

LORI JESCHKE

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You could say the motivation for Lori Jeschke's teaching career arrived through the mail.

When she graduated from Grade 12, her first job was with Canada Post, but it didn't take long to realize that being a teacher was her true

calling. It was a realization inspired by a love of teaching and learning instilled by her father, Art Priebe, an elementary school teacher for 30 years, and her mother, Clara Priebe, who taught piano for almost six decades.

Lori earned an education degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 1987 and began her teaching career with 36 students in a kindergarten, Grade 1 and 2 classroom at Laird School in the former Sask Valley School Division. During her eight years in Laird, she also taught Grades 5 and 6 and classes in Grades 7 and 8 before finally becoming principal in her last year there. A move to Hepburn School, where she remained for 12 years, brought Lori together with her father who taught Grade 4 in a classroom right across the hall.

After serving as vice-principal and principal at Hepburn, Lori took on the role of human resources principal for the Prairie Spirit School Division. That led to further leadership opportunities as coordinator of assessment and learning, superintendent of learning and leading, and four years as director of education before her retirement in 2021, following a 34-and-a-half-year career in education.

Lori's professional contributions included two terms as president of the Canadian Assessment for Learning Network and two years as co-chair of the Saskatchewan Director group in 2019-20. She co-facilitated national and international leadership and assessment opportunities and co-wrote *Residency: Powerful Assessment and Professional Development* (2016). Lori was a contributor with several authors writing on the topic of assessment and was one of the 108 irregulars for Michael Bungay Stanier's book *How to Work With Almost Anyone* (2023).

Lori Jeschke remains a passionate and dedicated educator after a varied and well-rounded career serving and supporting learners and learning.

A CONVERSATION WITH LORI JESCHKE

What inspired you to pursue a career in education?

My parents were really passionate about serving and learning. I'm told that when I was three and four, I had stuffed animals lined up on stairs and around tables and I was teaching. I know that teaching was planted in my heart really early on. When I was in my teenage years, my dad was a classroom teacher and coach and he gave so much of his time and energy to his work, I thought that other kids got more of his time than I did. He impacted so many kids and families, and I knew that was who I wanted to be, too. When I graduated from Grade 12, I got a great job at Canada Post but after a year it was like no, I want to teach. My parents instilled this love of teaching and that stayed with me.

What did you love most about being a teacher?

I love the idea of being with other learners. It didn't matter if I was the big learner and they were the small ones (in terms of height) or I was in a room with all adult learners - you can learn from anyone, right? So, for me, it was exciting to be part of the curiosity and wonder in classrooms and outside of them. I will never forget teaching Grade 1. It's like a lightbulb comes on for students when they put letters and sounds together and can read words and suddenly their whole world is opened up. "Look at that Mrs. J, it says this on our wall!" Or, "I just read a whole book, and I want to read more!" Then the fun of being a teacher is to continue to create spaces where that excitement and wonder can continue to grow.

I got to learn and work in a school division where our focus was on learning for life. We modelled what learning looked, sounded, and felt like across our division through My Prairie Spirit Classroom. What we asked kindergarten students to do, we asked our Grade 11 and 12 students to do and also our principals and vice-principals and senior

administration. Let's learn and let's learn how to learn was our focus. I think that's the hugest part of getting to be a teacher - just getting to sit side by side with other learners and discovering things.

What did you find rewarding about your work?

The rewarding part of my work, I think, is just the beauty of being part of getting to learn and lead alongside so many incredible educators. At the heart of our work is always the goal of finding ways to support students and teachers. A huge part of that for me was our annual Learning for Life presentations from our schools and staff. Hearing stories from students, teachers, staff, school community council members, parents and administrators about what worked and what didn't and then what they planned to do next, was inspirational for me. We got to celebrate learning for life as a school division.

What challenges did you face during the course of your career?

The challenges, in a broad sense, would be the many hats that a teacher wears. Teachers are asked to be and do so many different things in a day. It's quite remarkable. There are so many complexities around the charge of caring for small humans and big humans. They need to feel safe, feel cared for, and be successful. It's not really something you learn in university courses. You don't learn about how it feels to suddenly remember late at night that you promised one of your students you'd listen to their story and you forgot, or noticing someone didn't have very much in their lunch, or how there were teachers in your staffroom who were trying to tell you they were just too tired and you still had them sit through a presentation at a staff meeting. Those are pieces of your heart that get tugged time and time again and you try to pay close attention every day so that you can do your best. I sometimes wonder what people would do if they had a camera in a classroom and saw all the things a teacher is actually handling throughout the day. I hope they would say 'thank you'!

What advice would you give a new teacher?

I would start with thank you. And probably add a few thousand thank-yous. I would say thank you for choosing what I believe is the most incredibly noble career. I would thank them for choosing this profession and for choosing it now. I say that because we're in a time where the teaching profession is not respected and appreciated like it once was. My desire would be that teachers would be respected and celebrated for who they are and what they do everyday. They are caring for students, which is really the ultimate job! Teachers are a key part of the starting point in every other career. Teachers teach us how to learn and hopefully, how to love learning. We need that!

I would say get to know your why and let that be your guide in all your decisions. Focus on what's important to you and find other colleagues that are willing to mentor you and learn alongside you and help you to grow. When you can learn and grow with others, there's the support that you need to keep going and ultimately make the difference for all your learners. That's what I found in my career, and I am forever grateful for that.