PREPARED TO TEACH, BUT NOT TO BE A TEACHER:
CASE STUDIES OF FIRST YEAR TEACHERS

By
Monica Huggins Riley

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By

Monica Huggins Riley

Approved:

R. Dwight Hare
Professor of Curriculum and Instruction
(Director of Dissertation)

Linda Walker
Assistant Professor of Elementary Education
(Co-Chair)

George Thomas
Professor and Chair
Division of Education- Meridian
(Committee Member)

Laura Bryan
Associate Professor of Elementary Education
(Committee Member)

Devon Brenner
Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction
(Committee Member)

Linda Coats
Associate Professor and Graduate Coordinator
Curriculum and Instruction

Sue Minchew
Interim Dean of the College of Education
Britt (1998) indicated that to get to the heart of the complex issues first year teachers face, it is necessary to give first year teachers an opportunity to tell their own stories of their experiences as neophytes. The purpose of this study was to share the experiences of first year teachers. Of particular interest was how well these first year teachers believed their teacher preparation program had prepared them. The research question posed for this study was: How do graduates of Mississippi State University describe their first year teaching experience?

A multiple-case design was used in this research study. Because this research was exploratory and descriptive, and because it had multiple cases, the replication approach to multiple-case studies was employed. The researcher was the instrument used for the collection of data. Five first year teachers participated in this study. All graduated from Mississippi State University and were teaching for the first time during the 2003-2004 school year. Six major themes emerged from the data. These themes were: (a) a feeling of being overwhelmed, (b) dealing with student misbehavior, (c) concern for
student learning, (d) ineffective mentoring, (e) understanding the local culture, particularly in the area of discipline, and (f) lack of commitment to remain in the teaching profession. Three additional concerns of three participants emerged as well. These were: (a) negative student teaching experience, (b) conflict with parents, and (c) difficulties with other professionals.

Recommendations included: (a) re-examining the practicum experience throughout the teacher education program, (b) implementing a follow-up program for graduates of the teacher education program, (c) re-examining the critical needs scholarship, and (d) implementing a study concerning student teacher placement.
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my wonderful parents, Emmitt and Ida Huggins, who constantly remind me, “If it is to be, it is up to me” and “If I think I can or if I think I can’t, either way I am right”.

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Acknowledgment for this research begins with my committee members who consistently shared their time, knowledge and friendship throughout the process of reaching this goal. My thanks are extended too Dr. Dwight Hare, co-chair and dissertation director, who not only is an outstanding role model in the excellence of teaching, but who has guided me through this process and encouraged me at every stage with a simple “well done.” His wisdom and support are highly appreciated and valued.

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Thanks are extended to the five first year teachers who allowed me to invade their lives. I appreciate their willingness to share tears as well as joys. The story of their first year in the teaching profession is theirs; I was privileged to convey it.
Finally, love and gratefulness are offered to my family: to my daughter Kourtney, and to my son, Kenneth, who encourage me and support me just because I am their mom and to my husband, Scot, who always believes in me, encourages me and supports me in every dream.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

There is a growing body of research on how first year teachers perceive their preparedness to meet the demands of the world of teaching. The vast amount of this research focuses on areas that first year teachers feel they need more instruction during preparatory classes. Martin (1991), for example, reported first-year teachers experience “intense feelings of apprehension, anxiety, and self-doubt” (p. 885) as they enter their first year in this profession. This research will add to that body of knowledge.

The following chapter is presented in five sections: (a) Review of Related Literature, (b) Purpose of the Study, (c) Research Question, (d) Limitations, and (e) Definition of Terms. The literature review will develop the rationale for this study.

Review of Related Literature

The research on how teachers perceive their preparedness to meet the demands they will face as new teachers is steadily growing. Britt (1997) conducted a study with first year teachers and found many felt unprepared to meet the specific challenges that come with teaching. Many were frustrated and stated a need for more training in the areas of preparation and planning, involving parents, managing their time wisely, and discipline issues.
According to Wilson and Ireton (1997), student assessment is another area of concern for first year teachers. One of the goals of teacher education programs should be to prepare first year teachers to be competent in the classroom and to help them understand how theory and practice work together (Martin, 1991). Martin stated that for this goal to become a reality we must know more about how first year teachers perceive their experiences. Nicklin (1991) reported on a survey that found first year teachers do not always feel prepared to meet the challenges of the teaching profession. According to Kemis and Warren (1991), the confidence teachers have in their ability to teach is highly correlated with their commitment to the profession. Williams, Eiserman, and Lynch (1985) stated, “Suddenly in the ‘real world’, they face the challenges of curriculum decision making, policy making, discipline, evaluation, and instruction. Understanding the problems first year teachers face could provide information useful to their training” (p.2).

Teacher educators can begin to understand the experiences of first year teachers by reviewing and conducting case studies. As Bullough (1989) stated:

Written cases and case studies are a means by which educators can explore how others have confronted problems similar to their own. They are also a means by which to identify potential problems and a vehicle by which to begin thinking them through. In these ways they can influence the basis on which teaching decisions are or will be made. (p. xii)

This review of the literature will begin by reviewing case studies that give insight into the situations first year teachers face. The literature that pertains to the Student Teacher Assessment Instrument (STAI), which is used to evaluate student teachers at Mississippi State University, will be reviewed. The STAI will be presented in five areas: (a) planning and preparing, (b) communication and interaction, (c) teaching for learning,
(d) managing the learning environment and (e) assessment of student learning. The literature review concludes with a discussion of the relevant literature in each of the five areas.

Case Studies

Ryan (1970) discussed a study in which he followed six teachers through their first year of teaching. This diverse group taught in low income as well as in wealthy neighborhoods. Ryan indicated that five themes developed from following these teachers through their first year. The first theme, how teachers learn to teach, contains four different subcategories. These are (a) their innate tendencies to teach, (b) their conscious or unconscious imitation of teachers from the past, (c) their teacher preparatory courses, and (d) learning from their own first year teaching experiences. “The shock of the familiar” (p. 170) is the second theme Ryan identified. He defined the familiarity shock as the first year teacher feeling as if he or she knows what to expect. The routines of school life have been part of the first year teacher’s life for 16 or more years. The problem arises when the teacher is no longer sitting in the student desk, but must now take on an entirely new role. This is a role they have watched performed many times, but have never performed by themselves. The third theme addressed by Ryan is the immense amount of learning that takes place the first year. First year teachers must learn the authoritative stance that works the best for them. The teacher must learn how to draw on the students’ schemata in developing lessons appropriate for the students. Learning how to accomplish the non-teaching tasks in a short amount of time is another learning experience. Next, Ryan identified the struggle to maintain discipline. It is almost
impossible to establish control and to hold onto the idealistic views of student behavior with which many first year teachers begin. Finally, Ryan discussed the conflicts first year teachers face. Conflicts arise between the veteran teacher and the first year teacher, between student and first year teacher, and the first year teacher faces conflict within himself or herself.

Applegate, et al (1977) reported on a study of first year teachers with themes that emerged which mirrored many of those from Ryan’s (1970) study. Applegate, et al (1977) stated though each case was unique, similar patterns and themes still weaved their way throughout each case. The conflicts each participant faced, in spite of the years they had been in a school setting, were surprising. The first year teachers did not always feel prepared for the challenges that arose. Discipline issues in the classroom were also a consistent theme throughout each participant’s experience.

Ryan, et al (1980) followed 12 first year teachers. Several themes emerged from the interviews and observations with these 12 teachers. The first year teachers struggled with the adjustments from student to adult life. Handling life issues that took place outside of school was a challenge. These first year teachers entered the classroom with preconceived ideas about what the classroom and school would be like and found they had to make adjustments to these notions. Many first year teachers are well prepared to teach a particular subject or grade and find their teaching assignment is different from their training. Finally, the first year teacher must adjust to the difficulty of the teaching profession.

Bullough (1989) conducted a case study with one first year teacher who taught seventh grade in a public school. The school served approximately 970 students from
mostly lower and middle class families. Bullough pointed out that Kerri, the teacher in the study, had problems totally unique to her situation, but she also faced problems that are universal to first year teachers. Kerri had to deal with managing the classroom. She mistakenly thought if she planned well enough the management problems would disappear. She quickly decided she needed to be consistent, stick to a management plan and have established routines. Kerri faced several of the problems considered common to first year teachers, as were identified by Veenman (1984). Bullough (1989) reported Kerri had to learn to have “withitness” in the classroom. “Withitness” has to do with the ability of the teacher to know what is going on in every part of the classroom at the same time. Motivating students was another area in which Kerri had to develop experience. She found it difficult to accept that she was not be able to reach all of the students and that she could only do the best she could to motivate them to get their work completed.

Near the end of her first year, Kerri began to understand the importance of matching assignments with student ability in the effort to motivate the students. Dealing with students’ individual differences was difficult. During her first year of teaching, Kerri was not able to effectively deal with these differences. She did make every effort to try to help each student, but it was not until her second year that she was able to be more effective in the area of meeting individual needs. Kerri dealt with the problem of assessing student work by developing a point system she shared with her students before she made the assignment. This helped her to address the challenge of fairness in her grading, and it made the process of grading easier for her. She developed rubrics for each assignment so the students would know exactly what was expected of them. Finally, Kerri struggled with parental involvement. In the beginning, she felt intimidated by the
parents of her students and did not want them to visit the classroom. Eventually she became disappointed in the parents because of the lack of involvement they had in their children’s education. By the end of Kerri’s first year she was more confident in dealing with parents and worked to involve them in the education process. Kerri worked through many of the problems she encountered as a first year teacher. Although Kerri was a good student in her education classes and successfully completed her student teaching, she still faced problems her first year and was not able to function at the level of an expert teacher.

Martin (1991) conducted a study with 10 first year teachers. The study was conducted in 10 different schools in Southern California, all of which were in suburban school districts. The themes that developed throughout Martin’s study indicated some of the same issues that had surfaced with Kerri, as well as the participants in the 1984 study by Veenman. Concern with student learning and what to teach when, were two of the major concerns that developed. The issues of classroom management and classroom discipline also surfaced during the interviews. Relationship with parents came to the forefront as a problem area, but those first year teachers who had this problem felt they were able to resolve this issue.

Walker (1996) conducted a study of non-traditional first year teachers in Mississippi. The students in the schools where these teachers taught, ranged from predominately African American to racially balanced. Walker found the four participants in her study did not exhibit the same concerns as those traditional teachers reviewed in the literature. The teachers in this study did not feel classroom management or discipline were major areas of concern. They also did not express concern over parental
involvement or interaction with other teachers or the principal. These non-traditional teachers seemed to be more focused on the development of the students than on those areas of concern that traditional first year teachers seem to focus.

In a study conducted by Corley (1998), five factors emerged that affected the three first year teachers who participated in the study. These factors were (a) communication, (b) mentoring, (c) classroom savvy, (d) discipline, and (e) expectations of various powers in the community. These factors mirrored as those already described in the literature. The ability to communicate appropriately with parents, students and other teachers was identified as a major concern. Being able to handle the issues that arise daily in the classroom and to develop and maintain appropriate discipline also found its way into the list of concerns of these three first year teachers. The expectations the community holds for the classroom teacher, though not new to the literature, is a concern that does not arise as often.

Lundeen (2002) conducted a case study with six first year teachers. The participants in this study faced problems with discipline and with classroom management. In addition, one of the most prevalent problems reported by these beginning teachers had to do with their relationships with other adults. Lundeen’s study agreed with and added to the current literature on the subject of beginning teachers.

Many beginning teachers deal with similar problems as neophytes. The issues raised by Veenman (1984) 20 years ago still emerge today. McCarra (2003) compared perceived problems of beginning teachers, who graduated from Mississippi State University between 1996 and 2000, with Veenman’s (1984) list of perceived problems. She found of the top ten problems identified by these beginning teachers, five had
appeared on Veenman’s list. The five problems on both McCarra’s list and Veenman’s list were: (a) dealing with slow learners, (b) burden of clerical work, (c) lack of spare time, (d) heavy teaching load resulting in insufficient preparation time, and (e) dealing with problems of individual students.

Each first year teacher faces problems unique to his or her experience. However, universal problems of beginning teachers have been identified in the literature. In addition to the problems identified by Veenman (1984) and McCarra (2003), other problems are consistently identified. Some of the recurring themes are: (a) lack of parental involvement, (b) maintaining classroom discipline, (c) motivating students, (d) relationships with other adults, and (e) concern with student learning.

Student Teacher Assessment Instrument

Pre-service teachers at Mississippi State University are required to successfully complete a 15-week student teaching experience before graduation. Student teaching is a culminating activity for all students in the education program. Prior to student teaching, elementary education majors must successfully complete senior block. This block of courses is designed to instruct pre-service teachers in methods of teaching science, social studies, language arts, and math. Six weeks of the senior block is a practicum experience in an elementary classroom.

The teacher candidates at Mississippi State University are expected to be competent in the five areas addressed on the Student Teacher Assessment Instrument (STAI) before graduating from the elementary education program. Each student is evaluated with this instrument during the senior block practicum experience and during
student teaching. Therefore, this instrument will be used in this study as a starting point for guiding interview protocol.

According to Jones (2001), the STAI was developed in 1998 by a committee from Mississippi State University. Several experts served on this committee including a faculty member from the university with experience in both elementary and secondary settings, a principal from a local school, a clinical instructor, a graduate assistant with teaching experience at the elementary level, and the director of field experiences from the university. A task force that had been appointed to examine student teacher assessment adopted the instrument. Following suggestions by the members of this task force, several universities joined together to develop a rubric for the items on the STAI. The items on the STAI (see Appendix A) were developed from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards. From these standards, five headings were developed. These are (a) planning and preparation, (b) communication and interaction, (c) teaching for learning, (d) managing the learning environment, and (e) assessment of student learning. All major teaching universities in the state of Mississippi use this instrument. According to Jones, these universities “could add items or make minor revisions, but the core items remained the same” (p. 2).

A Discussion of the Literature by Areas of the STAI

Planning and Preparation

Planning and preparation is addressed in three of the INTASC standards. Standard two states teacher candidates should be able to provide learning opportunities for children
that are supportive of their social, intellectual and personal development. Standard three indicates the teacher candidate should be able to plan and implement instructional opportunities for diverse learners, and standard seven states teachers should be able use their knowledge of not only the subject matter, but of the community and the curriculum goals as they plan for instruction (INTASC, 1992).

Many of the studies conducted with first year teachers are related to the concerns these teachers have as they enter the work force. Much of this research focuses on the areas in which first year teachers feel they need more instruction during methods classes and student teaching. Brooks (1998) indicated planning and preparation are areas where first year teachers felt the need for more instruction, especially in dealing with students from diverse backgrounds. Headley-Howell (1997) stated some graduates reported little, if any, amounts of class time spent on the challenges of teaching students from backgrounds that differ from their own. These teachers desired to learn more about how to incorporate multicultural activities in the classroom. Teachers did not seem to be able to understand those from a different culture unless they moved and began to live in the culture with those different from themselves.

According to Moyles (1995), first year teachers struggle with the awesome task of challenging stereotypes, helping children understand our changing society, and teaching them to value the contributions that people of diverse backgrounds have made to society. Benz (1984) found teachers are concerned with dealing with the way families are changing in our society and thus creating different cultural experiences. It is important that each culture learn the value of other cultures. Feelings of superiority could arise if students are ignorant of the value of those different from themselves.
Communication and Interaction

According to INTASC (1992) teacher candidates should be able to communicate effectively verbally, non-verbally and with appropriate media. Teachers should have an understanding of how effective communication affects the environment in the classroom. Standard 10 states that teacher candidates should develop relationships with school personnel, parents and the community. Interaction with these groups will allow the teacher to understand students and what influences their learning.

Veenman (1984) stated that developing productive relationships with parents is an area of concern mentioned most often by beginning teachers. Brock and Grady (1997) indicated that principals put pressure on first year teachers to be proficient in many areas. Two of the areas principals list as being important for a first year teacher are communication and interpersonal skills. That means it is important to the employment of teachers to be able to effectively communicate with parents. Lynn (1997) reported on a study conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project that found the ability to communicate and interact with parents is essential to teacher success. Even though having the expertise to communicate effectively with parents is a concern for first year teachers, very few teacher education programs offer thorough coverage of family involvement strategies. University professors may encourage students to communicate with parents; however, rarely are students given strategies for dealing with parents who are uncooperative, unsupportive or hostile (Lovette, 1996).
Teaching for Learning

Teacher candidates should be able to create learning opportunities so that the subject being studied is meaningful to all students. To create meaningful experiences for students the teacher must understand how the background knowledge of a student can affect their learning. Teachers must also use a variety of instructional techniques that will encourage students to think critically and become problem solvers (INTASC, 1992).

Teaching for learning includes areas such as knowledge of the subject, ability to give clear directions, and appropriate use of technology. Gratch (1998) found when first year teachers had early as well as extensive experiences in the field, they had greater subject area knowledge, were able to give clearer directions, and used technology more appropriately, than those teachers with less field experience. Leou (1997) found among other areas of concern, first year teachers felt they needed more training in the subject matter they were expected to teach and in instructional strategies. According to Cooperman (1998), teachers are more likely to include technology in their classrooms when they have had experience with technology. Putnam and Borko (2000, as cited in Samuels, Rodenberg, Frey, & Fisher, 2001), stated a combination of field practice and university setting instructions is the best way to create professional development experiences.

Managing the learning environment

INTASC (1992) emphasizes that teacher candidates should create a learning environment conducive to active learning and self-motivation. Students should be encouraged to interact with one another and to become involved in the learning process.
Teachers should be aware of a variety of strategies for managing the learning environment and recognize strategies that may restrict learning.

Another area of concern for first year teachers is the area of managing the learning environment (Hall 2001). In a needs assessment conducted by Levy (1987) with 469 first year teachers, the area of greatest concern was classroom management. This is an area where first year teachers often feel the least prepared. First year teachers state the need for more attention to be given to topics of discipline and management in the university classroom (Byrd-Rider, 1998). According to Martin and Baldwin (1996), management and discipline are not the same thing, though sometimes the terms are used interchangeably. While discipline refers to dealing with student behavior, classroom management is a much broader term that includes all of the efforts of the teacher to encourage learning, appropriate student behavior, and student interaction. Stewart- Wells (2000) concluded that the greatest concern of those entering the education field was classroom management and that this was an area where more training was desired. Gee (2001) conducted a study to assess the attitudes of pre-service teachers. The greatest areas of concern appeared to be the areas of discipline and management. According to Corley (1998), some first year teachers could not remember taking a class that gave useful information in the area of classroom management. Corley believed first year teachers should have a clear understanding of classroom management expectations as early as possible.
Student Assessment

Another concern that is prevalent among many first year teachers is the ability to assess student achievement. According to INTASC (1992), appropriate student assessment has to do with the ability of the teacher to incorporate both formal and informal assessment strategies. Teachers should be aware of various kinds of assessments and use the results to plan for future instruction.

A study conducted with 630 first year teachers in Kentucky indicated beginning teachers felt confident in the areas of hands-on learning and collaborating with other professionals, but struggled in the area of student assessment (Atwood, et al, 1995). Moyles (1995) noted that often beginning teachers think of assessment and teaching as separate entities. With these processes separated in their mind, the assessment of students can seem like an overwhelming job. It is important that teachers have knowledge in student assessment as well as the skill to put the knowledge into practice. Williams and Alawiye (2001) reported that of 33 Washington student teachers responding to a survey, only 24% rated their preparation in the area of assessing students’ strengths and weaknesses as excellent.

Summary of the Literature Review

Three areas of literature have been covered in this review: (a) the literature on case studies of first year teachers, (b) the literature on the STAI, and (c) the literature by areas of the STAI. Many case studies have been conducted over the previous 30 years. Whether conducted with one participant or 12, similar themes emerge. Teachers often enter the classroom feeling they know what to do because they are in familiar
surroundings, but often find that listening to a teacher and being a teacher are quite different and they may not be ready for the challenges ahead. First year teachers often struggle with classroom management and motivating the diverse group of students in the classroom. Many first year teachers are concerned with assessing their students’ work and having a healthy relationship with parents so the students’ strengths and weaknesses can be appropriately discussed. First year teachers are concerned that they are not knowledgeable enough in a particular subject area to be able to plan the lessons they need to teach. These themes emerge frequently in case studies conducted with first year teachers.

INTASC developed a set of standards for pre-service teachers in an effort to ensure they would be prepared for the first year. With these standards as a guide, a committee from MSU created the STAI. This form of assessment is used across Mississippi as a guide for evaluating the preparedness of pre-service teachers in their last year of college. The main headings of the STAI, (a) planning and preparation, (b) communication and interaction, (c) teaching for learning, (d) managing the learning environment, and (e) assessment of student learning, address many of the themes that emerge in the literature concerning first year teachers.

Purpose of the Study

Many changes have occurred in teacher education programs as they prepare teachers to be effective (William & Alawiye, 2001). As part of these changes the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) was established. According to INTASC (1992), “The complex art of teaching requires performance-based
standards and assessment strategies that are capable of capturing teachers’ reasoned judgments and that evaluate what they can actually do in authentic teaching situations” (Preface, para. 2). While this is a widespread belief, Weiss and Weiss (1998) stated, “teaching needs to be understood dynamically in its multiple contexts and performance data needs to be gathered from diverse sources” (p. 4), and one visit from the principal can not accomplish this. Breeding (1998) stated that becoming an effective teacher is a highly complex and individual process. In order to get to the heart of this complexity and to understand the individuality of the first year teacher, it is necessary to conduct case studies wherein beginning teachers will be able to tell their own stories of their experiences as neophytes.

Ryan (1979) stated the development of a teacher in the first year of teaching has a profound effect on the professionalism and competency level that the teacher will maintain in the future. Reinhartz (1989, as cited in Walker, 1996) indicated teachers’ voices often are unheard, but information collected from first year teachers may offer insights into the teaching profession that only the first year teachers themselves can give. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to share the experiences of first year teachers. Of particular interest was how well these first year teachers believed their teacher preparation program had prepared them.

Research Question

The research question for this study was: How do graduates of Mississippi State University describe their first year teaching experience? To better understand this phenomenon, guiding protocol questions were used. These questions were adapted from
the Student Teacher Assessment Instrument (STAI), which is the instrument used by Mississippi State University in grading the performance of student teachers in the classroom (see appendix A). The STAI was developed using INTASC standards. The broad categories covered in the interview were: (a) planning and preparing, (b) communication and interaction, (c) teaching for learning, (d) managing the learning environment, and (e) assessment of student learning. Because these are the areas in which graduates from MSU are expected to be competent, they are the areas this research addressed. Each participant was asked to submit lesson plans and journals for analysis. None of the participants submitted journals. Each of them indicated they were too busy to keep a journal. All of the participants, except one, submitted lesson plans. The one who did not submit indicated she was extremely busy and could not remember to submit the lesson plans. This information was used to determine the teachers’ ability to write lesson plans.

Limitations

Because this study utilized observations as well as interviews, a limitation may be the way the presence of the researcher affected the participants (Merriam, 1998). The important thing, according to Merriam, is that the researcher be aware of the effects and account for them.

Definition of Terms

The following operational definitions were used throughout this study:

First-year teachers- Those individuals who are in their first year of teaching in a public, elementary school setting following graduation from a teacher education program.
Their prior teaching experience is limited to that required by the teacher education program.

Traditional students- Those students who entered college directly after high school and completed requirements to become an educator.

Non-traditional students- Those students who returned to college and obtained an education degree after having been out of high school for 5 or more years.
CHAPTER II
RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, the methods of the research are discussed. First, the design of the research is explained. Next, the method of selecting the participants is presented. Then, the steps for collecting the data and the avenues through which the data were analyzed are conveyed. Finally, the methods by which validity and reliability were established are communicated.

Design

The purpose of this study was to share the experiences of first year teachers. Of particular interest was how well these first year teachers believed their teacher preparation program had prepared them. According to Patton (1987), qualitative methods are most appropriate when the researcher wishes to understand individual outcomes. When the researcher wants to evaluate a phenomenon in a detailed manner, it is desirable for the researcher to have regular and close contact with the participants. Qualitative research methods allowed this closeness. For this purpose, a qualitative approach seemed most appropriate.

Merriam (1998) stated when a researcher wants to deeply understand a situation and gain meaning from the participants, a case study method could be used. Yin (1994) defined a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary
phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 13). When a study contains multiple cases instead of just one, a multiple-case design should be employed. In this research, five cases were investigated; therefore, a multiple-case study was used. Yin also explained the need for replication, as opposed to sampling, logic when using a multiple-case study design. Herriott and Firestone (1983, as cited in Yin, 1994) stated when multiple cases are used the evidence is often more compelling, which allows the study to be seen as more robust.

Patton (1987) stated case studies should be chosen to meet a particular purpose. According to Patton, “a case study can be a person, an event, a program, a time period, a critical incident, or a community” (p. 19). Furthermore, Patton pointed out when the researcher is looking for individualization or desiring to look at a situation in great detail, the case study method is very effective. Yin (1994) indicated case studies are the best design to use when “how” and “why” (p. 20) questions are being asked.

Merriam (1998) stated the more cases a researcher incorporates into the study the more persuasive the analysis might be. A researcher should choose the design for the study based on the problem being studied. Because this research was exploratory and descriptive and, because it had multiple cases, the replication approach to multiple-case studies was employed. Figure 1 depicts a replication approach in multiple-case studies that has been adapted from Yin (1994) In qualitative research the researcher is the instrument used for the collection of data (Merriam, 1998). I taught in an elementary setting for 10 years. Subjects taught included science, social studies, reading, language arts, and math (see Vitae in Appendix B). As a lecturer at MSU-M, I taught Childhood Education, Science for Children and Elementary School Arithmetic. Other courses taught
are Social Studies for Elementary Teachers, Language Arts, Children’s Literature as well as Fundamentals of Literacy and Teaching of Literacy. Further experiences have included serving as an assistant university supervisor for student teachers and a university supervisor for senior block field experience.
Figure 1
Case Study Method (adapted from Yin, 1994)
Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. According to Merriam (1998), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). The purpose of this study was to share the experiences of first year teachers. Of particular interest was how well these first year teachers believed their teacher preparation program had prepared them. After permission was granted from the Institution Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) of Mississippi State University (MSU) (see IRB approval in Appendix C), I purposefully selected seven participants for the study. I chose participants from the 2003 graduating class of MSU. The participants were elementary education majors who taught in the elementary grades (K-8), during the 2003-2004 school year. Participants were selected to reflect diversity in the areas of race, place of employment, grade taught, and whether or not the teacher had been a traditional or nontraditional student. This diverse sample allowed the researcher to better understand how teachers from different backgrounds view their teacher education preparation, and to draw similarities and differences based on their experiences.

Participants for this study were selected via verbal announcement. Seven participates were selected from those graduates who qualified for the study and were willing to participate. Two of the participants chose not to participate in the study. One had been selected to serve as the testing coordinator for the school and would not be in the classroom. The other stated she was too busy and felt that participating in the study would be overwhelming. Therefore, there were five participants in this study.
Collection of Data

Before any data were collected, the participating school districts granted permission, in writing, for me to conduct research in their school district. In addition to permission from the school districts, consent forms were collected from each participant. Following permission being granted by the necessary parties, I began collecting data based on the case study method as adapted from Yin (1994) and presented in Figure 1. I followed the steps listed below in the collection of data.

1. Receive permission to conduct research from all necessary parties.

2. Schedule a semi-structured interview with each of the participants and address the areas of the protocol. Interviews were tape-recorded.

3. Record researcher notes as they pertain to the interview.

4. Transcribe each interview.

5. Ask each participant to submit lesson plans and journals etc. for analysis. This information was used to determine the teachers’ ability to write lesson plans as well as to assess their personal thoughts about the first year of teaching.

6. Analyze the data.

This research used interviews during the collection of data. Merriam (1998) stated interviews should be used when the phenomena in question cannot be observed. Since this study explored the thoughts of the participants as they pertained to their first year of teaching, and since thoughts cannot be observed, the interviewing process was used. The broad categories covered in the interviews were:

(a) planning and preparing, (b) communication and interaction, (c) teaching for learning, (d) managing the learning environment, and (e) assessment of
Analysis

The analysis of data in a qualitative research study is best conducted simultaneously with the collection of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This simultaneous collection and analysis allows the researcher opportunity to “fill in the gaps” (p. 50) as needed. Miles and Huberman suggested researchers analyze early so that areas of blind spots that the researcher may have can be corrected.

I developed a coding system for coding data as it was collected. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), coding is an efficient way to label the data so retrieval is faster and easier. The next step in the analysis process is in categorizing the data. Categorizing for this research was partially based on the researcher’s intuition as well as on the meanings the participants presented (Merriam, 1998). The categories that developed are reflective of the purpose of the study and are exhaustive.

Merriam (1998) provided several suggestions for categorizing the data. The method that I used was file folders. A copy of the entire interview or observation was made and then I wrote marginal notes as themes emerged. The pages were then electronically separated and put into the categorized folders in a Word Program.

According to Merriam, multiple-case research studies, such as this one, require two steps in the analysis process. The first step is within-case and the second step of analyses is called cross-case. For the first step, each case is taken and analyzed
individually. The researcher then begins to build a bridge across cases looking for “a
general explanation that fits each of the individual cases, even though the cases will vary
in their details” (Yin, 1994, p. 112).

According to Hankins (2003) one of the ways narratives can be used is to create
meaning or reality from the narrator’s perspective. The case presentations, summaries,
and analyses for this study were each written in narrative. For this study, five case studies
were conducted. Each of the interviews were transcribed and read. As the first
participant’s interviews were read, themes that developed were listed on a chart.
Subsequent participant’s interviews were read and compared to the first. When all
interviews were read and major concerns were recorded on the chart, six themes had
emerged, each mentioned by all participants. Three additional concerns were also noted
concerning topics that at least three of the participants mentioned. The stories of the
participants were then written in narrative form.

Reliability and Validity

Construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability are the areas
that need to be addressed in a case study design (Yin, 1994). Construct validity will be
increased by using “multiple sources of evidence”, collecting a “chain of evidence”, and
by allowing “key informants” to review the case study report (p. 34). Data in this study
were collected through observation, interviews and document analysis. I followed the
procedure that was laid forth in the design of the case study and explained each step as it
relates to the next, thus allowing the reader to map each step. Furthermore, the
participants were asked to review their case study and comment on its accuracy before the final report was written.

The next area to be addressed is that of external validity. According to Yin (1994), external validity deals with the generalizability of the study. Results of descriptive studies are not generalizable to other populations, but they can be generalized to “theoretical positions where further tests of the findings can be conducted” (Walker, 1996, p. 44). Following the advice of Yin (1994), I collected data using “replication logic” (p. 45). Additionally, as discussed above, the sample was chosen purposefully. These conditions helped in the establishing of external validity.

The final test is that of reliability. Reliability refers to the consistency of the results if the study were to be replicated (Frankel & Wallen, 2003). The goal in establishing reliability is to minimize the biases of the researcher and to eliminate as many errors as possible (Yin, 1994). To help in establishing reliability for this study, a protocol was followed for data collection. Triangulation is the use of varied methods of data collection (Merriam, 1998). In this multi-case study, I collected data through interviews, document analysis, and classroom observation.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into six sections. These sections are: (a) introduction, (b) presentation of the case studies, (c) within-case analysis of the data, (d) cross-case analysis of the data, (e) discussion of related literature, and (f) summary.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to share the experiences of first year teachers. Of particular interest was how well these first year teachers believed their teacher preparation program had prepared them. Williams, Eiserman, and Lynch (1985) indicated the importance of understanding the problems first year teachers face. Allowing first year teachers to share their experiences can give insight into the problems they encounter. The information obtained from reviewing and conducting case studies can provide teacher educators with a basis on which to make decisions concerning the teacher education program.

Presentation of Case Studies

Four terms, which are used throughout the presentation of these case studies, need to be defined. The first term, critical needs scholarship, is a scholarship requiring those accepting it to work two years in a critical needs school district. Should the teacher choose not to work in a critical needs area after graduation, the scholarship reverts to a
loan and must be repaid. Full certification is another term that needs to be defined.
Teacher graduates seeking certification in the state of Mississippi prior to September 2004 must complete 18 hours in two areas of concentration in areas such as social studies or math. Teacher graduates who successfully complete an accredited education program including these two areas of concentration and who pass Praxis II can receive certification from the Mississippi Department of Education. These teachers are considered “highly qualified.” Each school in the state of Mississippi is issued a school report card each year by the Mississippi State Department of Education. The report contains three kinds of information: (a) teacher qualifications, (b) school improvement, and (c) test data. Schools that do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) are identified for school improvement. Finally, benchmarks are state standards. Each school in Mississippi is required to teach the benchmarks.

The following case studies are the result of five interviews conducted with each participant. The words and meanings in these case studies are those of the participants. Before the final drafts were written, the participants were asked to read and comment on the content, thus using member checking to ensure accuracy.

Kathy

Kathy is a 32-year old white female. As she grew up, she knew she wanted to be a teacher. Many of her family’s close friends were educators, and when she shared this dream with them, they discouraged her from entering the teaching profession. At first, Kathy did not listen to them, and enrolled in the elementary education program at Mississippi State University, but they continued to discourage her and suggested she
reconsider her decision. Kathy also had some negative experiences while in the program. She said she received some incorrect information from her academic advisor and took a class she had already completed at the community college. She also said she had difficulty getting anyone to help her when she had questions. “Honestly, I literally sat up there all day and still did not get my questions answered.” Because of the urging from her friends to get out of education and these negative experiences, she left the program and decided to attend cosmetology school. Kathy’s husband’s job transferred him to another state and so they moved. While in Texas, Kathy had a baby. She was still employed at a beauty shop during this time and was finding it more and more difficult to leave her son to go to work. After seven years in cosmetology, she decided she did not want to cut hair for the rest of her life. As her son began to approach school age, she began to have the desire to finish her degree in education. Kathy had a passion for the teaching field but she also wanted to have a teacher’s schedule, with free summers and weekends. “Little did I know what a teacher’s schedule was.” Her family returned to Mississippi and Kathy re-enrolled in elementary education.

The practicum experiences were the most beneficial part of her education and provided the most practical experiences. Kathy said, “Until you have that practice experience, you know, it’s just unreal.” There were, however, some negative experiences in senior block and struggles during one of her placements in student teaching. During the block, she thought some of the assignments were more to entertain the professors than to give the students practical materials for the classroom. Specifically, the social studies part of the block was taught opposite of the way other professors were instructing them to teach in the classroom. “[It is] exactly what they told us not to how to teach our students.
We had to memorize and take tests on that and I thought, you know, this is supposed to be a methods course.” The science block class was, “the most productive class that I had.” In this class the students actually wrote lesson plans and taught them to each other. Kathy felt this practice was what she needed as a pre-service teacher.

Negative experiences during Kathy’s first placement as a student teacher still affect her. This placement was in a sixth grade class with a veteran teacher. “It was very difficult. I debated whether I should even be a teacher.” The teacher made many negative comments and made Kathy feel as though she did not get the feedback or support she needed as a student teacher.

[The classroom teacher] told me I didn’t need to be a teacher. She just told me a lot of things that really hurt me and I just, you know, I asked to be moved from the placement and I ended up having to stay there, which was really awful.

The main problem between Kathy and the classroom teacher seemed to be differences in classroom management. The teacher allowed the students to engage in activities during class that caused Kathy some concern. Students played video games and did homework during class time. Kathy asked the teacher to discuss classroom management with her so she could learn and was “consistently told I had to figure it out on my own.” The classroom teacher told Kathy she was too harsh with the students and that she could not expect them to be “little soldiers”. Kathy said, “that just really cut me deep because that was not what I was trying to do.” The struggle with the classroom teacher during the first placement of student teaching still makes her second-guess her decisions in the area of discipline. When she disciplines the students, “that still pops into my mind and I hate that feeling.”
Kathy’s second placement was in a first grade classroom and was a better experience. The classroom teacher “was just so wonderful.” A lot of what Kathy learned about teaching was learned during this placement. The classroom teacher had “the best temperament.” She also had a lot of patience with the children. It was from this experience Kathy learned to use the discipline plan that she has in her classroom.

After graduation, Kathy applied for a job in the district where she completed her student teaching. She interviewed with several principals, but thinks she did not get a job in the district because of the negative way the classroom teacher from her first placement talked about her. So, she applied for a job in her hometown and was hired. The school where Kathy is employed has 100% of the core subjects taught by “highly qualified” teachers. The school has been identified as a level three school. This rating indicates the school is successful by state standards. The school has not been identified for the school improvement program.

There have not been a lot of positives for Kathy during this first year. Professional development meetings are required for first year teachers. These took place every Wednesday afternoon and Kathy thinks valuable instructional time is lost. An assistant came in to the room and taught the class during this time. Kathy did not think the information presented during these meetings was useful. Many of the topics discussed were topics that were discussed in college.

In addition, Kathy thought there were too many different programs being implemented at the same time. “There are so many programs going on at this school that it is difficult to make any of them very effective. There’s too much.” Sometimes she was overwhelmed with all of the meetings required by the different programs being
implemented at the school. “I am one of those teachers they tell you not to be in college. [They tell you] don’t teach out of the book. That’s all, time-wise, that I can do.”

Kathy had to plan intervention lessons for students who did not pass the benchmarks. These lessons were in addition to the regular curriculum. Every student had to have a separate lesson plan for each benchmark that was not passed. The paperwork for the interventions was overwhelming. “I mean it has been overwhelming the amount of information that I have to fill out on each one of these children.” Even after working diligently to complete interventions as directed there was still more work. After completing the first set of paperwork required for the intervention and doing additional work, Kathy was assigned more work when she went to the next meeting. “So, now I can see why teachers are taking forever to get these done because this is what they have next. And then what’s after this?”

Another issue was the lack of support from the Teacher Support Team. There was very little support for Kathy from this group.

Nobody has given me any recommendations. I have not met with a group [offering suggestions like], Why don’t you try this intervention out? Why don’t you do this? And that’s to be Teachers’ SUPPORT team. The name implies that you are going to have some support and that you are going to have somebody to talk with and give you feedback. No, I have come up with the interventions on my own. I have written them down on my own. The only thing that anybody has talked with me about is how I feel about all of my paperwork.

Kathy learned a little about planning intervention in college, but she was not prepared for this amount of paperwork or for the lack of support. “I mean I have been very overwhelmed, very overwhelmed and not prepared in the least for this.” There did not seem to be any support system in the school. “There are no relationships in this school that I have seen.” Teachers do not work together or plan together. One of the
reasons Kathy wanted to become a teacher was because she thought she would get to work closely with other professionals and share ideas and work together with others as part of a team. “I love talking about teaching. I really have a passion for [teaching].” Kathy begged other teachers to stay after school and talk about how they could incorporate centers into the classroom but found that no one wanted to do anything extra. “We don’t meet. We don’t talk. Nobody wants to go above and beyond anything that I have noticed.”

Tension between teachers was another area that was bothersome this year. “When I asked if they were going to do anything special when parents came to visit, one teacher [made] a spectacle out of me, like my question was so stupid.” Because of this kind of reaction, “I just quit asking.” Sometimes the teachers in the surrounding classrooms did not speak, making Kathy “feel like I have leprosy. It is tough when you are a [first year] teacher and trying to fit in and it’s tough when you’ve got people that won’t look at you or speak to you.” It was difficult to deal with these kinds of issues in addition to just being a first year teacher. Sometimes Kathy had the feeling that some of the teachers think, “Your first year is supposed to be hell, and I am here to make sure that it is.” Although there seemed to be a feeling of the other teachers being mad at her, Kathy cannot think of anything she might have done to create this, but she said, “I will think it to death until I think of something.” Family members told Kathy she was going to have to get some confidence in herself.

I do have confidence but it is nice to have somebody back you up by saying ‘sure’. Especially your first year, you need that. Just pleasant attitudes, and it’s just, it’s not a good feeling. You do what you hope is the best thing to do and put a smile on your face and try to be as positive as you can be and just stay away from the people who are negative and I feel like that is a whole lot of people.
In addition to not having a relationship with the other teachers, there was not a mentor relationship either. The mentor teacher assigned to Kathy was not a classroom teacher. She was the coordinator for one of the reading programs. If there was a question about anything other than the reading program then someone else had to answer it.

Even if I have a question, most of the time she can’t [answer it]. I have to go ask somebody else. She is a very sweet lady. [However,] even the stuff I have told you about there is no way that she and I would ever have that [kind of] conversation.

Kathy thought there was a double standard concerning the way some teachers were allowed to discipline students and how others were allowed to discipline. Some of the teachers seemed to have the freedom to be very harsh with the students and to “put their hands on them,” while Kathy was told she should not touch their face to direct them to look her in the eye. “I’ve been told it would be better if [I] just didn’t touch their face, but then I see stuff like this happen and it’s a double standard.” Many of the teachers at the school yelled at the children and it frustrated Kathy that sometimes she fell into that pattern. “It makes me physically ill to fuss all the time. You know, sometimes I do raise my voice. I hate that.”

