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An Examination of Teacher Education Programs and School Induction Programs in Their  
Preparation of Teachers for the First Year of Teaching

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A dissertation  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education

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by  
Nancy Kay Dillon  
August 2004

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Dr. Russell West, Chair  
Dr. Nancy Dishner  
Dr. Louise MacKay  
Dr. Elizabeth Ralston

Keywords: teacher induction, mentoring, teacher education, first year teacher, teacher  
preparation, teacher shortage, teacher satisfaction

## ABSTRACT

### An Examination of Teacher Education Programs and School Induction Programs in Their Preparation of Teachers for the First Year of Teaching

by

Nancy Kay Dillon

The purpose of this study was to identify beginning teachers' perceptions of how colleges and universities can improve their teacher preparation programs and what school systems can do to ensure that first-year teachers have a successful and satisfying experience in the classroom. A total of 20 first and second-year elementary teachers participated in 20 separate, qualitative interviews. The information collected from the interviews was inductively analyzed.

Several themes reflecting the perceptions of study participants emerged during the data analysis process: (1) a belief that college classes did not reflect or prepare new teachers for the "real world" of teaching; (2) feeling overwhelmed by teaching duties and expectations; (3) positive benefits of mentoring; (4) a desire for more interactive field experience; and (5) the need for classroom management skills.

From the findings, the investigator presented the following suggestions for improving the teacher education program at colleges: (1) provide additional opportunities for more interactive field experience, not just observing; (2) eliminate many of the philosophy classes and research requirements; (3) include more instruction in dealing with classroom management, including discipline strategies and effective means of interacting with parents; (4) intensify reading instruction; and (5) provide more course work in special education issues.

The following suggestions were presented for improving the induction program at the school level: (1) formally assign a mentor; (2) schedule a time for the principal to meet with new teachers individually to fully explain school procedures and expectations; (3) hire beginning teachers earlier in the summer to provide them with more preparation time; (4) furnish teachers with adequate funds to purchase school materials; and (5) provide release time to observe veteran teachers.

This study provides valuable information for university departments of education to improve their teacher preparation program to reflect the needs of today's new teachers. These findings will assist school systems in developing more appropriate induction programs for new teachers.

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family: to my late husband, Dan, who gave me great advice and was always supportive; to my children, Montana and Stephanie, who believed that I really would be Dr. Dillon one day; to my mom, who was so proud of me for working toward this degree; and to my beloved twin sister, Chris, who truly is "the wind beneath my wings."

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Russell West, Chairperson of my graduate committee, for his guidance and assistance. Thank you for your patience and encouragement throughout this journey. I would also like to thank my committee members - Dr. Nancy Dishner, Dr. Louise MacKay, and Dr. Elizabeth Ralston for their support and advice. To Kellie Brown and Janet Keener - thank you for being my friends throughout our ELPA experience.

In addition, I would like to offer my gratitude to the administrators, supervisors, principals, and teachers of the school systems that participated in my study. Thank you for your warm and friendly welcome when I visited your schools. I am so deeply grateful to the 20 teachers who gave their time to speak to me from the heart. They made me proud that I was a teacher.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The first year of teaching is traumatic for many beginning teachers. The process of moving from college student to teacher can represent such a painful period in the professional lives of new teachers that it has frequently been described as "reality shock" (Rogers & Babinski, 1999, p. 38). First-year teachers are often left in a "sink-or-swim" position, given little support from colleagues and few opportunities for staff development (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Faced with the realities of teaching, frustrated by an insufficient level of preparation, and isolated from the support of experienced teachers, many beginning teachers flounder their first year, while some leave the teaching profession entirely.

#### Teacher Shortage

A novice teacher begins the school year full of excitement and enthusiasm. A few months later that same teacher is discouraged and disillusioned and wonders if she or he will ever be successful in the profession (Caccia, 1996). The attrition rate for new teachers in the United States is staggering. Almost 30% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years and the rate is higher in particular school districts. Seventeen percent will not stay past one year (Wong & Wong, 2001). Sadly, the most talented new educators are the most likely to leave the profession (Gonzales & Sosa, 1993 as cited by Halford, 1998). Compared to fields such as medicine and law, which understand and recognize the needs of new professionals more fully, - some have dubbed education "the profession that eats its young" (Halford, 1998, p. 33). Colleges and universities teach theory, but new teachers are faced with reality the moment they step through the classroom door.

There is growing concern that a teacher shortage is developing. At the same time that a large number of older teachers are leaving the profession, student enrollment is beginning to rise. Most of these aging teachers are retiring but some have simply decided to quit. More than six of every 100 teachers are leaving the profession each year (Kronholz, 1997).

## Teacher Preparation

Darling-Hammond (1999) contended, "The most important contribution academe can make to supporting learning in our country is if colleges and universities would commit their substantial resources to better preparing those who become elementary and secondary school teachers" (p. 18). Frequently, there is a disparity between the academic practices that colleges and universities teach their students and the experiences students actually encounter as beginning teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Wasserman (1999) asserted that her college teacher training did not prepare her for the realities of the overwhelming and exhausting human interactions and dilemmas that make up life in the classrooms. She recalled one professor in particular who repeatedly lectured students on the importance of remembering that all children were individuals and to structure teaching to meet these differences. While espousing this philosophy, the professor conducted her college education class the same way every day, never deviating from the lecture format, never realizing that she was not practicing what she so sincerely preached.

When students are in university classrooms, they are basically learning theories of content and pedagogy while experimenting with their peers regarding how best to prepare and teach a lesson (Futrell, 2002). Critics of teacher training programs claim there is a critical difference between theory and practice, and that many students are being taught by professors who have never practiced what they teach (Darling-Hammond, 1999). New teachers commonly experience anxiety because they feel unprepared and unqualified to lead a classroom of students. Croker (1999) maintained that to be successful, education students have to balance notions of teaching based on their preparation at the university with the reality they face in the classroom. High expectations of what children should know and be able to do, an increasingly diverse student population, and breakthroughs in research about how children learn, increase the pressure on teachers to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to educate children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Shanker, 1996).

## Restructuring Teacher Education

Although colleges and universities may genuinely strive to prepare education students as effective teachers (Weissenfels, 1991), the beginning teacher typically enters the world of full-time teaching fairly naïve. Critics of teacher preparation programs lament the intellectual

emptiness of the curriculum and the lack of connections between what is taught and the realities teachers find when they walk into the classroom. Even many students are critical of their college preparation (Shenk, 1998). Most new teachers begin teaching without any experience in maintaining discipline, and they blame their colleges' teacher preparation programs for their lack of training (Blair, 2000).

Along with a graying teacher force and swelling numbers of immigrant and baby boomer children, other factors are contributing to the looming teacher shortage, including class size reduction initiatives, inadequate induction programs, poor working conditions, and a growing salary gap between beginning teachers and other new college graduates (Chaika, 2000). Although teaching is a labor of love for educators (Blair, 2000), many teachers are frustrated due to a perceived lack of support from administrators, low salary, and having to work with children who come to school unprepared and unmotivated to learn.

Schools today face enormous pressure to educate an increasingly diverse and complex student body (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Professional Development Schools (PDS) help bridge the gap between theoretical application and the realities of the classroom. At these specialized schools, teacher education faculty work closely with school faculty to build shared visions of good teaching that integrate theory and practice. This relationship allows college faculty a better and more realistic understanding of teaching in today's schools, while providing school teachers a stake in the preparation of future teachers (McBee, 1998).

Mentoring is a favored strategy implemented by school systems that emphasize teacher induction practices. Assigning mentors to work with beginning teachers provides an alternative to the often abrupt and unassisted entry into teaching that characterizes the experience of many new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1996). During the first year of teaching, new teachers should be given support by expert mentors in the hope that such support will improve teacher effectiveness and retention (Darling-Hammond, 1996a).

### Statement of the Problem

Increased dissatisfaction with the public school system, a changing and complex student body, and a looming teacher shortage reflect the alarming state of public education. New teachers must be prepared for the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. Colleges and universities, along with school systems, need to assume responsibility for providing adequate

training of new teachers.

Understanding the needs of today's students will allow colleges and universities to plan their teacher education curricula to fit our changing society. School systems must also take responsibility in helping beginning teachers apply the educational theories learned in college to the classroom setting.

The purpose of this study was to identify beginning teachers' perceptions of how colleges and universities can improve their teacher preparation programs and what school systems can do to ensure that first-year teachers have a successful and satisfying experience in the classroom.

### Research Questions

1. What do satisfied and successful first and second-year teachers have in common?
2. Did they receive additional professional training through quality staff development opportunities at their respective schools?
3. In what ways can schools ensure first and second year teachers a successful transition from college to teaching?
4. Are mentoring programs successful in helping new teachers make a smooth transition from college student to teacher?
5. What can colleges and universities do to make the transition from college to teaching more fulfilling and successful?
6. Are student teachers provided with an adequate amount of quality teaching experiences in a classroom setting before graduation?

### Significance of the Study

Colleges and universities are seeking new approaches to successfully prepare future teachers, while school systems are struggling to acclimate new teachers into the school culture. Teacher candidates at Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, must demonstrate that they know how to practice what they have been taught in their education and non-education classes (George Lucas Educational Foundation A, 2002). These students are provided with extensive field service prior to student teaching and receive regular feedback from the university faculty and classroom instructors. The creation of Professional Development Schools (PDS) is an effort to connect theory to practice and allows the bumping together of university and school cultures

to strengthen teacher preparation (Goodlad, 1993, p 182, as cited by Grisham, et al., 1999).

This study will provide valuable information for the college and university departments of education that desire to improve their teacher training methods and restructure their curriculum to reflect the needs of today's new teachers. Additionally, to assist school systems in developing more appropriate programs to train and retain their future teachers, the study will identify the essential components of a successful induction process to facilitate a smooth transition from student teacher to educator.

#### Delimitations of the Study

This study will be delimited to groups of first- and second-year teachers employed in four East Tennessee school systems: two county systems and two city systems.

#### Procedures

The investigator followed this set of procedures. A thorough review of the literature was conducted. Permission was obtained from participating school systems to conduct interviews with groups of first and second-year elementary teachers. The data from these interviews were analyzed to determine the common and recurring themes first and second-year teachers experienced during the course of college training and within their school systems. Lastly, conclusions and recommendations were made using information gathered in the data analysis.

#### Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 consists of an introduction to the study, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the limitations, the assumptions, and the procedures. Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature. Chapter 3 relates the methodology and procedures used in the study and a descriptive background of the schools involved in the study. Chapter 4 furnishes the results of the study. Chapter 5 contains a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Chapter 2 identifies pertinent literature relevant to this study. The literature review consists of four major components. These include the ramifications of an emerging teacher shortage, the level and degree of preparation teachers receive in their college education classes, the role of states and universities in improving teacher preparation programs, and the inclusion of school induction programs designed to acclimate new teachers to the school culture.

#### The Emerging Teacher Shortage

##### Background

Elementary and secondary schools across the country are facing a threat that could impair the quality of education of all children. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that the nation's schools will need 3 million new teachers by 2008. The challenge of this emerging teacher shortage impacts the whole education community, both in public and private schools (Council for American Private Education, 2002).

According to Halford (1998), teacher attrition impacts school reform, which requires years of sustained effort by a school staff. Teachers who remain may have experienced difficulties in their formative years that can continue to negatively impact their teaching skills and abilities. Ultimately, students as well as teachers are affected because of inadequate support for beginning teachers.

For a variety of reasons, many new teachers become discouraged and leave the teaching profession. As a result, schools have to hire 50,000 "teachers" each year who are not trained or certified for the positions in which they are hired (Howe, 1999). Assisting new teachers to become veteran teachers constitutes an important step in not only addressing this problem, but decreasing the teacher shortage. Texas A & M University (2001) reported that 30% of teachers leave the profession during the first two years and 50% leave during the first five years. Consequently, schools are losing educators almost as fast as they can be recruited (Merrow Report, 1999). After about the seventh year, as teacher experience increases, the rate at which they leave the teaching profession begins to level off (Bolich, 2001).

Over the next decade, more than two million new K-12 teachers will be hired in the United States due to an increase in student enrollment, smaller class sizes, and accelerating retirements among aging educators. A large number of school districts that are facing teacher shortages are focusing on induction programs to stem the flow of new teachers leaving the profession. Many urban districts report increased retention rates when their new teachers participated in induction programs. Unfortunately, despite these positive results, there is a lack of commitment in recent years to include induction activities on a permanent basis (Weiss & Weiss, 1999).

Although teacher recruitment efforts are vital, retaining beginning teachers remains a critical factor in maintaining an adequate number of teachers. To address the shortage, it is necessary to understand why many teachers leave the teaching profession so early in their careers (Bolich, 2001).

#### Reasons New Teachers Leave the Teaching Profession

A study conducted in 1994 by the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 25% of new teachers left the profession within the first five years to pursue other careers. An additional 25% stated they were leaving either due to a decrease in job satisfaction or diminished interest in teaching. Of this group, 40% confirmed they would not teach again (Bolich, 2001). Poor working conditions were a common complaint of many of these teachers. Large class sizes, endless paperwork, a lack of support, insufficient resources, and salary were specifically cited as reasons that played an important role in career changing decisions (NEA Today, 2004).

Eliminating the growing teacher shortage involves both recruiting promising new teachers and insuring that qualified teachers remain in the profession after they are hired (Educational Policy Publications, 2002). National and state research studies (Bolich, 2001) cite several key factors that can affect an educator's decision to leave the profession:

First, prospective teachers suffer from inadequate preparation, such as inadequate student teaching experience, a lack of classroom management skills, the inability to effectively deal with the pressures and stress of teaching, and a lack of content preparation for the subjects taught.

The second factor reflects the conditions in the school and classroom, especially the lack of professional support from school staff, as well as dissatisfaction with student discipline and the school environment.

Lastly, a teacher's decision to leave the profession is affected by salary and benefits. Although this is a factor, it was not a significant reason for teachers leaving the profession.

### Retention Strategies

High attrition rates, especially in the first few years of teaching, obligate school districts to expend an enormous amount of energy and resources in supporting and developing new teachers, many of whom will ultimately leave the profession. Shortages are presently emerging in certain regions with high poverty levels, within particular subject areas, such as math and science, as well as in areas of the country where enrollment is increasing (Educational Policy Publications, 2002).

Several strategies to retain teachers may prove successful (Educational Policy Publications, 2002). First, schools need to provide support for new teachers, such as through mentoring programs. Also, schools could be made smaller through restructuring so new teachers feel a sense of community. In larger schools it is easy to feel isolated. Additionally, providing a common planning time among same-grade or same-subject teachers would provide opportunities for new teachers to meet with those more experienced to ask questions, share ideas, and develop a support system. Team teaching would also provide support for new teachers by providing opportunities to observe experienced teammates teaching and interacting with their students. Lastly, those schools that provide more compensation for beginning teachers may persuade them to strengthen their commitment to teaching.

### Teacher Preparation

When a federal report entitled *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, the level of public concern about the state of the American educational system rose sharply. Although numerous reforms aimed at improving the educational system resulted, an important element was omitted: the classroom teacher (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2003).

The educational system in the United States faces a unique challenge. Although critics may believe that schools are not as good as they once were, in actuality, the problem lies in the fact that schools are expected to educate the majority of students to levels once attained by only a few. It is a challenge for many schools to achieve the level of learning demanded by most reforms, not because of a lack of effort, but because teachers do not know how, and the school

systems they work in do not provide the support for teachers' effort (Darling-Hammond, 1996 A). It is now recognized by legislators and policy makers that teacher-based expertise is the most important factor affecting student achievement (Wise & Leibbrand, 1996). To insure a quality teacher force will require a change in a variety of ways, such as the manner in which teachers are trained, both in pre-service and professional development programs, the quality of induction practices, and the standards of licensure (Shanker, 1996). According to Fraser (2001), Dean of the School of Education at Northeastern University in Boston, "the whole fabric of teacher preparation seems to be coming unraveled" (p 56) and teacher education has lost its legitimacy.

### Critics of Teacher Education

Schools of education have long been the target of criticism for a perceived lack of quality and depth (ATE 1991, as cited by Digby, Gartin, & Murdick, 1993). Intellectually empty curriculums and the lack of connection between what is taught and the reality of teaching are two common complaints directed toward teacher education programs. In fact, a teacher survey conducted in the mid-nineties elicited such comments as their teacher training was the "the shabbiest psychobabble imaginable", as well as an "abject waste of time" (Shenk, 1998). In contrast to assertions by NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) that education schools impart essential knowledge of pedagogy, 57% of teachers surveyed by Public Agenda disagreed. According to those surveyed, their teacher training programs were mediocre to poor in preparing them to maintain discipline (Education Week, 2003). Despite many reforms, the world of teacher education remains uneven. Teacher educators who preach the use of multiple modes of instruction to their students, but only use the lecture method during class, those who have not been in the classroom in years, and those who are boring are still a real part of college and university teacher preparation programs (Fraser, 2001).

In addition to not preparing enough effective teachers for our nation's schools, state-approved teacher education programs maintain low standards for entry and exit into their educational program. Although required classes may broach the topics of classroom diversity, child development, and the foundations of education, the area of content knowledge is not given high priority. To counteract this trend, some states are requiring more stringent accountability measures for college and university teacher preparation curriculums, as well as creating other

avenues for teacher certification that bypass the traditional path of education schools (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2002).

To many educators, teacher education has not changed much in the past 50 years, and any change in the future appears quite unlikely. For those in this group, teacher preparation consists of three separate components: a broad-based undergraduate program with education classes near the end of their program; a brief student teaching experience; and a first-year teaching assignment in a public school system where very little college training is relevant to the real classroom experience (Natalicio & Pacheco, 2000).

Although understanding the subject content is important, many teachers maintain that, to be successful in the classroom, they need to know such skills as encouraging their students to persevere, strategies for explaining difficult material, and methods of managing a productive and respectful classroom (Public Agenda Online, 2000). Giving prospective new teachers the many opportunities for real-life classroom experience as well as working with other teachers provides a critical component in teacher preparation (Feistritzer, 2002).

Teacher quality plays a critical role in affecting student performance and state legislators have begun reexamining policies that affect teachers. Teacher preparation and licensure requirements are being amended to guarantee they are performance-based. Not only do policy makers hold students to high standards, but they have elevated their expectations for teacher standards, also. Emphasizing teacher quality is an important element in the efforts of states to raise student achievement levels (National Conference of State Legislators, 2003).

Darling-Hammond (1996 B) noted that standards for teaching are haphazard; thus, all teachers do not have the same training. Quality of teacher preparation often depends on state standards for licensing. To complicate matters, the authority for the reform of teacher education is held by each of the 50 states and their local school districts (Ambach, 1996).

The key issue for teacher educators is how to develop effective teaching skills in those who have the potential to become good teachers (Andrews, 2000). Teacher education programs in the United States have historically been poorly financed, uneven, thin, fragmented, and outdated (Darling-Hammond, 1996 A; Shanker, 1996). Critics argue that schools of education are not providing students with challenging instruction or educating them deeply, either in the content they will teach or in the knowledge and skills of their profession. Unlike the fields of medicine and law, where students have to pass rigorous examinations, teaching candidates do not

have to pass an examination of a similar degree of difficulty to gain certification in the areas of content or classroom practice (Shanker, 1996). According to a 1998 survey of 3,500 teachers conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, four out of five respondents admitted they considered themselves unprepared to teach. In addition, more than one third confirmed they were not adequately trained to teach in their subject areas (George Lucas Educational Foundation B, 2002).

Since the release of *A Nation at Risk* 20 years ago, states have been implementing reforms in teaching and teacher preparation (Wise & Leibbrand, 1996). National and state attention to the quality of teachers, as well as the high attrition rates and external accountability systems, have increased the pressure to change the concept of teacher preparation (Natalicio & Pacheco, 2000). Despite the fact that a good deal of legislation has been passed, the actual effect has been minimal (Wise and Leibbrand).

### The Current State of Teacher Education Programs

Teacher preparation programs have traditionally been perceived as the responsibility of education departments at colleges and universities (Natalicio & Pacheco, 2000). These programs have often been viewed as having a lower status than other university programs, possibly due to having been starved for resources for a long time, and are considered the cash cow of many universities (Wise, 2002). However, education faculty members are being motivated to accept the responsibility for improving these programs due to two factors. The first is the growing body of research supporting the idea that better teachers are the key to improving public education and that colleges of education have a responsibility to prepare teachers accordingly. The second factor is that colleges and universities are being held accountable for preparing more effective teachers by state governments (Natalicio & Pacheco, 2000).

Numerous universities and colleges are redesigning their education programs by improving the curriculum, requiring higher standards for admission, and providing more clinical experience. In addition, many require prospective teachers to major in specific content areas (Latham, Gitomer, & Ziomek, 1999). Colleges that prepare teachers (Schwartz, 1996) should assume responsibility for properly training future educators so they are prepared to remain in the teaching profession and not abandon their careers after a few years. After all, the reputation of schools of law, engineering, and medicine are determined primarily by the accomplishments of

their graduates, so why not hold schools of education to the same high standards?

### Curriculum

A rigorous curriculum that reflects sound content and effective teaching practices, as well as a positive student teaching experience, are necessary to prepare budding teachers for their profession. Evidence indicates that the best practice for teacher preparation includes a challenging liberal arts and science education emphasizing a deep grasp of subject matter, along with the knowledge of child development, school and classroom organization relating to academic goals of schooling, and in-depth clinical experience in the classroom (Shanker, 1996).

Schwartz (1996) recommended that student teachers be placed in a variety of settings throughout their clinical experience, not always in an exemplary classroom within an exemplary school. By focusing on exemplary schools in place of typical schools, college faculties prevent student teachers from experiencing the realities of teaching in more difficult school settings, settings in which they may begin their first year of teaching. Instead, placement should be in model classrooms within typical schools. Following this practice allows student teachers to learn with and observe exemplary teachers working in a variety of settings and conditions.

Moreover, an effective teacher education program is coherent. It identifies sound teaching practices, then organizes all of its course work and clinical experiences to reflect and reinforce that vision. The class work integrates theory as well as practice. Sound education programs include teachers in training constantly working with expert teachers while learning how students learn, how to assess learning, and other effective teaching strategies (Darling-Hammond, 2002).

Research from the past 10 years supports the claim that the single most important determinant of what students learn is what their teachers know. The research affirms that a teacher's qualifications, knowledge and skills make more difference for student learning than any other single factor. Therefore, to improve student learning, it is imperative that teacher learning be improved (Darling-Hammond, 2002).

In February 2001, the U.S. Department of Education summarized teacher preparation research conducted by Michigan State University scholars. The report concluded that although the research base for teacher preparation is not deep, studies do show a positive connection between the level of teacher preparation and the degree of impact and performance in the

classroom (George Lucas Educational Foundation B, 2002, Education Week, 2001).

### The Role of States and Universities in Restructuring Teacher Education

There have been a number of restructuring efforts implemented in the last five years in the hope of improving our nation's public school system. Some of these efforts include developing partnerships between universities and public school systems, redefining the role of states in improving teacher preparation programs, adopting accreditation standards developed by NCATE and INTASC, and providing induction and mentoring programs for new teachers.

### University and Public School Partnerships

Many schools and universities are seeking more effective ways for new teachers to make the transition from education student to educator. Beginning teachers frequently experience problems when the beliefs they formed during their university training are dissimilar to those they encounter on the job (Halford, 1998).

Beginning teachers benefit when universities work more closely with school districts. Although university and college faculty occasionally help new teachers after they graduate, numerous school districts are implementing a more formal partnership with the universities. One example is the development of groups of trained mentors to assist beginning teachers (Halford, 1998). According to Imig (2002), one of the most intriguing developments in teacher education to emerge in the last few years is the growth of professional development schools (PDS). The PDS acts as a bridge between the university and the school setting and promotes three purposes. First, it serves as a model or demonstration site for new teachers to observe outstanding teachers practicing good educational practices. The PDS also provides ample opportunities for excellent professional development. In addition, it provides a place that takes on the challenges of demonstrating that teachers can promote student learning with a diverse population.

Professional Development Schools have developed across the United States as a means to provide a richer learning environment for children. Colleges of Education work in collaboration with public school systems to create a laboratory to assist in the preparation of new teachers, and to promote the continuing professional growth of experienced teachers, administrators, and other school support personnel. Research related to teacher education and school curriculum is presented, discussed, and implemented. Collaboration is an essential component of teacher



education, and Professional Development Schools provide the means for new and experienced teachers and college faculty to achieve the goal of preparing and nurturing quality teachers (Cleary, 2002).

Wise and Levine (2002) contended that "the PDS is to teacher preparation as the teaching hospital is to physician preparation" (p 2). Professional Development Schools are re-staffed and restructured schools developed and operated by the faculties of school districts and universities to prepare new teachers to teach more effectively their first year (Wise and Levine). The PDS professional learning model affords opportunities for observations, conferences, and participation of teachers in school-wide meetings. The benefit of the PDS is the creation of a more stable, higher quality teaching staff. Ideally (Darling-Hammond, 2002) the PDS provides a setting in which many beginning teachers are being trained together with the whole environment organized around teacher and student learning.

Three goals are important in the development of the Professional Development School. The first goal is to assist pre-service teachers in learning to work effectively and successfully with a diverse student population. Second, the PDS provides opportunities for pre-service teachers to work on school sites and in college classrooms. The last goal is to promote collaboration between public schools and colleges of education (Grisham, et al., 1999).

A Professional Development School promotes a learner-centered climate in which new teachers are expected to collaborate with more experienced teachers and college faculty. This concept not only strengthens the connection among teachers at different career stages, but also links theory to practice. First year teachers participating in a Professional Development School are inclined to have higher morale, are more committed to teaching, and plan to continue in the teaching profession (Weiss & Weiss, 1999).

According to the researchers at the George Lucas Educational Foundation A (2002), schools of education determine whether teachers enter their classrooms well prepared or feeling overwhelmed. To promote a high-quality teacher preparation program, the Foundation developed the following suggestions. First, put teacher candidates in the classroom. This will ensure prospective teachers are given many opportunities to observe, tutor, and teach in a real classroom. Also, send education professors out to the K-12 schools. This will enable professors to ascertain that the theory and content taught in the college classes reflects the reality of real classrooms.

### The Role of States in Improving Teacher Preparation Programs

State legislators can encourage colleges and universities to improve their teacher preparation programs by raising the requirements for accreditation (Lauer, 2001; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001, as cited by Reichardt, 2001). Professional schools on campuses everywhere in the country have been assessed against rigorous national standards for accreditation, but for many colleges of education, accreditation is optional (Wise, 2002).

In another wave of effort at education reform, President Bush announced his support for the *No Child Left Behind* Act, which became law in 2001. This law is the framework for improving public education. It re-authorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and includes greater school choice for parents and teachers, especially those attending failing schools. It also provides states and agencies more flexibility in spending federal money, stresses greater accountability of states and their school districts, and strongly emphasizes reading, especially for younger children (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

### The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

Many colleges and universities, as well as states, are increasing the requirements for entrance, continuation, and graduation from college education programs. In fact, (Reichardt, 2001) numerous states have adopted the accreditation standards developed by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NCATE is the accrediting organization for schools of education and functions as the profession's means of quality assurance. NCATE is the only accrediting body for schools, universities, colleges, and departments of education authorized by the U.S. Department of Education. Through its rigorous standards, NCATE determines which institutions meet the national standards of preparing teachers and other education specialists for the classroom (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education A, 2003).

The first step in the partnership between states and NCATE is the rigorous review process of states' schools of education. The second stage encompasses a prolonged clinical phase of preparation lasting through the first year of teaching, in which the teacher is given a beginner's license and receives clinical assistance. This concept, which is in various stages of development in school districts, involves a paradigm shift in teacher preparation. The third

phase entails National Board certification to recognize and focus attention on teacher performance (Wise & Leibbrand, 1996).

Performance assessment is a vital component of accreditation through NCATE. The Praxis Series is one such assessment that provides accurate and reliable information for state education agencies to use in making licensing decisions for new teachers. Universities and colleges of education may also use the basic academic skills section of the Praxis assessment to qualify individuals for acceptance into the education program. The other two components of the Praxis Series can be used for licensing beginning teachers, and as a means of assessing classroom performance during the first year of teaching (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education B, 2003).

Another method of performance assessment is the National Board Certification. This certification concentrates educational reform in the classroom. A teacher's demonstrated practices are measured against high and rigorous standards. The National Board Certification is voluntary and is valid for 10 years (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education B, 2003).

Then, think diversity. Prepare teacher candidates for the challenge of teaching a diverse student population. In addition, establish professional development schools. This program would provide a year-long internship in a professional development school. Furthermore, consider dual-degree programs. To ensure that teachers are cognizant in content area and have knowledge of a variety of teaching strategies, some education schools have adopted a five-year program. A Bachelor's degree in an academic area is earned the senior year while a Bachelor's degree in education is earned the following year. And lastly, train future teachers in the use of technology.

