

HEARTcare

with Dr Astrid Kendrick



Meet Astrid

Questions to consider

The HEARTcare framework encourages pre-service teachers to consider questions about themselves and the teaching environment. This introspective exercise is necessary for identifying the types of resources and support measures that would be most useful and appropriate.

Write short answers to the following questions, extracted from the HEARTcare Workbook, to begin this process.

Why you chose teaching

- Why did you decide to be a teacher?
- What appeals to you about working with children or youth?
- How do you define a good teacher? Why?

Compassion satisfaction

- How do you define a professional relationship with children and youth in your classroom?
- How has your mentor teacher built trust with students in their classroom? How can you build trust with students?
- How will you know if you have built a safe, warm and caring classroom environment?

Identifying burnout

- Are you physically tired despite getting the recommended six to eight hours of sleep every night?
- Can you find the energy to exercise or socialise?
- Is your workload chronically too heavy, without any rest periods?
- What forms of appreciation mean the most to you? Have you received this form of appreciation recently?
- Do you feel that your local, university and government communities care about the work that you do?

The HEARTcare Workbook includes a wealth of information related to all the question areas above, as well as specific information and exercises related to the five HEARTcare strands. It is freely available online: heartcareeducators.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/COOR-101-37-HeartCare-Workbook-1-1.pdf

I began teaching in 1998 at a First Nations school in northern Alberta. I learnt more from my students than I think they learnt from me! From there, I taught at a wilderness school that served male incarcerated youth, an urban school for pregnant and parenting teenage girls, a highly diverse elementary school, and an arts-based middle school.

After I was hired for my first teaching job, my principal said to me, “Teachers are a dime a dozen, and I can replace you any time”. As a result, I worked too hard and did not ask for help when I was struggling because I felt that showing any weakness would result in my employment being terminated. I did not do any constructive self-care or pay attention to my own well-being because I was too busy trying to be a perfect teacher.

My main learning from 19 years of teaching was that students are who they are, and they’ll learn what I teach them. My responsibility was to learn about my students — what they already knew and needed to learn from me, how I could connect my subject areas knowledge to their interests and hobbies, and to ensure that I was preparing them for their future.

I’ve had the opportunity to keep in touch with some of the students I have taught. I like to feel that I played a small part in their career choices and enjoy seeing them build loving families of their own. I recently met a former student who had decided to become a teacher, which filled me with pride for their progress.

As a teacher educator, I hope to pass along some of the knowledge I gained during my teaching career to pre-service teachers – not in the hope that they will do exactly as I did, but that they understand both the wonder and heavy responsibility that comes with joining the teaching profession.

Further resources

- This podcast episode by the Alberta Teacher Education Practicum Working Group examines the importance of wellness for pre-service teachers: voiced.ca/podcast_episode_post/episode-two-wellness-in-the-teacher-practicum
- This article from CBC News investigates the burnout felt by Calgary area educators during the COVID-19 pandemic and includes Astrid’s research into compassion fatigue and burnout: www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/educators-exhaustion-pandemic-1.6023715
- Education Support, a UK-based charity, provides a wealth of resources, such as informative videos and articles, that focus on improving teachers’ well-being: www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations