**Teaching Secrets: After the Honeymoon**

By Cossondra George

The school year's honeymoon is over. Teachers and students are settling into routines—which can be comforting but can also confront new teachers with the reality of how tiring a teacher's life can be. This can be a make-or-break period for new teachers. It's when you need to develop habits that will sustain you—and keep your excitement and enthusiasm flowing—throughout the school year:

• **Take Time for Yourself**. Exercise, eat healthfully, and relax. Care for yourself so you that you can care for those who are important to you. Set aside time each day to pursue a passion, whether it is gardening, reading a fun novel, or walking your dog. Meanwhile, reach out to your family, colleagues, and social networks for healthy go-to dinner recipes so you don't succumb to the takeout temptation after a long day's work. Those healthy dinners can also make healthy lunches to keep you fueled all day! (And if you can't face the task of packing a lunch in the morning, consider getting it ready before you go to bed.)

• **Be Proactive About Your Health**. Wash your hands frequently—especially when you know your students are sneezing and coughing, generously sharing their germs. Consider a flu shot. Know the signs of the flu, and tip off the school nurse and/or parents when students are exhibiting symptoms. When you do succumb to the inevitable bug, stay home, rest, and go to the doctor. Don't try to tough it out at school. Often, this only leads to a more serious illness, and more time away from school.

• **Keep Family Time Sacred**. Teaching can be an all-consuming career choice, with hours spent planning, grading, and worrying about students. While these tasks are important, your own relationships must come first. Set aside a predetermined limit on how much time you will work on evenings and weekends and stick to it. If that means those essays wait another day to be graded, your students will forgive you. Your family and loved ones deserve undistracted attention every day.

• **Exalt the Positive**. Find the good in every student who walks in your door—and share your observations with the student, his peers, and parents. Often students have a preconceived notion of who they are. Seeking out the positives will help that child reinforce his worth. Sharing such observations with parents will set the stage should you need help or support later in the year. When parents feel you value their child and her uniqueness, they are more likely to understand when you ask for their help in solving a problem. Appreciating your students as individuals will help you deal with discipline issues and motivate students academically.

• **Build a Support Network for Yourself**. Find like-minded colleagues in your building or online, with whom you can share your successes, bounce around ideas, and vent on the tough days. Build your network with a variety of others—newbies, veterans, those with similar teaching assignments, as well as those teaching in completely different subjects and grades. These diverse viewpoints (and shoulders to lean on) will make a significant difference in dealing with the rough patches of teaching.

• **Take Time to Laugh**. Every day, find a way to laugh with your students. Maybe you share a laugh about a mistake you made, a joke or cartoon you've shared, or even something a student has shared. Whatever it is, enjoy it together. When you're feeling low on appropriate "material," look for it: email forwards (don't we all have *that* person who fills our inboxes?), the Sunday comics, the *Daily Funny*. Your students will appreciate the laugh—and may even give you more attention than they ordinarily would.

• **Choose Happiness**. We all have good days. We all have bad days. In the end, it is our personal reaction to what is thrown at us that sets a happy teacher apart from a grumpy one. Choose to be a happy teacher in your students' days. The benefits will accrue not just to them but also to you.

As the school-year honeymoon fades into routine, remember to make time for these small things that make a big difference. Not only will you feel better, but you’ll also teach better. Your students will appreciate your positive attitude—and, hopefully, will share it!