Excerpt from: **Diary of First-Year: Setting Goals,** Blog post, August 26, 2015 Shelby Denhop

… hopes and goals I have for my first year. I want my kids to read more, write more, and speak more. I want to make learning more interactive with in-class debates, discussions, and games. I want to incorporate articles of the week and journaling to propel meaningful conversation. I want to embed service learning into what we do as a class. The list goes on.

**But I need to take a breath.** I’ve been told that beginning teachers should focus on doing **one or two new things really well** instead of doing many new things haphazardly. Now, I’m a “go big or go home” kind of person, but that advice speaks some truth to me. When I was student teaching, I gave it my all; the classes were mine to do what I wanted with them and my cooperating teachers gave me an absurd amount of freedom. I put everything I had into making those classes rock, consistently working thirteen hour days, and I’d find myself crying out of stress at least once a week. Best case scenario would be a few tears on Sunday evening, feeling overwhelmed with planning and grading. Worst case scenario would be a time like one weekend where I received a minor injury that required stitches; the whole hospital process backed up my schedule so badly, I couldn’t do any of the work I needed to to survive the week (or, that’s at least how it felt), and I became a bucket of tears. Any small hiccup—stitches or not—was a threat to my fragile, inefficient system. The heavy pile of obligations was too much at points because I was working just days ahead of my students. Now, student teaching really was a big success for me, but is that lifestyle sustainable? Heck no. And I’m not going to let myself get like that again.

Therefore, ***time management* is my biggest goal** for the year. I need to make the clock my boss and cut myself off from working at a certain point. If I have a lot of time to work on something, I won’t stop. I desperately need to get better at creating quality lesson - and unit plans and grading within a reasonable amount of time. I’m also giving Saturdays back to myself - one day a week with no school obligations. We’ll see how long that lasts, but it’s a solid step to keeping me sane this year.

Just as important for my sanity, I need to maintain the mindset that I have value, even as a newbie. I’m the only first-year teacher at my school in a sea of seasoned professionals. That intimidates me. Thoughts run through my mind if they’ll accept me and take me seriously. At low points, I question what I have to offer.

The thing is, though, when I really think about it, I have unique experiences, most coming from working with at-risk youth. My principal highlighted how excited he is to have me on the team *because* of my youth and enthusiasm. The superintendent mentioned how thrilled he is to have me on board because I offer the opportunity to expand German in the middle school as well. Many times, **what seems normal to me can be completely new to my more experienced colleagues**. I already saw that when I shared the reading comprehension strategies I use with students to members of my department. As a new teacher, I have a completely different perspective than those around me and I think that kind of diversity in thought is going to be valuable to the school. I just need to trust myself with my ideas as well as be open to the advice of others.

Questions we explored afterwards:

Something I know how to do that I could teach other staff…

My biggest goal for next year is…

Some advice from my new teacher colleagues…