At the beginning of the year Kathy was comfortable with the principal and liked her. However, by the middle of the year, “I feel if I had to go and say something, like if I have to take a child to the office, I feel very, just knots in my stomach. I feel like [they are] looking at me and questioning my judgment and [asking], ‘Why are you bringing a student in here?’ Sometimes I [think there is an] attitude of, if you are a first year teacher, you suck.”
Kathy was also uncomfortable about asking the administration to fill out a reference form. Although she would like to change schools or maybe even districts she is concerned about what kind of reference the principal would give her. The principal only evaluated her once this year and the only feedback from that observation was the principal telling Kathy she did a good job as the principal left the room. Kathy asked another teacher about when she might get some feedback from the observation and was told they usually don’t get any feedback, but they have a right to go ask to see the evaluation. The teachers who want to leave the school filled out evaluations for each other because they did not want to go to the principal. “We feel like she would think we were being traitors or something.”

There were minimal discipline problems in Kathy’s classroom and she expected the students to obey the rules and act appropriately for their age. “These kids are in third grade and they know how to act.” There were five rules posted that students were expected to follow. Each child had a pocket on the classroom discipline board with his or her name on it. If a rule was broken, the child who broke the rule put a stick in the pocket with a number on it that corresponded to the broken rule. A lot of time was spent at the beginning of the year calling parents and sending students to the office. Kathy was determined that she was going to have control of the classroom. “I feel I have to have two things. Children need to be able to follow my directions and show respect. If they can do that, then I can teach.” Although she second-guessed herself a lot in the area of discipline, Kathy had a very well structured classroom and minimal discipline problems. Kathy said she questioned her decisions in the area of discipline because of some of the comments that were made to her during her first student teacher placement and because she was not
sure how the school administration wants her to handle problems. One thing that was surprising to Kathy was that the school still used corporal punishment as a form of discipline. Even though Kathy had paddled, because she thinks that is what the administration and the parents expect her to do, she did not like it. “It’s definitely a last resort, but I still don’t like doing it at all.”

One of the worst experiences for Kathy this year was when she called a child’s home because the child constantly talked during a test. “I warned him several times and I warn them all the time, do not talk during a test.” During the test, the child would not stop talking so Kathy took his paper and told him he would not be able to finish. “I ended up taking his paper because this wasn’t the first time this had happened and I feel like he doesn’t feel like there are any consequences for doing anything wrong.” When Kathy called home, an older sibling answered the phone and told Kathy the mother was not available. Kathy asked him to have the mom call her back because she was having some behavioral problems with the child. The brother, who was about 22, said he would come up to the school and handle the problem. Kathy told him she did not know what he could do, but to please ask the mom to call. Kathy was concerned that the brother said he was coming to the school so she went and discussed it with the assistant principal. The assistant principal said, “Yes, I know him and I know his family. He’ll be up here in a minute.” Kathy’s class was at special subjects at this time. She went to the library to look at science fair projects. As she was returning to her classroom she saw the brother in the hall talking to the child from her class. Kathy talked with the brother and told him she usually does not have any problems with the child, but this time he would not stop talking after repeatedly being asked to be quiet. The child started crying and told Kathy and his
brother someone else was cheating off of his paper. This was not possible because each child had privacy folders around their test paper. Kathy told the brother she had taken up the child’s test and then she had to leave to pick up the other students from special subjects.

After Kathy had been back in the room for five minutes, “I hear, I meant I had my door shut, and I hear a child screaming and I hear whapping.” Kathy did not know what was making the noise. She opened her door and,

It kept going on and I am standing there thinking somebody is being beat. I mean because you could hear the whap, whap, whap. [I stood] there and thought, what am I gonna do? Do I do anything? I mean because some parents, I mean this is a school that has paddling, and some parents don’t want you to paddle them, but they come up [here] and they take care of it and I’ve heard it. But it stops! This kept going and going and going. After a few seconds of standing there like well, do I do something or what do I do, it kept going and going and I’m like I cannot let this go on.

Kathy did not know it was the child from her class being spanked until she walked down the hall and opened the door to the boy’s restroom. Kathy intervened and told the older brother to “cut it out.” “I was shaking like a leaf, cause I guess he could have turned around and whacked me and beat the crap out of me.” When the administration was informed of what happened the response was, “maybe he won’t be anymore trouble in your classroom.” “It was all I could do to keep from going to the office and saying y’all can find somebody else to work here, because I refuse.”

The experiences this year dampened Kathy’s desire to be a teacher.

I am looking very hard to have a good year next year. I really feel like it was a calling for me to do this. I enjoyed learning about it. I enjoy talking to people about it and if somebody would just sit down and plan with me, I mean, if I could do that everyday you know, just discuss it and plan it and doing things like that, but I mean I just don’t have it. I don’t have that here.
Overall there was a feeling of isolation. To Kathy, if there were someone she could have talked to and plan with and share her thoughts and feelings with, things would have been better.

During spring break, Kathy went on a retreat with her church and while there she resolved not to be so overwhelmed with everything. Things at the school did not change. Relationships with teachers did not change. There was still no mentor and no one stayed late to plan or discuss school issues, but she decided to calm down and let things go that needed to be let go. She decided not to internalize everything and she thought she was doing a lot of that. “I would let stuff like somebody not talking to me [worry me]. I could not sleep at night.” Kathy constantly asked herself, “What have I done? What’s tomorrow going to be like?” She does not do that anymore.

Now, I’m still having difficulties teaching in certain areas and I want things to be better. [But] on the inside, I don’t have the emotional burden that would go along with some of the things that have happened here.

There was a change in the attitude Kathy had toward the people she worked with. At first she felt like,

Fine, if they’re not going to talk, I’m not going to talk either. But then, after coming back from [the retreat] I just decided, they can be as ugly as they want to be. I’m not going to. I speak to them everyday and they walk right past me and sometimes they speak and sometimes they don’t. But that’s fine. If I didn’t say anything, they wouldn’t speak to me. But that’s ok.

Kathy summed up her first year and how she has felt when she said,

I have gone home crying at nights thinking, I would never want my child to be in my classroom. I hate that feeling. I hate it. But, nobody wants to talk to you to make it better or help you. And I think I’m a big girl. Maybe I should just be able to do it myself.
Julie

Julie is a 25 year-old white female. When she started college at MSU she wanted to be a teacher. Her mom was a teacher’s assistant at a school and discouraged her from enrolling in teacher education. Julie first enrolled in the marketing degree program, changed to physical therapy, and then changed her major to psychology. None of these choices satisfied her. Finally she said, “I just decided not to listen to my mom anymore and I was going to go to school to be a teacher.” She went to a junior college and made the best grades she had ever made and then transferred to Mississippi State University and enrolled in the elementary education program.

Julie enjoyed school, but was frustrated during student teaching with having to turn in assignments to the university and carry out duties in the elementary classroom. She thought it would have been better if she worked as a paid employee in the classroom during her student teaching and not had to worry about all of the additional assignments that were a part of the teacher education curriculum. She also thought it would have been beneficial to have practicum experiences in a variety of grades. She thought teacher education students needed to spend less time in the university classroom and more time in the school classroom. “You learn in the classroom, but you learn by doing.” Since becoming a teacher, Julie realizes she needs to know more about teaching reading. She thinks everyone should be required to get a remedial reading certificate, because of all of the emphasis put on reading in the schools. A remedial reading certificate requires 15 hours of course work in the area of reading and includes a class in diagnosing and remediating reading problems.
Although Julie had a good experience in senior block, she did get very frustrated with having to work with teaching partners. She had two teaching partners and they could never seem to get their different schedules coordinated so they could meet to work on their projects. “When you get in the classroom you aren’t going to have two other people helping you.”

As far as learning about classroom discipline is concerned, she said, “We learned some stuff, like proximity and stuff like that. They taught us to use a happy tone when we spoke to the children. I try to use my happy voice, and then by the end of the week it’s just like, where’s my happy voice? I don’t know what it sounds like anymore.”

Julie said the professors at college told her the first year would be tough. She knew she would have to learn to be organized and to manage herself. But, she did not think she was really prepared for the first year. Julie thought college did not really prepare her for teaching. “You have to learn as you go.”

While in college, her parents helped her with as many living expenses as they could. Because of financial issues, however, she applied for a critical needs scholarship. She was employed in a critical needs area. According to Julie, teacher turnover was high and many new teachers to the area do not return for a second year. The school where Julie was employed had 100% of the core subjects taught by “highly qualified” teachers. The school had not been identified for school improvement. The school performance level was a level two which indicates that the school is under-performing.

One of Julie’s most stressful experiences this year was concerning the classroom assistant. The assistant, Betty, constantly did things she did not have the authority to do. She sent notes home to parents telling them their children were not doing well, and if the
parents did not get involved the children would fail. Julie told her, “Do not call parents. Do not write notes.” But, Betty continued to do so. When the principal was informed of the problems, she defended Julie and told Betty she would have to do as Julie asked. However, nothing changed. At the beginning of the year Julie thought she could be more easily replaced than the teacher assistant. “The assistants here can get away with anything because they are so hard to replace.” She worried about the principal holding her responsible for the actions of the assistant because the principal told the first year teachers it was their job to be sure the assistant was working. The principal said, “If I come to your room and [the assistant] is not doing what she’s supposed to, I’m going to hold you responsible.”

In January, Betty was moved out of Julie’s classroom, but still did things to frustrate Julie. For example, Betty brought a gift to one of the students in the cafeteria and gave it to the child at lunch in front of the other children. The other students did not understand why they did not get gifts. Julie was very frustrated and said, “How can you justify that in your head and doing it in front of the whole class?” Julie was also frustrated because Betty did not tell the students she was moving to another room. One Monday she was in Julie’s classroom helping the students, and the next day was her first day in the other classroom. The students did not know she was moving and Betty did not tell them she would miss them or why she would not be there anymore. Julie said, “I just couldn’t imagine doing that. If I know I’m not going to be here, [I tell the students in advance], I’m not going to be here. I’m going to miss you. I want you to act really good.” But Betty just left without a word.
The new assistant, Monique, made Julie feel like she had a “whole new attitude.” Monique did everything Julie asked of her. She helped with the students and respected Julie’s decisions. At the beginning of the year, Julie had decided she would not be back for another year. It was too stressful to deal with the assistant everyday and feel like she was doing the assistant’s job and her job. But, after getting a new assistant, Julie thought she could handle one more year in the critical needs area, but said she definitely would not be back for a third year. At the end of the second year she will have fulfilled the requirements of accepting a critical needs scholarship and she does not think she can handle another year in the district where she is teaching.

Another issue Julie struggled with was dealing with the principal and the superintendent. The principal was nice and Julie was comfortable with her coming into her room; however, she did not feel like she got any support with discipline. When she sent kids to the office, no action was taken and the students were returned to the room. Last year, the discipline was the responsibility of the assistant principal, but the school does not have an assistant this year, so that leaves the principal responsible and Julie thought she was not very good at disciplining. Most of the time the principal delegated the discipline to the counselor and according to Julie, the counselor only wanted to do was talk to the students.

Julie thought the superintendent, Mrs. Johnson, was unfriendly and Julie did not like for her to come into her classroom because Mrs. Johnson disturbed the class. When she came in the room she brought three or four other people from central office with her. Julie thought bringing that many people in the room at the same time upset the class. When Mrs. Johnson evaluated the teachers at the school, she spoke in generalities with
the principal about problems she saw and the principal then addressed the problems with the teachers. No feedback was specific. This was very aggravating to Julie because she would rather have direct feedback. “How do [I] know if [I am] doing something wrong? If you want me to change it, tell me. Tell me what you want me to change and I’ll be glad to change it.”

Julie also thought there was hostility between the principal and the superintendent. Because of this hostility, Julie thought their school had to follow rules that other schools did not have to follow. One example was the teacher dress code. While the school where Julie worked was constantly receiving reprimands from the superintendent about adhering to the dress code, another school across town did not have a dress code.

Julie did not have a mentor teacher, but believed she found a support base with the other new teachers. She got along with all of the teachers on the first grade hall and they did have peer coaching. The first grade teachers met every Thursday. The lead teacher, Mrs. Brown, was in charge of the meeting and had things assigned by the principal to discuss or the teachers may share problems they were having with their students. The teachers were usually very supportive and helped each other any way they can.

Julie noticed that the teachers who grew up in the local culture with the students were able to discipline differently than teachers who did not grow up in the culture. Julie could not spank students because it was against school policy, but a teacher who lives in the local culture could spank them and there were not any repercussions. If Julie had difficulty with a child and called the child’s aunt, whom she knew would discipline the
child, instead of calling the mother, whom she knew would not discipline the child, the mother would be angry with her. But, if a teacher who knew the family and was familiar with the family culture did the same thing, it would be okay.

Julie struggled with discipline this year. There was a school-wide discipline policy. Every classroom had a green, yellow, red, and blue circle at the front of the room. Green indicated good behavior, yellow was a warning, red meant the child would miss recess, and blue indicated that the teacher would phone home or send a note home to parents. Each child had a clothes’ pin on the chart of circles. When a child misbehaved, his or her clip was moved to the next color. Julie said, “They [the school administration] are real big on everybody being on the same wagon. You know, everybody following the same standards. They’re really big on uniformity.” The discipline plan did not allow for sending students to the office and when Julie does send a child to the office, “nothing is done.” Julie said,

As far as discipline in my classroom, I mean, as you can probably tell, I have none. I can threaten all day and move those clips. It doesn’t do any good. I can write notes home and those parents don’t care, they don’t show up [for parent-teacher conferences].

One of the teachers at the school where Julie worked told the first year teachers they should not smile until Christmas. Before getting in the classroom she said, “Oh, whatever. That’s not true.” But now she thinks it is true. “I didn’t realize that, but now I do. It is so true.” Julie tried to become firmer throughout the year and plans to start the next year out differently. One thing Julie learned was she couldn’t discipline every child the same way. Children, who knew their parents would follow through with consequences if Julie called home, straightened up immediately when their clip was
moved to blue (phone home, note sent home). But, some children would be completely lost for the rest of the day and refuse to learn anything. Julie tried not to move their clips to blue because she knew she would lose them. Julie also learned how important it is to mean what you say. “I’ve learned not to just have meaningless words come out of my mouth. If I say I am going to call mom, then I have to call mom.” The discipline factor was a major problem for Julie. “It is really huge, because those kids, they know nothing is going to happen to them. They know it and they will tempt you.”

Julie was very concerned about her students and frustrated that they did not have knowledge of common things. One day she was reading a poem to them and said the word “breeze”. “Just the other day we were talking about a breeze, like a breeze in the wind. They had no idea what that word [meant]. No clue.” The majority of the students were in a Head Start class, but Julie thinks this did not help them have an educational foundation. “These kids that I work with, they don’t have a foundation. I mean, you are their foundation.”

She thought the parents of some the children were not interested and did not care about helping them. “I’ve dealt with kids who had nobody at home. You know, no support at home. They don’t care if [their children] go to school or not. And so, their children’s attitude reflects the exact same thing.” Julie invited parents to come and visit the classroom and read to the students. Only one parent came and she did not want to read. The first grade class went on a field trip to the zoo and only one parent went as a chaperon. Julie thought there is little parental involvement at the school.

I send them letters home telling them to check out stuff from the Parent Center, which is like useless. It’s like talking to thin air. They don’t care. They don’t read my notes. They don’t do anything they’re supposed to. You get real frustrated.
One of the students missed 40 days of school before spring break. Julie reported it to the truancy officer and nothing seemed to be done. She called the parent and sent notes home with no response. Julie would have hated for the mother (the father is not involved with the child) to go to jail, but she was concerned that there are three or four other children in the family and none of them will attend school.

There are four or five kids out of the same family that aren’t going to finish high school. They aren’t going to be able to hold a job because they won’t have any idea about what it means to be responsible and get up and go to school. [This student] is going to be a little statistic and it just breaks your heart, because you think you can’t do anything.

It was “so overwhelmingly stressful” to handle all of the paperwork required to document student learning. The school where Julie was teaching tracked the students from year to year. Student achievement was documented based on performance on state standards or benchmarks. For every benchmark that is taught, a checklist was filled out with every student’s grade indicating a pass or fail on that particular benchmark. This form had to be filled out every week and turned into the principal who sent them to the central office. If students did not master 80% of the benchmarks they were retained. Students who failed a benchmark had to be constantly retested throughout the year until they showed mastery. This was in addition to the daily grades and unit test grades that are a part of the curriculum. “We are having to teach whatever is [in the reading text] and then we also have to go back and cover what we are teaching that week for benchmarks. So that’s a little bit frustrating.” It seems she was always testing something. It was difficult for her to find time to teach the regular curriculum. If she was teaching the curriculum then she struggled with time to teach the benchmarks. “It’s a lot of work
[keeping up with benchmark grades and curriculum grades]. It’s a lot more work that I thought it would be. You know, not which is bad, but to me it’s pointless work [to have to keep up with both sets of grades].”

The idea behind teaching both the curriculum and the benchmarks was that “your benchmark [grades] should match your daily grades [but] they don’t. I mean they don’t even come close to matching up with your daily grades.” Julie thought this was “frustrating” because the benchmarks are the bare minimum and they do not move beyond that. “There is so much more they could be learning, but we just focus on the bare minimum.”

The restrictions that were placed on the way Julie was able to present the material was another area that was frustrating. The superintendent mandated that the teachers were not to do anything except what is “in the book”. The school had adopted Reading Trophies as the reading text and a Houghton Mifflin text as the math text. The material in the book changed from one topic to the next too quickly for the students and they fell behind. When Julie was teaching the unit on money, the first day they learned the front and back of coins. The next day they were supposed to count pennies and nickels together and the next day they moved to counting dimes, nickels, and pennies. “That’s just too quick. It is too quick for [these kids]. We have to do everything with that book. It just doesn’t make sense.” If she needs to do remediation with some students, she must use the material that came with the book.

I feel like I would get in trouble if I were doing something else, even if they were learning and benefitting from it. [We are constantly told] go by the book, go by the book, go by the book. Then you’ve got to match up your benchmarks with what your testing and if you get behind then your benchmarks don’t match and they get on to you for that.
By April, Julie had decided to start incorporating ideas she felt would work.

I’m to the point; I don’t care [about teaching from the book]. I’ve cared up until this point. I don’t care anymore. I figure if [they] are going to fire me because I’m doing new ideas that I think work in my room, you know, [they] might need to fire me. [I still ask myself], Are my kids learning anything? Each year will get easier and each year will get better and so I’ve got to keep reminding myself that next year I will know so much more than what I knew when I started this year.

Several unnerving events happened in Julie’s classroom this year. One of the students bit himself and called himself stupid. He went to the school counselor for therapy. “He is a six year old little boy who lives in an adult world.” This was upsetting to Julie. She knew he needed help and tried to work with the child, but the principal told Julie that Julie can’t save them all.

Another student stood up in the chair and was making inappropriate gestures. “I mean, real inappropriate gesture.” He was grabbing himself and doing “other things” and Julie saw him doing it. When she took him to the office and explained the actions of the child, he was sent back to the classroom without receiving any type of discipline.

Two other children, a boy and a girl, were caught kissing. “I’m not talking about a [a short little kiss]. I’m talking about grown-up kissing.” The principal said, “Oh, they’re just kids. That is part of life.” This answer aggravated Julie. She did not feel the same as the principal. “I’m sorry. That’s not [part of life]; not for a first grader. I thought boys were icky in first grade. Those two kids; one’s going to have a baby and the other is going to be a daddy.” Julie said nothing in college prepared her for this kind of atmosphere.

This was a rough year for Julie. This year made her not want to teach. Before Christmas she had decided to repay her critical needs scholarship and not return. She
knew her first year would be rough. But, “I had no idea it would be like this.” Although she decided to teach for one more year at the school where she was, some days she still goes home and thinks, “I [don’t] want to be a teacher anymore. This is not what I’m meant to do. I’m not going back there and [no one] can make me.” Julie was aware that this attitude affected the classroom climate and she tried to change her attitude.

Julie felt like she was under a microscope and at any minute she could be sued for making a wrong decision. Before the end of March, Julie felt “burnt out” and was ready for the year to be over. Julie had to have hope that things could be better or she wouldn’t continue to teach. She loves teaching, “but not the things that go with it.” She was frustrated with things like parents who don’t care, the concern over being sued, all of the additional paperwork, and an unsupportive administration in the area of discipline. She said,

I told myself, I was going to do one more year here and one more year [in another school]. It’s got to be better than what it is now, because if it’s like it is now, I probably wouldn’t teach three or four years from now. It’s tough. I’m not one of these people that live in a fairy tale world. I know it’s going to be tough wherever I go, and you’re going to have the same issues wherever you go. But, I just think, I think, I’ve just got to have it in my head [that it will be better].

Suzanne

Suzanne is 22 year-old African American female. As she was growing up she knew she wanted to work with children. At first, being a pediatrician was appealing and she started out her first semester at college in biological science. After realizing how many years of school were required to complete this degree, she thought teaching might be a better option. Suzanne’s parents taught her the importance of a good education and expected her to perform to the best of her ability in elementary school, high school, and
college. She was expected to respect her teachers and other adults in her life. Her parents also expected her to behave both at school and at home. Suzanne has two sisters who are much older than her and left home while she was still very young. Because of this, Suzanne was basically raised as an only child. This influenced her wanting to work with children and created a desire to be with them. Many of her teachers were good role models, as were some aunts who are teachers. The influence of these role models played a part in her decision to change majors. She looked up to these people and admired the work they did everyday. Because Suzanne loves kids and wanted to work with them, she changed her major to elementary education.

To Suzanne, the university professors in the education program did not tell students how it was going to be in the real world. While in the reading courses, she felt good about what she was learning and thought she learned from the scenarios and understood the different aspects of reading. Once in the classroom, however, “when you are actually here teaching reading, it’s something totally different, totally different.”

She did not think her actual classroom experience at the university level helped her become a better teacher. College classes didn’t prepare Suzanne for the classroom because,

We kind of went by hearsay. Instead of actually being out there experiencing it. They (the professors) would basically tell us about their experiences. You know, every experience is different. That’s the tough part, because we went by hearsay and everything may not be like it was for that person, you know, it may be different for someone else.

The senior block experience was very stressful because of the many projects that were constantly due. Having time in the classroom, trying to juggle planning for teaching, and turning in university assignments was difficult. The stress seemed to affect her
health. While in block, a red blotch appeared over her right eye. When block was over, the blotch disappeared.

Even though Suzanne had a bad experience in one of her student teaching placements, she considers the student teaching experience to be the most beneficial for preparing her for the classroom. The first placement, in third grade, was good. The teacher was helpful, offered suggestions, and gave feedback. The principal at the school observed Suzanne, provided feedback, and offered her suggestions. Suzanne became very attached to the teacher and the students, and did not want to leave. This is the part of her schooling where she learned the most and became the most prepared for the classroom.

While in a fifth grade class, for her second placement, there was no feedback from the supervising teacher until the placement was over and then it was all negative comments. The teacher did not offer to help her plan or teach nor did she give her suggestions for improvement. To Suzanne, the problem was that there was not time to go back and correct mistakes. There was no camaraderie between her and the supervising teacher either. “Some days, I honestly did not want to go back. I was glad to get out of there.” The teacher didn’t give her what she needed. While discussing this placement, Suzanne began to cry. It was a very emotional experience for her. She did not realize just how much this experience affected her until she began discussing it. “She never showed me the evaluation. It was unbelievable. I didn’t know what was going on.” The classroom teacher often undermined Suzanne’s authority in the classroom and made comments to the students like, “you aren’t going to treat me like you treat [Suzanne]. When I talk, you are going to listen.” Because of this the students felt like they could treat her however
they wanted. “I didn’t think that was appropriate. I think I needed, especially being a student, I think I needed some help.”

During Suzanne’s senior year she attended an education interview day at the university. She talked with recruiters from all over the state. The principal at the school where Suzanne was employed the first year offered her a job on the education interview day and was persistent, so Suzanne took the job. The school where Suzanne was employed had 100% of the core subjects taught by “highly qualified” teachers. The school was not been identified for school improvement. The school performance level was a level two which indicates that the school is under-performing.

The retention of subject matter was a major concern for new teachers. The anxiety that comes with wondering if the children are grasping the material and worrying if they can reproduce what they have been taught when it comes test time was overwhelming. Even the grades on the weekly unit tests can be frustrating. After reviewing the material with students several times and in several different ways, the students are still not performing up to expectations and they are missing what should be easy and obvious questions. When asked if she thought the way the students were being taught was effective she said, “No, it’s not working, it’s not working. I’ve tried [many different things].” Sometimes she thinks they know or should know the answer, but when they take a test, they mark something different. “To me it’s kind of sad because it puts me in a bad situation. I have tried it so many ways and it’s still not working, so I’m not sure what I should do.” Even though retaining subject matter was such an issue, it was the students’ ability to retain information on one particular comprehension unit that Suzanne described as her most successful teaching experience. The students read a particular story and then
took a comprehension test. They all did a good job on the test and “I felt so good about it. I [said] homework passes for everyone.” Suzanne was so proud that the students had performed well on the unit test that she gave each student a homework pass so they could have a night with no homework.

Sometimes when students were not having success, it was difficult for Suzanne to know when to leave a subject and move on, and when to stay with it and continue to re-teach. Decisions about moving on when you know that some children do not have a good grasp of the concept were very difficult to make.

I don’t know when to stop and when to go on. I don’t. I don’t know. When do you stop even if five out of 16 have learned this and the other 11 have not [learned]? When do you go on?

It was frustrating when it seemed that something should be easy to grasp but the children did not understand after it had been explained many different ways. When asked what she did when this happens, Suzanne said, “I just calm down. I take a deep breath and say ‘whew.’ You know, do it and re-teach it.”

It was also difficult when it was test time and the students were not ready to test. In the school district where Suzanne was employed the central office mandated certain benchmarks that had to be tested within a given nine-week period. On one occasion Suzanne asked for more time to teach a particular skill because she knew her students were not ready.

[It] makes me upset because I don’t want them to take a test and I know they are not prepared for it. I don’t [like] that. It will make them fail. You know, they shouldn’t do that if we are not prepared.

Success was very important to students and she wanted her students to see success. When asked what the main problem was that she was having Suzanne said,
The main problem is actually getting up there and teaching these kids and getting through to them. In the end, I’ll be held accountable for it. So that’s the hardest thing that I have to worry about. Are they going to get it? It reflects on me, but at the same time I’m doing what I am supposed to. That’s the toughest thing. That stays on my mind. That worries me.

Sometimes it seemed that students could not remember something from one day to the next much less retain it for the end of the year standardized test.

For instance, Monday you’ve taught your vocabulary. You’ve introduced it. You tell the kids to go home and study. Well, Tuesday, you come back and review the vocabulary. REVIEW? It’s just like [going] back and actually introducing it all over again.

This resulted in losing time that the class needed to cover the remainder of the material. In college, her professors taught pre-service teachers to be creative and do extra things to help students retain the material. “You don’t have time for creative. You hate to say it. You want to do it; because maybe that is one way somebody else may get it. I want to be creative. I want to do these things that I was taught but I don’t have time [during the school day] for it.”

There was not enough time during the semester to stay on one topic for very long because each nine weeks a list of benchmarks that must be covered during that particular grading period arrived from central office. In a way, that helped keep the teachers on track and was a guide that allowed them to see where they needed to be and what they needed to be teaching their students. However, especially in math, it “tends to go overboard, I mean it is just a lot you have to cover.” At the end of each grading period a benchmark card had to be turned in to the principal. This card was like a checklist that had each student’s name and a list of the benchmarks covered. “If they did not pass, I put
a minus. If they did pass, I put a plus.” A child had scored 80% on a benchmark test in order to pass that benchmark objective.

Students who were making a failing grade in a particular subject area must receive remediation in that area. Benchmarks that were not been passed were identified and then the teacher must write lesson plans covering that benchmark and use those plans as intervention for the child. Suzanne was just beginning to learn about this process after the Christmas break. A teacher support team met together and decided what types of intervention strategies to use. The regular classroom teacher implemented these strategies. When the child passed one benchmark then another failed benchmark was identified. Once success was demonstrated in reaching two benchmark goals the child was released from the intervention program. This system caused some frustration for her. She was not seeing the success with her students that she would have liked to see. In fact, it seemed some of the students were actually doing worse on the post-test than on the pre-test that was given before the intervention started. This was frustrating because “you are actually going over the steps with them and you let them do it by themselves and [they can’t do it]. I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know what to do.” When the students are receiving direct instruction they can complete the assignment correctly, but as soon as they are left on their own, they do not do what they need to do. Suzanne had a lot of questions about this. “Some of them, I am still working on the same objectives that I was the first time. After this time, do you continue to work on it or do you move on even though they may have failed it?” This intervention was supposed to be preparing the students for state testing in early May, but “I know that they are not prepared for that
Next year Suzanne will start teaching the benchmarks at the very beginning of the year. This year she wasn’t sure when to start teaching the benchmarks or when to give out the textbooks so she waited for a couple of weeks after school started. “This [next] year I will be more familiar with it and go on and start. I didn’t know. I was a first year teacher.”

Most of the teachers at the school were helpful and kind. She had a mentor teacher she talked to a lot, but did not really confide in her because Suzanne would rather just talk to her mom. The other teachers on the hall were “older and wiser and they know a lot.” Suzanne was comfortable with them and made friends. She hadn’t found any she could really confide in though. Sometimes it was difficult to know who to talk to because they may be related to the person she was having difficulty with. It was hard to know who was related and who was not, and Suzanne wasn’t comfortable talking with the other teachers about some of the experiences she had.

The administration at the school gave good support. The principal checked lesson plans and wrote helpful comments about how long a unit should take or reminders about upcoming school testing or events. The best thing about the administration was the immediate feedback after a formal or informal evaluation. The principal gave many positive comments, and even stopped and encouraged Suzanne when she saw her in the hall or knew she was having a particularly bad day. The positive and immediate feedback from the principal was very important to Suzanne because of the negative experience
during her student teaching. The superintendent did not visit the classrooms, but could be seen around the hall. He also came to special school events and encouraged the students.

Suzanne had an open and friendly relationship with most of her students and parents. However, she faced some difficult situations this year. At one point, some of the students indicated that it was her fault they did not understand what she was teaching. This hurt her feelings until she came to the conclusion that these were the students who were not taking their education seriously and who often talked or misbehaved while she was teaching. Suzanne had to constantly remind these children to get on task during a lesson.

Another problem was a fight that broke out while the students were rehearsing for a Thanksgiving play. Two boys started arguing and then began fighting. Suzanne wished she had been better prepared to handle a situation like this. “I didn’t step in like I should have.”

She had one child who had an anger management issue and has counseling sessions for the problem. This was the child’s second time in third grade and he begged for attention. Suzanne thought she made great progress with the child this year and comments from the principal confirmed that. She tried several different ways to work with the child and felt good that she developed a relationship with him. “If you give him a little attention, he’ll go on and do what he is supposed to do and if [when he gets out of control] you kind of ignore him and say what you have to say and leave him alone, he’ll calm down.” She did things on the weekend with him and he worked hard to perform in school because he needed the positive attention that came from her.
There was one incident, concerning parents, that upset Suzanne. One of the students in her classroom misbehaved. The parent thought Suzanne was picking on her child and vented these feelings to the administration. One particular incident had to do with a fun day Suzanne had planned. The students were to bring money to Suzanne and she would get special snacks for the day. This particular child, who was in third grade for the second time, had been in trouble on several occasions. On his weekly progress report, Suzanne wrote a note to the parent requesting a parent teacher conference. This was done several times and no response was received from the parent. The rules for being allowed to come to the fun day were clear: You must not get into trouble or you won’t be allowed to attend. This child misbehaved. As a result, his money was refunded and he was told he would not be able to attend the fun day. When he told his mother he couldn’t attend the fun day, she sent a note requesting that she be called concerning the situation.

I didn’t call her because I thought it was very silly. It was over a fun day. [She] was not addressing the issue of what I thought was important, so I didn’t call her. I didn’t call her. No, I didn’t call her. She called up here and requested that we have a conference. I knew what she wrote on that note [and] that it was going to be some trouble and I asked that the principal be present and she was.

The principal let the parent and Suzanne tell their sides of the story and then called some of the students in to tell what they saw and heard. The parent thought her child was being picked on and that Suzanne had called her child ugly.

I haven’t called these children anything but their name or, you know, baby or something, but ugly? That is so childish. That is so childish. I’ve not come up here to pick on her child. That’s not what I come up here for. This is my job.

This meeting was very upsetting and “I was nervous. Honestly, I was shaking.” It was shocking to Suzanne that a parent would be upset about the child missing a fun day and not upset about the child’s misbehavior. In the meeting Suzanne was so upset about
the way the situation had gotten out of control she started crying in front of the principal. When the meeting was over, the principal reassured Suzanne and told her not to let the parent intimidate her. Nothing changed and the child still did not get to attend the festivities. When asked how these kinds of incidents affect her self-confidence she said, “It makes me tougher.”

Another upsetting event was that a child brought a knife to school. Suzanne found it and reported it to the principal. She was not prepared for this type of situation, but felt that she handled it well. The knife fell out of the child’s book bag and another child saw it. She said she doesn’t think the child intended to hurt anyone, but brought it because he wanted attention. There was a meeting with the parents and the principal. The child seemed remorseful and seemed to understand the seriousness of what he had done. The child could not return to school but was to be serviced by some type of community counseling. It is unclear to Suzanne exactly what happened to the child, but he was not allowed back in the classroom. He had to have someone monitor his behavior and he also had to have an IEP developed for him.

Suzanne thought she had good classroom management. She was able to handle the students and get them to behave appropriately. One thing she noticed was that teachers who grew up in the local culture with the students were able to discipline the students more harshly than she was able to. For instance, when some students misbehave, Suzanne sends them to another teacher who is a part of the local culture and they can “put them in line”. If she used the same kind of technique, the parent would probably be angry with her. It was difficult to discipline the students because she did not know the parents or grandparents. She could send the child, with whom she had the most problems, to a
different teacher’s classroom and “[that teacher] may shout at him [or her] and it [will] be no problem.” This was frustrating because she did not think she should have to send her students to be disciplined by another teacher. When this occurs, the child is not learning they must obey the teacher in the classroom. The children know,

[This teacher] cannot put her hands on me, but that she can. [This] puts a strain on me. He is in my class. He’s not disrespecting her or him. He’s disrespecting me. If I can’t discipline this child, it’s going to continue to happen. If I say I’m going to pop you upside your ear that may be a threat from ME, but if this other teacher says ‘if you don’t calm down right now I’m going to come over there and knock you out’ It’s OK.

The same words from two different people make a difference. “That’s the truth. Different cultures, different races, you know, it can be different.”

For Suzanne this was a tough year. It was “good” and it “has been frustrating.” She has learned a lot, but felt the pressure of the end of the year state test. When asked if she thought her self-confidence was getting better, Suzanne said, “No”. She was unsure of how to measure what would be on the test and was worried about the accountability issue. Her biggest concern was how it was going to reflect on her and she was not sure she wanted the responsibility that came with teaching. Being held accountable for the students who don’t perform on the state test was a lot of pressure. “I don’t want to be [held accountable] for them not learning; especially 18 students with four different subjects.” For Suzanne, it is very stressful. If the students did not do well on the test she wondered how that would reflect on her teaching ability. She questioned whether she wanted to continue to teach. It was a struggle because, on one hand she couldn’t see herself anywhere but in the classroom, but, on the other hand, Suzanne thought she could be just as happy doing other things in education, like helping other teachers. For now, she
is going to stay where she is one more year because she plans to continue her education next year by working on her master’s degree. The joy of teaching did not come naturally for her and everyday was different. It was frustrating to know she taught something and thought the students knew it, but then see them not reproduce on the test. Suzanne summed up her feelings for this year when she said, “It’s almost scary. It’s OK to teach. Don’t get me wrong. I like to do it, but I don’t want to have the worry of it when I go home.”

_Sandra_

Sandra is a 25 year-old white female and the mother of twin daughters. At an early age she wanted to be a teacher. However, in high school she took accounting classes and enjoyed them. When she started to college she entered the accounting program. She was in accounting for about a year and decided accounting was not what she really wanted to do with her life. Sandra worked for a nurse at the time, so she changed majors and went to nursing school. After being in nursing for a year, she realized she wanted to teach. She changed majors again and entered the elementary education program at Mississippi State University.

Sandra thought she learned the most in student teaching and in the practicum experience of the senior block.

I learned the most from student teaching, and the last few weeks in block when I wasn’t going crazy trying to pass tests and stuff [that were a part of block]. [The professors told us] you can try this or that in the classroom. But, until you see it or practice it, that’s not very helpful.

Sandra also learned from her reading courses. Some of the strategies she
learned (for instance peer tutoring) she did not implement in her classroom until March. After struggling with children who had difficulty reading, she remembered what she had learned about peer tutoring and decided to implement the strategy.

Sandra thought she learned in college what not to do with discipline problems in the classroom, but no one told her what to do. For example, she was taught not to raise her voice when the students are misbehaving. “Okay, so you never raise your voice. What do you do?” Sandra felt like she needed to know what kind of discipline steps to take in place of raising her voice.

After graduation, she wanted to begin the master’s program, so she did not look for a teaching position immediately. However, toward the end of the summer she realized she did need, for financial reasons, to become employed. When she began looking for a job, there were few jobs still available. In August, one week before school started, Sandra was hired at the school where she is currently teaching.

The school where Sandra was employed has 100% of the core subjects taught by “highly qualified” teachers. The school was not identified for school improvement. The school performance level was a level three which indicates the school is successful.

Sandra taught reading and social studies in a sixth grade classroom. She team taught with Rita Smith who had been teaching for approximately five years. Sandra and Rita did not get along well and Sandra thought Rita undermined her authority. When Sandra disciplined a child in her classroom and that child changed classes and went to Rita’s room, Rita pampered him or her.

If she thinks that I get on to a student, that student is her baby for the rest of the day. I hate it. We’ll go outside and whomever I got on to that day is sitting all around her and laughing and having the best time. They (the students) will even hold it over my head. [They tell me] they are going to tell Mrs. Smith.
Sometimes Rita told the students she did not think Sandra should fuss at them. When the students came to Sandra’s room they told her, “Mrs. Smith says you shouldn’t fuss at us.” Sandra confronted Rita about this. Sandra told Rita if she had a problem with her, she needed to address it with her and not the students. Rita told Sandra she didn’t have a problem with her; however, Rita’s behavior did not change. Because of the tension between them, “We just don’t communicate like we should. We don’t support each other.”

There was another teacher on Sandra’s hall, Mrs. Fisher, who occasionally assisted Sandra in dealing with discipline problems. If Mrs. Fisher heard Sandra out in the hall speaking with a student, she would come out of her room and support Sandra by witnessing her conversation. But Sandra struggled with that too. “I feel uncomfortable about that, because my team teacher is in the window looking at us. I think she thinks it’s us ganging up on her, which we’re not.”

Sandra did have a mentor teacher who taught the same grade. However, the teacher was on a different hall. Sandra did not think she could confide in her. The school day was so busy Sandra did not have time to spend with her mentor teacher. “I don’t feel like I have time to talk to other teachers.” They sometimes write unit tests together and Sandra will tell her things that are taking place in the classroom, but Sandra would not discuss her true feelings about the year with the mentor teacher.

Managing student behavior was very difficult for Sandra. “I feel like I spend most of my time saying ‘stop’ and ‘don’t do that’.” Sandra thought she could not turn her back on the students “for one second.” Even when she turned her back to write on the
board, “it’s chaos.” At the beginning of the year, Sandra and the team teacher had the class roll on a clipboard for each class. When a child misbehaved, a check was placed beside the child’s name. This served as a warning. When a second check was added, the child’s parents were contacted. A third check resulted in a request for a parent-teacher conference. If a child received a fourth check, then he or she was sent to the office.

Because of the tension between Sandra and the team teacher, this plan did not work. Sandra also admitted she did not always follow through with calling parents because calling parents did not always work. Another difficulty with the discipline plan was lack of support from the principal. “When I do follow our policy and they get to the fourth check and I send them to the office, I feel like I am putting [the principal] out.” The principal will call Sandra on the intercom and ask, “Why is this child here and what do I do with him [or her]?”

Throughout the year Sandra tried other methods to manage her classroom. The team teacher allowed Sandra to switch students from one class to another so problem students would not be in the same class. She tried new seating arrangements. After the Christmas break the students were “ten times worse.” Sandra told the students if they would behave until it was time for progress reports to be sent home, the class would have a pizza party. The students misbehaved until “they saw they were getting ready to be out of the pizza party. They would keep going and going and going up to that point.”

