



The Heart-Centered Teacher

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As you get set to close another year in your learning spaces, and work on tying up the loose ends and set yourself up for your next chapter as best you can, it is important to recognize this can be a hectic process. Besides finalizing grades, comments, TIENET records, organizing or packing up your learning space, there are also the unpacking and packing of the memories of the year. What if you allowed yourself the time and space to be able to take as much in as possible as you do the next thing on your to-do list?

As a jumping off point, I offer the following quote: "Observe it, don't absorb it"—unless it's a good memory. Let the good stuff fill the spaces where comfort is needed. As for the other stuff, observing it, taking the lesson and leaving the rest might offer a helpful analogy for how to close this year.

This edition of The Well Teacher giveaway is called *The Heart-Centered Teacher* by Regit Routman and offers teachers a chance to connect to those parts of their practice that help to build relationships—not just with students, but also with themselves.

The very first line of the book asks the question: "*How do we find hope and possibility in challenging times?*" Let's allow this question to frame the closing out of another school year and the process of observing and absorbing so that we can work towards, "*bringing our truest selves into our teaching and personal lives.*"

As you work to finish your year, you will undoubtedly have moments of wondering what could have been done differently, what still needs to be done, who were you able to help, the times when the lesson/activity went well, and the times when it didn't. What do we do with all of that?

Sometimes our tendency is to push these thoughts and feelings aside in favour of our to-do's. We become human-doings instead of human beings. When we do this, those feelings tend to resurface in other times. If we practice observing and sitting with the lessons that our experiences teach us, we can work towards being ready to enter the next chapter and truly take the time to reflect, repose and recharge.

Routman invites readers to try to focus on what matters most in our work and in our most cherished relationships. I invite you to reflect on the following practices as you end your year, enter summer, and looking towards next year.

- Seeing and celebrating each learner's gifts and strengths: How were you able to do this during this past year? How might you approach this moving forward? How do you fit into this practice?
- Creating a storytelling culture: what would your story about this year include? What challenges would the characters face during the plot and what triumphs would they realize?
- Ensuring equitable opportunities for all: genuinely offering the opportunity for all those in your learning space to be heard, represented, seen and acknowledged, including you.

- Co-creating welcoming spaces and routines: where does this happen for you in your teaching and in your life outside work? How to you work to cultivate space that creates the conditions you need to feel safe, happy and comfy?
- Developing professional knowledge: think back to some of your biggest A-Ha moments this year; these don't only have to come from workshops or conferences—many of our lessons come from our students, their families, colleagues and other (unexpected) sources.
- Championing the reading-writing connection: how can you use writing to help you close out your year and engage in the meaningful, intentional reflection and planning you need to help you feel prepared to meet your time away and allow for important pause before the work wheel starts moving again? Are you able to read (or listen) to books/articles/podcasts and meet your different needs at different times? When you need to feel levity, when you feel the need to be inspired, when you feel the need to learn? Do you have the resources to help you? Are you willing to make the time to explore these options?
- Fostering resilience and hope: Sometimes, this challenge seems insurmountable. It may not be exactly where or how you imagined, but allow that feeling to breathe and observe it. Before you absorb what doesn't serve you, recognize the lessons learned, the challenges overcome and the fact you are still moving forward. Also, recognize you do not have to do it alone. You have access to one of the best support networks through your [Group Insurance Plan](#). Reach out to see what services might work for you in supporting your own wellness goals.
- Taking care of ourselves and our students: how we do this looks different in each learning space, context and with each new group of students. However, often as adults, we put our own needs aside to support students. It is so very important you include yourselves in this equation. We hear this often, but it is important to make space and hold space for ourselves and check in with colleagues. Having a wellness buddy can help you to be mindful to stay on track.

Finally, Routman notes that making a worthy difference is an important tenet of our professional practice and personal goals. Remember you define what is worthy. Teachers don't always know if they've made a difference. You won't always receive instant gratification that today's world offers in so many contexts. However, I invite you to create a collection or reminder folder. This collection of notes, drawings, cards, emails, etc. from students, families, colleagues, supervisors, recognizes your efforts in their lives. You can then turn to this collection in times of doubt to

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remind you of the difference you make. When a student sees you outside of the school setting and makes the effort to say hello and you feel that positive connection, soak it in and let it fill those spaces where comfort is needed. This happened to me recently. A student who faced considerable challenge and demonstrated such poise and resilience made an effort to say hello—it made my day. Let those moments shine.

Your Professional Learning and MAP team would like to express our most sincere wishes for a restful, relaxing and rejuvenating summer.