

# **Navigating the Transition: A Handbook for Welcoming New Teachers**

**A Handbook for Schools Welcoming a New  
Teacher from A Teacher Education Institute**

**AWSNA**

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## **Introduction**

The Teacher Education Committee of AWSNA has been charged by the delegates to AWSNA to promote and support new teacher development and retention. Experience throughout the movement has shown that teachers need support in the process of developing from newly trained, but inexperienced teachers, into strong and capable classroom teachers. Without support, some excellent candidates are not able to successfully make the transition. This experience is difficult and costly for all involved, from the individual teacher, to the children, to the school, to the Waldorf movement as a whole. As a response to this felt need in the association the Teacher Education Committee has developed this resource book to support you in the healthy and supportive welcoming of newly trained teachers into your school.

We hope that these guidelines and suggestions will promote conversation and eventually policies and procedures in your school around the support of new teachers.

The Teacher Education Committee of AWSNA

John Broussard – Teacher Education Institute of Southern California

Betty Staley – Rudolf Steiner College

Cat Greenstreet – Sunbridge College

Diana Hughes – Teacher Development Institute

Douglas Gerwin – Center for Anthroposophy and Antioch Waldorf Teacher Training Program

## **The Teacher Education Program at Rudolf Steiner College: What Your New Teacher has Studied in the Classroom**

The exact course of study that each newly certified teacher has studied depends on the educational institution that they attended. As you prepare to support your new teacher it is important that you are aware of the various elements of the program in which they participated. We recommend that you talk with your new teacher to understand the elements of his or her program

### **The Teacher Education Program – Teaching Practicum**

As part of their teacher education program your new teacher completed a teaching practicum.

Ideally the teaching practicum includes significant actual classroom teaching practice under the supervision of an experienced teacher. However, depending on the hosting teacher and school, individual newly trained teachers will have varying amounts of classroom experience and practice. It is important that you review the individual information at the end of this document, and, if you haven't already, discuss the teaching practice experience with your new teacher. This will allow you to more successfully support your new teacher.

## **Orienting a New Teacher to your School Policies and Practices**

One of the common difficulties for new teachers is that they find that they are expected to pick up the routines and practices of their new school through experience rather than a formal orientation process. This means that for the first few weeks, and even months, of the school year each day is less predictable and more challenging than necessary. This is especially true for subject or part-time teachers who are often not present at daily morning verses or check-ins.

A thorough orientation to the practices, traditions and expectations of your school will help to make a new teacher feel more at home, more confident, and more a full member of the school's faculty sooner. The orientation should take place before the August faculty work week or period. Leaving the discussion until later in the fall means that the teacher is working to find his or her way through the confusion of unmentioned routines and school wide expectations. An orientation is best supported by an employee manual, which will allow the new teacher to refer back to topics covered in the orientation.

The orientation can be carried out in a wide variety of ways: if your school has a number of new teachers, dedicating one day to orienting the group can be a good way to quickly move through the necessary material. On the other hand, an orientation of an individual teacher can be done by either a teacher's mentor or a member of administration, or both. It is a good idea for each school to develop a list of topics for orientation that can be used for each process, as this will help to reduce inconsistency between orientations.

The following is a suggested listing of necessary topics for a full orientation.

### **General School Items:**

Faculty listing, roles and contact information; school calendar and expectations for faculty; school mission and vision statements; organization and governance of the school; board member listing and roles; school conflict resolution process; emergency procedures: fire, tornado, serious accident; school wide festivals and celebrations.

### **Class Related Items:**

Supply budgets; classroom furnishings and materials; classroom set-up and preparation –especially for first grade; classroom cleaning and maintenance; parent meetings – form, scheduling and approach; home visits; parent/teacher conferences – scheduling expectations; reports – form, length, dates due; extra lesson and support services for students; discipline policy; classroom centered festivals and celebrations; field-trips and overnight activities

**Colleague Related Items:**

Committees and faculty responsibilities; playground duty and other coverage expectations; faculty morning gatherings; faculty governance and faculty meetings; college governance, including membership criteria, and college meetings.

**Mentoring and Evaluation**

Mentoring policies and process; evaluation policies and process.

**Personnel Related Items:**

School policies for faculty; equal employment policy; sexual harassment policy; complaint procedures; dress code; smoking, alcohol and drug policies; confidentiality procedures and expectations; benefits information - medical, dental, disability; tuition remission; extended care fees/no fees for faculty and staff; schedule of pay-days; reimbursement process; substitution procedures and availability; sick time, personal days, holidays

**Practical Information:**

Computer use; copiers, phones, fax machines etc.; parking; building access outside of regular hours; office procedures and mail

**Administration:**

Organizational structure; leadership practices; mentoring and evaluation; administrative staff; job descriptions; Board of Trustees

## Supporting a New Teacher in the Summer before They Start Teaching

During the summer months your newly hired teacher will be making a number of important personal and professional transitions. The following things should be kept in mind as you support these moves.