At one point, in January, the students behaved so badly Sandra started crying. One of the students left the room and went to get the principal, Mrs. Windham. By the time Mrs. Windham came, Sandra had regained her composure. When the students saw the principal they were completely silent. Mrs. Windham stood in the doorway and did not
say anything to her. Sandra felt “like a complete idiot.” The next day Mrs. Windham spent most of the day in Sandra’s room. While Sandra taught class, the principal cleaned out Sandra’s desk. She threw some of Sandra’s things away and rearranged some other things. Then, Mrs. Windham moved Sandra’s desk to the other side of the room. She did all of this without speaking a word to Sandra. “I was so angry, but I wouldn’t dare say a word.” The following day she was nice to Sandra. Mrs. Windham even found Sandra a new shelf for her classroom.

Sandra did not think the principal had been supportive. Mrs. Windham evaluated Sandra in February. Sandra felt good about the instructional strategies she used the day she was evaluated, but, by March, she still had not received any feedback. Sandra was not sure what Mrs. Windham thought about her. “I’m definitely unsure about how she feels. I have no clue about how she feels about me.” Sandra did not receive positive or negative feedback the entire year. This was uncomfortable for Sandra. “Maybe she just knew I was going to come in and get tortured and leave, so she is not going to spend much time trying to make me feel comfortable.”

As early as October Sandra was frustrated but she was not willing to give up.

I want to [go back to the same school] just because I want to do better next year. There is only one reason why I would want to go back. It is not like I love the people I work for or anything. It is my selfish goal to do better.

In January, she decided she would not teach at the same school again and she went to another district to fill out an application for a job. At this point, Sandra felt like she was babysitting the students. The negative experiences outweighed the positive experiences. “I want to do a good job, but I will not continue to be in this atmosphere where I am so miserable.”
In March Sandra said, “It’s out of control in my classroom.” She was frustrated at this point and did not want to teach anymore. She was only doing what was necessary.

The district office required certain benchmarks to be taught during a given nine-weeks. They also told the teachers when to test the benchmarks.

I teach what they tell me to teach. I give the tests out when they tell me to give the tests out. It’s not that I don’t care. I care about every one of [the students], but I’m just like ‘whatever.’ A lot of my problem is feeling very, very guilty about my lack of interest or my lack of motivation. I think it is a mixture of everything. As far as being a first year teacher and you’re not prepared like you should be, but also, the situation of where I am, and the situation of the students. It’s not just one thing. It’s everything altogether.

By April, she felt she had tried everything and nothing worked. “There are a bunch of different personalities that just don’t go together at all. I’ve tried every seating arrangement. We’ve switched up students. I don’t know. I really don’t.”

In spite of all of the discipline problems, Sandra tried to build a relationship with the students. In the afternoons, after school, she thought she could relax and enjoy the students. With one student in particular she worked to develop a relationship.

He’s probably my worst student, yet very charming. I like him a lot. He’s an excellent drummer. He drums all day long. At the end of class I’ll ask him to come drum for me. Some of my favorite students are probably my worst students. I hate them through the day, but in the afternoon I can enjoy them, when everybody’s gone.

Sandra did not feel the rewards of teaching she hears other teachers talk about. “You hear other teachers say it’s such a good feeling when [the students] learn this or when they do this. But for me, I don’t get the rewards.” Occasionally she teaches a lesson she feels good about “but for the most part [I don’t feel good].” She still wanted to
try teaching again, but not at the same school. “I will wipe tables [first].” Everyday it was
difficult for Sandra to go to work.

I just dread it everyday. I hate that. I hate that I dread everyday. I’ve always been
happy about everything. I want to be happy, but I just dread going there. When I
walk in the room with them, I’m just like ‘Ugh’. Then I feel guilty because I don’t
want them to know that I don’t want to be there.

At this point in the year Sandra felt disappointed in herself and indicated she
would never have chosen teaching if she had known it would be this way. Even with the
negative feelings, Sandra made a decision to do what she felt was best for her students.
She allowed students to go into the hall for peer tutoring. This was one teaching strategy
Sandra felt was helping the students improve their reading ability. However, at a faculty
meeting the principal announced students were not to be in the hall during class time.
Sandra thought the announcement was directed at her and she was frustrated the principal
did not come to her individually.

She doesn’t have to make an announcement in front of everybody. If she has a
problem with me, she can come tell me to bring them back in my classroom and
I’ll do it. These are kids that aren’t doing a darn thing out in the hall except for
helping each other and she knows that. It’s not my personality, but I’m mad about
it now, so I’m just gonna wait until she comes and says something to me. I’m not
doing it for her to come say something to me. I’m doing it because I think it’s
what’s best for my students.

Sandra has been disillusioned this year with teaching. She does not think the first
year has progressed the way she thought it would. “I knew it was going to be hard. It’s
just, you have all these big plans and it doesn’t happen that way. It just doesn’t happen.”

Sandra does not think she was prepared for teaching. She does not think any of
her college professors prepared her for what the first year has been like. Dealing with the
many discipline problems, the students who are not able to perform at grade level,
difficulties with other teachers, lack of support from the principal, and emotional stress have been very difficult. The thing Sandra thought might have better prepared her is more time in the elementary classroom before her first year.

Nobody told me it would be like this. It’s not the teaching part; I love that [part]. I guess just experience helps out. I don’t know. In school they teach you a lot of different ways to do things like Reading Workshop type things, but nothing prepares you for it until you are there.

Sandra has not had any problems with parents this year. When she had parent teacher conferences all of the parents left her room happy and smiling. She felt comfortable with all but one parent. The parent she did not feel comfortable with made her feel like she was stupid. “He thinks he is above teachers. He walked in and said let me see his grades.” When Sandra showed him the grades he said, “Prove it.” Sandra was able to pull the child’s papers and show the dad his child’s work. The parent accepted the grade and did not question Sandra further.

One of the most disturbing events for Sandra this year was Mrs. Windham coming into Sandra’s class one morning and telling her she needed to go to the courthouse to testify against one of her former students. At the beginning of the year, the student, Jody, was in her class and constantly caused problems. Before Christmas he was sent to the alternative school, which is In School Suspension for the district where Sandra teaches. The regular classroom teacher still has to provide work for the students to complete while at the alternative school. The teachers at the alternative school monitor students as they do work supplied by the classroom teacher. The bus transports the students to the alternative school. Jody did not behave at the alternative school either. Sandra did not know why he was in court. She had no advance warning or time to prepare. When she got
to the courtroom Jody and his dad were there. The judge showed Sandra a copy of some anecdotal records and asked if she had written them. They were notes from when Jody was in her class. The judge asked if Jody was disrespectful in class and if he had a hard time obeying. Sandra answered yes to both of the questions. It was a very emotional day for Sandra. She did not learn the outcome of the case until another student told her Jody was sent to a boot camp. She does not know where the camp is or how long Jody will be there.

Another negative experience happened when a child brought a movie from home for the class to watch. The child brought Scream 3. Sandra did not play the movie, but instead played El Dorado, an animated movie that belonged to her. Some of the children said they did not want to watch El Dorado, so Sandra stopped playing it. Carla, one of the students in Sandra’s class told her parents Sandra allowed the class to watch Scream 3. The next day the parent called to complain. Mrs. Windham called Sandra into her office and told Sandra she was going to have to call Carla’s mom and explain to her she did not show the movie. Sandra felt Mrs. Windham approached the situation as though she believed that parent.

I just really would have felt much better if I would have walked in there and felt like, oh of course she knows I wouldn’t do something like that instead of her saying, ‘Sit right here at my desk and call her.’ I would have never played it.

Dealing with a child who attended anger management classes was another difficult situation for Sandra. The child, Lacretia, was very difficult to handle. In January, Sandra had a “mystery” student (a student who would take names of misbehaving students) Michael, take names of students who were misbehaving. At lunch that day, Michael handed a list of names to Sandra and Lacretia saw her name on the list. When
the class returned from lunch, Lacretia started beating Michael. She broke his glasses and bruised and bloodied his face. Sandra could not get them apart. Finally, another teacher came into the room and grabbed Lacretia and pulled her off of Michael. Sandra took them to the office, but did not see Mrs. Windham, because she was at lunch. When school was dismissed that afternoon, Sandra left earlier than she was supposed too because she did not want to talk with the principal. Sandra thinks she does not have a good relationship with the principal and Sandra finds it difficult to talk with her. Sandra never talked with the principal about the situation. The students were sent to alternative school, which is like In School Suspension, for five days. Both of the students were sent to the alternative school because it is school policy that students involved in a fight are sent to the alternative school. Before the end of the school year, Lacretia had been sent permanently to the alternative school because she threatened to stab Sandra’s team teacher and to harm Sandra.

One thing Sandra noticed was that teachers from the local culture were able to say things to the students that Sandra thought would be inappropriate for her to say. The teachers said, “shut up” or they used a harsh tone when speaking with them. Sandra stated the harsh tone used by some of the teachers, was also used by the parents when speaking to their child.

By April, things in Sandra’s classroom had not changed, she still did not have a good relationship with the team teacher or with the administration, but her feelings about returning for another year had changed. “I’ve just accepted things. I’ve decided to tough it out and do it again next year. I had decided I would never do it, but now I’ll do it again next year and see if I can do it.” Sandra thinks she has grown this year.
I have grown. I really don’t know what hit me or made me want to stay, maybe just not being so uptight. I just feel that I’ve had a wild experience this year. I think this year has been a great learning experience for me. I know what I don’t want to do next year. I have(375,168),(760,259) learned to accept that things aren’t going to go as smoothly as [I would like]. I know that next year I can do it.

Holly

Holly is a 23 year-old white female. She knew, from the first day of kindergarten, she wanted to be a teacher. Her kindergarten teacher was nice and pretty. “She had long, big hair and I wanted to grow up and be just like her and be a teacher.” As Holly got older, her desire to be a teacher did not change. She loved kids and there was never a question about what she would do when she went to college. “I just knew.” Most days Holly is happy with her decision to become a teacher, but sometimes she wonders, “What have I done?”

After graduating from high school, Holly married her high school sweetheart. They moved to Starkville and both of them started college. Holly had her first child during her first year at school and thinks that having kids has helped her to be a better teacher. She does not understand how someone without kids can “multi-task” enough to be a teacher. “[Teaching] is all about multi-tasking.”

Holly indicated she didn’t really learn to be a teacher in college because it is not the same until you are totally responsible for every aspect of the students and classroom.

I don’t know how going to school would prepare you for being a teacher, because [there] is so much more [to] being a teacher. It’s paperwork, business, being a disciplinarian, being a mathematician, meeting deadlines, cleaning your room, organizing your room, time management, and classroom management. The list goes on and on and you’re never done. It can be very overwhelming. I think they did try to tell [us] the first year was going to be hard, but hard doesn’t describe it. It’s more like busy and you always have to be on your toes, all the time, and [be] ready.
She did learn about writing lesson plans, how to negotiate and compromise with others, and about parent conferencing. However, she did not feel like she learned how to deal with parents that come to the school angry. “They come up here wanting to get you. I don’t know what they would do to me.”

Senior block, over all, was a good experience. In her methods classes she learned many teaching ideas. Science was the methods class she enjoyed the least. Holly thinks the students were doing most of the teaching. She did not learn good teaching strategies in science and thinks this might be affecting her teaching, because sometimes she does feel like she has to “pull off of things I can find.” Holly did not learn many methods of teaching science. She is having to research to find effective teaching strategies.

Holly’s first student teaching placement, in seventh grade, was a horrible experience for her. “I hated it and cried every day.” At the beginning of the placement the teacher told Holly to plan a unit on myths. When Holly asked what specifically the teacher wanted her to do, the teacher told her to just find anything about myths. “After I’d busted my rear trying to find something to do because [she wouldn’t give me any direction],” the teacher told Holly the material she found was not what she was looking for. Then the teacher produced a book about myths and told Holly to use that book.

After Holly began teaching most of the day, the classroom teacher seldom came to school and, when she was at school, she did not stay in the classroom. When she would come to the room and hear Holly disciplining a student for something, the teacher would get angry with her. “When I would get on to the kids, she would get angry with me. I hated it. [It was] not fun.” Holly thought some of the problems stemmed from differences
between her personal life and the personal life of the classroom teacher. The semester before Holly student taught in this teacher’s room one of her good friends, Martha, was a student teacher in the same class. Martha and the teacher had very similar home life experiences. Both of them were struggling with difficult husbands and children. The two of them seemed to get along fine and Martha loved the experience she had. But, Holly thought because she was happy at home the teacher made her miserable at school.

I go in there and everything is fine with me. My husband is in school and it’s not fun, but you know, it’s all right. I’m fine. I didn’t need her [to confide in]. I didn’t need her to tell me what to do. I had it under control. I didn’t like the way she did [things] at home. I liked the way I had it at my house. I wasn’t going there [to find] a really good friend. I was going there to learn how to teach, not connect with her.

Holly thought she would have learned more from another teacher. “I think I could have learned more from somebody I didn’t feel like had it out for me, because I really felt like she had it out for me. I don’t think she liked me from the get-go.” The entire time Holly was in seventh grade doing her student teaching she, “felt like I was fishing.” Everyday when she would get home she would ask herself, “What am I going to do to stay alive [tomorrow].”

The classroom teacher did not give Holly feedback. Holly thought she made up the evaluations she gave to the university supervisor. The student teachers are supposed to have two evaluations in each placement. The first one is a formative evaluation and the second is a summative. Before the second evaluation, the student teacher should work to incorporate the feedback given from the teacher. Holly said, “She made up all those forms. She did it all at once. I know she did. I told [the university supervisor] that, too.”
This was very frustrating for Holly. She did not receive constructive criticism to help her improve her teaching.

Student teaching in the second grade, which was Holly’s second placement, was a good experience. “The teacher had a good discipline routine in place and the students knew what was expected of them. The kids knew it and I knew how to work it. So, I worked it and they behaved.” The classroom teacher was very encouraging and understanding. Her room was well organized and it was easy to “just come in and [take] her place.”

After graduating, Holly interviewed with several schools. She decided to take a job in a critical needs area. While in college she received a critical needs scholarship. She drove about 40 minutes one way to the work Holly would have taken a job closer to her home if she had not received the scholarship. The school where Holly was employed had approximately 90% of the core subjects taught by “highly qualified” teachers. The school was not been identified for school improvement and the performance level was a level three, which indicates that the school is successful.

Dealing with difficult parents was a challenge for Holly. Holly had one child in her class who complained his arm was hurting. That afternoon, when the students were going home, she told him to be sure and let his mom know his arm was hurting. The next day, when the child returned to school, she asked him if he had told his mom. The child said he had and his mom was going to take him to the doctor. When he went to the doctor, he was diagnosed with a bruised shoulder. The parent came to the school the next morning and was angry with Holly. The child’s mother told the principal that her son had a bruised shoulder and that he had been telling Holly about it for two days. The parent
thought it was Holly’s responsibility to take care of the child’s shoulder. “You know, just a bunch of bologna stuffing!” After talking with the principal and Holly, the parent did finally calm down but, “She came up there ready to get me. I think the parents are known for coming [to the school] for any reason.”

Another difficult situation for Holly was when one of her students bit another student while standing in the lunch line. When Holly confronted him, he became belligerent. He asked her what she thought she was going to do about the situation. He became very disrespectful. “I was so mad. I [told him] he needed to come with me to the office.” When they got to the office, Holly filled out a discipline form. The child laughed at Holly and asked her what she was going to do. He told her he wanted to go to In School Suspension. The mother came to the school and was angry with Holly for disciplining her child. She told the principal she had no idea her child had been misbehaving. Holly had documentation of how many times the child had been in trouble and how many notes she sent home that the parent signed concerning discipline issues. “As far as documenting stuff, I learned that in student teaching. Whatever they do, however they behave, write it down, so when something comes up, you [will have documentation].” The principal decided a paddling would be the best discipline because the child had never been suspended. Holly did not think paddling was sufficient.

Before I realized what I had said, I was like, he is not coming back to my room. No, he’s not coming back to my room. He’s going home. He’s crossed the line. I mean, if he comes back, I’m going to go home because he is not supposed to be here. If he comes back to my room the kids are going to know [they] can do whatever and nothing is going to happen.

The principal changed his mind and the child was suspended. Holly felt good that the principal was willing to change his mind and support her.
One of the most difficult and shocking experiences for Holly this year concerned a parent paddling her child in front of the whole class.

His mama came up to the school and [paddled] him in front of our class. The kids put their heads down. They were just mortified. I was mortified. It was awful.

One day Holly could not get the child to do anything. She kept a record of how many times she had to tell him to turn around and pay attention. Finally, after 20 times of telling him to turn around, she told him she was going to call his mom. The child got angry and “just walked out [of the room] real quick.” Holly went to the principal’s office and the boy was in the office. The child told the principal Holly was not being fair. He said she was embarrassing him in front of the other students because she kept calling his name. The principal told Holly that he could either call the child’s mom or have the county police come, pick him up, and keep him in jail for 12 hours. Holly left the decision up to the principal and went back to her classroom. Approximately 30 minutes later the door to her room opened and the principal, child, and mother entered. When the mother began to paddle the child Holly thought, “Surely, [this is not happening].” Holly was just about to cry when it happened. “I was just like, oh, lord, help us.” Holly told the principal, “Don’t ever do that to me again. Ever. Don’t you ever.” In spite of the situation, she would call the child’s mom again. “[But], we’re not doing that again. I mean, she can come up here and paddle him, but we are not doing it in the classroom like that again.”

Holly struggled with a child who attended anger management classes. Sometimes the child got out of control. He started to shake and he threw his head back and rolled his eyes. “It looks like something Mama hasn’t stopped, when a two year old throws a fit and
Mama doesn’t stop it at two, so it [has] progressed. Now we are in the sixth grade and it’s really ridiculous.” At times, Holly was afraid for the safety of the other children. At one point, after he was released from the counseling program, she documented his behaviors in the classroom. Holly told the counselor, “He has got to be [in counseling]. He doesn’t need to stop going to counseling. He needs to still go.” He was placed back under the care of a social worker and she came and checked on the child regularly.

The first time Holly observed a fight between students she was shocked. A fight broke out on the playground. Holly did not realize what was happening at first. “It was like a herd of cattle, just running [everywhere].” The other teachers knew what was happening and they went to stop the fight. “I really was just kind of in shock, because I didn’t know anything about fights. I hadn’t ever seen one, not at school.”

Holly tried various discipline plans with her class this year. At the beginning of the year she put names on the board and then began sending home behavior reports once a week. When she realized the same children were receiving the same comments on their behavior reports week after week, she stopped doing them. She felt like it was a waste of time.

“I’ve done a lot of different things. I’ve done several different things, just trying to test it out and see [what works].” Holly has paddled students, but she does not like to paddle. She does, however, understand this is what the students are used to happening when they misbehave, so they respond. Holly thinks she has learned which discipline method works for each student. “I know which ones I can call mama and I know [for] which ones, [the] paddling doesn’t work.”
Holly kept her cell phone in her room and called parents immediately if she had a problem with a child. But even that did not work for some children. “You know, after you call [a parent] and nothing happens, you know don’t worry about calling them back.”

Holly decided, “It’s not really being consistent. It’s doing what works.” Different students respond differently to various discipline methods. What works for one student may not work for another student. When the students told her she was treating them differently than someone else she says, “You are not them. You’re you.”

One student gave Holly so many discipline problems he was moved to another teacher’s class. The mother thought Holly was picking on her child.

At first, when they moved him, I was like, great. He’s going to be real good. He’s not going to give [the other teacher] any problems. It’s going to be all my fault. But, no, she has rounds with him too.”

Holly thought the child’s mom could accept the disciplinary actions better, “from a big black lady than from a little white girl.”

Teachers who grew up in the same culture as the students were able to discipline the students differently than those who did not grow up in the culture.

They can get in their face and talk to them, but if I did that, they would just freak out. When my kids get in a fight, I can stand in the middle of them and [tell them to stop]. [A teacher from the local culture] can push them apart [or] pull them by the shirt and ask them if they want to act like that when they grow up and tell them they are going to end up [in jail]. They talk to them just real blunt. But if I did that, it would turn into [an accusation].

The principal was supportive of the decisions Holly made for the students. He also gave good feedback after evaluations. He praised her in the areas she was doing well and then made suggestions for improving other areas. One problem she did have with the principal was lack of communication concerning routine school activities. For example,
she did not know she was supposed to sit in the hall after school and wait for all of the bus numbers to be called. The teachers received a memo in their mailbox telling them they would get a warning in their folder if they were not sitting in the hall. She also found out she was supposed to chaperone a basketball game the day before it was her turn. This short notice frustrated Holly because she has small children that she has to make arrangements for when she needs to stay after school.