#### The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC).

The INTASC standards provide a general framework for documenting achievements throughout the various domains of teaching and may be useful in structuring and developing useful induction experiences (Weiss & Weiss, 1999). According to North Carolina Public Schools (2002), INTASC was created to strengthen collaboration among states interested in re-examining licensing, preparation, and induction into the teaching profession. In 1992 INTASC published model standards that apply to all teaching levels, content areas, and student

populations. These 10 standards emphasize what beginning teachers should know and be able to do in the following domains:

- \* Content pedagogy
- \* Student development
- \* Diverse learners
- \* Multiple instructional strategies
- \* Motivation and management
- \* School and community involvement
- \* Communication and technology
- \* Assessment
- \* Reflective practice: professional growth
- \* Planning (p. 2)

### School Experiences of Beginning Teachers

The first years of teaching can be overwhelming. This "reality shock" may drastically affect teacher morale, the recruitment efforts of school districts, and student achievement (National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse, 2002). In many professions, new employees are given assistance in making the transition from college graduates to their new positions. In the teaching profession, however, beginning teachers are given the same responsibilities and duties as veteran teachers.

### Induction Programs

Traditionally, beginning teachers are given few, if any, opportunities to participate in formal induction into the education profession (Texas A & M University - Corpus Christi, 2001). Teacher induction programs provide new teachers with the needed support during the frequently difficult transition from college student to the actual classroom teaching experience (Moskowitz & Stephens, 1997). Induction programs may also aid in forming a professional base on which the beginning teacher can build his or her teaching career (East Central Georgia P-16 Council, 1998). Various studies attest to the value of teacher induction programs. The benefits of induction programs include increasing retention rates among beginning teachers, improving teaching capabilities, and enhancing teacher success (Weiss & Weiss, 1999 and East Central

Georgia P-16 Council, 1998). Promoting the personal well-being of new teachers using stress management procedures and developing peer support groups are also goals of the induction process (Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi, 2001).

At the center of support efforts is the understanding that all teachers, especially beginning teachers, are learners. While learning to work with a diverse student population, new teachers are also developing an understanding of who they are and how they fit in with the school culture (Halford, 1998).

The State Board for Educator Certification (1998) assembled a group of experts to investigate and gather information from Texas teachers concerning the induction practices of their state. As a result of their investigation, the group recommended that Texas educators receive at least two years of induction services. The first year would center on providing the basic mechanics of teaching, while the second year's focus would be effective instructional practices (State Board for Educator Certification).

Successful induction programs are comprised of four elements. The first element, orientation, is used as a means to familiarize new teachers with school procedures and to introduce them to existing faculty and the culture of the school. Another critical component of successful induction programs involves training to assist teachers with classroom management strategies, student assessment, and curriculum mandates. Support from a mentor is recognized as the third component. Within a strong support system, new teachers are provided with the attention and assistance from an experienced teacher necessary to make a positive transition from college to the classroom setting. The last factor that is essential to a successful induction program is assessment of a new teacher's teaching performance (National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse, 2002).

The East Central Georgia P-16 Council (1998) developed seven objectives to attain the goals of their teacher induction program. The first objective is to familiarize beginning teachers with the school district's policies, procedures, support services, and resources. The second objective involves assisting beginning teachers with management and organizational strategies. Third, assist new teachers with legal, ethical, and professional issues and expectations. Next, assist beginning teachers with curriculum, planning, instructional strategies, and assessment. In addition, provide new teachers with peer support and excellent role models. Also, familiarize beginning teachers with professional growth opportunities. Finally, help new teachers develop

interpersonal skills for communicating with the school and community (p1).

In his "Theory of Motivation", Maslow (1970) stated that an individual's needs are arranged in a hierarchy, and that the needs at the lowest level must be satisfied before the individual can move to the next higher level. These needs include basic physiological needs, security and safety, social affiliation, esteem, and self-actualization.

According to Wong (2000), Maslow's hierarchy can be applied to the needs of beginning teachers as well. Physiological needs include knowing the location of school restrooms, the cost of a cafeteria lunch, and information regarding insurance benefits. Security and safety needs involve knowing if the faculty's cars will be safe in the school parking lot, if it is safe to stay late after school, and whether the door to the classroom should be locked when leaving at the end of the school day. Social affiliation consists of an induction program to acquaint new teachers with other teachers, along with school procedures, rules, and rituals. Esteem encompasses the need of beginning teachers to be told of their importance as new teachers in the school and their role as a member of the school staff and in the community. Self-actualization embodies the feeling of eagerness in wanting to successfully contribute to the work of the staff.

Bolich (2001) noted that studies have indicated those teachers with less than five years of experience who had not been involved in an induction program were nearly twice as likely to leave the teaching profession as those who had participated in such a program.

### Mentoring

From commission chambers to classrooms, education leaders are discovering the power of mentoring in supporting new teachers. "Simply put, new teachers need somebody to talk to" (Janicki, as cited by Halford, 1998 p 6).

Beginning in the mid 1980s, many induction programs began including assistance to new teachers by assigning them to mentors, veteran teachers who help beginning teachers assimilate the culture, philosophy, and behaviors expected of them in the schools at which they teach. Although the intensity, frequency, and quality of support is critical for the success of beginning teachers, the degree of implementation differs from school system to school system (Weiss & Weiss, 1999).

Malcom (2002) remembers her first day in the classroom as a scary experience. She indicates there are real opportunities for new teachers to connect with experienced teachers in a

mentor relationship. Mentors can assist beginning teachers in understanding and dealing with the day to day experiences of teaching. Malcom contends that one of the main reasons teachers leave the profession in the first five years is that when they face difficulties there is no one to talk to.

The school district of Hampton, Virginia developed a school-centered mentoring program that pairs new and retired teachers in an effort to increase the retention rate of beginning teachers. The mentors assist new teachers in building confidence while providing teaching strategies and suggestions for managing the classroom. The program also includes release time for new teachers to observe experienced teachers at other schools. A critical component of this mentoring program is the help that new teachers receive in dealing with frustration and the encouragement they receive to remain in the profession. In addition to improving the skills of new teachers, the program saves the district money due to a decrease in attrition (Loschert & O'Neil, 2002).

In 1995, Baltimore County Public Schools developed a teacher mentoring program to improve teacher effectiveness, and thus improve student achievement, and to retain new teachers by improving their job satisfaction. What makes this mentoring program unusual is that it supports teachers with five or fewer years teaching experience who teach at schools with struggling learners and a high turnover of personnel. This mentoring program centers on fostering teacher development by improving their skills and instructional approaches, and shaping positive attitudes toward the students and teaching profession. The school district found that teachers need continuous support and training from mentors to improve their instructional ability because low student achievement rates can discourage new teachers. It was also discovered that the presence of mentors helped the new teachers acquire realistic expectations of the classroom environment (Clark, 2001).

Induction programs undeniably present a valuable experience for beginning teachers, but those that stress constant feedback in collaborative environments remain a rare experience for most new teachers. Educators do not agree on what teachers should know or what constitutes the best learning environments, so this condition produces divergent programs that differ from district to district. (Weiss & Weiss, 1999).

In July of 2000, the American Federation of Teachers (2001) adopted a resolution stating their position on induction for new teachers:

Graduation from a teacher education program ... cannot be considered the end of training for teachers. The demands of the pre-college degree - acquiring subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and clinical training - do not allow sufficient time for teacher candidates to develop the skills and experience necessary for completely independent practice in their initial teaching assignments ... Nonetheless, after graduation most new teachers are assigned a class, often with the most hard-to-reach students, and left to 'sink or swim' on their own. By contrast, other countries with high-achieving students induct new teachers into the profession through clinical, real-world training processes ... by which inductees develop and perfect their teaching skills under the mentorship of more experienced and skilled colleagues ... Resolved that the AFT call for an induction program for all beginning teachers ... (p 1).

### Summary

Teacher preparation programs, induction activities, and an impending teacher shortage are inextricably linked. New teachers who believe they have not been adequately prepared to teach often leave the profession in the first few years of their careers. Whether teachers experience success their first year or decide to leave the profession often depends on the quality of both their college training and of the induction program at their school.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify beginning teachers' perceptions of how colleges and universities can improve their teacher preparation programs and what school systems can do to assure that first-year teachers have a successful and satisfying experience in the classroom. Chapter 3 included a description of the research design, selection of participants, interview guide, analysis of data, and strategies for assuring trustworthiness.

#### Research Design

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), "qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people (p. 2)." Denzin and Lincoln (1994; as cited by Gall et al., 1996) described a qualitative researcher as one who studies things in their natural settings, trying to make sense of the phenomena according to the meanings people bring to them. Many researchers maintain that qualitative research is most valuable in discovering themes and relationships at the case level (Gall et al., 1996). A virtue of qualitative research is its descriptive nature in the quest for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Rich description indicates that the researcher was immersed in the setting and provides the reader with sufficient details to understand the situation (Firestone, 1987). I chose a descriptive qualitative research design to learn directly from the experiences of a group of first and second-year teachers with the assumption that they would provide rich insights into the research topic. Using this approach, I conducted one-on-one interviews with teachers who have completed one or two years of teaching.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed five axioms, or basic beliefs, that are central to the naturalistic, or qualitative, paradigm. The first axiom focuses on the concept of reality. In qualitative research, reality is viewed as holistic and multiple. Different people can interpret the same event in various ways. This first axiom is important to my study, because a group of teachers discussed their personal observations and perceptions regarding their college preparation and first-year school experiences. Despite the fact that all of the participants held teaching certificates and had taught for a similar period of time, their beliefs sometimes differed

from one another.

The second axiom centers on the relationship between the researcher and the participants. They interact continually, and the researcher encourages this behavior because it is part of the qualitative scheme of research. Developing this relationship is crucial because the researcher must be privy to, and understand, the participants' views. While interacting and talking with participants about their perceptions (Glesne, 1998), researchers pursue a variety of viewpoints. Although I heard similar viewpoints repeated at the beginning of each interview, I made an effort to gently probe for deeper details and more divergent themes. I asked open-ended questions, either those I had previously formed or those that emerged as a result of something the participant had shared.

Generalizability, the third axiom advanced by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is not a goal of qualitative researchers. Qualitative research only examines data gathered from the participants in the study, with the results and findings not intended to be generalized to any larger group. If a reader can transfer some of the conclusions to another study, that is acceptable, but it is not the intent of the qualitative researcher. My hope was that after I analyzed and summarized the data, readers who were interested in this topic may either use the information to improve teacher preparation and/or school induction programs, or utilize it as a springboard for future, related research.

The fourth axiom developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is *cause and effect*. Although patterns may appear when data are analyzed, the qualitative researcher may be unable to, or even uninterested in, explaining the cause/effect relationship of events. The researcher is more interested in providing a rich description and in-depth analysis of the data revealed from the participants' experiences relevant to the topic. Patterns of cause and effect may be very evident after the analysis of the data has been completed, and I believe this would be of interest to readers who wish to improve teacher preparation programs or develop and improve school induction programs.

The fifth axiom explains the role of values within the study. In qualitative research, the researcher's values are interwoven throughout the study and may influence and color the scope, direction, and findings of the report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although I have been a teacher for over 20 years, I conducted the study in a manner as bias-free as possible to eliminate any possibility that my personal inclinations would be reflected in or affect the findings.

This research study presented a summary of all of the pertinent data reflecting the perceptions of teachers regarding the quality of their college preparation and their experiences during their first year of teaching. I integrated the rich details and descriptions of interviews with my own explanation into a descriptive narrative.

### Selection of Participants

Qualitative researchers are inclined to choose each of their participants purposefully. This approach allows the researcher to select "information-rich" *cases* to facilitate an in-depth study of the proposed research. From these, a researcher is able to learn much about important issues central to the study (Patton, 1987).

Gall et al, (1996) described the choice of participants that fulfill an important criterion for research as criterion sampling. Criterion sampling allows the researcher to choose only participants who meet the criterion for the study.

I conducted in-depth interviews with the participants during the fall and spring semesters of their first or second year of teaching. All of the participants in this study were first- or second-year teachers employed in various elementary schools located in East Tennessee. Teachers with fewer than two years of experience were selected to participate in the study because they would have accrued a wide array of job-related experiences while still retaining details of their college training and induction experiences. Participants were selected from school districts in East Tennessee for convenient access to interviewing.

I contacted the superintendents of the school systems to explain the study and to request permission to conduct research in their systems through the method of interviewing a group of first and second-year teachers. Verbal permission was granted. I was given the names of the supervisors in two of the participating systems to contact, who in turn gave me the names of the principals to call to schedule my visits. In the other two systems, the superintendents gave me the names of the principals to contact directly. The participants were chosen by the supervisors and/or principals based on the research criteria. I then contacted the principals at the participating elementary schools to schedule the interviews. All of the teachers completed the Informed Consent (Appendix B).

Sample selection should continue to the point of redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the choices of who to study next or how long to continue interviewing are affected by

the information that is discovered (Ryder, 2002). After I had interviewed 20 teachers, the point of redundancy had been reached. In-depth interviews were the principal data-gathering technique.

The process of in-depth interviewing delves beneath the surface to gather details and provides a holistic understanding of a participant's perspective (Patton, 1987). In-depth interviewing (Kahn & Cannell, 1957; as cited by Marshall & Rossman, 1999) is a "conversation with a purpose" (p. 149). Patton (1987) described three basic approaches to collecting data through interviewing: 1) the informal conversational interview, 2) the general interview guide, and 3) the standardized open-ended interview.

### Interview Guide

I used the general interview guide approach in this research study. Patton (1987) defines an interview guide as a list of questions that will be asked during the interview. Using this approach ensures that essentially the same information is gathered from the research participants. The guide allows the interviewer the opportunity to explore and probe for rich and illuminating details central to the topic. In addition, using an interview guide provides a systematic approach to interviewing different people. This method is especially useful in directing group interviews because it helps to keep the interview focused on a certain set of questions.

To develop the questions, I conducted a focus group consisting of a small group of new teachers, none of whom participated in the study. Through this informal group activity, I solicited ideas and questions pertinent to the exploration of this study. I developed many of the questions prior to interviewing as a result of the literature review, input from members of the focus group, and my own experiences as a veteran elementary teacher. However, I did not hesitate to deviate from the guide when a new theme or idea emerged during an interview(s). I was flexible so that I would not overlook new ideas offered by participants. The interview guide used in this study is shown in Appendix A.

The interviewer provides a setting in which participants can respond accurately, honestly, and comfortably to open-ended questions (Patton, 1987). I conducted the interviews in an informal, convenient setting at the participant's school. During the interviews, I sought to gather data regarding the perception of the quality of the participants' teacher preparation program and

the existence of induction activities provided by their schools during the first year of teaching. I asked them to reflect on what colleges and universities can do to make the transition from college to teaching more fulfilling and successful and the various ways schools can ensure first year teachers a comfortable transition from college to teaching. My intention was to determine to what extent college training and school induction programs influenced the degree of satisfaction perceived by first and second-year teachers.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis entails organizing what one has read, heard, and seen throughout your study so that you are able to understand what you have learned (Glesne, 1998). Interviews were the primary method for collecting data. The data were coded and divided into categories, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), in an attempt to discover common themes. Patton (1990) defines constant comparison analysis as grouping answers to common questions and analyzing the different perspectives. After the initial examination of early observations and answers, the researcher continued to analyze collected data and code it by categories (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). Thus, new data was constantly compared with previously collected data in the hope that relationships and themes would be discovered. The important task of categorizing is bringing together the various bits of data into specific, not necessarily permanent, categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a critical and necessary component to valid qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If qualitative research is to be of value to others, either in their understanding of the problem investigated or as a springboard for future research, then the procedures and interpretations must be trustworthy, or credible.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), various criteria can be met to insure that a study is trustworthy. First, the researcher must have prolonged engagement with the participants. This can take the form of in-depth interviews, either with individuals or groups, and an adequate number of observations, with the researcher participating or merely observing and taking notes. In my study, I spent between one and two hours individually interviewing each participant. The teachers were given an adequate amount of time to reflect on the questions before expressing

their feelings and perceptions, and then spoke their thoughts without feeling rushed.

Secondly, the qualitative researcher must always be aware of her biases. Although she may become emotionally involved with the participants, she must not attempt to color their perspectives by making personal comments or affirming their perceptions. During the interviews I made a conscious effort to refrain from agreeing or disagreeing with any points, comments, or feelings expressed by the participants so that my feelings would not influence their responses.

A third criteria, as distinguished by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is that qualitative researchers persuade by providing a rich, thick description of their interpretations and settings. The goal is to immerse the reader in the study - creating a "being there" experience. To ensure that my study provided a rich description, I intentionally refrained from interrupting the flow of conversation when the participants paused, thus giving them time to recollect their experiences and hopefully continue their train of thought. In addition, if the answers were brief, I gently probed for more thoughtful, deeper responses.

Fourth, using a process called member checking can assist in insuring that the interpretations of the researcher match the perceptions of the participants. The researcher can show the participants a rough draft of the document so they can check the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of their perceptions. I mailed a written transcription of the taped interview to the teachers requesting they read it to see if it accurately captured their thoughts and feelings. I then asked them to make any necessary changes, initial each page, and return it to me in the enclosed stamped envelope. When I received the transcriptions, I made any changes that were noted.

In addition, the qualitative researcher can keep a reflective log in which are noted important, personal perceptions, observations, and feelings toward the participants, specific insights into the documents she reads, etc. It is a record of thoughts that can be valuable later when the document is being written. In my reflective log, I documented written and verbal correspondence with employees of the participating school systems. In addition, I kept notes of verbal and personal contacts with my committee chairman. I also noted the themes that were emerging as the interviews progressed.

Lastly, an outside audit can be helpful to insure trustworthiness and accuracy. An auditor listens to the tapes of interviews, reads field and observation notes, and then compares that information to the written perceptions of the researcher to determine if they "match". The

inclusion of these processes will assure the reader that the document is trustworthy. The materials I released for an audit of this study included the taped interviews of the research participants, the transcriptions of the interviews, and my notes analyzing the data. The auditing process was conducted by Meredith deNobriga, an accountant at Tennessee Eastman Company. The auditing process proceeded after all data had been collected and analyzed. See Appendix C for a copy of the letter from the investigator to the auditor outlining the audit agreement and Appendix D for a copy of the auditor's findings.

### Summary

This study was designed to explore the perceptions and observations of first and second-year teachers regarding the quality of their teacher preparation at the university level and their experience with induction programs at their respective schools. Participants were selected using a purposeful sampling technique and included teachers in grades K-5 employed in elementary schools in East Tennessee.

## CHAPTER 4 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and identify beginning teachers' perceptions of the quality of teacher preparation they received and how colleges and universities can improve their teacher preparation programs. In addition, their ideas and perceptions of what school systems can do to insure that first-year teachers have a successful and satisfying experience in the classroom were investigated. By analyzing these perceptions, implications were drawn as to how school systems and universities can best prepare and support new teachers to increase the likelihood that they will remain in the teaching profession and enjoy satisfying and successful careers.

### Participant Information

As originally planned, data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews with 20 public school teachers. Written or verbal permission from the Directors of Schools of four school systems, along with permission from school principals, was obtained before interviewing began. The teachers were selected by their administrators. All of the participants were first or second year teachers employed in various elementary schools located in East Tennessee. The group of participants was comprised of 17 females and 3 males. Of the 20 teachers, 11 were in their first year of teaching, and 9 were in their second year. All of the teachers graduated from public or private colleges located in Tennessee. They represented 7 colleges and universities where they received their degrees.

The participants in the study ranged in age from 22 to 53. Teaching was a second career for 7 of the participants, and 7 of the members had earned a master's degree. Ten of the participants taught in rural schools and 10 taught in a city setting. One teacher was African American and the remainder were Caucasian.

The interviews were conducted at the participants' schools in their classrooms or a conference room. This environment was chosen for convenience and comfort to the teachers. Each interview lasted between one and two hours and was tape-recorded. An interview guide was used to maintain focus. Before the formal taped interview began, the purpose of the study



was explained and the participants signed a consent form (Appendix B). The tapes were transcribed by the interviewer, which facilitated in the categorization, coding, and analysis of the data. Copies of individual transcriptions were sent to each participant for member checking. In keeping with the promise of confidentiality, participants were given pseudonyms that have no bearing on their given name or place of employment.

Several themes reflecting the perceptions of study participants emerged during the data analysis process. These themes are summarized below under each of the broad research questions addressed in the study.

Research Question # 1: What do satisfied first and second-year teachers have in common?

### A Supportive Work Environment

#### Peer Support from Teachers

A critical factor affecting teacher confidence and satisfaction was the continual presence of support from their peers. New teachers struggling with academic concerns of their pupils, interacting with parents, feeling overwhelmed by the workload, and wondering if they are successfully teaching their students, seem to receive and benefit from a tremendous amount of support and encouragement from their more experienced colleagues. Mia shared how peer support provided help and guidance for her when she said,

... the teacher closest to me wasn't my mentor but she was always there to fix my problem. This year the teacher across the hall from me is still not my mentor, but he and I tend to really plan more together than my mentor and I do. So, it's a very supportive staff here from the top to the bottom, and I don't know, they just, they all work together like a well-oiled machine.

Jeff agreed with the benefits of peer support and explained the steps he took when he needed assistance:

Ask the other teachers all the time. Ask them what they're doing. How they're doing it. What are they struggling with. How are you helping them [the students]. So I do ask the other teachers a lot.

Janet echoed this theme when she shared how her peers helped her through the tough

spots:

I feel like they carried me, kind of like that footprint thing about Jesus. He said, 'I'm carrying you.' I never taught a grade that was tested and because third grade is tested, there is a lot of invisible pressure. The other third grade teachers were awesome, and still are.

Diane affirmed the importance of peer support in aiding new teachers and making them feel welcome:

Oh, everyone's so nice here. The faculty has been so kind and generous to me. I'm made to feel really welcome. I feel like I could ask anybody a question, and being my first year, as I'm floundering about and forgetting things, they've been very helpful in reminding me-' Oh, we've got program practice tonight,' or 'We've got the teachers' meeting.' I feel very comfortable with the staff here. They've just all been friendly and outgoing.

Maria indicated that her feelings of success could mostly be attributed to support from her fellow teachers:

I have always gone to them for what to do on the first day of school, the first week. Like this year I'm teaching a new grade and the teacher that is next to me, I go to her and say, 'What are we doing this week,' and so we discuss what we want to do and what curriculum goals we want to accomplish. We pretty much work together and teach that way.

Tina confirmed that support was essential to encourage her to remain in teaching. She offered,

What would encourage me to stay on the job is to know that you're not alone, that you have people or teachers who have the same problems as you do, and yet have the same successes, too. You know, being at a school where you have good interaction with your colleagues, not just on the same grade level, but just all across the board.

Peer support, either by a group of colleagues or from a mentor, has been a tremendous source of strength in helping Phyllis experience success. She recounted her experiences:

I think the mentor I had, she was a very organized person, and I picked up a lot of tips from her. She had a system for each child. Each child had a mailbox, and then also she had boxes for each subject when they turned things in. They didn't just go on the

teacher's desk. You know, it went in the math box or the reading box. Just things like that just really helped with the paper flow.

Praise and support from his fellow teachers constituted a very important factor in allowing Jeff to experience success. He related,

I had a lot of support from within the school. There are a lot of older teachers here, as far as 'You're doing a good job. I like what you're doing. You've changed the program here. It's a lot better than it was. The kids are more active. You actually make them do something. They're not just in there running wild. You have structure.' Things of that nature always just kind of helped you out.

Whether from an assigned mentor or just willing colleagues, peer support played a tremendous role in assisting teachers to successfully transition from college to teaching. All of the teachers in the study cited peer support as a critical component to surviving the first year of teaching.

### Support from Principal

Every study participant mentioned that the principal offered assistance, either formally or informally. Having an organized principal can help keep teachers aware of things that are going on and eliminate some job stress. However, some new teachers feared that asking for help might give the appearance that a teacher is not well-trained or effective

When asked if she had received good support at her school, Melissa confided,

Now I do. ... I'm not afraid anymore to go ask for help. People are willing to help. You just have to get over that paranoia. It's not that you're NOT a good teacher. It's just everybody needs help. So once I figured that out, I was okay. Teaching is very much a sink or swim profession. You know, you have to at least get in over your head before you can learn how to tread that water because I don't think anyone has come in, at least not now, has come in and felt like they know what they're doing. That was something I had to come to realize, and it came when I was sitting down with my principal and with my vice-principal just on different occasions and finally just opened up to them and said, 'Look, this is what I'm feeling. I need some help.' And they both looked at me and said, 'Do you think we weren't first year teachers also?' It was finally being able to open up to them and realize that nobody's out to get me and everyone wants to help you. It's just being able to find the help and being able to swallow your pride and go do it.

Maria also overcame her reluctance to ask her principal for help. She stated,

Now I'm starting to go to the principal and the assistant principal just about the behavior problems I've had in my classroom, and I guess I've never gone to them before because I didn't want them to think I couldn't manage my classroom. But now, the children I have have severe problems that need to be dealt with, so now I am comfortable going to them with those problems.

When asked what factor has helped her feel successful, Leigh laughed and said,

I would say that my principal has been very supportive of me. I mean, she's been there for me whenever I've needed her, as far as just not knowing stuff, you know, and getting discouraged.

Formal meetings, newsletters, and e-mails were a few of the ways that Mia's principal kept her on track. She chuckled as she explained,

I like that my principal has staff meetings almost every Monday, every other Monday if we skip one, which has helped me in these two years to keep my eyes focused on what is happening right now because I tend to get overwhelmed about what should happen in six weeks. It has helped keep me focused and keeps me aware of the things that are going on. Plus, not losing sight that I'm not the only one in the building that may be having any kind of problem, and that's helped. My principal not only does that, but he e-mails us a newsletter every week that keeps us posted. It gives us the calendar of events for the week, and he reminds us of anything that's coming up. It's just good. He keeps us right there on the edge and keeps me in touch with everything that's going on and the other teachers in the building.

When Jessica needed help, she was confident she would receive administrative support. She said,

I go straight to the principal ... if I have trouble with dealing with a parent or a situation that I think's going to happen, I go and I ask my principal for advice.

Going directly to the principal when she required assistance was also the approach taken by Amy. She shared,

I asked my principal a lot of questions. At this point I don't know if I'd ask him so many questions, but I went directly to his office and just asked him if he had a minute and just asked him the questions to get it right from the horse's mouth.

Laughing a little, Melissa described steps she took when she needed help, in addition to asking her mentor.

... if it's something really big, then I'm to the point now where I feel comfortable going to my assistant principal or my principal and just sitting down and saying, 'Hey, help me please.' And there's part of me that really does not like doing that. I had to get over, get over my ego, for one, and get over the feeling that every time I go in there and ask for help, that they're marking it down somewhere, and then at the end of the year they're going to come up and say, 'Well, you came in and asked for help 276 times, and that is over our limit, so we're not going to invite you back next year. Thanks. Have a nice summer.' And once I got over that ... I'm just doing the best I can. Nobody's perfect. But I REALLY struggled with it at the beginning and went home many afternoons in tears.

Donna said this about her principal:

He has let me know that he's very concerned and he's said, 'Is there anything we can do to help you or is there something we can do for you?' If I need somebody to talk to about something, he's always very open and receptive.

Tina affirmed that along with having a very good support system with her colleagues, her principal has also been very supportive.

I've been very pleased, and my principal is just so organized and, you know, she takes a lot of things on herself. Any time that I have had a question or something come up that maybe my colleagues couldn't answer or couldn't help me with, she's always been very supportive and very helpful.

Becky affirmed the value of her principal's support:

The principal is wonderful. She's had me here before school started this year getting me prepared, sending me to seminars, and she was really, really helpful

The general overall consensus of the participants was that if they needed help, their principals were more than willing to offer assistance. For some teachers, however, getting past the fear of asking for help was an obstacle that they eventually overcame, much to their relief.

### Positive Evaluations

Positive feedback from principals' evaluations also has helped new teachers feel successful. Beginning teachers are evaluated several times a year until they are granted tenure. Tina pointed out that not only has support from her colleagues proven helpful, but so had her evaluations. She stated,

The support my principal has given me through like, my evaluations, for example,

anything that she commented on or was critical of, I totally agreed. There wasn't a discrepancy in what she saw and what I thought.

In addition to a supportive faculty and administrators being key factors in helping her feel successful, Amy agreed that feedback from the principal's evaluations was very important. She said,

Having a supporting faculty and administrators; evaluations - they're the only time you get feedback on your work.

Jeff seemed satisfied with the manner in which his evaluations were conducted and stated that the evaluations had been helpful.

[The principals] here they are real open and courteous in helping me with evaluations. They're open-minded and you can relate with them. I haven't really had any trouble in that aspect at all. I feel that I do a pretty good job, and I asked them one day last year, especially being my first year, if I was doing okay, and he said, 'Well, I haven't said anything to you so you're doing fine

Although the principal's evaluation may evoke nervous feelings to those being evaluated, the general feeling was that evaluations provided beneficial feedback.

### Support from Student Feedback

Seeing students learn is a critical component that affects job satisfaction. One of the reasons teachers can face the ups and downs of teaching is because they can see that their efforts are making a difference in the lives of their students. As Phyllis related,

There are challenging days, but, just for example, we just started long division, and when you see that click for your students, that is why I do what I do ... just seeing them learn.

When asked to what she attributed her feelings of success the first year of teaching, Patty confided that her students were an important factor. She noted,

Although there's not a formal support system, I have felt completely welcomed. But more importantly that that, I have a super group of kids, and so I picked a good year to come in. Teaching a group of children can be challenging, but when you witness learning taking place, it is very gratifying.

It is very satisfying for teachers to see their students progress academically and socially. Teachers work very hard to create an environment conducive to learning. Observing their students learning a new skill is a very rewarding experience and can make teachers feel that all their hard work was worth it.

### Strong Faith

A few of the participants confided that a strong faith conviction was essential in helping them feel successful and satisfied. They said they very blessed that they were teaching and attributed this to their relationship with God. Toby discussed what he felt had contributed to his success as a new teacher at his school:

The support of the other teachers in the school, the principal, my wife. She's very supportive. I've got the support of the parents in the classroom for the most part. I have [had] a really good group of kids last year. I was ... blessed. So I attribute a lot of it to the Lord. He was good to me last year.

Although Stephanie listed supportive grade-level teachers, a fabulous faculty, and the fact that the principal is there for you as reasons her job was satisfying, she affirmed that her faith was the most influential factor in achieving this success. She stressed,

... first and foremost every day I pray. I pray in this room and I pray over every one of these desks and these children, and that's where I get my source of help. That's my first and foremost help, and I answer to Him.

Faith plays an important role in promoting confidence and satisfaction in their choice of a teaching career. Some of the teachers expressed the belief that teaching was "a calling", and they were right where they wanted to be.

### Increase in Self-Confidence

As their teaching experience increases, teachers begin feeling more confident and hopeful that they are becoming better teachers. Reflecting on and evaluating their struggles and successes, receiving input from peer teachers and principals, and seeing positive results of their teaching through student achievement positively affects their level of confidence.

Tish expressed the belief that her own sense of direction and self-evaluation helped her

experience success when she began teaching. She laughed as she explained,

Well, I think a lot of what has contributed to my success, which I guess you could say success, I constantly am searching to do things differently and evaluating myself. I find myself in the car on the way to school evaluating what I'm planning for that day and constantly changing it and rearranging it. A lot of times, too, that emotional level comes in there and how the class is working together, and some days my lesson plans will change like that (snapping her fingers). So I think I'm really flexible and able to evaluate myself and I'm my worst critic. So I think that those kinds of factors help teachers because then you realize there is no one way to do anything. It's constantly changing.

Citing what she thought contributed to her success this year, Melissa laughed and said,

What success? They're few and far between. Well, I guess becoming more comfortable. Becoming more comfortable here at my school. Becoming more comfortable with my subject matter because ... you're not going to get everything right and if you don't teach it just exactly the way the textbook says ...the teaching police aren't going to come and get you. But just basically becoming more comfortable with myself.

As the school year progressed, new teachers became more familiar with school routines, procedures, and curriculum, as well as gaining a better understanding of themselves in their new role as teachers. This enabled them to feel more confident in their teaching abilities.

### Prior Experience with Children

Working with children in a school setting prior to beginning their teaching careers can provide invaluable experience for new teachers. Some of the participants related their experiences volunteering in schools or recreational centers as well as the experience they received during their practicums.

Besides peer and administrative support, Becky expressed her belief that working with children during her college years facilitated personal feelings of success:

I think all the practicum time really did help and being here at the school.

Breanna reported that her success had been influenced by personal experiences outside of her classroom before she began her teaching career. Getting her feet wet in the classroom [by] coming in and volunteering with her children prompted her to enroll in college and become a teacher. She explained,



I feel successful, but I think what's been helpful is just my experience volunteering in my children's classroom. And just things I've done outside the classroom. Volunteering at recreational centers and getting to know the kids and just being around children. That's what's helped me. The experience ... helps me focus on their needs instead of all the books, all the stuff we need to do. We need to do the curriculum, but I focus on the children first, and then once I get to know them, then that's when I can go ahead and start teaching them the things they need to know.

During Amy's college years, she exceeded the number of hours required for field experiences. She completed a lot of time helping in community service programs as well as teaching private lessons and said these activities were very fulfilling. Amy indicated these experiences would enhance her education and help her decide on a career path.

Although all of the participants were required to complete a certain amount of field experience, those who had completed additional activities stressed this had helped extend and enrich their repertoire of teaching experiences.

### Quality School

A few of the participants attributed their feelings of satisfaction and success to working in a good school, where factors such as peer support, a helpful principal, and good kids were present.

Tim expressed how fortunate he felt to be teaching at his school when he stated,

I think I'm very lucky to be in this school, that I'm here. I've had more support than I could ever imagine from my other teachers, and especially from the principal. I mean, I don't know if I would have been that successful in another school, but the kids here are great and the support - it's great. There's just so much help that from Day 1 I felt very comfortable in this school and in the classroom. Coming in two weeks into the year was very smooth and the principal was so incredible. I truly think it's just the school that has been my biggest asset.

The fact that she had landed a teaching job at a good school made Patty feel very lucky. She said,

I'm very fortunate to have this school and to be where I am. I love teaching.

Overall, the teachers expressed high praise for their schools. They seemed happy and professed a high degree of support from the staff.

## Strategies for Success

After surviving several months of teaching, these new educators were willing to share insights, offer words of encouragement, and render their strategies for success to new teachers.

### Organize Your Classroom and Resources

The beginning of school can be particularly confusing and stressful even for veteran teachers. Organizing materials and books, keeping detailed lesson plans, and familiarizing yourself with the school's teaching resources can help a new teacher enjoy a smoother entry into the school year.

Maria expressed the view that getting your classroom organized before the students arrive would be very helpful in insuring a smooth beginning. Faithfully writing down lesson plans and ideas during the year will result in a written history that can be used and adapted the following year. This could possibly prevent a teacher from having to start from scratch each year. Maria explained,

My main advice would be to get organized before your children come in and just have a folder for everything, and have a file for everything. Make sure you keep up with all the paperwork that you have to keep up with because that's one thing I'm having trouble with. I'm a ... perfectionist and organized person, but I've found that in my classroom it's completely disorganized because I've not had time, or I've not had somebody to show me what to do with all of the paperwork that I get, and what to do with everything that I've copied. Like, you want to keep everything that you're doing and you want to write down in your lesson book everything you're doing for next year in case you teach the same grade, you'll have that reference for you. And I'm starting to learn that this year. I have a mentor that's helping me with those things. It's been very helpful.

Phyllis offered similar suggestions when she laughingly volunteered this advice:

... develop organizational system[s] early on. Save any form that you're sending home because you're going to need it again. ... have a system for the children as far as any correspondence that goes home. Any problems that you have with the child, document everything. As teachers, we need to have systems for everything - from correspondence, to parents, to daily assignment, and discipline.

Melissa advised learning to use the resources at your school. She said,

Take the time [to] completely immerse yourself ... . I've learned to use a lot of my resources that are around and that's something first year teachers have to learn how to do.

Jessica offered this advice to new teachers: begin preparing at soon as you're hired and document everything you do. Unfortunately, many teachers often are not offered a job until late in the summer, and by then there is little time to get ready for the school year. She described her situation when she was hired:

Get yourself prepared. I know a lot of times some first year teachers...don't realize they have a job until the day before school starts. If you know you've got that job, then take that time out of the summer to get yourself prepared. Get the textbooks, take them home, read them beforehand.

Although Jessica stated this was the thing to do, she was not given that opportunity when she began teaching. She continued,

I didn't even have textbooks, so I learned with the students last year. And I learned how to organize myself. This year I can just pull that file out and I've got it, and I've been through the books. I've read all the reading stories. Last year I had no idea what the stories were about. Even though I took them home and I read them, it's still not the same [because] I hadn't taught them at all.

... log everything you do. If you talk to a parent, make sure you log when you talk to them, what time you talked to them. ...documentation of everything, not just with parents but as for money that goes through the office. That was the hardest thing for me - learning how to organize myself in small issues and getting that done along with getting my lessons throughout the day.

If new teachers are hired in late spring or early summer, it would be very beneficial for them to take time during the summer to organize the classroom, both materials and furniture, as well as locate useful teacher resource materials. If these tasks can be completed before in-service activities begin, new teachers can spend those days focusing on meeting colleagues and assimilating all of the new information they will be given that deals with a myriad of school issues.

### Relax and Enjoy Your Job

Feeling overwhelmed by various teaching duties is a common occurrence for new and experienced teachers. Even though new teachers work long hours, they may still feel like they are not meeting the school's expectations.

Amy shared that feeling overwhelmed was normal for new teachers and that you should teach the best you can and enjoy your job. She noted,

Everyone is overwhelmed - it's okay! Teach your curriculum, get to school on time, don't take it home with you, and enjoy your students. They are the only reason you are teaching!

Melissa noted it was important that new teachers give themselves time to get used to their job because the expectations may be more than you first thought

Relax. I know I need to take my own advice. You're not going to come in and be the greatest and grandest that ever was no matter how much people bragged on you when you were student teaching. It's a whole new ball game when it's your class.

Patty offered this advice:

Be ready for anything. Be extremely flexible. Don't beat yourself up whenever you didn't get everything in your plan book covered. If you have a good group of kids, take advantage of it. Have a good year, work hard, cover your standards, and have fun doing it.

Many participants stressed to avoid being overly critical of yourself. Do the best you can and take care of yourself. Chuckling, Diane pointed out,

Advice ... I would just say to be expecting the unexpected, don't be afraid to ask questions, and just try to keep your head up.

Leigh laughed as she pointed out,

I guess don't sweat the small stuff. Just don't get overwhelmed cause I've got myself overwhelmed a lot. And don't get sick all of time. Take care of yourself.

Teachers experience a wide variety of human interactions throughout the day with students, parents, other teachers, and administrators. To prevent feeling overwhelmed, Donna cautioned against taking things personally and just doing the best you can. She suggested,

Just be prepared for just about anything. And I tried so hard not to take things personally because there's so many things that come our way from so many different areas - from parents, from children, from other teachers. It could be almost overwhelming because there's so many different ideas and opinions coming at you. I think it's very important to

be focused and to be confident in what you do and just always do your best without taking things personal. There can be some pretty tough things coming at you, and I think especially with teaching, you're in it because you're so passionate and it all comes from your heart. I think to have so many people critiquing you, and sometimes criticizing you for reasons that aren't usually good reasons, it can really be almost defeating if you let it.

Becky commented that some things that occur are just normal and you have to let them go. She stated,

[Get] plenty of rest. Don't take anything too hard because it'll pass. Parents are going to get angry, children are going to be wild, and it'll be okay. Usually it's normal.

Because teaching is a high-pressured job, it may be difficult for new teachers to relax and "smell the roses." It may improve the morale of struggling new teachers if colleagues offer support and encouragement

### Prioritize

Teaching encompasses so many duties that it can be difficult to know which tasks should be done first, and which that can be completed later. This can be overwhelming to inexperienced teachers.

Breanna cautioned against becoming discouraged. She suggested prioritizing tasks to avoid becoming overwhelmed. She advised new teachers to hang in there:

Don't get discouraged because ... you'll be wearing many hats. ... you'll be doing a lot of things and it does, after a while, get sometimes overwhelming, especially if you have a family to take care of. You see, sometimes you want to put them last, but you need to put them first and then just do the best that you can and not try to get too stressed out. Just don't let every little thing bother you. Some things you're just going to have to let go. You have to prioritize, I guess.

Prioritizing was Toby's advice to new teachers. Know what's important. For Toby, kids come first. He explained,

Jump through the hoops and forget whatever you've learned at [college]... come in there [school] and keep an open mind and treat each child as an individual. Work hard and pray a lot. You got to love the kids. Don't let money be your number one priority. You got to worry about those kids first of all.

There are only 24 hours in a day, and there is a limit to what can be done. Therefore, new teachers need to prioritize their duties and tasks and concentrate on completing the most important ones first.

### Continue to Learn

Many of the study participants claimed they did not feel their college course work adequately prepared them to teach. As a result, on-the-job training was very valuable. However, there is such a plethora of information dealing with educational issues that new teachers should take advantage of it even after they begin their teaching career.

According to Mia, even though you have graduated with a teaching degree, you will still need to work very hard to be successful. Having a college degree does not automatically make you a good teacher. She suggested reading books that deal with school issues, watching educational videos, and asking questions of college professors and colleagues to help you develop and extend your teaching skills. Mia warned,

Don't wait for somebody to come to you to fix your problems. You have to go out there and seek the solutions on your own because the answer might not always come to you first. And then secondly, read everything and look at every video you can get your hands on because in my college experience there were six professors in the early childhood department and they had wonderful ideas and I really enjoyed my professors, but their opinions weren't the only ones that are out there, and so I saw things with blinders. Then take the best of our college education and put it together with what you're still digging for and come up with something that's really going to impact the kids. But I think when I graduated and got that diploma in my hand, I thought, I can do this now, and I didn't really have an idea that I was really going to have to work so hard to really still get what I need to have to be a good teacher, And you know, that's still an ongoing process. But the learning and the digging and the watching and the note taking don't stop when you get that degree. It has to go on and on and on.

Laughing, Toby offered this bit of practical advice:

Learn how to check heads for lice. This is some advice I need to tell to the first year teacher because that's not taught in college, that you have to do a lice check every Friday afternoon. So be prepared.

New educational research and theories are constantly emerging, and teachers must be equipped with this knowledge to improve student learning. Teachers must be life-long learners. Learning does not cease when you walk across the stage and receive your diploma.

## Find a Mentor

When new teachers struggle to cope with the day-to-day aspects of teaching, they need someone to talk to. A mentor can provide answers to troubling questions and offer comfort and encouragement to their inexperienced colleagues. Although it is probably impossible not to feel overwhelmed, Tina laughingly said,

Don't be overwhelmed. ... that's easy to do, but just be real careful about that, and just kind of take it a few days at a time. Rely on the experience that you do have. Rely on your experience as a student growing up through school, and rely on your veteran teachers and your principals and your colleagues, and just feel like you're supported.

Diane stressed the importance of finding a good mentor and soliciting support from the school staff to ensure you experience success your first year or two. She pointed out,

I think the most important thing would just be finding a good mentor. If you didn't get along with the person you were assigned to as a mentor, that would be bad. But I think your mentor and getting along with your principal is the most important thing to help you succeed. If you have a supportive principal and a good mentor, you should be okay.

Tim emphasized that it was important to avoid letting little things upset you, and when you are faced with big things, ask for help. Don't be reluctant to seek assistance because you think you should know all of the answers. Tim said,

I think the biggest thing is first of all, don't sweat the minor stuff and the major stuff, ask for help. I mean, my first six weeks... I thought I'm just out of college, I [should] know what I'm supposed to do, and I was afraid to ask for help... but the second that I let others help me, let others with more experience around me help me, you know, things go so much more smoothly. I mean there's so many processes that take place every day and there's no way that you're going to learn them in college. And every school's going to be different, and you just need to ask for help and let other teachers help you.

If a new teacher is not assigned a mentor by the principal, it is in her/his best interest to ask a colleague to assume that role. A mentor provides wise counsel, support, and encouragement for a novice teacher.

Research Question # 2: Do new teachers receive additional professional training through quality staff development opportunities at their respective schools?

### Pre-service Professional Training Opportunities

Study participants were asked to describe the training opportunities afforded them through their system's induction program. It was evident that opportunities for professional development varied from school system to school system. Some schools provided only one day of induction activities, while others required new teachers to attend three days. Some teachers were given the opportunity to attend more training workshops later in the year. Induction opportunities covered a wide range of topics, from insurance benefits to theories of classroom management. Many teachers who received more than one day thought that too much information was covered, and they just felt overwhelmed by all of the information they received. Those who received less induction were often given a teacher handbook that provided answers to a variety of questions new teachers might have. Certain new teachers were assigned a formal mentor, while others were just encouraged to ask if they needed help. Regardless of the amount and degree of staff development opportunities, new teachers still felt the need for peer support.

### Adequate Induction Program

An adequate induction program might include scheduling a meeting for new teachers to explain important procedures and regulations of the school system and/or providing a handbook that explains pertinent information. At this time a mentor teacher could be formally assigned by the principal. Meetings that focus on such topics as classroom management, the No Child Left Behind Act, and curriculum standards could be provided, as well as scheduling time to complete necessary paperwork for the personnel department.

Tish indicated that her induction program was helpful but somewhat overwhelming. She laughed when she explained that she did not have enough time to process all the information and get ready for school to start:

I was assigned a mentor and we had mentor/mentee meetings together. The first six weeks of school we had two, and we've slacked of a little but, but I'm still in contact with my mentor everyday. [The induction program] ... was at the beginning of school, the two days before the other teachers that were experienced came in. We had two days just for new teachers and they gave us notebooks and lots of information. It was [helpful],



but it was a lot of information. It was a lot of information to cram in for two days ... to get ready before the next Monday, to have to get ready for school stuff.

At Diane's school, more formal induction activities were provided. She stated,

We went to a couple of in-services for new teachers and have had mentor teachers at our own school. Also, the principal at my school has been very helpful. [System-wide] there was just the one meeting, but I did go to a two-day in-service. It was about learning about the new targeting for the Terra Nova test, and it was more of a program to help you use new strategies in your classroom than just for new teachers, but it was useful to me.

An explanation of the evaluation process, along with tips and strategies for effective classroom management, were included in Maria's induction activities. She reported,

We did have a system wide [induction program]. I went to a new teacher orientation and there they went over all the evaluation procedures that we would have to do. They did go over the Harry Wong procedures, things that we could use in our classroom for classroom management. ... we had a couple of speakers that came in that were teachers that discussed some methods in their classroom that they used for classroom management and different things in learning. We have mentor teachers [at my school] that we can go to for help. We have mentor meetings that you're assigned a mentor, and you can go to that person and ask any questions and that person's supposed to meet with you once a week, or twice a week, however many times you all want to do to it, to help you with things in your classroom that's going on, or paperwork.

Although helpful suggestions for classroom management and other topics were discussed, Stephanie indicated that the most important part of her induction program was the assignment of a mentor teacher. She stated,

We had the new teachers' program over at Central Office. We went through a week of kind of getting our feet wet about the school system and what was expected, and some helpful hints about classroom management and different things. My biggest help, I guess, was from here [school] because I was set up with a mentor teacher and my whole grade level group of teachers were really hovering around me, ready to help me.

Amy praised the induction activities provided by her school system. She enthusiastically described why she felt the induction was so helpful, both at the system level and at her school:

There was a really good, good program for induction. I felt overwhelmed. I was given tons and tons and tons of information, but it was good. [I was given] so many things that I couldn't really, didn't at the time, know to filter out. Too many things, but it was good in the sense that I knew that my school system really cared about their teachers and wanted them to be comfortable in schools and has tried so hard to give them so much.

Well, I have a mentor, but I feel that that's pretty much saying, 'Here's somebody that you could go to with questions,' but you find your own people. Everybody's been very helpful. When I was here in the summer working, if anybody would come by they would say, 'I'll help you in any way I can,' and many people have ... I find that in this profession so far that teachers are very willing to help you out.

In addition to having a mentor assigned, Phyllis recalled other features of her induction program:

We had one day prior to the beginning of school where it was sponsored by the Education Association, and they kind of gave us an overview of what the system had to offer, some of the resources we could draw from, and that type of thing. And it was just for new teachers, so we had that one day. And then there was also an in-service that was provided, probably early on in September, that we could take one Saturday, just [to] give you some tips - basic classroom management type things.

Ashley remembered her induction program as one big meeting with all of the new teachers. She recalled that several in-service workshops were offered throughout the year that were optional for her to attend.

We all came together, all the first year teachers, and they gave us an overview. We had a notebook with all the policies. They went through different procedures. ... the nurse that came in told us what we could do with medication, what we couldn't do. We had someone talk to us about standards, what's on curriculum. And we had someone tell us where we could go and find all the standards on the Internet so we would know what we needed to go by. What we needed to teach.

Three days of induction activities were provided at Janet's school. The activities covered a wide range of topics which Janet found helpful. She explained,

When we got hired at the beginning of the year, they do an in-service that is for new teachers, and you go in and they talk about different types of research. We talked about brain research and stuff, and they talked about classroom management. It was a three-day in-service that you attended and they give you a book ... that goes along with it ... that's kind of about our first year of teaching. You also did like a blood-borne pathogen thing [training].

Many of the participants explained that their school had induction activities for all of the staff, not just for new teachers. Donna confirmed that this was the case at her school:

System wide we had ... an orientation that was held for us as far as paperwork and what

we could expect from mentor teaching and things like that. It lasted two days. And then talking to my principal here, he has always been very helpful and [said], 'Let me know if there is anything I can do for you and how are things going?' but I wasn't given a mentor teacher. ... but there have been people here that I felt like I could reach out to if I needed help.

Tina described her induction process as consisting of three days of meetings where questions were answered and concerns were addressed. She said,

There was a three-day in-service that I had up at Central Office which was three days prior to the first day that regular teachers had to start back to school. And during that three-day period, one day was spent on the curriculum, and the Tennessee state standards, and the accomplishments that ... we would be expected to teach during that time along with ... lesson planning and, and different methods to use in terms of lesson planning. ... one day was spent on ... the school handbook. We went [over] the school system's handbook, ... highlighting the most important points, going through expectations of the school system ... vacation days, sick days, just kind of did the paperwork kind of stuff. And then it seems like the third and final day was a roundtable session where you just rotated around tables. One table was signing off on all of your paperwork. Another table was if you had questions on benefits, life insurance, health insurance, those kinds of things. One table was strictly for the lunch program within the, the school system, explaining to you how that lunch program works. Another table was I think just any, any questions you had that you needed to ask. What's on your mind, what's on your heart, as you head into your first year of teaching? Anything at all, ask. And then there were different people within Central Office that were seated at those tables so they were specialized in those different areas to help guide you through.

Many of the participants were provided a formal induction program at the beginning of the school year. They had opportunities to meet with staff from the Central Office where questions and concerns could be addressed. Some principals also met with their new teachers to explain school procedures. A few teachers were given a handbook, which they stated was very helpful. Overall, the teachers viewed their induction program as beneficial.

### Inadequate Induction Program

The remaining group of participants either received a short, informal induction or were provided with no induction at all. Some expressed the feeling that they were just thrown in the classroom with no preparation at all from their school system.

Patty reported that at her school there was just a short welcome and that was it. She explained her school's induction program:

There was a small, maybe 10 minutes school-wide that we were welcomed as new teachers in the county. It was just pretty much a welcome, though it wasn't very helpful. I don't have a set mentor, but everyone here at the school is wonderful to help me out, so that's good.

An informal induction was what Jessica also experienced. When asked to describe the kind of assistance she received, Jessica remarked,

We just went to the Central Office and signed our agreement and started. [There was] no orientation at all. They did give us a teacher handbook the first day of real classes - the first day of teacher classes and [I] just took the handbook home and read it. Other teachers are what helped out.

Many of these new teachers felt overwhelmed and frustrated during the first year of these teaching careers. Just surviving the year seemed to be a priority for most. According to Jeff, his school did not provide an induction program for new teachers at the beginning of the school year. Jeff remembered,

I was just placed in the classroom pretty much and hoped you were prepared correctly in college, and you were fed to the wolves .

Becky's school did not provide formal induction activities but she was encouraged to ask for anything she needed. She explained,

Well, I have a mentor teacher here and just anything I need my principal's real open for us to come in and ask her for what we need. That's pretty much it. If we need it, just ask for it.

Mia attended a similar two-day induction program but stated it was not very helpful. She said she felt a little confused when she finished. The most helpful aspect of the induction was being assigned a mentor. She said,

There was a system-wide induction program that was two days long. They used a lot of Harry Wong's information and went over just the basics - dress, what to do the first day of school. It wasn't very meaty, but it was there. I did get a few things from the Harry Wong videos, but I guess I was just looking to come away with more information. What I came away with was the instructions that my mentor would take care of all my questions. So there was a system in place for anything they didn't cover. I just felt a little bewildered when I left.

Leigh was not aware of a formal induction program, but she had completed an interim at the school the year before, so she said that experience had helped her successfully adjust to her full time teaching position. She related,

We had a compliance training on harassment as far as how you deal with harassment in the classroom. I did an interim here last year so ... it helped me because I knew a little bit about it [the school] I don't think there's anything really formal, but I sort of joined up, I guess, with the other grade-level teachers, so that's really helped me as far as getting on the same path that they are. Like, if they switch chapters, then I switch chapters to go along with the standards. But as far as an actual so called mentor, I don't think I had that. I just kind of found my own.

Jeff does not remember his induction program as being particularly helpful. His program consisted of a two and a half-hour meeting. Jeff shared,

Yeah, we had one day at the beginning where all the new teachers - it was just an introduction, basically - to help you about insurance and if you need any help give us a call type thing. It was just, 'Okay, here you are. Here's some rules and regulations. You want to join the Union?' And that was it.

Two of the participants were hired a few weeks after the school year had started. Their experiences differed from those teachers who began teaching on the first day of school. Tim shared his experience:

Actually, I had a different situation because I came in two weeks into the school year. The teacher I replaced had thought she was going to come back, and she suffered a stroke and other medical problem so I was hired two weeks into the school year. At the beginning of summer there is [an induction program], but I was not in the actual in-service training in the summer. However, I went back and picked that back up. It's not only for new teachers, it's just all faculty have to go through so many in-service hours before school.

Tim said he was not aware of an induction program that was provided just for new teachers in his school system, only overall observations for them.

Breanna began teaching a few weeks into the year under similar circumstances. Because of this, she was not given the induction training that other new teachers had received. Breanna commented,

I didn't have any training. As far as on-going training now, we have a monthly

workshop, a reading workshop that we participate in because this is a targeted school. So we have to participate at least twice a month. And that's the only training that I get so far right now. I mean, the principal did let me know what his plans were as far as this classroom and how I was supposed to teach and the areas that we're focusing on here at the school. But other than that, that was it.

New teachers face many uncertainties as they began their career. They must understand school procedures and regulations, implement curriculum standards, learn grade-level content, master classroom management skills, along with a host of other skills and duties. This in itself is very challenging. When an adequate induction program is not provided, these teachers are denied an important initiation process into the teaching profession, possibly making their first year of teaching even more stressful.

Research Question # 3: In what ways can schools ensure first and second-year teachers a successful transition from college to teaching?

#### Ways Schools Can Assist New Teachers

Hiring new teachers represents a major investment for school systems. They must pay the teacher's salary, a portion of health insurance, provide sick leave provisions, and finance a share of retirement benefits. In addition, schools may furnish opportunities for staff development or other opportunities for teacher growth and training, often at no cost to the teacher, but at a considerable cost to the system. Furthermore, a substitute must be hired if these workshops are held during school hours. It is in the best interest of school systems to retain their teaching force, not only for financial reasons, but having an experienced and stable faculty is thought to positively affect student achievement. So what can schools do to help first-year teachers be successful?

#### Peer Support

Overwhelmingly, study participants said they benefited from a strong level of support within their schools. This support came from colleagues, principals, and even school secretaries. In a supportive environment, the teachers had knowledgeable people who were very

willing to help them with academic concerns, as well as providing emotional support.

Patty offered her opinion:

I think that having a strong support group is important- making a teacher feel welcome. I know I was worried about that. I was worried about coming in here and being the new teacher and not really having anybody to go to when I had a problem or [to] talk to. Everybody has just been wonderful here, so I think that is the most important thing.

Assistance in understanding everyday routines and completing paperwork correctly were concerns expressed by Maria. She recognized the fact that she needed more guidance and support to successfully deal with these areas. Maria laughed a little as she remembered,

...more support, you know, as far as just showing you what to do, telling you what to do. I know we had to do those collections logs. I didn't have a clue about how to do collection logs and things like that. Also, referrals, speech referrals, ... just all of these different things, referring for special needs ... like what behaviors to send to the office and what not to. This is what we really don't tolerate. If ... one of our students does this, send them to the office. ... I had a lot of behaviors my first year here and I didn't send them to [the] office because I didn't want them to think I didn't have any classroom management ... So, just kind of the balance on ... what to do with certain paperwork and what to do about discipline and things like that.

Supporting and welcoming new teachers was high on Diane's list of things a school could do to make new teachers feel successful. She offered,

Just try to be real supportive of the new people and make them welcome. That's been one of the most heart-warming things that's helped me to succeed here, because if I felt like the staff didn't care about me or were too busy with their own things to worry about how I was doing, I probably would have been a lot more discouraged than I have been. That's really been a saving grace.

Sometimes new teachers are hired shortly before school begins. However, if time allowed, Tish explained it would have been valuable if she had been able to prepare more thoroughly before her students walked into the classroom on that first day. Tish stated,

Looking back [to] the summer ...I wish that I had the opportunity to attend ... a meeting with the grade level that you're assigned to ... and to map out the scope and sequence for the year using the state curriculum standards and accomplishments and goals.

Peer support was viewed in a very positive light as a means of helping new teachers make a successful transition into their first year of teaching. All of the participants agreed that having the support of their colleagues was extremely important in helping them understand and implement the duties and expectations of teaching.

### Support Group

Teaching and isolation go hand-in-hand. Most teachers work within the confines of a room with 20 - 30 children. They may see other adults at lunch or recess, but the profession does not present teachers with many opportunities to interact during the day. Meeting on a regular basis with a group of like-minded teachers could provide much needed, continuous support for new teachers.

Tim expressed the opinion that creating a network to afford opportunities for new and experienced teachers to interact would be helpful in providing support and encouragement to beginning teachers. He also suggested balancing new teachers with veterans at grade levels.

I think they [schools] need to set up a network ... meetings having all first year teachers get together occasionally to talk about things would certainly help. And I think it's very important that schools and principals, when they place new teachers, that they place new teachers around quality, experienced teachers. I think that really makes a difference, and I think that's what's happened here is that in every grade there's just a balance.

Donna also agreed that a support group for new teachers would be helpful to enable new and experienced teachers to share strategies and encourage one another. She explained how this would look:

Ideally, a support group would be nice. Not just a mentor teacher, but a support group who, of people who are just really interested in doing it. I know a lot of teachers complain and fuss because they don't want anything else to do after school, but having a support group that you could talk to of people who just really wanted to be there would be good.

I think ... it's important to have a mix of veteran teachers who have been successful in what they've done. That's one thing I enjoy so much about going to Dr. Dwyer's reading workshops because he does have the veteran teachers who have taught reading for years and they get together and talk about different methods. I love listening to people who have been doing it for a long time.



Jeff also suggested regularly scheduled meetings with a mentor would be a big help if situations developed that he didn't know how to handle. He explained,

There are a lot of gray areas there. ... that could be taken care of with a mentor program, or even a more in-depth orientation program that you would stay together once a month or twice a month for the first six months. It's just something to give you a base and structure ...

Although Donna was satisfied with the beginning-of-the-year induction program, she did agree that future support group meetings with a mentor would be helpful. She said,

Something ongoing because there are things that you may not have thought about ... that are going to come up through the school year.

Toby noted that providing new teachers with a good support network to help them with school-related problems would be very useful.

A specific way to help new teachers was suggested by Janet. She explained,

Only last year did I have one [mentor] ... but like I said, both of the third grade teachers were VERY helpful. ...it would be nice if ...in the ideal world, if they [school] could hire someone to go around and maybe teach an in-service about ... things you need to look at the beginning of the year, these are things you need to think about.' And they kind of did it in my in-service

Continuous peer support was viewed as a valuable component of a good induction program. Support can come from an assigned mentor or within a support group that meets on a regular basis.

### Expand Orientation

Orientation means different things to different school systems. For some, it is a short period of time set aside for new, and sometimes veteran teachers, to meet and receive written and verbal information pertinent to the new school year. In other systems, the orientation period consists of a general meeting to welcome the faculty and then provides opportunities to attend workshops dealing with school related issues, such as classroom management and curriculum standards. Even though there may not be enough time at the beginning of the school year to address all of the issues that are confusing to new teachers, future workshops could be scheduled as part of the orientation program. Although all of these new teachers participated in some type

of orientation meeting at the beginning of the school year, many indicated they wished there had been more time to prepare for the beginning of school, not just time for setting up their rooms, but also to have a chance to study and familiarize themselves with the curriculum and standards.

Janet pointed out that her orientation experience had been very beneficial in preparing her for her first year of teaching. She explained,

Yeah, yeah, definitely the orientation like we had. We also had a separate orientation that talked about when you were evaluated, and all the paperwork you have to have ... I mean, there's a thick folder of stuff you have to have, and they went over that in detail and talked about what you needed to do and what it ... was about.

Jessica said she needed someone to sit down with her and explain how to interpret Terra Nova scores, to figure out what all the numbers mean. Another area in which she expressed a desire for help was in understanding and implementing different methods of assessing children. She said,

The Special Ed. does a really good job with helping us - how to assess, how to make an assessment if we have a child in the class. We do have the guidance counselor in charge of our 504 plans and I do have two children on 504 in this class. So this year the guidance counselor actually did a great job. Any problems I still have with that child I can go to her and say, 'Give me an idea. What can I do?' and she shows me how to break a lesson down.

Obviously colleges cannot prepare teachers for every situation that may occur in the classroom. Because of this reality, Mia suggested that schools should fill in the missing gaps in such areas, for example, as classroom management and literacy. She explained,

The school systems could compensate for what the colleges aren't doing. If the school system had given me even just mimeographed information on typical classroom problems that I could read, go, 'Oh yeah, that's happened in my classroom, so that's what that is and now I know what I can do.' That would be helpful, and that's something the school psychologist or the school system as a whole could do. But that would be very helpful if they kind of picked up the slack in that area. But this particular school has a video library that is, it's just a wealth. So, knowing they were there to go get them but maybe to have, especially for new teachers, a system where you need to check these out every so often and look at the new information, because most teachers do their in-service in the summer, and then where do you grow during the year? You know, what have I lacked because I didn't know it was out there, and I didn't know I was supposed to be doing it?

Maria noted one way the induction program could be improved was to provide some kind

of instruction on communicating with parents. She elaborated,

I think one more way that the induction program could be improved ... would be discussion with parents. I've had ... many parent conferences and things like that, but ...it's hard to deal with parent questions that they have or if a parents gets angry with you for some reason, how to address things like that. I think it would be very helpful if they [schools] included something about how to communicate with parents ... in a conference and outside of a conference...when they call you about maybe putting their child on medication, how you address that, because I know we can't say anything about your child needs to be medicated.

Phyllis stressed that new teachers should be given a faculty handbook to help orient themselves to their new school. She also thought that schools could make new teachers feel welcomed and part of the group by including opportunities for social interaction, such as providing a place for after school clubs and celebrating special events like birthdays. She said,

The faculty handbook that I have here, I personally think every school should have that. It's really nice to be recognized on your birthday and just to get the faculty to get to know you being new. And it's nice here that we can have lunch together with the different grade levels so I get to know different teachers throughout the building ... it's nice to have more social interaction. I know some schools that'll have Weight Watchers after school or they might have an exercise class after school. But first year teachers, it's kind of hard to do those things because you're so busy. We did have a wonderful faculty Christmas party. You know, things like that, it really helps you feel included in the group.

A daunting task often faced by educators is trying to teach non-English speaking students. Donna expressed this concern and explained how her school could help her be successful in teaching these students:

One thing I think would be tremendously helpful is to have ... more strategies on how to reach non-English speaking children. ... just from going to workshops I've discovered you don't have to be fluent in the language, but just strategies to reach children who don't speak the same language as you do. That would be very helpful, and particularly right now because I have one. I'm just lost as to where to start.

Extending the orientation period to include workshops that address school issues was viewed as being an important way to help new teachers be assimilated into the school culture. These workshops could be scheduled during a longer orientation period at the beginning of the

school year or held later in the year.

### Adequate Funding

Maintaining and operating a classroom requires various kinds of equipment and supplies. It is important that this equipment, such as computers, overhead projectors, and televisions, operates properly. Teachers also use various kinds of supplies throughout the year, such as paper, staples, crayons, and so forth. Some of the teachers mentioned that they often bought these necessary supplies using personal funds.

Becky stressed that it was also important to have classroom equipment working properly so teachers could stay informed about upcoming school events. She related,

You know, last year my e-mail, I noticed it wouldn't come up, and I had Accelerated Reader - that's a reading program, and I couldn't get that to come up. I never did get anybody to really fix them. At this school we have one person that goes around and she takes care of all that. But I didn't have anybody to fix that throughout the whole year, and I was very uninformed.. So my e-mail, it was stuck and I'd be behind times, and wouldn't know, 'Oh, we're having a meeting today?'

Financial issues were a concern to Toby. He expressed this opinion of what schools could do to help teachers that first year:

[Provide] stipends of some sort to buy the materials that they need because I came into school with nothing. You know, I've had to buy it out of my pocket. I think that would help a lot. Give them a basic kit to start out teaching with that's geared to their grade level so I don't have to go all over the school borrowing things, which the teachers don't care for me borrowing, but I shouldn't have to.

Maria, too, echoed the sentiment that teachers should be given adequate money and materials to operate their classrooms. She said,

One way [teachers] could be more successful is by giving them materials, things that they need. I know they do give you money for your classroom, but ... if you don't have furniture in your classroom, you have to buy furniture things and books and ... materials to go on the wall - environmental print. And there's no money left over for actual things that you need, like books to actually help you teach that grade. Maybe a little bit more money for your classroom to get it started if your classroom's not already filled.

When asked if she had been given adequate funds to purchase classroom supplies, Breanna admitted she had spent quite a bit of her own money. She stated,

Since I've been here I'd say I've probably spent over three or four hundred dollars on things that I need. There have been some opportunities, well, they have told me, 'If you need certain things then you can ask for it. And then there's times, well, when we may not have the money for it.' I guess I'm the type of person [if] I need it for a lesson, I'm just going to go ahead and just get it.

It is common knowledge that teachers spend a lot of their own money buying teaching supplies for their classrooms. Most teachers would like to have the necessary supplies and equipment to teach their students, but purchasing such items with their own money does not seem right to them.

### Improving the Induction Program for Beginning Teachers

Many of the participants shared their views of how the induction program at their schools could be improved. Their suggestions could help new teachers more easily transition into their roles as classroom teachers.

In Donna's opinion, her school's induction program could not be improved. She explained,

I thought it was pretty comprehensive, considering the amount of time. ... they did include a very interesting speaker on classroom management at that time, so you know, I think considering the amount of time that we had and everything that was coming up into us at once, I don't think there was anything that I could criticize or would have done different. I thought it was helpful, and it was helpful to me to see what the focus of the school system is and what the expectations are, and the different routes I could go if I needed help with anything. So, I don't think there would be anything that I would do differently.

Not everyone shared her opinion, however.

### Increase the Length of the Induction Program

Some of the participants expressed the opinion that the induction program should be extended to allow for more preparation time in the classroom, provide more detailed information about school expectations, and generally give new teachers a chance to get to meet one another before the school year was in full swing.

Melissa noted one way her school system's induction program could be improved would be to plan a more formal, structured first meeting with her mentor. She said,

I think what would be great would be ... to have one day - let it count for an in-service for both you and the mentor - one day where you come into your classroom, you have all your materials, and you sit down with your mentor and you just say, 'Help me. Tell me where I need to go. Help me decide what path I need to take. Let me know, especially in fifth grade, let me know what I need to get done before we take that T-CAP.' That would be great. Just one day, seven hours, you know?

Leigh's induction program had not been very extensive and she thought that scheduling a meeting just for new teachers would have been beneficial. She also mentioned that sometimes new teachers just are not told simple routines and information that will help acclimate them to the school's culture and procedures. Leigh said,

... maybe even just silly little things. ... stuff like lunch count. Like, how are you supposed to know you're supposed to put the names of the students who want peanut butter and jelly? Nobody tells you that. Little things like, just LITTLE things people don't think to tell you. But it's not that they don't want to tell you or they don't want to help you. It's just things they don't think of.

Stephanie addressed the importance of spending more time in the classroom prior to the first day of school. She explained,

I think that if I hadn't spent time ... at our Central Office for a week, I think that would have been good to have spent my week here in my classroom. Now, tell me what you're going to pay me. Tell me your insurance. Tell me what your expectations are. Do that in a day and then bring me in this classroom and sit down with me like my mentor teacher and these other teachers. Here, Stephanie, we're going to be handing this out the first day. This is going to go home the second day, and lay it out for me and let me be part of it. I think that would have been helpful

Diane shared that having the chance to work in her classroom before the school year began

would have been more advantageous than meeting formally with others. She explained,

I suppose that would have helped me, but with all the in-services and teachers' meeting we have otherwise, I feel like if I needed anything it was always available to me. I didn't feel like I had to get together and discuss it, but that's just me personally. Other people might find that more useful than I would. I would rather spend my time preparing for my classroom and just getting my lesson plans ready and really diving into that.

Increasing the length of the induction program and adding a personal touch to school

relationships were a couple of ideas mentioned by Jeff. He said,

Oh, yeah, maybe instead of just a couple hours, go out and have a day. Maybe go out to a park or have a cookout type thing where you really get to know those people that you're going into the first year teaching with, and maybe pair you with a mentor teacher then. Or the people at Central Office sit down and say, 'Okay, we understand teaching's tough. We don't want to lose you. We're lucky to get good teachers like you' and really talk to you and express to you if you really have a problem and you need to talk to somebody, this is the person you need to call. This is the person over the mentor and new teacher program and they'll help you out. Rather than, 'Okay, this is the person over the elementary, and this is the person over high school, and if you have a maintenance problem, this is this guy here.' Really sit down with you and help you through those things ...

Toby also stated it would help if the orientation was extended but he was not sure what else could be included. Like Jeff, he too indicated it was important for new teachers to have a chance to get to know their colleagues before the school year began. Toby suggested meeting together perhaps over lunch. This would give all new teachers a chance to get to know one another and perhaps pick up some classroom strategies from more experienced personnel. Toby said,

I think maybe come into the classroom ... all the teachers that they're hiring, the supervisors, and just sit down and have, maybe have a lunch or something with them, get to know them, have some chat time. Lay out the expectations and get their ideas and let the supervisors give you ideas about what they expect. ...things that you might do for classroom management. I think that's really an issue ... that a lot of people struggle with.

In Amy's opinion, the duration of the induction program was not the problem. She just felt bombarded by the amount of papers and information given to her and ended up throwing most of it away.

Many teachers indicated they wished there had been more time to prepare for the beginning of school. Not just time for setting up their rooms, but also to have a chance to study and familiarize themselves with the curriculum standards and to talk to other teachers.

### Hiring New Teachers

School systems begin hiring new teachers from early spring right up to the week school begins. Of course it would be in the best interests of new teachers and school systems alike if the hiring was completed by early summer, but some circumstances, such as faculty members

retiring or moving cannot always be foreseen.

Stephanie was not hired until late summer. She faced difficulties getting her room in order because of lack of time. She related,

... I got hired ... two weeks before school, so that slaughtered me. Obviously it would have been nice to have been hired a little earlier, but ... you don't know those openings, so that's kind of out of our control. But I think that being able to be in this classroom - my whole center of my room was piled from the teacher who retired. All the boxes, everything, all over the place. You have to rearrange it, but that would have been nice to have had at least a couple of weeks before school started.

Toby suggested school systems make an effort to hire new teachers as early as possible. He said this would alleviate quite a bit of stress and provide more preparation time before begins. He explained his thoughts on helping new teachers:

If school systems would not wait until the last week of school to hire a teacher, if they would give them a little bit more time to prepare in the summer instead of making... the new teachers stress out over whether or not they're going to get a job cause I got hired a week before I started school, and it was hard. And there's a lot of emotional stress on us, on me and my wife as a family ... during that time because I didn't know if I was going to have a job to go to or not, and I knew I was going to have to start paying back a student loan. So if they would just... they know who is going to retire and who isn't, to go ahead and hire the teachers as soon as they could to give them a couple months to prepare, I think would be easier.

The majority of study participants stressed that increasing the length of the induction program would be beneficial because it would allow them more time to spend in their classrooms preparing for the school year as well as give them opportunities to meet with their colleagues to discuss educational issues.

### Observing Veteran Teachers

Numerous participants indicated they would like more opportunities to observe veteran teachers, perhaps even including this as a component of the induction program. However, some expressed feeling somewhat anxious about leaving their students so early in the year.

Janet noted that it definitely would help, but she added, chuckling,

I think if I requested it, I probably could [get release time]. I don't want to leave my classroom because my kids are tested, and the more subs they have, the harder it is.



Maria shared that she had been given release time to observe more experienced teachers at her school as well as visiting teachers at other schools using her professional days, and that it had been helpful. She shared her thoughts:

...I've found, though, that with my own classroom, it's hard for me to leave because ... sometimes leaving sub plans are worse than actually being in your classroom. So I found it hard to find the time to actually go to somebody else's classroom because there's so much stuff to be done. I think that's the main thing - I'm overwhelmed by all of the stuff that has to get done, and all of it's stuff that needs to be done immediately, and I don't have time to do it immediately.

Donna expressed a similar reluctance to leave her classroom at the time but put it in her future plans. She explained,

... I have been given that opportunity. My principal has said that I could take professional leave and do that, and I do plan on doing it here towards the, a little bit further on, but I haven't felt comfortable leaving the classroom yet. ... I wouldn't feel good about leaving right now. So when I start to feel more comfortable in leaving, being able to leave some, I will do that before the year is up.

Donna also expressed the opinion that it would probably be a different experience observing teachers as a college student compared to when you are a practicing teacher. You would look at it with different eyes. She shared that watching videos of outstanding teachers "in action" would be beneficial in a different way:

That would be helpful, and I'm sure much more convenient than leaving the classroom and give you more of a chance to reflect on what it is that you have seen. In our after-school reading program that we have now school-wide, we have done that once or twice and it's always been so much, so interesting to see other teachers and different strategies that they used.

Observing other teachers was perceived as beneficial to many of the new teachers. However, taking time away from their own students was not something they were eager to do. They hinted that time away from their classrooms could be detrimental.

#### Support from the Principal

During the interviews, most of the participants spoke enthusiastically of their relationship with their principals. The role of the principals varied. Some were more directly involved with

the teachers than were others. Generally, the teachers felt supported by their administrators and believed that if they needed any assistance, they would receive it. Most participants expressed the belief that support from their principal was an important factor in helping them feel successful.

### Clarify Expectations

The participants were asked if the school's expectations were clearly communicated by the principal or other administrators. The degree and depth of their principals' explanations varied but, for the most part, were not adequate. The participants wanted clarification of rules, procedures, curriculum, and expectations. Jessica offered this insight:

Well, we only have one principal and he has a lot to do. We are a large elementary school. I do think that we need someone to actually sit down with us and go over the rules, the expectations of what we need to do our first year teaching, and how to handle situations. Maybe if he was absent and we didn't have a principal, how to handle it without him being in the office.

The principal did not meet with Leigh to specifically explain the school's expectations to her, and although a handbook was mentioned, Leigh could not remember if she had received it. She, too, was told how to access the curriculum guidelines off the Internet. Leigh noted,

...at the in-service meeting ... [for] new teachers from all over the county ... they [school]... showed us how we could get the curriculum guidelines off the Internet ... so that's the way I went about seeing what my standards were for the state of Tennessee ... And then I printed it out and then I went from there, and then I met with [and] I talked with the other second grade teachers. But nobody really sat down and said, 'This is what your class needs to know.' I just ... found it.

Melissa was not sure what was expected at her grade level, either. Although she was given some information on standards, she did not feel confident she was doing the right things. She shared her experience:

I was given my little book of standards ... but maybe it was just because I didn't have experience with Tennessee standards, I really wasn't sure where to go, what to do first. Exactly what path I should take. And it wasn't ... explicitly said to me, 'Okay, you need to emphasize writing right at the first, or you need to emphasize reading, or you need to have a balance of everything, or this is your time frame that you need to make sure that you get at least this far before your T-CAP assessments.' Nothing like that was ever said,

and that makes it really difficult. It made it difficult for me because I felt like for, gosh, up until now, probably, I've been sort of like a chicken with my head cut off. You know, not really sure what path I want to take and hoping that I'm doing the right thing as I go along. I hope I'm doing the right thing, but I'm really not sure if I'm meeting exactly what the standards are wanting. So at this point, no, I wasn't really aware - I had a clue, but not a very good clue of what I was supposed to do.

Jeff said he did not meet with his principal to discuss school expectations, nor did he receive a copy of the curriculum. He figured out what to do on his own . He stated,

No, I've never been given a curriculum. I've got one from where I picked [it] up when I was in college. It's about two years old now. I looked through it and kind of go by it the best I can. Time-wise ... you're not going to be able to teach the whole curriculum that you're given by the state. I pick out what I think's the most important and most adequate and go by [what]the other teachers that I know are in the system and what they're doing and try to match with what I'm doing.

School expectations were not explained to Jessica when she was employed, either. She was hired in a very informal manner. Jessica explained,

I grew up in the county. They [school system] called me one day and said, 'I've got three jobs. Which one do you want?' I got to pick because they knew me. They knew my family. But no, as for sitting down and telling me this is what you've got to do, no. I was just thrown in. I didn't even have an interview.

Nor did Tina receive much specific information on school expectations from her principal. She was given a brief welcome and was left pretty much on her own, with the offer that if she needed anything, the principal was in the office. Tina discussed her experience:

...I got a lot from other teachers of what was expected of me, but not necessarily from the principal. It was from teachers who had worked with this principal for a long time. And she never actually sat down with me and said, 'These are my expectations of you.' We had a brief meeting where she welcomed me and went through the handbook and those kinds of things just very briefly ... in fact, she came in and she said to me on my first day, 'I'm going to leave you alone for about the first two or three weeks. If you need me, I'm in the office, but I'm just going to leave you alone.' So ... her expectations, what I got, were from other teachers.

Tina indicated it would have helped if the principal had met with her and personally explained the school's expectations. She stated,

I think ... just to sit down one on one. ... the year I was hired, I was the only new teacher

at this school, so I think she kind of felt like I would get what I needed through my colleagues. Whereas this particular year, I think she hired nine new teachers and I believe that she did do that with those nine teachers. She had meetings - small group meetings with them. But I think because I was the only new one that year that she kind of felt like, 'Oh, she'll get ...what she needs.' And she even said to me, 'Any help you need, other teachers here will be more than willing to help you ... '

Ashley's principal did not meet with her to share school expectations, either. She learned about them in a group setting. She explained,

... [the curriculum] was mostly done during the ...system-wide induction. They sort of gave us an outline. ...that's when we learned ...you need to go and look at these standards and that's what you'll teach by, and we had like set curriculum in our room to use so ...I just went by that pretty much.

Melissa expressed concern about whether the way she was teaching was the way the principal wanted. Although she had read the standards and curriculum, she just was not confident that her methods were what the principal expected. She stated,

Well, they [school system] encouraged us to do a pacing guide, and I have done a pacing guide before. ...I have one but as far as knowing ...where they wanted me to start ... nobody ever said you're starting at the wrong place or you're doing this wrong. ...no one every came out and said, 'This is the way we want you to do it.' Which I guess that's good because that gives us some creativity as a teacher. I'm assuming that they [principal] felt like since I had my standards, I knew what parameters I should stay in and I've done that, but, hey, I don't know if I've pleased the principal. I don't know if I've taught it the way he wants me to.

A few of the new teachers stated that their principals had thoroughly informed them regarding school procedures and expectations. Sometimes a handbook was given to new teachers that provided detailed explanations of school rules, procedures, and expectations. Stephanie described the meeting with her principal:

...she told us[the expectations] and then we had meetings because there were like nine of us this year ... Yeah, she went through her handbook and she explained things to us. She explained the different curriculum that we had. I mean, she told us we were going to be on this block type [schedule]. She told us about the Write from Beginning. She told us about ...Learning Focus. She told us about all this stuff that we were going to be doing but she also told us she was going to help us learn that stuff, that she provided classes for us to learn it. So yeah, she laid it out. Yeah, she was real thorough.

Phyllis really appreciated her principal outlining exactly what she was expected to do in

her classroom. She related how helpful that had been:

...I've been fortunate. I've worked for two different principals. ...I think the guidelines, as far as your evaluations, that kind of helps ...the principal to identify what's expected. Last year my principal was new so we basically went by the three-evaluation process. This year, ... my principal gave me a faculty handbook and to me that has been an enormous help. I mean, she just spelled out everything that you would need to know. All the schedules, ...of course, the evaluation stuff is in there, but just the basic knowledge of how the school works. How does carpool work? She had it all in there.

Leigh noted that she had received general support from her principal. She explained,

I would say that my principal has been very supportive of me. ...she's been there for me whenever I've needed her, as far as just not knowing stuff ... and getting discouraged. ...she does teacher evaluations quite frequently ...she's been a very big help to me as far as if I don't know something...she'll come around to the classroom and [ask], 'How's it going, how are ...the kids doing?' Things like that. So she's ... usually in the building and she's usually accessible if you need her.

Tina mentioned the fact that her principal did not hover around her and constantly critique her every move. She said that helped her feel more successful and confident that first year. Tina noted:

... as long as you are successful and as long as your children are accomplishing what it is they need to accomplish at that grade level, she [principal] kind of lets you have your own teaching style. She's not ...real picky about how you run the classroom and ... your teaching styles as long as you are meeting the needs of the students and meeting those accomplishments, and preparing them as best you can for the next grade level. Then she pretty much leaves you alone. ...I don't have somebody constantly at my door, constantly critiquing every little thing I do... so that leads to you being successful, I think, especially in your first year.

Despite the fact that their principals assured their new teachers that they were there for them if they needed help, many wanted more specific information related to teaching expectations and procedures at their schools.

### Discipline

Lacking an understanding of the school's discipline procedures and expectations can lead to confusion and stress. Most new teachers are not experienced in dealing with inappropriate student behaviors and parent interactions when behavior problems arise.

Jeff offered that he needed more experience in classroom management and that not only

should this area be addressed in college, but also by the schools when teachers are hired. He explained,

...when you come into the real-life setting of teaching, there's nothing [procedures] to really go by ...it's just whatever you feel. It might need to be addressed in college so that you'd know what to do when you got in the real world ...[and] when you're first hired, then that should be addressed, too, you know, because some principals are going to think, 'Well, he's sending people up here to the office all the time. He doesn't have control.' And others are going to think, 'Well, he's doing a good job,' but ...he might not be doing a good job because you're afraid to send somebody up to the office.

Although Jeff was given a school handbook, it did not clearly spelled out specific discipline issues. He said,

Yeah, we ...got a school handbook but there's not really exactly - okay, you take the child to the office when this occurs, or there's nothing really written in stone on several things, and you can't write everything down. Maybe the administration would help you out by saying, 'Okay, if there's a parent has a problem they need to call and schedule a conference, rather than just coming in any time they want to and disrupting class and whatever. You know, ...[parents] might be required to call on the phone first and talk to them, a teacher maybe, or come in in a courteous way rather [then] just storming in like I've had them do (laughing).

Many of the participants were not clear on issues of discipline in their schools. They were not sure if and when to send students to the office and sometimes were reluctant to do this for fear it would reflect badly on their classroom management skills.

#### Assistance from School Supervisors

Three of the four school systems employed elementary school supervisors. However, their role in assisting new teachers appeared to be limited to disseminating information at general meetings for all faculty, observing and evaluating new teachers if the principals desired this, and providing an offer of help to new teachers if something was needed. None of the participants received individual assistance from their supervisors.

Diane was not sure exactly what the supervisor did. She shared her experience:

...I've seen one. They've popped their heads in a couple of times this year or about twice, and I've seen a note - the county-wide meetings. They would be willing [to observe], but not yet. I'm sure they will at some point. But ... I haven't been contacted as far as that's

concerned, but they basically let it be known that they're there if I need any advice or materials or any support. They've made themselves available through [telephone] numbers and contact sheets and stuff.

Diane said she would not mind if the supervisor sat in her class to observe but did not know if it would be helpful to her:

... that would be all right. It's always helpful, but I've been supervised, and supervised, and supervised so much I think it's more useful to go out and observe other teachers rather than have somebody always coming in and observing you, because sometimes you learn more through watching others than just by being marked on a sheet and having a discussion. At least that's what I found through my student teaching.

I've discussed that [teacher observations] with my principal and she's said that she'd be willing. She actually mentioned it, said there were a lot of good fourth grade teachers in this system, and she'd be happy for me go observe some of them.

Tina offered this insight into the role of the supervisor in observing and evaluating new teachers her school system:

...I think we have that option. When I was going through the evaluation process, my principal said, 'Most schools will have this particular person from Central Office come in and observe you but I,' she said, 'I do my own observations. So I think maybe if I wanted someone else to come in and evaluate me ... I could have done that I'm sure, but she [principal] seems to be very territorial and, and that's what she'll do. You know, that's her job, and ... she's done all my evaluations and observations ...

Janet's principal also assumed the role of observing and evaluating. Janet described encounters with her school supervisor:

...we do get evaluated, which is done by our principal. There is ...our curriculum director who does a lot of the evaluations, but our principal prefers to do his own, so she does not come into our school and do that. But ... I've seen her in other schools, and when I was student teaching, she came into my classroom ...and others as well. ...I asked her if she was doing it, but she said our principal prefers to do his own, so she doesn't come to our school and do it here.

Tim knew the name and title of his school system's supervisor but had received no individual training or assistance from her. He stated,

She [school supervisor] has come in a couple of times, not for me personally, but as a school to train us on various things, such as we got a new reporting system for report cards. Things like that. But as far as just coming into the classroom and working with

me personally, no.

Phyllis had a similar relationship with her supervisor. The supervisor was visible but did not observe and evaluate her. Phyllis said,

... while she was at [school], she and a team ... visited all of third grade. We were in a pod at that point and they kind of stuck their head in each classroom and saw how it was set up and kind of the logistics of how we did things. ...this year, the curriculum supervisor came and helped us with a new program for report cards and she's been here on other occasions where she's just popped in to say she thinks about us. I think she tries to stay in touch with the new teachers.

Becky had not seen her supervisor very often, either. She described these visits:

I've seen [the supervisor] one time and that's because my license had not come to the county and that's the only time I've seen [her]. The [superintendent] has been here just a couple of times just to visit, but I think he's just trying to be sociable and let us know he's out there.

Toby explained his perception of the supervisor's role in his school system:

I think she's probably a troubleshooter. ...if somebody calls in and complains, she comes down and she calls and investigates. But ... the only one that ever observed me was [the principal].

Breanna said she was a little familiar with her system's supervisor but had not been observed or evaluated by this person. She said,

I know her title is Curriculum Director and I would say that would be part of her job to come in ... and look and see if we're teaching what they're asking us to teach. But no, she doesn't come in and ...sit down and watch. She was in the room one time just inquiring about if I had taken ...the Praxis test to be highly qualified.

According to the participants, their systems' supervisors did not offer help to individual new teachers. Instead, their role was to disseminate information to all teachers. There were offers of help to new teachers if they needed anything, however.

### Beginning and Closing the School Year

For many of the new teachers, the beginning of the school year was an especially stressful time. Curriculum needed to be studied, standards learned, school procedures and rules



remembered, and the classroom prepared for incoming students. Many teachers expressed the view that special help is needed at this time. Closing out the school year was perceived as less stressful and difficult than the beginning, although certain things had to be done in a timely manner. Because they had not learned how to begin a school year, helpful mentors and colleagues took up the slack and helped the struggling new teachers.

Mia recollected an experience she had the night before school started her first year of teaching:

...I remember the night before school started that first year I was teaching ... that it suddenly dawned on me I didn't know what you did on the first day of school. I had no idea. I'd done my student teaching at the second half of the school, and I didn't know what to do, and it was kind of a joke. All year long [as] I'd taught first grade, the rest of the teachers just giggled - I was still using the first week's lesson plans cause I planned hundreds of things to do ... So I don't think they [college] prepared me to even have a clue what to expect.

Maria said that it would have been very helpful to have had someone provide guidance during the first week of school. She said,

...I didn't really have a clue what to do. I mean, I knew that I had these kids and I kind of knew what developmental level they were on according to what grade I taught, but you've got them here, it's just kind of like, what to do with them? I know you need to go over procedures and things like that, but you can't really spend a whole entire day ...walking in line ...

Tish was not prepared for the beginning or the end of school, either, and was unaware of the importance of these times until after she began teaching. She stated,

I came in [student teaching] like August 26 and school had started two weeks prior to that, so I felt like I wasn't connected with the teacher and really didn't get to see a lot of the ...rituals that they go through and the procedures that they go through to set up their school year. ...I didn't see any of how to start a school year or how to end a school year. That's important. The first week is like the most important time. I see that now ...

Special thought should be given to helping new teachers prepare for the first week (s) of school, as well as closing the school year. There is so much that must be done before the children ever step foot in the classroom. It may be helpful for schools to provide them with a checklist of important tasks to complete by certain dates. There is where a mentor can prove invaluable to a novice teacher.

### Team Teaching

For some new teachers, the opportunity to team teach with a more experienced teacher seemed very appealing. A new teacher can receive constant support and on-the-job training when he or she is teamed with a veteran. Although none of these new teachers expressed interest in sharing their class all day long, they did concede that sharing some subjects or activities could be beneficial.

Patty had this to say about working with another teacher:

I think that would work really good, especially if you had a weakness where another teacher had a strength. I think you should play up your teacher strengths as much as you possibly can. Team teaching - as far as sometimes there's another teacher here that's in fifth grade - that's been wonderful. Sometimes we'll get our groups together and do things, or we will talk about what we are doing, but she still has her class and I still have mine.

Ashley shared memories of team teaching in college but was not sure that she would want to teach in this manner. Team teaching and teaching solo in a self-contained classroom both had appeal. She said,

I like it both ways. ... one thing I did enjoy in college was when we taught together, because there were a lot more things that you could do and different activities that we could work on together - do skits together, and it was fun to do that. But I don't know if I'd want to do it all day long.

Ashley agreed that it might be helpful to combine groups of children with another teacher where each would teach a homogeneous grouping of children. This could eliminate the need to locate and prepare activities and resources for a wide range of ability levels.

Team teaching may cause apprehension for some new teachers because of the possibility of having their developing teaching methods judged and critiqued by colleagues. However, team teaching had merit for Maria when balanced with the benefits for students. She said,

...I kind of go both ways. I think it's good for your first year for you to go ahead and ...get in the classroom and not have somebody watching you... you can get comfortable with it. I don't like somebody standing there watching me when I'm teaching because I'm afraid I'm going to say something wrong ... But I think it would be a great thing as far as having someone work with you ...on the goals and the curriculum and what you want to teach ...so that person can help you ...

I did that my first year ... in second grade - we had five teachers and we all had a subject to teach - science or social studies. I had government and we rotated classes, and I didn't mind doing that at all. It was very helpful to me, too. I know my first year of teaching, and kind of this year, too, I feel like my kids aren't ...learning anything just because I'm a new teacher and I'm having to deal with all these discipline problems that I feel like they're not ...getting the education that they would get if they had a more experience teacher...So I think it is helpful that they get to have other teachers and it's good not to have one person all the time ...

Leigh also had ambivalent feelings about team teaching. She noted that because of her personality type, it was better for her to figure out things for herself than rely on a colleague. She explained,

I would be apprehensive [about team teaching]. ...I like having my own classroom because it helps me to grow, figuring out what works and what doesn't. I think that's been my biggest challenge this year, figuring out what works and what doesn't because you've never done it before. So ...I guess it would be good, but for me, I don't think I would like it cause I'm the type of person - I just want to get in there and do it. I just want to figure it out by myself.

Team teaching with a veteran teacher was an experience Melissa enjoyed her first year of teaching. She indicated that it was a wonderful idea because not only could she learn valuable strategies on the job from an experienced teacher, but it lightened her teaching burden. She also could maintain a level of independence. Melissa described her experience:

...I love it. The lady that I team teach with has taught ...for seven years before coming here, and this is her third year here. So even just little things ...where do I need to send my kids when we're doing this special event, or how did you do this last year? Especially field trips and things like that. It sort of takes the stress off of me and ... she has really come through and led a lot of things that I would [not] have had any clue how to do. Especially field trips and any kind of special type days ...parent teacher conferences ...back-to-school night, things like that, she has really been helpful. ...with a veteran teacher...team teaching is wonderful.

Many of the teachers liked the idea of sharing ideas and possibly changing classes for one subject with another teacher. However, the general consensus was that they enjoyed the independence of teaching by themselves.

Research Question # 4: Are mentoring programs successful in helping new teachers make a smooth transition from college student to teacher?

## Mentoring

Praise for the mentoring system was widespread among the study participants. The manner of assigning mentors and conducting mentor/mentee meetings differed from school to school. Some schools assigned mentors, while others expected the new teacher to connect with an accommodating grade level colleague or with another teacher whose room was in close proximity to the new teacher's classroom. Many teachers expressed an interest in attending regularly scheduled meetings, while others indicated that if they needed assistance, it was easy for them to get it.

### Benefits to Mentoring

The transition from college to teaching can be stressful and overwhelming. Mentors can provide novice teachers with invaluable help by sharing teaching strategies, classroom management tips, and offering encouragement and support during stressful moments.

Ashley suggested a mentor could help a new teacher learn the ropes. She explained,

...there are so many questions in your first year. You just need someone that that you can ask. Maybe if we had a designated ...mentor, someone at the school when we got hired on to ...just check on us, give us sort of what we need to do when we're first starting out, what we need to make sure that we have ...I have had one teacher, not really designated as my mentor, but that I went to, and she's told me from the first day of school, let's sit down together and we'll plan out our first week together. Sort of what we need to cover. What you need to make sure that you do. And when she would remember things, she would come to me and be like, 'Make sure you do this, or make sure you tell them this.' You know, just sort of the first few weeks of school.

Ashley stated it might be beneficial to have a formal mentoring program where new teachers would meet with their mentors on a regular basis, perhaps monthly, if everyone was willing. She explained,

I know it's a lot of work. I mean, usually everyone's so busy that it's hard to have something to say, to go to, to commit to.

Having a mentor during the transition period would be very helpful, according to Breanna, who said that a mentor could provide much needed guidance for a new teacher. She said,

I think [a mentor] - someone that's been there and the same grade ... guiding me to let me know, 'Well, this is what's expected and this is kind of like a timeline that I used.' And I guess trying to help me to see where I need to be, where I want to go, and different things like that.

Although the mentoring system at Mia's school was informal, she stated that the program was excellent. However, she did offer a suggestion for improving it. She stated,

I think there should be some standards within that mentor program ... you meet with your mentor teacher so often and go through the process of the ER [Employee Information Record] ... it's the process of evaluation that you go through [when you're] non-tenured. My first year mentor was just excellent with all that. She sat down and came and said, 'Okay, this is the next step in your ER. This is what you need to do. If you have any questions, let me know. I can't imagine not having a mentor that would be that hands-on and in there.

Melissa emphasized that having a mentor could make a new teacher feel welcomed and part of the group. A mentor could be someone to confide in when a new teacher struggles with the many tasks teachers regularly do in the course of a day. She related how she would have preferred to spend one day of the new teacher orientation:

If you could just sit there - one, it would help you create a bond with your mentor because as a new teacher, when you come into a school, you feel like the outsider anyway. You're thankful that they hired you. You sure don't want to let them know you don't know what you're doing or you feel like you don't know what you're doing. And so, just to be able to have someone that you can sort of confide in and [say], 'Okay, I'm really worried about this subject. Help me ease my fears about this. You know, give me some of your insight.' That'd be great.

Additionally, scheduling mentor meetings on a regular basis would have been helpful to keep her on track, according to Melissa. She added,

That would be wonderful [meeting on a regular basis] because I think when you ...have to meet with administrators for your evaluations and things like that, it's too late. ...most of your evaluations don't happen until October, November, December - to wait until then you're so filled with anxiety anyway thinking, 'Am I doing the right thing?' So, if you can have those meetings once a month, once every two months - you can do them once a month until January and then hopefully by January you've got it together - and then after that you could taper off. But just to be able to sit down with someone to say, 'Hey, here's my lesson plans. Am I going about this the right way? What do I need to change?' That would be wonderful.

Learning how to organize her classroom and improve her classroom management techniques were valuable skills Phyllis learned from her mentor. She shared,

...I think the mentor I had ...was a very organized person, and I picked up a lot of tips from her. ...she had ...a system for each child. Each child had a mailbox and then also she had boxes for each subject. When they turned things in, they didn't just go on the teacher's desk. It went in the math box or the reading box. Just things like that just really helped with the paper flow. So I felt like I had someone there to just back me up all the way.

Phyllis said it might be even more helpful if a new teacher was assigned two mentors - one from the teacher's school and one from another school in the system. She said,

... just someone you could bounce ideas off of. It would be nice to have that connection.

Stephanie was overwhelmed until about Christmas. There was just so much to learn and understand about teaching. Her mentor proved invaluable. She related her early experience:

...just everything coming at the same time. I mean ...that's what I felt like and I felt like that until Christmas. ...it was just too much, but I don't know how you could have done anything differently. It's just this is what you have to do, so do it. But I didn't understand and that was the blessing of having a mentor. They said, 'Don't forget, you have to do this, you have to do this.' What is that? I don't even know what you're talking about, and they would explain it. ...I fell apart more times than I can count, and these people, they just had kleenexes available, cause here I come!

Tina mentioned that having opportunities to observe and talk with veteran teachers, not just an individual mentor, would benefit new teachers. Continuing the mentor program for two years was something she had thought about, too. Tina stated,

I was just thinking about that yesterday because I was talking with her [mentor] in a meeting. Yeah, I think it would be helpful. I don't think it would hurt. I had a really good mentor my first year. She ...was constantly either in my room or I was in hers, and ...just answering questions and giving me things ... 'Here's something you need to think about or try this. I try this in my classroom, why don't you try?' She was really good about that. Of course, that didn't continue my second year, but it wouldn't hurt. I think, yes, I think it would still be helpful just to maintain that relationship of ... having a mentor.

Participants valued mentors very highly and if they did not have one, wished they had. The ideas of having a mentor for more than one year and also attending regularly scheduled mentor meetings were expressed. New teachers derived tremendous benefits from working with a mentor teacher.

### Mentoring Concerns

Despite wide-spread support for mentoring, a couple of concerns were aired. New teachers wanted to retain their independence while benefiting from a mentor/mentee relationship. Also, matching a new and veteran teacher needed to be done carefully if it was to be beneficial. However, there were a few instances of concern expressed.

When the teaching styles of the mentor and mentee match, the pairing can be very helpful to the new teacher. On the other hand, as Mia discovered, when teachers do not match, the mentoring is not as beneficial. She elaborated,

...my first year teaching my mentor and I matched like two gloves. Our teaching styles were matched. Our opinions, our mind sets were just a perfect match. We planned twice a week together. Anything she thought I might need she was one step ahead of me in getting it. I have a mentor again this year because it's a two-year thing, and it's not quite as wonderful a match. Our teaching styles differ tremendously, and therefore we can't plan together because the things the other teacher plans would not fit with my philosophy of teaching. ...I have to go and ask a lot of questions instead of her anticipating the things that I might need. So I think a lot of the mentor is the match, the personal match that makes it more successful or less successful.

Clarifying the importance of pacing yourself when teaching and what skills should be covered for the T-CAP tests were two things Melissa wished her mentor had done. She explained,

I think my mentor should have been a little bit more, 'Hey, you need to make sure that you get from 1865 to 1940 before March in social studies. You need to make sure that in reading ...the kids need to be able to make inferences, they need to be able to do ...cause and effect. Specific skills that they need to do before March because that's probably going to be on the T-CAP, or that was on the T-CAP last year.' And she has done some of that, but it goes back to she's been so stressed with her new job. I've been so stressed. ...it's just we haven't been able to get together like that. I feel like we probably should have. And it's not her fault, it's not my fault.

When Becky was hired, she was not assigned a mentor teacher. Although the

assistant principal was willing to help, Becky expressed that it would have been beneficial if her school had a mentor program in place when she arrived. She described her experience:

Well, I know this spring I didn't have a mentor teacher. I was new, it was a new school. I'd never been in the school before I had the job, and I didn't have anybody really. I had the assistant principal. She was the only one that I really had to help [me], and I think they needed a mentor program.

Becky stated that her school was trying to improve the way they assisted new teachers by creating a school handbook, which she thought would be helpful.

Having a mentor to answer questions and give support would really help, according to Jeff. However, he definitely did not want to lose his own identity and become his mentor's clone. He expressed his concern:

Yeah, a mentoring program would definitely help, but then again ...I wouldn't want somebody to exactly tell me what to do or how to do it. Just if I had a concern or a comment, they could pair me with another teacher or maybe just go out to eat with that person or have an arrangement where they come by and watch you teach and they could tell you, 'Okay, I see a good job doing that. You need to work on this a little bit.' Somebody that's going to be critical, but yet open-minded and not trying to be like, 'Okay, I'm like this and I want you to be like this'.

Mentoring was considered a priceless benefit to all of the teachers despite a few concerns. Mentors willingly and patiently provide answers to tough questions, as well as give much needed encouragement and support. The trick to ensuring a successful experience is to thoughtfully match the individuals, and to make sure that the mentor is aware of information that needs to be shared with the mentee.

Research Question # 5: What can colleges and universities do to make the transition from college to teaching more fulfilling and successful?

#### Factors Affecting a Successful Transition

The transition from college student to novice teacher can be overwhelming and stressful. New teachers are confronted with the real world the minute they walk in their classrooms. Colleges genuinely make an effort to prepare students for a successful career, but



despite the good intentions, many teachers graduate from college only to find themselves sadly unprepared for the career they dreamed about. Generally speaking, the participants did not believe their college course work adequately prepared them for the first year of teaching. They felt they were not prepared in areas such as classroom management, parental relationships, teaching children to read, and effective discipline techniques and strategies. Some believed that their professors were not aware of how schools really operated or how the student population had changed. For most, their first year of teaching was a struggle as they tried to apply what they had learned in college to the realities of teaching. The participants in this study offered their opinions on what was beneficial in their college preparation and what they thought could be improved.

### Experiences with Professors

The study participants observed and experienced a wide array of teaching styles throughout their college course work. Although they heard and noted the theories and strategies their professors were teaching, what excited them the most was to see their teachers modeling as they were conducting class. This led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the concepts.

### Modeling

Several teachers stated that education professors taught current teaching strategies and theories, but they did not always model what they were so sincerely teaching to their students. Mia expressed a similar opinion that seemed to be shared by many of the new teachers. Some of her college professors modeled the teaching strategies and theories they taught, while others did not. She explained,

I think of (a particular professor) who did. She would treat us like adults sometimes, then treat us like kids sometimes, and she would tell us when she was going to switch. I think early childhood, that department, is very good at that. (Another professor) says if I don't think children should be taught this way, then why on earth would I teach you this way? So, she puts things out there ...even for college students in a way that she would teach children so that it touches the multiple intelligences and it's hands-on ... So yeah, I think ...they did a very good job of that. There were others who lectured from the time you got [there] until the time you got out, and even though they were lecturing about doing all these wonderful things, they never actually showed you how to do them.

Melissa shared her experience:

...to see a professor actually teaching the way that they wanted you to teach was great. And there were a lot of times that we would be in class and the professor would be saying 'Okay, you need to ...use brain-based learning, tap into the multiple intelligence, constructivism,' and all this stuff and we would look at each other and go, 'Yeah, they're not doing it.' So it was complete opposite in a lot of places.

Patty described how her professors taught. She stated,

A lot of the teachers were trying to push or show us [and] model the things that we were to do.

Janet related similar thoughts when she spoke of the manner in which her professors had conducted classes. She said,

Some of them did [apply the theories they taught]. I had ..."Environment in the Classroom". The class ...consisted of the environment in the classroom and she would talk about different stuff and how to set it up. We did projects and she even ...took us on field trips where we went into a room and [she] said, 'Do you see how they have this and this and this? And evaluate this, and what do you think about this?' We learned about it first and then we would go in and evaluate different types of ...daycare and things like that. And I thought, to me, that was better than just kind of looking at it from a book or even having a diagram of ...something drawn out. I mean, we created our own, too, and then we created centers and stuff to go in our rooms as well. And I really enjoyed that ...

Then I had others that (chuckling) you just wrote from the book and that was it. ... I am a hands-on learner. I am a [believer in} Gardner's Eight Intelligence (s). If we can get on the floor, touch it, feel it, hear it, say it, then the kids are going to learn it because that's how I learn, and so I think that that's better. Not all of them [professors] are like that and there are a lot of people that would disagree and say, 'I would rather sit in a classroom and hear a lecture about it than go and do it myself.' But I'm not that way.

In Melissa's experience, professors rarely taught classes by modeling the strategies and theories they were promoting. However, she excitedly related an experience with a professor teaching a science lesson who actually provided the students with materials so they could do the experiment in class. Melissa elaborated,

[the professor] would model ...the way she wanted us to teach and ... she focused a lot on science. So we did a lot of science experiments. It wasn't anything fancy. We're not talking about chemistry and stuff like that, but simple things as working with magnets and electricity, trying to make a light bulb light up using batteries and circuits, and all that stuff. And that was fun. That was great because I'd never had that experience even in school. So to see ... a professor actually teaching the way that they wanted you to

teach was great.

Maria confided that her professors didn't really model what they taught their students. Any modeling she saw was by her fellow students in her methods classes and during her internship. Maria said,

Every now and then ...they would model an example of a teaching lesson, but most of everything that we got was through our internship. Most everything that was modeled was through our internship, and we had to do projects where we had to teach like that. So I got to see ... my peers ... do examples like that, maybe once.

Tim declared that he was very fortunate that he had classes with several professors who modeled current teaching strategies. He noted that this method of teaching was very effective and remarked that it had positively influenced his style of teaching. He commented,

...I was originally in Elementary Ed and it was more like college where they do the syllabus and have the assignments. They [professors] sit up in front of the room and lecture and things like that, and you take tests. I switched to Early Childhood my last year and a half that I was at (college) in undergrad. The philosophy of that department was so much different ... they actually model the way to do it [in] elementary schools ... There are a lot of hands-on taught. There aren't many tests, things like that, just modeling what's expected. [It was] so much more effective, and when I said earlier the philosophy of that department, that's ...how I teach in this classroom, and it's because of my experiences with both programs. ...I do not learn very effectively in the first way, where it was just teacher directed, very, very formal. ...in Early Childhood Department, it was more hands-on and more interaction. It was a much more personal environment.

Tina spoke very enthusiastically about two of her methods classes in which the professors modeled effective ways to teach math and social studies concepts. She stated,

Everything this professor taught on how to teach social studies, we did. You know, ... you're going to have your students create this interactive learning box, than that was our ...homework. We had to go create our own interactive learning box. Story telling - then we had to story tell. ...she [professor] talked about how you could have something from the past, an object or an artifact from the past, and ...then we all had to bring in something from the past and talk about it. ...my methods from math was the same way. We actually did in class what it was she was teaching us how to teach, as if we were the students and she was the teacher, and this is what you would be doing. But I can only recall two persons that did that.

Tina was emphatic that this method of teaching was invaluable to her. She explained,

You know ... I was able to make things that I would actually use in the classroom, and then kind of look at them from the student perspective as to how they would be used ...

Leigh also had experience with professors modeling teaching strategies and applying those techniques in the college classroom. She said,

Oh, we would [read] children's book and we would play with blocks, and we would do stuff like that all the time. ...it showed me, hey, this helps me even see it (laughing) better, so surely that can make the children see it better. They did that a lot, for sure.

Toby's experiences were similar to many of the teachers. Some of his college professors modeled effective teaching strategies while others did not. Toby stated,

The new teachers did [model effective strategies]. I think some of the old guard - you know, I just despise political history down there at (college). The teacher had been there for 40 years. He was of a different political affiliation than I was. We butted heads because I'm a strong personality and he lectured from the time he got there til he left, and like I said, old guard. But they hired some new teachers that were in with the Teacher Ed department. The one...that really sticks out in my mind was (teacher's name). She was the Science Methods teacher and she was just inquiry based learning, totally hands-on, and we had to come up with different hands-on activities each day that we had to teach the whole class of kids, and we came out of there with a whole file of different lesson activities after that semester in college. ...that one really was a good class.

Tish expressed sentiments similar to the other participants:

I had one professor that did occasionally practice what she preached, but most of the time it was just a lot of theory and reading, and this is the way you could do it, or you could do it this way. But not a lot of modeling.

Donna remarked on the contrasts she noticed regarding the capabilities of her professors. Some were more proficient and helpful than others. She remarked,

I think one of the things I noticed at (college) was a DRASTIC difference between the professors and what they were able to bring to the classroom. Some classes I walked out of there knowing that if they had just given me a book and let me have done it, I would have done just as well as the professor. I honestly felt like that person offered nothing, and talking to my classmates, ... it was pretty much a consensus. And then you had other classes where the teachers were so inspiring ... just in their love of teaching and their love of sharing their knowledge that that you just felt like you walked out of there a better person just being in the same room with them. And it was SUCH a drastic difference. If you (colleges) could just make sure that you had more teachers who were qualified and were able to, I guess, light the torch for other teachers instead of you just feel like you're

wasting your time sitting in a classroom with them.

Jeff praised one of his professors for giving him opportunities to practice what she was teaching. He explained,

... (the professor) would talk in the classroom and draw it on the board, which all the other teachers did, but then we would go ...out there and physically do it on the court, and you would see what was going on. And a lot of times some of the professors ...would talk about it but, you can talk all you want to but til you see it done sometimes, especially out on the court or gym floor, you don't know what's going on.

Toby discussed how his college classes had been generally beneficial:

It gave me my background ... you know, I've got to teach these things, and it did freshen my memory from what I learned in high school, the ...rudimentary aspects of it. But I have ...come to realize in the last year and a half [that] each child is individual. They all have different learning styles. ...they told us that in college but... until you experience it, I feel like you don't really get that.

One college professor was fondly remembered by Jessica because not only did she model teaching theories she taught, but she also embraced the different ideas of her students and did not insist that everyone think like she did. Jessica stressed that this was very important. She recounted,

I loved going to her classes everyday because she actually put us in a classroom situation. Some of the other teachers just sat there and mumbled and mumbled. In one class we had to do a unit lesson plan, which was great. It taught us how to do a unit. But every teacher teaches a unit in different ways and when we would submit our units, they [other professors] would cut them down. They wanted us to change our units to fit their needs. And you just don't do that. I just felt like you didn't do that because I do not teach like a college professor. My ideas were different than what they wanted me to put down.

Stephanie echoed praise for the teaching methods of her professors, also. She described her positive experience,

Reggio Emilia is a place in Italy where the philosophy of constructivism is practiced. Many of our professors went there and are modeling and exposing us to that philosophy. They emphasize a classroom that is not teacher directed. The teacher is a facilitator, one source of information, not "the" source of information. Of course they [Italy] didn't have No Child Left Behind, so that makes a difference! And they didn't have tests to do. ...I can honestly say they [professors] practiced what they preached. And the ...adjuncts

who came in, they were practicing what they preached, too.

Phyllis was also very pleased with the style of teaching she encountered at college. She related that most of the professors modeled effective educational strategies and theories they were teaching to their students. She stated,

I would say 75% of them at (college) did. I was really pleased with that. I had a few that were, I guess, adjunct professors, and we didn't really think they were in ...the real world. They were saying one thing but we would see them do something else. But for the most part they really did. We did the cooperative learning groups in our classroom, and ... it worked for us ... because we were open to the concept and we were adults. But then when we actually got out practicing in the different school systems, unless the kids had been exposed to that on a regular basis, it was kind of a challenge.

Even though she faced challenges implementing some of these theories at various school sites, Phyllis agreed that the experiences she gained in college allowed her to apply that in her classroom.

According to Breanna, few of her professors modeled the teaching strategies and theories they taught. However, for those who did not, an effort was made to take their students to a school site where they could observe veteran teachers apply these ideas.

These teachers experienced a mixture of teaching styles within their classes. They expressed joy and enthusiasm when relating how their professors modeled the theories and concepts they were teaching. The participants admitted they preferred this style of teaching over listening to a lecture, and some even said they had incorporated what they had experienced into their own teaching style. Seeing their professors model led to a deeper understanding of the concept in question, which in turn helped the students successfully apply and incorporate it into their own classroom.

### Current Classroom Experience

Many participants thought it would be beneficial if college professors visited classroom sites to see how students and the process of teaching have changed. This could have a direct affect on their teaching style and course content. In addition, this may lead to improvement in the teacher preparation program

In Toby's opinion, professors should take opportunities to visit classrooms and see the conditions under which their students will be teaching. This may motivate them to redesign and

teach their classes in ways that more closely match the reality of the public school setting, and prevent them from idealizing it. Toby explained,

...[professors would see] what they [new teachers] had to face ... and some of the apathetic nature of the parents. I just get so frustrated because I see the potential but then some of these children - this one kid I was telling you about that I've had the problem with the parent, I asked them what they wanted to do when they grew up and the child said he wanted to be like his daddy and lay on the couch and watch soap operas. His daddy doesn't work.

Observing the new trends and processes that are found in many classrooms and then incorporating this knowledge into the course work would be a useful tool for professors to use in order to prepare college students for the reality of the teaching world. It is also imperative that colleges employ professors who genuinely enjoy teaching and are effective instructors.

#### College Course Work

The study participants gave mixed reviews to the value of their course work. Some classes were viewed more favorably than others. While particular types of course work were deemed beneficial, others were considered a waste of time. High marks were given to the methods classes and field experience, but certain philosophy classes, research projects, and related arts classes (music, art, physical education) garnered little praise from several teachers.

Stephanie agreed that, to some extent, college work helped her achieve a degree of success the first year of teaching, but explained that other parts were not very useful, such as maintaining a portfolio and conducting research. She related,

...I think the [portfolio] was a waste of time. ...even though it was valid research and it was interesting to me, I would like to have spent a lot more hours ... watching different techniques for really powerful management. I would like to have had an entire course on that. I would like to have had a little more extensive courses in...really helping these kids with reading, because last year I got a really good experience but I wasn't prepared for it college-wise. I think everything else I was okay with. It's nice to say they're not preparing us, but I don't know how you would teach this [time management]. I mean, how would you teach the stress that you deal with in a class? I don't know how you could prepare them [new teachers] for that.

Jessica had mixed feelings about the value of her course work and whether it had prepared her for teaching. She elaborated,

Back to the reflections, the daily logs. That was busy work. Unit lesson plans in some classes - they were beneficial. Some were not. It's kind of hard. I mean, ... I have so many mixed feelings. It just depends on the professor. Some teachers at (college) prepared me in an excellent [way], and some took the same concept and I didn't learn a thing from them.

Tim shared similar thoughts about his course work. Some classes were helpful and some were not. He explained,

The course in General Ed, things like that, did not [help]. I think the last year of my undergraduate work did, more the teacher prep classes - the methods classes. I think just the overall philosophy of those teachers - I was in Early Childhood - and ...the philosophy they shared I think more so than the actual course work is what influenced me in my teaching.

Although she indicated that field experience was beneficial, Becky specifically mentioned one area of preparation that could be changed. She said,

I believe that maybe the practicums and student teaching did prepare, but I'm not so sure about some of the other classes that were more assessment, you know? ...maybe they could just compact that. 'Yeah, this is exactly what you need to know and this is what you need to do,' instead of months and months of work, because after it comes down to it, it's not that much if you know the basics.

Leigh pointed out that to a certain extent the expectations of college paralleled those of her school system, but in other areas there was a distinction. She noted,

...discipline wise ...they try to tell you, but they don't really tell you ...strategies. I mean, even in college, if they would even had just a class on how ...you handle discipline ...it would have been helpful. Cause even in college I would ask questions but you never really get a straight answer (laughing).

Leigh indicated that the expectations were similar to some degree regarding child development and children's literature, but as far as learning techniques to manage a classroom and the day to day dealings, she could have been better prepared.

Tina expressed similar feelings about her college course work and the reality of the classroom. She compared them in this way:

There were parts that, overall, I would ... say yes and no. I know that's a wishy-washy answer but through your course work you learn a lot and you do a lot of research and



...studying. But then there again when you get into the classroom it's like whole new things come up ... [like] dealing with parents, ... behavior issues, discipline, and classroom management ... I never had a classroom management course throughout my course work and ...I wish that I had done that. ...you go through all these courses ...and then you get your first job and you're like - it's just different because you're like actually in the classroom with 20 kids and there are problems that arise in the classroom that aren't necessarily talked about or dealt with ... in your course work.

Amy stressed the importance of engaging in realistic field experience as well as eliminating certain courses. She elaborated,

I would include more and better structured field study. I would also begin the program with a real classroom teaching situation, somehow. I would exclude your basic education foundations course. Much of the information is redundant and unnecessary before actually teaching.

At the college that Breanna attended, the teacher education department strongly promoted the theory of Constructivism. She explained that the training she had received in this area influenced her teaching style because that was the way she learned, too. She related,

...I feel like it has helped me in teaching, not letting the kids just sit and listen to me all day but just helping them learn hands-on, because I'm the type of person, I have to learn hands-on also, and I just can't read it in a book. I have to just do it and then also see it being done. And so I think that helped me as far as teaching.

In Ashley's opinion, her course work helped her understand and apply different aspects of classroom management. She recalled these classes:

...some of the ...behavior classes - how to manage the classroom - those types of [classes] I learned a lot from that, of how to be effective with managing the class ...sort of how to get the class started when you first go in. What you need to do. The rules you need to set up. How to get the first steps going.

Except for one science course, Mia gave her course work high grades. She chuckled as she noted,

...there was only one course that I took in college that I really complained about as being worthless and that was Tennessee Wildlife or something equally as silly. ...take that three hours that I'm having to spend on this course and give me a course of methodology in teaching science instead of teaching me science as an adult because I can go and do the research on wolves ...

Teachers are certified to teach certain grade levels and subject areas. Tina expressed concern that her certification in Kindergarten did not reflect her preparation level. She explained,

... teaching kindergarten I don't feel like I was prepared even though I had my K certification. ... I think a lot of the courses that I took were preparation for ... upper grades. Of course, my certification is K-8. I never really felt like I was getting what I needed to teach kindergarten even though I was getting that certification, and that's what I ended up teaching was kindergarten. I kind of wish that I had gotten maybe an early childhood certification because that would focus more on what I need, but...that's one big point that I remember was that I felt like I was being trained to teach upper grades more so than kindergarten or even first grade. And when I did my student teaching, it was a ...first grade placement and an eighth grade placement.

Many of the participants expressed the opinion that college course work did not reflect the skills and content necessary for a successful transition from student to teacher. The classes just did not match the reality of the classroom, plus the content was not useful. Maria described some of her classes that reflected this:

... in college I guess I had several classes that were for my master's and for my bachelor's that were a lot on research .. about assessment and things like that, and those are things that I just don't use. ...we spent lots of time reading books and things about how to research behavior and how to do all of these in-depth assessments on these children which I really don't use now. ...the school has their own assessment and I have my own simple form of assessments. But as far as the really in-depth research and assessments, we don't use any of those here.

I know in my reading class ... we made books a lot ... which is great, but you can learn how to make a book, those little flip books and those type things somewhere else and you can learn that in your teaching. It was just things like that that weren't really geared towards actual teaching in your classroom. And we also, in one classroom, we read a book about reflections of other teachers, and which I know other peoples' reflections can help you, but we had to do research on those type things and that just didn't help me at all. I would have rather learned about what to do in a classroom and what successful teachers do in a classroom rather than reading just about reflections and things like that.

From Tina's point of view, more time spent observing or volunteering in a classroom would have benefited her far more than sitting in a college classroom. She said this would have helped her become more familiar with the workings of the classroom, particularly if she could have observed a parent conference or sat in on a faculty meeting. Tina clarified her point:

... I remember taking a couple of course[s] to where ... I felt like ... it was a waste of my time, where I could be. ... in the classroom ... working and helping ... as an aid and a volunteer. And I don't know how you would do that. ... maybe if you could be assigned to a school and assigned to a classroom throughout your course work and that's where you would student teach. ...that way you would be with them from your initial stages of the ... course work until the very end. I just think more hands-on, more [time] in the classroom and less in the classroom at ... college.

The study participants expressed their belief that field experience had been very beneficial, but they would have liked more opportunities to interact with children at school sites. They wanted authentic learning experiences so it would not have been such a shock when they began teaching their own students. Furthermore, they needed more instruction in classroom management techniques and parent communication strategies.

### Reading Instruction

Several participants voiced the concern that they were not taught how to teach children to read. Although they had taken a reading class, its focus was more on examining various reading theories instead of actually teaching students the process of creating an effective reading program. Participants felt that colleges should more thoroughly prepare future teachers in the area of teaching reading, not only to beginning readers, but also how to reach struggling readers in the upper grades. Janet discussed her reading class:

The one thing I was very disappointed in, and I don't know if my expectations were too high or what, were the reading classes that were taught at (college). ...they have some great reading instructors, but it was just kind of done over all - you can do this, you can do that, you can do this. ...I felt like it really needed to be specified. You need to teach phonics. You need to do the four blocks. You need to do Open Court ... There are programs that you can use to teach reading. But the ...one thing that truly bothered me was that I didn't feel very strong in teaching reading, and really, that's something that needs to be very strong, in my opinion, in the classroom. You need to have a very strong reading teacher.

Janet agreed that she pretty much taught herself how to teach children to read, but that it would have been very helpful to have learned how to conduct reading lessons and use strategies geared toward various grade levels.

Maria experienced a similar lack of reading instruction in her classes. She noted that

learning the theories was important but she really needed to understand how to apply them in her classroom reading program. She noted,

One area I don't think I was prepared in at all was the reading. I only had to have one reading class and in that reading class we ... had a textbook, and we learned a little bit about phonics and whole language and pretty much the history of reading, and a little bit of guided reading and shared reading, and things like that, but ... that's pretty much it. They [professors] didn't teach us how to teach reading. They just told us pretty much the philosophies about reading and how it did need to be a balanced approach. Didn't tell us anything about how to do reading groups or things like that, and I would have really liked to [have] known more about that cause ... the main thing here is reading groups. ... I would have liked to learn ... methods of doing that and some good activities for doing that. ... and just different learning styles. I would have liked to learn more about multiple intelligences, things like that, and how to incorporate it into your classroom without your kids just going wild.

Patty described her insufficient training in teaching children to read. She suggested that colleges should offer more classes in reading instruction. Patty said

... I never learned how to teach a child to read. My student teaching involved first grade and I asked my mentor, I said, 'How do you teach them to read?' And I still don't know that I could teach a child to read. That is a scary thought to me. To be the one that makes or breaks a reader, because reading is very important in my classroom. I'm just glad I'm not teaching them because I never learned how to teach a child to read. I learned phonics, or whole word, and really I didn't learn how or anything about them except there was a huge debate on which one was the right way. So they [professors] kind of bypassed the learning altogether and said, 'Which one do you agree with and why?'

Janet pointed out that she did not receive adequate instruction in teaching reading in any of her college classes, either. She explained,

...the one thing that truly bothered me was that I didn't feel very strong in teaching reading, and really that's something that needs to be very strong, in my opinion, in the classroom. ...They just said you can teach phonics. You can teach whole language. Which whole language in my opinion is not appropriate because you only have that certain percentage of children that can read whole language. The rest of us, there's a code you have to go by, and we all need that code. And even if you do whole language to decode a word later on you still need that code if it's a word you've never come across before. I had a friend that used Orton Gillingham [reading method] and then my mentor teacher used Slingerland [reading method] and so I was able to build on that.

Janet offered this suggestion to professors for helping new teachers learn to teach children to read. Discuss the various reading programs and spend a few days talking about how

to apply them in a reading class. She explained further,

...I wish they would have sat down and said, 'Okay, we've ... spent three or four class periods - this is Wilson, this is how it works. This is Orton Gillingham, this is how it works. They're related in this way. This is whole language, this is how it works here.' And I took two literature classes. I took one for K-8 and then I took one for Early Childhood, and both of them were so general. And I would have liked it to be more specific and more broken down into -'This is kind of how you do it. And it wasn't done that way at all.

Tina stressed that when she graduated, she was not prepared to teach children to read. She said that because so many of her methods classes were in the same semester, there just was not adequate time for reading instruction. Tina explained her experience:

...my reading methods class was one of those that was ... in a semester where I had my methods of math, ... methods of social studies, and methods of reading, so I had, within a semester, those three ... divided up - four weeks here, four weeks here, and four weeks here. ...I've often said I'm glad I'm not teaching first grade because that's a ...big reading year ...

Tina said it would definitely be beneficial to include more instruction on how to teach reading. She stated,

I would make it definitely a semester long. That's such an important skill and especially at the kind of school ...that I teach at where there are a lot of struggling learners in reading because they don't come from a background at home that ... it's stressed as being important.

Donna experienced a lack of reading instruction, also. Although she spoke highly of the instructors she did have, Donna said the course work did not provide adequate preparation necessary for her to teach her students to read. She learned the theories but not how to use them. She commented further,

I don't think in my experience so far, there's been a lot of emphasis on the different methods of teaching reading and making sure you're ... reaching all of the children of different abilities, and we have very little of that in our program. Now we did have ...one wonderful class with two wonderful instructors at (college) that was very inspiring, and I did get a lot from both of those instructors, but I just felt like that ... was just one class, and considering the importance of it in the classroom, I felt like there just needed to be much more.

Learning by experience was how Melissa developed her reading skills. She said,

...it's just one of those things that ... I call on-the-job training. I've gotten so much more experience and so much more knowledge just from being here (school) and experiencing it and trying to get through it than I ever did in college.

Ashley emphasizee that she learned important things in college, but there were many areas that were not addressed, so she had to learn them on her own. Ashley remarked,

I really think there was a lot of stuff that we didn't cover. A lot of how to actually ... teach reading. We came up with some little activities that you could do with reading but not actually how to teach them the beginning steps. Of how to actually teach a child how to read. That was something that you just had to learn, or I had to learn on my own, and ask the other teachers once I got here.

Knowledge of effective reading instruction is crucial for elementary teachers, especially in the primary grades. Yet many participants felt inadequately prepared for teaching children to read. These teachers wanted to be taught specific methods of reading instruction so they would be prepared to teach reading competently.

### Parental Interaction

Interacting effectively with parents is a skill new teachers must develop. Whether during planned conferences or in unplanned drop-in meetings, teachers deal with parents on a regular basis. Many teachers expressed a lack of training in knowing how to successfully relate to parents. They felt strongly that more emphasis should be placed on that aspect of teaching while they were still in college. Jeff expressed this concern when he said,

...there's never ...instruction on how to deal with parents. Maybe have a class where you would have a mock ...situation where you'd be in there with ..other students in the classroom in college and you would be watching some kids, maybe in a daycare situation. ...then the parent of a child actually comes in and says, 'Well, what'd you do this for?' and ...give you a mock trial basically of ...fussing at you for what took place so you could handle that situation and be able to deal with it.

Jeff agreed that it would have really been useful to have taken a class in college that dealt with parent interaction and community involvement. He added,

...even if they had pulled just parents out of the community. You come in and they just came up to you and start fussing at you because [of] what you had done in class that day

with their child would have given you enough pressure ...to be able to respond with an answer and work yourself out of it. ...college prepares you to handle different situations but not really a really irate parent. It gets real confrontational.

Janet related her desire for more thorough preparation in this area. She explained,

...[college] DID NOT prepare me for dealing with parents in any way. I think there should be more emphasis on just dealing with the community and parents as teachers. I remember it was talked about a couple of times, but we didn't really get into it.

Although Janet did have a course on classroom management, it did not include much on parent relationships. She said,

...it was more just about dealing with the students, more so than dealing with the parents. This is a very strong community-based school I'm at, and ...talking with the parents and having a good rapport with them is very important.

According to Diane, she was not taught techniques for dealing with parents, which she considered an extremely important aspect in teaching. She commented,

College DID NOT prepare me for dealing with parents in any way - and my first parent teacher conference, I was quite flabbergasted. I wasn't sure what to say. I didn't want to upset anybody, but I wanted to be realistic. That's what I have problems with, so I would include a class about that.

Tim confessed that an obstacle to his success was communicating successfully with parents. He did not receive enough training in this skill while at college and wished he had. He stated,

I think the one thing in undergrad at college curriculum work that they don't prepare you for is dealing with ... parents and that whole aspect of teaching because ... it's a two-way street. You've got to deal with the children every day in the classroom but you also have ... to deal with the families. You have [to] communicate effectively with the parents. The first six weeks I was so focused on the children and what we were doing in the classroom that I left out the communication with the parents and that was my biggest obstacle ...

Tim had taken a class that dealt with those issues but it just did not fit what he needed. He explained,

I had a class on parent-community relationships. I think [I need] more of the psychology of not just children's psychology but I need to know adult psychology. I don't know if

they have something where ... you focus on families and on parents... not necessarily the relationship at school but just the overall family ... the dynamics of the family and just things like that to prepare you more for dealing with adults and parents.

Understanding how to build positive relationships with parents was considered very important by the participants. Some of the teachers suggested role playing with their peers as a means to gain experience with this important aspect of teaching. They felt inadequate in that realm and thought course work dealing with this topic should be included in the teacher preparation program, perhaps as a component of a Classroom Management class.

### College Expectations Versus School Expectations

The course work college professors viewed as important for new teachers to learn and the expectations of school systems were often radically different, according to these teachers. The feeling that college professors did not understand the realities of the classroom was widespread. Janet explained what she saw as the distinctions between college expectations and those of her school system:

I will say that ... in college, there were classes that were very, very beneficial and that rang true to the real-world classroom. And then there were classes that I felt like that professors had not been in the real world in ten or fifteen years and had not dealt with the children of today and how they grow up ...in what is real life. So a lot of college classes are hypothetical. In an ideal, perfect classroom you can do all this stuff and it's great. But then in the real world it doesn't always work.

Diane echoed this lack of realism. She said that if class instruction and discussions had centered on more practical applications instead of the theoretical, the transition into teaching could have been smoother and more successful. She stated,

I just think more of a real world approach could be taken in the college classroom. A little bit more realism, because a lot of the things we would talk about in the college classroom ... weren't as real world as when you get out there. Even though I did a lot of field work, as being opposed with the responsibility of the whole class of your own, ..I didn't feel prepared for that when I got all that responsibility on me. ... when you're in the college classroom talking, it's all theoretical and like a little ivory tower. Oh, what if this happens? What if this happens? But then when you get out there, it really does. It's a different story.

Melissa expressed similar feelings in reference to her college preparation. Although she



credited her professors with teaching her about a few specific topics, such as phonics and how to create social studies activities, overall Melissa was not prepared to walk into her classroom. When asked if her college course work prepared her for the first year of teaching she laughed and said,

Heh! You got to be kidding, right? Nor did student teaching. I'm sorry. It's a joke. It's a great experience, but it is NOTHING like when you have your own classroom because you are coming in your first year of teaching [and] you have to make the rules. You have to enforce the rules. When you're student teaching, somebody's already made the rules. You just have to follow them, too. You just have to keep the flow going when you're student teaching. When you're teaching, you're responsible for that flow. So, I mean there were some great things that I had at (college), needless to say. I mean ...I wouldn't have known about phonics. Those things were great. Social studies - I wouldn't have known how to make a learning box. Have I gotten to use it? No. Other than that there's really nothing that can prepare you for what is out there until that first day of school.

Feeling disconnected from the classroom during her student teaching experience was how Maria described her experience. When asked if she felt prepared for her first day of teaching, she also laughed when she answered,

No, I don't. I don't because it leaves out a lot of the emotional [element] ... you're kind of disconnected because the teacher, it's another teacher's classroom. ... I wasn't even there for the beginning of school ... school had started two weeks prior to that, so I felt like I wasn't connected with the teacher ...

Becky indicated her college experiences had prepared her pretty well, but it was not completely smooth sailing at the beginning. She explained,

I thought I was pretty [well] prepared. I knew what was out there... My nerves were a little shot the first few weeks of teaching first grade last year, but yeah, I was prepared.

Comparing the expectations between college professors and school systems, Tim had this to say,

I think that in college they teach the "ideal world, the ideal situation" - what to do in a perfect setting. And as we know, the real world and the real classroom are not perfect. It's not the real world, and so I think you can pull bits and pieces out of it, out of the training in what they teach. And it certainly [is] beneficial, but there's nothing like just truly being in the classroom for the first year. I think the expectations were not realistic.

Melissa concurred that college work did not reflect the realities of the classroom and that

some of what she had learned was not practical. She explained further,

Very few teachers I know can incorporate all the Constructivist theories and hands-on, reaching the multiple intelligence. That's great but you've got to have that time for direct instruction, and I felt like at (college) it was sort of, that's the last resort. Direct instruction is the LAST resort that you want to use. And that's just not possible. And it's great if we get to do something hands-on or create something. ... but the majority of the time it's direct instruction and just practice because of the time.

Although some college course work appeared to be a waste of time to Becky, she stated there was some value after giving it more thought. She said,

There were some [classes] that were not helpful. I had to take [a] class in drama, but I don't think I needed a class in that ... And then in one class I had at (college) they wanted me to play a musical recorder, and I felt that that was a big waste of time because I never could play it. ... now, like geometry, I thought at the time ... this is a waste of time, but then I saw this is a way to learn to problem solve. So, you know, maybe it is useful. So some of it I guess is pretty much all useful except for some of the little nitty, little bitty things like the drama and the music ... but I felt like I learned a lot from the art classes I had to take.

Despite the experience of having raised her own children, Phyllis acknowledged that certain developmental courses were valuable in helping her understand the behaviors of elementary age children. She explained,

...even though I have three children of my own, it's different being in a classroom setting where you have 19 fourth graders and the way they interact together because, of course, my own children are all different ages and they interact differently than children of the same age. So I think my developmental courses, my psychology courses, they were very helpful, just realizing ...I guess, the synergy of the classroom.

Ashley spent a lot of time in college classes creating lesson plans and games that she just does not have time to do now that she is teaching. She explained,

In college it seemed more about having fancy lesson plans - spending hours and hours on making game-like fun activities. A lot of hands-on type activities, which, once you get into teaching full-time, are not possible. ... you still try to do a lot of that, but there's just more focus on really teaching them a lot more ... where we don't have time just to do fancy little activities.

Even though Toby can laugh about it now as he spoke about his experience of taking Chinese to meet a foreign language requirement, his frustration was evident. He related his

college experience:

I had to take Chinese because with (college), you had to ...have a full year of foreign language, and I would love to have taken Spanish. It would be so much more helpful. ...we don't see a big influx of Chinese immigrants into East Tennessee. What we do [see] is Hispanics. I was not required to have a foreign language in high school - did not think I would be going down the route to being a teacher when I went through high school, and I didn't take it. So in order to get my degree, I was going to have to go back and take a year of high school level Spanish to get up to the basic level I needed to get into college level. So I was going to have to take 3 years of a foreign language to get that Spanish, whereas I would only have to take the one year of Chinese. So I got a year of Chinese foreign language under my belt and it's not done me a bit of good except I know how to say ... hello [in Chinese].

Patty spoke very plainly about the value of her college classes when she said,

As far as course work, I don't think - this is terrible - I don't think any of my classes helped me. None. ... the huge amounts of late nights doing lesson plans - I could have spent that time observing a classroom and gotten ten times more experience than I got. And there are a lot of classes that you take because you have to that really have nothing to do with what - I took P.E. for elementary school. I'm not a P.E. teacher. I can play games with the kids. That's not a big deal but that class was a waste. It was a fun class but it was a waste. What helped me was my time spent observing classrooms, and that was from the beginning.

When Jessica considered whether anything at college helped her have a successful first year she answered in one word:

No.

One teacher commented that it was probably not possible to prepare college students for teaching. The realism of the classroom just cannot be replicated in a college classroom. Some participants suggested professors teach more practical lessons dealing with such issues as communicating effectively with parents, not spend so much time discussing hypothetical scenarios. The one aspect of the teacher training program that all of the study participants readily agreed was useful was field experience.

### On the Job Training

Classes that are led by well-prepared professors who are knowledgeable in current teaching strategies and theories, and who practice what they preach, provide invaluable learning

experiences for student teachers. The act of teaching itself, however, presents powerful, authentic learning opportunities for new teachers. Participants described their first year of teaching in colorful phrases: thrown to the wolves, sink or swim, getting your feet wet, and learning to tread water. Clearly, there was a high level of stress at the beginning of the year, but with the assistance of mentors or other helpful colleagues, they survived.

Maria summed up her sentiments saying,

...I think my college education did prepare me. My internship mostly prepared me for this job, but I really don't think anything can prepare you for this job other than just going in and getting your feet wet and seeing how it's like. You're the person in charge, and you'll never learn how to be the person in charge until you're actually that person. So I believe just the experience of being the teacher ... nothing really prepares you for that as well as just doing it.

Donna's perceptions of what teaching involved changed as she began working with children. Although her course work prepared her to some extent for teaching, other experiences provided a more realistic view of what she would be doing when she began teaching. She explained,

I think when I first went into teaching, I went into it thinking bulletin boards and children, and just getting to spend fun time with children during the day. And then going through the program, I started to realize ... just how deep it is and really what is involved in being a teacher. And then I started substituting and working in the schools at the same time so there were two areas there where I was getting realities that I did not know existed. ..if I had of come straight from the program into teaching without doing all of my substituting and volunteering in the schools, I think I would have been in for a ...shock. Because I did spend a lot of time volunteering in schools and substituting and doing different things that really helped me to see more realistically than what was given to me through the program. So to some extent [college course work helped]... but not nearly as much as just being in the middle of it and seeing what actually happens in the classrooms.

Melissa felt that no amount of course work in college could surpass the value of just working on the job. She said,

I've gotten so much more experience and so much more knowledge just from being here [school] and experiencing it and trying to get through it than I ever did in college.

Tim concurred that classroom experience was more helpful than course work even if the

college experience was good. He added,

...I honestly don't think there's any real solution. I think truly for teaching, just being in the classroom on your own, and just having that experience, and having that classroom that's yours, and having to do all of the necessary paperwork, having to do all of the lesson plans and teaching ... all that by yourself is just good experience for me, more helpful than school (college) was ...

As Melissa acquired the different skills of teaching, her confidence increased, which she admitted resulted in a more productive and successful experience. She offered,

Time is a big ... factor ... and unfortunately, we don't have a lot of it, and so if you stumble in those first few weeks, man it's hard. ... basically becoming more comfortable with myself and with the content has been ... the biggest thing that I think has made me feel more successful in what I'm doing. And the kids seem to respond to that because I can tell a big difference from the beginning of school when I was not quite sure, because kids can sense that, and boy, do they feed on it. But then when I became more confident with my teaching style, with the content of my subject matter, with classroom management, with discipline, with what's going to happen when you break my rules ... the kids have felt that and they've responded to that, and it's led for a much more productive and successful classroom.

Overall, participants were divided on the value of college course work. What they did agree on, however, was that nothing proved more beneficial to learning how to be a successful teacher than actually teaching in a classroom. These teachers realized the value of on-the-job training where whether you either sink or swim depends on what you do. They attributed their acquisition of teaching skills and strategies to learning as they were teaching.

### Redesigning the Teacher Education Program

The study participants offered numerous suggestions for reshaping the teacher training program. They proposed eliminating some classes, adding others, and extending the duration of student teaching. Their criteria for making these suggestions reflected the value they placed on course work that successfully prepared them to teach.

### Classroom Management

Classroom management encompasses a wide array of skills, such as establishing a classroom routine so children can work independently, creating and sustaining reading groups, understanding how to transition from one subject to another quickly and quietly, dealing with

discipline problems and hopefully knowing how to prevent them, building successful relationships with parents, and so forth. Much effort is required to create a smooth, functioning classroom, and solid management skills can affect whether the effort is a success or failure. New teachers realize this and are desperate to know how to become effective classroom managers.

Mia needed more information on classroom management skills, specifically in dealing with children exhibiting extreme behavioral problems, such as Oppositional Defiance Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. She just had not been prepared to deal with this aspect of teaching.. Mia explained,

I had an excellent course ... called Inclusion in the Classroom for including children with disabilities and they took curriculum lesson plans that we had written already and we had to rewrite them for a child with disabilities. ... however, there was nothing on classroom management. What I got on classroom management I observed from the teachers that I did my student teaching with. And several times last year things would come up in my classroom and I called our school psychologist and said, 'I don't know what to do. I'm not qualified to handle this.' But they [professors] hadn't taught me how to combat that. In first grade, I had one that was Oppositional Defiant and he pitched fits. ... but no one had told me how to handle that at school, and no one had told me what to do or how to even identify ADHD. In fact, I had a child that just the very last six weeks of school did I finally identify what my problem was, and it was ADHD. And she is flourishing this year and it makes me sick thinking what she could have done last year if I had been trained to identify what was happening earlier in the school year. So I think that they really need to focus on classroom management.

At the top of Becky's list of changes was the inclusion of more hands-on experiences working with children who exhibited inappropriate behavior . She explained,

Let's see. I would include plenty of hands-on experience - time with difficult children ... maybe have the college students assigned to maybe a student with special needs. I'm not talking about ... one with extreme needs. ... I'm talking maybe an ADHD child that's pretty extreme - that won't sit down, that won't stop talking. Let them follow that child for a while and let them see what the teacher's going through. I mean, maybe not just actually helping the child, but sit there and just watch that one child and what they're doing, instead of watching the whole group. I know in Special Education they do that, but I think in regular education they need to assign the students to one particular child to watch.

I had a class (college) that was... children with special needs and they did send us out, but it was a different child each week and we were to go several different place. But a lot of times the children were extreme. It wasn't the ones you would see that [were] included in [the] classroom most of the time. These were the more excluded children that are...out

of the classroom. They're resource.

Becky also indicated it would be advantageous for education students to observe students with the kinds of behaviors they might find in their classrooms. She explained further,

The ones that are going to be there all day long because they're included and they're going to stay included because they're really smart. They're just hyperactive or wild or can't keep their hands to theirself.

Jessica thought it would be helpful to add a parenting class and to redesign the classroom management class. She said,

I think that there should be a class on... how to deal with parents. How to communicate with parents. How to handle situations that can arise. I did have a classroom management class. It was good. I think in a classroom management class there should be role-playing. I had professors in college who would give situations of things and maybe give us hints on how to handle it, but it just went in one ear and out the other at that time.

Diane indicated she, too, had a need for more insight into successful methods of interacting with parents. She said,

Like I said before just about ... dealing with parents, at my first parent teacher conference ... I wasn't sure what to say and I didn't want to upset anybody. I would include maybe a class more just about that because that is so important.

Echoing this need for more instruction on interacting with parents, Breanna said,

I would include ... a course just informing us as far as how to talk to parents. I mean, I think that's very important. ...once you meet a parent, and especially if they come in and they're irate about something, I mean, how are you supposed to handle it? Have mock settings or interviews between someone pretending they're a parent and doing scenarios of parent-teacher conferences - that type thing.

Stephanie indicated that more classroom management classes would have helped her. with time management. She explained,

...I would have liked to have had more classroom management classes on a variety of classroom management [topics]. I would like to have some other class that teaches you prioritizing your time and using your time, and how to use it effectively. ...not puffy in-the-air ideas. If you have 5,000 papers walking in that door, and three parents yelling and screaming at you, and four kids tugging, here's what you need to do first, second, and

third.

Under the umbrella of classroom management, study participants emphasized the need for a deeper understanding of how to build good relationships with parents. Furthermore, they wanted to know how to identify various student behaviors and different methods for successfully working with students who exhibit them.

### Eliminating Courses

If courses were not viewed as beneficial, participants thought they should be eliminated. The thinking was, 'Why keep a course if it does not prepare students to teach?'

Mia recommended eliminating some of those courses that were not particularly helpful. She elaborated,

My Educational Psych class was not helpful. Issues in Education just scared me to death. I can't say that I came away ... with anything from that class except that if I sneeze and close my eyes, I may get sued (laughing). It just was a frightening course. So I'd like to see them [college] strengthen those things that teachers need on a day to day basis and a little less philosophy in every single class. ... I know philosophies are important, but if you have one course that's a requirement that you talk about those philosophies the entire semester, you don't need to talk about it for four weeks the next class you take.

In Jessica's opinion, some of the math classes should be eliminated.

I would take out some of the math classes. ... not the math methods classes but the probability and statistics. And I can't even think what the name of some of the classes that we have to take were in math, but I know there was one class where it was just busy work. There was no teacher telling us how to teach a child to do math. ... if you are a K-8 teacher, you're not going to be teaching them calculus and statistics, and that was a type of class we had to take, and I felt that was a waste of time.

In addition, Jessica also suggested combining the related arts classes into one class. She explained,

... we did art, gym, and music ... and I felt like they could have combined them to one because we're not going to have P.E. ... there are going to be times when we have to do games or stuff in the classroom, but if someone would just touch on the rules and what to watch for, rather than learning how to design a game. That was a waste. That's for P.E. teachers. That's a physical education job, I felt. Not ours.

Melissa was adamant about excluding one class. She said,



I would exclude my psychology class that talked only about baboon sex. ... I learned more about baboon sex than I ever want to know in my entire life.

Tim offered his recommendation for redesigning the teacher training program.

Eliminate classes that stress memorizing information and replace them with classes that give education students quality experience working with children in a classroom setting. Tim stated,

I would certainly exclude a lot of the stuff ... like the philosophies. ... I had to take Art History and some of that stuff ... you really do nothing but look at pictures, memorize the pictures, and take a test on it. The classes like that I would do away with. ...if someone is committed to being a teacher, then for four years they work on being a teacher. They need a lot of good experience, a lot of in-classroom [experience] and the course work would be more hands-on and more experience-related than memorizing

Becky also shared that some of the philosophy classes should be removed and said it was difficult understanding the reason they were even included in the teacher training program.

Becky explained,

I'm sure there's something I'm thinking about here that I couldn't stand. Philosophy. You know, there's some philosophies that I thought did help, but I didn't see ... the need . There was one class called Practical Reasoning and ... I didn't really understand why I was taking it. And then I had a religion class which I enjoyed, but I don't see the purpose of actually having them in the program.

Diane thought that too much emphasis was placed on testing:

... so much ...was on the testing, the testing, the testing. It was, like, we've already heard it once, okay? I mean, I know that's very important, but I would exclude some of those classes that were about the standards and testing. Which it's good to be very proficient in them but they seem to change a lot anyway, and they're not set, so I would ... try to do things that were more useful to actually being in the classroom . More useful to a new teacher. Real life, real world experiences rather than talking about a set of standards and rules that might change within the next five years. Cause there seem to be a lot of trends in education, and I wouldn't focus so much on the trend that was popular now, whenever you would happen to be in school. I would just try to focus more on time-tested teaching strategies and just getting out there in the schools.

Maria would exclude most of the research components of the teacher program:

I would probably exclude ... most of just the papers and things that you have to write. I know that's important and that's a way that college teachers assess how students are learning, but I think it would be more important to ... focus on the actual classroom ...

In addition, she would limit the amount of time spent learning assessment techniques. She explained further,

I ...know assessment's extremely important, but most schools have assessment that they want you to do anyway. For example, T-CAPSs ... Brigance testing, Dibels, things like that, and I know you have to have your own classroom assessment. But all of these huge assessments that I remember learning about, which I still don't remember, I forgot after the class test was over. I don't think they're relevant ... or important.

Stephanie would modify the research component of the teacher preparation class, also. She noted,

I'd exclude my portfolio. I'd exclude my research, at least the amount of research that we did. It was fascinating. I just didn't find it real applicable ...

Excluding the research was a sentiment echoed by Phyllis, who graduated through the M.A.T. program. She said,

One thing that was tremendously frustrating for me, doing a year-long internship, we were also required to do a thesis. I know some universities will allow you to do extra course work. Maybe some more hands-on classes. That would have been more helpful to me. I mean, I respect the research process. All I wanted to do was prepare for my students, but I had this thesis hanging over my head that I had to research topics. Jeff would remove the philosophy classes and replace them with more realistic teaching experiences, like dealing with parents. He said,

...you can sit in there and talk philosophy and what people believe in, whatever, but ... that doesn't help you when an angry parent comes to your door wanting to know why's Little Johnny upset ...

Patty seriously considered the value of some of her course work when she shared,

There are many classes that are - I'm not going to say worthless. There are many classes that did nothing for my first year of teaching. Nothing. They taught me how to stay up late. That's one good thing. I'm still doing that grading papers, so they taught me how to stay up late and get up early.

Tina confided that some of her classes were not very valuable, either:

... there were courses that could have been much more helpful. For example, I had a really good Special Ed. course but it was in the summer and it was really quick, and I

think more course work in areas like special education and classroom management in ... dealing with parents. Those kinds of skills as opposed to maybe some of the philosophy classes - educational philosophy classes.

The overwhelming consensus of the participants was to eliminate course work that did not directly affect teaching children. They strongly felt that too much attention was given to testing, research, and philosophy classes, all of which they believed were not going to help them teach their students.

### Adding Course Work

When the participants were asked to address the issue of adding course work to the teacher preparation program, their responses varied. The common element found in all of their suggestions, though, reflected a practical aspect to enhance their teaching skills.

Melissa expressed the opinion that a class dealing with the Tennessee Standards should have been included in her preparation. She stated,

I wish we had a class on the standards. Teach us how to read it. Teach us how to understand it. Give us a teacher's or a student textbook and one of the assignments could be, 'Hey, you need to find this standard. You need to locate the information that goes along with this standard in the textbook.' And that would probably ease the transition because you spend most of your time pouring over those standards, trying to understand them, and then going back in your textbooks and trying to find where the heck you can find this stuff.

I would not only do Tennessee standards, but I would bring in standards from other states, too, because these teachers that you're training, not all of them are going to stay in the classroom. They're going to be going into administrators' positions, central office positions. Hopefully, maybe one of them will end up in Nashville and be able to straighten some people out, and you want to give them a clue as to what else is out there.

Mia recollected a class on assessment:

There was one class on assessment that I took which was wonderful in giving me tools to assess with, but didn't address what you do with it once you've done it. And I know I can assess with the best of them, but ... what do I do with this assessment once I've done it? How do you use it to go to the next step? And that class didn't offer what to do with it. There's just some ... classes that need to be tweaked a little to show you what's the next step? What do you do then?

Stephanie's ideas for changing the teacher preparation program involved visits from local

principals. She explained,

I probably would have the principals come to the school ... and really lay out ... what is expected ... this is what you need to do so I could balance it with my course work.

Toby suggested it might be useful to offer a sign language class to accommodate hearing impaired students as an alternative to taking a foreign language. He also would include techniques for teaching students to read, along with a class that focused on dressing appropriately for the profession. Toby explained,

Well, I would take out Chinese. I think I would encourage a foreign language, but ... wouldn't it be fantastic if they offered sign language as a foreign language ...? I know we've got a kindergartner coming in next year that's deaf, and would that not be awesome to be able to have that as a foreign language instead of having to take some wasteful, useless thing such as Chinese?

I think we need more [instruction]... on how to teach reading. I think that's very important because if [a child] can't read, you can't do anything in the classroom.

He would also include additional course work that dealt with teaching children with disabilities because he only had one class in that area.

Leigh agreed that special education issues should be taught in more depth. She stated,

I think that the Special Ed that I was taught could have been on a deeper level because I think that it would help me, even now in my own classroom, to see how to, you know, to help ... students. I mean ... it's hard whenever they're [professors] telling you about stuff and you're sitting in the college classroom they're telling you how to teach an ADD student, but until you're actually there trying to do it, it's a whole other thing.

Toby suggested offering a class on professionalism, especially one targeting appropriate dress for teachers:

I do know one thing that I think that shouldn't have to be taught ... a class on etiquette and proper attire for teachers, because some of the...kids ... come to school looking like a bunch of tramps. And it was more girls than it was guys. They don't know how to dress appropriately, and I think maybe they [colleges] need to teach a class on that

Two particular courses Patty considered beneficial to include were those on law and computer usage. She explained that it would be very useful to include more opportunities for field experience within the course work. She said,

I would include a class on the laws because it's important to know what your rights are or not as a teacher. I would have your subject matter classes just like they do now, just maybe more in-depth and the rest of the whole program pretty much computer classes. That's important - computer classes. The rest of the program I think should be, even if you go to a class that you're going to five days a week, three of those five days should be out in the field.

Melissa offered the suggestion to teach student teachers the intricacies of the evaluation process they would encounter when they began teaching. She said,

...it would be neat if you could do something to help ... the student teachers with working on ... the summative evaluation, because that is just scary.

Janet suggested it would be helpful to have a class where you spent a couple of weeks learning how to prepare lessons and materials for the first few weeks of school and perhaps even viewing some videos showing experienced teachers "in action" during that time.

Understanding how to begin the school year was also mentioned by Maria as an important component of teacher training. Organizing the large amount of paperwork and planning suitable activities for the first day of school were things Maria just had not been prepared for in college. She also offered that it would be helpful to include more opportunities for fieldwork. Maria said,

...the internship, the whole year helped me out so much and I guess, too, talking about every little thing that you had to do, that was one thing that my mentor's great, but the only thing I didn't know about [was] all the paperwork that you had to do because she already had done it. I didn't know about all the preparations that you had to make before the kids came because she already had ... those things done. So mainly just the major transitions as far as the paperwork that you have to do, what all you have to get ready before the kids come ... the report cards. We didn't have to do report cards, so just the major things like that I think need to be addressed in a college class or internship.

Jessica thought that watching educational videos with interactive problem-solving situations would be invaluable. Another suggestion Jessica offered was to have professors explain different ways to teach using a textbook.

In Mia's mind, the methods courses were very useful and she thought more should be offered. She explained,

I would like to see more methodology courses. There's a big HUGE course on math

methodology and it was wonderful, but I didn't have any science methods class. I didn't have any social studies methods class, and I had one course in literacy, when all that I do revolves around literacy and language, and I didn't have but one literacy course.

Patty agreed that methods classes were pretty important and that more should be included in the teaching program.

Jeff suggested that students in the teacher preparation program should be informed of the rules for tenure and familiarize themselves with teacher salary pay scales. He said,

Make sure that people actually know what the salary is because when I was there, people really didn't find out until they were too far into it. So when you go to college, you ought to know what you're getting into.

The study participants were very specific in describing the kinds of course work they believed would improve the teacher preparation program. Suggestions included adding classes on Tennessee Standards, reading instruction, special education, and educational law. Other suggestions included offering methods classes that were available to all of the students. In addition, participants stressed the value of fieldwork and wanting more of it. This could take the form of a longer student teaching term as well as more opportunities to visit school sites as part of the education classes requirements.

## Restructure Field Experience

Field experience was viewed as the most significant part of the teacher preparation program. Field experience affords students the chance to visit school sites either as an observer or to actually teach a group of children. The participants enjoyed this aspect of their college training very much. However, the teachers did offer some recommendations to improve this experience.

Amy would change the structure of field experience. She said,

I would include more and better structured field study. I would also begin the program with a real classroom teaching situation, somehow.

Tish would also change the structure of field experience to include an entire year of student teaching that would begin on the first day of the school year and last until the school year ended. Teachers could then see the whole year in its entirety. She stated,

Well, I really believe that a student ... at college who's getting ready to go into teaching needs to see the whole ... year, regardless of what they're in - Early Childhood, Secondary, whatever. They need to see the opening and the closing of a year ... the whole kind of ebb and flow of how the year goes, because when you are hired, that seems to be the most stressful times to me - how to start things out, how to close things ...out, how to kind of tie up my ends. And I didn't really have an idea about how you're supposed to do that in education until after I got my job.

And I think that they maybe should cut out some of the course hours as far as in a college classroom and increase the hours that you're actually in a classroom teaching or with a teacher who has that experience [both] at the beginning of the year and at the end.

Breanna agreed that it was very important for new teachers to see how to begin the first week and end the last week of school.

Jessica expressed a similar sentiment. She would increase student teaching from one semester to a whole year. It was not her intention to add a fifth year to accommodate the extended student teaching time. Instead, Jessica suggested getting rid of the useless classes she called "money grabbers" and use that time for the extra student teaching.

Becky mentioned that she would include a wider range of grade levels for observation purposes. She explained,

I would keep all the field experience.. Every bit of it. Go over the strategies, the

techniques ... for each grade level. Then they may say, 'Well, this works best, you know, with this subject, and this works best with this subject,' and just to go over which one works best.

Maria suggested varying the field experience to include schools representing different socioeconomic levels

... [include] an internship that's a whole year, but also going and seeing different kinds of classrooms. We did have an internship in two different schools. One was a school that came from a housing project and it was inner city, and the other one was a more well-to-do school, and I had more experience in the well-to-do school. But also in the inner city, the teacher that I worked with, she did not have a handle on the classroom management, either. So I think it would be ... important to include just getting a variety of experiences from different schools that have different backgrounds and being able to see ... successful teachers that ... are including all of these things like the reading groups and the positive discipline, and the aspects that they want us to have in the actual classroom.

I mean, I can read something in a book and forget what I've read the next day or the next minute. But if I can see it, and then actually put that into practice what I'm ... teaching, then that will help me so much more later down the line.

Because Tina received her teacher training through a 15 month M.AT. program, she did not have the time to observe and interact with children as much as she would have liked. She pointed out that it would be beneficial if more opportunities for observation were provided. Tina explained her idea:

...it seems like each semester I had maybe, up until student teaching, I had like 12 hours I had to fit in of field experience, which would have been basically ... being in one classroom for a twelve hour time span one semester, each semester. That was a lot of observation, not a whole lot of interaction, and not a whole [lot]of ... actual teaching experience.

Tina offered her idea to improve field experience:

I think more of it. I think more than the 12 hours because one of the problems I found was that once you actually get into the classroom and it's your classroom and you're now the teacher, you kind of wish you had had more hands-on experience than what you did receive. ...offering or requiring maybe more than the 12 hours of field experience, requiring more than you just going in and observing. Just the requirements I think should be more because I know one particular time I went, the instructor at the university said, 'You can just go and sit and just take notes. Just observe.' Well, that's good up to a point, but then you actually need to get involved and see what it's like to be up in front of a classroom. See what it's like to have to ...plan a lesson, actually plan it out and then



implement it, ... [in] the next day or two.

In Janet's opinion, a valuable experience that should be included in the teacher preparation program is observing a classroom from the very first day of school. So much happens the first week or two in establishing routines, processing the necessary paperwork, getting acquainted with the children, etc. that college students are not given the opportunity to see. Janet said,

The place that I did my student teaching was on year-round, and I love year-round calendar. But ... they started before I got to see [the beginning] and so starting out in my classroom the first year, they (colleagues) helped me so much, told me stuff that needed to be done, ... and just kind of carried me through ... the first year. I mean, we discussed things like that in class at college and stuff, but actually doing it, I mean, and setting up your own classroom, getting everything ready, not forgetting something, and you're a month into school and you're. 'Oh, my gosh, I never did that (laughing). It's nice to have someone who has done it before lay it out for you. And the ending, I would say, if you were going to ask me which is worse, I guess, not in a bad sense in that it's bad, but which is worse to have to handle? The beginning of school is much harder than the end of school.

Jeff noted a critical role of observations not mentioned before. He explained,

... observation hours are critical. If you don't want to be a teacher, you [are] going to figure that out during that time.

By far the most valuable component of the teacher education program were the various field experiences. All of the participants agreed that this was extremely useful because it gave them hands-on experience working with children and observing skills and techniques used by veteran teachers. Adding more opportunities to visit school sites is important, as well as giving student teachers the chance to begin their teaching assignment on or before the first day of school so they can see the preparation that occurs before the students arrive. Experiencing the end-of-school processes would be helpful, also.

The participants in this study offered a variety of means to improve teacher preparation based on their own experiences. Suggestions included increasing the opportunities for more field experience, eliminating some philosophy classes, offering classes that deal with parent issues, providing more instruction in dealing with special education practices, combining classes such as art, music, and physical education into one class, gaining a deeper understanding of behavior

problems and learning successful techniques for handling them, and acquiring strategies for effective classroom management.

### Remaining in Teaching

New teachers leave the teaching profession for a variety of reasons. To increase the retention rate, many schools are focusing on their induction programs to prevent this from happening. The study participants spoke candidly about the factors that would affect their decision to remain in the teaching profession.

For Toby, salary and class size were important considerations in his decision to remain in teaching. He explained,

What would encourage me would be more money, of course. Actually, I took a cut in pay to do what I'm doing now because when I left my profession before, I was making quite a bit more than what I'm making now. But it wasn't satisfying. It wasn't what I wanted to do. I was burned out after 15 years. Smaller classroom size, smaller number of children. Wouldn't 10 be awesome? If you just had 10 kids? And more time in the classroom with the kids instead of ... pulling the kids out for all these different related arts things.

Toby also said he would prefer less paperwork:

Another thing that would encourage me was if we had to do less accounting and paperwork. Because we have all these fund raisers that we have to be responsible for [and] collecting the money, and ... I find myself in the role of an accountant and a bank teller, too.

Patty confirmed that it was very likely that she would still be teaching five years from now but confided that if her academic freedom was compromised, this could affect her decision to stay in teaching. She said,

I guess when they [school administrators] come in ...tell me to teach this, this week, and this next week, and this the next week ... that will be hard. I wouldn't say that I would go out of teaching because I do love it, but that takes all the teacher out of teaching. If they set up a timetable and are actually telling me what and when to teach - now Tennessee State Standards are totally different. I can go by that and fit it to me and still be a teacher.

Jessica enthusiastically affirmed that she would still be teaching in 5 years even if she

had a difficult class (es) of students. She revealed what has kept her going:

I love it. I love the kids. It's not the money. Being able to get up in the morning and think to myself, 'Okay, I'm going to be this child's mother for so many hours a day.' Even if they're here an hour, at least I made a difference in an hour. They're safe. Because I go home at night worrying about whether these kids are safe ... when they go home.

Although Jessica expressed a strong belief that she would remain in teaching, she did mention an aspect that troubled her. She remarked,

The state putting so much pressure on us - No Child Left Behind. ...sometimes I feel that teachers are doing all that they can do, but it's up to the child to make the difference ...whether they want to learn or not. And they're putting all this pressure on us for us to have high test scores and this and that, but they're determining these students' abilities by a test, and I don't feel a test is what these kids need. State Standards is the big thing that scares me to death.

Jessica stated that these standards were unattainable no matter how hard a teacher tried.

Although Becky said it was pretty likely that she would remain a teacher, she, too, expressed concerns about the implications of the No Child Left Behind Act. Becky also indicated that student discipline issues could affect her decision. She elaborated on the matter of discipline and also addressed the need for different classroom management techniques:

Some of my parents are very supportive, but some of them are not. ...I've maybe take(n) a snack away and I've had a parent call me at home and say, 'Please don't take snack away from my child.' I've actually had two or three page letters from parents. ' So ... maybe some way to have the discipline. Some way to keep them under control. I'm thinking maybe after five years my nerves may be shot (laughing).

Becky stressed that new teachers needed to be prepared for different kinds of discipline situations. She said,

... you see an unruly child but you're always thinking that's the teacher's responsibility. ...when it comes down to it, when you go in a classroom that's your responsibility. You have to deal with it. When you have one that won't sit in their seat and they won't stop talking, and they're picking on Billy whose sitting next to them, and Billy can't learn because Peter's over here smacking him across the head.

Discussing the No Child Left Behind Act, Becky said,

... you think about it [No Child Left Behind Act] and you have one child or two children

and they're just not learning. When you try your best, and you've got some that are ready - you know, I teach kindergarten, so there are some that are ready to read. And then I had some, you know, they couldn't hardly say their name, let alone write their name. So I think ...the biggest discouragement is ... I can't move [students] on.

Diane laughing said she could not speculate where she would be in five years. However, she did point out some areas of teaching that were frustrating to her. Diane remarked,

I find it [teaching] very rewarding. I truly enjoy seeing the light bulb go on in their heads and really teaching children. The pay is not what I would like it to be, but of course, it's improved this year. We've actually gotten raises and it's getting better. And I know teachers have been dealing with that for a long time. I didn't go into it for the money, but that is a factor.

Diane confirmed that she would like to remain in teaching but a number of circumstances could affect her decision. She added,

It's all the OTHER STUFF. The outside stuff and the parents, and even the No Child Left Behind Act. All these other factors are really frustrating to me. The pay, the more stringent laws, the highly qualified - really, the Bush Administration plans bother me. I hope that changes because I see it as the death of public education unless something's done about it.

Diane explained the direction she would like to see education take:

Just to see communities and people and federal government, all the way up, take public education more seriously, and try to improve it and not put so much focus on private schools.

Although Jeff enjoys teaching, the issue of salary is an important consideration in making a career change. He explained,

... I like my job. I don't see me really leaving it unless there was something else that came along that I really, really liked. Money always becomes an issue, especially [for] a male and ... being the breadwinner of the family, so to speak. So I plan on being here unless something just comes along that would be an opportunity you couldn't pass up.

In addition to the variety that each day of teaching brings and working with children, there is an additional factor that would encourage her to stay in teaching, however. She explained,

What will encourage me to stay [in teaching] is the fact that I won't have another first year. ...I'm already thinking of things - hey, I'm going to do this differently next year. And I feel like next year, I mean, it can't get any worse. It can't get any more stressful. I only have one direction to go and that's up, so that encourages me to stay.

An aspect that would dissuade Melissa is the continual criticism of teachers and the accountability factor. She said,

When it gets to the point where I leave in tears every day ... I would really have to consider another profession. You know ... it is a very stressful job. And I can't imagine another job, except maybe for a surgeon or a doctor, where what they produce is looked at so closely. And you really, I mean, you can stand up here and teach your heart out, but it's sort of a game of chance if the kid's getting it or not. And it scares me that my job and my reputation are based on if that kid ate breakfast that morning and has all the brain cells going. And that really discourages me.

I think teachers should be held accountable. But I think we should also make the students accountable because it's not fair to us that we are doing our best. ...my main goal is...if I can leave my room every day with a clear conscience and say, 'I have done my personal best today. I can do no more. ' Then I feel like I've had a good day. But what scares me is that we're being held so accountable for something that we don't have that much control of, and ... that's frightening to me. And I think that it's not only discouraging to me as a first year teacher, it's going to be discouraging to anybody who even wants to be a teacher.

Maria indicated that she had other goals in life that would not be compatible with a teaching career, so whether she remained in teaching depended on if or when she pursued those goals. She laughed as she elaborated,

Well, I've had a rough couple of years, and I would like to continue teaching, but of course I have other goals, too. I would like to get married and have children, and I will not do this job and have children at the same time (laughing) because I don't believe if every year is like the year I'm having now, there is no way that I can teach and go home to my own children. So let's just say if I don't have any children, I would like to continue teaching. ... I'm definitely going to need some support and some more methods on discipline ... my main problem this year is discipline and how to actually teach my classroom with all these behaviors going on. So if I can get a handle on the classroom management aspect of teaching, then I would hope to continue teaching.

For Mia, teaching is a heart's dream and she fully expects to continue in the teaching profession, although a decrease in the level of support would bother her. She explained,

I feel pretty strongly about staying at this school. Through all the college hours ... I've

had my feet in different schools. And my children all grew up in a different county school. And this school just has a different feeling. I mean, it may be just because this is where my first teaching job was ...but I'd probably be really heartbroken if I had to leave. I like it here. ...the staff is so outgoing and so caring, and there's such a network that if you feel like you're slipping through a crack teaching something or dealing with a child or something, there's always somebody right there to catch you. It wouldn't stop me from teaching, but it'd take some gathering to get past [losing] that support system. I guess I've waited too long to get started to think about leaving. And all those years in the business world, I know what is out there. So I tend to look at it a little differently. This is something that I've lived my life wanting to do.

Tina indicated that it was pretty likely she would remain in teaching. However, she pointed out how important peer support was in affecting her decision:

I've had two very good years. I'm very happy here. ... just to know you're supported ... that's an encouragement to stay in the job, to know that ... you're not alone, that you have people who... have the same problems as you do, and yet have the same successes, too.

Amy listed several factors that will affect her decision to continue teaching. She said,

It all depends on my family situation at this point. Also, finding a school where I feel that I can grow and be myself. The kids are the biggest reason to stay in teaching. Burnout is the biggest reason to go. I definitely don't want to teach if it isn't in my heart anymore.

Despite some challenges with discipline issues, Phyllis noted it was very likely that she would pursue a teaching career because she really enjoyed seeing her students learn. She explained,

Luckily here at this school I feel that I am supported by my principal when I have a problem with a student. Just the lack of respect that you get from some students, and if you don't have a good administrator to back you up, that's very frustrating. ... I have been fortunate in the two years that I've been teaching that I've had the administration back me up. But it's very frustrating when you have no parental support and the children are just very disrespectful. Luckily, those students are few and far between.

Leigh was adamant that she would continue teaching. She stated,

[It's] highly, highly likely. I knew this was something I really wanted to do just for the fact that I love doing it, and it's just something I've always wanted to do. And it gives me joy ... when they actually learn something.

Leigh echoed the sentiment that disrespectful students were a discouraging aspect of

teaching, though.

Ashley described two factors that would influence her to remain in teaching:

If I see that I'm actually an effective teacher, the children are actually learning, and I feel like I'm really helping them to grow. If not, then there's no point [teaching].

Another consideration was the availability of a teaching position. Jobs can be hard to come by in this area.

An important point in Janet's decision to continue teaching was the school setting. She indicated that she would not pursue her career unless she was placed at a school where she would feel passionate about teaching. Lack of discipline and the various problems the students brought with them to school was very discouraging and frustrating. According to Janet,

I like teaching ... students. And I used to tutor, and things like that were great. I don't know how I'm going to continue here if things continue to progress outward. That ripple effect of the way that it used to be when I was little, a teacher called home and you were in trouble. It's not like that [now]. If I call home and complain, I've got parents up here in my face. It's not the same. So not only are you having to deal with children in a poor environment, an uneducated environment as well, ... but you have to deal with the ... other baggage that comes with them. But ... it isn't like that at all schools.

Donna said she was positive she would continue teaching unless the school system got rid of her. She explained her feelings:

Well, I'm just happy to be here. At this point in my life - I'm 41 and I had a business degree and I've done ... quite a few other things - and all along ... I've always thought that this is what I wanted to do. And this year I have loved it so much, and I just know in my heart this is what I'm supposed to do. ... I'm not ever going to leave it unless I have to.

To Stephanie, teaching is her calling, and she is praying to stay put. Stephanie stated,

This is my mission field and til God tells me to move on, I plan to probably retire and die [a teacher]. I mean, I can't put 25 years in - I'm 53 - but, yeah, I'll be here until he moves me on. People are stuck with me now (laughing).

Stephanie explained what inspired her to feel this way:

Just to get these kids - this is a special, special group of kids - ... to be excited to learn. And I want them to believe in themselves - that they can go all the way through college. And I told these 16 kids, 'I'm going to be at your graduation from high school, and don't

you dare let me down.'

The only situation that would prevent Stephanie from teaching would be if health problems occurred with herself or her family.

The participants revealed several factors that would influence their decision to make teaching their career. The issue of inadequate salary was mentioned as well as the lack of discipline in the classroom. The accountability facet of the No Child Left Behind Act was a consideration, also. Teachers work very hard and feel it is unfair to be the only group held accountable for student achievement.

Research Question # 6: Are students provided with an adequate amount of quality teaching experiences in a classroom setting before graduation?

Field experience remains an integral part of teacher preparation programs. Many education classes require students to visit classrooms for on site training. There they learn teaching skills first through observing experienced teachers at work and then interacting with the students. The final and most important field experience culminates in a semester, or sometimes two, of student teaching. Study participants agreed that field experience was very valuable, but they still thought it could be improved.

From a practical and economical standpoint, Patty recommended that field work begin as early as possible in the teacher preparation program. She noted,

Definitely start as a freshman because you can tell pretty quickly when you're out there if you are making a mistake . . . . What helped me was my time spent observing classrooms and that was from the beginning. You observed your three hours for Special Ed. You observed for foundations maybe 10 or 15 hours. You observed and then you actually get into it during student teaching. And all of that ... has made me the teacher I am.

Patty added this observation:

I think that they do try to prepare you at college. I think ... the only thing they really could do is to add more hours into your actual placement - where you're actually in the field.

Maria agreed that field experience had been invaluable. She said,

...just the internship, the whole year helped me out so much, and talking about every



little thing that you had to do.

Leigh acknowledged the value of field work, too. She explained,

Oh, I don't know the exact number of hours, but one thing about our college that I did like was ... as soon as I finished my freshman year in college, they sent us out in the classroom. And I ... spent two weeks in a first grade and second grade classroom. ... I was there every day for two weeks and that was supposed to be just to see if I really wanted to do this or not. And then every single year, almost every semester, I was in the classroom just doing different stuff, whether it was reading to kids or whatever. And I think that helped....getting in the classroom just a lot of the time, seeing how different classrooms were set up as far as the ... discipline, the classroom procedures, ... even just seating. I felt ... like that was very helpful.

Diane recalled her field experience:

I had ...student teaching and before that I had several ... hours of field work. ...a lot of the classes at (college) were geared towards working out in the schools so [I had] quite a few hours of field work - a lot. From the very first education course, we had field work.

Field work was also an important component of Becky's college program. She said,

I think all the practicum time really did help... . They put us in a classroom ... we worked in a classroom, assisted whatever the teacher needed. A lot of times we did some teaching,[and] ... graded papers.

Mia validated the importance of field experience but indicated that student teaching should have been longer. She explained,

My junior year of college I probably had ... in the neighborhood of 70 - 80 hours [of field experience] because I remember everyone complaining about it so heartily. And then my student teaching and that was it. I felt all along since the second week of my student teaching that I would have preferred to drop a few of the classes and add a full year of student teaching because I learned so much of practical, applicable things during student teaching that were so important.

Jeff shared that college taught him what he needed to know in most areas to be a successful teacher. However, he did have a suggestion for improving student teaching.

He elaborated,

Yes, [the] course work prepared me well. I'm K through 12 certification so you had to get a balance with the elementary, middle school, and high school level to prepare you. And I did my student teaching in elementary and middle school, and I never had much high school experience, and that kind of left a void there. But then I came out and was

substituting, so that helped me get some experience at the high school level. Maybe we [could] do our student teaching one secondary and one ...elementary. Maybe they could do two secondaries and some more on elementary or something cause I don't feel that you had enough secondary ...cause middle school and high school's such a big difference.

Jessica emphasized the need to pay close attention during student teaching and other classroom experiences. She shared,

...student teachers [should] ... pay attention in student teaching because ... your student teaching is when you are actually hands-on. ... I just think hands-on involvement, being in the school system actually doing it is better than sitting in a class with thirty people with your hand on your cheek listening.

For Donna, field experience provided opportunities to observe and interact within a variety of classrooms and children. She stated,

I do remember it being varied enough to where I felt like I was getting different samples of different grade levels and different school environments. [It was] very helpful ... . I know some people didn't like it ... but I always thought it was very helpful because it gave me so many different perspectives, not only from the school but the different types of children. And then also working with different teachers to see how drastically different they are in their methods and in their philosophies.

Generally speaking, most of the study participants indicated they had received a sufficient amount of field work , although many thought more hours in the field would be beneficial. There was widespread agreement that working in classrooms at school sites was the most valuable element of the teacher preparation program. Often, field experience was scheduled early in their program. Field experience provided opportunities for the students to observe veteran teachers, volunteer in the classroom , and acquire valuable teaching experience.

### Summary

Within the data analysis of the taped interviews, several themes emerged as new teachers shared their perceptions regarding the quality of their teacher preparation program and the steps taken by their school systems to acclimate them to the teaching profession. These themes reflected the belief that college courses often did not model or prepare new teachers for the "real world" of teaching, feeling overwhelmed by teaching duties and expectations, the benefits of

mentoring, a need for strategies to effectively dealing with parents, a desire for more interactive field experience, the necessity for better classroom management skills, understanding and applying the state standards, and implications at the school level for the No Child Left Behind Act.

Thick description was used to present these themes that were generated from the perceptions of each of the twenty study participants whenever possible. Information from the data analysis chapter was used to developed findings and implications for future research presented in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND FUTURE PRACTICE

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and observations of first and second-year teachers regarding the quality of their teacher preparation program at the university level and their experience with induction programs at their respective schools. Individual interviews were conducted with 20 elementary teachers at schools located in the East Tennessee area. These in-depth interviews were completed using an open-ended technique with a set of interview guide questions to focus the inquiry. The qualitative methodology used in this study allowed for the emergence of details and thick description that would be lacking through the use of a quantitative study.

The interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the researcher, which facilitated in the categorization, coding, and analysis of the data. The transcriptions were inductively analyzed and coded into common categories. Through the analysis of the interviews, the researcher uncovered a wide range of feelings and perceptions held by the participants concerning their college preparation and school experiences as beginning teachers.

Through a review of pertinent literature, interviews with 20 beginning teachers, and the investigator's 20 plus years as an elementary classroom teacher, certain conclusions have been formulated and specific recommendations presented for revising teacher training programs and improving induction practices in school systems.

#### General Findings

Certain broad educational aspects addressed in the study include: (a) What can colleges do to help new teachers successfully transition to their jobs? (b) Have colleges provided beginning teachers with adequate field experience? (c) What do satisfied and successful new teachers have in common? (d) Did new teachers receive additional professional training through staff development opportunities at their schools? (e) In what ways can schools ensure beginning teachers a successful transition from college to teaching? (f) Are mentoring programs helpful?

### Summary of Findings

Despite the differences in age, gender, college affiliation, and school setting of the participants, the findings in this study were surprisingly similar, and resembled much of the information cited in the literature review. Regardless of the college they had attended, the grade they taught, or the system where they were employed, these new teachers generally responded to the interview questions in a like manner. The findings are summarized as a series of responses to the research questions.

The following key points relate to Research Question 1:

#### \*Supportive Work Environment

- peer support from teachers
- peer support from principals
- positive evaluations from principals
- increased self-confidence
- prior experience working with children
- high quality of the teacher's school

#### \*Strategies for Success

- organize classroom and materials
- cultivate a relaxed attitude
- prioritize tasks in order of importance
- view self as a lifelong learner
- work with a mentor

Study participants overwhelmingly attributed much of their feelings of success and satisfaction to continuous support from their peers. They received a tremendous amount of guidance and encouragement from their more experienced colleagues, both teachers and administrators. Initially, some felt reluctant to ask their principals for help because they felt this might indicate a lack of training and knowledge that would reflect poorly on them. However, all

of the teachers relied on this support system their first year. Not only did this provision make new teachers feel welcome, but it carried them through the struggles that most beginning teachers encounter, including pressure for their pupils to make academic gains, interaction with parents, an abundance of paperwork, understanding and using assessment procedures, the teacher evaluation process, and much more. The prevalent feeling was that peer support helped them keep their heads above water when they were feeling discouraged, overwhelmed, and confused. Malcolm (2002) contended that one of the main reasons teachers leave the profession in the first five years is that when they face difficulties, there is no one to talk to.

Additionally, beginning teachers expressed an increase of self-confidence as a result of positive evaluations from their principals and seeing their students achieving academic success. A few of the participants attributed feelings of success to prior experience working with children, either as a volunteer in a school setting or in other group settings. The majority of participants described their schools as good places to teach, with supportive faculty and staff.

The participants offered upcoming new teachers several "pearls of wisdom" to help their first year go smoothly. They stressed that organizing the classroom and materials and keeping detailed lesson plans were very important, along with understanding how to prioritize tasks and duties in order of importance. Participants also noted the significance of continuing to learn better methods of teaching, not to assume that graduating from college signaled the end for needing to learn. Asking an experienced colleague to serve as their mentor if one was not assigned was strongly suggested. Their last piece of advice was to relax and enjoy your job and to understand that feeling overwhelmed was normal.

In summary, a strong support system was deemed absolutely essential to help new teachers make the transition from student teacher to educator. Positive principal evaluations of their teaching performance and evidence of student progress contributed to feelings of increased self-confidence. The study participants also encouraged new teachers to take time to organize their classrooms and materials, continue to seek opportunities to learn from colleagues and other sources of learning, and realize that feeling overwhelmed is normal, so just do your best, relax, and enjoy your job.

The following key points relate to Research Question 2:

\*Pre-service Professional Training Opportunities

adequate induction program

inadequate induction program

The range and depth of induction programs and staff development opportunities varied among school systems, and even between schools in the same system. At the beginning of the school year, new teachers were often required to attend meetings to help acclimate them into the school culture and to acquire more information about their school system. All of the participants, regardless of their system, spent time completing personnel forms. Some schools provided a handbook that answered commonly asked questions about the system, while others provided time for new teachers to meet with staff to discuss various issues. This formal induction period lasted anywhere from a couple of hours to three days. In addition to completing necessary paperwork, some systems with longer induction periods planned meetings to familiarize new teachers with topics such as classroom management strategies, professional evaluation, Terra Nova testing, and the state standards. Some teachers mentioned they were given opportunities to attend workshops that were held later in the year. A few of the teachers were formally assigned mentors at this time. Several participants reported that their induction activities included all of the system's teachers, not just for those newly hired. It was interesting to note that many of the teachers who had received the longest induction program reported feeling overwhelmed by all the information they had received, while those receiving the least felt like they had just been "thrown in" the classroom.

Bolich (2001) noted that studies have indicated those teachers with less than five years of experience who had not been involved in an induction program were nearly twice as likely to leave the teaching profession as those who had participated in such a program. Traditionally, beginning teachers are given few, if any opportunities to participate in informal induction programs (Texas A & M University - Corpus Christi, 2001). Teacher induction programs are important because they provide new teachers with the needed support during the frequently difficult transition from college student to the actual classroom teaching experience (Moskowitz & Stephens, 1997).

In summary, induction programs and in-service opportunities varied from school system to school system. All of the study participants were required to attend some type of induction activity ranging from a few hours to 3 days at the beginning of the school year, however. In a few schools, some workshops dealing with educational issues were scheduled for both new teachers and veteran teachers at times later in the year. Regardless of the depth or duration of these opportunities, all of the participants still felt the need for peer support their first year.

The following key points relate to Research Question 3:

\*Ways Schools Can Assist New Teachers

- peer support from teachers
- create a support group comprised of new and veteran teachers
- expand the orientation program
- provide adequate funding for classroom supplies and equipment

\*Improving the Induction Program

- increase the duration
- hire new teachers early
- provide opportunities to observe veteran teachers

\*Support from the Principal

- outline school expectations and procedures
- explain student discipline policy, including the role of teacher/principal

\*Assistance from the School Supervisor

- \*Procedures for Opening and Closing the School Year
- \*Opportunities for Team Teaching

All of the participants expressed the belief that support from their colleagues was very beneficial, and praise for the mentoring system was widespread. Although the manner of assigning mentors and conducting mentor/mentee meetings differed from school to school, many



teachers expressed a desire to attend regularly scheduled meetings to discuss concerns and teaching strategies.

Along with strong peer support, new teachers indicated an additional way schools could assist new teachers was to schedule time for principals to meet with them personally and explain school rules, procedures, expectations, and student discipline policies. The combination of a strong peer support system and firsthand information from the principal could promote a better understanding of school routines and expectations and help alleviate confusion and stress.

In addition to providing a support system, new teachers suggested that administrators hire beginning teachers earlier in the summer, if possible, to give them more time to familiarize themselves with textbooks, standards, and to prepare their classrooms. They also suggested furnishing teachers with enough money to purchase equipment and materials so they would not have to use personal funds. Opportunities for release time to observe veteran teachers were also noted as something they would appreciate, as well as a chance to team teach with a more experienced colleague. Increasing the length of the orientation program was viewed as a means of providing teachers with more time to organize their classrooms and meet their fellow teachers. A longer orientation period would also allow time for new teachers to attend educational workshops, either before school began or at future dates in the school year. New teachers expressed the need for additional instruction on the process of beginning and closing the school year. Participants noted that in general, the role of their school supervisors was providing assistance to the entire group of their system's teachers, not assisting them individually unless specifically requested by either the teacher or the principal.

In summary the study participants stressed the importance of peer support from their colleagues and principals. They also believed it would be helpful for principals to meet with each of the new teachers to explain school rules, procedures, and expectations. Participants expressed the opinion that hiring new teachers early would allow them time to prepare more thoroughly for the coming year. They also expressed the concern that schools should provide adequate classroom materials and supplies so teachers would not have to use their own money to buy these items. Opportunities for team teaching and observing experienced teachers were considered valuable.

The following key points relate to Research Question 4:

\*Mentoring

benefits

concerns

Mentoring programs are recognized as a very significant element in school induction programs. Mentors provide new teachers with the attention and assistance of experienced teachers. With the help of mentors, novice teachers are assisted in making a positive transition from college to the classroom setting (National Recruitment Clearinghouse, 2002). Mentors usually teach in close proximity to their inexperienced partners and are available to answer questions and offer guidance on a continuous basis. According to Malcolm (2002), mentors can assist beginning teachers in understanding and dealing with the day to day experiences of teaching. Some participants expressed an interest in meeting with their mentors on a regular basis, or forming a support group of new and veteran teachers as a means of exchanging ideas while providing support to the novices. From commission chambers to classrooms, education leaders are discovering the power of mentoring in supporting new teachers. "Simply put, new teachers need somebody to talk to" (Janicki, as cited by Halford, 1998 p 6).

A few of the participants indicated some concerns with a mentoring program. They stressed the importance of carefully matching the teaching philosophies of the mentor and mentee to maximize the benefits. Also, although new teachers appreciate advice, they do not want to become clones of their mentors.

In summary, study participants noted the importance of peer support during their first year of teaching. Peer support appeared in the form of general assistance from colleagues as well as that of a formally assigned mentor who provided help on a continuous basis. The idea of mentors and mentees meeting on a regular basis was endorsed by several of the participants. The new teachers stressed the value of mentors in providing guidance with the curriculum, answers to questions concerning school procedures, and in offering moral support, encouragement, and friendship. Concerns attributed to working with a mentor included the desire for new teachers to retain their academic freedom and the assurance that the mentor and mentee held similar teaching philosophies.

The following key points relate to Research Question 5:

\*Experience with Professors

modeling teaching theories and strategies

current classroom experience in schools

\*College Course Work

reading instruction

strategies for successful parental interaction

college and school expectations

\*Redesigning the Teacher Education Program

classroom management instruction

eliminate courses

add courses

restructure field experience

\*Remaining in Teaching

The participants shared the opinion that while some of their college classes and professors adequately prepared them for their first year of teaching, others did not. According to Darling-Hammond (1999), frequently there is a disparity between the academic practices that colleges and universities teach their students and the experiences students actually encounter as beginning teachers.

A few of the teachers described their first year of teaching in colorful terms: thrown to the wolves, sink or swim, and learning to tread water. Some expressed the view that professors needed to visit classrooms in public schools to get an update on current classroom conditions because they were teaching in an ivory tower that did not match the realism of today's schools. Researchers at the George Lucas Educational Foundation A (2002) advocate sending education professors out to K-12 schools to enable professors to ascertain that the theory and content taught

in the college classes reflect the reality of real classrooms. The participants spoke very enthusiastically about the professors who "walk the talk", modeling the strategies and theories they were teaching. Unfortunately, not all of the professors taught this way.

The teachers also expressed mixed feelings about the value of their course work. They described some of their assignments as busy work. They stressed the need for more instruction in classroom management, including practical discipline strategies, and understanding how to effectively interact with parents. A very common criticism was that new teachers are not taught how to teach children to read. Although a variety of theories were explored, the actual application aspect was often overlooked. The participants wanted in-depth reading instruction. Sherk (1998) stated that intellectually empty curriculums and the lack of connection between what is taught and the reality of teaching are two common complaints directed toward teacher education programs.

Shanker (1996) posited that a rigorous curriculum that reflects sound content and effective teaching practices is necessary to prepare budding teachers for their profession. In addition, an effective teacher education program is coherent. It identifies sound teaching practices, then organizes all of its course work and clinical experiences to reflect and reinforce that vision (Darling-Hammond, 2002). According to researchers at the George Lucas Educational Foundation B (2002), schools of education determine whether teachers enter their classrooms well prepared or feeling overwhelmed.

Another important issue voiced repeatedly was that teachers did not know how to begin the school year. Thus, this time of the year proved very stressful. These new teachers were unaware of the overwhelming amount of paperwork that is generated in the first couple of weeks of school. They needed assistance with creating a routine and understanding basic every day things to do, like collecting lunch money or keeping a collection log. Teachers revealed that some of the course work, such as statistics, related arts classes like gym, music, and art, as well as various philosophy classes, was just not useful to them in the classroom. Most participants said their time could have been better spent doing more field experience to gain hands-on experience in classrooms rather than taking these classes. Along with more opportunities for field experience, these teachers indicated that a year of student teaching would be very beneficial, especially if the placement began a few days before school started to allow them to see the preparation that occurs before students come to school.

According to Fraser (2001), teacher educators who preach the use of multiple modes of instruction to their students but only use the lecture method during class, those who have not been in the classroom in years, and those who are boring are still a real part of college and university teacher preparation programs. The perceptions of the study participants reflected and supported the information presented in the literature review

In summary, participants offered these suggestions for improving the teacher education program at colleges: 1) add opportunities for more interactive field experience, not just observation, and increase student teaching to a full year; 2) eliminate or limit the philosophy classes and research requirements; 3) include more course work that focuses on the elements of classroom management, including discipline strategies and effective means of interacting with parents; (4) intensify reading instruction; and (5) provide more instruction in special education issues; (6) encourage professors to visit school sites to see the realism of the classroom, and then model effective strategies and theories that reflect this realism to their students

The following key point relates to Research Question 6:

*\*Teaching Experience in a Classroom Setting*

The study participants affirmed the most important component in the teacher education program was field experience, and they wanted more opportunities to visit classrooms. In addition to the obligatory semester of student teaching (one college included a year's internship), participants were required to visit classrooms to observe veteran teachers and if they were fortunate, to teach a lesson(s) to either a small group of children or the whole class. Several college classes included a set number of hours of field service as part of the course requirements. Study participants agreed that field experience beginning early in their college career would not only increase the hours spent in the classroom, but would give them the chance early on to determine if teaching children was really what they wanted to do. If teaching was not their choice, then they would have enough time to switch to another career path.

According to Feistritzer (2002), providing prospective new teachers the many opportunities for real-life classroom experience as well as working with other teachers provides a critical component in teacher preparation. Although understanding the subject content is

important, many teachers maintain that to be successful in the classroom, they need to know such skills as encouraging their students to persevere, strategies for explaining difficult material, and methods of managing a productive and respectful classroom (Public Agenda Online, 2000). Additional time spent in classrooms working with experienced, effective teachers would enable new teachers to learn the best techniques and strategies for educating children. Putting teacher candidates in the classroom will ensure prospective teachers are given many opportunities to observe, tutor, and teach in a real classroom (George Lucas Educational Foundation A, 2002)

In summary, beginning teachers were provided many opportunities to visit school sites to observe veteran teachers. During these times, the college students were sometimes provided opportunities to work with a student (s). The new teachers indicated that field experience was the most important component in their teacher preparation program. They believed it would be very beneficial to increase the amount of classroom experience and suggested professors should schedule more opportunities for them to visit school sites, especially to interact with the students, not just to observe veteran teachers.

### Conclusions

Halford (1998) reported that many schools and universities are seeking more ways for new teachers to make the transition from education student to educator. Beginning teachers frequently experience problems when the beliefs they formed during their university training are dissimilar to those they encounter on the job. To stop the flow of teachers leaving the profession after only a few years, certain steps must be taken.

Conclusion 1: *Teacher preparation programs need to reflect the realism of today's classrooms.*

Professors responsible for educating and training future teachers need to be knowledgeable about what these students are going to encounter when they walk through their classroom doors. This "reality shock" may drastically affect teacher morale, the recruitment efforts of school districts, and student achievement (National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse, 2002). If professors would regularly visit school sites to see first-hand the educational process in schools, they could use this knowledge to redesign their course work to

more accurately reflect the school setting. Shenk (1998) noted that intellectually empty curriculums and the lack of connection between what is taught and the reality of teaching are two common complaints directed toward teacher education programs.

*Conclusion 2: Within this framework, schools and colleges should develop a closer relationship and investigate the possibility of creating a Professional Development School.*

A Professional Development School would provide a learner-centered climate where new teachers are able to collaborate with more experienced teachers and college faculty and link theory to practice. According to Weiss and Weiss (1999), first year teachers who participate in Professional Development Schools tend to have higher morale, are more committed to teaching, and plan to continue in the teaching profession.

*Conclusion 3: School systems should develop and implement quality induction programs.*

According to the research compiled at the National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse (2002), successful induction programs are comprised of four elements. The first element, orientation, is used as a means to familiarize new teachers with school procedures and to introduce them to existing faculty and the culture of the school. Another critical component of successful induction programs involves training to assist teachers with classroom management strategies, student assessment, and curriculum mandates. Support from a mentor is recognized as the third component. Within a strong support system, new teachers are provided with the attention and assistance from an experienced teacher necessary to make a positive transition from college to the classroom setting. The last factor that is essential to a successful induction program is assessment of a new teacher's teaching performance.

*Conclusion 4: Hiring education faculty who "walk the talk" can have a positive influence on the development of beginning teachers.*

Despite many reforms, the world of teacher education remains uneven. Teacher educators who preach the use of multiple modes of instruction to their students, but only use the lecture method during class, those who have not been in the classroom in years, and those who

are boring are still a real part of college and university teacher preparation programs (Fraser, 2001). Professors who understand current teaching theories and concepts and model them in their classrooms provide a rich learning environment for their students. In turn, this can have a positive affect on the teaching styles of our future teachers. Colleges and universities should make a strong effort to hire teachers who are familiar with current educational research and practices and are willing to implement them in their education classes.

*Conclusion 5: Student teachers need as much field experience in a variety of settings as can be integrated into their teacher training program.*

Student teachers should be placed in a variety of classroom settings throughout their clinical experience, not always in an exemplary classroom within an exemplary school. By focusing on exemplary schools in place of typical schools, college faculties prevent student teachers from experiencing the realities of teaching in more difficult school settings, settings in which they may begin their first year of teacher. This practice allows student teachers to learn with and observe exemplary teachers working in a variety of settings and conditions (Schwartz, 1996). According to Darling-Hammond (2002), sound education programs include teachers in training constantly working with expert teachers while learning how students learn, how to assess learning, and other effective teaching strategies.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

This study consisted of a review of pertinent literature and interviews with 20 first and second-year elementary teachers in four school systems in East Tennessee. As a result of the findings, recommendations for further research are presented.

A future qualitative study could include more novice teachers from a larger pool of school systems. The perceptions of teachers from wealthy systems could be compared to those from poorer systems to determine if this variable affects participants' responses.

Because only elementary teachers were interviewed, a qualitative study could be conducted interviewing new teachers in middle and/or high school to ascertain if their perceptions are similar or different to those of elementary teachers. Because the school setting and teaching process are different in the upper grades, the perceptions may differ, also.



In this study, only public school teachers were interviewed. Another qualitative study might focus on new teachers from private schools only. Private and public schools may not share the same teaching philosophies, so this factor may affect the perceptions of those interviewed.

The final qualitative study could compare teachers who graduated from private and public colleges or teachers with a MAT degree and those with a traditional degree to determine if college affiliation or type of teaching degree affects their perceptions.

Last, a quantitative study using a survey questionnaire could be conducted targeting new teachers across regions or states in which the data are cross-referenced for the effect of gender, grade, subject taught, race, age, and educational background. Determining if these variables affect teacher perceptions may prove enlightening.

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## APPENDICES



APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic Information

1. Did you graduate from a traditional 4-year teacher preparatory college, a five-year program, or did you get your license through an alternative route (MAT, MEd, etc. - ask for credentials, list of degrees, areas of endorsement).
2. What is the size of your school? (number of students and teachers)
3. Rural or city?
4. What is your age?
5. Male or female?
6. Are you married? Do you have children?
7. Is this a second profession?
8. Is this your first or second year of teaching?

Interview Guide:

1. How were you assisted as a new teacher? Was there an induction program at your school or system wide?
2. How much early field experience did you get prior to student teaching?  
How many hours?
3. Was there a distinction between the expectations of college work and the expectations of the school system?
4. Did you feel the expectations were similar? Did your college classes match what the school system or school told you to do?
5. Were you told what was expected at the school level? Did you have a school supervisor? How often was the supervisor in your classroom?
6. Do you believe that your course work really prepared you for your first year?
7. Did you take any steps to ask for help at your school? Specify.
8. Have you maintained a relationship with the college? (support group with other new teachers, advice from a professor, pursuing an additional degree, etc.)

9. What can be done to make the transition from college to teaching smoother and more successful?
10. Did your college professors model the teaching strategies and theories they taught?
11. What has been helpful in contributing to your success in your first and second year of teaching?
12. What has not been helpful?
13. How likely are you to be teaching five years from now?
14. What factors would encourage you to remain in teaching?
15. What factors would discourage you from staying?
16. If you could design the teacher training program at a college or university, what would you include? Exclude?
17. Tell me how you think schools can help first-year teachers be successful?
18. Does your school provide any kind of induction program or orientation to assist new teachers?
19. If so, what kinds of assistance did you receive? How long does the induction program last?
20. Do you believe that this induction program helped you to be a more successful teacher:
21. Tell me how you think the induction program could be improved?
22. Do you like the idea of team teaching with a more experienced teacher for the first couple of years? Would you be apprehensive?
23. What advice would you give a first-year teacher?
24. When you entered teaching, where did you expect to see yourself in ten years?

APPENDIX B  
CONSENT FORM

Page 1 of 4

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** An Examination of Teacher Education Programs and School Induction Programs in Their Preparation of Teachers for the First Year of Teaching

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Nancy K. Dillon

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is as follows: to gather information and explore the perceptions of first and second-year teachers regarding the quality of their teacher preparation at the university level and their experience with induction programs at their schools. The results may be used by school systems and universities to better understand the needs of their education students and newly employed teachers.

DURATION: Research subjects will be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview with the researcher that should last approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours.

PROCEDURES: The researcher will meet with participants at their schools to conduct the interviews. The interviews will be tape recorded and the participants will be asked to allow the researcher to contact them by phone after the interview to clarify and confirm information gathered during the meeting.

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

**Title of Project:** An Examination of Teacher Education Programs and School Induction Programs in Their Preparation of Teachers for the First Year of Teaching. **Principal**

**Investigator:** Nancy K. Dillon

**POSSIBLE RISK/DISCOMFORTS:** There is some possible risk of emotional discomfort when discussing the topic, and the participant may choose not to answer any questions that provoke such feelings.

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS and/or COMPENSATION:** No direct benefit or compensation will be provided to the participants. Any potential benefit to the participant would arise from that individual's reflection upon the interview questions. The benefits of this study would be the value elementary teachers place on their college training and induction opportunities at their schools.

**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:** If you have any questions about this research, you may call Nancy K. Dillon at 423-357-6986, Dr. Russell West, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy analysis, East Tennessee State university at 423-439-7619, or the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423-439-6055 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject.

Every attempt will be made to see that my study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in a locked file in my home office located at 445 Hickory Hills Road, Church Hill, Tennessee, for at least 10 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the East Tennessee State University/V.. Medical Center Institutional Review Board, the Food and Drug Administration, \***V.A. Medical Center**

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

**Research & Development, the \*\*Johnson City Medical Center Institutional Review Board,** and the ETSU Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis have access to the study records. My records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

**Title of Project:** An Examination of Teacher Education Programs and School Induction Programs in Their Preparation of Teachers for the First Year of Teaching. **Principal**

**Investigator:** Nancy K. Dillon

COMPENSATION FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT: East Tennessee State University (ETSU) will pay the cost of emergency first aid for any \*injury which may happen as a result of your being in this study. They will not pay for any other medical treatment. Claims against ETSU or any of its agents or employees may be submitted to the Tennessee Claims Commission. These claims will be settled to the extent allowable as provided under TCA Section 9-8-307. For more information about claims call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board of ETSU at 423-439-6055.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: The nature, demands, risks, and benefits of the project have been explained to me as well as are known and available. I understand what my participation involves. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to ask questions and withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty. I have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A signed copy has been given to me.

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

Your study record will be maintained in strictest confidence according to current legal requirements and will not be revealed unless required by law or as noted above.

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SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER                      DATE

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SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR                      DATE

Subject's Initials \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C  
AUDIT AGREEMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Meredith deNobriga  
FROM: Nancy Dillon  
SUBJECT: Auditing Procedures for Research Project  
DATE: June 9, 2004

Thank you for agreeing to audit the research I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. I really appreciate your commitment to this project.

Would you please listen to the audio tapes to ensure that the transcriptions are accurate, and then ascertain that the findings are consistent with the data?

Again, thank you for undertaking this project.

APPENDIX D  
AUDIT FINDINGS

June 23, 2004

Ms. Nancy Dillon  
East Tennessee State University  
Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis  
Re: Dissertation Audit Report

Ms. Dillon,

I have read the transcripts and listened to the tapes of your interviews. The transcripts accurately reflected the information heard on the tapes. The themes in your research could easily be traced back to the transcripts and tapes.

Congratulations on the completion of your research.

Sincerely,

Meredith H. de Nobriga



VITA  
NANCY KAY DILLON

Personal Data: Place of birth - Danville, Illinois

Education: Claremont Central High School,  
Hickory, North Carolina  
East Tennessee State University, August  
1974, BS degree, cum laude  
Tusculum College, December 1996,  
MA in Education  
East Tennessee State University, August  
2004, Doctorate in Education in the Department  
of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

Personal Experience: 1975-1982, Hawkins County, TN, classroom teacher  
1980-1981, GED teacher, Hawkins County, TN  
1982-1988, Littleton Schools District, CO  
classroom teacher  
1988-present, Kingsport City, TN classroom teacher

Honors/Accomplishments: 1990 Career Ladder III Teacher  
Who's Who in America's Teachers publication - twice  
nominated