

Navigating the Transition: A Guide for Welcoming New Teachers

Supporting Your New Teacher

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

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About Your New Teacher

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. Each of the teacher education institutes in the country maintain web sites which are ideal ways to explore the training and preparation that your new teacher has received.

As part of their teacher education program your new teacher completed a teaching practicum. The actual experience differs from one teacher education institute to another, but all include observation, assisting, and independent classroom teaching. 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 your new teacher's experiences with them to prepare them for success in your school.

Supporting Your New Teacher

Orientation to your school:

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.

Support in the Summer Before 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:

- a. Practical details related to moving and settling into a new community.
- b. Summer professional development expectations and financial support possibilities.
- c. Beginning mentoring support around room preparation, curriculum development, introduction to class parents, and home visits.
- d. Faculty work week expectations and arrangements
- e. Opening day ceremonies and activities

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 their 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:

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: Work on committees and work groups within the faculty; work on community wide committees and work groups; practices for interaction and cooperation with subject teachers; faculty meeting expectations; other faculty commitments.

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: Conference attendance and participation; ongoing summer workshops; local, non-Waldorf opportunities

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.

Mentoring Your 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. Deepening insights into Waldorf pedagogy, festivals, and grade level curriculum.
2. Supporting the development of effective relationships with the children, including order and discipline.
3. Creating healthy social dynamics within the class.
4. Applying age appropriate curriculum methods to support healthy child development.
5. Collegial relationships.
6. Better communication and partnering with parents.
7. 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 if not 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 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 as 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.

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 making sure it is happening effectively and regularly.