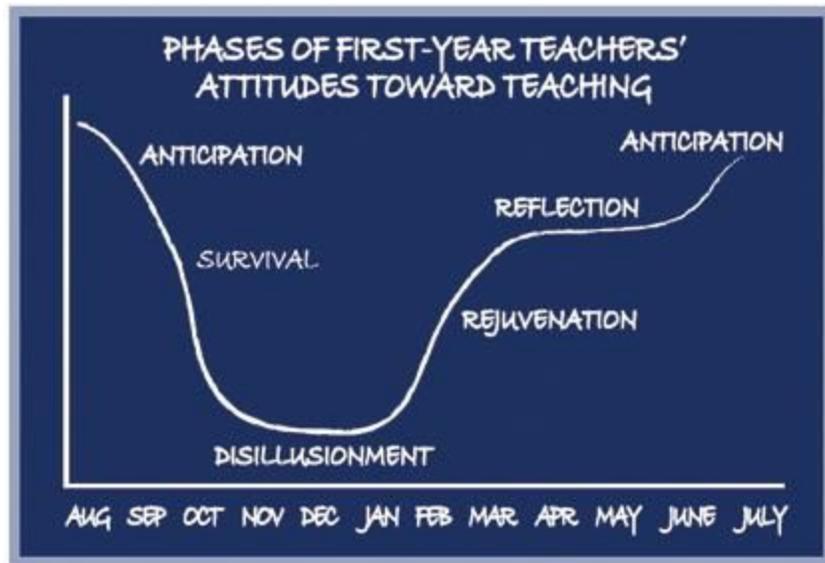


Phases of First-Year Teaching



It's alarming but true: studies have shown that 35% of teachers leave the profession during the first year. By the end of the fifth year, 50% of teachers have left the field! — From Teachers Helping Teachers, Springfield Public Schools, Springfield, MA

The first year of teaching is a difficult challenge. If you are currently in your first year of teaching, the graph above probably applies to you. And you are most certainly not alone! Whether you are currently feeling extremely overwhelmed or abundantly triumphant, other first-year teachers are going through the same thing. The University of California Santa Cruz New Teacher Project has worked to support the efforts of new teachers. They have identified phases through which all new teachers progress. The phases are very useful for mentors and new teachers as they work together the first year. Teachers move through the phases from anticipation, to survival, to disillusionment, to rejuvenation, to reflection, and then back to anticipation.

Anticipation Phase

The anticipation stage begins during the student teaching portion of preservice preparation. The closer student teachers get to completing their assignment, the more excited and anxious they become about their first teaching positions. They tend to romanticize the role of the teachers and the positions. New teachers enter with a tremendous commitment to making a difference and a somewhat idealistic view of how

to accomplish their goals. This feeling of excitement carries new teachers through the first few weeks of school.

Survival Phase

The first month of school is very overwhelming for new teachers. They are learning a lot at a very rapid pace. Beginning teachers are instantly bombarded with a variety of problems and situations they had not anticipated. Despite teacher preparation programs, new teachers are caught off guard by the realities of teaching.

During the survival phase, most new teachers struggle to keep their heads above water. They become very focused and consumed with the day-to-day routine of teaching. There is little time to stop and reflect on their experiences. It is not uncommon for new teachers to spend up to seventy hours a week on schoolwork.

Particularly overwhelming is the constant need to develop curriculum. Veteran teachers routinely reuse excellent lessons and units from the past. New teachers, still uncertain of what will really work, must develop their lessons for the first time. Even depending on unfamiliar prepared curriculum such as textbooks, is enormously time consuming.

Disillusionment Phase

After six to eight weeks of nonstop work and stress, new teachers enter the disillusionment phase. The intensity and length of the phase varies among new teachers. The extensive time commitment, the realization that things are probably not going as smoothly as they want, and low morale contribute to this period of disenchantment. New teachers begin questioning both their commitment and their competence. Many new teachers get sick during this phase.

Compounding an already difficult situation is the fact that new teachers are confronted with several new events during this time frame. They are faced with back-to-school night, parent conferences, and their first formal evaluation by the site administrator. Each of these important milestones places an already vulnerable individual in a very stressful situation.

During the disillusionment phase, classroom management is a major source of distress. New teachers want to focus more time on curriculum and less on classroom management and discipline.

At this point, the accumulated stress of the first year teachers, coupled with months of excessive time allotted to teaching, often bring complaints from family and friends. This is a very difficult and challenging phase for new entrants into the profession. They express self-doubt, have lower self-esteem, and question their profession

commitment. In fact, getting through this phase may be the toughest challenge new teachers face.

Rejuvenation Phase

The rejuvenation phase is characterized by a slow rise in the new teacher's attitude toward teaching. It generally begins in January. Having a winter break makes a tremendous difference for new teachers. It allows them to resume a more normal lifestyle, with plenty of rest, food, exercise, and time for family and friends. This vacation is the first opportunity that new teachers have for organizing materials and planning curriculum. It is a time for them to sort through materials that have accumulated and prepare new ones. This breath of fresh air gives novice teachers a broader perspective with renewed hope.

They seem ready to put past problems behind them. A better understanding of the system, an acceptance of the realities of teaching, and a sense of accomplishment help to rejuvenate new teachers.

Through their experiences in the first half of the year, beginning teachers gain new coping strategies and skills to prevent, reduce, or manage many problems they are likely to encounter during the second half of the year. Many feel a great sense of relief that they have made it through the first half of the year. During this phase, new teachers focus on curriculum development, long-term planning, and teaching strategies.

Reflection Phase

The reflection phase, beginning in May, is a particularly invigorating time for first-year teachers. Reflecting back over the year, they highlight events that were successful and those that were not. They think about the various changes that they plan to make the following year in management, curriculum, and teaching strategies. The end is almost in sight, and they have almost made it; but more importantly, a vision emerges as to what their second year will look like, which brings them to a new phase of anticipation.

It is critical that we assist new teachers and ease the transition from student teachers to full-time professionals. Recognizing the phases new teachers go through gives us a framework within which we can begin to design support programs to make the first year of teaching a more positive experience for our new colleagues. — *Ellen Moir, New Teacher Center, University of California, Santa Cruz*

Top 5 Concerns of New Teachers

1. Classroom arrangement and management

2. Curriculum planning

and pacing

3. Establishing a grading system that's fair

4. Parent conferences

5. Personal sanity