

Powerful Partnerships: Supporting Tomorrow's Educators



by Meg Ferguson, Executive Staff Officer, Professional Learning

As a child, the first significant sign that Kennedy Jessome at Inglis Street Elementary School wanted to be a teacher was making her sister play school and consistently appointing herself as the teacher. This new educator's biggest takeaway from her practicum experiences was, "How to build connections with my students, how to truly get to know them—what they love and who they are as people."

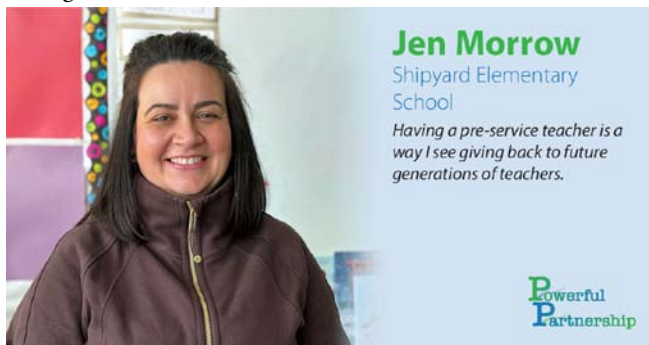
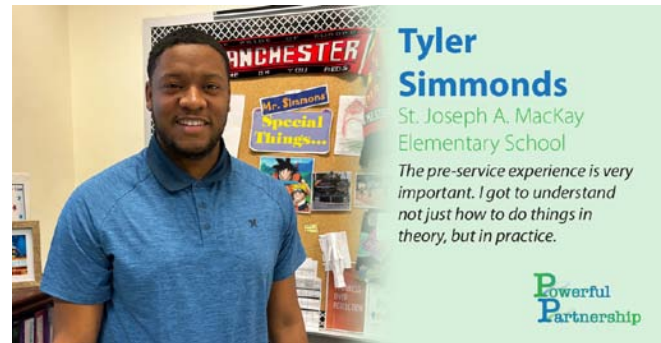
At Breton Education Centre, Holly Shaller stated that she, "Would argue that the pre-service experience is the most important part of your education degree." Why is that? It's where theory meets practice, according to Tyler Simmons at St. Joseph A. MacKay Elementary. This point was highlighted by nearly every new teacher and most associate teachers interviewed over the last two months.

It's one thing to read and write reports on pedagogy, but learning to take in how the class is going and adapt on the spot is a skill that needs to be developed. Current pre-service teacher, Jeremy Bourque from Université Ste-Anne admitted there is a big difference between learning approaches in his courses and applying them in real life.

It is clear that the immersive experience of a practicum is essential to lay the groundwork for new teachers' careers by providing invaluable skill development and real-world classroom management skills.

Additionally, "It's very important for our pre-service teachers to work with our students who have special needs because they bring a great dynamic to our classes," exclaimed Collène Cyr, from École Secondaire de Clare. She also advocates that associate teachers should ensure the university students in their charge spend time in other areas of the school, to get a clearer picture of our students.

In other words, it is ideal that they have an overall positive, growth experience, but a realistic one too.



Needs of the Associate Teacher

Understandably, some pre-service teachers require more support than others. This means the associate teacher will need more time in the day to do so. "Although it's an excellent experience welcoming pre-service teachers into our classrooms, it does take extra time," explained Sara Adams at École Rose-des-Vents. "Depending on where they trained, they may not be familiar with outcomes and initiatives, tools or technologies." This means needing additional professional learning duties from their mentor.

The administrative side to being an effective mentor has not only been identified and acknowledged as requiring more time by the Practicum Sub-Committee, it has become part of their goals. Comprised of representatives from CSAP, each RCE, each university with a B.Ed program, PSAANS, EECD, Common Services Bureau, ELCNS, and the NSTU, this group is working on improving the practicum experience of the pre-service teacher, which includes these three goals:

- • Associate Teacher Recruitment
- • Supporting Pre-Service Teachers Using a Culturally & Linguistically Inclusive Lens
- • Valuing and Supporting Associate Teachers

Frontline Retention & Recruitment

Our first line for retention and recruitment is the practicum experience.

I'm not sure I truly thought about it in this manner over the years—but will from now on. It is so important that soon-to-be graduates not only gain necessary practical skills in and excitement for teaching but understand the realities of this career and that there is conscious effort required to maintain positive morale and longevity.

From each of these goals there are a series of recommendations and actions being developed and implemented in the next year.

Marie-Pierre Grau Windybank was able to share her own perspective as having trained across the pond, “In England, associate teachers get two days with their pre-service teacher at the university to get to know each other, inform them about their students, plan what they will be teaching, as well as to review both expectations and standards.” This teacher from École Bois-Joli said that simply receiving a few documents does not set up the practicum experience as well, here in Nova Scotia.

Fresh ideas & benefits

“My teaching is better now after having had those two pre-service teachers in my classroom,” shared Marc Dalesandro, from Auburn Drive High School. “It’s always great to get a breath of fresh air.” Not only did he gain new ideas for teaching, but absorbed some newbie enthusiasm, as well.

From Shipyard Elementary, Jen Morrow advises taking advantage of having a second teacher in the room to reach twice as many students, complete administrative tasks, and more. “It gives you a chance to do a small group, I get to do something different with my class because I have someone with me,” added Jen.

Every associate teacher spoken to mentions the same thing—education is constantly evolving, and things have changed since completing their education degrees. The new teachers coming into the system often have the most up-to-date information and ideas for student learning, from which they benefit.



Variety is the spice of life

As important as it is for our students to experience a wide variety of teaching styles, it is even more so for our pre-service teachers. Allie White from Whitney Pier Memorial and Brookland Elementary remarked how lucky she was to have “three different mentor teachers all with different backgrounds, different styles of teaching in which I (am) able to take different parts of their teaching styles and bring them with me today in my own classroom.”

Colleagues, do consider being an associate teacher if you haven’t done so in a while. It can breathe new life into some well-used lessons, pay forward the mentorship you received in the past, and provide additional support for your classroom. A bonus to many teachers being open to welcoming education students would be to have pool from which to match our pre-service teachers.

A final thought from Marc at Auburn, “When I think back to my Associate Teacher and how he guided me and how much I learned from him... the idea that I could guide someone like that—that’s a good feeling.”