



Pleasure Past Retirement

by CLAUDETTE E. S. COOMBS

Congratulations to all the end-of-year retirees! You are moving in on the home stretch and this is *The Bulletin's* last chance to provide wellness information to you as an “active teacher”.

If you haven't done so already, it's time to start the preparations for the next facet of your teaching career; from education student to active teacher and at long last, to retired teacher. Stay alert – another stage is being prepared and the next performance is outstanding.

Each facet has been filled with new experiences and anticipation, along with a little apprehension. The years as student were filled with excitement of meeting new people, learning skills and strategies for excellence and survival. As a teacher, life was filled with challenges and the rewards of successfully reaching the children under our influence and achieving many of our personal goals. Now, as a retired teacher, comes the opportunity to reflect on the past two stages and carry forward the good memories, lessons learned, skills acquired and talents developed. Finally, we have the coveted freedoms – time and choice.

To make the most of our unprecedented opportunities and flexibility, we need to plan, set goals and take action. Just as we did those things as students and teachers, we must continue into retirement. Otherwise, on our 100th birthday, how will we know whether or not we have done what we wanted?

Defining Self

We are often defined in terms of our occupation (current or past) or our volunteer work. This likely won't change and you will be in great demand by community and professional organizations because of the wealth of knowledge and experience you possess – and because of your newly acquired availability. Before you accept new roles, develop a plan for how much time you want to spend on “other people's projects”. If you later find yourself too busy, you may resent the involvement and that will take the pleasure out of volunteering. Protect your time and choose your involvements carefully.

Deciding What to Do

Opinions vary. You may want to remain working but in a new location or at a new career. This decision may result from financial, energy or curiosity reasons. Whatever your reasons for working – or not – be sure to think them through. Some people interpret their new freedom as never needing to be controlled by a clock again. Others feel that it means they have completed one career obligation and can now move on to explore other employment dreams. Whatever your plans are, it is important to enter this phase with anticipation for all the good things yet to come. If you think retirement is the time when you will finally organize all those photos or get the workroom in order, think again. If it wasn't a priority earlier, it may not be now. Teachers are fortunate in that they can retire after working in their profession for 30 years and can expect to enjoy another 30+ years of health and activity. To ensure that happens... be healthy now!

**“... this year when the doors open
and the teachers meet for their
administration day, you can sleep in!”**

Plan for the future before you retire and be ready for the predictable changes and associated feelings. Adequate planning requires consideration of time, energy and financial demands; awareness of changes in feelings, activity and social contact; exploration of new areas of interest; recognition of ongoing health needs; and, satisfying the desire to stay connected and use personal talents.

Allocate Resources. This is still an issue, except now you are planning for the efficient use of your own resources. Using each (time, energy, finances) wisely and according to your pre-planned budget will almost guarantee that you will achieve the realistic goals you set.

Face change. First identify what the changes are, then understand what you need, despite the change.

The obvious next step is to ensure that you have a way to meet your needs. Common, and potentially difficult, changes include: feelings about contributing to society or about using your earned freedoms; separation from colleagues, parents and students; and daily routines. Taking on new self-paced and flexible routines is an excellent way to meet needs and enjoy retirement. This is especially true if they encourage social contact while also using personal talents and skills.

Explore interests. If you have been saving up ideas wishing you had the free time to do things, get out your calendar and start scheduling. Put in the fun things before your calendar is blocked with new obligations.

Protect health. We tend to lose focus on health when other duties are urgent. Health must now become a priority. Maintaining social supports and a healthy lifestyle focus by undoing the damage of stress; establishing rest and sleep routines; and paying attention to activity, eating, and relaxation habits, can work wonders for getting our bodies back in condition.

Re-adjust. Just as we switch mental gears when we move from one role to another, so we now switch gears as we move from this to another stage. There are new roles to play, experiences to be had and lots of adjustments along the way. Set and understand personal goals about the new arrangements with family and friends, personal commitments, volunteer and/or paid work, and finances. Your time frames and even your wardrobe will be modified. Confirm this re-balance. Alter expectations to fit your new reality. Those around you may have to be reminded of the retirement goals you set for yourself. This is no time to lose your assertiveness. You have worked long and hard to get to this stage. Be sure to create your own climate for this stage.

Incorporate Pleasure. There is a multitude of pleasures in retirement. The autonomy and adaptability are just the beginning. The absence of the school stressors of lesson plans, supervision duty, correcting and coding report cards is significant but still only a fraction of the whole picture. You now get to expand on things which were previously limited by time; introduce activities which just couldn't fit into your schedule; and continue with other interests which you want to keep in your revised lifestyle.

For the retiree, many of the common stressors which filled a teacher's days no longer exist. Those professional concerns belong to someone else. You can move on to different horizons with other hills to climb. However, don't be surprised when September comes and you haven't yet felt retired. After all, you have had this same routine for about 30 years: work until June, take a little holiday, watch for all the "back-to-school" sales, then head back to class. Except... this year when the doors open and the teachers meet for their administration day,

you can sleep in! That hint of melancholy isn't unusual and the little twinge of regret or sadness is temporary. You soon realize that although there are plenty of pleasant and rewarding things about being a teacher, you have given so much of yourself during your career, now it's time to graciously accept the benefits earned. You may want to celebrate the special occasions with rituals all your own. At the first report card due date spend the day treating yourself to a day of leisure. Smile again when the holiday schedule is announced... you are no longer confined to a rigid holiday schedule or to defining "year" as the period of time between September and June. Sure you can empathize with former colleagues who are longing for that spring break or hoping for a storm day, water or furnace problems, or even a PD day. You have done your share of supervision duty, report cards and meetings, and have faced the frustrations of curriculum changes and new routines. Now, you start your new performance. Enjoy it and a long and healthy retirement!

Claudette Coombs is an EAP Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for teachers. For confidential assistance contact Claudette Coombs (ext. 242) or Marie Wall (ext. 265).

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