

# The Stages of a Teacher's First Year

By Tami Roth

Professional Development (Teacher on Assignment), Lake Havasu Unified School District #1

Imagine you are a new college graduate who is twenty-two years old, thrilled about your new professional career choice that is located one thousand miles away from your family and friends. You arrange for that departure day when you must say good bye to your parents, siblings, and friends. You get in your car with tears in your eyes, as you leave your family behind for your new professional journey. The passion that you exhibit for education reassures you that you can make a difference in your students' lives. Quickly, the passion that you demonstrate morphs into courage that carries you to your new home of Lake Havasu City, Arizona.



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You arrive into town mid-July when the weather is one hundred degrees plus. The sun is so hot that you burn your hand when you open your car door. The desert surroundings are so vastly different than your familiar environment. Then, the first day of in-service at Lake Havasu Unified School District arrives. You walk into the district office where you do not know a single person. The jitters once again begin to shutter, "Did I make the correct professional choice?" As the week progresses, you make new friends that share your same thoughts and inhibitions. The laughs and friendships begin to emerge.

First year teaching is a difficult challenge for most young teachers. Equally challenging is determining how to assist beginning teachers as they enter the

profession. Research shows that most new educators follow a five phase interval. However, not every teacher goes through this exact sequence.

The anticipation phase is based on new teacher's affirmative and empowering student teaching experience. This excitement carries new teachers through the first few weeks of school. Experienced educators often call this phase the "honeymoon phase", as it carries new teachers through the first month of their challenging and exhilarating career.

The first month of school is overwhelming for new teachers. They are learning a lot at a rapid pace, and entering the survival phase. Federal demands, followed by state and district regulations, and finally the building administrator's expectations can be overwhelming. Despite teacher education courses and student teaching experiences, the realities of teaching on their own catch new educators off guard. There is so little time and so much to learn! They become consumed with the day-to-day routine of teaching. It is not uncommon for new teachers to spend up to 70 hours a week on school work. New teachers are creating positive interactions with students and parents during this time, while trying to balance the day to day bombardments of learning a new life style.

After six to eight weeks of nonstop work and stress, new teachers enter the disillusionment phase. The extensive time commitment, the realization that things are probably not going as smoothly as they would like, and low morale contribute to this period of disenchantment. New teachers

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begin questioning their commitment and their competence. Many new teachers fall ill during this phase. Getting through this segment, may be the toughest challenge they face as new teachers. Christmas vacation arrives, and the reunion with family members is very comforting and reassuring.

Having a winter break makes a tremendous difference for new teachers. This free time allows them to resume a more normal lifestyle, with plenty of rest, food, exercise, and time for family and friends. This breathing space gives new teachers time for reflection and change to gain perspective. Most of all, it provides hope. This is why this chapter is called the rejuvenation phase. During this phase, new teachers focus on curriculum development, long-term planning for the first time in their professional life, and best practices of teaching strategies. This time lasts into spring, at which new teachers begin to voice concerns about whether they can accomplish everything by the end of the school year and wonder how their students will perform on the high stakes tests.

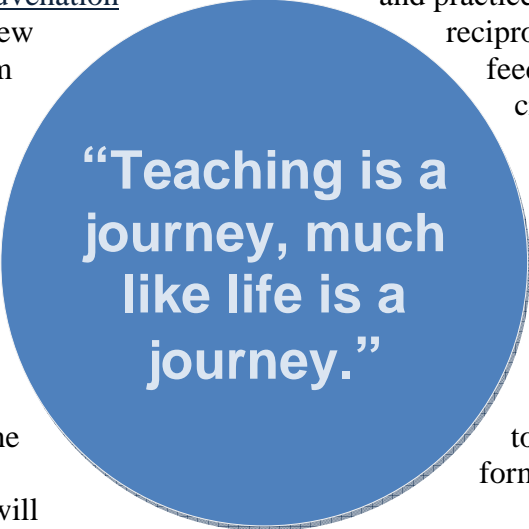
The reflection phase begins the last six weeks of school. These final weeks are a particularly invigorating time for first year teachers. Reflecting back over the year, new teachers highlight events that were successful and those that were not. They think about the various changes that they plan to make the following year in management, curriculum, and teaching

strategies. A vision emerges about what their second year will look like, which brings them to a new stage of anticipation.

We, at Lake Havasu Unified School District, recognize and understand the five phases of our new employees. That is why each new teacher is assigned a mentor, for two years, who is an experienced, optimistic, and recalls the experiences of being a first year teacher.

This mentor often is a confidant professionally as well as personally. The trust and friendship allows for weekly meetings to plan lessons, answer questions, and practice the effective method of

reciprocal teaching. Positive feedback and constructive criticism help new teachers adjust and refine their classroom management skills and sharpen their lesson delivery skills. All of this dialogue is handled privately and with much respect, allowing the new teachers to be successful in their first formal evaluation.



“Teaching is a journey, much like life is a journey.”

Teaching is a journey, much like life is a journey. It is the intention at L.H.U.S.D. #1 to retain excellent educators who have enthusiasm to be the best teachers they can be, while modeling and encouraging their students to demonstrate the passion for lifelong habits of learning.