Scenario for SRI Ann McCormick

Tapped In, A Career-Long Home for Teachers

Cara is a new teacher. She has dreamt of being a teacher since she went to Kindergarten. It’s been a long road to finish her college preparation at Seattle University while she was working, and her whole teacher preparation course was one intense semester. She was so excited by some of her experiences visiting schools, learning how a teachers at ease with his class could respond to the interests of students concerned about an important event in the news, seeing how teachers did math with manipulatives. But she only had a glimpse of all this–she doesn’t know the steps to take with her own class.

Her teacher preparation included one week of 2-hour classes to learn how to teach reading, and she has no idea how to proceed with math, except what is in the textbook. Cara dropped out of her one semester teacher prep course due to illness, and she’s not feeling ready to teach, but she needs to make a living and she was able to graduate with a B.A.

Cara approaches the Buffalo, NY school district to see what is required for her to get a credential in New York, where her family lives. They see her exceptionally good grades in college and offer her a job. She doesn’t know that no new teacher in living memory has lasted over a year in the school where they are sending her.

Buffalo has just had a riot, and this school is in the center of the conflict. Cara went to a private, girls’ high school and a college where she was far the pulse of inner city life. She is excited and hopeful as she goes to her own classroom for the first time, and prepares for students to come.

But when she begins to teach, she finds her voice wearing out from trying to get the attention of the children. In her class of 28, 5 children have failed 4 times by the time they reach 5th grade. One child can barely print his name, and four can’t read a sentence. The children look at her with bright, expectant eyes, and she wants so much to be a good teacher for them, but there are so many things she doesn’t know how to do.

The other teachers in the school seem militaristic, and aren’t helpful particularly. Cara feels alone in her situation, and the more weeks that pass, the more she needs to find some help. The district sends her to a workshop that involves sitting in someone else’s boring classroom for a week. That’s not much help. She enrolls in her local college, and these courses seem very academic, and out of touch with her situation.

Then Cara hears about Tapped In. There is a special part of the entry program at Tapped In that invites new teachers to come in.

There are special resources for teachers in their first two years of teaching, and she finds 3 people she especially likes who are in similar circumstances in Roxbury, Boston and in East Oakland. Even though they are relatively far away, they are facing many of the challenges Cara is facing. One teacher, Fritha, is funny and helps lighten her perspective on her teaching.

Here are the resources Cara finds in Tapped In:

A 3D room with school stuff that’s amusing. A place to chat, and excerpts of some of her favorite books and some new ones on the shelf.

The last thing she needs is something hard to figure out. There is no jargon, no command language, no directions or guidance needed.

There is a little chart showing a few things she needs to know to enter into a dialog. There is a list of 3
questions about her immediate concerns that day. There are radio buttons for the answers, so it’s easy. Based on her response, she is given a paragraph about 2-3 groups she could chat with, and a window on their conversation so she can see what it’s like. She doesn’t have to say anything.

Cara answers the 3 questions about priorities for conversation, and she is observes a group with 15 members. There is threaded conversation on topics like those that concern her. She watches for a while.

There is a button to click that indicates she wants to join in. And three new topics come up to help her get started–just what she needs and no more. There is a book beside this list where she can get more clues for interacting online.

A mentor teacher named Nancy, who feels wise, is part of the conversation online.

Cara can hardly wait to come home and share the funny and hard things that happened that day in her class. She gets to know some people who care what’s happening with her, and she gradually learns about all the resources in Tapped In.

- Courses with conversation.
- Information on Standards, with examples she can relate to–at her grade level with examples from classes like hers.
- A list of criteria for determining whether she is doing OK, which she adds to and refines as a set of goals for herself.
- A portfolio of her experiences that she can save, add to and look back on. This is completely private, but she can post parts of it if and when she wants. This portfolio has many cool features.
- Many other features that meet her needs just where she is in her career.

©1996-2001 Center for Technology in Learning
TAPPED IN is a trademark of SRI International.