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## THE BEGINNINGS AT SCHOOL DON'T HAVE TO BE DIFFICULT... YOUNG TEACHERS AND THEIR FIRST DAYS AT WORK

### Abstract

The authors present one way of introducing young people to work at their school. They describe how they help young teachers to lower the level of stress and avoid problems. In other words, how to help young, new teachers survive during the first days at work.

### Abstract

Autorki prezentują jeden ze sposobów wprowadzania młodych ludzi do pracy w szkole. Opisują, w jaki sposób pomagają młodym nauczycielom obniżyć poziom stresu i unikania problemów. Innymi słowy, jak pomóc młodym, nowym, nauczycielom przetrwać podczas pierwszych dni pracy.

### Introduction

Good ideas can emerge from practice. By sharing those ideas with broader audiences feedback and reflection improve the practice while expanding its possibilities to others. On such good practice is the “Guardian Angel” program from Zespół Szkół Ogólnokształcących no. 1 in Stalowa Wola. This school building consists of two separately operating schools: Primary School no. 5 and Gymnasium no. 7. The school governance includes a Teachers’ Council. The school is composed of:

- Headteacher;
- Vice headteacher;
- 36 teachers (there are 2–4 young teachers among them every year);
- 390 students at the age of 6–15 attend the school.

## The Rationale for the Program

A young man who has just graduated his or her studies, has factual knowledge and is qualified to teach. Unfortunately, he or she is usually prepared well only in theory. And so something is needed. A program that helps bring young teachers into the school and work to help them survive their first days.

A brief summary of the idea of the “Guardian Angel” program includes many aspects. In order to lower the level of stress and to avoid problems, a young teacher is under special protection. A headteacher appoints a guardian angel for him or her. This person is responsible for the young teacher. This angel has to take care of him/her, gives him/her advice, supports and helps him/her. The guardian angel is also a kind of a guide who controls the first steps in his/her career.

## Activities That Have Worked

A “Guardian Angel” is often a guardian of training as well. He or she is an experienced teacher who teaches the same or a related school subject (as the young teacher). He or she is an open – minded person who helps others willingly. A teacher’s plans are also connected with the ideas behind the guardian angel program. A young teacher has to know the documents that organize and regulate the work of the school as well as the documents that help him to organize his or her work as a teacher, for example a register and marksheets.

A young teacher, with his/her guardian angel goes to the class tutor (homeroom teacher) who took care of his/her class in the previous year. The class tutor talks with them about his/her ex-students (their progress and marks, their behavior, interests, problems, etc. that have occurred in the past).

The guardian angel also takes the young teacher to visit the school psychologist. A young teacher, his/her guardian angel and an ex-class tutor meet the school psychologist who informs them of the social background of the students. Moreover, he or she passes to them the psychological counseling service’s information about the students.

...I was sincerely surprised by cordiality of my welcome to this school. My patron and Guardian Angel guided me faultlessly through winding and difficult paths. I was so afraid of this new environment. I still remember the enjoyable talk with the school psychologist. After this meeting I seemed to have known all my students since the kindergarten...

Gosia, Teacher of Polish.

A young teacher has an opportunity to know something about students’ families and become more aware of potential problems that may happen in the future.

A young teacher prepares his/ her papers under the intent eye of a guardian angel. Some of the most inconvenient documents are those ones connected with

the proper organization of class work (e.g. A Plan of a Class Tutor, and Subject Matter of Meetings with Parents).

## Help From a Friend

Help from a friend, the guardian angel, who teaches students of the same age as students from the class of a young teacher is a great convenience for some “tasks” for young teachers. They usually cooperate together. Preparation of the first meeting with students’ parents is one activity. Some clues and ideas for the first meeting are given by the guardian angel. If a young teacher thinks that he/she will not manage to conduct the meeting, he/she can ask his/her angel for help. The angel can conduct part of this meeting or the whole one in order to show his/her “subordinate” how to do it properly and successfully.

The school library gives the teacher access to numerous concepts of tutorial lessons that have been worked out by senior teachers, in recent years. “Guardian Angels” work with their young teachers to introduce the resources in the school. They also help with school meetings and ceremonies. Not everyone has organizational skills and artistic talents. That is why organizing school meeting and ceremonies may turn out to be a very difficult task for a junior teacher.

A junior teacher has to participate in group efforts to prepare diagnostic tests. He or she has to cooperate with more experienced teachers, as well as with his or her patron, the guardian angel, in preparing test materials and their appropriate interpretation. The internship patron has to introduce the junior teacher to school programs and projects. The intern makes decisions, under guidance of the patron, as to which tasks he or she can participate to be helpful.

All my friends warned me that gymnasium is the hardest piece of living in the teacher’s career. The very first school conference convinced me that it wasn’t going to be so bad. All teacher fellows welcomed me with great cordiality. My patron showed a lot of patience in preparing me to be an educator. I remember all lessons that we prepared together. I felt like a student myself. In the first semester I used so many draft standards. I couldn’t do my job without them. The Guardian Angel is a wonderful idea...

Joanna, History teacher.

The internship patron, the guardian angel, might also be seen as a therapist. The internship patron might be a therapist and psychologist who can celebrate your joys with you and support you through times of sorrows. This is the person who helps and guides the junior teacher.

Another step in the actions of the first year is integration with the teaching staff. One of the most enjoyable moments in the beginning of a teaching career is the integration trip or venture with the teaching staff. This is most often an out of town trip involving dance and music, as well as sightseeing in charming regions of Poland. This form of integrating the staff is very popular among teachers.

## Warnings for Those Who Might Adopt This Program

There are concerns that must be shared. First, the internship patron or guardian angel has to be selected properly. Second, the school director has to meet and talk with the junior teacher at least once every month. The director has to listen carefully and pay attention to intern's comments about the school, as this is a person with a fresh look at all school matters. This communication is critical to the success of the young teacher.

The "Guardian Angel" program from Zespół Szkół Ogólnokształcących no. 1 in Stalowa Wola is a good practice that might help others to bring new, young teachers into school and a successful career. By choosing the patron or guardian angel well, young teachers will be well prepared for their students, parents and the work of the school community.

