

On Deferred Salary Leave

Dr. Steven Van Zoost

So there I was, on deferred salary leave, living large in tiny moments. Doesn't that sound amazing? I am often asked what it is that I do on a deferred salary leave. Here is what I like to do: go “professional adventuring.” Adventuring on my deferred leaves has meant expanding my professional experience by working for universities, being a senior author for educational publishing companies, working with educators in developing countries, and offering consulting services close to home, and far, far away. I hereby name this “professional adventuring.”

My students as well as school board benefit when I take a deferred leave. I use my deferred leaves to extend my professional knowledge and experience. During my deferred leaves, I teach graduate courses in education, allowing me to sustain a life as an academic. For example, during my current deferred leave, I am teaching five graduate courses in four Canadian provinces. My graduate teaching keeps me current about recent research, best classroom practices, and connects me with other educators' experiences in a wider context than the day-to-day work in my own teaching.

Also during my current deferred leave, I am collaborating with a team of other education professors and offering professional training projects in two developing countries, as well as meeting with faculties and ministries of education. This involves extensive travel to work with these educators. Locally, I have spent time visiting colleagues who are working in different schools and universities in Quebec, and Ontario. I am able to visit classrooms, attend lectures, chat in staff rooms, and in some instances partake in

teacher supervision sessions. Such experiences—both within Canada and beyond—are invaluable to my professional growth; by nature, they require me to reflect upon my own teaching practices and how I support student learning.

In addition, during this current leave, I am the senior author of a student text intended for high school English students. This text book is informed by my teaching experiences at Avon View High School and responds to the writing needs of my students. My role as senior author is to guide a writing team of authors from across Canada thereby expanding my knowledge about the needs of high school English instruction in Canada. During my deferred leave, I am also able to take-on contract work for a publishing company that includes a review of roughly 100 recent Atlantic Canadian resources available to high school English classrooms and match these resources with curricular expectations in Nova Scotia and elsewhere.

My six month deferred leave allows me to partake in this wide range of professional experiences that would otherwise be



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unavailable to me when I am working full-time in my classroom. I have considered other ways of organizing my professional life to continue my lifelong learning and development (such as job sharing) and in my situation I conclude that frequent six month deferred leaves provides me with the greatest opportunity to do other professional work.

When I take a six-month deferred leave, my school has the opportunity to get to know a new teacher and learn about his or her potential as an employee. Because of our semestering system, this teacher works almost completely with different students than I would be teaching, allowing him or her to establish their own classroom dynamics and expectations.

In addition to professional adventuring, I would be remiss not to mention that I also use time during my deferred leave for travel adventures. This has meant meeting family and friends in various places to travel, or it has meant visiting them at their homes to get to know their day-to-day routines better. Travel adventuring has meant cage diving with great white sharks in South Africa; dancing at Carnival in Rio de Janeiro; kayaking in New Zealand; hiking in Peru; safarriing in Zimbabwe. When you are on a deferred leave, you can use the time as you like and take advantage of travel deals!

It's true—I collect airline points of all kinds. I use them on my deferred leave. I have to find ways to economize due the decrease in my income as I participate in the deferred salary plan. I love to travel, find new ways of seeing the world, and enchant my everyday world with these travel learnings.

I should point-out that one of my favourite ways to see the world is “through the eyes” of local educators. Recently, I toured a remote village in the jungles

of a developing country. This involved having access to a car, driver, guide, and security detail—all organized by my teaching contacts in that country. My guide was a teacher-instructor at the teacher college who grew up in this small village. One of her childhood friends—a teacher as well as a leader in the community—joined our tour when we arrived to the village. Besides visiting schools and the teacher college, we also visited family members of my guide and went to one of her friend's for a beautiful homemade lunch with cassava, duff, breadfruit, and plantain. I'm still trying to master how to make her delicious fruit juice from star fruit, mango, and ginger! After lunch, a boatman took us across the river where we continued our dialogue about teaching and learning. I was living large in these tiny moments and big conversations about the future of schooling, about today's youth, and about the profession of teaching.

When I return from a deferred leave, I bring a wealth of professional experiences to my teaching. My students benefit not only from a rejuvenated teacher, but also from the pedagogical ideas, resources, and ways of thinking about learning that I am exposed to during my deferred leave. I take great pride in my teaching and I want to bring the best of me to my students, colleagues, and school community. The deferred salary leaves allow me to do this in a way that is a financial savings (rather than a cost) to my school board. The deferred salary plan benefits not only my wider professional work, but also my students, school, and employer.

[Dr. Steven Van Zoost teaches for Avon View High School and Nova Scotia Virtual School in the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board.](#)