



Making the Most of Summer Holidays

by KATHY TAYLOR-ROGERS

The school year is slowly winding down. We've had our Easter break and watched the time fly by and we are now headed into preparation for final report cards. It has been a busy, fast paced year with the usual tirade of deadlines to meet. As in every year, there have been many unexpected interruptions that have challenged us. They have included more storm days than usual, the public service strike, other unforeseen incidents and accidents, even tragedies, that created a need for many changes in planning. Over time though we learn to expect the unexpected and do what is necessary so that we can deal with the unexpected, whatever it might be.

Although at times during the year there was doubt that all of the goals and objectives would be met, as the school year comes to a close everything begins to fall into place. This may be partially due to a change in expectations, but sometimes this is necessary as we are only human and therefore can only perform human feats. There is an adrenaline rush associated with the extra pressure placed upon us due to the expectation to complete the year's learning objectives and the report card deadlines. Thankfully, along with this adrenaline rush there is comfort in the knowledge that summer holidays are just around the corner. That long awaited and well deserved break in the school year that is meant to give teachers a chance to get away from the stressors of teaching, a break from deadlines, students, exams, marking, committees, and all of the other things that add to the havoc of the regular school year.

Teaching is an extremely emotionally and psychologically demanding career that has physically demanding aspects as well. It is psychologically exhausting to try to keep in tune with all the different levels of need that every student has in a classroom. The reality of the complex social issues that children are facing within and outside their homes today add further to the challenges that face teachers. One example is the ever increasing numbers of children in our classrooms who come from families where the parents are either separated or divorced. It is challenging enough in two-

parent families with both parents residing in the same home to negotiate who will help which child with what homework, but in a family where the parents are separated it becomes even more difficult to ensure that all of the children's school-related needs are met in a consistent fashion. This translates into increased reliance on the teacher.

Another factor which adds to the psychological drain is the effort required to gain and maintain the respect of the students in a society that has changed so drastically over the past two decades. We are no longer in an era when teachers are automatically given respect by virtue of their position so teachers find themselves having to earn the respect of their students while also having to prove themselves to the parents. Yet another dimension to this complicated career is the challenge of providing structure and discipline to students in a society where there are ever changing policies and expectations with regard to acceptable methods of discipline, yet limited training offered for teachers to learn new methods.

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The constant necessity to take work home or to complete work after school hours also takes its toll as there is not enough time allocated within the school day to complete all of the work required such as marking of tests, grading assignments/projects/papers, performing committee work and completing lesson plans. There are physically demanding aspects of teaching as well, such as spending long hours on your feet, using one's voice excessively on a daily basis, lack of breaks, and exposure to a great number of cold, flu, and other viruses. At the root of all these challenges is the necessity to use

time off wisely. Any teacher who has experienced a "summer break" is all too painfully aware of just how quickly time passes. The summer break needs to be just that – a break. The biggest danger that a teacher can fall into is trading one source of stress for another over the holidays.

During the last month of school it would be wise to take some time for true inner reflection. Time to give thought to what you need to do for yourself during the summer. Reflection on how you want to be in the fall and what you need to get there. Reflection on the past year and what has gone well professionally and personally and what has not gone so well. Reflection on how you can improve on the positive aspects of your life and what you need to do to overcome the negative aspects. Thought also needs to be given to what you will need over the summer to give yourself a true break and to revitalize your body and soul before the next school year begins. It would be worthwhile to develop a plan that identifies goals that you would like to achieve and how you are going to reach those goals. One of the goals may be to become healthier and your plan to achieve this goal might be to walk for at least one half hour every day and to eat more fruits and vegetables. The reason for planning is our tendency to procrastinate. We all give thought to changes that we would like to make from time to time but never seem to get around to actually making those changes. Sometimes when we write things down we have more of a likelihood to actually follow through with them. A written plan may help to ensure that the summer doesn't pass you by without having had the chance to do any of the things that you wanted to do. This can be a real disappointment and can create difficulties when it comes time to adjust to returning to the classroom. A reality is that the person we have the most difficulty taking time for is ourselves. If you have a plan that sets out "Me Time" then you will be more likely to take that desperately needed and well deserved time for yourself, because you have balanced this with taking care of the other important people in your life.

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