Holly did not know she was supposed to follow a particular subject schedule, since a bell doesn’t ring and her class is self-contained. She also did not know she was supposed to post the objective of the day on the board and leave it up the entire day. One day she erased the objective to write assignments on the board. The superintendent came in her room and asked her why she did not have the objective posted. She explained she had erased it and the superintendent asked to look in her plan book to see what was originally posted.

Another time, the principal asked Holly and another teacher to hold a math workshop for the entire school to help prepare the students for an upcoming standardized test. Holly did not mind planning the workshop, but she would have liked to have had more than a one-week notice. Occasionally she was asked to do paperwork on Thursday and have it turned in by Friday. Sometimes it was not possible for Holly to get it all finished.

Overall, Holly felt unprepared about general school rules and issues. No one told the new teachers what they needed to do until they asked and sometimes the new teachers did not know what they needed to ask.
Things you just don’t know about until they come up. [There are] things that you are supposed to do, but you just really don’t know. [I] have pretty much been out in the water just swimming along.

The school did have a mentor program, but Holly said, “it does not work.” The teachers, who are assigned as mentors, were busy with their own classrooms and forgot they were supposed to be mentors. “They always have things they need to do. How can they, all the time, think about [me]? They’ve got as much stuff as I do, you know, and more.” Holly made friends with the veteran teachers on the same hall, but confided in another first year teacher. She talked with another new teacher regularly about different situations and they have relied on each other to survive the year. Holly thought it would be nice to have someone to talk with who had been through the same experiences.

Holly covered the required benchmarks, but thought she started out too slowly at the beginning of the year and had to rush to finish before standardized tests in May. It was hard for her to determine when she should leave a concept and when to continue to re-teach. She thought at the beginning she was spending too much time on certain concepts. “I was waiting [for everyone to catch on] but I can’t. I don’t have time. [Even if] everybody’s not on the boat, you are going to have to leave some.” She does not know how she will determine when to move to a new topic. She knows which skills she must cover. “I’ve gotta teach those skills and I feel like my smarter kids are feeling rushed, like I am trying to get in everything. I feel like they know that I am rushed. The other ones are just lazy.”

Holly got frustrated when she thought the students understood a skill, but when they “do it by themselves [they can’t do it].” For example, before students took the Terra
Nova, a standardized test, Holly had just finished teaching fractions. As she was walking around during the test she saw students adding numerators and denominators.

I was like, What! What are you doing! Oh, my gosh! I taught you every which way. You told me [how to add fractions] out loud. What are you doing?

Holly had a student she thought did not try on the test. She looked at his paper one time and he was on question nine and then in less than two minutes he was on question 30. When the test was over, Holly told them, “I am very disappointed. I am very disappointed in you. I am very disappointed in myself that I couldn’t make you want to make good grades on this test.” She worked to prepare them for the standardized test. On every unit test she gave multiple-choice questions that were similar to questions that would be on the standardized test. It was very frustrating to see students not doing their best.

According to Holly, gaining student respect was important for student performance. “Not only do you have to sell a lesson, you have to sell yourself. You’ve gotta make them respect you. You’ve gotta sell what you want them to learn.” Holly thought if she find common ground with the students and built a relationship with them, they would perform better on their schoolwork.

Holly thought that because she taught in a different culture than the one she grew up in, she had an especially difficult year. “Not only did I have to learn the first year teaching thing, but [I had to learn] a whole lot about the culture thing.” She thought she would be a better teacher next year because she better understands the culture of the students with whom she is working.
Balancing her personal life and her school life was a difficult task. Many nights Holly took work home. “I try not to, but I have to.” To Holly, “I am in route or at work from 6:30 until 4:15 everyday. That is 10 hours out of my day, right there. “I can have five hours by myself with my family.”

One day, Holly wants to have more children and be a stay-at-home mom. She has already decided that she will not teach forever. When her husband finishes school and begins a full time job, Holly wants to quit work. She has become somewhat disillusioned with the teaching profession. “You don’t realize how much [work] it is. I don’t think you could realize how much [work] it is until you do it.”

Holly described this year as a roller coaster ride.

Sometimes [I] feel like I’ve got this figured out. I’m doing everything just right. And then sometimes [I] get at the bottom and [I’m] like what’s going on? Have I done anything right this year? I think at first I [wondered], what have I done? I’m not going to make it. Because, I mean I had never seen a fight. I didn’t know anything about drugs. You know, all those things. I was just like, WHAT? I didn’t have a clue. Every day is a learning experience. I went from having no clue to having some clue.

With-in Case Analysis

Kathy

Summary

Kathy teaches third grade in a self-contained classroom. As a child she knew she wanted to teach. Because of being discouraged from teaching by family members, she went into cosmetology. She did this for seven years before returning to college and completing a degree in elementary education.
Kathy faced some negative experiences in senior block and in one of her student teaching placements. Specifically, Kathy thought the social studies part of block did not give her the teaching strategies she needed. One of her student teaching placements was difficult because the classroom teacher did not share teaching ideas or classroom management concepts with Kathy.

The paperwork required to plan interventions for students not passing the benchmarks was overwhelming for Kathy. It seemed there was never an end to the paperwork. She did not receive support from the Teacher Support Team with the interventions.

Kathy’s mentor teacher was not helpful. She was not a classroom teacher, but directed one of the reading programs. Kathy felt like the mentor teacher was only able to answer questions that pertained to the reading program. Kathy did not have a good relationship with the veteran teachers who taught on her hall or with the administration. She felt isolated and alone.

Kathy spent time at the beginning of the year teaching the children the rules which she expected them to follow. She called parents and sent many notes home at the beginning of the year and thought she was able to handle the discipline issues in her classroom. However, she thought she received little support from the administration in this area. She felt uncomfortable talking with the administration about discipline issues and about other concerns she was facing.

The teachers from the local culture were able to discipline the students differently than Kathy thought she was able to discipline. They were harsher in their approach to discipline. This was frustrating to Kathy and she thought it was a double standard. She
was also shocked when a brother of one of her students came to the school and paddled the student. She interrupted the paddling and told the brother to “stop.”

Kathy indicated she needed to have a better experience next year to continue teaching. She hopes to change schools and thinks changing schools may help her to succeed. She was so frustrated at times she cried and wondered what to do to make the situation better.

*Analysis*

Kathy needed the support of someone who could understand the uncertainties of a first year teacher. It would have been beneficial for her to have someone she could ask questions of and share frustrations with, without the fear of being labeled as someone who couldn’t teach. She needed someone to teach her the day-to-day happenings of teachers. She needed guidance in how to plan and implement interventions. She also needed instruction in how to approach the administration with problems and how to deal with other professionals who are difficult to work with.

It would have been helpful for Kathy to have training in understanding the local culture before teaching in this environment. What she experienced upset her because she did not understand the local culture beforehand. She needed training in more than teaching different cultures. Kathy needed to understand the local culture.

The education program offers many opportunities for pre-service teachers to teach in a classroom setting, but few opportunities for pre-service teachers to be a part of the whole teaching experience. Being in front of a class or working one on one with students was enjoyable for Kathy. These are the areas she had experience in and what she learned
how to do during her college years. The things she didn’t learn about in college: the detailed planning of interventions, the endless meetings, the negative interactions that often occur between beginning and veteran teachers, and the uneasiness of interacting with the administration were frustrating to Kathy. She did not know how to handle these things. She did not have training in dealing with these difficult situations. Because she did not have training in these areas, she was frustrated to the point of leaving the teaching profession.

When Kathy could successfully teach a lesson based on an observation that used the STAI as a measurement, she was told she was prepared for teaching. What she was not told or prepared for were the other duties required of a teacher. Now, unless she is able to develop on her own the ability to handle these situations and others like them, she will, most likely, leave the teaching profession.

Julie

Summary
Julie knew as a child she wanted to teach school. While in college, she received a critical needs scholarship and is currently teaching in a critical needs area. She teaches first grade.

Julie enjoyed school, but felt frustrated during block because of having to turn in university assignments and plan for lessons in the elementary classroom at the same time. She had difficulty during block trying to work with partners and arrange meetings around their schedules. She thought she needed more experience in how to teach reading.

Julie indicated she did not learn enough about classroom management in college. At the beginning of the year, she felt she had little control in her classroom. By the end of
the year, she thought she had better control, but was still not satisfied with her classroom management.

Julie did not feel support from the principal in the area of discipline. The school-wide policy did not recognize sending students to the office as an option. However, occasionally Julie did send students to the office, but they were not disciplined.

The teacher’s assistant who worked with Julie at the beginning of the year did not perform the duties Julie requested. She also continued to do things Julie asked her not to do. Julie complained to the principal. In January, a new assistant was assigned to Julie’s classroom.

Julie did not have an assigned mentor teacher, but thought she found a support base with other new teachers. The veteran teachers at the school were nice to Julie and the school did have a peer-coaching program. However, Julie confided in and shared her concerns with the other first year teachers.

Teachers from the local culture were able to discipline students differently than Julie. Julie could not paddle students because it was against school policy. However, the teachers from the local culture did paddle the students.

Julie was concerned with the students’ lack of general knowledge. Though most of the students had completed the Head Start Program, she felt they did not have any educational foundation. She also thought that many of the parents were unconcerned for their children’s education.

Dealing with paperwork required to document student learning was overwhelming for Julie. Documenting student outcomes on the benchmark tests and
keeping track of student achievement within the regular curriculum required a lot of paperwork. Julie thought keeping up with both sets of grades was too much work.

Julie saw a student making inappropriate gestures and two other students kissing. She was shocked at these events. She did not feel prepared to deal with this kind of behavior.

Julie had a difficult year. She has decided to teach another year where she is currently teaching. If she does so, Julie will not have to repay the critical needs scholarship. She also plans to teach for a third year in a different district. However, if she does not have positive experiences over the next two years, she will not stay in the teaching profession.

**Analysis**

In addition to the training Julie received in how to teach, she needed more training in the everyday duties, which are required to be a teacher. At the university, she learned techniques for teaching the subject areas. She also learned how to plan integrated lessons and how to present them to a whole class or a small group of children. These are not the areas that Julie struggled with her first year. However, what Julie did not learn: working with difficult paraprofessionals, working without parental involvement, dealing with lack of support from the administration, and planning interventions often frustrated her. She needed opportunity to be exposed to the real world of teaching.

Julie received a critical needs scholarship. Nothing in her college education prepared her to teach students or work with parents in a critical needs area. Julie needed additional training in how to work with these low level students and how to relate to their
parents. She needed someone to prepare her for the environment in which she would be teaching.

Julie needed training in how to work with students and teachers from a culture different from her own. Some of the frustrations Julie faced were a result of not understanding the local culture. Having an understanding of the culture in which she was teaching might have benefited Julie when she needed to make instructional and disciplinary decisions.

Julie did not receive extensive training at the university level in classroom management. More training in classroom management might have been beneficial for Julie, specifically in the area of discipline. She needed training in how to handle difficult students without sending them to the office. She also needed training in how to handle unexpected student behavior.

It might have been beneficial for Julie to receive instruction in how to integrate the benchmarks with everyday lessons planned from the textbook. She did not understand how these two components should work together as parts of the whole curriculum. Further instruction concerning how to create lessons that teach the benchmarks and come from a textbook would have been useful.

Julie needed someone with experience in the teaching field with whom she could share her frustrations and from whom she could receive advice. Julie found support in other first year teachers who were having similar experiences. However, she needed someone who could guide her, not necessarily someone who could only empathize with her.
When Julie successfully completed her education courses and student teaching, she was informed she was prepared to be a teacher. Although Julie felt confident to teach, the other duties she had to master to be successful frustrated her to the point of leaving teaching. If, in the next two years, Julie does not gain an understanding of how to handle these issues, she will not continue in this profession.

Suzanne

Summary

Suzanne always wanted to work with children. Her love of children influenced her decision to become a teacher. She teaches third grade.

Suzanne did not think her college professors told her about the real world. Once she entered the classroom, things were totally different for her from the way she expected. Senior Block and one of her student teaching placements were very stressful for her.

Teaching the benchmarks required by the central office each nine weeks was frustrating for Suzanne. She was required to teach mathematics material at a faster rate than students were able to retain it. Those students who did not pass the benchmark tests had to receive remediation. The remediation process was frustrating for Suzanne because she did not see the results she anticipated.

One experience with a difficult parent upset Suzanne. The parent accused her of picking on the child. When she confronted the parent, Suzanne was so upset she was shaking. Another difficult experience was dealing with a child who was in anger management counseling this year. She thought she made progress in developing a
relationship with the child and by the end of the year saw some improvement in his behavior.

There was some anxiety concerning student learning. Knowing when to move to a new subject or when to continue to re-teach was not easy. Suzanne was also concerned about how well students were grasping the material.

A mentor teacher was assigned to Suzanne at the beginning of the year. Although she liked her mentor teacher, Suzanne did not confide in her about difficulties. Suzanne indicated that it was difficult to know to whom she could talk because the person she was talking with may be related to the person with whom she was struggling.

One frustrating situation for Suzanne was that teachers who lived in the local culture could discipline more harshly than Suzanne. She learned she could send difficult students to a different teacher’s classroom and that teacher could discipline the child in a way Suzanne could not. This irritated Suzanne because she thought she should have the right to control the students without having to send them to another teacher.

According to Suzanne, teaching is “okay”. She has struggled with the decision of whether or not to continue in the teaching profession. She was overwhelmed with being accountable for how well students perform on state tests. She is not sure she will continue to teach because she doesn’t want the “worry of it.”

Analysis

Experiences in the elementary classroom prior to being solely responsible for a classroom, which allowed Suzanne to see the whole teaching experience, would have been beneficial. She received ample training in how to prepare lessons and teach them to
students. However, she did not receive training in dealing with other responsibilities that are required of those in the teaching profession.

Suzanne needed strategies for working with students who need remediation. She also needed instruction on how to decide when to move to a new topic and when to continue to re-teach. She did not have a broad knowledge of how to offer remediation for students who are struggling with a concept while at the same time allowing students who grasp the concept to move to new material.

Opportunities to learn how to manage the amount of paperwork required to document student learning of the benchmarks would have been useful to Suzanne. Understanding of how to incorporate the benchmarks with planned lessons from the textbook would have been valuable. Suzanne separated teaching and testing benchmarks from teaching and testing the textbook. Learning how to blend these could have lessened her feelings of anxiety.

Suzanne did not have another person in the teaching profession with whom to share her deepest concerns. She needed someone in whom to confide without concern for whether that person may be related to others. She needed someone who could offer guidance in dealing with difficult parents or difficult students.

Suzanne needed training in understanding the local culture. She needed an understanding of how the people in the local culture related to one another. She struggled with not having the right to discipline the students in the same manner that teachers from the local culture were able to discipline.

It would have been beneficial for Suzanne to understand how state testing could affect her job. She was concerned with student achievement on the test. Suzanne thought
the students were not ready for the test and felt frustrated with the pressure of accountability. Having a grasp of the accountability process would have been helpful.

Suzanne, most likely, will not continue in the teaching profession. She enjoys teaching; however, she was overwhelmed with the accountability issues. The pressure of accountability and the non-teaching responsibilities of being a teacher are causing Suzanne to rethink teaching as a lifetime profession.

_Sandra_

Summary

Sandra knew from a young age she wanted to be a teacher. She teaches sixth grade social studies and reading. Sandra has a team-teacher who teaches the other subjects.

Sandra thinks she learned what not to do in college, but not what to do. She did not feel prepared for her first year. She indicated more practicum experiences would have been beneficial to her.

By the middle of the school year, Sandra had a sense of dread when going to work. She taught and tested the benchmarks as required by the superintendent. At this point she felt frustrated with teaching.

Sandra struggled with maintaining control in her classroom. She indicated that all she said was “stop” and “don’t do that.” Dealing with a child who attended anger management counseling was extremely difficult for Sandra. Sandra felt that her classroom was “out of control.”
A mentor teacher was assigned to Sandra at the beginning of the year, but she taught on a different hall and Sandra did not feel comfortable confiding in her about the frustrations of the year. Another issue that was frustrating for Sandra was tension between herself and her team teacher. The two did not communicate or work well together. To Sandra, the administration was not supportive. She did not think she could address any area of concern with the principal.

The veteran teachers who were familiar with the families of the students and who grew up in the local culture were able to speak to the students differently than Sandra thought would be acceptable for her. For instance, the veteran teacher may tell a student, “I’m gonna call your mama and tell her I’m gonna whip you.” Sandra felt she would not be able to make a statement like this to one of the students. Sandra also thought the teachers from the local culture were able to use a different tone of voice with the students. She noted many parents spoke to their children in the same tone, but she did not think it would have been acceptable for her to use the harsh tone.

Sandra did not have a good experience during her first year of teaching. She was disillusioned with teaching and disappointed in herself. Sandra indicated she loved the actual teaching, but everything else she was dealing with made her “miserable.”

**Analysis**

When Sandra was observed during student teaching and successfully passed the measures on the STAI concerning managing the learning environment, she thought she was prepared to manage the classroom environment. However, she did not have the strategies necessary to deal with students who were constantly disruptive or students with
severe behavioral issues. She had not received training in dealing with students who needed anger management counseling. She struggled with maintaining control in the classroom because, though she knew what not to do, she did not know strategies for maintaining order.

She did not have the ability to appropriately pace learning of students, specifically those working below grade level. Sandra needed instruction in how to work with remedial students. Furthermore, she needed to understand how to incorporate the required benchmarks with the regular curriculum and how to determine when to move to a new concept and when to continue to teach or re-teach the concept.

Sandra needed to have a veteran teacher to share her concerns with. She needed support from the teachers she worked with. She needed support from the administration. Without the support of experienced teachers, Sandra lost interest in creating an environment where students had the opportunity to excel and did only what was necessary to survive the year.

Having an understanding of the local culture would have been beneficial to Sandra. The teachers who grew up in the local culture were able to speak in harsher tones to the students than would have been acceptable for Sandra. Sandra thought students responded to the harshness because of the way their parents speak with them. Sandra; however, did not think it would have been acceptable for her to speak harshly to the students. Sandra needed more than an understanding of how to teach a diverse group of students. She needed an understanding of the local culture.

It was not actually teaching that caused Sandra to dread going to school every morning. She dreaded going to school because she did not know how to deal with
disciplinary problems. She did not know how to work with teachers who were difficult. She did not know how to relate to the administration or how to handle the required paperwork.

Sandra is planning to teach another year. She needs to have a positive second year. If she does not learn how to carry out the responsibilities required in the teaching profession, other than simply teaching, she will leave the profession.

_Holly_

**Summary**

Holly always knew she wanted to be a teacher. While in college she received a critical needs scholarship and is currently teaching in a critical needs district. She teaches sixth grade in a self-contained classroom.

According to Holly, college cannot prepare you to be a teacher. There are so many other things required of teachers than just teaching. One of her student teaching placements was very difficult. She cried and struggled to survive the experience.

This year has been a lot of work for Holly. The work has not been hard for her, but it has been time consuming. Many days she was overwhelmed with the amount of things required.

Dealing with difficult parents was a hard task. Holly was not sure how parents would treat her and at times thought they might “get” her. She also had a difficult time when a mother disciplined her child in front of the class.
Holly dealt with a difficult child who attended anger management counseling. The child sometimes got out of control in the classroom and Holly was sometimes concerned for the safety of the other children. One child she had discipline problems with was moved to another class. She also struggled with when to continue to teach a topic and when to move on to the next topic. Holly felt frustrated when students did not perform to the best of their ability on standardized tests.

Holly thought she had to learn the local culture to gain the respect of the students. It was important for Holly to find common ground with the students. She also thought teachers from the same culture as the students were able to discipline the students differently than teachers from a different culture.

This year has been a busy year for Holly. She believes that it is important for teachers to know how to multi-task in order to be successful. She does not plan to continue to teach forever. Holly plans to have more children and be a stay-at-home mom.

*Analysis*

Holly dealt with many difficult situations this year. Though she felt overwhelmed sometimes, she was able to deal with each situation without wanting to quit teaching. Each time she would began to feel confident in her abilities a new situation would arise that she had to learn to deal with.

It would have been beneficial if Holly had better understood the local culture in which she worked. Holly did not understand the background of the students or the environments in which they lived. She did not understand the discipline tactics of some of the parents. Learning about how to interact with the local culture before teaching in this environment would have been beneficial.
Holly was teaching in a critical needs area. She needed someone to guide her in understanding the issues a critical needs school faces. Holly was not prepared to teach in a critical needs environment.

Training in how to deal with difficult students would have been useful. Holly had difficulty dealing with a child who attended anger management counseling. Holly needed someone to guide her in dealing with this issue.

Holly needed to understand the balance between teaching the benchmarks and teaching lessons planned from the textbook. She needed to learn how to incorporate the benchmarks with the textbook, rather than think of these two separately.

Holly did not have an understanding of how to pace student learning. She questioned herself about when it was appropriate to move from a topic, even though some students did not show mastery. She did not understand at what point to move to a new topic and when to continue to re-teach. Knowing how to write a lesson plan is not the same as knowing how to pace student learning.

Holly found support from another first year teacher. She needed the support of a veteran teacher who would understood school policy and school routine. She needed someone who could guide her in balancing school and home life. Holly needed a veteran teacher she could talk to and who understand Holly’s concerns as a first year teacher. She needed someone who was not too busy in his or her own classroom to help a first year teacher be successful.

Holly will not continue in the teaching profession beyond three or four more years. There is too much conflict between Holly’s home life and school life. Holly will leave the profession to stay at home with her family.
Cross-Case Analysis

The participants for this study were selected to reflect diversity in the areas of race, place of employment, grade taught, and whether or not the teacher had been a traditional or nontraditional student. These factors did not seem to influence the experiences of the first-year teachers. Both Caucasian and African-American first-year teachers participated in this study. One of the participants, Kathy, returned to college after several years of working in cosmetology and was a non-traditional student. Two of the participants, Julie and Holly, worked in critical needs school districts, as part of the requirements for receiving a critical needs scholarship while attending Mississippi State University. Two sixth grade teachers were in the study. One of these teachers, Sandra, worked in a departmentalized setting, while Holly worked in a self-contained classroom. All of the participants indicated they had a desire to teach at an early age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Grade Taught</th>
<th>Place of Employment</th>
<th>Traditional or Non-traditional</th>
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<td>North</td>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Sixth grade Self-contained</td>
<td>South East</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 Demographics of Participants
Six themes emerged that were raised by all five of the participants. These were: (a) feeling of being overwhelmed, (b) dealing with student misbehavior, (c) concern for student learning, (d) ineffective mentoring, (e) understanding the local culture, particularly in the area of discipline, and (f) lack of commitment to remain in the teaching profession. These themes are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Each of the participants felt overwhelmed with the amount of work required of them. Specifically, the paperwork required for reporting student performance on the benchmark tests and integrating the benchmarks with the lessons planned from the textbook were mentioned by each participant during interviews. During college, these students managed to put together professional portfolios, write integrated lesson plans and study for tests. They were able to plan lessons for an elementary classroom during block and student teaching and turn in university assignments, yet they felt overwhelmed at the amount of paperwork required when they entered the classroom. Tests, writing lesson plans, and developing notebooks had been a part of their lives since entering college, yet they had not received training in the kinds of paperwork required of teachers.

Dealing with student misbehavior was an issue for all of the participants. Kathy dealt with discipline problems at the beginning of the year, but was able to solve classroom discipline problems and felt like she had control in the classroom. Suzanne, Sandra and Holly each had a child who received anger management counseling in their classroom. These children were especially difficult. No part of the pre-service training taught these teachers to work with students dealing with anger management issues. Though classroom management may have been addressed in different areas throughout
their program, at no point did they receive intensive training in a range of strategies for handling classroom management problems.

All of the participants were concerned about student learning and wanted to have a classroom where students could succeed. They all tried different strategies to encourage student learning. The participants specifically faced anxiety over when to “move-on” from a particular topic and when to continue to re-teach. The participants could effectively plan lessons for a given subject on a given day. Learning to write lesson plans is a large part of their training as pre-service teachers. But, they did not understand how to determine when it was appropriate to move on to a new topic or when they needed to re-teach.

None of the participants were part of an effective mentoring program. All of the participants except Julie were assigned mentor teachers, but none of them felt comfortable to confide in them. Kathy’s mentor teacher was not a classroom teacher, but directed one of the reading programs at the school. The other mentors taught on a different hall or were too busy to take time to listen to the concerns of the participants. Suzanne mentioned being cautious about what she said to the mentor teacher because she could not be sure to whom the mentor teacher was related. Though in four of the schools a mentoring program was in place, they were not effective programs. It would seem that simply assigning a mentor teacher to a first-year teacher is not enough.

Though each of the participants could incorporate multiculturalism and diversity into the lessons they planned as measured by the STAI, each of them struggled with understanding the local culture in which they taught. Two of the participants struggled with understanding the discipline methods used by some of the families of their students.
All five of the participants found that teachers who grew up in the local culture would discipline the students more harshly than they could discipline. This included paddling, raising their voice at the students and “putting their hands on them.” The teachers from the local culture were African American as were the students they disciplined in this matter. Suzanne, who is African American, found the same difference in discipline techniques at her school as the Caucasian participants.

None of the participants are committed to remain in the profession. Each of them expressed disillusionment with teaching. All of them expressed a need for a better second year. Because of the difficulties the first-year teachers faced this year, they are apprehensive about staying in the profession. If situations do not improve over the next two to four years these teachers said they would not remain in the profession. Holly does not plan to continue to teach after her husband finishes school. She plans to become a stay at home mom.

In addition to the themes discussed above, three concerns were discussed by at least three of the participants. These were: (a) negative student teaching experiences, (b) conflict with parents, and (c) difficulties with other professionals. These concerns are discussed below.

Kathy, Suzanne, and Holly had a negative student teaching experience in one of their placements. Kathy debated whether or not to continue her education. Suzanne and Holly both felt like they did not receive appropriate feedback from the classroom teacher. Perhaps student teachers are not being matched appropriately with veteran teachers for their student teaching experience. It could be that some veteran teachers who allow student teachers to be placed in their classrooms are not trained to guide a student teacher
to success. According to Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1987) it is the responsibility of the cooperating teacher to discuss with the student teacher how to determine what students know, how to extend that knowledge, how to teach what students need to learn, and why certain teaching strategies were employed. The cooperating teacher needs to become a part of the teacher education process.

Julie, Suzanne, and Holly all dealt with difficult parent situations. Julie and Holly taught in critical needs school districts. Their lack of understanding of a critical needs situation might have contributed to their difficulties. Each of them faced accusations by parents concerning treatment of their children. These conflicts resulted in the administration becoming involved. Though these pre-service teachers had developed in student teaching a plan for parental involvement, they did not receive training in how to work with angry parents.

Three of the first year teachers struggled in their relationships with other professionals. Julie struggled with the teacher’s assistant. Kathy and Sandra had conflict with veteran teachers. Interestingly, these same three participants also felt discord between themselves and the principal. It is possible that the support system in the schools were not set up to encourage positive relationships between the administration, veteran teachers, and first year teachers.

Each of the participants stated a love for teaching but a frustration with the other responsibilities that are part of the profession. All of the participants had a concern for student learning and drew from their teacher education training for strategies to implement. By the end of the year the participants were confident enough in their instructional decisions that they were willing to defend those decisions even in the face of
opposition from administrators or veteran teachers. Their teacher education program prepared them well for actual teaching responsibilities. However, they found that teaching requires more than presenting information to the students. Though expressed in different ways, each of them stated there was more involved in teaching than they initially thought. Kathy said, “I have been very overwhelmed and not prepared in the least for this.” Julie loves teaching but “not the things that go with it.” Suzanne doesn’t “want the worry of it when I go home.” Sandra said, “It’s not just one thing. It’s everything altogether.” Holly summarized how each of the participants felt when she indicated that there was so much more to being a teacher than simply teaching. These first year teachers were prepared to teach, but not to be teachers.

Discussion of Related Literature

The research question posed for this study was: How do graduates of Mississippi State University describe their first year teaching experience? Six themes emerged that were raised by all of five of the participants. These were: (a) feeling of being overwhelmed, (b) dealing with student misbehavior, (c) concern for student learning, (d) ineffective mentoring (e) understanding the local culture, particularly in the area of discipline, and (f) lack of commitment to remain in the teaching profession. Three additional concerns were discussed by at least three of the participants. These were: (a) negative student teaching experiences, (b) conflict with parents, and (c) difficulties with other professionals.
The sense of being overwhelmed with paperwork and duties other than teaching was discussed by all of the participants in this study. Ryan (1970) found that teachers had to learn during their first year how to accomplish non-teaching tasks. McCarra (2003) indicated the major problem of first year teachers as determined by her study was the sense of being overwhelmed.

Ryan (1970) found that first year teachers struggle to maintain discipline. Applegate, et al (1977) found that discipline issues in the classroom were a consistent theme throughout the experiences of the participants in her study. Bullough (1980) conducted a study with Kerri, a first year teacher. She also had to learn during the first year to maintain discipline in the classroom. Participants in this study were challenged by discipline issues, which they faced throughout the year.

In spite of conflicts with the students, the first year teachers in this study were concerned with student learning. The teachers were concerned with how well students would be able to retain information. They were also concerned with when to move from a particular topic and when to re-teach. Martin (1991) conducted a study with first year teachers and found these same concerns. Walker (1996) found that non-traditional first year teachers were also concerned with the development of the students. Veeman (1984) and McCarra (2003) found that dealing with slow learners was a concern of first year teachers.

The first year teachers in this study expressed concern over the ineffective mentoring programs. Even those teachers who were assigned a mentor did not receive support from the mentor teacher. McCarra (2003) and Veenman (1984) both cited inadequate guidance and support as an issue raised by first year teachers. The participants
in McCarra’s study suggested mentoring as a proposed solution for the problems they faced as first year teachers. Yet, first year teachers, who participated in this study and who were assigned a mentor, still raised the issue of lack of support.

Understanding the local culture was a concern raised by the participants in this study. Headley-Howell (1997) found graduates of education programs report little time spent on the challenges of teaching students from diverse cultures. Brooks (1998) found that first year teachers indicate a need for more instruction in the area for planning and preparation, specifically as it relates to students from cultures different from the teacher’s culture.

Four of the participants in this study indicated they would not continue to teach if things did not improve over the next year or two. The fifth participant decided before she began teaching she would not remain in the teaching profession. According to Kemis and Warren (1991), teachers’ commitment to the profession is highly correlated with the confidence teachers have in their ability to teach. This could explain some of the concerns these teachers have faced this year. Each of the participants began their teacher education training with a strong desire to become a teacher. Following a difficult first year, four of the participants indicated that they might be happy to work in some other field of education. The participants were not committed to remain in the teaching profession.

Three of the participants in this study indicated they had a negative experience while student teaching. Each of them had a difficult experience in one of her placements. A search of the literature did not find any studies that addressed this theme.
Conflict with parents of students is another theme that emerged with three of the participants. Kerri, a teacher in a study conducted by Bullough (1989), dealt with frustration as it related to parents. She felt intimidated by some of the parents and was discouraged at their lack of involvement. Being able to communicate effectively with parents was a concern of first year teachers in a study conducted by Corley (1998). Veenman (1984) and McCarra (2003) also cited concern over relationships with parents as a problem.

Lundeen (2002) raised the issue of beginning teachers struggling with their relationship with other adults. Ryan (1970) discussed the conflicts first year teachers face and labeled conflicts with veteran teachers as an area of concern. The first year teachers in this study also discussed conflicts with other professionals as an area of concern. Interestingly, the three teachers who felt conflict with other teachers or paraprofessionals also faced conflict with the administration.

Summary

This chapter introduced the five participants of this study, provided within-case and cross-case analysis and discussed the findings as they related to the literature. The participants taught in diverse settings. Four Caucasians and one African-American participated in the study. They were all females and graduates of Mississippi State University.

Six major themes emerged from the data. These themes were: (a) feeling of being overwhelmed, (b) dealing with student misbehavior, (c) concern for student learning, (d) ineffective mentoring, (e) understanding the local culture, particularly in the area of
discipline, and (f) lack of commitment to remain in the teaching profession. Three additional concerns of three of the participants emerged as well. These were: (a) negative student teaching experience, (b) conflict with parents, and (c) difficulties with other professionals.

All of the themes, except the negative student teaching experience, could be found in the literature. Every first year teacher faces concerns that are unique to their situation. However, themes that are universal to first year teachers emerged from this study.
CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to share the experiences of first year teachers. Of particular interest was how well these first year teachers believed their teacher preparation program had prepared them. The research question that was posed for this study was: How do graduates of Mississippi State University describe their first year teaching experience? This chapter is divided into three sections: (a) summary, (b) implications, and (c) recommendations.

Summary

The review of related literature presented case studies that give insight into the situations that first year teachers face. Each first year teacher faces problems that are unique to his or her own experiences; however, a review of case studies conducted with first year teacher found that similar problems consistently arise among neophytes.

Ryan (1970) followed six teachers throughout their first year of teaching. Five themes emerged from this study. These themes were: (a) how teachers learn to teach, (b) the shock of the familiar, (c) the immense amount of learning that takes place the first year, (d) the struggle to maintain discipline, and (e) conflicts that first year teachers face.

Applegate, et al (1977) conducted a study with first year teachers and found that many of the same themes emerged as did in Ryan’s (1970) study.
The participants in a study conducted by Ryan, et al (1980) struggled with the adjustments from student to adult life. They also had to adjust their preconceived ideas concerning the teaching profession. Kerri, the participant in a study conducted by Bullough (1989) also found preconceived ideas had to be adjusted. Though some of Kerri’s difficulties were unique to her experience, she faced many issues common to first year teachers. Issues such as managing the classroom, discipline issues, motivating students, and struggles with parental involvement emerged. Martin (1991) found the 10 first year teachers who participated in her study faced many of these same issues.

Studies conducted over the last 20 years found first year teachers face many struggles. McCarra (2003) found beginning teachers still face similar problems. These problems have changed positions when ranked from most important to least important, yet problems such as (a) dealing with slow learners, (b) burden of clerical work, (c) lack of spare time, (d) heavy teaching load resulting in insufficient preparation time, and (e) dealing with problems of individual students remain a major concern for beginning teachers.

Literature as it pertains to the Student Teacher Assessment Instrument (STAI), which is the instrument used to evaluate student teachers at Mississippi State University was presented. Jones (2001) indicated a committee of experts associated with Mississippi State University developed the STAI. A task force appointed to examine student teacher assessment adopted the STAI. Following this adoption, several universities worked together to develop a rubric for the items on the STAI. The document is divided into five areas. The areas are: (a) planning and preparation, (b) communication and interaction, (c)
teaching for learning, (d) managing the learning environment, and (e) assessment of student learning.

The literature that pertains to the five areas of the STAI was presented. The literature pertaining to beginning teachers in the area of planning and preparation indicated that these teachers often desired more training in planning and preparation, especially as it pertains to dealing with students from diverse backgrounds. Beginning teachers struggled with understanding those from a different culture unless they moved and began living in the culture. Moyles (1995) found that helping children to appreciate the contribution made to society by people of diverse backgrounds was a struggle for first year teachers.

Though the area of communication and interaction on the STAI involves communicating and interacting with students, it also includes developing a relationship with parents. A review of the literature found that beginning teachers are concerned with developing a relationship with parents. This is also an area that principals stress as important. Lovette (1996) indicated that though university supervisors encourage students to communicate with parents, rarely are the students offered strategies for dealing with uncooperative or hostile parents.

Having knowledge of the subject matter, being able to give clear directions and using technology appropriately are all items covered under the teaching for learning area of the STAI. Gratch (1998) found that early experiences and extended experiences in the field were useful in helping first year teachers have success in teaching for learning. Putnam and Borko (2000, as cited in Samuels, Rodenberg, Frey, & Fisher, 2001)
indicated that professional development experiences are best developed with extended field experiences combined with instruction in the university setting.

Managing the learning environment is the fourth area covered on the STAI. Stewart-Wells (2000) identified classroom management as an area in which beginning teachers desired more training. Discipline and management were areas of concern for beginning teachers who participated in a study conducted by Gee (2001).

The last area covered on the STAI is student assessment. According to INTASC (1992) teachers should use both formal and informal assessment strategies and use the results of these assessments to plan future instruction. Moyles (1995) noted that beginning teachers think of assessment and instruction as two separate entities. Atwood, et al (1995) indicated that beginning teachers might feel comfortable in the areas of hands-on learning, but struggle with student assessment.

This chapter also stated the purpose of this study. The purpose of this study was to share the experiences of first year teachers. Of particular interest was how well these first year teachers believed their teacher preparation program had prepared them. Additionally, the research question was given. The question was: How do graduates of Mississippi State University describe their first year teaching experience?

Finally, the limitations of the study and the definition of terms for the study were given. A limitation may be the way that the presence of the researcher affected the participants. The important thing, according to Merriam (1998), is that the researcher be aware of the effects and account for them.

A multiple-case study design was used in this research. Because this research was exploratory and descriptive, and because it had multiple cases, the replication approach to
multiple-case studies was employed. As the researcher, I was the instrument used for the collection of data.

Five first year teachers participated in this study. All were females who graduated from Mississippi State University and were teaching for the first time during the 2003-2004 school year. Four of the teachers were Caucasian and one was African-American. Two taught in a critical needs school district. The study included: a first grade teacher, a third grade non-traditional teacher, an African-American third grade teacher, a teacher who taught in a departmentalized sixth grade classroom, and a teacher who taught in a self-contained sixth grade classroom.

I observed in each of the participants classrooms and interviewed the participants five times. During the fifth interview, the participant read and commented on their case. All of the participants, except Holly, submitted lesson plans for analysis. None of the participants provided a journal. The participants were overwhelmed with their first year and did not keep a journal for this study.

The collection and analysis of the data were conducted simultaneously throughout this study. Construct validity was increased by using “multiple sources of evidence”, collecting a “chain of evidence”, and by allowing “key informants” to review the case study report (Yin, 1994, p. 34). The data were collected through observation, interviews and document analysis. The participants were asked to review their case study and comment on its accuracy before the final report was written. External validity was established by using “replication logic” as discussed by Yin (1994). Additionally, the sample was chosen purposefully. Reliability was established through the use of a protocol for data collection.
Chapter III provided an answer to the research question. The research question was: How do Mississippi State University graduates describe their first year teaching experience? The participants were introduced in this chapter through a presentation of the individual case studies. Then, the within-case analysis was presented. Kathy needed someone with whom to share the frustrations she faced as a first year teacher. She felt overwhelmed with duties other than actually teaching. Understanding the local culture, planning interventions, working with veteran teachers, and working with the administration are areas where Kathy needed additional training. Julie may have benefited from further training in the everyday duties required by teachers. She struggled with working with paraprofessionals, parental involvement, lack of support from the administration, and planning interventions. She felt overwhelmed at the amount of required paperwork. Julie did not have an understanding of the local culture and she struggled with classroom management. Suzanne needed strategies for planning remediation and for deciding when to leave a topic and move on to a new topic. She also needed someone with whom to share her concerns. Furthermore, Suzanne did not understand the discipline procedures of the local culture or how outcomes on the state test could affect her job. Sandra did not have a grasp of how to appropriately pace student learning. It may have been helpful for Sandra to be able to share her frustrations of the first year with a caring veteran teacher. She also needed an understanding of the local culture. Holly struggled with the paperwork required for documenting student progress. Additionally, she found teachers from the local culture could discipline differently than what was acceptable for her. If Holly had a veteran teacher with whom to share her frustrations, it may have lessened her feelings of being overwhelmed the first year.
Next, a cross-case analysis, which offered a comparison of the participants, was given. Six themes emerged from this study. These themes were mentioned by each of the participants. They are: (a) feeling of being overwhelmed, (b) dealing with student misbehavior, (c) concern for student learning, (d) ineffective mentoring, (e) understanding the local culture, particularly in the area of discipline, and (f) lack of commitment to remain in the teaching profession. Three additional themes emerged that were mentioned by at least three of the participants. These are: (a) negative student teaching experiences, (b) conflict with parents, and (c) difficulties with other professionals.

Finally, a discussion of themes that developed from this study was related to the available literature. All except one of the themes that emerged from this research are recurring themes throughout the literature. The only theme that did not appear in the literature was negative teaching experiences. If pre-service teacher educators will listen, first year teachers will share experiences that can lead to meaningful changes in the development of programs which train future teachers.

Implications

This study asked first year teachers who graduated from Mississippi State University to share their experiences. When first year teachers reflect and share the experience of their first year, teacher educators are better able to understand the problems of first year teachers, and therefore, can make informed decisions concerning the training pre-service teachers will receive. Williams, Eiserman, and Lynch (1985) stated, “Understanding the problems first year teachers face could provide information useful to
their training” (p.2). This study, when read by the education faculty, could provide a better understanding of problems first year teachers are facing. Understanding these problems could lead to more informed decisions concerning curriculum as well as placement of student teachers.

Each of the participants in this study repeatedly expressed a feeling of being overwhelmed. McCarra (2003) stated, “As MSU and MSU-M graduates enter the teaching profession, they need to have continuing contact with those who have known and loved them during their pre-service training” (p. 121). This implies the necessity to put in place a follow-up program for MSU graduates whereby the faculty can have continued contact with these first year teachers and offer them a support system.

The results of the study indicate these first year teachers wanted more time in the elementary classroom before actually entering the teaching profession. The feeling of being overwhelmed could be reduced if education faculty provide “real world” scenarios while in the university classroom and allow for extended periods of time in the elementary classroom, in addition to those experiences already provided. Perhaps other measures of success, in addition to the STAI, should be employed before pre-service teachers are deemed prepared for the teaching profession.

Another implication is that school districts need to choose mentor teachers who want to be involved in helping first year teachers succeed. The findings of this study indicated that, for these five participants, mentor teachers were not offering the support that is vital to a first year teacher’s success.

Providing instruction in the area of dealing with student misbehavior, with particular emphasis on students with anger management issues, would be helpful. These
first year teachers expressed concern with dealing with classroom management problems. They each expressed a need for more training in this area.

First year teachers need to understand the local culture in which they are teaching. The first year teachers in this study struggled with understanding the local culture particularly as it relates to discipline methods. Training pre-service teachers to understand the importance of understanding the culture may be beneficial.

Two of the participants in this study raised working in a critical needs school as a possible reason for some of their difficulties. These participants received a critical needs scholarship while in college and were employed in a critical needs school district. This critical needs scholarship endeavors to draw teachers to the critical needs area. Teacher turnover is high in these areas. In addition, these areas are generally plagued with less parental involvement and more student misbehavior. First year teachers face a myriad of problems that are only exacerbated when combined with the issues critical needs districts face. Although the critical needs scholarship was not part of the research originally, it is an issue that developed out of the interviews.

Allowing first year teachers to share their experiences provides benefits to those who will listen and to the first year teacher who shares. Another implication from this study is the importance of allowing first year teachers to discuss their experiences. Each of the participants said being able to share their experiences with someone, without being concerned with professional repercussions, was therapy for them. If teacher educators and school administrators will listen to first year teachers, adjustments can be made at the university and the school level to help increase a commitment to the teaching profession in Mississippi.
Recommendations

The participants in this study indicated a need for more practicum experiences prior to entering the first year of teaching. It is recommended that the education faculty re-examine practicum experiences offered throughout the education program to determine if teacher candidates are receiving exposure to “real-life” teaching experiences, both at the university level and in the K-8 classroom setting, prior to graduation.

I recommended that a follow-up program be established at Mississippi State University. Implementing a follow-up program will allow education faculty to know how their instruction is assisting first year teachers. The program will also help faculty make informed decisions concerning areas of training that need to be added or deleted from the elementary education program.

Further study in how to strategically place student teachers is recommended. Three of the five participants had a difficult placement in student teaching. Each of them thought these difficulties affected their first year and robbed them of learning vital information that might have contributed to their success. The difficulties the participates faced seemed to stem from the cooperating teachers lack of communication with the participant.

It is recommended the critical needs scholarship be re-examined. If retaining teachers in the profession is a priority, then it should be determined if pre-service teachers who accept a critical needs scholarship and teach in a critical needs district face a higher rate of attrition than do teachers who teach in areas which are not critical needs. There is a need for determining how teaching in a critical needs area affects first year teachers.
It is also recommended that further study be conducted in the area of training first year teachers about the importance of understanding cultural differences. The participants in this study all faced difficulties with understanding the local culture. This was true of both Caucasian and African American participants.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

STUDENT TEACHER ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT
FORMATIVE STUDENT TEACHER ASSESSMENT

June 2004

College of Education
Mississippi State University

Name_____________________________ Social Security Number________________________
Semester/Year____________________ Grade Level/Subject___________________________
School___________________________ Supervisor Completing Form__________________

About this Instrument: The assessment of teaching performance is based on ten standards developed by
the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). The standards are incorporated
into six domains: 1) planning and preparation, 2) communication and interaction, 3) teaching for learning,
4) managing the learning environment, 5) assessment of student learning, and 6) professionalism and
partnerships. Two analysis scales have been developed to assist the supervisor in determining the student
teacher’s performance: Occurrence - 1) not evident, 2) somewhat evident, 3) evident, 4) very evident, and
NA) not applicable or NO) not observed; and Effectiveness - 1) not effective, 2) somewhat effective, 3)
effective, 4) very effective, and NA) not applicable or NO) not observed. These performance criteria should
be used throughout the placement to provide feedback to the student teacher. The supervising teachers
should assess the student teacher’s performance over a 5 to 10 day period/unit. Whereas the supervising
teacher can observe the student teacher over an extended period of time, the university supervisor is
limited to observation of single lessons. Therefore, the supervising teacher’s role is critical to a
comprehensive assessment of the student teacher’s performance.

Directions for use of these forms:

1. The supervising teacher and university supervisor share responsibility for assessment of the student
   teacher. The formative assessment instrument should be completed a minimum of twice during each
   8-week placement. Some items may be assessed through review of documents and interviewing.
   These items are marked with an asterisk (*). Additional observations are recommended to facilitate the
growth of the student teacher. Following each observation, the supervisor should hold a conference
with the student teacher and provide a copy of the assessment. Joint conferences with the classroom
supervisor should also be held periodically so that the student teacher’s progress is evident to all parties.

2. Other personal and professional factors used to guide the observation and evaluation process are listed
   on the Summative Student Teacher Evaluation form. This summative evaluation will be completed by
   the supervisor at the end of each placement. The items on this form should be discussed through the
   placement with the student teacher. The ratings on this part of the instrument are intended to reflect the
   overall performance of the student teacher.

3. After the final supervisory visit of the university supervisor, the school supervisor and university supervisor
   should complete the Summative Student Teacher Evaluation and determine the grade of the student
   teacher. The student teacher should be told that this is the grade as of that time. The grade is not final
   until after wrap-up day at the end of the semester.

4. The Formative Student Teacher Assessment forms completed by the supervising teacher and the
   university supervisor become part of the student teacher’s records and should be turned into the
   Office of Clinical/Field-Based Instruction by the university supervisor.

5. The occurrence and effectiveness scores on the first and second assessment completed by the
   school and university supervisor must also be entered online (see instructions).
Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards

1. The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for students.

2. The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development.

3. The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

4. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

5. The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

6. The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.

7. The teacher plans instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals.

8. The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social and physical development of the learner.

9. The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.

10. The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being.

(Numbers in parentheses on the assessment instrument refer to the INTASC standards.)
FORMATIVE STUDENT TEACHER ASSESSMENT

ANALYSIS SCALES

Student Teacher: ____________________________

O = Occurrence    E = Effectiveness

1. Not evident    1. Not effective
2. Somewhat evident 2. Somewhat effective
3. Evident        3. Effective
4. Very evident    4. Very effective
NA Not applicable  NA Not applicable
NO Not observed   NO Not observed

Occurrence (O) refers to the extent to which the performance criteria are evident. Effectiveness (E) refers to the outcome (impact on student learning and success). Indicate 1, 2, 3, 4, NA or NO for each item.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION*

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1. Prepares complete lesson plans that meet curriculum goals. Complete lesson plans include the following components: (1, 7)
   - Clearly-stated objectives
   - Teaching procedures
   - Content materials and media
   - Assessment procedures and materials

2. Uses information about students to plan and organize instruction to accommodate differences in developmental and individual needs. (2, 7)

3. Uses knowledge of students' needs, interests, and experiences. (2, 5)

4. Plans lessons that integrate knowledge from several subject areas. (1, 7)

5. Incorporates multiculturalism and diversity in lessons. (3)

COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

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6. Uses acceptable written, oral, and nonverbal communication with students. (6)

7. Communicates high expectations for learning to all students. (3)

8. Demonstrates communication skills which show sensitivity to diversity. (3, 6)

9. Listens to students and demonstrates interest in what they are saying by responding appropriately. (2, 6)

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**TEACHING FOR LEARNING**

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<td>13.</td>
<td>Displays knowledge of the subject being taught.</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Projects enthusiasm for teaching and learning.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>States objectives and communicates the importance of topics being studied.</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Uses knowledge of students' prior understandings and experiences to make instruction relevant and meaningful.</td>
<td><em>(1, 3, 7)</em></td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Uses a variety of appropriate teaching strategies (e.g., cooperative learning, discovery learning, demonstration, discussion, inquiry, simulation).</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Provides learning experiences that accommodate differences in developmental and individual needs (e.g., various levels, learning styles, performance modes, and multiple intelligences).</td>
<td>(2, 3, 4)</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Relates concepts using language that is understood by the students.</td>
<td>(4, 6)</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Gives directions appropriate for carrying out instructional activities and uses concrete examples to clarify when necessary.</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Incorporates a variety of technology and resources into instruction (e.g., VCR, overhead projector, calculators, computers, newspapers, etc.).</td>
<td><em>(6)</em></td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Provides opportunities for students to apply concepts in problem-solving and critical thinking.</td>
<td>(4, 6)</td>
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<td>23.</td>
<td>Uses questioning to identify misconceptions or confusion and to monitor student work.</td>
<td>(6)</td>
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<td>24.</td>
<td>Uses higher-order questions to engage students in original, creative, and evaluative thinking. (4, 6)</td>
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<td>25.</td>
<td>Adjusts strategies in response to learner feedback and encourages students to expand on and support their responses. (4, 6)</td>
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<td>26.</td>
<td>Uses adequate wait time (e.g., 3 to 5 seconds) for responses in order to encourage higher-level, reflective thinking. (2, 4)</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Gives timely feedback on academic performance and discusses corrective procedures to be taken.* (8)</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Uses community resources to enhance student learning.* (10)</td>
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<td><strong>MANAGING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</strong></td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Demonstrates fairness and supportiveness in order to achieve a positive, interactive learning environment. (5)</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Uses instructional time effectively. (5)</td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>Monitors students' participation and interpersonal interactions in learning activities and encourages students to develop self-monitoring skills. (5)</td>
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<td>Establishes efficient routines for procedural tasks and delegates to students. (5)</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Applies the principles of effective classroom management using a range of strategies to promote cooperation and learning. (5)</td>
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<td>34.</td>
<td>Analyzes the classroom environment and makes adjustments to enhance social relationships, student motivation, and learning.* (5, 6, 7)</td>
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<td>35.</td>
<td>Utilizes individual and group responses to pace learning, proceed with new work, or reteach unclear parts of the lesson. (2, 4)</td>
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<td>36.</td>
<td>Attends to organizing time, space, activities and materials to provide equitable engagement of students in productive tasks. (5)</td>
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**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING***

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37. Communicates assessment criteria and performance standards to the students. (8)

38. Develops and uses a variety of formal and informal performance assessments. (8)

39. Encourages students to assume responsibility for learning and to engage in self evaluation. (8)

40. Maintains records of student work and performance and communicates student progress to students, parents and colleagues. (8)

*These items may be assessed by interviewing and reviewing documents.

**COMMENTS**

**Strong Points of Teaching**

**Suggestions for Improvement**

**Summary** (general statement about teaching effectiveness)
SUMMATIVE STUDENT TEACHER EVALUATION

College of Education
Mississippi State University

Name of Student Teacher: __________________________

Social Security Number: __________________________ Semester/Year: __________________________

School: __________________________ Grade: __________________________

Level/Subject: __________________________

School Supervisor: __________________________

University Supervisor: __________________________

Directions for use of these forms:

1. The supervising teacher and university share responsibility for the summative evaluation of the student teacher.

2. Part I provides a summary of the effectiveness scores obtained from the Formative Student Teacher Assessment forms completed by the school and university supervisor. Part II provides a summary of personal characteristics, professionalism and partnerships and is completed by the school supervisor. Part III provides a summary of personal and professional characteristics and is completed by the university supervisor. The Grade Summary provides a total number of points for each part and the grading scale. The summary should be signed by the supervising teacher, university supervisor, and student teacher.

3. After the final supervisory visit of the university supervisor, the school supervisor and university supervisor should jointly determine the student teacher's grade for each eight weeks. The student teacher should be told that this is the grade as of that time and given a copy of the summary. However, the grade is not final until after wrap-up day at the end of the semester.

4. This form completed by the supervising teacher and the university supervisor becomes part of the student teacher's records and should be turned into the Office of Clinical/Field Based Instruction by the university supervisor.

5. The school supervisor must also enter Part II online. The university supervisor must enter Part III online. (See instructions for online assessment instrument.)

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Check One: First Placement/8 weeks ______ Second Placement/8 weeks ______

Grade: __________ [A-Excellent  B-Good  C-Fair  D-Poor  F-Unsatisfactory]
Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards

1. The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for students.

2. The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development.

3. The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

4. The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students’ development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

5. The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

6. The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.

7. The teacher plans instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals.

8. The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social and physical development of the learner.

9. The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.

10. The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students’ learning and well-being.

(Numbers in parentheses on the assessment instrument refer to the INTASC standards.)
### SUMMATIVE STUDENT TEACHER EVALUATION

#### Part I: Teaching Performance

**Name of Student Teacher: ____________________________ Date: ____________________**

**Part I: School and University Supervisor - Please place effectiveness scores from the last assessment next to the item number. University supervisors should use the supervising teacher's score for any items marked NO or NA.**

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<th>Item #</th>
<th>School Supervisor Scores</th>
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**TOTAL _______ + TOTAL _______ = _______ x 2 = _______**
SUMMATIVE STUDENT TEACHER EVALUATION
Part II Personal Characteristics, Professionalism and Partnerships

Name of Student Teacher __________________________ Date __________________________

Appraisal Scale: 0 - Below Expectations/Lacks Effort, 1 - Does Not Meet Expectations, 2 - Meets Minimal Expectations Inconsistently, 3 - Meets Expectations Consistently, 4 - Exceeds Expectations

Part II: School Supervisor - Please use the analysis scale to complete this section and indicate total number of points at bottom. Use space at bottom or attach separate page to explain any items.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

1. Flexibility ........................................... 0 1 2 3 4
2. Poise and confidence ................................. 0 1 2 3 4
3. Maturity and judgment ............................... 0 1 2 3 4
4. Attendance ............................................ 0 1 2 3 4
5. Punctuality ............................................. 0 1 2 3 4
6. Dependability ......................................... 0 1 2 3 4
7. Sensitivity .............................................. 0 1 2 3 4
8. Enthusiasm ............................................ 0 1 2 3 4
9. Appropriate dress, grooming and appearance .... 0 1 2 3 4
10. Attitude ............................................... 0 1 2 3 4
11. Initiative .............................................. 0 1 2 3 4
12. Oral and written communication ................... 0 1 2 3 4
13. Resourcefulness/creativity ........................... 0 1 2 3 4

PROFESSIONALISM AND PARTNERSHIPS

14. Cooperates and collaborates with colleagues (9, 10)* .................. 0 1 2 3 4
15. Accepts constructive criticism in a positive manner .................... 0 1 2 3 4
16. Shares and seeks professional materials and ideas (9, 10) ............. 0 1 2 3 4
17. Engages in self-evaluation (i.e., completes checklists) (9) ............. 0 1 2 3 4
18. Reflects on decisions made concerning students, teaching methods, and subject matter (9) ........................................ 0 1 2 3 4
19. Follows school policies and procedures ................................. 0 1 2 3 4
20. Knows safety measures and how to handle emergency situations .... 0 1 2 3 4
21. Maintains confidentiality ................................ 0 1 2 3 4
22. Exhibits understanding of how to work with parents/guardians (10) ........................................ 0 1 2 3 4
23. Develops cooperative home-to-school partnerships in support of student learning and well being (10) ....................... 0 1 2 3 4
24. Participates in professional activities (staff development, PTA, parent-teacher conferences, etc.) (9) ........................................ 0 1 2 3 4
25. Knows how to work with community and social service agencies for the benefit of individual students and families (10) ..................... 0 1 2 3 4

TOTAL POINTS for items 1 - 25

Comments:

*Numbers refer to INTASC standards.
Part III. University Supervisor Rating - Maximum of 80 points for personal and professional characteristics.

_____ Submits weekly reports with narrative on time (20 points)  _____ Calls when absent and communicates when needed (5 points)

_____ Accepts constructive criticism in a positive manner (5 points)  _____ Demonstrates honesty and professionalism (15 points)

_____ Demonstrates a positive attitude throughout placement (10 points)  _____ Engages in problem solving, self-evaluation and reflection (15 points)

_____ Uses correct oral and written communication (10 points)  _____ Other (loss of points)

TOTAL POINTS

Please provide explanation of scoring or other factors affecting evaluation (e.g., for any significant loss of points).

Grade Summary

TOTAL PART I

TOTAL PART II (School Supervisor)

TOTAL PART III (University Supervisor)

TOTAL POINTS

LETTER GRADE

Grades are not final until after wrap-up day at the end of the semester when student teaching has been completed and all requirements have been met.

Supervising Teacher’s Signature

First Placement:  Second Placement:

University Supervisor’s Signature  Student Teacher’s Signature

Comments: (please use back if needed)
APPENDIX B

RESEARCHER’S VITAE
PERSONAL DATA:

Home Address: 1004 Clara Way
Starkville, Mississippi  39759
(662) 323-1241
E-mail: Rmonascot@aol.com

Business Address:  Mississippi State University- Meridian Campus
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Box 9300
1000 Highway 19 North
Meridian, Mississippi 39301
(601) 484-0186
FAX: (601) 484-0279
E-mail: mriley@meridian.msstate.edu

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

Doctor of Philosophy: Mississippi State University
  Major Area: Elementary Education
  Minor Area: Reading
  Dissertation Title: Facing the Challenge of the First Year Teacher
  Anticipated Graduation Date: August 2004

Master of Arts: University of West Florida, Pensacola
  Major Area: Elementary Education
  Emphasis: Reading
  1991

Bachelor of Arts: Southeastern College, Lakeland, Florida
  Major Area: Elementary Education
  1986

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2001 Lecturer, College of Education. Responsibilities include: teaching courses
  in senior block methods of teaching social studies and language arts for
  children, teaching of literacy, foundations of literacy, children’s literature,
  social foundations of education, early childhood education, substituting
  for functions and methods of research and advising elementary education
  students. Mississippi State University-Meridian Campus

1999 Testing Coordinator for West Florida Home School League
1996-2001  Home School Educator
1989-1991  Teacher, sixth grade, King Middle School, Milton Florida
1988-1991  Teacher, sixth grade, Pace Middle School, Pace, Florida
1986-1989  Teacher, sixth and seventh grade, King Middle School, Milton, Florida
1985  Teacher, four-year old class, Montessori Preschool, Lakeland, Florida

PUBLICATIONS and PRESENTATIONS:

2004  Weaving the INTASC Standards throughout a teacher education program. Paper presented at the annual meeting: Association of Teacher Educators, Dallas, Texas.


2002  Presenter, Reading Diagnostically Workshop, East Mississippi Center for Educational Development


2001  Presenter, Everyday Math Strategies Workshop, East Mississippi Center for Educational Development

SERVICE:

2002-  Career Day Coordinator, Coordinator of Career Day activities for elementary and secondary undergraduates and educational leadership and counselor education graduates.

2002  Alternate committee member, Box Council, College of Education, Mississippi State University.
      This council is responsible for approving changes to any courses offered through the College of Education.

2001  Judge, Reading fair, Calvary Christian School, Meridian, Mississippi.
CONSULTING ACTIVITIES:

1998-1999 Consulting new or troubled home schoolers concerning curriculum choices.
APPENDIX C

APPROVAL OF THE RESEARCH BY THE MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH
September 2, 2003

Monica Riley
Curriculum and Instruction
Mailstop 9300

Re: IRB Docket 03-186 – Perceptions of the First Year Teacher

Dear Monica:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via expedited review for a period of September 2, 2003 through August 15, 2004 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.110 #7. Please note the expiration date for approval of this project is August 15, 2004. If additional time is needed to complete the project, you will need to submit a Continuing Review Request form prior to July 15, 2004. Any modifications made to this project must be submitted for approval prior to implementation. Forms for both Continuing Review and Modifications are located on our website at http://www.msstate.edu/dept/compliance.

Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. Please note that the IRB reserves the right, at anytime, to observe you and any associated researchers as they conduct the project and audit research records associated with this project.

Please refer to your docket number (#03-186) when contacting our office regarding this project.

We wish you the very best of luck in your research and look forward to working with you again. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at 325-3294 or at tarwood@research.msstate.edu.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Tracy S. Arwood
Regulatory Compliance Officer

CC: Dwight Hare
File
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Interview Protocol

1. Understanding of basic concepts of instructional design.
2. Development of relationships with peers, teachers, students, and administrators.
3. Understanding and teaching subject matter.
4. Concerns with classroom management.
5. Concerns with assessment and communication of assessment.