1. Practical details: Any assistance offered by the school related to moving and relocation expenses should be outlined in a clear letter to the teacher. In addition, support with community information and suggestions for affordable housing and other settling in help can be very useful.
2. Summer Professional Development: Despite having just finished a teacher education program, many new teachers would benefit from attending an intensive focus week on the grade that they will be taking up in the fall. Ideally, there will be professional development money available to the teacher to support this continued professional development.
3. Mentoring support: During the summer months a new teacher needs mentoring support – first by phone and then, once he or she arrives in the community, in person. It is essential that the person chosen to mentor the teacher through the summer be highly available, and it can be the case that the summer mentor is not the same person as the first year mentor. Mentoring support must include the following:
  - i. Room preparation support. New teachers need support in the process of setting up their classroom, especially if your school has certain traditions around preparing the rooms.
  - ii. Curriculum development support. As the new teacher plans the first few blocks of the year, he or she will need mentoring support and review.
  - iii. Introduction to class parents. If the newly hired teacher was unable to meet with class parents in the spring, or if that meeting was quick and informal, a summer parent meeting or class picnic can be a great way to start the relationship in a warm and healthy way. An experienced class teacher should invite the parents, acting as host to the whole group and ensuring that the event is well planned and moves smoothly.
  - iv. Home visits. Many new teachers make home visits to each family with a child in their class during the summer months. This is an important way to build connection but can also be difficult as the newly hired teacher will be unfamiliar with the community and the families. If home visits are expected, the new teacher should be supported in arranging them, and in carrying them out. It is most important that the teacher have a clear idea of how home visits have been done in the school in the past as parents may hold

expectations about the visit that the new teacher will be unaware of.

4. Faculty Work Week. Each school has its own expectations and practices around the meetings that the faculty holds in the last few weeks before the children return. Your new teacher needs to be supported in attending these meetings in an appropriate way. It is very important that he or she be prepared for the schedule, expectations in terms of attendance, and their level of involvement. These meetings are usually a newly hired teacher's first collegial work and can set the tone for the coming relationships.
5. Opening day ceremonies. The first day of school is usually one that includes some traditional ceremonies particular to the individual school. New teachers, especially first grade teachers, often have a significant role to play in these ceremonies. For instance, many schools have a rose ceremony for first graders through which the new first grade teacher guides the children, sometimes even telling a story to the whole school and parents. It is essential that the new teacher have a full understanding of her role in the day's events as early as possible. Imagine the difficulty created for a nervous new teacher who discovers only a day or two ahead that he is expected to tell a story to the entire community. This type of surprise makes an already difficult first week much harder. The individual responsible for the opening day events, and/or the new teacher's mentor, should thoroughly brief the new teacher at least two weeks before the first day of school.



## **Mentoring a New Teacher**

The mentoring of a new teacher is essential in supporting a newly trained teacher in the process of moving from being a teacher education institute graduate to a successful and happy teacher. Every new teacher needs to receive strong and attentive mentoring. The following guidelines are designed to help each school shape its own individual mentoring program for new teachers.

### **Goals of Mentoring:**

Mentoring is designed to help support the following:

1. Deepen insights into Waldorf pedagogy, festivals, and grade level curriculum.
2. Support the development of effective relationships with the children, including order and discipline.
3. Create healthy social dynamics within the class.
4. Apply age appropriate curriculum methods to support healthy child development.
5. Foster collegial relationships.
6. Facilitate better communication and partnering with parents.
7. Promote personal well being and balance in relation to teaching.

### **Choosing a Mentor:**

A mentor should have most or all of the following characteristics:

- a. Experienced, trained Waldorf Teacher, ideally having completed an eight-year cycle, but at least well grounded in the year the new teacher will be teaching.
- b. Familiar with the school – able to convey all necessary information and support in school wide areas such as expectations, policies and procedures.
- c. Available for meetings and consultations – open and generous with his or her time and attention. Teachers who are already carrying large parts of school administration or in challenging years and situations themselves do not often make good mentors.
- d. Strong communicators with a history of good parent and colleague relationships.
- e. Confident about classroom practices and about giving advice and guidance to the young teacher.
- f. Able to work well with the individual teacher being mentored – this is a matter of temperament and approach and needs to be considered for each pairing.
- g. Knows how to ask questions and see that there are many approaches to teaching, not just his or her own.

Sometimes it is impossible to find all these characteristics in one mentor and in that situation some schools have two people working with one teacher – an outside person doing classroom observation visits and an in-house teacher doing weekly meetings with the new teacher. In this situation, it is still essential that both mentors make early and frequent visits to the classroom.

