching is knowing that I am making a difference in my students' lives. I love seeing that light bulb go off in their heads and the excitement they have when they finally understand something they have been struggling with.

What has been the most challenging part of teaching?

I think the most challenging part of teaching so far is fitting everything into one day. There is so much I want to teach my students!



“So many times teachers get caught up in lesson planning, assessments, and so many other things that they forget to make sure they are building relationships with their students.”

What makes Shortlidge such a special school?

I love working at Shortlidge Academy! The staff is always so willing to help and they have been very supportive during my first two years of teaching!

What have you gained from the mentoring program?

From the mentoring program, I have gained relationships with my mentors as well as formed bonds between other new teachers. I have also gained a lot of helpful ideas and strategies to use in my classroom!

What is one piece of advice that you would share with a new teacher?

I would tell new teachers to make sure you are having fun! So many times teachers get caught up in lesson planning, assessments, and so many other things that they forget to make sure they are building relationships with their students. So definitely make sure you are taking a minute every now and then to laugh with your students!!

What grade(s) and subject do you teach?

I am an Autism support teacher and I teach a wonderful classroom of kindergarteners!



NEW TEACHER SPOTLIGHT REBECCA RICHARDS, AUTISM SUPPORT, SHORTLIDGE ACADEMY

What were you like as student?

I was a very studious student. As early as 2nd grade, I always wanted to be a helper to the teacher and to other students. My mother told me I volunteered my recess to stay in and help students who did not complete their homework and needed assistance they didn't get from adults at home.

Who or what inspired you to be a teacher?

I guess I was inspired by my desire to work with children and to help others. Honestly, I started college as a nursing student. I knew I wanted to work with special needs children, but soon realized that wasn't the capacity in which I wanted to work with them. I think a lot of children with severe disabilities get overlooked and need someone to be their advocate and help them reach their full potential, and I decided I could be one of those people.

What have you found to be the most rewarding part of being a teacher?

Seeing the students succeed in learning something new is so rewarding. The pride they feel when they can complete something new makes my heart so full. Also, being able to see the growth from the beginning of the school year to when that child leaves you at the end is just amazing.

What has been the most challenging part of teaching?

The most challenging part has been remembering to focus on the big picture or long term aspect of each student. When they have a bad day it can be really frustrating, but remembering what I just mentioned about how much you see them change in a year helps you get through the hard days.

What makes Shortlidge such a special school?

The population at Shortlidge has a lower SES and a lot of our kids come from a somewhat difficult home life. That knowledge makes me want to connect with the students more than anything. I want them to know they have someone who cares about them and who wants to make a difference in their lives.

What have you gained from the mentoring program?

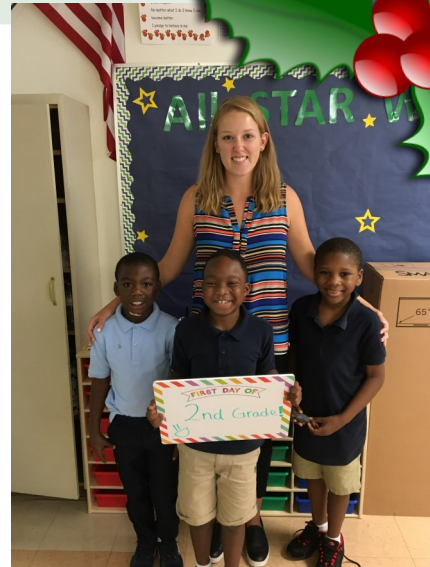
I gained the most insight when I observed seasoned teachers. I think seeing others teach shows a lot more than them telling you how they do something and gives you great ideas to take back to your own classroom.

What is one piece of advice that you would share with a new teacher?

Never be afraid to ask for help!

What grade(s) and subject do you teach?

2nd grade autism



Happy
Holidays!



You've Got Mail!

Purposes

This strategy can be used in mentor training and with new teachers

- To surface participants' issues, concerns, or questions
- To promote collegial interactions through suggestions and/or empathy messages
- To provide anonymity

Time

- 30 minutes to one hour

Materials

- Chart or PowerPoint slide with directions
- An envelope for each participant color coded to indicate original table group
- 8 to 10 index cards for each participant

Process

- Identify a focus area. Possibilities include:
 - Issues facing you at this time of the year
 - Working with school administration
 - Instructional concerns
 - Organizational concerns
 - Differentiation of instruction
 - Working with parents
 - Formative assessment
- Create a model envelope.
- Distribute envelopes and index cards.
- Post directions and talk through the process.
- Designate a table facilitator to handle the collection, passing, and distribution of envelopes between tables.
- Have participants put a "return address" in the upper left hand corner of the envelope. Suggest that they use their initials or the last four digits in their telephone number, or a code of their choice.
- Have participants write a question or describe a problematic situation on the outside of the envelope in the section where the address usually is placed.
- After the participants have written their questions or situations, ask the table facilitator to collect the envelopes and pass them to the next table in a clockwise pattern.
- Have the table facilitators distribute the envelopes received from the other table.
 - Each person answers the question on the envelope received on an index card.
 - One answer to a card.
 - The answering of this set of questions continues for five minutes.
 - Some participants may answer only one question, others may answer several.
 - If the recipient of the question does not have a suggestion to make, he should write an empathy message.
- At the end of the five minutes ask the table facilitators to collect the envelopes and pass the envelopes to the next table.
- Repeat the process as long as time allows.
- Have table facilitators retrieve the envelopes for their table and return them to the senders.
- Allow time for senders to read the suggested solutions.
- Ask participants if they received either good suggestions or felt supported.

