

It's Okay to be an Okay Teacher in 2020

This year I feel like every time I turn around there is a new social media post or email from my favourite teaching organization or vendor, introducing or highlighting a new innovative or creative COVID-19 friendly teaching practice. It is great that so many people are reaching out and sharing ideas to help advance us all as a profession.

In any other year, I have enjoyed scrolling through social media to see this sharing. I have utilized many good ideas and resources from those who share. I have always been thankful for those who take the time to share their ideas freely online, and sometimes I even try to contribute my own ideas. However, this year I am finding that seeing this sharing is more stressful than helpful. After some self-reflection I came to the conclusion that I only have the time, energy, and mental capacity to be an okay teacher this year. I also decided that I'm okay with that.

Let me clarify what I mean by being an okay teacher. Normally I have a desire to grow and improve my practice and try new things. This school year, I'm not taking on any new and creative learning opportunities, I'm leaning on my tried-and-true lessons, handouts, and textbook work. Sure, I'm recording myself to create online lessons, but it's just that; me recording myself going through my traditional notes/activities/handouts. I am however, taking the time and energy to be present for my students. I'm also using more of my time and energy to check in with students and colleagues about mental health and wellness.



Ultimately I had to remind myself that everyone has a different situation. To help you think about why someone else might have the time or energy to continue innovating in their teaching, I have developed a list of reasons to consider.

Considerations:

1. **Teaching Schedule:** If you are teaching all the same course you might have that extra energy to still be creative in your lesson planning. Some of these teachers may only have a part-time teaching schedule due to the organization of their quadmester or octomester system this year.
2. **Experience:** Depending on their teaching schedule and discipline, some teachers have taught the same senior level science courses every semester for the last 10, 15 or 20 years. At that point simply going through the motions of the course does not require a significant amount of energy or time. Taking time to do something creative is not a stretch then.
3. **Home Life:** I am currently in the thick of having two young kids and my time at home is primarily dedicated to them. I know when I was first starting my career and had a quieter home life I had more time and energy to dedicate to creative lessons. Some people might enjoy, and have partners that enjoy, sitting on the couch talking about interesting lesson ideas on a Saturday night.

4. **Paid Planning:** Some teachers are given time out of the classroom to be a curriculum leader or instructional coach or they can be hired by companies to create those lessons that incorporate or promote their products. You can't compete with paid time to plan.
5. **It's 2020;** We're in the middle of a global pandemic. Some of us are coping with this better than others, and that's okay.
6. **The Power of Online;** The good and bad thing about social media and online information is that you are getting the polished, reviewed, and edited version of everything. This takes time and energy and might make you feel bad when your attempt isn't that pretty, but remember, learning is messy. Also, when you scroll through an email blast from your favourite teaching organization or search online, you are getting an aggregate of everyone on the internet (many, many people) and you as one person cannot keep up with that.
7. **Burn Out;** What you and I might (likely) not see is those same educators who are sharing these great lessons burn out shortly after. Most people who post on social media post their polished work and don't always include the later burnout. I know this is happening to some teachers. We are no good to our family or students if we are burnt out. P.S. We are not even half-way yet!

For those of you who are posting these lessons, thank you. I know all of this sharing is done in good faith and with the intention to help those of us who might not have the time or energy to come up with these creative lessons. If you are one of those people I would like to urge you to acknowledge your own personal circumstances. This is not to allow others to judge you, but to allow us to recognize where you are coming from. It allows those of us struggling to keep up to be okay with being not as awesome as you.

Next time you see a social media post or get an email with a new creative lesson idea think about what might have allowed that person to be able to create it. Also think about how that might be different from where you are and that it is okay to be an okay teacher in 2020.

Personal disclaimer: This is my first year as the minor head of science. I'm teaching 4 different courses (between math and science) this year. I have 2 kids under the age of four. I do not get paid to write this, but I have a passion for helping fellow teachers, especially new teachers. I'm repeating one course this quadmester so I am fending off burnout so far. I'm forfeiting a few hours of sleep to write this at night and it took me two weeks!

Brad Dixon
Math and Science Teacher