### **A Mentoring Schedule:**

Mentoring should include classroom visits and observation and weekly meetings for planning, consulting and addressing issues.

Schedule for classroom visits and observation:

In the first year a new teacher should have at least a three-day classroom visit and observation within the first two weeks of the school year, followed by a two-to-three day visit around the winter break (December through February) and a final two-day visit in the spring. It is essential that each visit be longer than a single day since the teacher's work with the rhythm of the days is a critical part of the observation. This is the time habits are built for better or worse.

In coming years a two-day visit, once or preferably twice, during the school year is usually sufficient as long as there are no significant concerns about the teacher's classroom performance.

Scheduling these visits can be challenging. Some schools arrange it so that on a particular day subject teachers teach the main lesson in the mentor's class to allow the mentor to observe the new teacher's main lesson. In other schools the main lesson and the first two subject lessons are exchanged in the day occasionally, so the children start with the subject lessons and the mentor teaches his or her main lesson later in the day, after observing the new teacher. Other schools, especially when the upper-grade teachers have heavy mentoring loads, set a permanent schedule for the upper grades which starts the day with subject lessons, one or more days a week, allowing the main lesson teacher to observe regularly in lower grade classrooms. Finally, some other schools have a ninth main lesson teacher or permanent substitute who regularly steps in to allow the mentor time to observe in the new teacher's classroom or does much of the mentoring.

Schedule for mentoring meetings:

Each teacher should have a weekly mentoring meeting of at least one subject class period in length. For new teachers, especially those with lower grades, it is often best to schedule this meeting for the end or after

the school day, as they are with their classes for more subject periods than higher grade teachers.

In some situations some of these meetings can be held by telephone, but ideally the meeting is direct and long enough for issues to surface. It is also important that the mentor ensure that the meeting is directed to mentoring and not to personal conversation, even when supportive.

### **Topics for Mentoring:**

The following are suggestions for what mentoring conversations should include:

1. Focus on a small number of central areas that the new teacher has identified as needing improvement and/or development.
2. Overview of the year's curriculum, including goal-setting as well as the *why* for each subject. Review available resource materials. Discuss general organization of the year.
3. Review block schedule for the year.
4. Review the block plan a good two weeks before each block begins, including resources for songs, flute or recorder pieces, poems and verses, and movement.
5. Regularly review circle or opening exercises, rhythm of the main lesson, transitions, and discipline.
6. Advise on report writing; share copies of other reports for that grade in our school; preview and review reports.
7. Discuss and advise on particular children. This would include observing that child during recess, etc. Review assessments, past reports, etc.
8. Preview parent/teacher conferences, format, children with difficulties, etc. Review after conferences.
9. Review content of parent evenings. Plan to visit a parent evening in the fall and follow up in the spring if necessary.
10. Be available to review correspondence that goes out to parents.
11. Review the yearly festivals and events; help to gather resources. Inform the teacher of how things have been done at this school. Discuss any changes before they are implemented.

### **Resolving Problems with Mentoring:**

Each school needs to have a policy and procedure for resolving concerns and problems with mentoring, making clear who is responsible for overseeing mentoring throughout the school, and ensuring it is happening regularly.

## Supporting a New Teacher with His or Her Class Parents

The very nature of a teacher education institution means that the area that it is hardest to prepare teacher education students for, besides classroom discipline, is his or her work with class parents. At the institutions there are no parents to practice with, and as each class has its own nature and personality, it is hard to provide anything beyond guidelines for parent work. This having been said, much is accomplished in the programs in cultivating right listening and right speech practice, consensus decision-making, and appreciating multiple points of view. Participants are also given an understanding of the parent perspective and point-of-view.

However, the teacher's relationship with the class parents is a central part of their success or failure as a class teacher. Therefore, it is essential that each new class teacher be consciously mentored and supported in this particular area of responsibility. The following are some suggestions to help with this support:

1. Support with introductions and first meetings. The more formed and warm the first meeting is the more the relationship can get off to a good start. Schools should arrange for class picnics, teas or other gatherings to introduce the new teacher and allow parents to begin to work together.
2. Support with home visits if expected. Summer or fall home visits are the standard practice in some schools and not part of the expectations in others. New teachers should be mentored and supported through the home visiting process with an opportunity to discuss appropriate topics and behavior with an experienced school teacher.
3. Class meetings. New teachers should not be left to plan and carry out their first few class meetings alone. Mentors should provide a good sense of how often meetings are expected, and the general structure and format they should follow. Mentors or college members should also be at the first few meetings to help provide guidance, feedback to the new teacher after the meeting, and support in the meeting. All class meetings in the first year should have an agenda and a planned series of events, which avoids meetings taking turns that the teacher had not anticipated. The mentor should work to ensure that parents with particular concerns and questions that are not related to the class as a whole do not use full parent meeting time to pursue their personal needs, but instead schedule appropriate individual meeting.
4. Class communication. Letters to parents updating them on classroom events are essential to building strong trust and confidence in parents about the classroom and the teacher. Although many new teachers find writing parent letters to be an additional burden, the lack of communication can lead to parents feeling that they don't know what is happening in the classroom. Mentors should work with all new teachers

to ensure that a letter with regular classroom updates and news is being sent home and that all class parents are kept fully informed about upcoming events and responsibilities.

5. Conversation with, or questions from, parents. The new teacher should clearly communicate when she can be reached. The mentor should help the new teacher establish healthy boundaries.
6. Parent/teacher conferences. All new teachers need support around the planning and carrying out of their fall and/or spring parent/teacher conferences. This is especially important around the conferences for students who have specific challenges or classroom issues. Mentors should help new teachers think through and practice their approaches to parents on particularly sensitive issues, such as learning problems and behavioral concerns. There may be cases where the mentor or another colleague should be present at the conference.
7. Parent complaints and concerns. It is normal and to be expected that during each school year parents will raise concerns, and new teachers need to be prepared for it, ready to respond calmly and productively. A conversation about the inevitable and often healthy process of resolving concerns and issues with parents needs to be part of the ongoing mentoring and support. New teachers should also be fully aware of all school policies and practices for complaint and dispute resolution and mediation.

## **Collegial Expectations of a New Teacher**

It is important that newly hired teachers have a clear sense of the expectations upon them in the following areas:

1. Work on committees and work groups within the faculty. Number of committees they should be part of and involvement in curriculum groups or planning groups.
2. Work on community wide committees and work groups. Whether they are expected to take on a community role, beyond their own classrooms, in their first years.
3. Practices for interaction and cooperation with subject teachers. Curriculum groups or other meetings that take place regularly between teachers.
4. Faculty meeting expectations. Attendance and participation guidelines, methods of working and decision making (voting, consensus, etc)
5. Other faculty commitments. Festivals, plays, singing etc.

## **Evaluating a New Teacher**

Evaluation is a very different process to mentoring, and must be viewed and practiced separately. Mentoring is a process of supporting and developing teaching skill, a process in which the mentor is an advocate for and supporter of the individual teacher. Evaluation is a more objective and standard-based approach to assessing how the teacher is doing in the classroom. Both are important for the long-term development of a strong teacher.

Evaluation in most situations takes place only after a couple of years of teaching with strong mentoring have been completed. The teacher is then ready to have an outside evaluation of his teaching, outside meaning not carried out by his regular mentor,. New teachers need to be evaluated within the structure of evaluation in the school as a whole.

In some cases where there are concerns about new teachers and their abilities in the classroom, an evaluation may be necessary at the end of the first or second year as part of a decision making process about the teacher's continued role as class teacher. It is very important that as this takes place the distinction between mentoring and evaluating is sustained and that the teacher's mentor is not asked to recommend for or against continued employment.

## **Continuing Education for a New Teacher**

Continued professional development is an essential part of every teacher's development, whether newly educated and hired, or a long-term successful teacher. Professional development opportunities can be varied and range from curriculum development work to personal refreshment and renewal. The following kinds of professional development opportunities should be offered to all new teachers:

- a. Conference attendance and participation. Regional, national and topic specific conferences are offered through AWSNA and the Waldorf teacher education institutes each year. Conversation about appropriate ones for individual new teachers should be part of normal mentoring work, within the budgetary structure of the school of course.
- b. Ongoing summer workshops. A teacher education certificate means that the newly hired teacher has completed the full course of study in Waldorf education offered by the particular institution. However, these courses can not be focused on the entire curriculum for specific school years. Many fully trained teachers find it very helpful to attend intensive summer curriculum or personal renewal courses as they prepare for their next year of teaching.
- c. Local, non-Waldorf, opportunities. There are many excellent opportunities for continued education and professional development in communities. Consideration of such programs and offerings should be made as professional development choices are decided.
- d. Renewal opportunities— arts, anthroposophy and other personal renewal courses and programs.

Ideally, through the mentoring process each teacher will have a personal professional development plan. This plan is particularly important for new teachers as it will form the structure for their continued education and growth during the very important first three or four years of their life as Waldorf teachers.



## **Individual information about and suggestions from your new teacher**

**(This form should be filled out by your new teacher with their ideas and input for supporting them well)**

Name of new teacher:

Teacher Education Institution:

Program:

Particular strengths that I bring:

Particular areas where I need growth and development

Description of my individual practical teaching experience:

I would like the following mentoring support:

I would like the following continued education support: