

**Working Through Problems: An Investigation of the Problems and  
Problem-Solving Approaches of Beginning Teachers**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the present investigation was to determine what professional and personal problems elementary-school teachers face during their initial years of teaching and how they cope with or solve these problems. Beginning teachers abandon the teaching profession at alarming rates causing grave financial burdens to school divisions, schools, and tax payers. The phenomenon has also contributed to the current teacher shortages in particular subject areas and certain geographic locations. Many teachers who left the profession before their fifth year of professional teaching reported the problems associated with teaching as primary reasons for their exodus. Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with six in-service elementary teachers. The interviews were conducted in three parts. All of the six participants were between their fifth and tenth year of teaching, and they all taught at the elementary level. The results indicated that they had problems with (a) personal issues and life experiences, (b) school curricula, (c) children with special needs, (d) differentiation of instruction, (e) discipline, (f) workload and time management, (g) parents, (h), student poverty and students' home issues, (j) relationships with students, (k) teacher training, and (l) administration. The participants coped with these problems by using pattern matching indicating that their own life experiences and backgrounds had significant roles in their problem-solving processes. Recommendations are made for preservice and beginning in-service teachers to focus on their educational experiences and biographical information to recall relevant information that will help them to cope with and solve professional problems.

### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my sister, mother, and father. Thank you Lisa, for being a superior role model and for allowing them to put my name on your degree. I love you,..... Sister Dearest. Additionally, God truly blessed me with Spike and Mary Alice Jones for parents. I hope you will always be proud of me. I love both of you.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Teaching is sometimes seen as a profession that “cannibalizes its young” and has an initiation mentality comparable to that of a military boot camp (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In this atmosphere, beginners must “sink or swim” (Lortie, 2002; Moir, 2003; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Indeed, some feel that the problems experienced by beginning teachers are a necessary rite of passage, and these problems will help to weed out teachers who do not belong in the profession (Veenman, 1984; White, 1987). However, even teachers who have been well trained and have a genuine concern for the profession and the children whom they instruct encounter problems during the first three years that are profound and at times, unbearable.

These circumstances have led to high attrition and turnover rates for classroom teachers. The attrition rate of teachers has been reported to be as high as 50% within the initial five years of teaching (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The United States Department of Labor reported that in 2006 the combined overall turnover rate for education and healthcare professionals was 28.6%. It is important to note that this figure represents all educational personnel and those professionals employed in health care professions. It also represents all teachers including those who have remained in the profession beyond five years. However, Margolis (2008) reported that 16% of teachers leave their jobs every year. This is compared to 11% of all workers who leave their jobs annually.

When comparing the turnover statistics in Education and Healthcare to other professions, the findings are somewhat surprising, with Education and Healthcare ranking

second only to Government as having the lowest turnover rate. According the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007), the turnover rates by profession are as follows:



At 28.6%, the turnover in Education is quite low comparatively. Several factors may influence this low rate. It is important to note that this rate includes healthcare professions, and the number most likely includes only those educators who leave the field of education completely. It may not include teachers who transition from classroom teaching into administrative positions within education.

Returning to the finding by Smith and Ingersoll (2004) of a 50% attrition rate within the initial five years, this clearly signifies that 50% remain in teaching beyond five years. It is not known how much longer than five years these teachers remain in the profession, nor is it clear why these teachers remain. It has been well documented that teachers leave within the first five years for a number of reasons. Chief among these reasons was the low salaries of teachers (Fowler & Mittapalli, 2006). This finding is comparable to the general workforce at large (Margolis, 2008). Margolis, (2008) found that the top five reasons that all workers reported leaving one job for another were (a)

more money, (b) better benefits, (c) career growth, (d) less stress, and (e) a change of pace. Neither benefits, career growth, nor changing pace were reasons that teachers left their jobs. Once researchers controlled for low salaries, then the problems faced by beginning teachers surfaced as the primary reasons why new teachers left their jobs (Fowler & Mittapalli, 2006).

Beginning teachers face a multitude of problems, and many of these problems were not anticipated by beginners who find themselves completely unprepared to deal with them. Duffy (1982) quite colorfully analogized the phenomenon by comparing teachers to environmentalists entrusted with the task of draining an alligator-infested swamp. He stated, “When you are up to your ass in alligators, it’s difficult to remember that your original objective was to drain the swamp” (Duffy, 1982, p. 358). He went on to explain that classrooms are complex environments where teachers must balance multiple implicit and explicit demands (which he referred to as the alligators) with effective instruction. These classroom conditions affect the thinking of teachers and their perceptions of what they are to accomplish (Duffy, 1982).

The demands placed on teachers come at them from several different directions. Beginning teachers routinely face demands from administrators (Flores, 2006; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Wildman & Niles, 1987), parents (Regan & Hannah, 1993; Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, & McLaughlin, 1989), colleagues (Flores, 2006; Veenman, 1984), and students (Lortie, 2002). Students pose problems for beginning teachers in terms of discipline (Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992), diversity (Bartell, 1995), and a lack of motivation (Newby, 1991). The extrinsic demands include the workload that teachers face and their working conditions (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2005; Nieto, 2003;

Webb, Vulliamy, Hamalainen, Sarja, Kimonen, & Nevalainen, 2004). Non-teaching work demands consume a large portion of the professional and personal time of teachers (Nieto, 2003; Webb, et. al., 2004). Furthermore, teachers are increasingly dealing with issues of decrepit school buildings and an ever increasing rate of school violence (Buckley, et. al., 2005; Smith & Smith, 2006). Teachers also deal with intrinsic issues such as their own professional training for the profession and the professional knowledge that they bring with them to the position (McNergney, Medley, & Caldwell, 1988). These issues are compounded by state and federal demands placed on teachers to remain “highly qualified” and demonstrate that their students are adequately prepared to pass state and federal standardized tests (Nieto, 2003). All of these internal and external demands create problems for teachers, and beginning teachers often lack the adequate coping skills to deal with such problems (Veenman, 1984)

### **What’s the Problem?**

The onset of a problem usually involves the occurrence or non-occurrence of a specific event or obstacles (Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987). Davis (1973, p. 13) quoted John Dewey’s definition of a problem as a “psychological state of discomfort or disequilibrium as sensed by an individual.” Davis (1973, p. 12) offered a much broader definition stating that “a problem is a stimulus situation for which an organism does not have a ready response.” This definition implies that the organism need not necessarily be a sophisticated organism. It also implies that stimulus situations that trigger a ready response are not problems. Davis (1973) noted that language limitations have broadened the definition of a problem. He stated that we consider “ $2 + 2$ ” an arithmetic problem even though most people have a ready response for solving it. His argument about the

organism's level of sophistication is important in this context because many preschool and kindergarten children may not have a ready response for solving the stated arithmetic problem.

Heppner and Krauskopf (1987) argue that humans do not differentiate between various kinds of problems. They defined situations such as  $2+2$  as routine problems for which most adults have a ready response and do not consider a problem at all. The authors went on to argue that problems at the other end of the continuum may require a novel or creative response. There are also some problems that require both novel and routine responses. In such cases, routine responses are required, but the situation may also require some transformation of information. Persons in such circumstances often have difficulty with memory retrieval (Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987).

Problems can come in three forms. They can take the form of a loss, threat, or challenge. There are also three varieties of problems. There are formal or intellectual problems, hypothetical personal problems, and real-life personal problems. Formal or intellectual problems have well-defined parameters and objective means for evaluating the adequacy of possible solutions. Arithmetic problems are examples of formal or intellectual problems. The other two types of problems have poorly defined characteristics and may vary in different situations. There is evidence that people approach hypothetical or laboratory problems differently than they approach real-life problems. The approaches to hypothetical are generally less complex than real-life situations.

## **Problem Solving**

Dewey (1938, p. 108) once wrote “A problem represents the partial transformation by inquiry of a problematic situation into a determinate situation. It is a familiar and significant saying that a problem well put is half-solved.” The awareness of a problem and the proper appraisal of the problem’s dynamics lead to the natural progression of dealing with the problem and finding a solution.

Heppner and Krauskopf (1987, p. 375) defined problem solving as:

a goal-directed sequences of cognitive and affective operations as well as behavioral responses for the purposes of adapting to internal or external demands or challenges.... problem solving is the regulation of one’s cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses. Problem solving refers to successful and unsuccessful activities, as well as conscious and unconscious activities aimed at approaching or avoiding a problem.

The authors went on to state that:

Problem solving is intermittent in that different problem-solving processes occur at various intervals, often without a specified sequence. Personal problem solving is also a highly complex process in that a typical problem might be solved immediately or might involve innumerable decisions, have multiple possible solutions, and be so ambiguous as to hamper evaluation.

Before the problem-solving process can begin, one must become aware that a problem exists and that it warrants a cognitive, affective, or behavioral response. This occurs once there is the perception that some occurrence or non-occurrence is not consistent with a standard or expected norm. The next step is usually appraisal of the problem significance or difficulty. The possible responses to problem awareness and appraisal are attempts at coping or a solution, avoidance, repression, denial, or ignoring the problem. Once a person has decided to act upon a problem, the problem-solving process begins. This process involves encoding information, retrieving knowledge from memory, and using knowledge to develop a plan. Knowledge usage encompasses

encoding, goal setting, plan development, and taking action (Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987).

Encoding is at the center of both problem awareness and problem appraisal. Encoding is the process of processing and structuring information as it is presented to people. The way in which information is structured and stored in long-term memory determines how new information will be processed and structured (Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987). Information in long-term memory is crucial for everyday problem solving. Everyday or routine problems are those that are encountered in daily life. The process of solving these problems depends on procedural knowledge that people acquire throughout their lives. Individuals develop script knowledge of particular problem situations as they gain more experience with the problem. Extensive script knowledge guides cognitive processes in a way that results in subsequent behaviors becoming more script-consistent (Berg, Meegan, & Klaczynski, 1999).

Once information and script knowledge are retrieved from long-term memory, individuals begin to set goals and develop plans. The goal is usually to respond effectively to internal or external demands that have characterized the problem. Goals can vary in terms of the modes of processing used, their complexity or concreteness, and their function. The development of a plan is closely linked to pattern matching. The goal of solving the problem leads to actions which one must take. Those possible actions are usually examined by matching them to information stored in long-term memory. This process is called pattern matching. Pattern matching is necessary to plan sequential steps to solve a problem. The trial-and-error process of problem solving is also associated with pattern matching (Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987). A side effect of pattern matching may

also involve requesting additional information to solve problems. Berg, et. al. (1999) reported that experts and older adults usually request less information to solve problems. People with more experience often employ more goal-directed activities that requires less information. They found that younger adults requested much more information to make decisions about problem solving.

Berg, et. al. (1999) examined the strategy generation used by older and younger adults when solving problems. The authors hypothesized that older adults would define problems in terms of their own experiences and generate fewer strategies for solving problems than younger adults. They presented older and younger adults with problem vignettes related to visiting a doctor's office or attending a dinner party. They measured the participants' experience with the particular problem. They also measured their experience within the prior year and the participants' script knowledge about the problems. They found that younger adults requested more information. They also found that both older and younger adults with greater script knowledge requested more information. Their most striking finding was that participants, regardless of age, imposed their own experiences and actual people into the defined parameters of the problem vignettes. The authors concluded that experience may be important for people to define the content of strategies they use to solve problems.

Prior experiences are crucial for effective pattern matching. The process depends on retrieving information stored in long-term memory to direct problem-solving actions. Heppner and Krauskopf (1987) reported that effective pattern matching led to a specific plan or sequence of steps that produced satisfactory results for the problem solver. Pattern matching was most effective when it was based on the successful regulation of one's

behavioral, affective, and cognitive responses. Pattern matching was ineffective when the problem solver made decisions based on incomplete or inaccurate information during the encoding or goal-setting stage of problem solving. This resulted in the lack of specific plans or plans that resulted in maladaptive solutions (Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987). These findings highlight the importance of pattern matching when developing solutions to problems.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current research was based on the theory that effective pattern matching leads to strategy generation resulting in satisfactory problem solving. Since pattern matching involves the retrieval of long-term memory information to evaluate and direct current actions, it can be assumed that prior experiences and knowledge are a necessary component of problem solving. The research by Berg, et. al. (1999) led to the conclusion that individuals cannot even attack hypothetical problems without encoding the given information and anchoring it to their own recalled experiences. Under this theory, persons who can successfully match mentally-stored information with current actions can solve their problems.

In another study, De Simone (2008) found that prospective teachers who engage in problem-based learning are better able to construct and analyze a central problem. They were also able to use multiple resources to relate possible solutions to the given problem. Problem-based learning requires that individuals engage in an inquiry-based approach to solving problems. This coincided with the findings of Berg, et. al. (1999). They found that people often request additional information during the problem solving process. De Simone (2008) found that prospective teachers who engage in this practice were better

able to identify core elements of problems and use their resources more effectively than teachers who did not engage in problem-based learning. Teachers using problem-based learning were also better able to relate possible solutions directly to the problem. This act of pattern matching aids the problem solver in determining which actions will lead directly to the determined goal. The participants in the current study often relied on their own experiences and information from their long-term memories to deal with problems and to determine the problem's relevance. De Simone (2008) argues that beginning teachers are too often swayed by insignificant problems. Such teachers may have incorrectly assessed a problem at the appraisal stage of problem solving. Incorrect or incomplete information will lead a problem solver to take actions that may not resolve the current problem (Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987).

### **The Problems of Teachers**

Problems arise for people in several professions as they enter the workforce, and many professions routinely lose talented human resources every year. Margolis (2008) reported on the reasons that employees leave their jobs in education and in business. He stated that unhappy employees experience "withdrawal cognitions," and these feelings tended to arise when workers perceived differential treatment among their coworkers or when they felt as if they were not adequately compensated for their contributions. Public schools are drenched in bureaucracy in which the contributions of individual workers are seldom acknowledged and the opinions of these workers are seldom sought. Raises and promotions are based on seniority and the number of classes taught. A beginning teacher who demonstrated superior skills and extraordinary effort would not be likely rewarded

for such endeavors (Margolis, 2008). These institutional problems can have a profound impact on beginning teachers.

Problems begin to arise for teachers during their first year of professional teaching or even sooner. Some preservice teachers experience problems as early as their field experience (Veenman, 1984). Professional and personal problems are, by no means, the only reasons that teachers leave the profession. However, the work of Veenman (1984) suggested that some problems are so profound that leaving becomes an option, and too often, a reality. Theobald and Gritz (1996) found that teachers leave when their situations will improve by taking that option. Some of the problems that force teachers out of the profession were within their control, and others were problems that could not be solved by an individual teacher.

Teachers must also cope with salary levels that have historically ranked far below those of other white-collar professionals with comparable levels of education. Indeed salary and poor student behavior are the primary reasons that teachers have cited for leaving the profession. However, researchers have found that increases in salary have little impact on the reduction of teacher turnover, since teacher salaries do not increase at the comparable rates to other professions. This phenomenon not only holds true in the United States, but in other countries as well. Low salaries have been compounded by the decreasing status level of teachers over the last century (Nieto, 2003). Such issues have posed special problems for specific populations of teachers such as men or minority teachers. Salary levels are likely to cause teachers to resent the amount of work demanded of them. The low salary also prevents some prospective teacher candidates from entering the profession at all. Salary and many other intrinsic and extrinsic reasons

cause teachers to exit the profession at alarming rates during the initial years. This has led to the research question of this study which is, “What problem-solving approaches do beginning teachers use to remain in the profession beyond the initial five years?” The sub-questions are (a) what problems do elementary teachers face during their first five years of teaching, (b) how do elementary teachers cope with these problems to remain in the profession, (c) what problems are elementary teachers currently experiencing compared to the problems of their first five years of teaching, (d) how are elementary teachers dealing with current problems, and (e) what plans do elementary teachers have for remaining in the profession?

### **Delineation of Terms**

For the purposes of this paper, beginning teachers are defined as fully or provisionally licensed K-12 teachers with four or fewer full years of professional teaching experience. Experienced teachers are defined as fully licensed teachers with five or more years of professional teaching experience. Career switchers are defined as beginning teachers who have had at least one non-education related career prior to teaching. Teacher educators are defined as university or college faculty who are directly responsible for the training of teachers. Preservice teachers are defined as university students of education who do not have professional teaching experience. Finally, a school division is defined as all of the schools in a particular region or county of a state that are all under the supervision of a central administrative office of education.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

The research on the retention of teachers at the K-12 level is sparse, at best. There has, however, been much documentation of the attrition of teachers, its causes, its effects, and programs that have attempted to alleviate the problem. This chapter will present the research on the causes and effects of teacher attrition as well as the attempts that have been made to reduce the significant level of attrition. The chapter will conclude with a review of the limited amount of research conducted on the retention of teachers at various levels of teaching. By examining the problems of teachers during their initial years of teaching and the astounding effects that teacher attrition has on schools, school divisions, tax payers, students, and the profession, it will become evident that factors influencing the retention of teachers in the profession are worth a thorough examination.

### **The Attrition of Teachers**

#### **Teacher Turnover**

It is projected that by the year 2009, the United States will face a shortage of some two million teachers (Nieto, 2003). The situation is just as dire in other countries such as England and Wales (Barmby, 2006). There are also specific subject areas and particular types of schools that will be more adversely impacted by the teacher shortage more than other subjects and schools (Barmby, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Zeichner, 2001). The high attrition rate of beginning teachers is one of several predicted causes of an expected teacher shortage. The problem of turnover is most prominent among

beginning teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The reality is that as many as 50% of beginning teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching, which is an extraordinary rate for any white-collar profession (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

The primary method of addressing the teacher shortage has traditionally focused on recruitment of new teachers to replace the ones who have exited the profession (Barmby, 2006; Quartz and TEP, 2003) rather than on retention of current teachers (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). This often results a “revolving door,” (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) with high teacher turnover most directly affecting economically-disadvantaged minority children in poor urban schools. The children in these schools are far more likely to be taught by an unqualified teacher or a teacher on a provisional license (Fowler & Mittapalli, 2006; Moir, 2003; Quartz & TEP, 2003; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001), which can have detrimental effects on their learning (McCormack, et. al., 2006; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001).

Teacher turnover also has enormous financial costs to school divisions. Education, as well as business and industry, take great measures to limit employee turnover because of its financial implications (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). One study conducted in Texas indicated that teacher turnover can cost the state upwards of \$300 million annually (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Other states and school districts have calculated comparable costs in regards to replacing teachers. Granville County, North Carolina has spent \$10,000 for each teacher who left the district. The average cost per leaver in Milwaukee was calculated to be \$15,325, and Chicago has spent an average of \$17,872 per leaver for a total estimated cost of \$86 million per year for the school division. Even the small rural school division of Jemez Valley, New Mexico spends as

much as \$4,366 for every teacher who leaves the school division annually (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007). Such financial burden drains precious resources away from schools and school divisions. Teacher turnover also has “hidden costs” such as the loss of relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and communities (Moir, 2003). Other hidden costs included lower levels of school effectiveness, low school moral, and low student performance (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Stockard & Lehman, 2004). Researchers have found that 40% of new teachers leave the field within the first four years of teaching. New teachers must constantly be recruited to replace them, which is a financial burden to school divisions and to tax payers (Moir, 2003).

Theobald and Gritz (1996) studied teacher turnover and the possible conditions that may increase or stabilize the turnover rate. The three most likely paths for teachers leaving their placements are inner-division transfers, movement to non-teaching positions in education, and leaving education altogether. Salaries also play a role in the likelihood of teachers leaving a state’s education system. Teachers who stay in their current school division are more likely to stay if the benefits of choosing to remain in the division are greater than any of the three alternatives.

Theobald and Gritz (1996) studied the exit patterns of the teachers leaving their positions in Washington state based on the influences of annual salary, expenditures for educational services, expenditures for administrators, expenditures for support services, salaries for paraprofessional staff, and expenditures for teaching materials. Through multiple regression analysis, the authors found that rising salaries in all of the state’s school divisions increased the likelihood that beginning teachers will leave original assignments in favor of a different school division within the state where salaries were

higher. The results also indicated that beginning male teachers were more likely to leave education when salaries were lower in other school divisions. Beginning teachers were also likely to transfer to another school division when administrative salaries were increased in their own school divisions. Surprisingly, beginning teachers were likely to leave education completely when expenditures for paraprofessional staff were increased. Finally the authors found that an increase in expenditures for school materials decreased the likelihood that male teachers will leave their original assignment. The authors concluded that states need to focus on the salaries in all divisions in the state. They also concluded that beginning male teachers who leave their original position are likely to leave the state's educational system if salaries in competing divisions are also low. They finally concluded that beginning teachers overall are likely to move to another school division when their situations will improve by doing so. The results of this research were based on simulations of data. Although Theobald and Gritz did not state this in their article, the results of this study appeared to be incidents of correlations. It is important to note that correlations do not imply causation (Howell, 2007). Therefore one cannot assume, for example, that beginning teachers leave education because school divisions increase expenditures on paraprofessional staff. The two phenomena simply happen to correlate.

Smith and Ingersoll (2004) also studied beginning teacher attrition in terms of the effects that mentoring programs have on the likelihood of teachers leaving the profession. They investigated how many teachers are involved in these programs and how the different kinds of induction programs affected teacher retention and attrition. Their survey results revealed that 70% of public school beginning teachers reported working

closely with a mentor while the numbers in charter and private schools were slightly less than half. The programs with the greatest strengths paired a mentor and a beginning teacher within the same subject area, provided common planning time with the mentors, fostered collaboration with colleagues, and encouraged external networking. None of these features had a significant impact on teacher retention in and of themselves, but they had a great impact collectively (Smith & Ingersoll 2004).

The data further revealed that slightly less than a third of all of the teachers either changed schools or left teaching altogether after their first year. Fourteen percent left education altogether. Teachers in private or charter schools were more than twice as likely to leave education after the first year but they were far less likely to move to different schools than public school teachers. The attrition rates in private schools varied according to the religious affiliation of the school. Catholic schools had much lower turnover rates than non-Catholic religious schools. Small and rural private schools also had very high attrition rates. Attrition rates in public schools varied by school size and poverty rates of the student populations but not based on school location. Teachers in high-poverty schools were less likely to change schools but were more likely to simply leave education. The data finally revealed that elementary school teachers were the least likely to leave teaching while high school and middle school teachers were more likely with middle school teachers ranking the highest (Smith & Ingersoll 2004).

The findings indicated that extra support and assistance provided to a beginning teacher had no impact on reducing attrition, and the authors concluded that it may have been the case that extra support was provided to teachers who were more likely to leave

in the first place. The authors conclude that it is natural and even beneficial for some teachers to leave the field (Smith & Ingersoll 2004).

There was, however, a high correlation between induction programs and the retention of teachers. The programs with the greatest strengths paired a mentor with a beginning teacher within the same subject area. The stronger programs also ensured that beginning teachers had common planning time with mentors, fostered collaboration with colleagues, and included opportunities for external networking. None of these features had a significant impact by themselves, but they had a great impact collectively (Smith & Ingersoll 2004).

There does exist some research on predictor variables of which teachers are likely to leave the profession. Stockard and Lehman (2004) examined job satisfaction among first-year teachers to determine which ones were more likely to stay in the field and which ones were more likely to leave. They found that White males, non-Hispanic Whites, teachers with the lowest salaries, teachers in the western region of the United States, and teachers in small towns or rural areas were most likely to leave the field. They also discovered that younger teachers were more likely to leave. Additionally, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) reported a negative correlation between teacher retention and preservice teachers' scores on standardized examinations such as the SAT. Consequently, teachers with the highest examination scores are most likely to leave teaching, while teachers with the lowest scores are most likely to remain. Fowler & Mittapalli (2003) also found that the most qualified teachers were more likely to leave unsatisfactory working conditions for better job opportunities. Although men are more likely to leave than women, the differences in the attrition of male and female teachers is minimized when researchers

control for the aptitude of the teachers. This means that high-ability men and women are equally likely to leave teaching for other job opportunities (Fowler & Mittapalli, 2003). Stockard and Lehman (2004) speculated that Whites, men, and teachers with high test scores may have other job opportunities outside of education and are tempted to leave regardless of their satisfaction level. Additionally, teachers in rural areas and those with lower salaries may actively seek other jobs outside of education.

Teacher shortages are a fairly recent phenomenon in American culture. The 1970's saw a surplus of teachers, and many states routinely laid teachers off. During this period, teaching positions were also difficult to obtain for many college graduates (Ingersoll, 1997). Throughout the 1980's and into the present, three trends have led to the present shortage. First, the number of students enrolling in America's schools has continued to soar. Secondly, there are more career opportunities open to college-educated women who may have traditionally chosen teaching for a career. Finally, a number of teachers have retired over the past 20 years (Ingersoll, 1997; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

Fowler and Mittapalli (2006) argued that the actual reasons for teacher shortages are far more benign than the widely-held belief that teachers are utterly dissatisfied with their positions. They began by arguing that the attrition rate depends on how one defines "attrition." If researchers control for teachers who leave teaching for non-teaching positions within education, the attrition rate may look quite different. Ingersoll (1997) also examined teacher shortages from a different perspective. He argued that despite the difficulty that some schools have reported filling positions with qualified teachers, the fact remains that very few teaching positions go unfilled for long periods of time. Administrators have used a multitude of methods to cope with a limited supply of

teachers. They have canceled classes, hired teachers on temporary licenses, placed licensed teachers in positions outside of their fields, and made extensive use of substitutes. Although these methods provide a teacher for every student, all of these methods raise other issues concerning the quality of education that students receive.

Fowler and Mittapalli (2006) studied the problem of teacher shortages by examining what teachers do once they leave teaching. They found that women were not leaving education completely, but rather they were moving to other non-teaching positions within education in which they earned more money. They found that 38.1% of the teachers in their study, who left their position, took other jobs in their schools as a special kind of instructor or human service professional. They also found that 19% of the teachers in their study left teaching to start or manage their own business. Twelve percent left for jobs in sales and customer service. Others took jobs in editing, science, business and the finance industry, computers and technology, and the legal field. However, the majority remained in an education-related position that paid more than teaching. The findings led to the conclusion that teachers leave teaching primarily for personal reasons such as pregnancy or caring for a family member or for career advancement. Career advancement was usually considered to be a position with a higher salary.

In summary, teacher turnover has been predicted to lead to a teacher shortage within the next few years. Teacher attrition is caused by inner-division transfers, the movement of teachers to non-teaching positions in education, and teachers leaving education altogether. States and school divisions have spent astronomical amounts of money to replace teachers and limit attrition. School divisions have also attempted to cope with teacher shortages with methods that place the quality of children's education in

question. Retirements and increasing school enrollment have also added to the problem of teacher shortages. However, the reality is that many teachers are not exiting education altogether, but are taking education-related positions that pay considerably more than classroom teaching.

### **Salaries**

Low salaries and limited benefits have traditionally been considered the leading causes of teacher attrition (Buckley, et. al., 2005; Fowler & Mittapalli, 2006; Webb, et. al., 2004). There are also costs associated with teaching such as paying for professional development and certification classes and expenditures for housing and childcare in large urban areas (Barmby, 2006). Fowler and Mittapalli (2006) found that increases in salary have only marginal effects on the retention of teachers, and higher teacher salaries in urban schools are often not enough to compensate for what teachers perceive as poor working conditions. Many teachers have reported that their salaries are not comparable with those of persons outside of education with comparable levels of education and experiences. Nor are their salaries sufficiently compensatory for the amount of work involved in the occupation (Webb, et. al., 2004). Indeed, Quartz and TEP (2003) reported that in 1998, teachers between the ages of 22 and 28 grossed an average of \$7,894 less than college-educated professionals within the same age range. They also reported that salaries for master's degree holders increased \$17,505 for non-teachers from 1994 to 1998, while teachers with master's degrees saw an increase of less than \$2,000 during the same time period.

Teacher salaries are an international problem with other countries faring worse than the United States. Webb, et. al. (2004) found teachers in England and Finland also

citing low salaries as reasons for leaving teaching. The problem is so pervasive in Finland that elementary teachers are routinely paid less than secondary level teachers even within the same school division. In 2000, the Finish government attempted to raise teacher salaries by £2000 annually for up to four years by using a teacher performance assessment and rewarding teachers who met particular performance standards, but their efforts were generally regarded as nothing more than “an expensive farce” by many teachers who felt that a national across-the-board raise for all teachers and national pay scales would have been more appropriate.

### **Highly-Qualified Teachers**

While salary is a primary cause of teacher attrition, it is by no means the only problem that teachers face. There are a multitude of problems that beginning teachers face as they enter the profession. The problems reported by beginning teachers are far reaching and include such issues as poor training (Holmes Group, 1986; Veenman, 1984), lack of professional knowledge (McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006), social and psychological isolation (Flores, 2006; Lortie, 2002; Moir, 2003), poor working conditions (Buckley, et. al., 2005; Quartz & TEP, 2003; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Webb, et. al., 2004; Wildman, et. al. 1989), and even fears of being perceived as a pedophile (Hansen & Mullholland, 2005). The problems of some teachers have roots that stretch as far back as their freshman and sophomore years as undergraduates in college. Research has indicated that there are people who simply lack the personality characteristics to become successful teachers, and indeed sometimes the “wrong” people enter the profession (Veenman, 1984).

The quality of the teaching force is an issue that is important to researchers, school divisions, the media, and the public at large. The focus has been on experienced and new teachers as well as teacher candidates in undergraduate and graduate programs. The Holmes Group (1986) has long admonished teacher preparation programs for their inadequate recruitment of teacher candidates and lax selection criteria. Researchers have called for teacher preparation programs to recruit capable candidates who have demonstrated the potential for strong interpersonal skills rather than simply settling for available students who profess their love for children, among other reasons, as a rationale for entering the profession (Griffin, 1999). Smith and Ingersoll (2004) have argued that the attrition of such teachers ultimately benefits the profession. Additionally a number of funding agencies, politicians, media outlets, and teachers' unions have called for highly-qualified and competent teachers (Memory, Coleman, & Watkins, 2003). Such calls for more qualified teachers have served to lower the status of current teachers and the profession in general (Nieto, 2003; Webb, et. al., 2004). The public at large has increasingly taken the view of teaching at the K-12 level as semi-skilled and low-status work (Ingersoll, 1997). Nevertheless, states and the federal government have responded to the calls for highly-qualified teachers by imposing strict certification standards for beginning teachers and stringent standards for experienced teachers to be considered highly qualified (Memory, et. al., 2003; Nieto, 2003).

### **School Enculturation**

One way to alleviate some problems for beginning teachers is to quickly attempt to fit in to the culture of the schools in which they are first employed. Beginning teachers

usually go through three stages of induction which have been identified as a survival phase, a stage that involves concern for their teaching situations, and a final stage when they develop understandings of and respond to their students' academic, emotional, and social needs (Veenman, 1984). Many beginning teachers transition from being a student to being a teacher during the course of one summer (Lortie, 2002). This transition requires them to assume dual roles of teacher and student since they are still learning to teach during much of their first year (Wildman, et. al, 1989).

New teachers often endure “reality shock” as they become socialized into their school culture (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Veenman, 1984). Reality shock originates from the dichotomy of the unrealistic expectations with which teachers enter the profession and the realities of school and classroom life (Flores, 2006). This phenomenon is characterized as the collapse of many of the ideals about teaching that were developed during teacher training in favor of an assimilation of a set of complex situations that force themselves on beginning teachers. Teachers pass through five stages as they move through reality shock. They first perceive problems that exist and change their behavior to address the problems. Changes in behavior lead to changes in attitude, which may in turn lead to changes in personality. If teachers are not able to make these adjustments, then the final stage is, all too often, abandonment of the teaching profession (Veenman, 1984).

The teachers who remain often fall into compliance with the culture of the school, which can affect their levels of enthusiasm, sense of self-efficacy, and beliefs about teaching (Flores, 2006). Without proper guidance and support, beginning teachers grasp the first strategies that they perceive as working for them and cling to them, sometimes

throughout their careers. The first three years are also the time that career-long norms are formed (Bartell, 1995; Brock & Grady, 1998). Beginning teachers often look to their more experienced colleagues for guidance and emulate what seems to work for their colleagues which is the process of adapting to the social norms of the school culture. Such teachers can often find themselves at odds with their own teaching philosophies (Flores, 2006).

A team of researchers illustrated this when they conducted a longitudinal study of beginning math and science teachers during their first three years of teaching (Simmons, Emory, Carter, Coker, Finnegan, Crockett, Richardson, Yager, Craven, Tillotson, Brunkhorst, Twiest, Hossain, Gallagher, Duggan-Haas, Parker, Cajas, Alshannag, McGlamery, Krockover, Adams, Spector, Laporta, James, Rearden, & Labuda, 1999). The authors wanted to generate knowledge about the relationships between secondary science and math teacher preparation paradigms. They also wanted to compare the beliefs of these teachers to their performance. Similarly, Flores (2006) studied 14 beginning Portuguese teachers upon their completion of an undergraduate degree at a public Portuguese university. In a related study, Crawford (2004) chronicled an early childhood teacher from her student teaching experiences through her first year of teaching.

Simmons et. al. (1999) used a grounded theory and phenomenological research approach to conduct their study. They also used a constant comparative theoretical construct to analyze the data. The interview and observational data were coded and placed into broader general themes. The themes they identified were a teacher-centered teaching style, a conceptual teaching style, and a student-centered teaching style. The teacher-centered teaching style is consistent with the teacher as the chief conduit of most,

if not all, content knowledge. The factual and descriptive nature of science and math is stressed in this teaching style. The conceptual teaching style is characterized by the beliefs and actions in which the explanatory nature of math and science is emphasized. Subject-matter knowledge of the teacher is at the forefront in this teaching style. Finally, the student-centered teaching style stresses content knowledge as a set of negotiated understandings and inquiry-based constructivist knowledge construction with students.

In the comparable study, Flores (2006) collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals. She also used an annual report that teachers had to write at the end of every academic year. The teachers also wrote a reflection of their first two years of teaching at the end of the two-year study. Finally, 891 of the students of these teachers were asked to write an essay describing their teacher at the beginning and end of the academic year in which they were taught by one of the 14 teachers.

Finally, Crawford (2004) conducted a case study of an early childhood education (ECE) teacher who graduated from a teacher education program that emphasized student-centered learning and constructivist teaching. The author began by interviewing and holding regular focus group meetings with four non-traditional students from her undergraduate language arts class as they began their student teaching. She continued to follow these students as they began their first year of teaching. She focused her research on one participant who demonstrated a remarkable transformation in her instructional methods and her beliefs about teaching.

In all cases, the authors found that the beliefs held by the teachers were at odds with their actions. Simmons et. al. (1999) found that many of the teachers espoused either

student-centered or teacher-centered learning for their students, but they shifted back and forth between these two styles during their first and second years of teaching and did not firmly commit themselves to one particular style until the third year. Teaching methods used during the third year clearly indicated that they adopted a teacher-centered style of teaching even when they continued to espouse student-centered teaching. Many of these teachers thought that their students learned in the same way in which they did, and the authors concluded that teachers may view what are actually teacher-centered classrooms as being student-centered. The only actual evidence of wide-spread student-centered teaching occurred during the teachers' second year, and there was only moderate use of conceptual teaching during any of the three years. The authors speculated that concerns about tenure may have caused the teachers to shift to teacher-centered teaching during the third year. The authors concluded that the shift and the tenure concerns were all due to their enculturation into the school environment.

Enculturation into schools also had a significant effect on the 14 Portuguese teachers that Flores (2006) studied. Because of the surplus of teachers in Portugal, teachers must accept positions wherever they are placed. It is not uncommon for new teachers to be moved to distant, rural regions of the country that are often far from their homes. This was the case for 11 of the 14 teachers in the study during their second year of teaching. The unexpected complexities of teaching caused the teachers to reexamine their initial beliefs and motivations about teaching and the profession. Many of these teachers abandoned their initial student-centered views of teaching in favor of more traditional teacher-centered views. These teachers began to use lectures more often, and they had students work independently and assess their own work. These teachers

abandoned the flexibility, student-individuality, and responsiveness that were cornerstones of their training. This shift occurred as soon as the beginning of their first year of teaching. Apparently, the isolation of being far away from home in unfamiliar school settings increased the pressure for these teachers to conform to the schools' cultures during their second year.

Finally, Crawford (2004) noted the dilemma faced by ECE preservice teachers. Since many ECE university programs are encompassed in elementary education departments, ECE preservice teachers are caught between the developmental philosophies of early childhood education and the formal instructional methods of elementary education programs. The author focused her study on one participant who successfully completed an ECE program that stressed the cognitive development of primary school children. This participant was very excited about employing literacy instruction methods that went beyond the basal reader. She exhibited such practices with her students while student teaching in a suburban second-grade classroom.

However, her instructional practices changed when she when she was employed at an inner-city school in which adherence to the basal program was strictly enforced. Teachers in the school were under great pressure to teach to the benchmarks and standards. Workbooks were even routinely spot checked by school administrators to ensure that teachers were following the pacing guides. The participant began to teach directly to the unit tests provided by the basal program. She reported that the structure of the basal program guided her teaching because the teacher's manual color coded and highlighted material that would appear on the unit tests. This research yielded slightly different findings than the previous two aforementioned studies. The participants in the

Flores (2006) study and the Simmons, et. al. (1999) study, either intentionally or unintentionally, altered their instructional methods as a means to fit into the school culture or create greater instructional flow. However they continued to subscribe to student-centered instructional practices. Crawford's (2004) research subject actually changed her beliefs about teaching altogether. She allowed herself to be systematically deskilled and felt that the changes were necessary for the school's student population. She said that constructivist teaching methods worked for upper middle-class children but lower SES children needed the structure.

School enculturation is the process of conforming to a school context. Wildman, et. al., (1989) defined school context as a combination of class assignment, curriculum, collegial relationships, and principals. The school context has been viewed as important to professional educators. The task of learning the school context is the first professional standard listed on the Central Tasks of Learning to Teach which is a list of professional teaching standards adopted in other countries (McCormack, ed. al., 2006). This process of school enculturation for beginning teachers is a process that involves administrators, colleagues, and students.

In summary, the process of school enculturation can transform teachers permanently. Teachers transition from a student to a teacher during the course of one summer. Beginning teachers go through phases as they become acclimated to their new professions and their new schools. A desire to fit into the new school environment and "reality shock" often leads new teachers to abandon their ideals about teaching in favor of whatever they perceive that works in regards to their instruction. This can cause teachers to adopt teaching methods that are at odds with their original teaching philosophies.

## **Working Conditions and Workload**

There is a strong correlation between the perceived problems of a teacher at a school and that teacher's likelihood of leaving the profession (Veenman, 1984). Teaching is one of the few professions in which working conditions are likely to change from year to year (Wildman, et. al., 1989). For the most part, teachers report satisfaction with their working conditions. More than half of the participants in a particular study said that they wanted to stay in the school of their initial placement (Veenman, 1984). However, working conditions can present situational problems for teachers. These are problems that are beyond their control and can neither be solved by superior teacher training nor reflecting on teaching practices. These are problems embedded in the school structure and the management of a school (Veenman, 1984). The very nature of any teaching position requires a demanding workload. Along with instructional responsibilities, teachers routinely engage in long hours of planning and assessment which often spill over beyond the work day and consume time at home in the evenings and on weekends (Nieto, 2003; Webb, et. al., 2004).

Workloads are not always distributed evenly among faculties in a given school (Lortie, 2002). Beginning teachers are introduced to the uneven workloads early as they are often asked to perform extra responsibilities, and their enthusiasm for their new positions often prevent them from declining requests that increases their workloads (McCormack et. al., 2006). Beginning teachers are also more likely to be assigned more classes to teach since they have the least amount of seniority (Quartz & TEP, 2003). Teachers have even reported being assigned to perform pastoral duties for which they were never trained to do (Flores, 2006). Heavy workloads can raise the stress level for

teachers (Dadley & Edwards, 2007), increasing the likelihood that teachers will leave the profession. Barmby (2006) found that teacher workloads were the leading reason that would have dissuaded in-service teachers from entering the profession had they known of the demanding workload before they began teaching. A reduction in the workload was also among the top suggestions that teachers had for improving their jobs in the Barmby (2006) study.

Other working conditions also affect teachers' propensity to leave the profession. The poverty level of a school and the surrounding community is the most accurate predictor of teacher attrition (Smith, 2004). The community's poverty directly affects the condition of the schools in a given area. Buckley, et. al. (2005) compared school conditions to other factors that have influenced teacher attrition. These researchers surveyed teachers in Washington, D. C. about their job satisfaction and the conditions of their school facilities. The teachers documented serious deficiencies in the schools including problems such as poor air quality, elevated noise levels, and inadequate lighting, all of which affected student learning and the health and welfare of the teachers and students.

While the facilities in which teachers work can constitute concerns about safe working conditions, teachers sometimes face threats to their safety from their own students. Stockard and Lehman (2004) found that teachers who were physically threatened by students were much more likely not to be satisfied with their placements and more likely to leave teaching. This finding has been buttressed by accounts from teachers. A teacher in the Dadley and Edwards (2007) study stated that he left teaching after being physically assaulted by a student and a parent. Smith and Smith (2006)

studied several teachers who left urban schools due to fears of violence. They found that perceptions of school violence and concerns for personal safety are primary causes of teacher attrition in urban schools. Furthermore, teachers expect violence in urban schools and view violence as a part of the daily lives of their students and in the community surrounding the schools. Violence is perceived to seep into the schools causing teachers to feel unsafe and leave for suburban schools where incidents of violence are viewed as anomalies. The authors concluded that teacher-preparation programs should train teachers and administrators to defuse possible violent situations before teachers begin teaching in urban schools (Smith & Smith, 2006).

The problem of poor mismanaged schools stretched beyond nation's capital to other countries in Europe. In the previously discussed study, Flores (2006) studied 14 beginning Portuguese teachers upon their completion of an undergraduate degree at a public Portuguese university. The researcher found that the Portuguese teachers reported being much more unhappy in poor rural schools where there were higher dropout rates. This was even true of a teacher who was transferred to a school with only ten students in the entire school. Webb et. al. (2004) also found structural problems with poor schools in Finland with teachers complaining of schools poorly constructed of wood in which the occupants dealt with leaky pipes and damp rooms infested with mildew. Buckley et. al. (2005) concluded that teachers would be willing to accept lower salaries in exchange for better facilities and that a one-time expense of repairing buildings would be more cost effective in retaining teachers than permanent salary increases.

In summary, working conditions and teacher workloads can have an impact on teacher retention. Hazardous physical conditions and the threat of school violence have been shown to increase attrition among beginning teachers. Even the perceived threat of school violence can cause teachers to move to schools where the perception of violence occurring is not as great. This factor directly affects poor urban schools more than schools in other settings. Teachers also face demanding workloads that consume much of their personal time which can lead teachers to feel as though they are not adequately compensated for their work. Safer schools and a reduction in workloads have the potential to increase the retention of new teachers.

### **Problems with Administrators**

Teachers have cited the mismanagement of schools as one of the factors associated with increased attrition among teachers (Stockard & Lehman, 2004). Teachers' problems with the mismanagement of the schools often results in conflicts with the administrations of schools where they are employed. As teachers begin their careers, they often strive to impress a school's principal above all other populations affiliated with the school. They may also begin to alter their behaviors in ways that they believe will please the schools' administrators.

A restrictive school environment may hinder beginning teachers from reflecting on their actions and decisions (Wildman & Niles, 1987). Achinstein and Barrett (2004) argued that reflection could help beginning teachers re-frame situations and view them from different perspectives, which could ultimately cause them to change their behaviors and grow professionally. It is important that administrators acknowledge the benefits of reflecting on practices for beginning teachers and give them time for such reflecting by

reducing their workloads and assigning them less challenging students and classes (Hale, 2005). If reflection is not a valued practice among administrators, beginning teachers may not want to engage in an activity which administrators view as pointless (Wildman & Niles, 1987).

The administration of any school plays a central role in the induction process of any beginning teacher. The primary issue that beginning teachers have with principals is the mismatch between the skills and professional knowledge that principals expect beginning teachers to have mastered and the lack of actual skills and professional knowledge of the beginning teachers. Flores (2006) reported in her study of the Portuguese teachers that none of the participants received help from their principals before or after being relocated to remote schools. They reported never being observed or assessed by the school principals and being given no information in those schools that they felt were disorganized and poorly managed. Those teachers who did ask for help were only brave enough to seek help with bureaucratic matters. Interviews with the principals revealed that they all thought the teachers would already possess all of the skills necessary to instruct and manage students and would need no assistance. However, they also reported that they noticed an erosion of enthusiasm and a decline in the self-efficacy in the teachers across the year.

Regan and Hannah (1993), Wildman, et. al. (1989) and Stockard and Lehman (2004) found similar patterns with the teachers in case studies they conducted in the U.S. Regan and Hannah (1993) studied graduates of their teacher education program at Connecticut College. Wildman, et. al. (1989) also conducted case studies with beginning teachers as a part of Virginia's Beginning Teacher Assistance Program (BTAP). Finally,

Stockard and Lehman (2004) surveyed first-year teachers about influences affected their likely retention in teaching. Although the situations in these studies were not as drastic as those found by Flores in Portugal, all three sets of U. S. researchers found that principals played dominant roles that impacted beginning teachers. Two of the teachers studied by Regan and Hannah (1993) had principals whom they felt offered no assistance to them during a fragile point in their careers. Other participants reported not being given adequate support from their principals and not having open lines of communication with the administration. Some teachers in the study were more fortunate. Regan and Hannah found that the actions and beliefs of the principals greatly affected the dispositions of the teachers. Two of the teachers in the study felt completely comfortable turning to their principals for help and assistance. One participant turned to her principal when she began to have difficulties with parents. She reported that she and her principal designed Planning and Placement Team meetings with parents about specific children. These meetings moved the teacher from merely inexperienced to a more mature teacher who could assess the needs of her students and convey those needs persuasively to parents. The participant reported feeling far more comfortable with administrators because of this experience.

This experience was vastly different from that of a participant in the case studies conducted by Wildman, et. al. (1989). One participant in their study reported that her support from her principal eroded after parents began to complain about her. Another participant reported that the collapse of the relationship with her principal occurred when she was passed over for a promotion in favor of a less experienced colleague. It is evident that the relationships between principals and beginning teachers can vary greatly

depending on the personalities involved and have profound effects on the careers of teachers.

Stockard and Lehman (2004) found that overall, the 117 first-year teachers who participated in their study did not rate their principals as effective in areas of school management. The teachers who did report a more effective principal were more likely to remain in teaching. The teachers in a national sample analyzed by Stockard and Lehman (2004) rated school management as effective if teachers had influence over school policy, control over their classrooms, and perceived their principals as effective.

There has been very little research on the role that principals play in meeting the needs of beginning teachers. It appears that principals are not provided with information that might help them assist beginning teachers. Brock and Grady (1998) sought to explore the differences between what principals and beginning teachers report as problems for first-year teachers. They also wanted to examine the expectations that principals and beginning teachers have of each other. Finally, they wanted to examine the difference between the support that beginning teachers desire of principals and the support that principals actually provide.

The principals reported that they expected beginning teachers to have a professional attitude, adequate knowledge of their subject, good classroom management, excellent communication skills, a strong belief in every child, and a desire to help students. Principals in religiously-affiliated schools added that they expected beginning teachers to be spiritually sound and have a strong commitment to their faith. The teachers expected the principals to communicate the prevailing criteria for the teaching that was expected of them. Some of them even expressed a desire for regularly-scheduled

meetings with principals. They also wanted more classroom visits, feedback, and affirmation. The authors concluded that beginning teachers feel frustrated when principals fail to communicate their expectations and when they do not affirm the efforts of the teachers. They also concluded that principals recognize the need for assistance to beginning teachers and are making efforts to provide it.

These issues with principals and other school administrators have led investigators to explore exactly what type of teacher is preferred by principals. Zeichner and Schulte (2001) found that principals and administrators rated alternatively-trained teachers higher than traditionally-trained teachers in their performance. Alternatively-trained teachers ranked higher in personal qualities such as creativity, work habits, and commitment to teaching. They were also seen as responsive to the students' needs as well as creative and innovative. Alternatively-trained teachers were ranked as being equally effective as other teachers in most areas. It is important to note that there is no validity or reliability to the instruments used to rate these teachers, and principals often favor school-division sponsored alternative preparation programs over traditional university-based programs. The evidence supporting the superiority of alternatively-trained teachers that has been based on classroom observations is also very weak. Students also showed no statistical difference in their pre- and post-test scores with alternatively-trained or traditionally-trained teachers.

In a related study, Reynolds, Ross, and Rakow (2002) also asked principals to compare teachers who were trained at a professional development schools (PDS) with those trained in traditional teacher preparation programs. The principals rated the two groups nearly the same on every variable. The PDS students ranked higher on teaching

proficiency and reflecting on their practices. However, they found that the non-PDS teachers ranked higher on professional growth, good judgment, and relations with students. Principals indicated that neither group possessed effective classroom management skills nor were there huge statistical differences between the two groups on most of the other variables. These findings are significant since many educational researchers have long touted the benefits of PDSs (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Reynolds, et. al., 2002).

Principals and other administrators clearly expect basic competencies of beginning teachers, and many expect beginning teachers to have the same skills and knowledge as experienced teachers. This may account for the preference of principals for alternatively-trained teachers who have already had work experience. Further, it provides a rationale for principals favoring teachers who attended a school division-sponsored program that focused more on practical knowledge than pedagogical theory. Beginning teachers, on the other hand expect communication, professional guidance, and support from principals. When any one of those expectations is not met, beginning teachers may feel frustrated and have problems.

### **Problems with Colleagues**

Many beginning teachers enter the profession after seventeen years of being a student. Still other teachers enter teaching after other careers or return to teaching after some years' absence. Beginning teachers join faculties in which social structures have been well established (Brock & Grady, 1998). The social network of faculties in schools collectively has the power to withhold social acceptance of a beginning teacher (Veenman, 1984). For a profession that attracts gregarious people who enjoy

socialization with children, teaching is ironically enough, a very isolating profession (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Beginning teachers usually spend most of their time physically isolated from other adults (Lortie, 2002). Acceptance from colleagues is quite important because the beginning teachers' interaction with them is so limited. Beginners who are ostracized by experienced teachers in a school have increased feelings of stress and isolation. Social interactions between beginning teachers and experienced teachers adds to the growth of beginners. Beginning teachers have a need for respect, a need to be liked, a need to belong, and a need to feel competent. The colleagues of a beginning teacher can control all of those needs by withholding or supplying social acceptance (Veenman, 1984).

Beginning teachers will often reshape themselves to gain acceptance and respect from colleagues. Support from colleagues has been shown to be important to teachers and is among the top indicators of teacher retention (Dadley & Edwards, 2007; Stockard & Lehman, 2004). Teachers have a preference for working with like-minded colleagues (Dadley & Edwards, 2007); therefore, beginning teachers are often quick to redesign their instructional methods to comply with a school's culture and fit in with their colleagues, even when the new methods are at odds with their core fundamental beliefs about pedagogy. Beginning teachers may also alter other aspects of their personal persona in order to become a part of the social network of schools. This socialization involves compliance, identification, internalization, and evolution (Veenman, 1984). Beginning teachers first change their external behaviors to fit into the culture, and then they come to identify themselves with these new behaviors. Within a period of time, beginning teachers internalize the behaviors and the new identification. This is the evaluating

process in which beginning teachers modify themselves to fit into the culture of a school. These social influences play a role in the development of beginning teachers to adapt to institutional regularities. Teachers also develop socially in terms of coping skills and sensitivity to school politics. They also learn to distinguish between formal and informal school culture (Reynolds, 1995).

There has been research indicating that beginning teachers can provide some direction to the strength and quality of their socialization process within schools (Veenman, 1984). Beginning teachers can gain support from other teachers in schools by making their voices heard. It is equally important for beginning teachers to collaborate and meet with other experienced teachers to foster a shared sense of responsibility for student learning in a school (Moir, 2003). The issue is however, that many beginning teachers are reluctant to ask for help from colleagues so as to not appear incompetent or become a burden. If beginning teachers want to be perceived in the same light as experienced teachers, they may be reluctant to ask for help (Good & Brophy, 2003; McCormack, et. al., 2006). Friction may also develop within faculties when the school's "dirty work", such as lunch duty and hall monitoring, is not shared evenly among all faculty members (Lortie, 2002). Newer teachers are often given these tasks at a disproportionate rate (McCormack et. al., 2006).

There can also be a tendency for experienced teachers to isolate themselves from beginning teachers (Flores, 2006). Beginning teachers are often the only adults in their new classrooms, and this can cause them to feel isolated from fellow educators (Moir, 2003). The teachers in Flores's (2006) study felt that there were two groups in their schools; the newcomers, who were temporary, and the experienced teachers with

permanent posts in the schools. These schools also contained an atmosphere in which experienced faculty isolated themselves from the beginning teachers. Their self-efficacy was also affected by their own feelings of exhaustion, frustration, and lack of self-motivation. These beginners revealed through their interviews that the social and psychological isolation was the most negative aspect of their first years. They also reported feeling a lack of motivation, low morale, disappointment, and frustration during their second year of teaching.

Lortie (2002) also reported on the tension that can accumulate within faculties who do not work cohesively within a school. Teachers reported having their authority questioned by other teachers and not being consulted by specialists within a school about students in their classes. Other teachers have reported that the subjects that they teach are not taken as seriously by colleagues or administrators within a school. This was the case with Religious education teachers in England who felt that they were not given a comparable level of respect from colleagues because Religion is not a part of the core National Curriculum (Dadley & Edwards, 2007). Some teachers have reported routinely taking on administrative responsibilities for other teachers or disciplining the students of other teachers (Lortie, 2002). Male teachers are particularly exploited in this area as they are sometimes seen as the school disciplinarians for the students of all teachers (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005).

Despite the tensions that can develop among faculties, acceptance of colleagues is clearly a critical element in the school enculturation of beginning teachers. With the large amount of isolation already built into the teaching profession, beginners have a need to feel a part of the school community. Experienced teachers hold the power to accept

beginning teachers or add to their isolation. Beginning teachers must make their voices heard with their colleagues. The reality is that they often simply conform to the school culture and imitate their colleagues to gain acceptance.

### **Problems With Parents**

Wildman, et. al. (1989) found that parents represented the area about which beginning teachers felt least prepared to deal. One or two parents can have a significant influence on how beginning teachers view their progress. Veenman (1984) reported the findings of a national survey of beginning teachers throughout the country. All four of the top issues dealt with students. However, dealings and communication with parents ranked as the most pervasive non-student problem for beginning teachers. Quartz and TEP (2003) reported that a small minority of teachers in New York City public schools complained about parents not being cooperative with teachers. Teachers in other studies held far different views of parents. Teachers in Washington, D. C. reported that they would have liked to have better relations with their students' parents (Buckley, et. al., 2005). One of the teachers who participated in the Wildman, et. al., (1989) study reported being anxious about parents. She had gained some confidence until the end of the first year when she recommended that a student be held back. The parents of that student demanded her dismissal. This incident had a long-lasting effect on her.

Another one of their participants in the Wildman, et. al. (1989) study remained distant from her students' parents. This teacher was a White female teacher of African-American students. Her conflicts arose with the parents when they began to accuse her of racial prejudice. This affected her to the extent that she switched careers. This teacher had no social or professional support network in place to guide her through this ordeal. The

research has indicated that support for beginning teachers by administrators tends to erode when parents begin to complain about teachers (Regan & Hannah, 1993).

The predominant view among teachers is that parents and students are increasingly viewed as clients or customers of educational systems and therefore afforded substantial influence over curriculum development, student assessments, and school policies (Webb, et. al., 2004). This has caused a decline in the level of respect that teachers are afforded from parents and communities. Teachers feel conflicted, since the community and parents hold high expectations from schools but hold teachers in low regard (Buckley, et. al., 2005). The low status of teachers and the increasing power of parents within schools leaves teachers feeling frustrated. Teachers have stated that parents are too willing to give in to their children's demands and complain to school administrators on behalf of their children. School administrators are quick to pacify parents, leaving teachers without a voice in these matters (Lortie, 2002).

While some teachers are increasingly dealing with more demanding parents, others have become allies with parents. A participant in the Wildman, et. al. (1989) study tried to establish close relationships with parents. This helped her gain information about her students, and it softened the blow when there was a problem with a student. Research has indicated that establishing relationships with parents is the most effective method for beginning teachers to gain the trust of parents. Hansen and Mulholland (2005) reported that the beginning male teachers in their study were able to offset parents' fears of pedophilia by establishing close bonds with them. Some of the male teachers were able to gain the trust of these parents through the building of relationships. Inviting parents into the school and classroom as volunteers is another method to build partnerships with them.

Beginning teachers too often fear parents, and this can cause friction between teachers and parents. Parents are often simply looking for assurance (Stallings, 1998).

### **Problems with Motivating Students**

It is quite evident that beginning teachers face problems with salaries, working conditions, administrators, colleagues, and parents as they engage in the school enculturation process. However, there has been much research to document that the primary issues of concern for beginning teachers, by far, center around their interactions with students. This is only natural since teachers easily spend more time with students than they do with administrators, colleagues, and parents combined. Students play the most influential role in the socialization of beginning teachers (Wildman, et. al., 1989). Beginning teachers have reported a wide array of problems with students including assessment of their abilities and meeting the needs of students on different instructional levels. Motivating students to learn and comply with school and classroom rules are among the problems with which beginning teachers have had to grapple. Motivation of students ranked high on the national survey of problems faced by beginning teachers reported by Veenman (1984).

While a sound curriculum and effective teaching are necessary components in ensuring student learning, they are nearly useless if students minimize the amount of effort and attention they devote to learning. The motivation of students is a process that cannot be directly observed or measured. It is a subjective experience that must be inferred from the behaviors exhibited by students and by their comments (Good & Brophy, 2003). Beginning teachers can become especially frustrated when they encounter students who put forth no effort to learn (Wildman, et. al., 1989). Teachers however,

cannot rely on voluntary enthusiasm from students to increase their level of learning. Teachers often have the responsibility of motivating students to put forth their highest efforts and enjoy the process of learning. Teachers must also inspire students to want to learn. This can be difficult for content areas that students do not value or take seriously (Dadley & Edwards, 2007). Teachers are left with the difficult task of motivating a collective group of students who may lack self-discipline to sustain their effort levels for long periods of time (Lortie, 2002; Reynolds, 1995).

Students in classrooms are motivated by strategies that facilitate either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation occurs when students become motivated or exhibit a desired behavior to obtain a tangible item or some type of reward. Alternatively, students may be motivated to exhibit a desired behavior to prevent the infliction of a punishment. When students are intrinsically motivated, the motivation or effort is considered to be the desired end rather than the means to the end (Newby, 1991). Research has indicated that some factors that enhance students' intrinsic motivation are teaching skills, organizational structure, rapport with students, a challenging curriculum, fair grading, and prompt feedback (Pass, Riccomini, & Switzer, 2005), while extrinsic motivation follows patterns similar to behavior modification (Newby, 1991). According to flow theory intrinsic motivation occurs when people are motivated by engagement in activities for their own sake. Flow theory also incorporates students' affective learning into motivation (Schweinle, Turner, & Meyer, 2006). Student motivation has been linked to actions of a teacher (Newby, 1991) and the instructional style of the teacher; specifically whether the teachers is an autonomy supportive or controlling teacher (Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999).

Newby (1991) studied the motivation strategies of teachers using the ARCS model which suggests that there are four categories of motivational strategies used by teachers. They are attention-focusing, relevance, confidence-building, and satisfaction. Attention-focusing strategies are maintained by responding to the sensation-seeking needs of students. Relevance strategies relate to responding to students' questions in ways that make the content seem relevant to them. Confidence-building strategies refer to those strategies that help students see that tasks are challenging, yet accomplishable. These three strategies constitute intrinsic motivational orientations. The fourth strategy, satisfaction, centers around the attainment or withholding of a reward or the implementation of a punishment. Newby (1991) wanted to investigate the type and effectiveness of classroom motivational strategies by beginning teachers on student behavior.

There was a strong correlation between on-task behavior and relevance strategies. There was, however, a negative correlation between on-task behavior and the number of satisfaction strategies used. Confidence-building strategies and attention-focusing strategies both had weak positive correlations with on-task behaviors. Both rewards and punishments had negative correlations with on-task behavior. The author concluded that with more than 10 motivational strategies used per hour, the teachers expended a lot of effort on motivation, and he speculated that this was because the age of the children (Newby, 1991).

Although the teachers used a variety of strategies, most of them used satisfaction strategies of supplying or withholding rewards or inflicting punishments. He speculated that these methods are more easily understood by young children because of their

tangible characteristics. Rewards and punishments are also efficient and easy to implement. Teachers need to expend much more individualized attention to each child to use confidence-building strategies. There was however a negative correlation between the number of on-task behaviors and satisfaction strategies utilized, so students were off task more when there were either rewards or punishments involved. The author speculated that teachers increased the number of rewards or punishments if the class was off task, and this accounted for the strong negative correlation. The research indicated that satisfaction strategies of rewards and punishments were used most often, but these strategies were shown to be less effective than relevance strategies which were not routinely used (Newby, 1991).

In a similar vein, Reeve, Bolt, and Cai (1999) studied the instructional style of teachers by comparing the behaviors of autonomy-supportive teachers to those of controlling teachers. The authors conducted simulations in a laboratory environment using preservice teachers in the roles of teachers and students. Some “teacher” subjects exhibited autonomy-supportive behaviors while others were more controlling as they taught the “students” how to solve a puzzle. The authors hypothesized that autonomy-supportive teachers would display more student-centered approaches, more non-directive speech, and a more flexible interpersonal style.

The instructional style was a predictor of the amount of time that teachers spent holding the instructional material with autonomy-supportive teachers doing so less often and turning control over to the students. These teachers were also more enthusiastic, listened to student questions, responded to student questions more, and were more student-centered. The controlling teachers used frequent praise and criticism, asked

controlling questions, emphasized deadlines, and created pressure. As a result, the students of the autonomy-supportive teachers outperformed the students of controlling teachers.

Other instructional behaviors that may affect student motivation is teacher clarity and communication behaviors (Comadena, Hunt, & Simonds, 2007; McCroskey, Richmond, & Bennett, 2006). These factors can contribute to a student liking or disliking a teacher (Montalvo & Miller, 2007). All of these factors link motivation to students' affective learning. Comadena, et. al. (2007) found that teacher clarity, teacher caring, and non-verbal behaviors all affected students' motivation, affective learning, and cognitive learning. McCroskey, et. al. (2006) predicted that the communication style of university instructors would affect course evaluations. They also hypothesized that student perceptions of a professor's social communication style would be associated with student motivation. Their independent variables were the teachers' non-verbal immediacy (non-verbal communication), teacher clarity, teacher assertiveness, and responsiveness. Their dependent variables consisted of end-of-class motivation, teacher evaluations, and affective learning. All three dependent variables were measured on a survey in which students were asked to self report. As was the case with the Comadena, et. al. (2007) study, the authors found that all teacher communication behaviors positively correlated with course outcomes. Clarity and responsiveness were found to be prominent variables in teacher communication, while the correlations with immediacy and assertiveness were not as strong. Both of these studies indicated that teacher communication behaviors have significant effects on instructional outcomes.

Affective learning can also be affected by whether or not students like a teacher (Montalvo & Miller, 2007). Montalvo and Miller (2007) examined the effect of teachers on students' goals, their perceived ability, and their effort and persistence. The authors distinguished between learning goals and performance goals. Performance goals are often related to attaining a particular grade or attempting to please a teacher without regard to material actually being learned. In contrast, learning goals are associated with acquiring new knowledge for the sake of learning. They found a strong correlation between learning goals and students' perceived abilities and their persistence. They also found that students earned higher grades when they liked a teacher. Surprisingly, the authors found a positive correlation between effort and perceived ability when they disliked their teachers.

The correlation between effort and perceived ability was consistent with flow theory which indicated that a perfect balance is struck when students perceived their skills as equal to or superior to an imposed challenge (Schweinle, et. al., 2006). Students would put forth more effort if they perceived that their abilities would enable them to conquer the challenge. However, Schweinle, et. al. (2006) did not find this to be the case. Their findings countered flow theory in that students perceived challenges as a threats. They attributed this finding to the developmental stage of the sixth and seventh-graders whom they studied, the situations in which the challenge was presented, and connotations associated with the word "challenge." The authors concluded that there is a balance between perceived skills and challenge when teachers (a) demonstrated enthusiasm for the subject matter, (b) alleviated student frustration, (c) provided positive feedback, (d) encouraged cooperation, and (e) encouraged perseverance.

The motivation of students remains a problem for beginning teachers (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Newby, 1991). There are methods that have been suggested to promote intrinsic motivation in students, but teachers continue to respond to off-task behavior with the use of satisfaction strategies. Beginning teachers who cannot broaden their repertoire of motivational strategies will never be able to move beyond this authoritarian form of motivation (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004).

### **Student Diversity**

Teachers throughout the country are encountering an increasingly diverse population of students. Beginning teachers are always faced with students who have different ethnic, linguistic, and economic backgrounds from their own. California is a prime example of the increased level of diversity throughout the nation. California's student population represents the most diverse group of students in the world. Combined, the number of minority students in California represents the majority of students in the population. Teachers are never completely prepared to meet the needs of ever-increasing diverse populations of students, regardless of their training (Bartell, 1995). Teachers have typically dealt with this issue by relocating to schools where the students are more like themselves. White teachers routinely move to schools with predominantly White middle-class students. African American teachers also tend to move to schools with higher numbers of African American students (Fowler & Mittapalli, 2006).

Quartz and TEP (2003) and researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) attempted to tackle the issue of teachers with limited experience with and knowledge of diverse groups of students. In the wake of the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, UCLA established Center X, which sought to use research-based instructional

methods to prepare highly qualified teachers for urban schools. The rationale behind such a center was based on research documenting problems that teachers have in urban schools which have resulted in a high attrition rates and a number of unqualified teachers in these schools. The researchers used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data on 559 graduates of the program and their retention in urban schools. They found that teachers who began to identify with the plight of their students became activists for social justice. The Center X graduates mentored new teachers, encouraged parents to stand up for their rights, served as school leaders, and became agents of change. The most notable finding was the high level of self efficacy among graduates of this program. A full 94% of the graduates over a four year period remained in education.

Beginning teachers are also increasingly teaching large numbers of English Language Learning students. If they lack the appropriate training or cultural sensitivity, this experience can have effects on beginning teachers as they form their professional identities (Kooy, 2006). Preservice teachers can become better prepared for diverse student populations by being exposed to a variety of school settings and teachers during their teacher training programs (Hale, 2005). Teachers are routinely offered incentives to teach in poor urban schools (Easley, 2006), but many do not naturally opt to teach in urban schools of their own accord (Quartz & TEP, 2003). There is a dire need for highly-qualified caring teachers in urban schools, and many researchers have called for additional teachers of color in these schools (Nieto, 2003), since studies have indicated a link between achievement of minority students and the number of minority faculty in a school. Research has even shown that a positive correlation exists between the achievement of all students in a school and the ethnic diversity within the faculty at a

given school (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). Whatever the race of the teacher, it is important for teachers to have respect for the cultural identities of the students (Nieto, 2003). Reynolds, et. al., (2002) found that teachers who were trained in professional development schools had more cultural sensitivity to the needs of diverse student populations. Furthermore, research has indicated that minority children benefit when their culture becomes a part of the curriculum (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007).

Teachers in other countries have also experienced this phenomenon. Flores (2006) reported that the Portuguese teachers in her study were moved to remote rural schools with high dropout rates. The level of poverty among these students was completely unfamiliar to many of these middle-class teachers. Some participants in the sample reported that they became more familiar with the cultures of their students as the year progressed. Similarly, teachers in Finland had the added responsibility of integrating foreign students into their classrooms, which is challenging for teachers in a homogeneous society (Webb, et. al., 2004). The experiences of these Portuguese and Finish teachers were similar to teachers in a study conducted about the needs of beginning teachers in New South Wales, Australia. They too became more comfortable with their students as the year progressed (McCormack, et. al., 2006).

The issue of student diversity has taken on different dimensions in this country. Beginning teachers in White suburban schools reported higher levels of job satisfaction than teachers in poorer rural or urban schools (Veenman, 1984). Because of the preference that experienced teachers have for teaching in White suburban schools, poor and minority students in urban schools are far more likely to be taught by a beginning teacher or an unqualified teacher on a provisional license (Moir, 2003; Quartz & TEP,

2003; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001), and the research has indicated that unqualified teachers can have detrimental affects on students' learning (McCormack, et. al., 2006; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001).

The attrition rate of teachers is also much higher in poor urban schools. The poverty level of a school and the surrounding community is the greatest predictor of teacher attrition at a school (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). This has adverse affects on poor and minority students. Not only are the students disadvantaged who attend these schools, but research has shown that teachers in urban and rural schools are treated differently from teachers in White suburban schools. This differentiation of treatment comes from state education agencies. Beginning teachers, who are more likely to be placed at these schools, are further isolated from more experienced teachers in a school division (Ganser, 2000). With the lack of diversity among beginning teachers, most who enter the profession continue to be White and middle class (National Center for Educational Statistics, U. S. Census Bureau, 2004). Encountering students whose backgrounds are vastly different from the backgrounds of teachers presents problems that must be addressed. Education leaders have been called upon to consider the needs of culturally, racially, linguistically, and economically diverse groups when constructing educational policy (Easley, 2006).

In summary, teachers are increasingly teaching students that have vastly differently cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds from their own. There is a tendency for teachers to gravitate to schools where the students come from similar backgrounds to their own. Teachers are also dealing with special needs students under inclusion programs which have become popular both in the United States and other

countries. Teachers in other homogeneous countries are also increasingly teaching students from other countries. Programs such as UCLA's Center X are attempting to recruit people to take employment in urban schools and providing them with the tools to make a difference in the lives of ethnic and linguistic minority children.

### **Classroom Management and Discipline**

When Veenman (1984) reported the results of the national survey of the problems faced by beginning teachers, it was no surprise that problems of discipline and classroom management were ranked as the most serious problems faced by beginning teachers. Barmby (2006) also found that student behavior was one of the factors that would have dissuaded teachers from entering the profession. The teachers in this study also cited student behavior as one of the top five reasons for leaving the profession (Barmby, 2006). School principals have also rank classroom management as their most pressing problem with beginning teachers. Beginning teachers can spend upwards of ten percent of instructional time dealing with discipline problems (Schaffer, et. al., 1992). The monitoring of student behavior, implementing of effective classroom procedures, and managing time are all rated in the top five tasks that beginning teachers must perform to be effective in the classroom (Reynolds, 1995).

There has been much research about the problems that beginning teachers have with classroom management. Beginning teachers are far more likely to cite student behavior as a primary problem for them (Buckley, et. al., 2005), and teachers in urban schools are more likely to complain about student behavior than teachers in suburban schools (Quartz & TEP, 2003). Beginning teachers generally have concerns about establishing classroom routines as well as organization and discipline. Experienced

teachers are better able to distinguish between students who cannot perform tasks from those who simply do not make an effort. Experienced teachers also possess strategies for motivating students. A research study revealed that teachers did not develop strategies to keep students focused until they were well into their second year of teaching. Their skills were still inferior to those of their more experienced peers even at the end of their second year (Reynolds, 1995).

Discipline was a critical issue for the beginning male teachers in the Hansen and Mulholland (2005) study. The participants all assumed that they would have key roles in discipline even before they graduated. One of the participants equated a good male role model in schools with a strong disciplinarian. These male teachers found that they were seen as disciplinarians and at least one was annoyed by the perception. Others found ways to mix discipline with showing care for the students. The role of disciplinarian represented a way for male teachers to find their place in the feminized environment of elementary schools. However, the participants led the researchers to conclude that male teachers can be exploited when it comes to issues of discipline (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005).

There is no clear definition of exactly what constitutes classroom management or discipline problems, and indeed a discipline problem for one teacher may not be considered a problem for another. The research indicates that the primary cause for the failure of beginning teachers in this area is their lack control of their classrooms and students. Beginning elementary and secondary classroom teachers have had more problems with discipline than special area teachers (Veenman, 1984). Veenman (1984) cited a lack of control, personality clashes with students, immaturity, lack of

organization, and lack of confidence on the part of beginning teachers as reasons for not maintaining classroom control. Teachers have also cited inclusion programs as factors that contribute to the discipline problems in their classrooms. Teachers who were trained in general education have stated that they simply lack the training to properly instruct children with special needs, and they therefore question the effectiveness of inclusion (Webb, et. al., 2004). Idol (2006) found that teachers did prefer inclusion programs as long as there was administrative support and additional school resources. Most teachers, however, expressed the need for “resource room” model where students could receive services outside of the general classroom. The author concluded that school employing inclusion programs must use the same disciplinary policies with all students regardless of whether they have special needs or not.

There is a high correlation between the problems identified by beginning teachers and those that principals noted that beginning teachers have. Both populations viewed classroom management as a crucial issue. This issue is so critical because many beginning teachers leave the profession completely when the only problem they really had was classroom management (Carter, 2003). Dadley and Edwards (2007) even found that teachers who had left the field because of problems with behavior stated that they would return to teaching if they could return to a “good” school.

Students have as much of an effect on teachers as teachers have on students. The behavior of students can completely reform the disposition of a beginning teacher. There is also a tendency for principals to assign the most difficult students to beginning teachers since many experienced teachers opt not to take them (Bartell, 1995). Wildman, et. al., (1989) found that beginning teachers eventually grew to resent the amount of time that

they spent dealing with difficult students and discipline problems. In another study, a number of beginning teachers reported that discipline should be the sole responsibility of the school's administration (Brock & Grady, 1998). This view is so pervasive in Europe that researchers have called upon governments to address student behavior to prevent the mass attrition of teachers in countries such as England (Barmby, 2006; Dadley & Edwards, 2007). Beginning teachers also have to spend an extraordinary amount of time dealing with classroom management problems giving them very little time to take leadership roles in schools and fully participate in the school community (Wildman, et. al, 1989). Inadequate classroom management can also lead to several interruptions of instruction that have a negative impact on student learning (McCormack, et. al., 2006).

In the process of dealing with discipline and classroom management issues, beginning teachers sometimes redesign their instruction to better manage students with behavioral problems. This is the time when student-centered instruction is likely to easily give way to teacher-centered instruction, since it is much easier to manage student behavior when the focus is on the teacher (Simmons, et. al., 1999). Regan and Hannah (1993) found that one of the teachers who graduated from their teacher education program quickly abandoned constructivist teaching methods taught during her preparation in favor of direct instruction. This was a teacher who was placed at a lower SES school and had a difficult class. Instead of focusing on innovative instructional activities, she put her creative energies into managing a class of difficult students, and the authors concluded that she established a classroom where her students could trust her to gently treat them with respect.

Pass et. al. (2005) also examined how a social science student teacher and an experienced social science teacher interacted with and treated students. The experienced teacher maintained tight control of his class. His students indicated that they felt free to make comments in class as long as they related to the topic being addressed in class. He also made an effort to explain the relevance of lessons to his students. Additionally, he rewarded his class with pizza parties and free-homework nights. He stated that his educational objective was to get his students to obtain high scores on the advanced placement exam. He began the semester by trying to motivate his students, which he accomplished shortly thereafter. The younger student teacher was not able to establish the same kind of classroom management system, even though he did not have significant discipline problems.

Most of the discipline and behavior problems faced by teachers center on classroom control. The most effective teachers are able to keep students on task, and they also set behavioral expectations on the first day of school. Beginning teachers were shown in other studies to be less responsive to the spontaneous behavior of students and cues from the students. Hale (2005) argued that teacher preparation programs can prepare preservice teachers for discipline problems by helping them to develop complex understandings of the multiplicities of teaching. She recommended examinations of case studies and problem-based learning to foster thorough discussions about solutions to discipline problems in the classroom. Beginning teachers are very sensitive to student behaviors that disrupt their lessons. Beginning teachers have been shown to become more organized and systematic in their behavior with more years of experience (Veenman, 1984).

### **Professional Knowledge**

Reynolds (1995) described the knowledge base that all beginning teachers should possess upon entering the profession. The knowledge base is divided into what teachers know and what they know how to do. The four domains of the knowledge are general knowledge, content knowledge, general principles of teaching and learning, and content-specific pedagogy. The author concluded that teacher educators needed to know what is expected of beginning elementary teachers and prepare the teachers. She further stated that beginning teachers should be completely competent in most areas upon receiving a license, but the reality is that they are not. The author questioned if this expectation is realistic. She answered her question by pointing to the responsibility with which beginning teachers are entrusted to promote student learning. She argues that states need to develop a comprehensive set of professional development programs that begin during teacher training and continue throughout the careers of teachers. Schools and school districts need to participate in the development of teachers without leaving the entire process to universities.

The call for teachers with superior professional knowledge became a hot-button issue during the 1970's. During the 1980's and the following decade, many states began to adopt professional standards for teachers in response to national calls for higher teacher quality. Beginning teachers began to be assessed based on these standards as a means to obtain and maintain a professional teaching license (McNergney, et. al., 1988). States like California, Georgia, Florida, Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Virginia followed the assumption that there does exist an identifiable knowledge base that can be measured in beginning teachers (Andrew, 1981; Bartell, 1995; Ganser, 2000; McNergney, et. al.,

1988; Regan & Hannah, 1993; Stallings, 1998; White, 1987; Wildman, et. al., 1989). The first modern, state-wide instrument for teacher certification was adopted in Georgia. Observers used the Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument (TPAI) to determine the degree to which teachers demonstrated certain indicators of competent performance. Florida soon followed Georgia with the Florida Performance Measurement System (FPMS). Both of these instruments were designed to measure teacher performance (McNergney, et. al., 1988). Several states now have standards by which beginning teachers are measured.

The calls for such standards were rooted in identified gaps in either the pedagogical or content knowledge base of beginning teachers (Reynolds, 1995). The knowledge base is divided into what teachers know and what they know how to do. The four domains of the knowledge are general knowledge, content knowledge, general principles of teaching and learning, and content-specific pedagogy. The findings of several research studies have led to conclusions that beginning teachers have very few content-specific pedagogical understandings (Reynolds, 1995). Beginning teachers often lack solid instructional routines as a part of their daily teaching. Both principals and teacher educators expect beginning teachers to have the same basic level of competence that experienced teachers have, but the reality is that beginning teachers quite often lack enough content-specific pedagogical knowledge (Pass, et. al., 2005; Reynolds, 1995).

Beginning teachers must quickly build a repertoire of pedagogical methods, and many beginners face problems in this area (McCormack, et. al. 2006). Pedagogical methods must be combined with adequate content knowledge, which elementary teachers sometimes lack (Holmes Group, 1986; Reynolds, 1995). Studies have indicated that

secondary teachers, who were often specifically trained in a content area, struggle with content as well (Pass, et. al., 2005; Simmons, et. al., 1999). Beginners also struggle with questioning strategies and formulating answers to students' questions. This lack of knowledge among beginning teachers can have serious consequences for their students (Reynolds, 1995).

Reynolds (1995) found that many elementary-school principals and beginning teachers value a deep knowledge base in the traditional content areas such as reading, language arts, and mathematics. They should also be able to motivate students, have knowledge of standardized tests, and communicate effectively with other people. Older career switchers are likely to possess more of these interpersonal skills since they often bring the skills to teaching with them from their previous careers. Many of these "boundless career" skills present with them a sense of professionalism and maturity (Mayotte, 2003). More experienced teachers are also more effectively able to maintain instructional momentum while still managing student behavior since they too have developed strong interpersonal skills.

The response to the calls for professional knowledge has created problems for teachers as schools attempt to uniform curricula and provide all children with comparable educational experiences. Teachers have had to forgo autonomy in their teaching practices in favor of prescribed curricula. Experienced teachers have struggled with the loss of autonomy as they attempt to maintain their own personal discretion in the classroom (Buckley, et. al., 2005). The loss of autonomy has created problems for both experienced and beginning teachers. Teachers have reported difficulties with the curriculum of a particular school division and prescribed methods of delivering instruction. There is the

concern that there are limits to what empirical science can produce about the most effective teaching methods. These concerns have caused teachers to want to leave the profession (Wildman & Niles, 1987). The enormous amount of test preparation that has engulfed instruction in the present age has added to teacher attrition. Buckley et. al. (2005) reported that accountability and high-stakes testing was the top reasons that teachers gave for leaving the profession in a 2002 survey.

According to the 2001 federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), teachers must use the “best practices” of instruction to be considered highly-qualified teachers. These “highly-qualified” teachers are ones with superior verbal ability and use instructional strategies that have been scientifically proved to be effective. In theory, teachers who lack such ability and strategies also lack the professional knowledge necessary to adequately instruct their students. In reality, a highly-qualified teacher is one who is fully state-certified and possess a passing score on a state examination (Nieto, 2003).

Teachers are further frustrated by the demands that states have placed on them to ensure that all children score well on high-stakes tests (Hale, 2005). The professional knowledge expectations of teachers dictate that they possess the skills necessary to ensure that their students score well on standardized examinations. Critics have argued that NCLB had reduced education to an environment of test scores and accountability (Hale, 2005). Souto-Manning and Dice (2007) reported that teachers are increasingly having to follow strict pacing guides and remain on track rather than catering the curriculum to the specific needs of students. Government intrusion in classroom instruction is also occurring in England as Webb, et. al. (2004) found that British teachers were reporting a loss of autonomy in their classrooms. The Finish teachers in the same study had thus far,

escaped stringent government intrusion, but they also admitted that government reforms of education were on the horizon.

Beginning teachers are commonly overwhelmed with dealing with curriculum demands while learning about their new students (Moir, 2003). They are teaching and learning to teach at the same time (Moir, 2003; Wildman, et. al., 1989). Instruction is affected as beginning teachers attempt to become acclimated in their new profession. This often results in the abandonment of constructivist teaching principles that are so common in university-based teacher preparation programs (Regan & Hannah, 1993). This shift seems to make sense on the surface, as Veenman (1984) found that conservative, traditional teachers reported having fewer problems during their induction years than more progressive teachers. He also reported that less idealistic teachers reported fewer problems than more idealistic teachers. This most likely occurs because reality shock is more likely to have an impact on beginning teachers with idealistic or unrealistic notions about teaching. In addition to conservative school cultures, the author also reported a “subject subculture” in which teachers in the natural sciences were more conservative and custodial than teachers in the humanities.

Regan and Hannah (1993) found that teachers were at least attempting constructivist teaching in their early years of teaching. However, they also found that the extent to which this is possible depends on how conducive the school environment is to constructivist teaching. While it is true that students have given more favorable ratings to constructivist teachers than those who practice more traditional teaching methods, in an era of national standardized testing and minimal instructional time, many teachers are employing traditional teaching methods. Constructivist teachers who engage in inquiry-

based instruction or critical-thinking also find themselves working harder, and they must undertake larger pedagogy responsibilities (Pass, et. al., 2005). Hale (2005) argued that teacher education programs can address this issue by focusing on child-centered instructional methods while simultaneously preparing students for state-mandated standardized tests.

In summary, beginning teachers are expected to maintain four domains of professional knowledge upon entering the profession. The domains of the knowledge are general knowledge, content knowledge, general principles of teaching and learning, and content-specific pedagogy. The gap in the knowledge base of beginning teachers has led states to impose strict requirements for teachers to obtain licensure and for experienced teachers to maintain their credentials. The unfortunate side of this situation is that many school divisions have imposed strict curricula and pacing guides that have deprived many experienced teachers of the autonomy which they had come to value. This is also the case in European countries. Coupled with the loss of autonomy is the amount of preparation that for standardized tests in which teachers must engage. Principals and other interested parties expect teachers to possess the appropriate professional knowledge to prepare students to score well on standardized tests.

### **Special Populations of Teachers**

#### **Teachers and Gender**

The National Center for Educational Statistics and the United States Census Bureau reported that as of 2000, 75% of all public school teachers in the country were female. This is an increase from a 70% female majority from just a decade prior to the report (National Center for Educational Statistics, U. S. Census Bureau, 2004). Men are,

therefore, a special population of interest in public educational settings. Most men who enter teaching have absolutely no intention of remaining in classroom teaching for the entire of their careers (Lortie, 2002). They either desire to move into administrative positions within education or plan to leave education altogether. A study found that male teachers over forty had a strong interest in something other than education or had another source of income. Many younger male teachers have concerns about being able to support a family on the salaries of teachers. Men are therefore, far more likely to regret the decision to enter teaching when they compare their salaries to the salaries of men in other professions (Lortie, 2002). This greatly affects the retention of male teachers in the profession (Lortie, 2002).

The retention of male teachers in general is problematic, but both the entrance and retention of male teachers in elementary schools remains at a deficit (Sumsion, 1999). The school enculturation process and interaction with colleagues for beginning male elementary teachers takes on meanings that are vastly different from those of their female counterparts (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005). Hansen and Mulholland (2005) were interested in exploring the experiences of beginning male elementary school teachers as they began their careers. They were particularly interested in the experiences of these men as caregivers in a feminized profession. Sumsion (1999) documented a paradox that exists between care giving and masculinity. Mulholland and Hansen (2003) also theorized that male teachers in the elementary grades would be able to counter the alienation experienced by many boys in a female-dominated environment. They also called for men who possess nurturing or fatherly qualities for children who lack a father figure in their lives. Mulholland and Hansen (2003) further called for special training for

male teachers who lack those qualities. The authors suggest that male teachers have the ability to bring gender-balanced diversity to elementary schools. They can also provide a more balanced education for children, model learning as a masculine activity, substitute as surrogate fathers, and break down traditional gender stereotypes. As caregivers, they can show respect for colleagues, counter stereotypes, and serve as substitute parents.

Mulholland and Hansen (2003) conducted interviews with 16 male preservice elementary teachers from the same university during their final year of college. The data from these 16 participants were used in two reports written by the authors. The researchers were initially interested in investigating the reasons that male preservice teachers had for choosing the profession and how they felt about other male colleagues. They also wanted to investigate the male approach to academics in predominantly female-populated courses and how they felt about the courses. They finally wanted to investigate their feelings about the way in which they were treated by female colleagues.

Of those 16 participants, eight participants were interviewed a second time after their first year of teaching. This data was the primary source for the 2005 article. All of the interviews were standardized, open-ended, and semi-structured. The initial 2003 research primarily dealt with their experiences in their teacher training program. They were not concerned about entering a feminized profession and were even encouraged by their working-class parents who viewed teaching as a step up from the physical labor in which some of their fathers engaged. These male teachers also viewed working with children as a positive experience and had this reinforced by their field experiences, although the authors pointed out that men are less likely to cite the benefits of working with children as a benefit of the job.

The participants reported feeling shocked upon entering the university classes. Most of them acknowledged that they were not strong academic students, and they felt that the courses were geared towards women. They reported having inadequate verbal and written communication skills that were required for their courses and felt that this requirement favored women whose English and writing skills were likely to be superior. They also disliked the lecture style courses at university and favored a more active hands-on method of teaching, which they all intended to use in their own classrooms as teachers. Many of these men admitted putting forth minimal effort and misbehaving in their university classes, which caused resentment from many of their female colleagues. They also disliked planning and felt that they would be able to teach naturally without a great deal of planning. The author speculated that their own sense of maleness was closely connected to a sense of entitlement which translated to the notion that teaching would come naturally to them. This attitude prompted many of the female colleagues to view the males as “lazy” and “dumb.”

The subject of a case study by Sumsion (1999) also reported difficulties with female colleagues during his teacher education program. The author juxtaposed social constructions of hegemonic masculinity with a man’s decision to enter a profession of caring. The man in this study reported that entering a feminized profession raised doubts about his own sexuality, and he was treated like a novelty by his female colleagues during his training. He even suffered sexual harassment and began to wear a wedding band although he was not married at the time for the purpose of preventing women from approaching him sexually and to prove to them that he was not gay.

The feeling of novelty among males in elementary education was also prevalent for the participants in the Mulholland and Hansen (2003) study. They bonded together and began to work on projects together. The men in the cohort became close friends and began to associate outside of class at bars and pubs. The subject of Sumsion's (1999) study also felt marginalized and as though he was treated differently from his female colleagues. The men in both of these studies were not aware of the effects of "the glass escalator" which is the phenomena of men entering predominately-female professions and advancing very quickly (Sumsion, 1999). The Sumsion (1999) participant was advanced to director of a child-care center very quickly. Similarly, the participants in the Mulholland and Hansen (2003) study perceived that they would get jobs very quickly, which may have added to their lack of motivation during their training, their indifference toward lesson planning, and the resentment felt by their female colleagues. The authors reported that men experience "tokenism" differently from women entering male-dominated professions, and any numeric minority in a profession will become the subject of extra attention which is sometimes seen as favoritism.

The participants in the Hansen and Mulholland (2005) study reported feeling apprehension and frustration from remaining in their gender-specific roles and not showing care, warmth, gentleness, and compassion towards their students once they began teaching. They feared that close contact with children would subject them to scrutiny that did not affect their female counterparts. One male teacher reported that he and another male teacher were warned by the principal not to be alone with a child, while female teachers were given no such warning. Another participant was extremely apprehensive about being assigned to first grade and felt unprepared for such young

children. He did report being happy and comfortable with the first graders as the year progressed. One participant reported that, as a student teacher, he felt the need to report to his cooperating teacher when a female, fourth-grader hugged him. Another teacher reported that his cooperating teacher thought it was appropriate to have preschool children sit on his lap during story time even though he initially felt uncomfortable with it. Still another male teacher reported that the word “pedophile” was painted on the fence near his classroom.

The participants were all willing to sacrifice close physical contact with their students to maintain their reputations and avoid suspicion. This is comparable to the subject of the case study in the Sumsion (1999) study who took a leave of absence after being falsely accused of pedophilia. He reported that the students were so happy to see him upon his return that they began jumping to hug him and touched him. He felt so uncomfortable that he locked himself in his office to avoid the children. He entered the profession to feel emotionally close to children yet, he became emotionally withdrawn. He eventually left the profession to protect his wife and children from a possible scandal that might involve him and an actual charge of pedophilia which he saw as inevitable. The participants in the Hansen and Mulholland (2005) study felt more comfortable with their students as their first year progressed. They still attempted to avoid touching their students as much as possible. The authors concluded that it is important to help male preservice teachers view the profession as one of relational caring rather than one of parenting or showing affection. These men entered a profession that is highly feminized, yet there is still a need for more men in elementary education.

Men in education generally feel that they are not treated the same as their female counterparts. Many beginning female teachers in turn feel that they are not treated the same as male teachers. The feelings of female beginning teachers were expressed in a study by Kooy (2006) who studied six female beginning teachers through their participation in book clubs. She reported the discussion at a meeting in which the teachers discussed the Kent Haruf novel, *Plainsong* in which two of the central characters are teachers. These female teachers thought that there were different rules for male teachers as they discussed the fictional male high school teacher and his rough physical handling of a difficult student in his classroom. They also thought there may be different rules for those teachers in small towns.

Gender and education is an area in which there is an abundance of research. However the area of gender and beginning teachers needs to be researched further. The issues of male elementary teachers and the differential treatment of male and female teachers are examples of areas in which further research is necessary. The gender differentiations of teachers is also an issue that has its roots in teacher education programs with male and female preservice teachers feeling and being treated differently. Male teachers in elementary schools also must deal with the perception of them as pedophiles and their feelings about working as care givers in a feminized profession.

### **Minority Teachers**

The research on beginning minority teachers is also sparse. Many minorities enter teaching through alternative teacher education programs (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). These programs are increasingly becoming the only vehicle by which minorities can enter the teaching profession. The small number of minorities on the faculties of schools

presents problems for minority preservice teachers and minority beginning teachers. This is problematic because Souto-Manning and Dice (2007) found that beginning teachers benefit from having other teachers of similar ethnic backgrounds on the faculty as well as students. Similarly, Carter (2003) speculated that beginning teachers may benefit from having mentors of the same racial and ethnic groups as their own to prevent a lack of cultural understanding. She feared that trust and acceptance between a beginning teacher and a mentor may not develop if there is a lack of cultural understanding between novice and experienced teachers. The only resolution to this problem is having a fair amount of minorities on faculties who have the experience to mentor beginning minority teachers and reduce attrition.

The primary problem of many minority teachers has been getting into the profession in the first place. While America's school children are becoming more diverse, the teaching force has remained primarily White and middle-class (Lewis, 2006). Frank (2003) reported that African-Americans are opting not to enter the teaching profession because of; (a) the lack of prestige associated with teaching, (b) attitudes about teaching, (c) financial concerns, (d) broadening career options for educated African-Americans, and (e) entrance requirements. Similarly, Lewis, (2006) found that African-American men do not enter or remain in teaching because of the low pay, social and cultural impediments, and obstacles such as teacher certification examinations. The poor passing rate by African-Americans on state certification and PRAXIS exams has placed the teacher education programs in many historically Black colleges and universities in jeopardy. Some states require an 80% passage rate for students graduating from teacher education program. If students routinely fail to meet the quota, state education

departments and national accrediting agencies may strip the programs of their accreditation (Lewis, 2006).

The poor passing rate of minorities occurred in conjunction with calls for higher standards for teachers. The call for higher standards in education has led many states to raise cut-off scores on certification exams. The exams, themselves have been called into question. Memory, Coleman, and Watkins (2003) studied the possible effects of raising cut-off scores on certification exams on the number of African-Americans attempting to enter teaching. The authors used the scores on the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) for a set of student teachers and used multiple regression analysis to measure their predicted effectiveness if their scores were one point higher on the test. All of the participants were evaluated in similar ways by university supervisors to measure their effectiveness. The authors then obtained a level of teacher effectiveness for each student teacher. The evaluation was based on 11 elements of teacher effectiveness. The 11 elements ranged from the teacher's ability to demonstrate knowledge of student learning to the teacher's ability to demonstrate professionalism. The authors computed z scores within the eight groups of student teachers so the ratings would be based on observations by the same university supervisor. A correlation was then possible between the scores on the PPST sections and the level of effectiveness of the student teacher. They then ran multiple regression using the test score on the PPST as the predictor variable and the level of effectiveness as the predicted outcome. Each student's PPST was altered to yield a predicted level of effectiveness.

They found through linear regression that increasing the score on the reading section by one point would correlate with an increase in teacher effectiveness by 0.01

standard deviation units. They also found that increasing the score on the writing portion would correlate with an increase in teacher effectiveness by 0.03 standard deviation units. They finally found that an increase in the math score by one point would correlate an increase in teacher effectiveness by 0.01 standard deviation units. The authors concluded that increasing the required scores on basic skills test would yield questionable benefits, at best. The authors concluded that an increase in the reading portion of the PPST by one point would eliminate approximately 5% of African American test takers from obtaining a license. A similar increase in the writing score would eliminate approximately 9% of African American test takers, and a one-point increase on the math portion would eliminate 4% of African American test takers. The significance of this study is that it demonstrated that increasing scores on certification exams does not increase teacher effectiveness. It merely assures that preservice teachers with higher standardized scores will be the only teachers in schools. This may seem advantageous on the surface, but Smith and Ingersoll (2004) reported a negative correlation between SAT scores of teacher candidates and the likelihood of teachers remaining in the profession. High scores, therefore, do not ensure that the most effective teachers will remain in the profession. Such factors should be taken into account in terms of the status of minorities in teaching. Frank (2003) and Lewis (2006) called for alternative measures for teachers to earn a certificate.

Lewis (2006) focused specifically on African-American male teachers who are “on the verge of extinction within the U.S.” (Lewis, 2006, p. 224) as they make up one percent of the entire K-12 teaching force. He wrote that African-American students benefit from African-American men who are strong disciplinarians and good role models.

There is also evidence of increased academic achievement among minority children taught by African-American males. Indeed all students benefit from having African-American male teachers because students learn that Black men fill other roles in society besides athletes, entertainers, or inmates. The author found that there are financial, educational, and social reasons that African-American men do not enter or remain in the profession. These categories encompass their own negative experiences while in K-12 school, a lack of encouragement, and a feeling that teaching requires too much education with very little returns. Incentives such as student loan forgiveness, signing bonuses, and relocation allowances have proved largely unsuccessful in recruiting these men into teaching.

Lewis (2006) also focused on the retention of African-American men who are already in the teaching profession. He reported that corporations routinely recruit talented African-American men into their businesses and out of teaching. The researcher found that most African-American men reported entering teaching through the encouragement of a family member, and they reported as their reasoning for choosing teaching as (a) helping young people, (b) needing a job, (c) contributions to humanity, and (d) the location of the job. Job location and contributions to humanity were among the reasons given by African-American men for remaining in the profession along with the job security associated with teaching. Lewis (2006) therefore recommended school divisions recruit from historically Black colleges and universities and stress the job security in teaching. He also recommended sending current Black educators to job fairs to recruit and offering higher salaries and better benefits.

Lewis (2006) also concluded that universities and teacher education programs need to make campus cultures more welcoming for African-Americans. A number of studies have examined the environments in which many minority students find themselves in teacher education programs (Frank, 2003; Hoodless, 2004; Valenciana, Weisman, & Flores, 2006). Frank (2003) studied the experiences of African-American women in an American teacher education program, while Hoodless (2006) examined the experiences of minorities in England who were enrolled in the year-long Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course. In a comparable study, Valenciana, et. al. (2006) reported on the experiences of Latina paraprofessionals who attempted to become fully licensed teachers in California. All three of these studies chronicled the obstacles faced by special populations of teachers in teacher education programs, and they all documented the need for more cultural understanding on campuses and in schools during field experiences.

The seven African-American women in the Frank (2003) study all said that they chose to attend a predominantly White institution because important people in their lives encouraged them to do so. However, they had less positive experiences than their White counterparts within the same program. They reported that they felt as if they were often representatives for the entire race in some of their classes, yet they also felt like White students thought they were exceptions to most African-Americans because they were in college. The participants said they often found themselves having to explain the actions of all African-Americans. However, sometimes they felt that their contributions to classroom conversations were ignored completely. They reported that these kinds of conversations often occurred in classes with White professors saying nothing which led

the participants to question how much White faculty members really valued and respected diversity.

Hoodless (2004) also wanted to examine the diversity efforts in the ITT course in England. The author compared the experiences of White and minority candidates in the course. The researcher found that the course admitted an increasing number of minority students but not enough to keep up with the diversity of students in the public schools. There was also a high number of withdraws of minority students in the ITT course. The course requires placements in schools for field experience, and the participants reported issues of racism there as well. They discussed support in the university and schools, school placements, and relationships with colleagues and faculty. Asian students reported a lack of cultural awareness. This was especially true of Muslim students who did not feel comfortable discussing issues with White faculty and counselors. There were no minority faculty members to serve as mentors for these students.

They also said that school staff and parents did not view them as teachers. The comments and actions of parents and staff undermined the confidence of some of the minority teachers. However, Basit and McNamara (2004) reported on some minority teachers in England who felt that they benefitted from their minority status. Some reported that head teachers (principals) genuinely wanted to increase diversity among the schools' faculties and actively sought minority teachers. Additionally, some school children were impressed by the novelty aspect of minority teachers (Hoodless, 2004).

Basit and McNamara (2004) questioned the efforts of some principals to create equal opportunities. He said that in some cases, equal opportunity can actually reinforce prejudicial practices. He reported on some British minority teachers who felt that the

search for a job was a problem because they perceived that their ethnic names or their accents prevented them from being called to interview for jobs. Some participants were even given negative marks during observations for their failure to pronounce English words correctly due to their accents. They all saw White students with comparable qualifications get jobs before they did.

Principals in California have also sought ways to increase the number of Latino teachers to serve an ever-increasing number of Latino students. A rich source of potential Latina teachers lay in the high number of paraprofessionals in schools who work as teachers' aides. These women lived in the same communities as the Latino students and possessed "funds of knowledge" about the students' language and culture. Valenciana, et. al. (2006) reported on a group of Latina teachers as they attempted to become fully certified teachers. Many of these teacher candidates were first generation college students and did not have older relatives to advise them about navigating their way through college. Their own school experiences did not give them confidence about attending college. There were also language and cultural differences. Other issues for them were financial aid and finding sources of support. These teachers were older with families and could not afford to attend college without financial aid. They also had difficulty with the semester-long student teaching requirement of most teacher education programs.

The participants did report receiving support from their families and communities. Family members even provided financial support. The participants were also supported and encouraged by the in-service teachers for whom they worked as paraprofessionals. They also felt that they were able to help future generations of Latino students who wanted to attend college because their experiences provided them with cultural capital.

They wanted to prevent future Latino students from experiencing the same kinds of struggles that they experienced.

All three of these studies pointed to the lack of cultural understanding within teacher training programs. In many instances, higher education actually perpetuated inequality (Valenciana, 2006). Franked (2003) concluded that White faculty members needed to question their commitment to diversity and reflect on their racial consciousness. She said that the advantages afforded to White people are often not apparent to them but are very apparent to racial minorities. Whites are often, therefore, not aware of institutionalized racism. Similarly, Hoodless (2004) stated that the ITT course in England needed to go further to address the needs of minorities in the course. Finally, Valenciana, et. al. (2006) found that existing university structures hindered the progress of Latina paraprofessionals as they attempted to become teachers. The student teaching requirements, lack of university support, and financial burdens were all obstacles for the paraprofessionals. They advocated that school districts and universities collaborate to provide flexible work schedules for the paraprofessionals and that programs increase the amount of financial support. They finally suggested that teacher education programs involve families in orientations and social activities since the participants felt so supported by their families.

Frank (2003) questioned if teacher education programs in predominantly White institutions can affectively train African-American preservice teachers to teach African-American children. Dilpitt (1995) reported on the experiences of new African-American teacher who viewed her teacher training as a “joke.” This view has been expressed by minority teachers throughout the world. Cunningham (2006) examined the experiences of

new African-Caribbean teachers in England. Their views called into question the legitimacy of England's National Curriculum. The African-Caribbean teachers felt that minority students were having to learn a curriculum designed by White government officials for White teachers to deliver to White children. The author said that minority children are capable of learning difficult concepts. They simply learn in different ways. Many of the African-Caribbean teachers adapted the curriculum to better meet the needs of their students. These teachers also felt that they were better able to understand the cultural obstacles of minority children better than White teachers, and that they were better mentors of students of color.

In summary, the problems of beginning minority teachers begin before they ever enter their classrooms as teachers. Some of their problems developed when they were students in school and continued during their teacher training. Despite the efforts of teacher education programs to value and respect diversity, many minority students continued to report feeling alienated in these programs. Delpit (1995) reported that White university faculty members would benefit from allowing the voices of minority students to be heard in their classrooms. As White people listen to the stories of minority students, they can develop sensitivity to the plight of children of color and university faculty will help to make inroads in diminishing persistent racial prejudice.

### **Career Switchers**

Another special population of teachers is career switchers. Many career switchers who transition into teaching bring with them prior work experiences in which they have already demonstrated competence, responsibility, and success. They bring to teaching a strong sense of mission and agency, along with maturity and professionalism. However,

having these prior experiences does not automatically make the transition to teaching easy. They still need to be taught pedagogical skills that will enable them to adapt their prior skills to the classroom (Mayotte, 2003).

Career switchers may enter teaching either through a university-based master's degree program or an alternative-teacher preparation program. Alternative programs are defined as those programs that allow persons with at least a bachelor's degree a shortcut or special eligibility leading to a standard certification. These programs have primarily attracted career switchers as well as minorities and retired military officers (Zeichner and Schulte, 2001). The severe shortage of teachers in particular subject areas has fostered the need for alternative programs which use peace corps-like recruitment strategies and put professionals on a "fast-track" to certification (Easley, 2006; Quartz & TEP, 2003).

Through alternative programs, attempts have been made to attract teachers in critical shortage areas such as mathematics, science, special education, and bilingual education. The programs also attempt to fill positions in urban schools that are the schools in the greatest need of fully licensed teachers (Zeichner and Schulte, 2001). Critics of these programs have pointed out that the programs are misguided since they do nothing to reduce teacher attrition nor do they offer solutions to the problem of out-of-field teaching which is common in many secondary schools (Ingersoll, 1997).

Mayotte (2003) investigated whether or not career switchers from alternative teacher preparation programs and other programs recognized the competencies they developed in previous careers as transferring into teaching. She also wanted to know what support structures were in place for career switchers during their first year of teaching and whether or not these structures were adequate in meeting their needs. She

found that the participants did in fact recognize the skills from their previous careers, and those skills transferred to teaching.

In a related study, Easley (2006) also studied the factors that directly affect the decisions of alternatively-trained teachers to remain in or to leave urban schools. He focused specifically on New York City's Alternative Route Certification (ARC) program that began in 2000 to fill vacancies in New York's lowest performing schools. These schools are primarily populated by minority and English language learning students. Nearly one-third of all of the graduates of the program are placed in The Bronx.

The participants in Mayotte's (2003) study made efforts to make a connection between their work cultures and personal visions. Two of the participants decided to teach as a means to happiness and personal fulfillment. The other two decided to teach because of the social relevance and responsibility involved in teaching. One of the participants who chose to pursue teaching for happiness stated that she attempted to foster happiness in her students. She also used technology skills from her previous job in her teaching. Previous life experiences were very valuable to these new teachers and they connected their work and non-work identities. They all saw their previous careers as positive aspects of their teaching.

Easley (2006) also found that career switchers viewed their previous careers as assets to their teaching careers. Many saw their former careers and life experiences as preparing them to teach in hard-to-fill areas such as math and science. These candidates were also more willing to teach in urban schools. The researcher found that, at the end of their program, most (77%) of the graduates of ARC planned to remain in teaching. The benefits of working with children was the most cited reason for wanting to remain in

teaching. Many of these teachers entered teaching because of the moral ideals they had about teaching before switching their careers. The author stated that these reasons for entering teaching are more grounded in well-formed judgments than those of younger teachers who graduate from traditional programs. Through a survey, the author found no significant difference between the moral importance of education which attracted them to the profession in the first place and the environmental fulfillment which they gained from education causing them to remain in the profession. Easley (2006) concluded that education leaders need to focus on the moral importance of education when taking actions to attract and retain career switchers to teaching.

The previous work experiences of these teachers have made them preferred beginning teachers by many principals. These teachers with different sets of skills and knowledge reacted to teaching situations in different ways than younger beginning teachers (Good & Brophy, 2003). The participants in the Mayotte (2003) study acknowledged the abilities and skills they learned in their first careers and applied these skills to their teaching. They noted skills such as behavior management, interpersonal skills, typing, and finding the subtext in literature as skills that were helpful to them. They also cited their technical knowledge, business knowledge, and historical and journalistic knowledge as benefits. They also mentioned their communication skills, problem-solving skills, and their ability to multi-task. Writing skills, patience, and professionalism were also among the competencies they brought with them. Mayotte (2003) called for further research on the specific needs of older career switchers. She also advocated research on the needs of male career switchers, since there were none in her sample. The author finally advocated learning communities for career switchers to

reinforce the qualities of a “boundless career,” which she defined as a theory that certain work experiences go beyond the boundaries of a single employment situation.

In summary, career switchers bring with them to teaching many “boundless career” skills, professionalism, and maturity that is not as common with younger teachers fresh from teacher preparation programs. This, however, does not mean that teaching comes naturally to career switchers. There is still a need for proper guidance and mentoring as they begin their new careers. Various alternative teacher preparation programs, such as New York’s ARC, have attempted to train and attract career switchers to low-performing schools populated by minority and low-income children. These programs have demonstrated success in the retention of these teachers to low-performing schools, and some principals actually prefer alternatively-trained teachers. Career switchers also viewed the skills they acquired during their previous careers as benefiting them as they enter teaching.

### **Support for Beginning Teachers**

There has been an abundance of research on methods to help teachers with the problems they face. The support provided to teachers will increase the retention rate of both novice and experienced teachers. Stockard and Lehman (2004) found that first-year teachers who were most satisfied in their positions and most likely to remain in the field were supported by parents and the school’s administration. The participants most likely to remain in teaching also indicated that they had effective principals, which underscores that impact of effective school management on increasing the job satisfaction for beginning teachers.

Social support is so important for teachers in other countries that the governments of those countries have been requested to take action. Barmby (2006) concluded from his study on teacher retention in England that the government and educational leaders needed to address the issues of teachers' workloads and student behavior. The British government has implemented curriculum reform in England, but many teachers view this as a loss of autonomy although they all saw the need for curriculum reform to benefit their students (Webb, et. al., 2004). The government of Finland has also attempted to provide support for teachers with a program that will promote continual professional development for teachers. As was the case for teachers in England, the Finish teachers feared that they may lose their autonomy in their classrooms. Teacher autonomy has been one of the factors that has promoted teacher retention in Finland (Webb, et. al., 2004).

Some school divisions in the United States have attempted many programs to support teachers as well, however most of these programs are geared toward teachers in the beginning stages of their careers. The most natural method of support for beginning teachers deals with equipping preservice teachers with coping strategies while they are still in teacher preparation programs (The Holmes Group, 1986). While university faculty cannot possibly predict and prepare preservice teachers for all of the potential problems of beginning teachers, they are able to provide preservice teachers with ideas for decreasing some of the pressure placed on them during their beginning years (Veenman, 1984).

## **Teacher Preparation**

Universities have recognized the problems of beginning teachers and have made attempts to offset some of these problems by implementing programs and activities during teacher training before they ever enter the field. Some university researchers have attempted to equip preservice teachers with planning and peer observational skills that have the potential to prevent certain problems from ever occurring. Lalik and Niles (1990) conducted a quasi-experiment with two groups of preservice teachers by having them collaboratively plan a reading lesson from a basal reader. They were interested in examining what would be produced while planning together, as well as the process goals and the functional thinking levels of the two groups. The authors concluded that group planning evoked thinking about reading and reading instruction. It engaged student teachers in problem solving and decision making about the planning process. The student teachers worked together to create a shared understanding of the learning concept. Both groups made sense of a cause and effect reading worksheet by discussing the objectives, reflecting on possible answers, and weighing alternatives.

Darling-Hammond (1994) has written about the benefits of peer collaboration and teaming during the preservice years for student teachers. She argues that collaborative teaching and planning helps preservice teachers move beyond their primary feelings of being supported by colleagues to personal reflection, which allows them to adopt their own learning orientation and helps them to establish their own professional identities. The collaborative efforts of preservice teachers may also include peer observations. Anderson, Barksdale, and Hite, (2005) hypothesized that peer observations in a situation

where the preservice teachers had frequent opportunities to teach and observe peers teach might increase reflection and provide more frequent feedback to improve instruction.

The authors found three major themes and three minor themes. The major themes were classroom discipline and management, pedagogy, and being a general positive influence. The three minor themes were self-reflection/action, questioning strategies, and observations about pupils. The participants made notes about what seemed to work well when providing positive feedback, classroom circulation, complete awareness of the class, gaining the attentions of off-task students, behavior management, using wait time, engaging pupils, and carefully monitoring students. The authors concluded that the preservice teachers were demonstrating thinking that reflected their concerns for their own survival in the classroom or concerns for how they teach.

In addition to specific types of collaboration methods, there are also a number of structural changes that universities can make in their teacher preparation programs to better prepare preservice teachers. The Holmes Group (1986) made two recommendations for outstanding teacher education programs. They argued for more cohesion in the courses within teacher education programs. They also advocate that teachers be trained in advanced pedagogical studies, recommending these characteristics for both elementary and secondary preservice teachers. The Holmes Group (1986) has stated that teachers should not be permitted to teach any subject of which they lack a deep understanding.

Many universities have already taken the step of eliminating undergraduate teacher education programs. However, the Holmes Group (1986) went on to argue that universities need to sharply strengthen undergraduate curricula to provide future teachers

with a strong foundation in the content areas. They further called for a more sequential structure of the required courses as opposed to taking a series of disjointed and fragmented courses. In addition, the recommendation was made that cohort programs may support advanced studies in pedagogy. Some institutions have attempted this through the implementation of a “Fifth Year” program.

One of the first such programs began in New Hampshire (Andrew, 1981). The University of New Hampshire established a five-year teacher education program in 1974. The objectives of the program were to develop cooperative relationships between practitioners in the field and university teacher educators, to equip teachers with effective personal teaching styles, and to prepare teachers to become leaders in their schools and classrooms. The program existed in three phases and emphasized a strong liberal arts undergraduate background. Phase One of the program consisted of undergraduates working in the schools as instructional assistants and engaging in at least 65 instructional activities. The second phase of the program began during the students’ junior year in which they were required to complete four credits each in specific areas. The final phase of the program occurred during the fifth year of the program and consisted of a year-long internship in a school setting and additional graduate courses in students’ subject areas.

The strengths of the program were early classroom experiences, thoughtful career planning, program flexibility, small classes, a broad liberal arts education, advanced specialization in education courses, and a year-long internship. Another strength was the commitment of these preservice teachers to education. The challenges for the program came from the teacher educators themselves. Faculty members resisted flexibility and individualized programs for the students. They also did not favor classroom experiences

as a learning vehicle and favored traditional university-based courses. Their thinking was contrary to the research finding that university faculty are actually able to identify more with the plight of teachers when they conduct research and teach courses in school settings (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). Another challenge was the high cost of running a five-year program. The university finally feared that the personal expense to students paying for a fifth year of college would exclude certain candidates on the basis of economic status (Andrew, 1981).

The challenges faced by this fifth-year program raised the question of exactly how much universities can do to prepare preservice teachers for their first difficult years. Teacher training has been cited several times as a factor explaining some problems of beginning teachers. Researchers continue to cite the age-old debate between theory and practice as a limitation to how much universities are able to accomplish. There is also limited teaching experience for preservice teachers while still in preparation programs. The criticism of teacher training centers around the theory-laden atmosphere of universities, but Veenman (1984) argues that this criticism is unfair because theories serve a critical and reflective function and provide little guidance for direct actions in the classroom. Teacher education cannot anticipate all of the problems that beginning teachers will encounter. It may also be dangerous to center teacher preparation programs around problems reported by beginning teachers. Nieto (2003) argues that teacher education should shift their focus away from simply “what” to do and “how” to do things in the classroom and also focus on “why” teachers do certain things in the classroom. Teacher education should be broader than the issues that may directly apply to classroom practice (Veenman, 1984).

## **Teachers as Researchers**

There is evidence that beginning teachers can solve some of their problems by conducting research in their classrooms on their actions and reflecting on their pedagogical practices. Teachers must constantly reflect on their practices throughout their careers (Wildman & Niles, 1987). There are two particularly relevant studies concerning teacher action research. Breidenstein (2002) studied the possibility of beginning teachers using the same methods used by qualitative researchers to examine their practices. Conducting qualitative research during teacher training can lead teachers to understand the qualitative aspects of teaching and develop a stance toward teaching that would help them understand their profession. The author proposed having preservice teachers write educational biographies during their teacher preparation programs. She stated that teachers very seldom admit to uncertainty about teaching, since it may appear to others that they are not confident or competent as teachers.

Breidenstein (2002) analyzed the reflections of twenty-three secondary education preservice teachers over the course of two years. These preservice teachers applied what they learned about qualitative research to their teaching. They reported gaining insight about themselves as researchers and teachers on political, moral, and personal levels. The author concluded that teaching, like qualitative research, is emergent, ambiguous and socially constructed. The stance of a qualitative researcher and a reflective inquiring teacher are very similar. Preservice teachers can therefore learn to develop the stance of reflective inquiring teachers by first developing the stance of a qualitative researcher.

Teacher action research is another avenue by which teachers can conduct research on themselves and reflect on their practices. Ginns, Heirdsfield, Atweh, and Watters

(2001) studied groups of teachers in Australia who formed learning communities and conducted action research on issues in their schools that were important to them. The authors sought to use action research to aid these teachers in transitioning from students to teachers. The practices of reflectivity, inquiry, and developing a disposition may be difficult for beginning teachers as they face school structures. The authors advocated action research for beginning teachers that extends beyond the school in which they are placed. The teachers should be encouraged to share their action research with other teachers in different schools, and this will lead them to examine their own knowledge, skills, and values.

The teachers were initially confused about the research process, but these feelings tapered off during the latter stages of the research when the teachers began taking more control over the research process. The teachers changed their views of the university researchers as the authority figures, but they never gained a full understanding of participatory action research. All of the participants worked collaboratively to improve their teaching as a group, thus ensuring that the research was collaborative. The participants were interested in the generation of knowledge and sustaining the professional growth of beginning teachers. These participants also had a goal of strengthening teacher education at the university from which they graduated. These two studies indicated that beginning teachers who are able to examine and reflect upon their own classroom practices experience professional growth during the process.

### **Mentors**

Many states and school divisions have sought to provide assistance to beginning teachers by providing them with mentors through beginning teacher induction programs.

McCord and Bowden (2003) defined mentoring as, “the practice of pairing an experienced individual (mentor) with a less-experienced person (mentee or protégé). The anticipated outcome is that the protégé will increase in skills and knowledge as a result of the relationship with a mentor.” (McCord & Bowden, 2003, p. 44) Mentoring is now the staple of almost all induction programs. In Smith’s and Ingersoll’s (2004) study, they found that only three percent of beginning teachers reported having no mentor or not being involved in any kind of induction program. This condition was, for the most part, only common in small rural schools or small private schools (Flores, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Teachers who have reported high levels of job satisfaction are typically those who were involved in some sort of mentoring program during their initial years of teaching (Stockard & Lehman, 2004). Beginning teachers have reported that mentors were an important part of their induction program (Brock & Grady, 1998). Mentoring is most productive when mentors and beginning teachers share the same planning time and have opportunities to collaborate (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

The commonalities between mentors and protégées can be a crucial component of any mentoring induction program. Owen and Solomon (2006) studied the effects of interpersonal similarities between interns and cooperating teachers on the outcomes of mentoring programs. They hypothesized that people feel validated when surrounded with other people holding similar attitudes and opinions. They also hypothesized that people find others desirable when others share similar attitudes. The investigators surveyed student teachers in New York City and their corresponding cooperating teachers to gauge their level of interpersonal similarities and the level of satisfaction with the process of the student teachers.

The authors found that student teachers who were matched with someone who shared similar outside interests, teaching styles, and personality types were significantly more satisfied with the mentoring program and more likely to continue teaching in New York City public schools. The authors concluded that pairing mentors and interns on interpersonal variables could increase the retention of teachers over periods of time. The authors conceded that matching mentors with beginners on personal variables may be a difficult task for program designers to accomplish, but the effects are beneficial when the personal variables do correlate. The authors finally advocated that beginning teachers actively seek experienced teachers with similar teaching philosophies and personality characteristics, and principals and educational leaders should match mentors with protégées based on similarities (Owen & Solomon, 2006).

No matter how similar mentoring pairs are, mentoring is not as effective when pairs do not have time to plan together or meet (Wildman, et. al., 1989). Mentoring is only effective when mentors realize that the needs of beginning teachers differ from their own needs and the pairs have ample time to meet and reflect upon dilemmas and issues of concern. The most effective mentors provided help and feedback while allowing beginning teachers to construct their own self-improvement plans (Good & Brophy, 2003).

Problems may arise when mentors are improperly selected to mentor beginning teachers. Indeed, not all effective teachers can become effective mentors. Beginning teachers have also reported that assistance from mentors should not only be based on their questions, but mentors should automatically include issues related to academic content and issues that beginning teachers may not anticipate (Brock & Grady, 1998).

Mentors must also be trained to develop sensitivity to the varying needs of beginning teachers. Mayotte (2003), for example, found that career switchers have different needs from beginning teachers who are in their first careers. The mentors about whom she reported assumed that, because the beginning teachers were older, they were already acclimated to the workforce. Some mentors and cooperating teachers could not understand how experienced professionals could have such limited knowledge of teaching. There is also an issue as to whether race and gender should be considered when pairing a beginning teacher with a mentor. Some researchers feel that this should be a consideration, but it only occurs in certain instances (Carter, 2003).

Mentors can have a great impact on the careers of beginning teachers. Achinstein and Barrett (2004) found that mentors have the ability to help beginning teachers reframe issues related to classroom management. Reframing is the process of viewing classroom situations through a different frame or perspective. Reframing allows the teacher to view a problematic situation from multiple perspectives. The authors examined three frames used by teachers to analyze problems in their classrooms. They examined the managerial frame, the human relations frame, and the political frame. The managerial frame places the teacher in the dominant role of authority, while the human relations frame implies a community with strong teacher and student relationships. Finally, the political frame views the classroom as a democratic society with the teacher as a facilitator.

The authors concluded that beginning teachers face students that often do not meet their expectations, so they attempt to resolve situations by becoming increasingly authoritative and planning instruction around behavior management. Mentors in this study intervened and introduced beginning teachers to multiple frames from which to

view and solve situations in their classrooms. Beginning teachers need to be introduced to multiple frames to reframe situations as a way to understand the complexities of their classrooms and identify their own hidden values (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004).

Mentor programs have been shown to hold as much benefit for the mentor as they do for the beginning teacher. Margolis (2008) found that talented teachers within their fourth to sixth year of teaching were in critical danger of leaving the profession. These were teachers who have adjusted to their positions and the school culture. In the absence of new challenges or the prospect of professional growth, these teachers faced boredom, routine, stress, and frustration. Yet, these were also teachers who felt mastery of their craft and were comfortable with it. The author examined how teachers in their fourth to sixth year of teaching were reinvigorated by becoming mentors to preservice teachers.

He found that teachers at this stage were looking for different opportunities. Two of the three male teachers in this qualitative study were seeking administrative roles in schools and saw mentoring as the natural step to becoming a school administrator. The women in the study wanted to be a source of support and comfort for preservice teachers. They all expressed satisfaction in helping a new teacher grow, however one older male teacher felt that taking a student teacher hindered his relationships and interactions with his students. Overall, they said they felt rejuvenated by mentoring a preservice teacher, and the experience reminded them of why they became teachers (Margolis, 2008).

In summary, mentors can be very helpful to beginning teachers. Mentors can help beginning teachers to reframe classroom situations and reflect on their practices. The most effective mentors allow beginners to develop their own professional identities while offering support and feedback. Mentors must also be aware that different beginners have

different needs, and those needs will differ from the needs of experienced teachers. It has been argued that mentors should be available for any teacher, regardless of seniority, who needs collegial support (Hale, 2005). Hale (2005) even argues that beginning teachers form mentoring pairs with other beginners to create a peer system of support. The selection of mentors is also an important issue for principals or directors of induction programs. School administrators need to consider a number of variables when forming mentoring pairs.

### **Specific Induction Programs**

Many states have responded to the needs of beginning teachers through the creation of mentoring and induction programs. Induction programs can range from an individual school's own program to a state-mandated program complete with funding. The terms "mentoring" and "induction" are quite often used interchangeably (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Induction programs vary in terms of their structure, requirements, degree of participation, and length. States such as North Carolina, Wisconsin, California, and Virginia have all instituted programs to assist beginning teachers. Some defunct programs have been replaced with division-wide programs or programs sponsored by universities.

#### **North Carolina's Teacher Induction Program (TIP)**

In 1986 the University of North Carolina at Charlotte instituted a low-inference observational program in response to North Carolina's then-new law mandating a two-year probationary period for beginning teachers throughout the state. This law sought to ensure that all beginning teachers could instruct students and manage a class at satisfactory levels. The program was simply called the Teacher Induction Program (TIP),

and it was based on the theory that beginning teachers were most likely to change their behaviors when they were provided with clear theories, demonstrations, opportunities to practice new methods with feedback from trained professionals (Schaffer, et. al., 1992).

Schaffer et. al. (1992) sought to explore the extent to which participants' behavior changed during the TIP process as well as when specific behavioral changes occurred. Further, the researchers wanted to investigate the similarities and differences between the changes of the TIP participants and the behavioral changes of teachers in less intensive programs. The sample included 19 beginning teachers from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Low-inference observational data were collected from the teachers during their first year of teaching. The researchers then chose nine of the original 19 teachers from whom to collect more observational data during the second year. A comparison group of twelve experienced teachers were selected to provide a comparison of behaviors.

Trained observers collected observational data on the 19 teachers during their first year of teaching. The twelve experienced teachers were observed during the same time. The nine TIP teachers selected for follow-up during the second year were observed during their second year of teaching. The researchers chose the Stallings Observational System to observe the participants. For this study, the authors choose to focus on three variables: (a) academic statements, (b) organizational statements, and (c) behavioral-related statements.

The researchers examined the changes in TIP participants' behavioral patterns over time. Repeated analyses of variance were conducted on the variables. The second analysis was made by comparing the TIP teachers to the experienced teachers. The

authors analyzed the case studies based on the qualitative data collected from the interviews with TIP teachers and their journal entries. The authors present two case studies in their report.

The authors concluded that the TIP program had a positive impact on the beginning teachers. The research findings indicated that beginning teachers require time to develop appropriate behaviors that will enhance student learning. This is true even when beginning teachers are provided with extensive levels of support and feedback. With active support, a full year of experience, and structured opportunities for reflection, the beginning teachers acquired more sophisticated instructional techniques during their second year of teaching.

### **The University of Wisconsin at Whitewater's Beginning Teacher Assistance Program (BTAP)**

The University of Wisconsin at Whitewater has sponsored the Beginning Teacher Assistance Program since 1974 and has invited school divisions to participate voluntarily. Mentoring for beginning teachers was mandated for Wisconsin as of July of 2004. The new law required all beginning teachers with an Initial Educator license to work with a qualified mentor. The University of Wisconsin Whitewater's BTAP consisted of graduated credit for mentors and beginning teachers, required mentor training, and monthly meetings for all participants (Ganser, 2000).

Ganser (2000) surveyed 72 beginning teachers and 82 mentors who participated in Wisconsin's BTAP between 1988 and 1999. He found that both mentors and beginning teachers rated the graduate credits earned through participation in the program as the highest component of the program, although this was rated considerably higher by the

beginning teachers. The combined populations of the sample rated the visits to the schools by directors from the university as the least valuable component of the program. As a group, the respondents rated participation in BTAP higher than other forms of professional development. Beginning teachers rated BTAP higher compared to workshops sponsored by the schools or school divisions. The author concluded that BTAP offered a solution to small school divisions that may not have enough beginning teachers or the wherewithal to maintain their own structured programs by providing the state-mandated mentors for beginning teachers. The author also concluded that the overarching challenge for mentoring programs was the provision of adequate time for mentors and beginning teachers to meet. Communication between the mentor and beginning teacher is the most essential component of any mentoring program. Mentoring does not exist without this communication.

### **The California New Teacher Project (CNTP)**

Bartell (1995) reported on the findings of teacher induction research in California and a pilot study through the California New Teacher Project (CNTP). The California legislature created CNTP in 1988 as a pilot program to support and assess beginning teachers. The program's goal was to create a state-wide strategy for the professional induction of beginning teachers. It was also intended to retain capable teachers, improve the abilities of beginning teachers, improve teaching for diverse students, and identify incompetent teachers for guidance out of the profession. The program consisted of 37 spin-off programs that were state-funded and established through county offices of education, universities, or teacher associations. The program coordinators defined certain performance outcomes to be measured for beginning teachers and provided information

to the local programs for the services that the local programs might provide to beginning teachers.

The research on CNTP revealed that well-developed induction programs could increase the retention of new teachers and greatly improve the performance of those teachers who are retained. The beginning teachers involved in the induction programs used challenging and complex instructional activities that improved student achievement. Beginning teachers also engaged in long-range planning and engaged diverse groups of students in motivational activities by giving them the same kinds of assignments that they gave to homogenous groups of students. Many of the most successful programs involved mentoring and provided time for the mentoring pairs to collaborate. These programs also provided instructional groups for teachers and follow-up assessments from experienced teachers. This program proved to be widely successful.

### **Virginia's Beginning Teacher Assistance Program**

The Beginning Teacher Assistance Program (BTAP) began in the Commonwealth of Virginia through the University of Virginia in 1985. The program was designed to provide a two-year provisional license to beginning teachers during which time they were expected to demonstrate satisfactory classroom competence and effective teaching. BTAP had two goals: (a) to assure that every teacher awarded a permanent teaching certificate possessed specific teaching competencies and (b) to assist beginning teachers in the development of these competencies (McNergney, et. al., 1988). The program identified 14 competencies that all beginning teachers were required to demonstrate in order to be certified in Virginia. As White (1987) reported, the competencies were:

- planning
- reinforcement
- consistent rules
- academic learning time
- accountability
- close supervision
- awareness
- questioning skills
- clarity of structure
- meaningfulness
- individual differences
- learner self-concept
- affective climate
- evaluation

During the provisional period, all beginning teachers were required to demonstrate that they possessed the 14 competencies. Upon successfully demonstrating the competencies, beginning teachers were recommended for a regular, five-year certificate. Teachers who did not meet the requirements would be provided with assistance and reassessed. Each beginning teacher had three opportunities for assessment. Teachers who failed to meet the requirements after three assessments would not be recommended for a permanent teaching certificate (McNergney, et. al., 1988).

White (1987) surveyed Virginia superintendents, elementary and secondary principals, beginning elementary and secondary teachers, and observers of BTAP about their understandings and feelings about BTAP and its 14 competencies. The survey revealed that roughly 88% of the respondents indicated that they understood the BTAP process. Only about 5% of the respondents said they did not understand the competencies that were assessed by the process. Nearly 6.3% of the respondents said they did not

understand the process at all. The largest population that did not understand the process was at the elementary level. The participants saw several strengths with the program. The strengths included the standardization of the program, its objectivity, and the process of being observed by three different observers. Other strengths were the fact that the process occurred before certification, the assistance provided to teachers, the accounts given to teachers of their performance, and the program's relevance to all instructional areas. The participants also saw the program as worthwhile. There were also several weaknesses identified, including unqualified observers, a lack of communication with teachers, and possible inconsistencies in observations due to human error. Other weaknesses were identified to be an inadequate number observations, abnormal observations, the timing of the observations, and lack of quick feedback to teachers. A final weakness was a lack of communication with the observers.

BTAP was also criticized for its nearly complete focus on pedagogy with very little emphasis on content knowledge. Other critics of the program raised issues of minimal competency levels. They argued that teachers should not be satisfied with achieving minimal competence, and it should not be acceptable to the self-efficacy of teachers. Teachers should also strive for creativity and continued professional development. BTAP and other programs like it were threatened by a shortage in the supply of teachers. Some schools had difficulty filling positions in mathematics and science during the BTAP years (McNergney, et. al., 1988). The Virginia General Assembly rescinded BTAP in 1991 (Carter, 2003).

### **Other Virginia Induction Programs**

Upon the rescinding of BTAP, the Virginia General Assembly gave school divisions the opportunity to apply for grants to support beginning teachers in their own divisions. The legislature passed the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999 which required school divisions to provide mentors for probationary teachers. The Newport News School Division had already adopted such a program in 1991 when BTAP was rescinded. The school division partnered with Christopher Newport University and Hampton University in 1995 to enhance the program's goals and objectives, and it became a site-based program (Carter, 2003).

Carter (2003) sought to determine the perceptions of how well the mentoring program met the needs of beginning teachers, mentor teachers, and the school division. The program is based within individual schools and includes a special component for beginning minority male teachers. Each school principal appointed a mentor program coordinator who developed activities and training sessions for mentors and beginning teachers. Minority males were involved in a parallel program especially designed for them which consisted of monthly meetings with minority male community leaders or minority male administrators who were not necessarily teachers.

The beginning teachers reported that the mentoring program only had a modest level of effectiveness. All administrators perceived the program as effective, although they only saw it as modestly effective. There was no difference in the perceptions of the program by persons for whom teaching was the first career and those who were career switchers. The findings also revealed that male beginning teachers perceived the program

as more effective than females. There was also a positive correlation between the number of years that administrators served in their current roles and their perceptions of the program. Middle school administrators rated the program higher than elementary or high school principals. It was also discovered that mentor teachers with fewer years of experience rated the program higher than those with more experience. Of the three populations, administrators rated the program highest. The author concluded that the program was only modestly effective in meeting the needs of beginning teachers and mentors, and that the program did meet the needs of the school division. She finally recommended that future research focus on a comparison of programs in different school divisions. She also recommended a study be conducted on the perceptions of teachers who were inducted under the program and have reached tenure status.

There were also other induction programs that were developed in the wake of BTAP's resending. Stallings (1998) took the initiative to create an induction program for her Virginia school division of Montgomery County. She chose to study her school division since it had no formal program to assist beginning teachers. Administrators saw no apparent reason for the implementation of such a program. The mentoring of beginning teachers was the sole responsibility of individual schools, which created an uneven socialization process for many beginning teachers. Mentoring was also seen as a low priority. The author sought to develop and implement a support community for beginning teachers in Montgomery County. The author used a case study to explore the features of the planning and implementation of a community building process. She divided the case study into two phases which were first, planning and development of the program and secondly, establishing conditions for the program and its delivery. Phase

two consisted of four beginning teacher meetings and two mentor teacher meetings at various points during the first year. Data were collected through observation, interrogation, and documentation of oral data collection. The author finally used an open-ended questionnaire to help determine project goals and to determine what role beginning teachers and mentors saw for themselves in building community.

Stallings (1998) concluded that central office personnel and administrators needed to demonstrate support for beginning teachers. The program goals should have also been developed with central office personnel. The support staff, principals, and mentors needed to be trained in the program and assigned specific responsibilities. Principals also needed to have information about how to choose mentors for beginning teachers. She also concluded that she would need time to talk to administrators in various school divisions if the program were to expand to other divisions. She stated that she would advocate for a program manager. She also called for collaboration between public schools and universities. Tangible benefits were also important for mentor teachers. There also needed to be careful monitoring and evaluation of the program to plan outcomes and to provide program oversight. She finally called for the recognition of different needs. This is primarily to benefit the different needs of elementary and secondary teachers.

In summary, many states and school divisions see the need for formal induction programs for beginning teachers, however there is some dissention as to how and at what level these programs should be administered. Some states have mandated state-wide programs for teachers while other states leave such programs up to the school divisions or the schools themselves to decide the management of these programs. Nearly all of the programs involve some form of mentoring, but not all of the beginning teachers were

satisfied with the results of the mentoring or clearly understood the process. Overall, induction programs have been beneficial in retaining teachers throughout their initial years of teaching.

### **The Retention of Teachers**

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the teacher shortage in the United States is critical, and current projections indicate that the problem will only worsen over the next few years (Nieto, 2003). While the facts remain that most teachers in the field are qualified and new qualified teachers enter the field every year, there does exist a continuous exodus of classroom teachers annually (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) compared the problem to a bucket of water with several holes out of which water leaks. Rather than “patch the holes,” officials simply pour new water into the bucket. Administrators continue to recruit teacher candidates from foreign countries, and offer incentives such as signing bonuses and student-loan forgiveness. These methods are simply refilling the bucket. The shortage is due to the high attrition rate of teachers rather than a lack of people entering the profession. The retention of teachers has been identified by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future report as a “national crisis” (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). The United States is not alone with its problem of teacher retention, as the problem is prevalent in other countries as well (Barmby, 2006; Dadley & Edwards, 2007; Flores, 2006; Webb, et. al., 2004) extending the problem of teacher retention to a global crisis. Researchers in the United States and other countries have studied the attrition rate of teachers, its causes, and effects. Many states and school divisions have responded to the issue by recruiting more people into teaching (Easley, 2006; Quartz & TEP, 2003).

However, the retention of current teachers has received little attention. The research on the causes and effects of teacher retention is also sparse. Studying teachers who remain in teaching is important since the majority of people who remain in teaching say that they are satisfied with their jobs despite low salaries and poor benefits (Fowler & Mittapalli, 2006). People who remain in teaching are also more likely to focus on the positive aspects of teaching and have fonder memories of their experiences (Dadley & Edwards, 2007).

The limited amount of research on the possible causes of teacher retention provides some indication of why teachers choose to remain in the field of teaching. Stockard and Lehman (2004) found that more than half of the first-year teachers in their study planned to remain in teaching and had no regrets about choosing teaching as a career. Fowler and Mattapalli (2006) also found that 63% of former teachers said that they would more than likely return to teaching in the future. It is these populations of teachers that has been overlooked as the primary focus of research. Most of the research on teacher retention has occurred through happenstance as researchers were studying teacher attrition. This research does yield some indicators of possible anchors for some teachers.

To study the factors that retain teachers, it is beneficial to begin by studying what attracts persons to teaching in the first place. Barmby (2006) found that people are attracted to teaching for altruistic, intrinsic, and extrinsic reasons. Altruistic reasons center on the moralistic and public service aspects of teaching, and the research results have indicated that altruistic reasons are the primary reasons that teachers remain in the profession. Intrinsic reasons center on factors that are inherent to the job such as working

with children or teaching a subject that one finds fascinating. The extrinsic reasons for entering teaching are aspects of the job that are external from the work itself. These reasons include long vacations, status, and salary. These reasons are the most superficial and have been shown to have the opposite effect on retention in some instances. In addition, the author identified child oriented motivations for entering teaching such as a previous positive experiences working with children.

Barmby (2006) found that altruistic and child-oriented reasons were the most common attractors to teaching. These factors may also influence persons to remain in teaching. Easley (2006) found that moral reasons were a primary factor for the teachers in his study to remain in urban schools. These teachers all saw benefits to working with students in their classrooms. They also experienced supportive school environments, success with teaching their students, and maintained good relationships with their students. Nieto (2003) found that the relationships that teachers develop with their students have a significant effect on how children view their school experience. Caring and committed teachers are crucial to students in urban schools, and these teachers are most effective when they are able to affirm their students' identities through their relationships of the students and their understandings of the students' cultures.

Another prominent altruistic reason that teachers have stated for remaining in teaching is the social importance of teaching. Public schools have a civic aim to serve the greater society, and many people who enter teaching see a noble purpose behind teaching (Nieto, 2003). Many teachers see teaching as a worthwhile profession (Barmby, 2006). Both Easley (2006) and Mayotte (2003), in their respective studies of career switchers, found that some of their participants viewed the social importance of teaching as more

rewarding than their previous careers. Similarly, Quartz and TEP (2003) found that the students who graduated from the Center X program at UCLA also remained teaching in urban schools because of moralistic reasons. These teachers viewed themselves as agents of change and had high levels of self efficacy. They made efforts to make their urban schools just and caring places in terms of social justice. The participants also served on school committees, created programs for students, and assumed leadership roles in their schools. Other researchers concluded that many of the teachers were driven by issues involving social injustice in the lives of their students because of their race or social class. These inequalities created anger in teachers who then become motivated to work as agents of change for their students, influencing them to stay in schools (Nieto, 2003). These teachers become, as the authors titled the article, “too angry to leave” (Quartz & TEP, 2003).

Teachers have also reported intrinsic reasons for entering and remaining in teaching, although these influences appear to be less powerful than the altruistic reasons for teaching. The primary intrinsic reason to remain in teaching is the love of the subject matter. Dudley and Edwards (2007) found that the Religion teachers they studied in England said they remained because they valued Religious education and maintained a strong sense of vocation, although it was not a part of the national curriculum. They saw their jobs as important even when their colleagues did not see the value in Religious education.

Other intrinsic reasons for entering and remaining in teaching were the level of autonomy involved in teaching and the lifelong desire to become a teacher (Barmby, 2006; Buckley, et. al., 2005; Webb, et. al., 2004). Buckley, et. al. (2005) found that, while

beginning teachers had concerns about behavior and administrative tasks, experienced teachers were primarily concerned with autonomy in their classrooms and their own personal direction. Stockard and Lehman (2004) also found that first-year teachers were more likely to want to remain in teaching if they had control over their work environments. Similarly, Webb, et. al. (2004) hypothesized before the onset of their study that teacher autonomy would be a primary influence in the retention of Finnish teachers. They did indeed find this to be the case and contrasted this finding with their comparison group of English teachers. The English teachers reported strict government control over English schools and the British educational curriculum. Barmby (2006) also found that some teachers had positive previous experiences teaching children or that they simply always wanted to be a teacher. These reasons lend themselves to child-oriented motivations for entering teaching. It is, however, unclear as to how influential this factor is in retaining teachers.

There is no clear evidence that extrinsic reasons for teaching are factors that will retain teachers in the profession. Extrinsic reasons are those factors that are not inherent in the job itself (Barmby, 2006). The two primary extrinsic factors are the salary and status of teaching. As Barmby (2006) pointed out, these factors sometimes dissuade people from entering teaching. As previously mentioned in this chapter, teachers feel that their salaries do not adequately compensate them for the amount of work that they perform (Webb, et. al., 2004), and their salaries are not comparable to professionals with comparable levels of education (Quartz & TEP, 2003).

The status of teaching has not been proved to be a factor which might retain teachers. Teachers have noted the lack of respect from parents (Buckley, et. al., 2005;

Veenman, 1984; Wildman, et. al., 1989), students (Dadley & Edwards, 2007), administrators (Flores, 2006; Wildman, et. al., 1989), and the society at large (Ingersoll, 1997; Lortie, 2002; Nieto, 2003; Webb, et. al., 2004). The status of teaching has steadily declined which, along with the low salary, has detracted some people from entering teaching when they have opportunities to earn more money in other professions (Fowler & Mittapalli, 2006). Mulholland and Hansen (2003) found that one of the male preservice teachers who participated in their study was encouraged to enter the teaching profession by his father who viewed teaching as a higher step on the social ladder than the manual labor that his parents did for a living. This example was the exception. Buckley, et. al., (2005) noted that teaching is not well-respected in many communities, and Mulholland and Hansen (2003) even admitted that teachers and administrators in secondary schools do nothing to encourage male students to enter teaching. Status, along with salary and other extrinsic factors have not been demonstrated to encourage teachers to remain in the profession.

Since Barmby (2006) found that it is altruistic and child-oriented factors that primarily anchor teachers to teaching, it is worthwhile to study specifically how these factors have helped the field of education maintain its teachers. It is also beneficial to study how intrinsic and extrinsic factors have retained teachers in the classroom. The study of these phenomena in terms of the retention of elementary school teachers is of particular interest because these teachers are less likely to remain in teaching for their connection to a particular subject area. It is also beneficial to study how teachers who remain in the field have overcome problems they may have encountered during their initial years of teaching. Given the extensive amount of research presented in this chapter

about the problems of beginning teachers, it is reasonable to assume that teachers who remain have developed coping strategies to deal with problems or have found ways to overcome them. Uncovering these coping strategies from veteran teachers can provide teacher educators and school administrators with valuable tools to reduce the stress level for beginning teachers.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The research question was, “What problem-solving approaches do beginning teachers use to remain in the profession beyond the initial five years?”. The sub-questions were (a) what problems do elementary teachers face during their first five years of teaching, (b) how do elementary teachers cope with these problems to remain in the profession, (c) what problems are elementary teachers currently experiencing compared to the problems of their first five years of teaching, (d) how are elementary teachers dealing with current problems, (e) what plans do elementary teachers have for remaining in the profession.

As was stated in the previous chapter, 50% of teachers leave the classroom within the first five years of teaching (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). The study was designed to examine the kinds of problems that elementary school teachers encountered during their first five years of teaching and how they dealt with or overcame these problems to remain in the teaching profession. Additionally, data was gathered relative to what problems elementary school teachers currently encountered and how they were coping with these issues. This study will employ both qualitative data collection methods to answer the research questions. The answers to the primary research question and the supporting questions provided crucial direction to the field of teacher education and to schools and school divisions.

The problems of beginning teachers and the factors that cause them to leave the profession have been well documented, and the research about the causes of teacher attrition and its effects were documented in the previous chapter. By exploring how

teachers coped with or solved initial problems to remain in the profession it was possible to develop a broad understanding of the societal and professional influences that will retain teachers. Such an understanding could provide teacher education programs, school administrators, school divisions, and designers of mentoring programs with a knowledge base upon which to base methods that will lead beginning teachers into successful and prolonged teaching careers.

In the present chapter, the primary methodology for data collection and analysis to be used is described. First, there is a description of the research paradigm under which the work was conducted. This description includes how the research has been designed to address the four interrelated beliefs of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. This section also includes a brief discussion of my own status characteristics and how they affected the participants and ultimately the research. This section also details the sources of data that was collected and the rationale behind the decision to choose each data source. Theories about in-depth interviewing in qualitative research and why interviews are appropriate for answering the research questions are provided. The data gathering methods are then described including the identification and selection of participants. The qualitative component of this research is described including the interview process and the transcription of the interview data. Finally the data analysis process is described.

## Design

### Paradigms

The three predominant research paradigms under which qualitative researchers work are the positivist paradigm, the interpretive paradigm, and the critical paradigm. Under the positivist paradigm, the researcher constructs a testable hypothesis based on past research (Bailey, 2007). The researcher will then collect data to test the hypothesis to find support for an existing theory. This is in contrast to the critical paradigm in which the researcher seeks to emancipate and empower oppressed people. The researcher who chooses this paradigm is concerned with meaningful social change (Bailey, 2007).

The paradigm which was most appropriate for this research was the interpretive paradigm since subscribers to this paradigm assume that reality is formed through social relationships and through the forces that guide members of a natural setting as they navigate their social world. Interpretive researchers are primarily concerned with what actors in a given context do as well as how they do it and what purposes the activities serve. The researchers are also concerned with what these activities mean to the participants (Bailey, 2007). The actors that studied in this research maintained their teaching careers, and my interest was determining how they coped with problems to maintain their careers and the meanings they interpreted from their actions that led them to solving the problems. My objective was to socially construct the meanings of the actions from these participants.

Interpretive research is closely linked to constructivism and hermeneutics, in which case the researcher adopts a relativist ontology combined with a transactional epistemology, and a dialectical methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The relativist

ontology of constructivism suggests that realities are multiple and intangible mental constructions from individuals or groups of actors in a setting. Ontology questions the nature of reality and whether there does exist a universal truth that can be known by actors in a setting or the researcher (Bailey, 2007). Researchers who adopt a constructivist stance search for a connection between action and praxis while simultaneously searching for the socially-constructed realities of the actors being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 2005).

This constructivist stance was appropriate for the current research since the aim was to determine what factors led to the participants overcoming problems. By exploring teachers' actions and experiences and how they interpreted these experiences, I discovered the meaning that they attached to these experiences and the internal constructions of reality that were created by the meaning. This revealed the influences that helped these teachers to cope with initial problems of teaching. These constructions of reality may or may not be true in the absolute sense that positivists researchers assume, but this does not have any bearing on how the participants interpreted their reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The problem-solving approaches were theirs, and their problem-solving strategies were influenced by their own interpretations of their experiences as opposed to an absolute external force that has some ability to retain all teachers.

The next belief that must be addressed by a qualitative researcher adopting an interpretative theory is the epistemological belief of the researcher. Epistemology deals with the relationship between a knowledge seeker and what there is to be known. The primary epistemological question deals with the independence of knowledge from the researcher. There are two central philosophies surrounding epistemology. One

philosophy espouses that knowledge exists independent of the researcher. The other philosophy suggests that there are multiple realities and the researcher actively constructs knowledge throughout the research (Bailey, 2007). The latter philosophy is most appropriate for the current research since the data given by the participants were interpreted by the researcher. The interpretations of each participant's various experiences were likely clouded by their own status characteristics, background, and personality, among other variables. Additionally, many of these same variables factored into my interpretations of the data they provided. Consequently, the final product revealed my interpretations of teacher perceptions of their experiences; thus, a reality was constructed from multiple perspectives, including those of the researcher. Collectively, the researcher and the participants constructed the problem-solving mechanisms that these teachers used.

The next issue for any researcher conducting a qualitative study is the methodology of the study. This encompasses the entire research design, sampling, analysis, and the logic behind the research. The researcher controls the research process by addressing these issues prior to the research (Bailey, 2007). Qualitative interviews allowed for investigation of the meanings that teachers have attached to their coping strategies. The hermeneutical and dialectical aspect of the interpretative paradigm also dictates that the methodology center around interaction among the researcher and the participants. The ultimate goal of the methodology in interpretative research is to distill prior notions concerning knowledge of the research participants in favor of a more informed socially constructed knowledge base that involves the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The final belief that the qualitative researcher must consider when conducting an interpretive study is the axiology of the research, which is primarily concerned with values and ethics. This will determine how emotionally involved or disinterested the researcher is in the research (Bailey, 2007). The axiology of the researcher is paramount, since the researcher's values will guide the research, and the researcher's ethics will determine how participants are treated during the research process. Researcher values also influence the choice of the problem which to investigate, the research question, and the theoretical framework underlying the gathering and analysis of data. The axiology of the researcher is primarily what distinguishes the interpretative researcher from positivist and post positivist researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). Interpretative research rejects notions of value neutrality, and the reflections of the researcher about what was learned and the feelings of the researcher are often included in the final manuscript (Bailey, 2007). The experiences of my participants were filtered through my own experiences as a former elementary school teacher who left the field after five years.

### **Status Characteristics**

Axiology leads to another issue to be addressed prior to any qualitative research project. The values of the research are part of the researcher's status characteristics. Status characteristics are physical and identifying qualities of the researcher such as gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and age. Status characteristics can affect almost every aspect of everyday life. Race, gender, age, social class, and sexual orientation affect the human interactions of everyone and shape the ways in which individuals see the world. People embody several different characteristics at one time that

make up a person's characteristic status, and all of these characteristics affect the research in the sense that they may determine the axiology of the researcher and the researcher's chosen paradigm for research. Status characteristics have a great affect on the methodology of the research. A researcher's characteristics and status will determine the participants and settings to which the researcher will gain access and how comfortable the participants will be in sharing information with the researcher (Bailey, 2007).

Status characteristics are a prevalent component during every aspect of the research process. Interpretative research adheres to the notion that the status characteristics of the researcher will determine what is learned from the research. This is evident since meaning is socially constructed between the researcher and the participants in interpretative research. The values and behavior of the researcher also greatly affect the research findings in interpretive research, and these are affected by the researcher's status characteristics. The researcher must also consider the status characteristics of the participants since issues of power may be present during the research. Interpretative research dictates that the researcher remain open and honest with the participants. The status characteristics of the researcher must also be revealed to the participants. This will help to maintain the trustworthiness of the research (Bailey, 2007).

My own status characteristics affected the ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology of my research. I came to this research with my own status as a thirty-eight year old African-American male with five and a half years teaching experience. I also bring my background of being raised in a middle-class African-American community and attending predominately White higher education institutions for both undergraduate and graduate school. My background also includes teaching in one school for the entire of my

teaching career and in one classroom for five of the five and a half years in which I taught. I also taught students who were different from me in terms of ethnicity and race, but who came from a comparable social class as the one from which I came. Another important status characteristic of mine that was different from the five of my six participants in my study is that I taught in a private school in which I was never tenured and was not held to the same performance standards as teachers in public schools. I was not subject to the policies and regulations that are in place in public schools based on the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. My school was also free of high-stakes testing. This is significant because I have no professional experience teaching in any setting other than the one school in which I taught. Only one of my participants had experiences teaching in a private Christian-based school. She and I developed instant rapport when we began to discuss her experiences in a in the private school setting.

The contrast between my own status characteristics and the situations of the participants was discussed often informally after the recoding device was turned off. The interview participants provided thick, rich descriptions of the experiences by recounting problematic situations and explaining how they were able to cope with their problems. They also discussed how they constructed meaning from these experiences. Through the in-depth interviews, it was possible for me to reveal my status characteristics to the participants and create a balance of power in our relationships. After the final interview with the participant who had private school teaching experience, she informally interviewed me about some of the problems that I experienced and how I dealt with these problems. We both discussed how Religious school environments influenced our decision making and our views on the teaching profession. All of these teachers taught school for

a longer period of time than I did, and they all had experience teaching in public schools. They were able to provide data that I did not have. The ontology under which I entered the research process embraced the assumption that there are multiple realities that are dependent on understanding the perspectives of the participants whom interviewed. I cannot assume that there is one correct answer as to why teachers remain in the teaching profession.

My epistemological stance assumed that my experiences, emotions, and reflections are as important to the research as the experiences, emotions, and reflections of the participants. I was intimately involved in constructing the realities and the knowledge derived from this research. The participants and I combined our collaborative experiences to actively construct knowledge. This paradigm also dictates that my methodology is qualitative because I needed the personal stories of participants to socially construct the knowledge that I gained. Finally, the axiological stance that I took dictated that I was not value-free as a researcher. My values and status characteristics aided in my construction of the knowledge along with the participants. It is for all of the aforementioned reasons that I worked under the interpretive paradigm for this research.

## **Procedure**

### **Participants**

The participants were six currently practicing elementary school teachers from a rural/suburban area in a southern U.S. state. They were recommended by their school division mathematics curriculum coordinator and contacted by the researcher through electronic mail. All but one of the recommended teachers agreed to participate in the current study. The participants had all taught elementary school for at least five years, but

none of them had taught more than ten years. The participants also taught in a school division that employed inclusion programs for students with special needs. Idol (2006, p. 77) provided a description of inclusion programs and how they are structured:

In the inclusive school, all students are educated in general education programs. Inclusion is when a student with special learning and/or behavioral needs is educated full time in the general education program. Essentially, *inclusion* means that the student with special education needs is attending the general school program, enrolled in age-appropriate classes 100% of the school day.

Inclusion meant that these participants instructed students in their classes with a wide range of academic abilities. They spoke of instructing students afflicted with autism, Aspergers, Downs Syndrome, severe behavioral disorders, physical disabilities, and mild mental retardation. The school division provided special resource teachers and special education teachers for children with special needs; however, the special education teachers only spent part of the day in each classroom to work with special-needs children. Therefore, the general education teachers shared a fair amount of responsibility for serving and instructing these children. All, with the exception of one participant, was trained in general education. One participant had training in special education, although her degree was in general elementary education.

The participants taught grade levels ranging from second to fifth grade. Five of the participants were White females, and one was a White male. The participants were all within the same school division, and two of them taught at the same school. One participant worked part-time, and the others all worked full-time. They ranged in age from early thirties to early fifties. Only one participant had taught at the same school for all of her career. The participants either choose or were assigned pseudonyms which were; (a) Clara, (b) Gary, (c) Jackie, (d) Jane, (e) Laura, and (f) Rose.

Clara was in her early thirties and the mother of three elementary-aged children. All of her children attended the school where she taught. Clara currently taught third grade in a self-contained classroom. She taught all academic subjects. The school in which she taught at the time of the interview was her second school and the school where she had attended as an elementary school student. She taught in the same school division for all of her career. She held a master's degree in education, and was in her ninth year of teaching at the time of the interviews.

Gary was a 31-year-old male who was in his eighth year of teaching at the time of the interviews. Gary taught fourth grade science, mathematics, reading, and language arts. He held a bachelor's degree in English education and a master's in elementary education. Gary began his career by teaching eleventh and twelfth grade for one summer session and one academic year at a high school in another state. He taught American literature and English composition. He then moved to his current school and began teaching fifth grade. He eventually moved to fourth grade which is the grade he taught at the time of the interviews. Gary had been a participant in a Fulbright fellowship which allowed him to joined a group of teachers for a month-long research study in Malawi. He was married with no children of his own. He was in his last year of teaching at the time of the interviews. He had already been accepted at a Research I university in another part of the state to begin work on his Doctorate of Philosophy degree for the following fall semester. Gary had plans to pursue a doctorate in gifted education.

Jackie was a new mother in her early thirties. She had taught third grade for all of her career but was currently the substitute principal at her school. The school's regular principal was on maternity leave. This was the second school in which Jackie had taught,

and she had eight years of classroom teaching experience. She had also recently returned from maternity leave. She held a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's in curriculum and instruction. She also held an education leadership certification. Jackie said that she had plans to enter education administration on a permanent basis and hoped to become the principal of an elementary school.

Jane was 51 years of age. She had worked in education settings all of her adult life but did not begin to teach professionally until her forties. Jane's mother was a teacher, and Jane resisted her own desire to teach just to be different from her mother. She surrendered to her urge to teach and has taught in one school for all of her professional career. Jane also student taught at her current school. She has only ever taught second grade. Jane held a master's degree in elementary education. She taught all subjects in a self-contained classroom, but she often collaborated with the other two second grade teachers at her school and sometimes team taught. Jane's adult son was diagnosed with bone cancer during her first year of teaching, and she had to miss a substantial amount of school. Because of her extensive experience in the classroom, Jane was assigned a student teacher during her first year. The student teacher and the other two second grade teachers often covered her class while she was out with her son. Jane was in her ninth year of professional teaching at the time of the interviews.

Laura was 32-years old and was currently teaching in her third school. This was the first public school in which Laura had taught professionally. Previously, she had taught in two Christian-based private schools in another state. Laura taught for two years in one Christian school and took a job at another Christian school when the first one closed down. Laura only taught at the second school for a few months and then left to get

married. She also suffered from severe depression during her second year of teaching. Laura moved with her husband to her current area. Laura taught fifth grade mathematics and had a fourth grade homeroom. She only taught half days. Laura disclosed that she would only be teaching at her current school for another year. She said that she was unsure if she would continue teaching once she and her husband moved because she wanted to have more children and become a stay-at-home mom. Laura was in her eighth year of teaching at the time of the interviews.

Rose was 31-years old and currently taught fourth-grade mathematics and language arts. She had just completed her master's degree and earned her math specialist endorsement at the time of the interviews. Rose was teaching in her second school. She taught first grade for one year and third grade for four years at her previous school. Rose's plans included searching for a math specialist position in her school division. She was in her ninth year of teaching at the time of the interviews. Rose and Jackie taught at the same school.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

The research method most appropriate for this research was anthropological interviews with the participants. These open-ended and unstructured interviews were more conversational in nature and provided opportunities for knowledge to build upon previous responses. The goal was to have the participants reconstruct experiences related to the topic. The most appropriate method to maximize the knowledge to be gained from the research was to conduct a series of three in-depth interviews with each participant (Seidman, 1991). This method of series interviews allowed the participants and me to

comb through experiences and place them in context. The series also increased the comfort level between the participants and myself. This method also established continuing contact between the researcher and the participants, increasing trustworthiness and left opportunities for member checks on data interpretation (Seidman, 1991). Finally, this method increased the likelihood of the social construction of knowledge that is so crucial to interpretative research.

Each participant was interviewed three times over the course of two months. Five of the six participants were interviewed in their classrooms, and Jackie was interviewed in the principal's office. The first interview was designed to be an information gathering session that also served as an opportunity for the participant to reconstruct experiences. The job of the investigator was to establish rapport with the participants and ask the person questions that can be answered based solely on experience. This was an opportunity for the participants to explore their backgrounds and life histories in terms of how this history led them to the phenomena under investigation (Seidman, 1991). This interview therefore, focused on the experiences that led these participants to become teachers and their problems during their initial five years of teaching. Near the end of the first interview, the participants were provided with a list containing teachers' problems that appeared in the literature (See Appendix C). The participants were invited to comment on any or all areas that applied to them. Some participants commented on every area, and others only spoke about items that applied to their situations. This first interview was unstructured and conversational. The length ranged from a half hour to an hour.

The second was the longest for every single participant. The length ranged from forty minutes to an hour and twenty minutes. The second interview placed the experiences of the participants in the context of the present phenomena under study. This interview focused on the details of the problematic situations from the first interview. The details from these experiences supported the participants in formulating their feelings about their experiences which took center stage during the third interview (Seidman, 1991). The second interview also focused on the relationships that the participants share with other members in the setting such as students, administrators, colleagues, and parents. This interview was also unstructured, and the questions all came from the experiences described in the first interview. The interviews were also reflective since the participants were not currently in many of the situations of which they spoke. Studies of beginning teachers dealing with problems as they happened yielded different findings (Wildman, et. al., 1989).

The third interview required the participant to reflect on the details and the experiences described during the first two interviews. This interview revealed how the participants understood the experiences and allowed the participants and the researcher to make sense of the experiences. The meaning that was derived from the experiences ultimately became the knowledge that the research produced. The interpretative paradigm required that the participants and the investigator construct this knowledge collaboratively. Since the knowledge is not independent of the researcher, the two parties collectively interpreted meaning from the experiences. This shared understanding of the meaning accompanying the experiences led both the participants and the investigator to the present situation and the phenomena under study (Bailey, 2007; Seidman, 1991). This

interview was crucial to the present research since the question concerns how teachers solved problems.

### **Data Collection**

After agreeing to be interviewed each participant was contacted to arrange a time to conduct the first interview. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim by the investigator. The interviews were sent to the participants through electronic mail. A copy of the first interview was also brought to each participant during the second interview. The time for the second interviews were arranged at the end of the first interviews. I read the transcripts of the first interviews and formulated questions for the second interviews. The second interviews were conducted in the same way and transcribed by the investigator. The second interview transcripts were read and questions for the third interviews were formulated from those data. The third interviews were conducted in the same way and again, transcribed by the investigator. Participants only received an electronic copy of the third interview. The participants were also given a card of acknowledgement after each interview.

During the first interview, I began by collecting demographic information. Participants were then asked to talk about each year of their first five years of teaching and what was problematic about that year. The participants were then asked to talk about current problems and teaching situations. All questions for subsequent interviews were derived from the initial interviews. The interviews were all conducted at the schools of the participants either after the school day or during their planning periods.

## **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using coding and the identification of broad categories. I began with initial or open coding in which case I read each segment of the interview data and looked for individual sets of meaning. I considered each one of these a datum. I then gave each datum a code. Codes were given to each datum that was useful for final analysis. Similar items were be grouped together. Patterns also emerged in the data that guided the final analysis (Bailey, 2007).

After initial coding, I began the process of focus coding which is when I searched for chunks of data and combine codes into larger and more general codes. At this point, I moved from literal codes to conceptual coding. This is also the point where general targets were searched for and identified. I concentrate on the verbal data and did not focus on body language or verbal cues such as sighing or pausing. Interviews were coded soon after the transcription which enabled me to recall the context in which each datum was given (Bailey, 2007).

Each datum was coded, cut from a hard copy of the transcripts, and placed in an envelope. Compare data were compared, cut out, and added to the envelope if they were determined to fit into the same category. Categories were then labeled based on the subject area about which the participants spoke. The codes were collected into categories that were shared with my advisor for validity purposes. All codes were placed into categories and represented in conjunction with actual quotes in the final manuscript. The data from each category were then removed from the envelope and compared for possible repetition by the same participant. In such cases, the most prominent and information-rich

quotes were selected for inclusion in the final document. Other data were paraphrased, and written about with actual quotes from the participants.

## **Chapter 4**

### **What They Said**

The participants spoke at length about problems and concerns that affected them during their initial years of teaching. They also spoke about problems that they are currently experiencing as well as how they dealt with problems both then and now. Several categories were derived from the interview data; the predominant ones being (a) personal issues and life experiences, (b) problems with school curriculum, (c) children with special needs, (d) differentiation of instruction, (e) discipline, (f) workload and time management, (g) parents, (h), student poverty and students' personal issues, (j) relationships with students, (k) teacher training, and (l) administration.

The participants provided information about how each of these issues affected their teaching or caused problems for them as they began their careers. Most of the participants commented on these categories, while other issues were only mentioned by one of two of the participants. Some minor issues were poor working conditions, low salaries, motivating students, school violence, and a lack of diversity among students. These issues were not spoken about at length, and did not seem to cause significant problems. Some of the participants also talked about how they solved problems by seeking assistance from administrators or mentors. These issues were also not spoken about at length. The primary categories were written about in depth.

## **Personal Life and Experience**

As the participants began their careers, they were impacted by personal issues that affected their careers. These personal issues ranged from personal and family illnesses to relationship issues. They also expressed concerns about beginning families while balancing the demands of a new teaching career. The participants also discussed the factors that influenced them to go into the teaching profession and their own experiences in elementary school. The revelations about their inclinations toward teaching provided insight into what has kept them in the profession despite obstacles they encountered during their initial years. The participants all felt a natural orientation toward teaching that centered more on their affection for the children they served more than their feelings toward the subject matter. The participants all had plans to remain in the field of education, although not necessarily in classroom teaching.

There were two of the participants who admitted having indifferent feelings about remaining in the profession. Rose explained that she stayed because she had to work to support herself and her family, and Laura wondered if she would continue teaching or extend her family and remain at home with her children. The other four all had plans to continue in some aspect of education.

### *Personal and Family Illnesses*

The most prominent personal issue to affect Laura, Jane, and Rose during their initial years of teaching was physical and mental illness. These illnesses affected the families of the participants as well as the participants themselves. Laura was very open

about her battle with depression, which afflicted her during her second year of teaching.

She began:

You know, that second year, and this touches into a personal area. Actually, I was going through depression that second year of teaching, and it's all kind of a blur, and I wouldn't say that the depression was caused by anything school related. But on a professional note, I guess that was the biggest problem (Laura, 2008, 1).

Laura went on to express how depression affected her professional life during this difficult time:

I mean I would climb out of bed and just to put on clothes and it felt so uncomfortable. I just wanted to put on my PJs and go to bed. I just didn't want to be awake. I didn't want to be alive. So, it really was a chore just to go from one subject to the next and to remember, okay they have PE at 12:05, get them there on time. I could not think ahead. And in teaching, you always have to be one step ahead. You have to keep in mind, okay this is a Thursday. They go to this specialty, but we don't have writing today. You need to be ahead so the kids don't sense that you don't know what you're doing. So yeah, it affected me greatly (Laura, 2008, 2).

Laura turned to her colleagues and a former professor who helped her to devise a coping strategy to make it through her day. She stated:

I had a dear friend who was a professor of the college where I attended. She and I remained friends even when I graduated and moved out of town, and I called her every morning and cried with her every morning. Prayed with her every morning. Stayed close to my family. It really was a miracle that I got out of it. I know that

medicine helped, but as far as the day to day endurance, I just only focused on the next hour to come, ..... At one point I remember telling myself, okay for the next five minutes, I'm not gonna worry. And I would try to go just five minutes. Okay for the next five minutes again, I'm not gonna worry, and every five minutes, I would. And it got to the point where it wasn't quite every five minutes. It would stretch to ten and so on. But it was the worse time of my life. It was terrible (Laura, 2008, 3).

Laura also talked about how her depression affected her children; however she took great measures to hide her personal tragedy from her students. She was very open in talking about the illness during the interview, but she did all that she could at the time to keep her students from finding out. She stated:

I'm very open about my depression because I know it could help somebody. It's like the flu. It's something that can be treated with medicine, and you need to find somebody you trust and talk to them about it. At the time, I was going to see a counselor. I guess the way it affected my teaching. I was unable to concentrate, so it was very hard for me to get focused on a lesson and stay focused and to seem excited about that lesson. I kind of had a monotone voice. Didn't get excited about topics. Didn't get excited about doing a new exciting bulletin board. I just saw it as a chore that I didn't want to do, and I'd rather be in bed, and when the kids would go to specialty, I would go in my room, shut the door, put my head down on the desk and cry. It was terrible. And that year I had a classroom in the basement of a building. That church that I was teaching in. They moved me to the

basement that year. It was hard not to think of it as a dungeon and just be more depressed (Laura, 2008, 2).

Jane was also affected by illness during her first year of teaching. In her case, it was her son whose illness caused her distress during the onset of her career. During October of Jane's first year of teaching, her son was diagnosed with bone cancer, and required aggressive treatment in another town. She and her husband each spent time staying with him while he underwent treatment. This caused her to miss some school during that year.

Jane made it her practice to be completely open with her students, beginning her first year when she was honest with her them about her son's cancer and why she would be absent from school. She stated:

Oh yeah. I told them. Absolutely. I believe in telling. I didn't say he's got cancer; all of these things in detail. I told them that he was sick, and they all wrote him these beautiful letters. And I would take them, and would read them, and he would write back to the kids and send emails back and forth. They asked almost every day, how's he doing. They were just wonderful about the whole thing. I had one little girl who had autism that year, and she would say every time I would be out for like two days. There were certain days of the chemo that one of us had to stay there all the time, so we didn't drive back at five in the morning and then come on to school. And if I was gone a couple of days, she would immediately say, "Has he died?" Every time, and I knew that that was, she was very concerned about him (Jane, 2008, 2).

Like Laura, Jane turned to colleagues for help through the difficult periods in her life. Jane recalls telling her principal about her son's illness:

Oh, I went to her immediately and told her what was going on even before we had the final diagnosis because they have to do lots of different things, and I talked to her about it. She said immediately, she said, "You do what you need to do. Just absolutely, do what you need to do." (Jane, 2008, 3)

While Laura and Jane dealt with personal issues stemming from their personal life, Rose suffered depression-related issues that were caused by a difficult class. This class, which consisted of eight students on behavior plans, caused Rose considerable distress during the course of that year. She stated:

You are there by yourself. You may have an aide, who comes in an hour a day or something like that, but you're pretty much on your own, and that was quite a challenge. I was ready to quit after that year. Yeah. It was one of those years where it was so challenging that it would have made any teacher want to or think about just leaving in the middle of the year. It was that bad..... Oh yeah. I mean every day at lunch I had to like, as I'm walking back to pick up the kids from lunch, I'd have to say a prayer like, "Get me through the rest of this day." because like I said, God love them. These kids, they were okay if I had just had them one-on-one, but the mix of them (Rose, 2008, 2).

Rose also explained the reason that she did stay and did her best to make it through the year:

Money. I mean I have to work. This is what I'm trained in. At that point, I had had my first daughter and so I wanted a steady job where I could be home in the

afternoons and at that time, it was kind of like what else am I gonna do (Rose, 2008, 1).

These examples demonstrated how the personal lives of teachers affected their teaching and how teaching affected their personal lives. These two aspects of teachers' lives remain intertwined, and each teacher developed their own coping strategies for dealing with them.

### *Personal life choices*

Laura was put in a situation of having to make life changing choices about her career and personal life after her second year of teaching when the Christian school in which she was teaching was closed. The decision to continue teaching near her hometown or get married and move to another state plagued her during the summer after her second year of teaching. This decision was also clouded by the depression from which she still suffered. She recalled:

I had a lot of fear in my life coming off of that depression. Honestly, I was still dealing with some of that depression, and when you're in depression, a fear that's the size of a quarter appears to be the size of a plate..... Marriage was like that for me because all my life I had wanted to be married. I had this Cinderella image. It's all gonna be roses and candlelight blah, blah, blah, and I thought it was gonna go a certain way, and that was what I was expecting to happen. And when I met this person that I'm married to now, it didn't go the way I thought it was gonna go. He didn't look the way I thought he should look. We didn't interact the same way. When we would get together, we didn't have like these mountain top

experiences. When we would get together, we would just sit and watch TV. ....  
So, I was dealing with all of this fear, and this depression thing was in there and here's this man who.... wanted to marry me. He had actually proposed to me six months after that, and I accepted and then just said, "No, just kidding. Here's the ring back. I can't do this. We can still date, but I can't handle being engaged right now.".... It was a lot of stress (Laura, 2008, 2).

Instead of getting married, Laura decided to take another teaching job. She stated:  
So, I decided to go ahead and get another job up there. I found a job because I was still unsure if I really wanted to marry this person. I found a job up there and taught just a couple of weeks, and then I decided, "Okay, I do think that this is the right thing to do. I'm gonna go ahead and move forward and marry the person that I'm married to now." I was just scared (Laura, 2008, 1).

Laura's principal and colleagues helped her make the decision to get married after she accepted a position at another Christian school. Being married meant moving out of the state and away from her family. It also meant accepting a position in a public school which was new to her. She also continued to have reservations about being the wife of a community leader.

Laura stated that this was a very stressful time for her because she had a new job, a new home, a new husband, and was living in a new state. She was stressed about being married to a public person while having neighbors and the community watching and passing judgment on her husband and her. She said that people had followed their engagement and expressed concern when she called off the engagement. People close to her continued to judge her when she decided to become engaged again; however, she felt

that these were her decisions and this was her life. Her personal affairs were none of anyone's business, but she felt that everyone was watching. She was also aware of gossip and rumors being spread about her husband and her, and this was a difficult time for her.

Laura explained that she talked to her friends and colleagues at work to deal with the pressure of being married to a public person. She admitted that the stress of being married to the community leader was still affecting her at the time of the interview.

### *Parenthood and teaching*

The personal lives of the participants continued to affect their teaching as they continued their careers into the first five years. Having children posed a challenge for Jackie and Laura as they continued teaching. Jackie became very involved in her school and the local teachers' association. After having a child, she had to scale back on some of the responsibility that she had taken. She stated:

It is difficult because, I think, even when you're married, your job is your life.

You get up, you go to work, and I think when you have kids, your priorities shift.

Your job is still important, but your kids come first, and I think that'll be telling next year for me if I am in the classroom teaching. I'm not real sure how that is gonna go. I think it will be harder because I think at the end of the day when you maybe want to stay and prepare a little bit more, I'm probably gonna want to get home and get in and do those things at home, so I'm not sure. I think the extra curricula things will change a lot. Committees and groups and things like that. I probably won't try to be on as many of those just to free up some time (Jackie, 2008, 2).

Laura also had to reduce the amount of time that she spent at school after she had a son. She stated:

I do feel like those five years; I wasn't a mom yet, and so I felt as if I was constantly trying to get better, and I would be here until six and seven at night sometimes. But now that I'm a mother, I can't do that. I have to get right out the door, and I feel like I'm not putting as much into it these last few years. In the back of my mind, I tell myself, if he's (her son) in school, it'll be different. I will spend more time doing school. I won't leave the building right at four. That's been hard (Laura, 2008, 3).

Being a parent divided the time of both Laura and Jackie; however they both saw how teaching benefitted their parenthood and how being a mother helped them in their teaching careers. Jackie expressed great satisfaction with the extrinsic factors associated with teaching that afforded her the opportunities to spend time with her son. She stated:

I do think as far as teaching, of course having the snow days and the work days and the summers off, that's certainly a benefit that you have to think about. That's a very nice time in the summer that you have with your kids if you are a teacher (Jackie, 2008, 2).

Laura expressed the aspects of motherhood that she felt made her a better teacher. She stated:

A better teacher in that I'm more sympathetic, empathetic, patient, gentle. Because I know I wouldn't want somebody yell at my kid the way I used to yell at kids. I think about that more. I put myself in the parents' shoes now, especially in giving homework. I think, okay if my son got this much homework, I probably

would be upset with the teacher, so am I gonna give these kids this much homework? I'm really, yes, more sympathetic, but..... it's no nonsense in here (Laura, 2008, 3).

### *Taking teaching personally*

In addition to the personal aspects of their lives that affected their teaching, Jackie, Jane, and Gary expressed how personally interested they were in their teaching. Teaching affected their personal feelings as well as personal choices and non-professional actions. Jackie, for example expressed how personally she took the failures of her students when they did not meet certain standards. She stated:

I normally internalize that personally. I take responsibility for that. But for example, the last year I taught, I left in January of that year to have my son, and my plan was to come back before testing, but once I got home I realized that I wanted to take some time to be home with him. There were a couple of kids who didn't pass, who I felt maybe if I had been there to push them, would have gotten there. So, I think when kids don't pass, I personally struggle with it. I look at those scores. I take those tests apart, and then the next year, I just do everything I can from what I've learned from that group to help the next group..... I think for most teachers though, we take responsibility for it, and you feel responsible when a group of kids may not perform as well as you think they should (Jackie, 2008, 2).

Jane had similar internal feelings when she failed to motivate a class of second graders who were not interested in anything that she taught. She stated:

I feel like a failure. I mean, my goodness. If I can't do anything to get the kids to be excited about something, and the things that we do in second grade are, I think they're incredibly exciting (Jane, 2008, 2).

The participants also related personal issues that made encouraged them to become teachers. They spoke of people who influenced them as well as their natural inclination toward teaching and their love for the jobs and the children. Their inclination to teach was based on their own personality or their affinity for the children. Jane initially fought the allure of teaching until she saw how ineffective one of her son's teachers was as well as witnessing some of her son's teachers who were very effective at their jobs. She wanted to emulate the better teachers. She stated:

I kept saying from the time I was a senior in high school until I was in my thirties, I kept saying, I am not going to be a teacher. I am not going to be a teacher. Absolutely not. .... My mother was a teacher, and I am sort of an oppositional kind of person, so I said, I'm not going to be a teacher because my mother would always say, "Oh, you're gonna be a teacher." And my son was in elementary school, kindergarten, and I went over there to do some stuff with the kids, and I did some little math things with them. I thought, wow, this is so much fun. And then I watched his teacher do some things, and I thought to myself, I think I could do that better. I think I could come up with a better lesson plan than that. ....My son had some of the best teachers, unbelievable teachers when he was in early elementary, and I got a lot of ideas. ....So, that's why I became a teacher. It's just one of those things. I wanted to be the same, and I wanted to be different (Jane, 2008, 2).

Gary was also inspired to refocus his career toward elementary teaching when he subbed in an elementary school and observed a teacher who was able to breathe life into subjects that Gary did not enjoy while he was in school. Gary stated:

There was one who was a real inspiration to becoming an elementary teacher. That I probably would have before, not even come into the interview because I'd really just called this school asking for a letter of reference to apply to high schools. And one in particular, Mr. Beasley, did so many cool hands-on things with his kids. He did math. This is actually before the Everyday Math® program, which has a lot of nice hands-on things built into it, games. I saw him doing that when I was in his class. I was here for two months while I was in grad school. I was a long-term sub for a special ed. teacher that had knee surgery. And that really made me believe that I could teach math and that it would actually be a lot of fun. My math teachers were really boring, so I just didn't have an interest in teaching it. It wasn't a fear of teaching math, but I thought it was boring. . . . . He was a very good teacher (Gary, 2008, 3).

The participants' own educational experiences played a significant role in their decision to become teachers. As Gary mentioned, math was not exciting for him as a student, but he came to enjoy teaching after witnessing someone whom he greatly admired, and bringing it to life for the first time for him. He also recalled teachers from his youth that played a significant role in his decision to teach. He stated:

In terms of challenging kids, my favorites were the ones that challenged me. My least favorite teachers were ones that bored me. I almost think it was fortunate that I had some of each. Mostly mediocre teachers, when I look back and a few

great ones. That first inspired me into their subject area, biology, psychology in high school. I took those classes in AP. Had amazing teachers. I tried those out in college. Decided those really weren't for me as a job. What I really loved was the teaching (Gary, 2008, 3).

Jane's teaching was also influenced by teachers from her youth. She explained that her inability to read the body language of her teachers caused her to be blatantly open with her students about her feelings and concerns. She stated:

I guess my elementary school life was extremely controlled by the teachers. I mean always. Yeah it was. I really didn't understand. I didn't read people at all. I didn't notice when the teacher was mad, and then I got into trouble all the time because I had no idea that she was mad because I didn't read the facial expressions or anything (Jane, 2008, 2).

And I was always terrified because it seemed like the anger and disapproval and everything, it just came out of nowhere. It just hit me..... , and I didn't even know what I was doing wrong. Or I didn't know this is an unspoken rule in this classroom, and I broke it and I didn't even know about it. I think that the reason that I do that and make sure that they know that everything is gonna be up front, if I tell them I'm angry, I'm angry. If I don't say anything, then I'm not angry (Jane, 2008, 3).

The control that Jane's teachers had exhibited over her and her classmates influenced the open environment she established in her classroom. Jane recalled that she and her classmates sat in straight rows in strict environments where they were not allowed to move around the classroom and had to remain quiet. As a result, she arranged

her classroom in open tables and allowed students the autonomy to work in other areas of the room if they chose. She conducted many of her lessons on the class carpet, and allowed students to remain at their desks if they did not want to join the class on the carpet. She also provided comfortable chairs for them to curl up with a book. She said she was determined to make the environment different than her first and second grade classroom experiences.

In contrast, Jackie had pleasant experiences as a child in school, and never considered any other profession as a career. She stated:

That's really what I wanted to do. I cannot say that I had any other interests. When I enrolled at the university, I had no other. It wasn't like I was thinking, well maybe I'll do this or that. I was going teaching all the way. And I actually chose the university that I attended even over another university because at the time the other institution was moving to more of a human development major, and I didn't want that. I wanted to enroll in a program that was a teaching school, and of course, my Alma Mata was a teachers' college (Jackie, 2008, 2). I liked school. I went to a very dynamic preschool, I mean to the point that I can remember it. I mean I remember it vividly. I mean I can remember the names of the teachers. It was a really unique experience. It was a lady who ran a preschool out of her home. I remember this, and I was four, so you know. I just have always liked school, and I always had a good experiences in school with the teachers that I had and things like that. Yeah, I mean I played school, and made my brother play school and those types of things and I don't know if you know you just. Because some kids do that and some kids don't (Jackie, 2008, 3).

*Plans for the future*

The participants had personal experiences that affected their decisions to teach, and their future plans for teaching were also affected by personal issues. They had future plans for their careers that all involved some aspect of education, although not necessarily remaining a classroom teacher. Rose, for example, had just completed work on her master's degree and had plans of pursuing a position in an area of specialization. She stated:

I am going to pursue any math specialist job that becomes available within this county, and I'm crossing my fingers. We have one right now, and there's another one in the proposed budget, and I'm crossing my fingers that it doesn't get cut. I will pursue that, and go from there (Rose, 2008, 1).

Jackie also planned to remain in education, but had doubts as to whether she would stay a classroom teacher. Her natural leadership skills had attracted her to administrative positions within her county. She was acting principal of her current school, and thought that administrative work might be in her future. She stated:

My third year of teaching, I started my master's work. I finished that in 2005. That was in curriculum and instruction. I immediately began my certification for educational leadership, so I really see myself moving into the administrative piece of education. Now, in the back of my mind though, I miss the classroom. I miss the students. I'm definitely gonna stay in the field, and if I am teaching even for the next two to five years, that would be great. But I hope that in the next two to five years to be moving or to have found a position within administration.

Elementary's my preference, but of course, my certification will be K-12, so I think there's different responsibilities with either. Being a classroom teacher or being a principal, however, even the last 15 months that I've been off, things have changed a lot for classroom teachers, so more than likely I will be doing something in the field, and I see myself in the field for my career. I would love to eventually get to the collegiate level as far as, even adjunct or working with student interns that are kind of going through that process (Jackie, 2008, 1).

Gary had already been accepted into a doctoral program at a state university and was making plans to exit his teaching position for good. He wanted to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in gifted education and ultimately train teachers. He stated:

Not just being a teacher at fourth grade. And so I want to be able to affect change in that in a higher level. It's always been my goal. I actually said in my interview. They asked where I saw myself in five to ten years, and I said then that I'd planned to go back and get my PhD and become a professor to teach teachers. I'd always wanted to get five to ten years of experience before that. It had been recommended to me by my advisor in my master's program, and I'm very, very thankful for that time off. This is my eighth year of teaching, and I subbed for two years prior to that, so I feel like I'm fairly experienced, and I feel like this is kind of the next natural step. I'm really excited about my program and looking at things in kind of a higher level (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary was also the only participant who mentioned salary concerns affecting his future career planning. He added:

Salaries. That is a concern. I had planned to have children at some point. I just got married last summer. We were looking at kind of the tail end of my PhD program, but I would really like for my wife to be a stay-at-home mom as much as she would like to be or to work part-time. She thinks that would be her ideal if we have kids, and right now, we both make about the same. We're doing great. We're saving about a third of our income. We have a nice house. This is a cheap easy area to live in, but when we have kids and she's going to go to part-time, our expenses will have gone way up and our income going down. That's a scary thought, but that's not the reason I'm leaving teaching (Gary, 2008, 1).

Laura was the sole exception who was somewhat uncertain about her future in the profession. Her personal and professional life have intersected since she began her career, and her future plans depended on the decisions that she and her husband made about extending their families. She stated:

I'm probably moving next year. My husband is gonna request a transfer. Most people don't know that. Yeah, we'll be somewhere out of this area. ....And that scares me because I don't want to leave this building. Next year's probably gonna be my last year. Probably try to sub or get a job right away if we don't decide to have another child, and I think we'll probably wait. I'll get a job first. But as far as where, I have no idea what I'm looking for. Probably something similar to this situation. I don't think I'm ready to move into the big city again, especially now. I mean, there's certain areas of the state where the gangs are very, very bad, and that scares me. This little school, the worse problem we have are the parents are just illiterate. You know, the kids are as sweet as they can be for the most part.

...I don't think I'm gonna be in the classroom for 30 years. I think I'm gonna do something a little more specialized, but I'm always gonna work with kids, no matter what. Even if it's teaching Sunday School. I'm always gonna work with kids. They're great (Laura, 2008, 3).

While Gary, Rose, Laura, and Jackie all want to continue working in education in a different capacity besides classroom teaching, Jane and Clara are perfectly happy to continue classroom teaching. Their personal goals were to continue their teaching and become better at it. Jane spoke about what she was currently doing as a classroom teacher:

I love it. I can't even imagine not doing this. And I've had it presented to me that I could go back to school and get a PhD. I could do this and that. I could go into administration and absolutely not. I could not imagine not being in the classroom with a bunch of kids. I can't do that. It would be foreign to me, I think (Jane, 2008, 2).

Clara was also content with her current situation. However, she would be open to doing something else related to education in the future. She stated:

You know, I'm really comfortable now. I feel really comfortable in my teaching, but I'm a pretty ambitious person. I have my master's. I've not thought that I'd like to go back and do that. Although, I would like to work with student teachers. I think I would like to work with people that are going to be teachers. I think I have something to offer. I just don't want to have to go to school for that. If I could do something like that. I don't know, I mean I have definitely found a place with my kids, where they are and their ages. I'm comfortable being here. It's

helpful for me. But I'm definitely looking and open to different things and doing different things (Clara, 2008, 1).

### *Summary*

The personal lives of these teachers affected their teaching in ways that were not foreseen prior to entering the profession. Illnesses, family issues, and life decisions all affected the careers of beginning teachers, and there were very few institutional solutions to these personal problems. The participants all relied on the support of their students, colleagues, friends, and administrators to help them through these issues. Their personal lives also affected the kinds of teachers they wanted to be. Further, personal lives of these teachers influenced their future plans about their careers. These factors indicated that the background that teachers brought into the profession should not be ignored. These teachers all took their teaching very personally and found it difficult to compartmentalize their teaching and personal lives.

## **Problems with Curriculum**

These participants all reported having some level of difficulty with the school curricula where they were employed. The issues they reported included: (a) a difficult or inappropriate curriculum, (b) new curricula, (c) difficulty with different subject areas, (d) basal readers, (e) improvements that needed to be made in the curriculum, (f) an imposed curriculum from the school division, (g) a complete lack of a curriculum, and (h) difficulties centered around high-stakes testing. The participants expressed problems with preparing students for state-mandated testing as well as the high stress level that the tests could cause. They also expressed frustration with the value of the tests and how the tests affected their teaching.

Curriculum was an issue that came up quite often during the interviews. Some of the participants found methods of dealing with the curriculum, while some of them reported feeling completely comfortable with the material that they were expected to teach. There were some cases where autonomy was an issue, while other participants reported feeling a sense of guidance from state-mandated standards and the testing curriculum. This was an issue where they all had to somehow come to terms with what was expected of them.

### *Difficult and inappropriate curriculum*

Laura and Jane reported some level of difficulty in the areas of a difficult curriculum or one that was inappropriate for the students' age demographics. Laura said that her first school, which was a private Christian school, used the Abeka Curriculum. The Abeka Curriculum is common in many home schooling situations and was used at

this school since it was not under the mandates of the state. Laura did not report specific problems with this curriculum, but she thought that it was accelerated and that the students may have had a difficult time with it. She recounted:

Well, it just seemed like a lot of the curriculum was harder than public schools, and we didn't have state testing. We were held accountable in that I had a checklist, and I had to document the date that I covered a certain concept and if the kids mastered it, if they're just at a developing stage, if they're just at the beginning stage. And I had to turn it in once they were all mastered (Laura, 2008, 1).

The situation was difficult for Laura's students because, as a first-year teacher, she was very determined to complete her entire curriculum by the end of the school year. She admitted that she would rush the children through the curriculum, and any content that she did not manage to teach in school was assigned for homework. She said that the literature program the school used was probably the most difficult. She recounted:

Well, actually it was one company that was more difficult than the rest of them. We used that company for our literature-based stuff. The math wasn't too bad. .... It was a higher level, I would say. And I have taught from Saxon® math too, in another situation. It was hard because there weren't a lot of pictures. The kids couldn't really relate to it. It just looked like a big black and white, full of problems. But yeah, for the most part, the Abeka curriculum was higher leveled. The fourth-grade book probably had fifth and sixth-grade material in it (Laura, 2008, 2).

Jane also expressed having difficulties with a curriculum that may have been too advanced for her students. The second-grade curriculum in her school division includes ancient China and ancient Egypt. She said that teaching second-grade children concepts related to ancient history is very difficult since they have only been alive for seven or eight years in most instances. She explained what the process was like for her:

I have real issues with ancient culture. Trying to teach children ancient cultures because they don't understand. They don't have a concept of ancient yet. So, what we try to do is we try to give them the knowledge of the different places. Gosh, I've got to think about how to say this. Think of a tree, and there are all these little limbs. And those are the things that the child knows, and so we bring out something that they can't possibly understand like ancient times. They've only been on Earth seven or eight years. What can we do? So, we have to take that information and try to find a limb to hang it on, something that's already in their brain. Some idea that we can attach it to. That's difficult at times. Sometimes, we are floundering trying to figure out how we can connect something that we know that they can't understand. Something that is developmentally inappropriate, but we still have to teach it (Jane, 2008, 1).

Jane, who was the oldest of the participants, said that she tried to find different methods to have her students comprehend ancient times. She said that history as recent as the 20<sup>th</sup> century is difficult for students who were not even born until the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She explained how she tried to connect historical concepts to something that her students can understand:

We just try to keep saying ancient is a very, very, very, long time ago. I have a little timeline up there and some of the kids say where was Jesus on the timeline, and I'll point to it. Show them. .... The other day, one of the kids asked me what BC or we use BCE now. He asked me what that meant, and I told him. And he said, "How many years is that?" I said, "Let me ask you something. Do you think that Abraham Lincoln was in BCE or AD?" And he said, "Oh, he's a long time ago. It has to be BC." So, there's really no time frame for the kids when they're learning about ancient things. They put me on the timeline, if I put up a timeline at the beginning of the year, they will put me with Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, and they will put Jackie Robinson, Rosa Parks, all of us clumped together in one spot, usually about 1800 (Jane, 2008, 2).

Jane recounted the narrow view of students who were unaware of items such as cassette tapes or black and white televisions and how these students could not conceive of how she grew up without the benefit of cellular telephones. She said that these differences pointed to how difficult it was to teach them about ancient periods in China and Egypt. She recounted how she and her colleagues tried to teach the curriculum:

But when you start talking to them about, this was during a time when nobody could write, that there was no written language, and it's hard for them to even believe it. And I was doing a thing with the today about languages, and they kept asking questions like well, how did they read books. Well there were no books. Well, how did they go to school? Well, the boys went to school sometimes unless their parents needed them and the girls didn't go to school. It's very difficult. The whole thing. The whole idea. Ancient for second graders, it's ridiculous. Barbara

and I spend most of the time talking about the beautiful writing and the Great Wall and why it was built and the culture. Products that come from China and inventions that they did, but we don't spend a lot of time trying to get them to understand what ancient is. We just say it's a long time ago. .... that's way, way out of their scope of understanding (Jane, 2008, 2).

Jane and Laura both found ways of teaching curricula that they found to be inappropriate for their students. Laura was able to move her students through the accelerated curriculum because they did not struggle with it, and Jane collaborated with colleagues to teach ancient history to students who grappled with a concept beyond their understanding. Neither of these teachers felt pressure to prepare students for standardized testing since the Christian schools were exempt from it and the state-mandated tests were not administered to second graders.

### *New Curricula*

Jackie experienced the phenomenon of having an entirely new curriculum introduced to her school during her first year of teaching. She had interned at this school, so she was familiar with the curriculum used by the school before she began to work professionally. She recounted what the experience was like for her:

The county, at that time, was in the process of adopting several new textbooks and curriculum pieces for various content areas. So, that was a challenge in itself; just learning each of those new materials; new textbooks etc. However, it was easy on the one hand because I was brand new, but it was the first time it was being introduced to everyone, so I pretty much got the same staff development; the

same training; the same support as everyone else did. So, that was helpful, but it was a lot to have on your plate at one time. So, curriculum wise, I would have to say that was the biggest thing (Jackie, 2008, 1).

The curriculum was new and challenging for Jackie; however she expressed how pleased she was with the school's decisions. During her second year, the county adopted Everyday Math®, and Jackie reported that the faculty "fell in love" with it. She said that the county's math curriculum specialist prepared them well for the new series through grant money to attend workshops and professional development training. She was also pleased with the materials provided along with the textbook series. Jackie did admit that the program was not the favorite of everyone, and Gary reiterated this when he mentioned the difficulty of teaching the fifth-grade standards to students who had not been taught the foundations in this program. However, none of the participants expressed any major concerns about this new math program.

While the new math curriculum did not present difficulties for Jackie, she did express some concern about the arrival of several new textbooks at one time. She found some of them to be very beneficial, and she stated that she just learned to balance the different subject areas while not trying to become an expert at everything at the beginning. She stated:

We adopted several new texts. There was just a lot of staff development. There were a lot of meetings regarding those curricula, the books, the adoptions, the workbooks, how to best implement all those new resources and things like that. It was busy, and it was a lot to juggle, and like I said last time, I believe, even though we attended all of those workshops, you still had to pick one or two areas

and focus on. You couldn't become an expert at everything. You had to just pick one or two things, and then the math adoption actually came a couple years into my career but not too far after a lot of the other curriculum. So, I think you just have to find a balance, and do it that way (Jackie, 2008, 2).

### *Basal readers*

The participants all taught in the same school division and received training on the new mathematics curriculum when it was introduced. They were not always as pleased with some of the other subject areas. Jane and Gary decided to modify and add to the reading curriculum. While Jane was primarily satisfied with the basal reading series adopted by her school, Gary expressed strong opposition to the excerpts from longer novels that made up the basal series. Gary expressed his feelings about the stories:

Most of them are boring. It's got a lot of excerpts from longer books which I'm really strongly against. Kids should be reading the entire thing, and they don't tend to get into it if it's just a chapter. .... I have a real beef with the Houghton Mifflin curriculum for reading in that it's got excerpts. Its workbook is confusing. For example, in an early lesson in the workbook, .... they have something on complete and run-on sentences, and instead of labeling them complete and run-on sentences, they label them sink and swim. It's a story about the Titanic. There's not a whole lot of survivors of the Titanic left, but it's kind of like calling, something, say if you read a story about September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and it's calling it run or burn. I mean it's really pretty horrible. It's also confusing to the kids. .... Kids should be thinking longer and longer term, and to read a novel over a couple

weeks is a great thing, and to think about it and talk about it and write about it and write stories like it (Gary, 2008, 1).

Gary said that he dealt with the issue of basal readers that he considered substandard by placing children into leveled reader groups and allowing them to choose novels at their reading level to read as a group. He also said that they read novels as a class such as the Phyllis Reynolds novel, *Shiloh*, which he felt that many of the students from the rural area would find interesting. Gary also used similar reading methods when he taught high school. He said that many of his eleventh and twelfth-grade students had never read a whole novel, and he felt that they should experience reading one from beginning to end without being limited to excerpts.

Jane was also a fan of reading and quite often used trade books and novels to supplement her reading instruction. Unlike Gary, Jane did not have a problem with the basal reader. She just wanted to foster the love of books among her students. She stated:

Everything that I do, all of the language arts that I do has, we do the basal book which is pretty good. But I also bring in lots of other books that just go with it. That's the way it is with the social studies. We can't teach social studies with a textbook like that. So, I get as many books as I can and bring them in and put them in the classroom. A lot of times, the kids will just stand and stare at the books for a long time, but then I noticed that they're starting to take the books and tell me, "This is cool. Look at this." And then they're hooked (Jane, 2008, 3).

*Teaching various subjects*

Many elementary school teachers are charged with teaching multiple subjects, and some of the participants expressed concerns with some curriculum subjects with which they felt less comfortable. Other participants realized that they could not master everything at one time and focused on specific areas. This was the advice from Jackie's first principal, and she felt that she benefitted from following that advice. She stated:

My principal, at the time, encouraged me to pick one or two subjects to really focus on. Work on the lesson planning because, he said you can't be an expert in every subject, so you're going to have to pick a couple things and each year, you're gonna hone those subjects and make them better. So, that's what I did. As a school we were working on reading so, I basically focused on reading my entire first year, I mean as a primary focus but of course learning the rest of the curriculum (Jackie, 2008, 1).

Clara performed a comparable action during her first year since she received nearly identical advice from her principal. She said that she chose two subjects on which to concentrate during her first year. She stated:

I picked math because I was actually; You know they do level the class. Some schools group them, so for math and for reading, it's easier to differentiate in schools that are actually teaching to homogeneous groups. .... I concentrated on math because I was teaching the higher group, and I wanted to do a good job, and I wanted to push them. So, I concentrated on math. I thought that was important, and I also concentrated on literacy because I knew that literacy was something

that was very.... I mean I had kids coming in who didn't know how to write their name in fourth grade (Clara, 2008, 2).

The participants chose a few areas on which to focus, but they also realized the areas in which they were weak. Laura, for example, said that learning the history of her new state was something that she had to make a priority after moving from another state. They also realized that they had to devote an adequate amount of time to each subject regardless of whether they preferred the subject or not. Gary favored literature and writing but he was mindful of the other subjects. He stated:

Well, I like to think that I give fair time to each subject. I don't think that any subject's not important. In our day now, we have an hour for math. We have 30 minutes for writing, 30 minutes for small reading groups everyday, and then most days we have 45 minutes for other language arts activities, and we do everything from grammar to whole class novels. Right now, we're doing poetry. We're reading *Love That Dog* as a class, and then we're going to be moving into doing some *Romeo and Juliet* reader's theatre since we're finished the SOL tests. It's a lot of fun. The kids love it (Gary, 2008, 3).

Teaching multiple subjects did not present major problems for the teachers, but they knew that they could not master all of the subject areas at one time. They handled this by focusing on one or two subjects at a time while still being mindful to devote an appropriate amount of time to each subject area.

*Lack of curriculum*

Gary was the only participant who did not begin his career in an elementary school and one of two participants who did not begin in the same state as the others. His beginning experiences were unique in that he was in another state and at a high school. He recalled being hired to teach eleventh and twelfth-grade literature and composition, but he was provided with no guidance as to how to go about it. He said that there was a complete lack of a curriculum both at the summer school where he began and at the school where he taught his first full year. He recalled:

It was almost too open, though. I really had nothing except junior year was to teach American lit. Senior year was to teach world lit. That was all the direction I was given which as a first year teacher; I would appreciate that now, but as a first year teacher, it was a little overwhelming. .... I taught novels which I was happy to do. I prefer novels to textbooks, I had almost no direction. I was basically left alone in my classroom (Gary, 2008, 1).

Gary solved this problem by creating his own curriculum for the high school juniors and seniors. He used his literature and writing background to develop a curriculum for the students which he said they enjoyed. He decided to teach some of his favorite novels and teach writing since he had studied the craft. He recounted:

I went to the book room and taught novels that I already knew. .... So, I picked books that I knew. .... For juniors, I taught *Catcher in the Rye*, *Huck Finn*. I don't remember what else I taught. For seniors, I did *Siddhartha*, *Night* by Ely Wiesel. ....I picked books that I know and liked. I already had some ideas of what I was gonna do with them. ....it was really wide open. I would go and say, hey

I'm thinking about doing our major senior papers on human rights issues, and the multimedia teacher would say, "Oh, that sounds great." ..... So, they would do papers in my class MLA style, and they would turn those into websites in the multimedia lab (Gary, 2008, 2).

The problem of not having a clearly defined curriculum continued for Gary after he left high school and began teaching in elementary school. He recalled how ambiguous the curriculum was when he began teaching fifth grade:

It's not a very good curriculum, for the most part. I do like Everyday Math®, but they have curriculum guides that try to tell you what to teach and what week. .... there was again, no direction. The only thing that we had direction for was math. It was just implemented, Everyday Math®. .... So, that as another big problem, but other than that, there was no direction really for the English curriculum, for the science curriculum. We had textbooks that didn't really match up with the SOLs. Social studies, I had no direction on that one. .... and it was pretty overwhelming (Gary, 2008, 1).

#### *Imposed curriculum from the school division*

Gary mentioned the lack of a curriculum when he began his career at the high school level, however he also experienced the other extreme when he began teaching in elementary school. His school used curriculum guides which he had not been exposed to while teaching high school. Gary felt that these guides were imposing and were not the most effective method of teaching the curriculum. He stated:

Well, again it's interesting because I would say at this point, my biggest problem is that there's too much direction in the curriculum. .... And this is the time that we started getting a lot of news about the coming curriculum guides, which at this point, I wasn't very happy about whereas as a new teacher, that would have been a helpful, at least, starting place. But now, I see a lot of limitations (Gary, 2008, 1).

The impact of the curriculum guides was compounded by further curriculum mandates from the State Department of Education when Gary's school was incorrectly labeled as failing. This was Gary's fifth year of teaching, and it was a very difficult time for him because he and a group of teachers went to Africa during the previous summer on a Fulbright Fellowship. He and the other teachers were very excited about incorporating African themes into their curriculum. However, the school was labeled as "failing" under NCLB based on test scores from the previous year. The state sent inspectors to observe the school and recommend measures for improvements in the curriculum. These measures took much of the autonomy away from the teachers in his school, and many of the ideas based on African culture were forbidden. Gary recalled the incident:

But anyway, I'd just come back from a Fulbright scholarship summer in Africa with several other teachers from the area including two others from the school. And we were very excited about what we were going to bring into our classrooms from that experience, in particular doing some kind of pen pal project and creative writing project with students in Africa. And we were told that we couldn't do that, and so that was really deflating, after having that really amazing experience and being very, very excited about it. To come back and be told that (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary went on to discuss the impact of the inspectors on the school and the curriculum. He recalled that the inspectors stayed for about three days and left a list of recommendations. He said:

They wandered around a little bit. They spent about half a day here, interviewed a few teachers and then suggested that we reduce our recess by ten minutes, which is actually illegal, so I don't know who trained these folks. .... Teachers had to turn in their lesson plans, which I don't have any problem with. Although you do run into the worry then, that you're getting kind of the big brother thing. You expect some basic things. What was the other thing? No more class meeting, so those were kind of the three main things. To my knowledge, there wasn't much other than that that was changed (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary said that this incident affected the morale of the faculty in the school, and it affected him to the point where he seriously considered leaving and attending graduate school. He had always planned to leave the classroom and attend school to pursue a doctorate at a later point, but these changes in his school's curriculum made him want to leave at that point. He began to apply to universities, however having to undergo back surgery and becoming a foster parent made it difficult to leave. The mistake in the school's status was corrected, and teachers were slowly granted their autonomy again.

Gary had strong feelings about such mandates. He felt that they could actually prove beneficial to some teachers who were not performing well. He said such teachers at least began completing the workbook pages. He said that the process really pulled teachers toward the middle in that it brought some highly effective teachers down and some ineffective teachers up. He felt so strongly about the mandates that he actually

refused to eliminate morning meeting. He also opted not to limit the recess of his students whom he felt needed half hour of physical activity per day.

*Possible improvements in the curriculum*

Gary also offered recommendations for how his school's curriculum could be improved, since he was still not completely happy with the direction of the school. One of his first recommendations was to increase the number of field trips per year. He felt that the average of three per year was not adequate and any less than one per month was "pretty sorry." Another recommendation that he had for the school was to improve the writing program. He recalled the lack of a writing program in his high school, and he felt that students were not given enough writing time in the current curriculum. He stated:

They need to be doing lots of writing. Kids this age, I think do need some concrete rewards. I think when you're teaching high schoolers and college students, they can be thinking about their job marketability, and they could be thinking about showing their best language abilities through their writing. ....

The biggest and most important part, I think, is doing things on an individual level. I've got some kids that come in here that capitalize every letter D. And we need to work on that. That's one of first priorities. You've got to learn when to do capital and not. I've got kids that come in every now and then even already doing pretty decent paragraphing, making the right choices about where a paragraph goes. That's more rare, but one or two often in a year. .... They should be developing longer complex stories. They should be working on developing their character in different ways. They should be working on better word choices, not

just “he said, he said, he said, he said.” “And then, and then, and then (Gary, 2008, 3).”

Gary’s interest in teaching writing effectively to his students came from his own love of writing which began as a child when he was bored in his own classes. He was gifted as a child but was not properly challenged. He began writing to avoid being assigned additional worksheets while in school. He said that gifted children in today’s classrooms were not being properly challenged with the curriculum in his school. Gary said the program only required students to write paragraphs when they should have been writing their own stories. He asked his students to write their own stories, and in some cases, their own chapter books. He noticed the decline in writing among his gifted students and feared that this trend would continue if the curriculum did not adequately focus on writing.

### *High stakes testing*

While discussing the issues that they had with the curriculum, all of the participants eventually mentioned high stakes testing as a part of their curriculum. In the state where these teachers are employed, public school students must take the Standards of Learning (SOL) examinations beginning in the third grade. The examinations are given in April of each school year. The standards for each grade level are included as a part of the curriculum of all school divisions in the state. With the exception of Jane, all of the participants have had to administer these exams. Jane, a second-grade teacher, was still affected by the SOLs because the third grade battery has always measured standards from kindergarten through third grade, so Jane still had topics that had to be covered in

second grade. The participants expressed various issues with the tests. Some of them felt the tests were not problematic while others mentioned how the tests affected instruction and the negative aspects of the tests. The tests have also caused stress for some participants, and Gary had issues with the exams not being nationally normed or tested for validity or reliability. He also felt that the test was too limiting for children who need a more challenging curriculum.

Jackie and Gary did not feel intense pressure to drill their students for SOL testing, and they felt more relaxed with the standards they had to teach. Jackie said that she felt much more relaxed than other teachers in her school. She stated:

There were a lot of teachers around me who just.....they can't even say the SOL without their blood pressure rising, but I really saw it more as, this is my curriculum. This is what I'm asked to teach. This is what the children are being assessed on. So, I'm gonna teach them the best I can. So, I never really flew off the handle about SOLs (Jackie, 2008, 1).

Gary also did not feel much stress because of SOL testing since he said that the results of a negative score were not as much of a problem for teachers. He commented:

At the elementary level, at least, most of the high stakes lie with the administration. If our school district's not doing very well, unfortunately for the superintendent, whether she's great or she's terrible, eventually it's going to lie with her first and principals. As of yet, I do not know of anybody at our school who has had their job threatened for their test scores. Students and parents don't really have any high stake in them, almost unfortunately (Gary, 2008, 1).

Gary and Jackie are both tenured teachers who did not feel uncomfortable with high stakes testing. Gary later expressed separate issues with the tests, but he did not feel that his job was at all threatened by the results of the tests. High stakes tests were also not a problem for Laura while she was teaching in a private school since she did not have to administer them. They were also not problematic when she initially began teaching in public schools. Laura said that she was unaware of the tests' importance at first. She explained what it was like to come from a Christian school setting to a public school where the tests were critical:

I had the accountability, but it wasn't the same. Because all I had to do was turn a sheet of paper in. Nobody ever came to talk to me about what was on that paper. The principal just looked at it and said, "Okay, I trust that all these kids mastered." SOL tests are completely different. The first time, I had kids taking the SOL test, I flipped out and quite honestly, my first year in a public school, I didn't even look at the standards. I was told that if you teach this curriculum, you will be covering the standards, and it didn't even occur to me that I should be making sure and double checking, and it didn't come until probably my third year, that I started really pulling those SOL, the lists of SOLs out and seeing, did I cover that (Laura, 2008, 1).

Whether or not the participants felt comfortable with the tests, there has definitely been an impact on the instruction because of the standards. Both Rose and Jackie taught third grade during at least some of their initial years and had to prepare first-time test takers for the exam. One issue for third-grade teachers was having to prepare students to

be tested on material dating from their kindergarten year through their current third grade curriculum. Rose explained what this was like for her:

I would build in K through 2 reviews starting in January. For science and social studies, starting in January when we'd come back from winter break. Just to help keep it fresh in their minds. I mean, even the stuff from the second grade, the Native Americans, they wouldn't remember. It was just a lot of review (Rose, 2008, 2).

The effects of taking the responsibility to cover and review four years worth of material were also felt by Jackie when she taught third grade. Ideally, the third-grade teacher would be primarily responsible for the third grade curriculum. However, Jackie explained why this was not the case:

They start SOLs in third. And so, even though that third-grade SOLs is supposed to be a cumulative test of kindergarten through third, your name is on that test, and I took and I still take responsibility for that, and so I think another stress of that, not just feeling responsible, but you had to get through the third grade curriculum, but you also had to make some time to review second and even some of the content from first grade. You could do that some. With the way the curriculum spiraled some in social studies and some in science, but you still had to take time out and pull some of that second-grade stuff and just review it, Egypt and China (Jackie, 2008, 2).

The SOLs provided some guidance about the curriculum for one of the participants. Clara expressed satisfaction with the standards and how they had affected

her instruction. She recalled the situation before the standards were introduced and how they have helped. She stated:

Well, basically before we had the SOLs, you pretty much had to decide what the objectives are for each year, and what kinds of things you need to learn. In your math, sometimes that's already laid out for you, so you know. You don't need to learn that as much as you just kind of go by that material.

..... With the coming of the SOLs, and they have the third grade SOLs, and that's what you learn. Those are the content standards that you need for social studies and for science. Wherever you are, you just have to pick up what you're doing. Plus you ask the teachers that are already there, and you ask them for materials or when I knew I was gonna be teaching fourth grade, I went to every person I knew before. I went to my school and gathered all the materials that I could (Clara, 2008, 2).

The standards also helped Clara focus on what was important and where the focus of her instruction needed to be. She realized that some teachers had expressed frustration with the high stakes tests, but she looked to the standards for guidance in her instruction. She stated:

I think with the testing focusing your teaching and focusing; getting all of the teachers teaching similar things with the SOLs. We have a curriculum. We need to teach the curriculum. I think it is better for our children. I think, when I first taught, "Oh, we're gonna do this theme, and we're gonna teach about Valentine's Day." Well there wasn't a lot of purpose. Now there's a purpose, for me the way that I am. .... I don't teach because there's the tests. I'm teaching concepts that

are already on the test. They're testing what we're teaching. .... Starting now, we're probably talking about it a little bit more. We're doing a little bit more practicing, but I tell the kids, "this is not the end all be all of your third grade year." And if I'm doing my job, it shouldn't be an issue (Clara, 2008, 1).

While Clara was content with the role that the standards played in focusing her teaching, she did express some concern about the rigor of the curriculum and the isolating conditions it had caused for her and the other teachers. She adhered to a strict calendar as a means to ensure that she covered all of the material by the testing date. This forced her to move at a rapid pace. She said that she used to have a fun day after she tested each unit; however that had to cease because she had to quickly move to the next unit in her curriculum. She also said that she could no longer collaborate with other fourth-grade teachers because she had to concentrate on her students. She felt that it was a disadvantage to only show concern for the students in her class rather than all of the fourth-grade students, but she had to make sure that her students were prepared for the tests. She said her name would be on those tests, and she had to make sure that the students were well prepared.

Similar pressures were felt by other teachers as well. The interviews with the participants began near the beginning of the testing period and continued into the time that they were testing. Rose commented on how the stress level had increased because of the SOLs:

I mean, everybody's kind of on edge right now a little bit. I mean you can just tell a vibe has changed a little bit. I mean, not anything major, but it's still there, and

everybody's like, oh, once SOLs are done. They have that mentality. Once the test is done, we can relax (Rose, 2008, 2).

Jackie also talked about how stressful the tests could be for teachers. However, Jackie felt that she was able to deal with the tension. She stated:

SOLs were definitely a stress, but like I said, I was kind of on the beginning of that trend too, so as stressful as they were, my students usually did pretty well, and I felt like I had prepared them for that assessment. And they have even changed over the last eight years as far as federal guidelines that have come down. I mean, they were stressful, but they weren't necessarily hard. They were what they were (Jackie, 2008, 1).

Other negative aspects of the high stakes tests included the effects on the students, as well as problems with the tests themselves. Gary, Jane, and Rose talked about these aspects of the tests. Gary and Jane mentioned how students are affected by the constant assessments. Jane said that she had a parent say to her that, "You can't fatten a pig by weighing it (Jane, 2008, 1)." She took this to mean that assessing students does not make them any smarter. Gary said that the constant assessments served to burn students out for meaningful testing. He stated:

You're also wearing them out for testing. .... They're worn out on it, and I'm not sure that it's going to improve scores. I've always done some test-taking skills and some review; what the SOL tests look like, how to make good choices when you're stuck, but adding that in has been a problem (Gary, 2008, 1).

Another aspect of the testing was the tests did not accurately reflect what the students were able to do and what the teachers had accomplished over the year. Rose said

that when she was teaching third grade, she had to teach or review four years of material that was all assessed on one day. She said:

And then the other part of the testing that I find challenging is that I feel they're just looking at one day and what that kid can do. It's just a snapshot of that day, and it doesn't necessarily mean that they can do it or they can't do it. I just don't think it's as valid of an assessment for what we do. And then for them to say, based on pass or fail, what I have been doing all year in my classroom. If they didn't put so much pressure on the teacher from the fallout of the SOL testing, then I could be okay with it, but the fact that everything that I've done all year comes down to one day on a multiple choice question, I don't think that's appropriate (Rose, 2008, 1).

Gary also mentioned the statistical problems with the tests and how they may not have accurately assessed students' abilities. He said:

One major problem you'd run into right away is that the SOLs are not really standardized, that they're not nationally normed and that they vary wildly from one year to the next. I don't mean a little bit. They vary wildly in terms of how hard they are, what kinds of questions they ask. It's not like the SATs or even the Praxis. They're nationally normed (Gary, 2008, 3).

Gary realized that it was important for students to learn to take standardized tests and to teach them test-taking skills. He recalled that he had to take the GRE to be admitted to graduate school and the Praxis exam to become a certified teacher. His concerns were that so much emphasis was placed on a multiple choice test and the result could have detrimental effects on a student's academic career. He was satisfied with the

standards for subjects like science, but he was upset about the standards being all that was taught. He felt that teachers needed to expand beyond what was on the tests. He stated:

I didn't really have any idea what fifth graders should be learning in science otherwise. While I have big problems with multiple choice tests and some of the kind of threats that the state and federal government use regarding, I think it is nice to know that third graders have learned about habitats, and so in fourth grade, we're focused on animal adaptations in that same sequence and in fifth grade, they're gonna learn about cells. I think it's nice to know that. That doesn't mean that you can't teach more, teach things that go beyond that like say the Jason Project and include some of those things and go beyond that in all subjects (Gary, 2008, 2).

### *Summary*

While the participants were well adapted to the curricula that they had to teach, they all had concerns about certain aspects. The primary concerns were a curriculum that was too difficult or inappropriate, brand new curricula as well as the curricula of the various subject areas. Other concerns were the textbooks, an imposed curriculum, the lack of a curriculum, and high stakes testing. The participants found ways of dealing with these issues in various ways. In many of the cases, they went beyond what was expected in order to do what they felt was best for their students. Curricula was a primary concern that arose quite often during the interviews, but it did not cause any of the teachers to completely give up. They took the curricula that they were given and made the best of it.

### **Issues with Special Needs and Gifted Children**

All of the participants expressed concerns with special needs children in their classes. The various special needs ranged from visual and auditory processing problems to severe emotional and behavioral issues with children. The participants also discussed providing appropriate instruction and services for gifted children in their regular education classrooms. They worried about not having training in special education and a lack of support from the school's special education resources. Some of their solutions included pairing children with others who could help them, scaling down the curriculum, changing the curriculum, and seeking help from administrators.

#### *Prepared for special needs children*

Of all the participants, Jackie was the only one who had had special education training during her teacher preparation program. She purposely sought the training because she wanted a job in a county that actively employed inclusion programs. She stated:

I knew that that was probably gonna be the case when I applied to this county just because they had a well advertised and a well documented inclusion program. So, I knew going into wanting to work in this county that that was highly likely that I would have students with special needs in my classroom, and I also chose that as one of my concentrations at the university for my bachelor's (Jackie, 2008, 3).

She admitted that she was initially apprehensive about working with large groups of special needs students, but became comfortable with them and began to have those

students throughout her initial years of teaching and actually preferred them. She also stated:

My second and third year were similar in that I continued to, I don't know if you want to call it have the special ed. cluster, but we had about five or six grade levels every year in third at my first school. .... And we would group students accordingly so they would receive appropriate services, and I continued to have a pretty large percentage of students with special needs those second and third years, but I felt much more prepared and much more apt to deal with those students from day one. ....I had a lot of background, a lot of strategies and things to deal with students, but I think it's not as much those students as it is students, whether or not they have special needs, but just those behavior problems that really tripped me up my first year. But I think second and third year, I was much more prepared and much more comfortable in dealing with that group of students. .... So, I guess you could say that eventually that became my, specialty's not the word, but that's really where I was more comfortable (Jackie, 2008, 1).

#### *Not prepared for special needs children*

While most of the participants began to instruct special needs students from the onset of their careers, Laura had no real exposure to children with a range of academic abilities under her instruction until after her third year of teaching when she moved to a public school. She was completely immune to children with special needs while teaching

at the Christian schools. She preferred the diverse academic abilities that she encountered in public school. She stated:

I think I prefer public to private because you have a lot of variety of kids. We didn't accept any special needs kids, and the first few years of teaching that's fine because you're still trying to get your feet wet with being in front of a bunch of kids. For the most part, they were all about the same level, so I felt like I was able to work my way up to the point where I could have a diverse class of the full spectrum. You know, since I've been in the public school setting, I've had a child with autism. I've had a child with Down Syndrome. I've had a child with Aspergers, and it's like you have to (Laura, 2008, 1).

The range of disabilities also affected Jackie since she had such a large cluster of special needs children during all but one of her first five years of teaching. She stated:

For the most part, most years I had those with some variation of learning disability, depending on, usually it was focused in language arts or math. I had several students with autism over the eight years that I was at my first school. I had one student that was educable mentally retarded. I never had students with disabilities that had a lot of physical disabilities. It was more the learning or the cognitive things (Jackie, 2008, 2).

### *Minor special needs*

Some of the issues with special needs children were not severe and presented little difficulty for the teachers during their initial years. Some of Gary's problems were dealing with children who were not reading on grade level. He attempted to solve some

of these typical issues by providing these children with as much individualized attention as was possible. He stated:

I had two kids that were very low readers. Both of whom were bright kids with significant reading learning disabilities, and it was nice to see really with both of them, a lot of progress being made. I worked really well with the special ed. teacher at that point. She was putting a lot of effort into it. I felt a lot more confident about what I was doing and really working toward spending as much small group and one-on-one time as I could. When everybody else is writing, I have one kid at a time working on their writing (Gary, 2008, 1).

Gary noticed the issues of his students having reading difficulties and quickly developed a method for dealing with it, so the problem did not overwhelm him. Other special needs were so commonplace that they presented little or no problem for these beginning teachers. Participants mentioned dealing with children afflicted with Attention Deficient Hyper Disorder (ADHD), but it did not pose serious problems for them. As Jane stated:

I don't even notice ADHD anymore. I mean, if they're hyper. They'll go out and they'll be playing. They'll be in the hallway, and one of the other teachers will say, "My gosh, that kid is hyper." "What? What are you talking about?" Because I hadn't even noticed it (Jane, 2008, 3).

While Jane did not notice hyper children, she was always attuned to slight changes in her students. She fostered an open environment in her classroom where children were expected to participate and become fully engaged in the activities of her classroom. She said that by the middle of the school year, all of her students were usually

full participants in her classroom. If they were not, then she knew that there was an issue with that child. She was able to distinguish between children who were shy and those who may have had specific issues. She recounted a situation of an abrupt change in a student. She stated:

So, if I have a child who is not volunteering, that is a big tale for me. .... So, if the kids don't do that, that tells me something. But you have shy kids, but you know that they're shy. And when you work one-on-one with them, they're not shy anymore, and they can do this stuff. I've got a little girl right now that, she's a bright little girl, but every time I call on her she'll have her hand up or she'll look like she's getting ready to say something, and when I say her name, immediately, she just sits with her mouth open and her eyes like. And she told me the other day that she was feeling shy right now. If I hadn't watched her very, very closely all year, I would think that she did not know the material, and even when she did work, even when she does them right now, she's so worried and she's so anxious or shy or something, and her mother noticed it too. She has a hard time completing stuff. .... This came up. And her mom said it came up at home too (Jane, 2008, 3).

Jane developed a method of asking three questions before she called on this little girl to answer a question, thereby giving her an opportunity to formulate an answer before her name was called. Jane found that this method worked. She also noticed children who had problems that were possibly missed by previous teachers or others in the child's life. She recalled two incidents with children whose difficulties were thought to be much more serious than they actually were.

I notice very, very quickly if somebody isn't paying attention, if their mind is wandering. That's one of the things that I see very quickly. And sometimes, it's very, very subtle. I remember a little girl who had vision problems, and they didn't know it. And I was doing a running record with her, and I was sitting at a round table like this, and she was reading. And I started watching her eyes instead because she was stumbling over all these words, and finally I was like this, leaning over, looking up at her, watching her eyes. Her name was Chante'. I said, "Chante', can you see?" And she really was having an awful time seeing, and her mother sent me a note that afternoon, or Chante' had brought it in and gave it to me that afternoon and said, "Do you think Chante' might need glasses?" And when she took her and had her eyes checked, it was unbelievable how bad her eyes were, but everybody thought reading problem. (Jane, 2008, 3).

Jane recounted another situation with one of her students who she suspected had undetected learning problems.

I had another little boy. I see him. He started out the year having a very bad year, and I still think that he has an auditory processing disorder. (Jane, 2008, 2). I'll use him as an example. At the very beginning of the year, I was talking to the aide that was working in here and I said, "I'm going to kill him. I am. I seriously. I'm going to kill him. I'm gonna throw him out the door." Of course, I would never do anything like that. But I started watching him. Just constantly watching. What is going on because he was just; he acted like he never paid attention at all. Never paid attention. He was in trouble all the time for doing inappropriate things in the classroom, and then after I watched him very, very carefully, one day I was

outside with the kids and I was standing with this same aide, and I said, “Oh my God. This looks like auditory processing disorder.” (Jane, 2008, 3).

For Jane, this was an incident of a child whose learning disability was mislabeled.

This was not the only time in which this type of incident occurred. She added:

That’s usually what happens, that you’ll see something that’s just a little bit, doesn’t make sense the way the child is. And then you can start to address those problems. But when they come in with a label, there’ve been times when I said, “The label’s inappropriate.” One was developmentally delayed. I said, “no.” No. I thought that we might have a learning disability and I thought we might have an attention problem, but I wasn’t seeing any delays. And sometimes, of course, you miss stuff (Jane, 2008, 3).

Another participant dealt with a situation of having special needs children who did not meet the qualifications for special education services although they were clearly in need of additional support. Jackie experienced this within her special education cluster of students. She stated:

I think, in general, I don’t know that I could speak specifically to my first school, but I do think we went through a period of time where we over identified students, but you also had another group of students that maybe didn’t meet the requirements to qualify for special needs services, but they had a lot of special needs. You had to diversify more. You had to implement more individualized instruction whether or not children had IEPs. I think every year, you have to do more and more with kids individually which is hard because you don’t have the time to pull kids one by one every day. But through different types of

instructional strategies, you have to really focus on where the kids are and what their needs are (Jackie, 2008, 1).

### *Severe special needs*

Special needs such as reading difficulties, ADHD, and visual or auditory processing problems did not present as much of a problem for these beginning teachers. However, there was a wide range of special needs and some were, at times, much more severe. Gary stated:

I had a number of kids who were labeled ADHD, and I had a couple of kids with some pretty significant special needs. Two of them were right on the border of being considered mentally handicapped. One of them was labeled with SED. I think it's severe emotional disorder, disability (Gary, 2008, 1).

His problems were compounded when students were erratically medicated. He said that he knew when students were off their medication. He recounted:

Some of them were medicated, and some of them were not. My first year, I had several kids with pretty significant behavior problems. Never had that many before. I'd be better able to handle it now, but I was probably more frustrated with it knowing what I can do with a class. Some were medicated occasionally and not all the time, so they'd have good days and bad days. I had one boy who was a really good kid, who really wanted to do well, very extreme ADHD, and you could really tell when he was on and when he wasn't. I also started doing a lot reading at that time. There are always too many kids who are medicated.

Generally, by the time they get to fifth grade, the parents made a choice whether they are or not (Gary, 2008, 2).

He added:

That's always a challenge. I've learned so much personally from that. From working with students, particularly with autism. By accident, I ended up with four students over the years with autism. It's really fascinating. We've got a little girl in a third grade class with Cerebral Palsy who has just learned how to use facilitated communication, and they've learned, suddenly, how intelligent and capable she is, and it's really neat for the kids to see. We invited her over to share a story that she'd written using her facilitated communication board. Now, they're kind of blown away because they see her in the hall, and they typically assume that that student's not very smart because she acts differently. It was a great learning experience for them (Gary, 2008, 1).

Nearly all of the participants could remember a specific child or a small group of children with special needs that caused significant problems for them and other students in the class. Rather than cognitive disorders, most of these children had emotional or behavioral disorders which caused erratic behavior in the classroom. The disruptive incidents of these children resulted in the participants vividly recalling and recounting incidents of misbehavior and steps that they took to address the behavior. Jane, Clara, Rose, and Gary all remembered specific students whose disorders presented problems for them during their beginning years of teaching. Jane recounted:

One of the fires that I had to put out constantly is; I had little girl who was a screamer, and she would scream for no reason. I mean scream for ten minutes

without stopping with tears shooting out of her eyes. She could shut it off just like that. So, it was one of those things that was voluntary. And she had a lot of the kids very, very nervous all the time about if they bump into her is she going to start screaming and having one of her tantrums. And those kids were really nervous about stuff (Jane, 2008, 2).

Clara also dealt with a difficult student during her fourth year of teaching. This student's behavior caused her to fear for the safety of the other students in her classroom and presented her with the dilemma of tending to the needs of this student or serving the needs of the other 16 students in her class. She stated:

I think I had a particularly difficult special ed. student, and had not had experience with that. Not a lot of training with that, and it was not anyone's fault. It was just something that had not been done, and I don't know that you can ever prepare for it. You never know how they're gonna act. He was very physical. That was just so mentally draining. He ran all the time. I was in a trailer, and he would... You'd come in one door and he'd run out the next. You're chasing him. I was pregnant. .... So, in having him, you feel guilty because you want to do everything you can for him, but you also feel guilty. And again you also have that struggle. Do I see to the needs of this one student in sacrifice of the 16 other that are in here? Because really and truly, you want to make that balance. It's so hard to do. (Clara, 2008, 1).

She recalled that this student did not adapt well to any changes in his routine. She added:

I was in the first grade, and in first grade you set your morning up very structured as far as you have your calendar time and your sharing time, and I used to come in and write a letter to the kids and we would talk about it. Well, if I did my letter before I did my calendar or whatever it was, if I had moved anything in that routine, he'd freak out. He came up one time, I did it in the wrong order. I was tired, morning sickness or something, and he came up and he ripped my hair out of my head. Like he went, "(Yelled)" and jerked my hair out. .... He was never violent to other children. Mainly the adults that were working with him. He had the exact same lunch every day. If they didn't have his lunch, which God forbid, he'd flip out. Throw his tray on the floor. Just those kinds of things which he's young. And you learn more about it. .... to this day, I cannot name any of my children. When I hear that name, I cringe (Clara, 2008, 2).

Having a single child with behavioral disorders presented problems for the participants, but one participant, Rose, had to deal with eight students in her classroom who were all on behavior plans. Such plans are established when a student's behavior is so severe that a plan for improvement must be implemented. One of the eight presented a particular problem for Rose that nearly completely impeded her instruction. She recalled that several of the children needed special services but did not technically qualify for them. The children who were receiving special services were still underserved, which made classroom life very difficult for her. She felt as though she was not adequately supported by the school's resources. She recalled one particular student who was severely emotionally disturbed:

He was emotionally disturbed. He was very hard to deal with because he didn't have normal interactions. He would talk to inanimate objects as if they were animate, and he would do all sorts of things that just weren't right. He was very challenging, and he was receiving outside counseling from a psychologist or psychiatrist. And eventually, he was put on home bound instruction.....

Honestly, it's like one of those things where you just block it out because it was so bad. I'm trying to remember if there was a specific incident that he was involved in. I can't remember specifically what it was, but we had gotten to the point where he could not be in the classroom at all for any length or period of time, and he used to be, I guess at the beginning of the year, he could usually make it until about lunch time, and then it was an all-bets-are-off kind of deal. I think it got to the point where he wasn't able to be successful at all during the school day (Rose, 2008, 2).

While this child was one of several behavior problems for Rose during the year, Gary had a particularly well-behaved group of children during his third year of teaching with the exception of one child with emotional disorders. Gary vividly recalled the issues that he had with this student. He began:

I had a really neat group of kids. I had another kid labeled SED who would throw two-year-old-style temper tantrums over one. Missed one on a spelling pre-test. It's not even taken for a grade. I hadn't even seen it, and he would go to pieces. He was a bright kid, but this whole class was built around him. Really just being a bunch of nice kids, and it was really a great year (Gary, 2008, 1).

Gary elaborated on the spelling pre-test incident and other situations in which this child lost control. He added:

I think it was the second week, we had our first spelling pre-test, and he missed one word out of 20. Pretty darn good on a pre-test. That would be a 95%, and this is our first one. I don't even know though that he's missed one yet. We self graded the pre-tests. Just passed out the papers for them to check. And all of a sudden, he screams. He calls out, "Why don't you just call me a retard?" He picks up several hard back books that are on his desk, ...slammed them down on the ground and stormed out of the classroom crying..... So, that was my introduction to this student. At that point, I think the whole class was kind of in shock over the whole thing and looking at me. What am I gonna do? It was a truly unique experience. Again he was very, very bright, and he did know that his behavior was embarrassing. He didn't like it. He actually recovered really fast from it too. Really in just a minute or two, he would be fine (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary suspected that the parents of this child's previous classmates all requested that he not be placed in their child's class for the next year. His behavior was, therefore, new to both Gary and the other fifth graders in the class. Gary also determined that this child learned this behavior from his home environment. He stated:

I think probably from fourth grade, some kids had had him before, but I think they didn't put a single kid from the fourth grade classroom in the fifth grade classroom because too many parents would have complained because he'd distracted learning so much in the past. He's one I really feel truly proud of helping to improve, and I understand that he's done pretty well through middle

school. He's in high school now. When you meet the parents, you realize where that came from. Instead of a serious anger management issue, I don't think that he was physically abused, but he saw that kind of temper tantrum from adults (Gary, 2008, 2).

### *Dealing with special needs students*

These beginning teachers all found various methods to deal with students with severe behavioral problems. They sought help from administrators, other teachers, and the children themselves. Clara handled her problem by talking to relatives, colleagues, and her principal about it. She stated:

It was hard. I mean there were nights when I would go home crying. My husband's like, "It's not worth it. You're quitting. You're not going back." I don't emphasize it as much because it's something I've made it through. When you're in the middle of it, it's like you're just putting out fires. That's all you can do all day. But you also realize, I just need to make it through. Next year is gonna be a better year. But then again, you're also supported. I go to my principal. I went to my principal with the hair that he had pulled out of my head. "Okay yeah. This is not going to work. I need some support." And you just talk to the special ed. people, and she came in and would come in and make sure that she was in there at that time or we would come up with different strategies. But again, it's that crisis time when you're trying to just make it through. But one of the problems is you don't always have that plan, and you need to have a plan (Clara, 2008, 3).

While Clara actively sought the support of her colleagues, Gary actually ignored the advice of his colleagues in terms of dealing with his emotionally-disturbed student.

He stated:

I'd been encouraged not to play any game that had any kind of outcome really. A previous-year teacher and special ed. teachers. I decided that really wasn't gonna help him get better. You have a smart kid who recognizes the negative behavior. It's not the same as, say, having a behavior that's very hard to control, like perhaps a kid with attention deficit disorder who really has trouble. Even though I've had some that really want to focus, really want to do well, they seemed almost incapable of doing it for very long. We graphed the number of times per week that he had to take himself out in the hall way, developed some special rules. He could leave the classroom at any time he was upset and could sit in the hallway until he calmed down with no consequence, but if he yelled anything. It was almost always aimed at himself, but if he yelled anything negative or if he slammed the door, he would lose five minutes of recess. So, it very quickly became where he would get frustrated, but he would stand up. His face would contort like he wanted to yell something, but he wouldn't. He'd go to the door, he'd almost slam it, but he would stop it at the last second and close it gently. He started showing those kinds of self control (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary also challenged this student to change his own behavior since he felt that this child was able to control his behavior. His plan developed as a result of the incident when the child lost control during the spelling pre-test. He said:

As I recall, I either asked him to step out in the hallway for a few minutes so I could go speak to him or he just left and went into the hallway, and I followed him. I had heard a lot of stories, but this was the first time this year. .... I don't think that right at that point, that I had come up with a system. I think that took a lot of getting to know this student. The system did develop. I think I told you. If he said anything negative, it was usually about himself, he would lose five minutes, if he slammed the door, he'd lose five minutes, but he would go out in the hallway anytime he was upset until he calmed down, and that was fine. I felt like a real success story. It almost makes me happy to think back on it. It sounds so terrible to have a kid like this in your classroom, but he improved so much. I mean I've enjoyed every year that I've taught, but that year stands really above the rest. And it was just such a great interesting nice class. (Gary, 2008, 3).

Gary demonstrated how teachers can use students in their classrooms to help them solve issues with special needs students. He employed the peer of a special needs student at another point when he had a student afflicted with autism and with limited verbal communication skills. This student began to work closely with a gifted student in Gary's class, and the relationship was so successful that Gary continued to encourage it. Gary stated:

They were sitting next to each other, and the aides had been trained with the facilitated communication which the student with autism used. He could say "no" and "mad" and "yeah" and that was about the limit. .... We discovered that he could read and answer questions, that he could write stories. .... I don't know if we had the aide absent one day or what, but during writer's workshop, the student

asked me if he could work with the student with autism sitting next to him, and I think we were missing the aide that day, and I said that would be great. And kind of from watching them. They started that day writing stories together involving Sponge Bob and then the kids in the class and did some pretty amazing things. .... The student with autism was never upset to work with him, wanted to and it actually worked really well (Gary, 2008, 2).

Clara's and Gary's problems with emotionally disturbed children were solved by seeking help from colleagues, administrators, or other children in the classroom.

However, the issues that Rose had with her emotionally disturbed child were resolved for her near the end of the academic year. She said that the drastic step to decide to put this child on homebound instruction came from higher authorities.

I didn't make that decision. His psychiatrist made that decision. I did not. I mean I can speculate and make suggestions, but ultimately that's not a decision I can make. It wasn't working for him to be there everyday. It wasn't working. It wasn't working for him. It wasn't working for the other students, and in my mind that's the key when you say, okay we need to find something else. When it's no longer productive for anybody involved. But, no that wasn't a decision that I made (Rose, 2008, 3).

The participants also thought it was important to tailor instruction to special needs children. They differentiated the instruction and often scaled it down for children who were not developmentally prepared for advanced concepts. They were very careful not to frustrate students or set them up for failure. As Jackie stated:

It doesn't make sense. I think the other piece there too is why put them in a situation where they're extremely frustrated? Take them where they are. Work with them as far as they'll go. Sure, they still have to take the assessments and things, but you know, you're right. Why would you be standing at the board for an hour on exponents when they're looking at you like you're crazy. I mean it doesn't make any sense. And it was really just more a common sense basics approach which is what school was in a sense, probably before standards. Before we had specific standards to teach, even these textbook companies. You covered the basics and you moved on, and I think the standards are good because they brought some specificity to what we teach (Jackie, 2008, 3).

Laura was also careful not to teach above the heads of her students who were developmentally delayed. While teaching fifth grade mathematic concepts, she noticed three students who were not developmentally ready for the advanced material. She stated:

So, in math class, when they were doing exponents, in my mind, I'm thinking, they're never gonna have to do exponents in the real world. Most likely, this one child is going to work at McDonald's or doing landscaping work. Something that uses your hands, not as much of your mind. And it sounds terrible, but that was reality. And he's never gonna need to know exponents, and so, I asked the supervising teacher, the special ed. She was called the CT, consulting teacher. I asked her on several occasions, "Do you think this is appropriate work for him? Is this something," or if there were three of them, "Do you think this is something that they are gonna need to know in life? Should we be teaching them how to do these exponents just so they feel included with the rest of the group?" And that

was really hard for me. They needed to be doing basic skills. They needed to be counting money. They needed to be telling time. .... I mean, those exponents; really exponents, you don't need to know. Come on (Laura, 2008, 2).

Laura further justified her actions of modifying the curriculum for these students. She said that she and the other teachers referred to the students as the "Limited Edition" and modified the curriculum for them. She said that these students who read on a primer level, were more in need of real life skills rather than abstract concepts that appeared on the SOLs. She and the other teachers decided that these students were most likely not going to attend college nor were they going to take the same high school classes as the other students in the class. The teachers decided that these students needed more functional math skills such as telling time or counting money. Laura saw teaching the fifth grade math curriculum to these students as a waste of her time. She stated:

My conscious wouldn't allow me to teach them a bunch of fluff that they didn't really need to know. They need to be learning how to do laundry. They need to be learning how to fry hamburgers at home to be able to live someday. They needed to know how to pay the electric bill. These are things that, no, not in fifth grade, they don't need to know that, but in the next six, seven years, they will have to learn that, and we need to start working in that direction instead of dabbling with this fluffy stuff that half the kids don't need to know anyway, period. Because really, who needs to know some of this stuff. I just, my conscious. I was working with a very wonderful special ed. teacher at the time who was pretty much echoing the same thing that I was (Laura, 2008, 3).

Laura was very mindful of not frustrating children who were not able to perform at grade level. Gary also focused on what special needs children were able to do. He recounted an experience with a mentally handicapped child when he taught fifth grade.

He said:

I think that it's really pretty amazing that when you start doing different kinds of activities with kids. In fifth grade we studied vertebrates and invertebrates and I had the kids, I had modeling clay and a kid in my class who was labeled mentally handicapped, had lots and lots of problems, was the most amazing kid at modeling animals with the clay. When it was time to model a vertebrate, he made this pretty awesome shark. When it was an invertebrate, I think he made a horseshoe crab. I remember pretty distinctly because it blew everybody in the class away. Because here was a kid that was an utter and complete failure in school. He wasn't gonna be successful at regular kind of school work that was on grade level. But he was so amazing with this, so I think you see that (Gary, 2008, 3).

Clara, like the other participants, realized the importance of accommodating children with special needs, but she said that teachers can easily become resentful of the time spent dealing with the special needs of one child in a classroom of many children. She stated:

And the other part of it is you try, you have to work very hard not to be resentful of the one (child) that's taking 80% of your time because it's not fair. And that's when you have to come up with a plan and say, he needs to have breaks. This person, I need someone to come and take him and do some breaks with him or

whatever. You do lots of class building. You do lots of community work and say, you know what? Just because I'm doing this, being fair to someone does not always mean you're being equal (Clara, 2008, 3).

### *Gifted students*

The participants also expressed concerns with children in their classrooms who were classified as gifted. Gary, who is a strong advocate for gifted education, expressed concerns that gifted children in his classes were not appropriately challenged with the county-adopted curriculum. He stated:

But in terms of the academically gifted, we don't have very many kids with an IQ of 50, but we do have a few kids with an IQ of 150, and that's as different. Say someone with an IQ of 70 is on the borderline of being mentally handicapped. Someone with an IQ of 130 is on the borderline of being considered academically gifted. Shouldn't they be getting as much extra support? That's another problem with the pacing guides. We're always looking at the bare minimum, and they're some kids who are average...With the academically gifted, if the material's always easy for them, when they get to AP classes and the Governor's School and the university setting, they often really struggle because they're not used to a challenge (Gary, 2008, 1).

Gary said that magnet schools were a method of dealing with gifted children. He went on to add that the gifted program at his school was designed to for children to attend weekly for 40 minutes. Additionally, the service was only provided for part of the school year. He feared that gifted children in his class would become frustrated and fail once

they finally began to be challenged in high school Advanced Placement classes or in college. Gary, who participated in a gifted program in elementary school, had become an advocate for the needs of gifted children and planned to pursue a doctorate in gifted education to train teachers to provide appropriate instruction for gifted children.

Jackie has also had exposure to gifted children in her classroom. She had worked for three years with the special education cluster in her classroom, when her principal decided that he was going to give her the gifted education cluster for her fourth year of teaching. She stated:

It was kind of a shock because when the principal came around that year, he pulled the two of us, it was myself and my teammate pretty much beside me, and he said I'm not gonna give you the students with special needs this year. I'm gonna switch it up. I'm gonna give you two a break. And I'm going to give you the gifted kids.... He saw it as a break because we've always volunteered, so it wasn't like we had been told you're gonna deal with this group of kids, but we really felt like that was our strong point and that we did well with that group. ...I had to work a little bit harder that year because I had to come up with new plans. .... You know, kids are still kids. We still had our issues. I had a particular student that year who had serious behavior issues, but he was extremely bright. I think you're always gonna have a little bit of behavior, but it was a great year (Jackie, 2008, 2).

Jackie and Gary attempted to resolve the issues with the gifted children in their charge by attempting to find various ways to challenge them. The self-defined gifted

children in one of Jane's classes presented problems for her that affected the motivation of the entire class. She recalled:

And I had some kids that; I have a problem with gifted programs that separate children. I think that children need to be with lots of different types of learners all the time and not just put together in a little place, someplace to do. Those kids, the kids that were in the gifted program, would say, "We already know this. We've already learned this." They really hadn't, and they were not doing very well, but when they said we've already learned this, especially when I do differentiation for all the kids, and they were needing to be able to do a whole lot more than they thought they were going to get by with. When they said, we've already done this, half the kids in the class shut down immediately because they thought, "They know it. I'm stupid." So, that really bothered me that the kids just automatically shut down when we were trying to do something (Jane, 2008, 2).

When Jane was asked how these second-grade children knew that they were gifted, she responded:

I haven't the foggiest idea. I don't say in the classroom, "These are the gifted kids." I don't know if they think that because they go out, they have a pull out program once a week. Maybe they know that (Jane, 2008, 2).

### *Summary*

All six of the participants have had some sort of issues or concerns with special needs children. The issues have ranged from children with cognitive or behavioral problems to students who were not being properly challenged in their classes. The

participants sought solutions to these problems by turning to colleagues, administrators, other students in the classroom, or the child with special needs. They also tailored the curriculum to meet the specific needs of these children and accepted that they would be called upon to teach students whose needs differed from the needs of mainstream children.

## **Differentiation**

All but one of the participants expressed issues or difficulties with differentiation in their classes during their initial years of teaching. Because of the inclusion program within the school district, the participants have had to provide instruction for children at a variety of academic levels in their classrooms. The participants expressed concerns about the wide range of academic levels among the children as well as the curriculum materials that were provided for them to differentiate. Some of the participants sought assistance from special education staff within their schools, and others struggled with finding the best methods on their own. Their views on differentiation evolved from thinking that they could bring all of the students to the same level by the end of the academic year to realizing when and how to differentiate. While some of them welcomed the heterogeneous classrooms, others thought that differentiation was difficult and was actually detrimental to certain students in their classes.

### *Realizing the need for differentiation*

At a certain point within their first five years of teaching, the participants all realized that they would have to provide some sort of differentiation in their instruction. Gary and Clara talked about when they first began to differentiate. They took different measures to cater to the academic needs of children in their classes. Gary stated:

I really got into differentiations. I started reading a lot about that. I attended some workshops again, and so I asked to have both. There were at the time maybe only one or two other fourth grade teachers that were really differentiating and doing different things with different kids. Some open-ended projects. Working on longer

term writing projects..... But this year I had two kids with autism. I had three kids who were in or very near to the genius range and literally 150 IQ's. So, it was the most spread out class. In fact, that year I think that I only had one kid reading on the computerized Star Test.... coming up on a fourth grade level at the beginning of the year. They ranged from pre-primer..... I had one kid who was reading at a high school level, at a twelfth grade level, and then a couple that were reading at a pre-primer level. It showed PP on the test (Gary, 2008, 1).

Clara also saw the need for differentiated instruction in her classroom as she noticed the different academic ranges among the children in her third grade classroom.

She stated:

But if it's a math lesson, you plan it, but you also have those extension activities for those kids who are going to get done faster or if they've already tested out. You've got them on a totally different program. And the special ed. kids, if they're lower, you've got to figure out where they are. It is IEPs for everyone here. Figuring out. There's kids who come in here and can't add. So, on him, those days, he's gonna be working on a special program, and the gifted kids, some of them are multiplying three digits. So, you're working on a program for them. So, that's a hard thing to do (Clara, 2008, 2).

She added:

It is. It really is, but that's what they need. You can't just teach to the middle and hope for the best because the middle's shrinking. Each kid has their own needs. Each kid is coming in at different starting points, and you struggle. You work really hard to do that, but that's what a good teacher does. And you can't come in

doing that the first couple of years. It takes you five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten years to do it. And you still don't feel like you're doing the best that you can for each one, but you do what you can (Clara, 2008, 2).

### *Range of academic abilities*

Gary and Rose initially had difficulties with the range of academic abilities among their students, and some were not prepared to deal with them. Gary mentioned the wide range of reading ability that he noticed among his students based on Star testing which students take at the beginning of the year to determine their reading grade equivalence. He attempted to resolve this issue by placing the students into homogeneous reading groups with novels on their reading level. He stated:

Every year I've had a span of kids that sometimes span more than ten grade levels of reading ability. That is pretty tremendous. And some years I've had more. Some years I had kids that were non-readers. Essentially they come up on the Star Test as a pre-primer. I've had a few kids over the years that have maxed out the Star Test with a 12.9 plus who were reading literature I would teach in high school which is hard to select. I've had other kids that really can't read *The Cat in the Hat*. I've had a few (Gary, 2008, 1).

He added:

That was pretty shocking. We do have a computerized test that gives you an idea of where kids are reading, and so for example, in my class right now, my grade levels range from over a ten grade level equivalence. I think my lowest is 2.7, and

my highest maxed out the test at 12.9 plus, and it may well be higher than that.

So, it is pretty tremendous (Gary, 2008, 2).

Rose also expressed concerns about differentiation of instruction during her initial years of teaching although she felt more confident about it now. She stated:

My second year, and it kind of blurs for me, but the next couple of years I had moved up to third grade, and my first year I really didn't have any special education children or gifted children. I just kind of had an average run-of-the-mill class, and it was a very small class. I still have small class sizes. I think my largest ever in third grade was 17, so it was relatively small. I started having special education children and gifted children, and not having experience with them, I felt it was a challenge; especially the special education. So, that was what made those next couple of years more challenging because I felt like I wasn't prepared for, I guess, how to deal with that..... So, usually we had special ed. in one and gifted in another, but there were times when I had both and so having that full range became quite a challenge. I feel now I can handle it, but back then it was definitely something that was challenging for me (Rose, 2008, 1).

#### *Homogeneous to heterogeneous students*

Differentiation was also a problem for Laura during her initial teaching years, however she did not experience heterogeneous classes until she began teaching in public schools. Her classes at the two Christian schools where she began her career contained classes of academically homogeneous children. Since these children were so cognitively similar, Laura seldom had to remediate or differentiate. She stated:

Most of the kids were all about the same level, and then you had a child who was way lower; way higher, and that didn't come until public school. Yeah, it was really hard trying to figure out how I was going to differentiate for all the different levels and then cut myself slack when a few kids did get board and say, I cannot do everything. I'm going to have to just tell them to read a book, and that is okay. My fourth and my fifth year, I had genius level in with a child with Downs. And they're all kids, and it's just learning to love them all and laugh at them and let them laugh themselves and have fun with them and pick on them a little bit in a good way. Yeah. I would say the last two years, my hardest years were the differentiation (Laura, 2008, 1).

### *Methods of differentiating*

Gary and Laura had to develop their own methods of how to provide the most appropriate differentiated instruction to their students. Gary said that their prescribed curriculum did offer differentiated methods for students of varying academic levels; however the instructional level provided by the curriculum is inadequate. He stated:

With our Houghton Mifflin curriculum, they have; They've always pushed in the early couple years when I really tried to talk about differentiation and how these weren't meeting all the kids' needs. They really tried to push what they called the leveled readers which they have above level, on level, and below level..... but grade level wise, the above level is not more than a grade level above. The below level is not more than a grade level below. And I had kids that came in this year

reading between second-grade level and, at the beginning of the year, probably at ninth-grade level is my highest. Now I have four kids that are reading at a high school level on this test, and my lowest kid is around third grade. He made an average, on this test, 1.3 grade equivalence from September to the present. .... I've got one that's 12.9 plus. More or less, a college freshman, but that's where the test maxes out in the twelfth grade, so we'll say college freshman. .... So, that's a ten grade equivalent span. You can't meet that with one textbook. I also have a real problem with textbooks that are mostly made up of excerpts (Gary, 2008, 3).

To differentiate with the wide range of reading levels in his classroom, Gary has formed small reading groups with each group reading a novel that is on or near the grade level of the children in that group. He stated:

I like books like *Shiloh* and *Number the Stars* that are basically at a fourth grade level. We read together as a class with guided reading. I try to give kids time where they're reading on their own. That's harder and harder to do. We encourage it outside of class and some home projects, but then we also do small book groups. So, there are kind of three main things that we always do in class; reading quietly to oneself, smaller amounts, larger amounts, guided reading where I'm reading a book and all the kids have books. We talk about certain parts. I used a post note strategy from the book, *Strategies That Work*. It's very effective, and the kids use that same strategy when they're doing the small book groups. And small book groups are leveled, so for example, my class right now, I have one group reading a book that's right about a third grade level, beginning third grade level. I've got

several who are pulled out for Title One. There's two boys that are still in the room that are about third grade level, didn't qualify for it because their scores were actually too low. You get a whole problem with that. The rest of my class, this year, the average reading in my class right now is over the sixth-grade level according to the STAR Test. And again, that varies (Gary, 2008, 2).

Laura also established different ways to differentiate in her classroom when faced with the limited variations found within her math curriculum. She became frustrated with above-average children complaining of boredom in her classroom and created independent work for advanced children to complete while she continued to work with other children. She stated:

In the county, they have a binder for each grade level in math that has materials for each chapter, and so I just decided that I wanted to make a smaller version of that, just pick the materials I wanted. I didn't use all of them and made a binder for them to keep in their desk and pull out as needed. I guess I just took it from the county..... The first year that I was here, I had a little girl that told me she was bored, and at that time, I developed the same idea, only I had a vertical, hanging file basket. Each chapter was in a hanging file, and the kids would come to the back and pull out that chapter (Laura, 2008, 3).

Laura also explained how she modified the curriculum material for children who struggled with math. She explained:

Yeah, and with the lower kids, I just go in and modify their work. I'll take a magic marker and black two of the answer choices if it's multiple choice. If it's a matching problem, I take out some of the choices. You know, just any

modification you can do, and that does take a lot of prep work. It takes a lot (Laura, 2008, 2)..... I got that from a special ed. teacher. She showed me how to take what was already in there and make it simpler, even if it meant crossing out the entire problem completely and next to it, putting a completely different problem. It's still in that same workbook, and it's not quite as obvious to the rest of the kids. They're still working out of the workbook (Laura, 2008, 3).

### *Ineffective differentiation*

Jackie realized that differentiation does not always have the desired effect. Jackie spoke of the idealism that beginning teachers have of bringing every child to the same academic level by the end of the year. She realized with time that not every child is going to make the gains that beginning teachers hoped for them. She stated:

Well, I think when you're starting out as a teacher, you don't want to fail, and so you don't want to fail the students in your instruction and in your preparation and things, but you also want them to learn everything and get everything right. I think that's just something that when you get in there and you do it and you realize there's a bell curve, and every child is not average. Every child is not below average, and every child is not above average. You have to take them where they are, and then take them as far as they'll go. And I think when you start out as a teacher, everything's coming up roses and you want to make a difference and you want every child to experience that, and I think even though at the end of the year you have made a difference, it's not always exactly where you want the kids to be (Jackie, 2008, 2).

*When to differentiate*

Clara, Jackie, and Gary realized with experience that differentiation is not possible with every lesson. They acknowledged the time that is consumed with differentiation lessons for children and how difficult it can be with several students. They have determined when it is appropriate to differentiate. Clara has decided which subjects required differentiation. She stated:

Reading is a must. You have to differentiate for reading. You can't have them all on the same race. You have to do that. Math, you have to. There are certain skills that they have to have before they can go on. And learn the different learnings. So, those are a must. Science and social studies, as long as they have the essential learnings, you're gonna decide. Okay, how much am I going to pursue this experiment with these kids. Those kinds of things. But really math and reading are mostly the ones that you're gonna have to make sure you do because they're coming in at all different levels, and you don't have a choice, really. You don't have a choice..... You've got to find books that they can read. And math, you want to do a three digit multiplication lesson. There're kids who don't know how to do one digit times one digit. So, you have to differentiate. You can't let them just sit there while you're trying to teach a lesson because they're lost (Clara, 2008, 3).

Jackie also determined when to differentiate since she also realized that differentiation is not possible with every lesson. She also uses a variety of methods in her instruction to meet the needs of all students. She stated:

I think certain subjects and certain topics are easier to differentiate for kids. I think things like science and social studies, you can give the bare minimum information to a kid. You don't have to go too far above. You can give them exactly what they need and give it to them in different ways. Whether it be note taking or a project or whatever. Now I think it's our job to differentiate all the time, everyday, but I don't think realistically, that's possible. I think when you sit down to make a lesson plan you can think, how can I give some kids some different options for this lesson, and I think you do that. And I guess what I was saying is I feel like I do that better with certain things. Not with every lesson. I mean there are some things that you want everybody to get the same way, and other lessons lend themselves to some creativity maybe and some differentiation across the board (Jackie, 2008, 2).

Gary also determined when he has to differentiate or remediate for the class. He has generally accelerated the pacing guide that is mandated by his school district and only remediated when he noticed that students were not grasping concepts. He stated:

The pacing guide has, I think about, four lessons per week. You generally can do five. The research shows, particularly for gifted kids, research by a university, that gifted kids and most other kids tend to learn math better when the pace is kept up. If they really are missing a skill, you go back and make sure they have it. So, if I give a test and I have, say a couple of kids get a D or U's, which are our F's, then I'll pull those kids out. If I have kids generally scoring lower than they do on most other tests, I'll step back and re-teach it to the whole class and give a different test. But for the most part, that's not necessary. On most of my tests, I had 80%. I

use the tests out of Everyday Math®, passing benchmark tests which are from the district. The vast majority of my kids are passing and passing well (Gary, 2008, 2).

### *Meeting the needs of each student*

Differentiation now comes fairly naturally to Clara and Laura, however they did not always have such mastery of how to tailor instruction to each student. As new teachers, they were presented with school adopted curricula and had initial difficulty with how to adjust lessons to levels appropriate for their students. As Clara stated:

So, that was a challenge and learning how to do that, and also learning the curriculum. You're learning whatever curriculum it is for that age. It's a lot of information, and you've got to learn it. You've got to know it and learn it and know what to do with it, and how to teach it to different learning levels.

Differentiation I think was very hard for me, learning how to do that because I knew all my kids weren't gonna be at the same level, but the variety of levels, and how many different levels there were. That was interesting in trying to differentiate each lesson for each level (Clara, 2008, 1).

Laura also had difficulty with differentiation when she was first compelled to adjust lessons after arriving in a public school setting. She admitted to continuing to struggle with differentiation at times. She stated:

I still struggle with making sure that all the kids are working at an appropriate level. I have some solutions..... That's solved a few problems, but there're times when they just don't want to do another worksheet. I'm trying to think. I

guess making sure that the high kids' needs are met and that those children with special needs really; their needs are met and that they're loved..... Differentiation and then remembering that the kids; they're not perfect (Laura, 2008, 1).

### *Utilizing school resources*

The special education teachers within the schools have proved to be valuable resources for the teachers as they developed different methods of differentiation within their classrooms. Jackie recalled turning to the special education teacher during her first year since she felt so comfortable with the staff at the school. She accredited her comfort level with knowing the school's faculty and staff from her tenure student teaching at the same school. She stated:

Again, I think we witnessed that when we were there all year long as interns. We saw how that relationship worked, and so when I began my first year teaching there, whether I had students or not in my classroom with special needs, which I did, I went to them and just said, "Help me with this, or how can we co-teach, or how can we divide the kids and give them some more individualized instruction," that type of thing. And a lot of times there would be times where the special ed. teacher would do something with the regular ed. students while I pulled some of the students with special needs into small groups. So, I think I witnessed that collaboration and just felt like that was important, and so I just continued that model as I started my job there (Jackie, 2008, 3).

Jackie was so impressed with the assistance that she got from the special education staff at her school that she thought the methods would work equally as well with all of her students. She stated:

I think they're a lot of strategies and differentiated things that we use with students with disabilities that every kid can benefit from whether it's a visual or a Vin Diagram or anything. I think there are things that I got in my training since my concentration was special ed. I use those strategies with all kids. I mean it didn't matter. It was a good strategy to use so, we did that (Jackie, 2008, 2).

#### *Differentiation not presenting problems*

Differentiation was not a problem for all of the participants during their initial years of teaching. Rose and Jane actually preferred to have a range of academic levels in their classrooms. Rose only had 12 students during her first year of teaching which made differentiation possible for her without huge strains on her time. She stated:

Well, I was able to individualize the education a lot and do a lot of differentiation with the students. Just basically to meet their different needs, and so just having the 12 made it so much easier. You had less people that you needed to get around to so, you had more one-on-one time with each kid (Rose, 2008, 2).

Jane also did not experience difficulties with differentiation and actually favored having different children with different academic abilities in her classroom. She expressed that all children benefit from being exposed to different academic levels. She said that her style of turning control over to students creates an environment where students feel free to help each other. She stated:

I love classes that have students that have severe learning challenges and students who are gifted in the same classroom. I think that everybody benefits. I think that in this state we have a thing that is called clustering for gifted kids and that all the gifted kids are put in one room. I think that's a horrible idea because they only progress as high as the highest gifted kid, but when they're in a group with children who think in so many different and weird ways, they have to make themselves think in all kinds of different ways. They have to be able to communicate in different ways instead of just communicating on this higher academic level (Jane, 2008, 1)..... I've never had a problem with differentiation with doing lessons like my math lessons. I do some. Some of the stuff that I do is very simple. And I just keep adding layers of difficulty almost with the same problems throughout the entire lesson.....Last year I think the attitude of the gifted kids last year wasn't that they were bored or anything like that. It was that they didn't want to work with the other kids. And this year, it's not been a problem at all..... And that might be why I do work very well with a wide range of kids. Because I do have so many different things. If you're afraid or worried about losing control, this does not work. If you are a teacher that needs everything controlled or organized all the time, it doesn't work. You have to be very, very flexible and able to move between the groups and it's almost like schizophrenic teaching (Jane, 2008, 3).....I'm gonna teach them, and it doesn't matter to me if they're Einstein or if they can't count to 10. They are what they are (Jane, 2008, 1).

The participants all took pride in the methods that they used to differentiate and stated how much these methods helped struggling children in their classes. One of the methods that Gary used was morning meeting in which the students all sat in a circle and shared various academic and personal achievements. He was told to discontinue the daily meetings after his school was incorrectly labeled as failing under NCLB as a means of providing more time for academic instruction. Gary ignored the mandates and explained that such an action would have been detrimental to special needs children in his classroom. He stated:

We were also told that we couldn't have our morning meeting anymore which was a short 15, 20 minute thing, but I really found, especially in these very, very academically diverse classrooms, to be just transformative for letting kids get to know each other. Particularly that year, I had a student with autism who was very, very bright. He had been wrongly assumed to have been mentally handicapped before. He had recently stated using, at the end of third grade, a facilitated communication device.... The class may have been really transformative, and so I never stopped doing it. I was always waiting for someone to come and tell me that I couldn't, but this student with autism; and I had a gifted student who was very, very bright but completely disorganized. Alone, neither would do very much during our writers' workshop time. They really weren't living up to their potential (Gary, 2008, 1).

While Gary was proud of the differentiation strategies that he used in his classroom, he does have concerns about the potential that inclusion programs can have on

gifted children in his classes. He admitted to having mixed feelings about full inclusion.

He stated:

I really see it holding some kids back, and I'm not sure what the final answer is for that because I would have a lot of trouble with something that was very exclusive. That's a big issue. The larger your classes, the harder it is to differentiate (Gary, 2008, 1).

He continued to express his feelings on inclusion hampering the academic growth of some gifted children. He stated:

Research shows that it does. .... I don't have a clear definitive answer. I came in as a full supporter for inclusion, and I'm not positive anymore. You cannot meet, if you have somebody that is reading at a high school level, I can meet their needs some of the time in maybe the small reading groups if I have other kids that are at that similar level. You can meet their needs sometimes in math by giving them challenges and stuff, but still most of the time, it's fourth grade curriculum. (Gary, 2008, 2).

### *Summary*

Differentiation is an issue that has affected all of the participants at some point during their initial years of teaching. Whether they agreed with it or not, they all saw it as essential to their instruction. Some participants like Jackie anticipated it from the beginning and prepared for it as a part of her training. Others, such as Laura, did not have to differentiate until she began teaching in public school. They all clearly saw the range of academic levels in their classes and took initiatives to differentiate. Some of them

sought help from special education faculty members and others took it upon themselves to meet the individual needs of their students even when such practices were frowned upon by the school's administration. As Clara eluded to, teaching to the middle is becoming an increasingly fruitless practice. Beginning teachers must begin with either a strong foundation in differentiation methods or administrators need to provide support in the way of staff development or resources for beginning teachers to feel tailor instruction to the needs of all of their students.

## **Issues with Discipline**

All of the participants dealt with discipline issues during their initial years of teaching. While none of them reported overwhelming issues with discipline, they all had to seek methods for dealing with the problems they encountered. Many of them reported problems with individual students or small clusters of children instead of an entire class of rambunctious students. The participants addressed individual discipline problems on a case by case basis. A couple of participants attempted to address classroom behavior with the whole class, while others dealt directly with those children who were most problematic.

The discipline issues were discussed in terms of: (a) specific problems, (b) improvements as a teacher, (c) solutions to problems, and (d) a variety of behavior modification methods. Most of the participants spoke of the problems that they had with specific children and how they solved these issues. One participant, Jackie, saw discipline problems minimize as she grew more experienced as a teacher. Another participant, Laura, tried a variety of methods to control discipline in her classroom.

### *Specific Problems*

Rose and Gary primarily spoke about problems that they had with individual students or small clusters of students. Gary, who began his career teaching high school, did not have discipline issues until he moved to teaching fifth grade in elementary school. He stated:

The first year was very difficult because I had so many and was not used to those sorts of very minor discipline problems. I mean, when I taught high school, it was

pretty clear if two kids were about to get into a fight, and that was a vice principal issue or a kid was failing, so we'd pull everybody else in and say it's time to start turning the homework in, working harder in class. Here [in elementary school] was really different (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary had not been exposed the level of immaturity among elementary school students while teaching eleventh and twelfth grades. He recalled how he dealt with a group of girls who would play together at recess and would quarrel over very minor things. He said that it was hard for him to understand such incidents.

For the most part, Gary did not think that he handled discipline any better because he was a male. In fact, he recalled a female Latina teacher at the high school where he taught, who was much more effective at discipline issues because she lived in the same area as the students, knew many of their parents, and was of the same ethnic background. The only incident where Gary felt that he had an advantage as a male was with a student who had difficulties with female authority Gary recalled:

I've got a boy from a very difficult background who has a lot a trouble with female authority. Generally, he does really well with me. .... but generally it's outside of the classroom. So, he was working with a math aide. .... He was talking to a neighbor in a small room, and she asked him to move, which is little bit of a new teacher mistake. I would generally ask the kid that's less likely to have any problem to move even if he's not the offender. But anyway, so he just flat out refused, which is not something I've ever seen in the classroom. He had huge discipline problems last year, and he's one who's mom's in and out of prison. Dad's his everything, really, but also the authoritarian figure in his life.

And so, there's a time where it's helpful to be a male because he sees that differently. He was making faces at the art teacher's back a few weeks ago when she had moved him for the same kind of thing. Which he doesn't do for me (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary did not think that his gender was a huge advantage or disadvantage to his teaching. He identified only one particular student who responded better to males and whom Gary felt that he understood. Because he knew the student's home life was difficult, he made allowances for this child and dealt with him on an individual basis.

Rose had to deal with a number of children during one particular year who had behavior disorders. During her most challenging year of teaching, eight of her 15 students were on behavior improvement plans. She stated:

Yeah, kind of again, it's kind of all blurring together. Let me see if I can go back and figure out which classes those were. Let's see. Yeah, my most challenging year was after my fifth year. That one was where it was really the class makeup that was challenging. The students. Each kid individually was a unique child, great kid individually, but the mix of them was so awful. I had eight children on behavior plans, which is unheard of. This year I have one. I mean in the entire fourth grade, we have one. .... And some of those students were obviously more challenging, had more severe problems, but the fact that there was eight of them that had to be on behavior plans, ....So, more than half of my students were on behavior plans, and trying to manage that and keep up with that is; and when you don't have any extra assistance. ....you're pretty much on your own, and that was

quite a challenge. I was ready to quit after that year. ....It was that bad (Rose, 2008, 1).

Rose went on to explain that the number of discipline problems inhibited instruction and that she got very little accomplished that year. One student in the class had severe instructional needs, and she only had a special education aide for part of the day. She also said that only a few of the eight students were instigators, but they were able to entice the other students into misbehaving and affect the entire class. She stated that this was her most challenging year.

#### *General behavioral problems*

Both Gary and Rose recalled specific children or incidents of discipline problems, while Jackie recalled a more general problem. She said that she had to deal with issues of disrespect during her first couple of years. She stated that she was strict, but she did not know how to deal with children who did not show her proper respect. She recalled how she felt disrespected by children:

I think just in their actions, in the way they spoke to me at some points. Every kid, not every kid, but kids mess up and that's okay. You know, there are some children that consistently have issues, and it just seems like there was nothing you could do to break through that. You could send them to the office. You could take away this or that, and that really never made a difference. I think as you teach, you learn children and their personalities then you figure out what works for them because one size fits all just doesn't work as far as discipline goes. And that may have been the problem. As a first year teacher, I had a discipline, and I had a

behavior management system, and I tried to implement that, and it worked for some, but it didn't work everybody (Jackie, 2008, 2).

Jackie did not provide specific examples of disrespect, but she emphasized that one discipline plan would not fit all children. She also expressed frustration with a lack of support from parents. Jackie said that she had a classroom management system and behavior plan, but she felt that it was weak during her first couple of years. She added that she got much stricter as she progressed during her teaching career. She attributed her disrespect issues to just being a new teacher and not having the experience to deal with such issues.

#### *Solutions to discipline problems*

The solutions to the discipline problems experienced by the participants ranged from creating more interactive activities to seeking help from administrators. Discipline was not identified as a major problem for the participants, so they did not have much difficulty determining methods that would solve their problems. Gary and Clara developed similar methods for dealing with discipline issues. They both felt that occupying children with interesting or hands-on activities was the best method to limit behavior problems.

Gary realized this when he reflected on his high school teaching. He said that it was appropriate to have high schoolers stay in their seats for 90-minute periods of time, but this was unrealistic for fourth and fifth graders. He also commented on how teachers frequently took all of recess away from students as retribution for inappropriate behavior.

He determined that taking the entire recess was not necessary to correct behavior. He stated:

So, I guess I learned a couple of really important things there. One minute off recess was as effective as any other amount. You didn't need to have lot. So, instead of a kid losing all their recess over a few minor issues, taking off three minutes might have been as effective. They still have their exercise, but it's still a punishment and they still don't like it and change their behavior. .... I think those are the big keys to keeping the class under control and doing lots of hands-on stuff, having some breaks. You can't have fifth graders sit at their seats for a 90 minute block like high schoolers could (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary also used the one-minute rule with a student suffering from severe emotional problems. He was able to completely turn the behavior of this child around through a series of compromises. He realized that such young children could not remain still for long periods of time, and he was able to develop activities where they were able to interact and constantly move around the room. His belief was reinforced by the idea that children needed their recess to burn off energy. He thought that it did not make sense to have a child with too much energy sitting in at recess doing nothing.

Clara held similar views on occupying children to prevent discipline problems. Clara was a petite and slender woman, and she admitted to having concerns about her fourth-grade children getting into fights. She stated:

You know, that concerned me. I really was, my first year, thinking when I was in fourth grade, these kids are bigger. How am I gonna handle it? But my philosophy for that, and this did come from my teaching, is that if you are doing what you

need to be doing in the classroom, it's never going to get to that point. And if it's happening on the bus, if it's happening on the playground, that's when you need to be, doing some intervention in the classroom, but as far as teaching in the classroom, I was concerned about it, but it ended up not being a problem because if you are occupying their hands and their minds, they're not going to be wanting to fight (Clara, 2008, 1).

Clara also said that she sets clear expectations for her students, and she may lighten up or crack down as needed with her students. She recalled that her uncle, who is a teacher, advised her to never smile or banter with her students, but Clara did not think that she had to take her classroom management to that extreme. She really believed in occupying student time with engaging activities. She did not recall any major discipline problems during her initial years and found ways to control her classroom without taking drastic measures.

Rose had to take drastic measures to control the eight children that she had on behavior plans. She did what she called, "farming out" of the eight students, which entailed sending them to different rooms. The other faculty and the administrators all knew of Rose's plight and had sympathy for what she was experiencing. Rose found that if she removed certain key players from the group, the other students would generally settle down. Her colleagues freely took the other students because they knew of her unfortunate situation. Without the primary instigators in the classroom, Rose found that she was able to refocus the group and continue with instruction.

Jane's relationships with her students were more collaborative than those formed by Rose, Gary, or Clara, so classroom management and discipline policies were created

by the class. Jane felt that children needed to think about inappropriate behavior and reflect on it before they could improve it. She stated:

We have something called behavior books. When a student does something that is inappropriate, they have to write it in their behavior book, and the sheets say this is what I did, and the next paragraph down is this is why I did it, and then the last thing is this is my plan for changing my behavior. .... If they can't write, they can draw them out. Barbara and I always give the kids a little time after so that they can calm down, and they can be thinking about it in a more objective way instead of being so angry about something that happened, and then we can talk to them about that behavior. The behavior books don't go home. We've had a lot of success. We've been doing this for many years, so we've had a lot of success. I feel like I don't have a discipline problem (Jane, 2008, 1).

Jane felt that students will change their behavior once they have thought about why they behaved that way. Her discipline plan did not include contacting parents or administrators. The children felt that their behavior modification was strictly between them and Jane. This further established the trust that Jane built between herself and her children. She recalled incidents when students thought they had committed offenses and wrote about them in their behavior books. Once she and a particular student talked about what the student had written in her behavior book, and they both decided that the behavior was not inappropriate and that the other child involved was actually the offender. Jane felt that this reflection and time was crucial to solving problems of discipline.

*Multiple Methods*

Laura had tried a number of positive and negative reinforcements that have worked for her. Her methods of behavior management could be considered more authoritative than the methods of the other participants. Several methods seemed to have worked for Laura. She did state that she does not like to raise her voice and shout, but she had to have order in her classroom. She talked about some of the methods that she has used:

If the kids are not doing what they're supposed to do, I will stop them by saying, "If you hear my voice, clap once." Get them refocused, constantly. And if that doesn't seem to help them stay focused and controled, then I remind them that I've said, for instance, no talking. I'll say, "Now, I have asked you to stop talking, and if I catch you talking, you will get a warning." ....There's always one sacrificial kid who has to get a warning for the rest of them to learn. If they see you're not serious, they're just gonna keep talking. Once you give that first warning, usually they fall into line. Now, I've had years where it didn't matter. They still continued to talk, and when that's the case, it's hard. I've tried several things. I've tried doing a whole class positive rewards system where; positive some years, negative some years. .... A lot of times, I'll just randomly pick people and say, "Thank you so much for being quiet. Go get something out of the treasure box.". .... I find that the more positive I can be rather than harping, say, "I'm so sick of your talking. You need to stop talking right now." I try to get myself to stay on the positive side of that, and say, "Thank you so-and-so for not

talking.” I find that my attitude stays more positive and the kids’ attitudes stay more positive (Laura, 2008, 3).

Laura did not seem to have one method that worked for her all the time. She seemed to try different things at different times. She did not complain of any major behavior problems, but did like to be in control of her classroom at all times. She said that she likes for students to be themselves but behaved at the same time. Her method of choosing a child for either positive or negative reinforcement seemed to work for her in terms of refocusing the entire class.

### *Summary*

Although discipline problems were not huge issues for the participants, discipline is something that every new teacher must face. The participants felt that as they gained more experience teaching, they were better equipped to handle discipline problems. They decided to keep the students occupied with other things, thereby preventing problems or having the students reflect on what the problem was and develop their own solution to it. Another way of dealing with behavior was using whatever worked at the particular time. The discipline situations faced by these teachers seemed to work themselves out. Jackie was the sole person who turned to her administrator for assistance, but she also felt that she was able to manage her students better as she gained teaching experience.

### **Issues with Workload and Time**

All of participants had problems with the amount of work they had to do as well as the time restraints. Some of the work that the participants spoke of was self-imposed, while other tasks were the general work that all teachers must do. They said that they felt unprepared for the large amount and were not given training on how to manage all of the tasks. The teachers also talked about the number of students increasing the workload for them. Most of the teachers found ways to deal with the workload and time management as they gained more experience teaching; however, this issue was very problematic for them. They said that it was very easy to fall behind, and some of them complained that some tasks were unnecessary.

#### *Time*

Elementary school teachers have less planning time than secondary level teachers. Other than Gary, all of the participants began their careers in elementary schools and have remained there. They all experienced time constraints. They felt that their non-instructional time was taken with administrative tasks that could have been done by others. The participants also felt that they could use extra time during the day. Jane stated:

I don't think there's enough time in the day to do everything that we have to do. We're fudging on it all the time, trying to find these little minutes, actually, that we can shove something else into it, and then still give the students enough time to play because if they don't play, they don't learn. .... It would be nice if we had another half hour tacked on to the day. I think I would enjoy that. I don't know if

the kids would. I think that I would feel better about the time issue if we had a little more time (Jane, 2008, 1).

Jane wished for more academic time to cover her material without limiting recess for the children. Some of the other participants did not have as much of a problem with the academic time allotted. They were more concerned with the planning time that was taken up by the tasks they must accomplish. Rose initially felt that she spent a lot of time planning her lessons and stated that she routinely took work home and worked on the weekends. She said that she was single and did not have children at the onset of her career, so she did not have a problem with spending so much non-school time on school matters.

Gary also complained about a limited amount of planning time, but he refused to use non-school time for one particular task as a means of protest. Gary said that he had to administer benchmark tests to his students three times during the year. He did not dispute the necessity of these tests, but he complained about the time that it took to grade them. He felt strongly that this was work that could be accomplished by a machine and his planning time was being wasted by such tasks. As a form of protest, Gary stated that he would only grade the benchmark tests during his allotted planning time and would not spend any additional non-planning time on them. He admitted to being late with getting the scores into the computerized system, but he took solace in knowing that he was not the only teacher to be late.

Rose also complained about the non-teaching tasks that she was asked to perform. She said that her time does not allow for these administrative tasks. Rose stated:

I feel like the most challenging thing is all the paperwork and things that I have to do that get in the way of me actually teaching. There's so many checks and balances in place now that I have to make sure that I have to do A, B, and C, and if I don't have that paperwork done, if I don't have this done. I have to put things on hold in the classroom to make sure I have that stuff covered and done, and it takes away from me focusing on the kids; ..... I feel like I could have a secretary all day. I'm serious. ....so I can just teach. Because I feel like that's what I've been trained in. That's what I know how to do. I'm not an office person (Rose, 2008, 1).

Rose's concern was that the extra tasks took time away from her students, while Gary's issues were more of a protest about tasks that he did not deem necessary. Gary, Jane, and Rose all wanted more time with their students, and they were willing to spend additional time outside of school in order to have more time with students. Rose said that spending additional time became more difficult for her once she got married and had her own children. The additional responsibilities continued to take time away from their students that the participants found to be valuable.

### *Workload*

Time and workload issues were often spoken of interchangeably, since the participants found the workload was just too much for the limited amount of available. Both Clara and Rose felt that the workload was not properly addressed during their teacher training programs. Clara said that she was prepared to teach her students, but she did not feel prepared for many of the non-teaching aspects of teaching. She stated:

That once you hit the door, you're not only teaching them the lessons that you're preparing but you're also a nurse. You're also a guidance counselor. You're a school psychologist. All those things that come in that you just come at. They're coming to you with their problems. They're coming to you when they're hurt. They're coming to you not prepared or problems at home. No lunch money. All those things they don't tell you that you're basically taking care of these children's needs beyond educational needs. All kinds of needs. And they don't really talk about that (Clara, 2008, 2).

Rose also felt that she was not trained in the non-teaching aspects of teaching, but her natural propensity to stay organized had helped her throughout her career. She said that she kept up with her paperwork by staying on top of it and not falling behind. Once she fell behind, she said that it was difficult to catch up.

Laura also felt that her workload was difficult because she taught five subjects. She said that preparing lessons for all of the different subjects took a lot of effort because she also had to familiarize herself with the content for the different subjects. Laura said that she always wanted to make sure that she clearly understood what she was teaching before she taught it, and her workload increased because she needed to plan for five subjects every day. Time was also a factor since she did not have adequate planning time. She also said that her workload was increased with state-mandated tasks which the Christian school had to perform in order to maintain state funding. She said they had to complete checklists stating that every subject was taught, and this was an additional task that took her time.

The state mandates affected other participants as well. Gary had complained about scoring and entering the benchmark tests; however, he also had issues with the state-mandated high-stakes tests. He first spoke about the additional planning time that secondary teachers were granted and that elementary teachers were sometimes given teacher work days to compensate for the lack of planning time. However, he had an issue with how his time was spent during some teacher planning days. He said that the time was often spent in meetings performing tasks that he did not feel were a part of his job. He said:

Some of the worst have been looking over SOL data; figuring out what SOLs we needed to teach better. I mean, it's an important thing. .... What they did was they took all the teachers to do one person's job, basically, and that job should have been done by our math teacher at the district level..... It was very repetitive for us to do it. This person could have looked at all the data, and said, "You need to be teaching measurement better." And that was basically what we'd come out of it with. I was actually in a group for science, so we basically needed to be teaching the scientific method better as a school. But that was hours of work for eight people that would've not have taken any longer, in fact it might have been faster, if just one person had done it. Why not the head of the curriculum? So, it was pretty unnecessary work (Gary, 2008, 2).

This was an example of part of the workload that Gary felt was not his job. However, even the necessary tasks presented problems for teachers. Clara felt that this could be overwhelming for a new teacher. She said that she worked twelve-hour days when she began her career and took work home. She said that such a workload could

actually cause some new teachers to burn out. She reflected on the fifth year for teachers and concluded that this is the time when teachers are getting married and having children and therefore, may not have the time to devote to the heavy workload. She thought that the factors of marriage and family, along with burn out due to workload might contribute to teachers leaving at that point. Jackie stated that it is best for teachers to avoid getting bogged down in their work and manage the workload so that it does not overwhelm them.

The participants also felt that the number of students they had contributed to their workload. Clara said that having 24 students one year made it difficult for her to serve all of their needs. Having so many students can escalate simple tasks to difficult ones when she is the only adult in the room. She stated:

I mean, can I tell you how difficult it is to get all of 24 kids to cut and paste. You think that's an easy thing to do, but they're cutting and they're glue globbing and pasting them on the wrong page or upside down, and we're getting better at it, but I'm just one person. So, if I'm trying to make my way around the room. I've got six people who've done it wrong. Upside down. Glued it on the wrong page. So, that's hard. That's hard. They're getting better. And the thing with third graders, although the large numbers, that's why it's okay when they're older, but when they're third graders, they don't have that sense of responsibility (Clara, 2008, 2).

Jane also experienced her workload increase with an influx of students. Jane's classroom population only had to increase by two students for her to feel that her workload had doubled. She stated:

Having the 19 kids in the class was a lot more difficult. I have 17 now, and having 19, just two more kids, it seemed almost double the work. We had several

students, maybe four that this was their first year at this school. Most of the kids here have been together since preschool, and even before that, they've been playing together. So, we had a bunch of new kids. It was trying to have just two more kids than I have now. And they were wonderful kids. They really were. We did a lot of work. We did a lot of great things, but it just seemed like the work doubled (Jane, 2008, 1).

The workload of the teachers can be affected by necessary and perceived unnecessary teaching tasks. The participants did not seem opposed to working extra hours as long as they had the time and they felt the extra time was warranted. They took issue with non-student related work and tried to manage it without falling behind. Gary was the only participant who demonstrated his displeasure with a task by only working on it during the allotted amount of time. The participants also felt that the number of students with whom they were charged could increase their workload.

#### *Dealing with workload and managing time*

Some of the participants identified methods of dealing with the heavy workload or more effectively managing their time. Clara felt that her personality characteristics helped her manage the things she had to do. Rose simply found better ways to spend her time, and Gary used a different form of instruction to lighten his workload. The management of the workload came naturally to both Jane and Jackie. These participants simply found ways to overcome their work and manage their time.

Clara felt that the work was her job; therefore, she did not complain about it and simply did it. She felt that this is what her job entailed. She acknowledged that the

expectations imposed upon her grew each year, but she saw it as a part of her job. She felt that being flexible with time and being naturally organized had helped her to manage her workload. She stated:

Time goes along with organization. It keeps you on track. You never have enough time to teach what you want to teach, and you never have enough days in the week, but that makes you organized. We have time blocks. You have to have an hour and a half of language arts. You have an hour of math. You have to have 45 minutes of the content. If you add all of that up, you don't have time for anything else. Unfortunately, you have to make time for the other things because that's what's important too. You do what you can and know that you have to be flexible. If there's an assembly, okay. You just go with it, and sweating it or fighting it is not gonna make it go away. You just have to do it (Clara, 2008, 1).

She said that her own personality and her natural propensity towards organization had helped her to manage her workload and time. She tried to share and trade teaching methods and teaching supplies with other teachers and helped other teachers when she could to reduce their workload. She stated:

I'm very organized. I have all my copies made for the whole week for whatever it is. I'm making after school, I don't like to stay late because I've got three kids, so I try and do as much as I can in my specialties, at lunch, about a half hour I give myself after school, and you beg, borrow, and steal. You know, can I borrow that when you're done. Will you make this copy for me? Again, it's a personality thing. I don't mind saying because I would do it for someone else. .... It's a community thing and a lot of people don't get it, but they should, and that's what

it should be about. It definitely isn't about the money. That's for sure (Clara, 2008, 2).

Rose also found a way to manage her time. She decided to make better use of her time by not concentrating on extensive lesson plans. Instead, she spent more time analyzing assessments. She allowed this assessment analysis to drive her lesson planning rather than spending countless hours writing detailed lesson plans that may not have matched her students' needs at the time. She found that her time had been better managed.

Jane also decided to make better use of her time when she ceased completing weekly running records with all of her children. Jane said that during her first year of teaching, she felt that she needed to grade everything her students completed and assess them frequently. She noticed that this was taking an extraordinary amount of her time and just stopped doing it. She said that she was able to assess her students' reading without weekly informal assessments and that she did not need to assess everything her students did. This freed her to accomplish other things in the classroom and spend more time with her students.

Gary also altered his assessment methods to reduce his workload. Gary felt that his students should spend a lot of time writing; however, it created a lot of correcting and assessments for him. This began for Gary when he was teaching writing at the high school level. He decided, rather than spending his evenings and weekends correcting students' work, to complete them in class. He stated:

Or you can do it during class. That was the nice part about having a 90-minute block with teaching high school. I did give out reading assignments and writing assignments, but a lot was also in class. .... If I had to do high school over again, I

would try to set up a system more like I have now in elementary school where while the kids are writing, I'm working with one student at a time. At the time, I walked around in class, checked on things, answered questions, and then took it all home to grade or tried to get it on my planning period, which wasn't sufficient. .... And I don't think that it's very worthwhile to pass the stuff back to students who really need that one-on-one time and explanation because they'd been missing so much before. So, if I could re-do it, do one-on-one. Even if I was only meeting with each kid once every other week, I think that time would have been more valuable (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary, Rose, and Clara showed that their workloads could be managed by restructuring their time or the methods in which they performed certain tasks. They were certain that they could not continue to hope for mastery of the heavy workload by establishing routines. Jane, however, found the work satisfying and did not have a problem with the kind of work required of her. She stated:

I actually enjoy the workload. Teaching for me is, like my son said one time. He said, "Mom for you it's family, teaching, and then everything else is at the end." He really nailed it on the head there because I enjoy that kind of business and having to think constantly. Even working late at night is very satisfying (Jane, 2008, 1).

Workload and time management was an area where these participants felt unprepared as beginners, but they were ultimately able to control it. Jackie expressed that this is an area in which beginning teachers may need advice from mentors or others

professionals in the school. She said that as a mentor, she tried to counsel novice teachers about how to deal with it. She stated:

Of course, you know the hours above and beyond working, but I think probably the management was, now that I mentor new teachers, that's what I usually work with them on. It's just, here's what I experienced and here's some things you might want to try to avoid (Jackie, 2008, 1).

### *Summary*

The workloads of these teachers were affected by the work that they felt they had to complete, the work imposed upon them, and the number of students they taught. Some of the participants felt that their time was imposed upon, and they all felt that there was just not enough time. They were able to restructure their time and the work to better manage it during their initial years. Clara saw the workload of the teachers in her school as a group effort and routinely volunteered to help others. Jane, however, loved the work that she was doing and did not see the long hours as work. As Jackie stated, this is an area in which beginning teachers may want to seek help and guidance from more experienced teachers.

## **Issues with Parents**

The participants were fortunate to only have minor issues with parents during their initial years of teaching. Jane and Jackie admitted that they loved their parents and did not have problems with them at all. The participants who did express concerns with parents had difficulties with: (a) how much to communicate to parents, (b) parents who were not involved in their children's education, and (c) parents who were too concerned about activities in the school or their children's grades. These issues were not significant for the participants, and most of them quickly developed methods of dealing with parents. Their methods primarily centered on taking greater measures to contact parents, limiting the amount of information they shared with parents, or simply ignoring them.

### *Parent communication issues*

Both Jackie and Clara dealt with issues of how much to communicate to parents. They, ironically developed near opposite methods of dealing with communication issues with their parents. Jackie felt that she initially was not specific enough with the information that she provided to the parents of her students and began to give them much more information. In contrast, Clara felt that parents did not need to know every minute detail about their child's behavior and social interactions in class. Both participants had very good intentions and sought to maintain the best relationship possible with parents. The issues about which they spoke were also not completely comparable. Jackie was referring more to academic issues, while Clara referred to behavioral issues about which the parents could do little to control.

Jackie reflected on the initial parent conferences that she had during her first year and thought they were very general. She said that she did not give parents enough information about the strengths and weaknesses of their children. She said:

Instead of just, “Johnny’s a good reader.” After my second and third year, I could say, “Johnny’s a good reader, and here’s why.” Here’s some other things that I’ve learned. But I definitely think that comes with experience, and I think parents, although they respect you, they do see you as a first-year teacher and they know you’re learning (Jackie, 2008, 1).

She went on to express that as a beginning teacher she had not had much interaction with parents and did not always effectively communicate with them. As she gained more experience, she began to see how critical communication was with parents, and she thought that she now had more specific information to share with parents. She felt that keeping lines of communication open with parents was a key factor in a child’s success at school. She also made sure to share information with parents even when it is not good news. She said that she felt that, in the end, it was for the best.

Jackie spoke about how some parents had concerns about their child being in the class of a brand new teacher during her first year, but these issues were very minor. None of the parents made a big issue of their concerns. These concerns initially caused her to dread conferences with parents. She recalled being very nervous during her first conferences. With experience, she gained confidence and began to remember that she is the one in control of the situation and that parents are there to hear from her. Upon realizing that she should not fear parents, she began to view conferences as opportunities.

She eventually got to the point where she looked forward to parent conferences and placing phone calls to parents. Jackie stated:

I think it's just comfort level. I think it comes with confidence too. I mean I think you're first year teaching, you're not; I mean you feel like you're competent, ...and I think with experience, you gain, even having some tough parent conferences where things might not go so well, you just build off of those experiences, and it makes you more confident as you go into those conferences. And I think too, you learn that that's what parents want. They don't want a dreaded conference. They want to hear what their child is doing well and what they can do. It doesn't mean you don't share what their weaknesses are, but I think you really focus on what their child is doing, how far they've grown and how much progress they've made. ....I mean if you're open and honest with parents, whether the news is positive or negative, they're gonna take that if you have those open lines of communication and the students need to know too. "Hey, it's conference week, and I'm gonna be sharing with your mom and dad how you're doing and maybe what you're not doing so well." I think if they know, they're not worried either, when mom and dad come home (Jackie, 2008, 3).

Jackie felt that the more information parents had, the better they were able to assist in the education of their child. She turned conferences into opportunities and learned from conferences that didn't go well. She also let the children know what she would be sharing with parents; therefore neither students nor parents were surprised about the information being shared. She clearly overcame her initial fear of parents, and did not continue to dread the conferences.

Clara, in contrast, viewed parent communication from the perspective of what she, as a parent, would want to know from a teacher. Clara felt that there were certain behavioral issues of which parents had little control. She, therefore, did not feel it necessary to bother parents with these kinds of issues. She said that she had learned to pick her battles with parents and only tell parents about things that they needed to know and might be able to address. She stated:

I've also learned from parents, you pick your battles. If it's not something I think that they're gonna affect in the classroom, why am I gonna take it up with them. If they can't help me get George to sit down in his seat, that's my problem. Me calling his mom saying, "He won't sit in seat." What is his mom gonna do about it? Is she gonna come and sit. Picking your battles. How can they help me (Clara, 2008, 2)?

Clara did contact parents when she thought that they would be able to help her. She had contacted parents about disrespect issues and academic issues. She had no problem sending a note home to a parent when a child did not complete a test or take it seriously. In this case, she stated that she didn't even care if the parents bribed their child to complete assignments. She formed these letters in terms of asking for help from the parents. She said that these are issues that parents can address, and she has had success with these situations.

Since Clara was very much involved in the lives her students, she said that parents often feel that it was acceptable to contact her at home. She recalled how she tried to limit that kind of contact:

That's a lesson you learn because you learn that from parents calling you and the notes and things like that, and you just kind of say, you know what, do I really want so-and-so calling me tonight. But they have my home number. I got two calls this week from parents that are divorced and I had to talk to both of them (Clara, 2008, 3).

Clara recalled that she was often caught in the middle of divorced or divorcing parents. She felt that she was sometimes the mediator between parents who did not communicate well. She often had to send double copies of everything in these situations, including report cards and letters. She said that she just tried to shield the child from these kinds of negative conflicts. She was also careful not to bother parents who had difficult home situations. She stated:

Some kids don't have parents that are gonna help, so why do you call? If they can't do anything about it? You know, they're working two or three jobs. They're doing the best that they can. I'm not gonna call. They've got more things to worry about. The little girl whose dad was really sick and ill. I didn't call. I knew she's going through a hard time. .... You learn because you could write a note every day. You can do this, and then it loses its effect, and parents just get upset with you. You learn, and as a parent then also when I became a parent, I realized that I don't need to know every day that my son flipped a card (Clara, 2008, 3).

Clara's perspective was affected by her own motherhood and what she felt that she needed to know as a mother. She felt that parent communication was only appropriate when the parent could actually affect some sort of change in the classroom. She contacted parents for academic reasons, but unlike Jackie, she did not inform parents of every issue.

Instead, she was attempting to find ways in which parents could help her with issues after she had exhausted all that she could do. Parents were a resource for Clara in the betterment her student's lives.

### *Unsupportive parents*

Clara indicated that some parents had many more issues to deal with besides the school lives of their children. While Clara could understand this, and dealt with it, other participants were frustrated by the lack of cooperation of some parents. Rose began her career at a rural school where she said:

A lot of the parents had been drop-outs and didn't necessarily value education.

The children were basically at school, so they weren't at home and they got a free lunch. They got free breakfast and free lunch. It didn't really matter to some parents if their kids couldn't read or write and function in the school environment. So, that was an issue. And trying to get them to buy into to all the hard work we were trying to do. I mean, our PTA was non-existent. We'd have events or parent nights. We did work on trying to make that better, and we did get some increased involvement, but at the very beginning, those first five years especially, there was no PTA. There was no involvement (Rose, 2008, 1).

Rose was left with the impression that parents simply needed her to babysit their children all day and provide them with a free lunch and breakfast. She said that she tried to get her students to "buy into" the education that she was providing them, but she felt that the students did not care about education because their parents didn't care. She felt as though the work that she did all day was undone by the attitude of the parents once the

children went home to them. She did attempt to make contact with parents, and some of them did come in for conferences. She and other teachers at the school conducted home visits with parents who were reluctant to come to school for conferences because her principal felt strongly about maintaining communication with parents. Rose recalled visiting the homes of parents after she would schedule and reschedule conferences with parents who would not attend.

Rose drew the conclusion that parents at the rural school didn't care, and she could not make them care. Laura also held low opinions of some parents she dealt with when she began teaching in public school. She said:

This little school, the worst problem we have are the parents are just illiterate.

You know, the kids are as sweet as they can be, for the most part. There are other issues too. We got parents in jail and parents who were murdered, crazy stuff like that, but the kids aren't violent (Laura, 2008, 3).

Clara was more sympathetic with the plight of parents and did not let it bother her. She found most of her children's parents to be very supportive, but she did have some who were not when she taught at a different school. She stated:

Out of the 24 I would say probably 17 out of the 24, I have a lot of support at home. About probably 7, backpacks aren't checked. They don't know what's going on. They're not reading. They're not doing anything. They don't have lunch money. They don't have breakfast. Those kinds of things. When I taught at a different school, the rural school, you were on your own. You don't send anything home because it's not gonna get done. Parents are working two jobs. They're lucky just to go home and go to bed. .... So, I can expect parents to follow

through with more things here because I know that they will, but again, as a parent, I try not to send too much because I don't want to do it when I get home (Clara, 2008, 2).

It is important to note that neither Rose nor Laura viewed issues of non-communication with parents as problems that greatly affected them or their work with the children. They mentioned the topics because they did not expect parents to be so uninvolved in the education of their children. This did frustrate them, but it did not deter them in any way. Rose solved her problem by simply going to the homes when parents did not come to meet with her. She developed the attitude that she could not make parents care. Laura was not so affected by the level of concern by the children's parents. She was simply pleased that the children were not violent. Clara understood that some parents had other issues and did not let it affect her. She used this information to know which students she needed to treat differently.

#### *Overly involved parents*

Some of the participants dealt with parents whom they felt were too involved and were interested in trivial matters. These issues did not present major problems for the participants, but some of them mentioned them and found ways to deal with them. These problems centered on parents who had financial concerns about the school, parents who argued over minor differences in grades, and parents who wanted their children to be placed in gifted programs after failing to qualify.

Laura said that her experience was very unique when she began teaching at a Christian school. She recalled that parents were very concerned about the financial issues

of the school. Because the school was tuition-driven, the faculty was heavily involved in fund-raising activities. She recalled that parents were highly interested in how money was being spent and the financial situation of the school. She said that she was also frustrated by the amount of fund-raising that occurred at the school and thought that the parents' intense interest in how the funds were disbursed was not natural. This school closed after Laura's second year, and Laura admitted to being new and not knowing much about the culture of the school. It is quite possible that parents had a better insight into the financial difficulties of private schools than Laura had.

None of the other teachers had experience with tuition-paying parents and did not have to deal with parents with school finance concerns. Rose had different issues when she moved from a rural school where she felt as though parents didn't care, to a school in close proximity to two universities. She recalled the differences:

They're definitely more involved in the education aspect. They want to support the education that I'm trying provide to their children, but I find some of the things that they want to discuss are, I guess, on the nit-picky side. Like discussing a 96% over a 98% when anything over 90% is an A. It's an A. It's an A. It's an A. But I mean that kind of thing, but overall they're supportive of what we want to do here, so that's good (Rose, 2008, 2).

Rose dealt with grading issues by being more careful with what she sent home to parents and being more meticulous in her grading. She stated:

Well, I think I'm more aware of what goes on or what I send home and how I communicate with parents because I know that they're actually going to read what I send home or are actually going to check the homework folders, and so I think

I've become more aware of how I'm doing that so that I don't have questions about things. .... It's not that I communicate less. .... I guess I'm maybe more thoughtful or careful (Rose, 2008, 3).

Rose found that the best method to deal with more involved parents was to exhibit more care in her communication with them. Other participants tended to ignore parent complaints as it proved too difficult to please them all. Gary recalled that the issues of the parents were too diverse to address them all. He stated:

I had a lot of unique competing values of parents. In my first few conferences, I had parents say I was giving too much homework followed almost immediately, the next conference somebody told me I was giving too little homework. At the time we had a county guideline that was basically ten minutes per grade, so about 50 minutes at the fifth grade level. I don't think I was giving that much. .... I had really kind of a full gambit between a pretty radically parent who thought that I should, this was the one and only year I taught social studies, and he was a Confederate Civil War re-enactor who wanted to make sure that I was not teaching that slavery was bad and that most slave owners treated their slaves wonderfully and volunteered to come in and speak to the class. I told him I'd call him (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary also experienced difficulties when he had to inform parents that their child did not qualify for the gifted education program. He recalled parents being angry when a child scored within the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile but was rejected for the program. He had to inform these parents that while the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile is admirable, it does not qualify a child for the

gifted program, which typically only accepts the top three percent of students. Gary simply stated that he is firm when speaking to parents and does not back down.

While Gary found a way to deal with parents, other participants were still trying to maneuver their way around parents. Laura spoke about the parents in her private school being too concerned about financial issues, but they were good caring families who were heavily involved in the church. Once she began teaching in public school, she had conflicts with parents. She recalled a child telling her that his mother had called her a nasty name. When she confronted the parent about it, the parent denied it and was very embarrassed to meet her in person to talk about it. Laura said that she was not so much concerned about whether or not the remark was true, but she was concerned that the child was hearing such terms from someone and repeating them. She also dealt with a parent who told her that the child had personality conflicts with Laura. Laura said that she tried to ignore this, but it made classroom situations uncomfortable with that child.

### *Summary*

In summary, the participants did not have difficult issues with parents that represented specific problems for them. They were primarily issues that the teachers were not expecting and for which they were unprepared. They all solved them in their own ways. The teachers decided how much information to give to parents based on their own experiences. Clara's decision not to bother parents with certain issues was based on what she would want to know as a parent. Jackie's decision to be more specific came from parent conferences that didn't go well. Gary became firm in his communication with

parents, while Rose simply became more careful. These issues were not crucial for the teachers.

## **Students' Poverty and Home Issues**

The participants expressed difficulties with the poverty rate of the students as well as some of the issues that the students brought from home. Their students were not able to leave their home issues behind when they came to school; therefore, the teachers were drawn into and affected by the students' problems. Some of the issues that the teachers commented on were: (a) the parents' lack of priority in their spending habits, (b) schools and teachers having to supply students' needs, (c) the differential treatment of poor children, (d) poverty in other school divisions, (e) extreme conditions at home, (f) the students' lack of social skills, and (g) learning how to deal with students from poor or dysfunctional families. The participants all realized that they would have a variety of children in their classes and were open about how these issues have affected their teaching and themselves.

### *Parents' spending habits*

Gary said that his school had a number of children who qualified for and took advantage of the free and reduced lunch program. He was perplexed that these same students were able to pay for extraneous items such as school pictures. He stated:

We have a number of students that don't get their supplies at the beginning of the year. I would say that often the poorer kids are more likely, while they ask for the scholarship for the field trip, most of them are likely to buy all the pictures, and they have pretty expensive picture packages, and they could take them to Sears or Wal-Mart and have a picture package. I mean, it's a school fund raiser. It's great. You often have your kids that are on free lunch that somehow show up with forty

bucks for the pictures that should probably be spent on other necessities at home (Gary, 2008, 2).

Poverty has also affected Clara and her school. The actions of parents have greatly affected the students in her class. She said she was initially unprepared for some of the poverty issues but she quickly learned. She recalled:

Where I worked my first year, there were kids that I learned and I didn't know about, but I learned. They're called rent jumpers, and they would come. So, you'd have them for like nine weeks, and they're gone because rent's due and they're out. And then they'd come back. You might not see them for a quarter, and they're back. Yeah, so you have these kids who are coming in with a very temporary living statuses, not having any money. Not having those supplies that they need. Wearing the same clothes every day. Those kinds of concerns, and that's difficult because like I've said before, they're not concentrating on what's going on for school. They're worried about if they can have breakfast or not (Clara, 2008, 2).

### *Schools and teachers supplying needs*

The federal government supports students living in poverty by providing services such as free and reduced lunch programs. Schools also provide their own services to poverty-stricken children. Gary's school was a Title I school with a 40% poverty rate among students. He said that the school's guidance counselor aids children in need by providing them with school supplies, and Gary was pleased with the efforts of the school and the guidance counselor. He said the school does a pretty good job of supplying

children with necessities, but a large issue at the school was funding for expensive field trips. At the time of the interview, Gary was planning a field trip to Monticello. He talked about how the field trip affected the school. He said:

The real trick, I think, recently was this year's field trip to Monticello. We normally have about 15 scholarship requests, and this year we had about 25. So, we're talking about a \$55.00 field trip. .... to go to Monticello and Ash Lawn. Our charter bus is and they get a little souvenir bag. It's actually cheaper than it has been in past years. .... so that ended up being about five hundred dollars, and the school was trying to find where that was gonna come from. Because we have money from the PTA to pay for about 15 kids. We normally use more or less, all of it. Slightly, one way or the other, but it's easy. We can get \$50. It's easy to find. Five hundred's not. So, that's the kind of thing it affects (Gary, 2008, 3).

Clara's school also had to provide students with materials and supplies. The problem was so severe that Clara even took it upon herself to provide for her students' physical needs. She stated:

Fortunately, in all the schools that I've worked at, there's free and reduced lunch, and you can send them to breakfast. I keep snack here for those kids who come in hungry; who haven't eaten breakfast. You just make sure you can do what you can. I go to the guidance counselor. I find clothes for them. I've gone and bought stuff for them before. I've bought backpacks and winter coats and gloves and all kinds of stuff, because that's what you do (Clara, 2008, 2).

The school and the teachers tried to provide for students living in poverty, and both Gary and Clara were pleased with the help provided to these students. These

participants had not anticipated the student poverty they would face as school teachers, but they realized that it was their responsibility to step in and provide for their students in any way they could.

### *Differential treatment of poor children*

Jackie also realized that some of her students came from homes where there was little parent support and a lack of funds. Jackie determined that it was unfair to have the same expectations of children who come from disadvantaged homes. She stated that she treated children differently depending upon their home situations. She was able to do this without making excuses for poorer children or exempting them from learning the material. She was also mindful of how other students would react to differential treatment of poorer children. She stated.

I think one of the hardest lessons for me to learn and for the other students to learn is that you can treat everybody equitably but you cannot treat everybody equally, and so you couldn't have a rule that, if everybody's homework wasn't turned in, everybody didn't get break or everybody didn't get something. I had to learn to bend the rules a little bit for certain children in certain situations. If they didn't have any parental support at home or if they were worried about getting dinner, then I really couldn't expect them to get their homework done. .... And I think, yes you expect everybody to turn in their homework, but if little Johnny doesn't turn it in, it's not the end of the world. I would keep going. Hopefully, he understands the material. ....some people would be like, "It's not fair that so-and-so doesn't do their homework." My statement would change to be more

something like, “If you can get your homework done, then that’s great.

Everybody can’t get their homework done every night, so if you take care of you, and we don’t worry about everybody else (Jackie, 2008, 3).”

Jackie had to manage the differential treatment of some students while still holding them to the same academic standards. She said that flexibility was central to striking a balance. She stated:

You handle it one kid at a time, and you have to learn their situations. And you have to know when to hold them to something. It doesn’t mean everything’s just okay if you don’t do your work. But you have to be flexible. You have to be reasonable with kids. And be understanding of their circumstances, yet still continue to challenge them and expect them to do what they’re supposed to do (Jackie, 2008, 3).

Jackie noticed that some of her students had difficult home situations and made allowances for them. She recalled that she and other teachers in her school began noticing these children around the same time. Some teachers felt as she did while others refused to make allowances for any children. Jackie recalled:

We started doing a lot of things differently as far as providing snacks for kids who didn’t have a snack. Just little things like that we felt like maybe we weren’t doing enough of. I don’t think it was just me. It was really more of a school wide philosophy shift. Everybody didn’t necessarily agree with it, and you still had teachers who had very strict rules. If you didn’t have your homework, you got five minutes off break. And they were never asked to stop those procedures. They

were just asked to consider thinking about these children differently (Jackie, 2008, 3).

Jackie said that treating children individually is a skill that came with experience. She said as teachers build relationships with students, they start to see the individual needs of each student and act accordingly. She said that once teachers have built relationships and understand the children, then the teacher is able to teach them anything.

#### *Poverty-stricken schools in other areas*

Four of the participants began their careers in the same geographical area and have remained in the area for the duration of their teaching life. However, Gary and Laura began teaching in other areas of the country. Student poverty and personal issues plagued Gary from the onset of his career. However, Laura did not experience high levels of student poverty and children from dysfunctional families until she began teaching in a public school. Their experiences were unique and ultimately prepared them for teaching in poorer rural schools. Gary began teaching in a high poverty area of another state. He recalled the experience:

It was really interesting. I guess I didn't know quite what I was stepping into. It was kind of quasi inner city because in the area, the poor kids live on the outside of the city. The inner-city is, to my knowledge, has always been a very expensive place to live. It didn't have the kind of doughnut effect that other cities have. It stayed a pretty wealthy place, and so the poor people live on the outskirts. Most of our kids came from the area, which I guess is formally military. But a very impoverished area. Very high poverty rate at the school (Gary, 2008, 3).

Gary indicated that this experience prepared him for the poverty he encountered at his current elementary school. Laura did not have the benefit of experiencing teaching poor children while teaching in a Christian school. She contrasted the types of students that she taught in the two different school settings:

The differences that I've noticed along the way in the different classrooms. You know, obviously working in a private setting, the parents had a lot more money. Being down here, I have students whose parents can't read, students who, I have one little boy. His momma works at the restaurant. His daddy's going to community college. He's got four siblings. They're all fighting for Dad and Mom's attention. It's actually step-dad, so there's a whole history with the real father too, that's not pretty. He's not the only one like that. There's lots of kids that have situations. Similar kids whose mom and dad are in jail. Grandpa's raising them (Laura, 2008, 1).

She then spoke about the children and their families in the Christian school setting.

Parents were still together for the most part. I really can't remember any parent. One parent, I remember, was divorced. Off the top of my head, I can only think of one parent that was divorced. That was different. So, just the socio-economic (Laura, 2008, 1).

#### *Children from dysfunctional families*

In addition to poverty, some of the participants talked about other issues that have affected their students. Jane and Clara reported that their children had been affected by

issues such as family illnesses, divorce, homelessness, and the suicide of family members. In turn, these issues have affected Jane and Clara in dealing with their students.

Clara recalled a girl in her class who had to live with relatives because her father was afflicted with cancer which in turn, took all of her mother's attention. Clara also talked about how bitter divorces affected her students. She said:

Divorce has gotten really common and the problem with that is that I've had two in my room that it's been really kind of, what's the word, contentious. Like, they don't get along, and like I'm the mediator. And I have to email and call both of them. Send double copies of homework. Double pictures. All of that stuff. That's been really hard, and the fact that they don't communicate, and they communicate through me. .... So, divorce and staying with one parent one week and another parent another week, that's been interesting. .... Yeah, night to night or three nights a week and keeping up with that, being picked up by someone else. Going home with someone else. .... You have the other ones that don't have food at home, and we do as much as we can. So, it's a lot. It's a lot different than it used to be (Clara, 2008, 2).

Jane has had children from similar situations, and she spoke about how second-grade children were not able to adequately deal with personal issues in their lives. Jane recalled:

One year, three quarters of the kids in the class were from broken homes. And the rest of the kids were in homes that were just God-awful, but both parents were there. And that was a very difficult year because I worried about the kids all the time, and they were prone to bursting into tears at different times. And I

remember one day, for that specific class, I remember teaching an entire language arts lesson, writing on the board and everything with a sobbing child in my lap because I didn't want her to go anyplace else. I wanted her to be there, and she just held her arms around my neck and just sobbed (Jane, 2008, 3).

Jane also mentioned a second-grade girl whose father had committed suicide the previous year. She said that this child was aggressive in school and was lacking in mathematical skills. Jane suspected that this girl "shut down" after her father died and did not acquire anymore of the skills that were taught in first grade. Jane said that this child used reading as an escape; therefore, her reading scores soared. Jane also attempted to help this child by providing her with situations in which she could be in control, since her home life was completely out of her control.

Jane also talked about one of her students who was homeless and how he attempted to hide it from her and the other students. She said that she suspected that something was wrong with this boy and had to trick him into disclosing his dire situation to her. She recalled:

I kind of tricked him into telling me where he was living because people were unable to get a hold of his mother, and some of the people in the office really needed to know, so they could send things or whatever. He was not living in the school zone at the time, and that's why she told him "don't tell anybody." And he did tell me, he was worried. I didn't say anything else about it, but he was kind of worried that we were going to make him not come to school here, but that would not have happened. It was shortly after that that he started bringing me things, possessions that belonged to him that were important to him like a whole set of

stamps that you put in the ink and stamp things. Different books that he had and just things that were important to him. And he would bring them to me and he would say, “you can have this.” I said, “Don’t you want this?” “No, I want you to have it.” Well, what I found out later is that they were living in a car and he did not have any place to sleep if he had these possessions. He came to school dirty with the same clothes on for a week. One day he wore his clothes backward all day long because he couldn’t see in the car to get dressed and he just didn’t know. He sort of laughed about it when he finally realized it (Jane, 2008, 2).

Jane and Clara realized that children were bringing these issues into the classroom and they would have to deal with them. Both Jane and Clara sought to make school a safe haven for children from these extreme home environments. They wanted to make the school environment as stable as possible for children who had unstable home environments.

### *A lack of social skills*

Another issue that Clara noticed was that children were now spending too much time watching television or playing video games, which she believed contributed to a decline in the students’ social skills. She noticed how difficult it was for the students to get along with each other and working through problems with other people. She said that this was a new phenomenon for her, and she explained how she attempted to resolve this issue in her classroom:

We do lots. I have them set up in teams, so they’re not in rows. They’re not individual. We do lots of communicating. Like we’ll play games. ....I’ll say,

“Look at your eyeball buddy. Shoulder buddy. Tell your shoulder buddy what five times four is.” .....But you do a lot of community building too. They have to learn to work with each other. And if anything, I tell parents, “if they don’t learn that Rome is famous for The Coliseum, all right. But if they leave my room, I want them to know that it’s important to be a good citizen.” It’s important to be a good friend, and they need to work out problems and be responsible. I think those are almost even more important than any of the knowledge that we’re leaning. But we do. They help me clean up at the end of the day. I give them those responsibilities (Clara, 2008, 3).

*Learning to deal with student poverty and students’ personal issues*

Some of the participants talked about how they learned to deal with the students and their personal issues. Laura and Clara mentioned that the important aspect is remembering that children have these issues when you are dealing with them. Laura said:

I forget that they have these issues at home that are keeping them from learning. They have problems at home, and I’ll get really mad at one particular student who just sits and does nothing. And I forget that his dad’s on drugs. His mom isn’t around. He lives with grandma. I mean he truly has issues going on and so, I’m really hard on these kids too. I crack the whip to do their work, and it’s good. They need that to some degree, but I also need to remember that, once again, I’m not a drill sergeant. I need to love these kids, and they don’t have to be perfect (Laura, 2008, 1).

Clara also said that this was an area about which teachers must learn as they become more experienced. She also said that she used the resources within the school to help her when she had students with difficult home lives. She stated:

It's on-the-job training. You find out. You go, and you ask teachers that have worked there from experience. You ask your principal. You go to the guidance counselor. You use your resources. I'm a much better teacher now that I'm a parent because I also understand some of those nurturing needs. Sometimes they come in there, and they're having a bad day. Sometimes, all you need to give them is a smile and a hug and say, .... You just find things that work out, but when you're a first-year teacher, you're so afraid to mess up, you don't know that you have that permission to treat each kid individually and give them those different parameters (Clara, 2008, 2).

Jackie noticed a sharp contrast between the way children and families were when she was a student in school and the way families are now. She said that teachers could turn to professionals to help them deal with some of the issues that arose. She stated:

It wasn't like when I grew up. Mom and Dad get you on the bus. I mean, it's different, and they don't have a lot of that support at home, and I think that behaviorally and some other things are a result of that. I don't know that we had any drastic cases of neglect and things like that. Those things were there, and then I don't know if it was my second or third year teaching, we began doing some training as a county on Ruby Payne and her books and talking about poverty and breaking that cycle and things like that, and a lot of that research and her work is very applicable to the kids and teachers and classrooms (Jackie, 2008, 2).

Jackie felt that the role of teachers has expanded to the point where teachers must actually raise some children. She said that the hardest aspect of teaching was having to take children from a variety of home situations to the exact same academic level by the end of the school year. These home issues interfere with the children's school performance. She also noticed that the number of children with behavioral problems stemming from their home lives had increased over the years. This created a situation in which much more than instructing students was being asked of teachers.

### *Summary*

Student poverty and students from dysfunctional families were a reality of classrooms, and these teachers experienced it. They were aware that teachers will encounter situations of suicide, homelessness, poverty, and family illnesses. Their students were not able to separate their home lives from their school lives, so these issues were brought into the classroom. The participants used the schools' resources as well as their own to deal with these issues and tried to remember that these students had these issues. They also knew that more would be expected of them as teachers and found ways to accommodate the students who had problems.

## **Relationship with Students**

Most of the participants discussed the issue of forming relationships with their students during their initial years of teaching. These relationships centered on the school environment and the academic achievements of the students, however the teachers also formed personal relationships with students within the school setting. These personal relationships were sometimes nurturing and other times resembled more of a friendship. The students also served as a support system for some of the participants, and some teachers began turning a level control over to students creating a shared sense of responsibility in the classroom. One of the participants also tried to mediate the relationships of the students in her classroom and became especially close to a student. As the data will indicate, sometimes the teacher/student relationship blurred; for instance, students developed a strong interest in the appearance one teacher. Teachers also reported some ambiguity in the relationships and felt as though they had to regain control of their classes.

The sub categories for relationships with students include (a) the academic relationships, (b) nurturing relationships, (c) relationships of concern and support, (d) friendships, (e) relationships that fostered shared classroom responsibility, (f) relationships of special interest, and (g) relationships of maintaining distance or reestablishing boundaries. All of the participants all discussed relationships with their students that were categorized into one or more of these categories. Some of these relationships posed problems for the participants while other relationships proved to solve certain problems that the teachers encountered. These relationships were an

important component of the initial years for these teachers and they shared vast amounts of information about them.

### *Academic Relationships*

According to these teachers, their primary responsibility was to teach their students the content on which they would be tested and to lay further foundation for the next grade level that the students would enter. All of the participants acknowledged this responsibility and took measures to ensure that all students gained the necessary skills during the course of the year. They often differentiated to ensure that no child was frustrated and to help the children reach their own potentials.

Rose recalled that the high expectations she set for her students laid the foundation for them in raising their scores on the state-mandated test. Rose began her career at a rural school where the expectations for the students were fairly low. As she stated, this was an area where parents didn't take much interest in the education of their students, and students came from underprivileged homes. She recalled the training that she had in the methods of Ruby Payne from her undergraduate education and applied those methods with her students. She said that simply having high expectations of them and believing that they could all succeed was an important determining factor in raising the test scores of the students. She stated, "I need to keep the expectations high. Because they have this type of home life doesn't mean that I can just say, 'oh that's okay. You don't need to learn'" (Rose, 2008, 3).

Gary held similar views in terms of setting high expectations for his students. Gary's career began in a high school with a high dropout rate. He recalled that he taught

English composition to eleventh and twelfth graders in an inner city school. He was taken aback by the low expectations that many teachers had for the students and the pervasive attitude that students should pass classes simply for adequate attendance. He set high standards for his students and felt as though his students tried to meet them. He said that his students were receptive to the high standards that he set for them because:

They said so much. And that I did see a lot of effort that they did let me know, in so many words, that they hadn't had this stuff before. That their teachers didn't have high expectations for them. And I was really kind of surprised. .... But reflecting on it, I mean I've always tried to hold pretty high academic standards for my kids and help them meet those (Gary, 2008, 3).

Faced with the lack of a set curriculum, Gary took the initiative to set his own standards and teach novels that he enjoyed while he was in high school. He taught *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Siddhartha* and recalled how surprised he was that the class responded so well to such controversial novels. He was also surprised about the substandard writing ability of many students and focused on writing throughout the year. He also set high standards for their writing and witnessed improvements during the year. He strongly believed that the students really wanted to learn, but they had previously only encountered teachers who expected nothing of them. He stated:

They really showed a lot of interest in actually learning it. It wasn't just to pass a standardized test. For the most part, they had gotten by with less and still graduated, and I had feedback about the novels we were reading. I had kids who had never read a whole novel before. And I did have a number of kids who had actually missed, basically, middle school (Gary, 2008, 3).

Clara also showed great determination in helping her students learn, and she stated that she did not accept substandard work from her students. She got to quickly know the potential of her students and pushed them to reach their highest point. She recalled two students who did not work up to their full potential and how she pushed them to work harder. One of her students turned in a lengthy test shortly after he began work on it, and Clara recalled that she returned the test to him and held a little “come to Jesus” meeting with him about how important it was for him to demonstrate his highest potential while completing his work. She stated:

I made him go back. And I sat there and I said, “2:00. I don’t want you to turn it in till then.” And he just kept looking at the clock. And so, I can only do so much, and I understand that, but it’s my job to try to do as much as I can (Clara, 2008, 3).

She also recounted an experience when she taught a concept and tested the students on it. Upon reviewing the test, she noticed that one of her students did not grasp it. Clara was a strong believer in differentiating instruction for every child, so she never taught to the middle. She felt as though this student had the potential to do well with this concept, so she asked herself a set of questions and determined how she could help the student. She stated:

I’m like why didn’t he get it? What am I gonna do? And so what I did for him, I wrote a note and I said study this tonight. You didn’t take your notebook home, or you didn’t study or something and I said things. I made him a little study guide and I made it more for him. And I said study tonight. I want to make you another

test, and you're gonna do it tomorrow. And I'll make him do that until he passes it because he's going to pass it (Clara, 2008, 2).

She stated that the reason that she was so adamant that her students did well was because she took their failures personally. She saw it as her job to teach them and took responsibility for their failures. She said, "If Johnny's walking out that door, and he does not know what three times three is, that's not his fault. That's my fault" (Clara, 2008, 2). Whenever Clara was faced with situations in which students did not meet her academic expectations, she always asked herself what she could do to help the child succeed. This often caused her to establish relationships with her students in which the students knew that she would not accept substandard work and that she cared about their academic success. She admitted that these relationships don't always result in the students passing or working harder, but she saw that as a continual issue in teaching.

Contributing to the success that Clara had with her students was the individualized treatment of her students. Clara believed that treating students fairly does not necessitate treating them all equally. She said, "Two different things, and you do a lot of community building, class meetings, and you talk about that. And they understand, but sometimes they still resent it" (Clara, 2008, 3). She continued to form individual relationships with her students and set standards for them based on what she believed they could do. She said:

Each child is different, and I want my own children to be treated to their needs. Some kids are easier. Some kids don't need your attention. Some of them don't want your attention, and some of them do. It's a struggle. It is. But it's something you grow into. You don't realize that four or five years down (Clara, 2008, 3).

The academic relationships that the participants formed with their students centered on establishing standards for the children to meet. These teachers believed that their students were able to perform at higher levels and pushed them to do so. Some of them, such as Gary found that students were receptive to high standards and wanted to learn. However, Clara felt that she must sometimes form individual relationships with her students as a means of pushing them to reach their highest potential.

### *Nurturing Relationships*

Clara spent a lot of time discussing her development of nurturing relationships with her students. She is the mother of three elementary-school-aged children and quite often referred to how being a mother had enhanced her teaching. She was the only participant to make constant comparisons to teaching and motherhood, and this led to her forming nurturing relationships with students who needed it. Clara stated that it is her job to teach her students content in addition to attending to their affective and external needs. She remained aware of which students she needs to “mother” since she treated each child individually. However, she was adamant that nurturing was an important aspect of effective teaching. She stated:

Having my own kids, I mean I hate to say that, but I personally think that I’m a better teacher now that I’m a mother because you see that whole different part. You see that nurturing key, and you see that you do want those teachers that are going to look at, not just what they can do in the classroom, but what kind of people they are and what kind of people they’re becoming, and I want them to appreciate the differences of individuals, and say, “This one’s sensitive. He needs

to be loved on. You need to give him a little prop for what he's doing. This one, no. You know what, she doesn't need the prop. Push her. She can do more. This one's never gonna get it, but love on her anyway (Clara, 2008, 1)."

She said that she felt a personal connection to children who were in her care for six hours a day. Once she became a mother, she began to see the more nurturing element of teaching and began to tend to the needs of her students beyond academics. She acknowledged that teachers who are not mothers are still able to form nurturing relationships with their students, but some teachers forget the importance nurturing students for their well being. Her nurturing feelings stretched to situations where she bought school supplies and even clothes for her students. She also viewed discipline as an essential component of teaching. She stated:

I mean, you can fuss at them like a mom too. They need that too. They need that discipline, but they also need the smiles and the love, and I say, "You know what? I love you but come on, let's sit down and let's get this done" (Clara, 2008, 2).

Clara's mothering instinct had manifested itself in other areas. She revealed that she was very protective of her students. She became very protective of her students when she had an emotionally-disturbed student who was violent toward her. She said, "I think I felt more protective of them because I was like okay, at least he's doing it to me. He's not doing it to anyone else" (Clara, 2008, 3). She went on to explain how she sent students to other teachers for their protection when this problem child would have violent outburst. She even tried to talk to the violent student and calm him down. Her nurturing instinct did not dissipate when the student was violent with her. However her first priority was always protecting the other children. She considered what she would have done for her

own children had they been placed in a potentially violent situation and added, “The kids are much more resilient than you think they are, and they’re better about it, but still for me as a mom, I think they really don’t need to be exposed to it” (Clara, 2008, 3).

Clara’s protection of her students extended to sometimes protecting them from their home environments and their own parents. She explained that she is frequently dragged into battles between divorced or divorcing parents. She stated that her primary concern was for the child who was often caught in the middle. She stated:

It doesn’t affect me and the child because I just realize he needs me or she needs me much more than. I will do everything that I can to help that child because I just understand that they’re caught in the middle, and they have no party in that. It’s not their fault that they’re parents aren’t getting along. It does double my work, and I think it’s a shame that they cannot get along and work together for the benefit of their child. So, I do everything that I can while that child’s here (Clara, 2008, 3).

The nurturing relationships that Clara built extended to building the self-esteem of her students. While she did push every child to reach their highest potential, she was very careful to praise her students for what they did accomplish. She saw praising her students as a means to get them to achieve more and love school. She recalled a child with low self-esteem and how she was able to help this child:

I have a little girl, and she just has very low self-esteem. She’s come in with very low self-esteem. She doesn’t feel like she can do anything. And I’m just constantly pulling her up and saying, “You know what? You did a great job on that.” Maybe she didn’t get the whole thing. Maybe she didn’t get an “A” on it or

whatever, but you say, “You know what? I love that title. You are getting so good at that. I love the way that you were adding more detail into your sentences.” And you just build it up. The other part of it was I find ways that’s gonna make her feel successful (Clara, 2008, 2).

Finally, Clara felt it necessary to ensure that her students enjoyed learning. She said that she learned from her teaching experiences that if she does not build up the self-esteem and allow students to feel success, they will shut down for her and not accomplish anything academically. Clara clearly saw a connection between the affective needs of her students and their academic success. She attributed this insight to her experiences with her own children and motherhood. Clara realized the kind of teacher that she wanted for her own children, and she became that teacher for her students. Her use of terms like “love on them,” her inclination to form individualized nurturing relationships with her students, and even her disposition to spend her own money to ensure that her students had supplies indicated that she viewed her students as more of her own children. Nurturing was her primary method of motivating her students.

### *Relationships of Concern and Support*

The data revealed that nurturing relationships between teachers and students worked both ways. Clara felt that it was her obligation to support and worry about her students, however Jane often depended on her students for support, and they often worried about her during her first year of teaching. Jane was always very open with her second-grade students, and this fostered an open relationship with them. Her students felt completely comfortable talking to her about their problems and asking her about her own

problems. She began her academic years by talking to her students about things they worried about as well as what she was worried about. She used this opportunity to build trust with her students. She stated:

After we talk about being worried, I tell them I want them to draw a worry monster. What does your worry monster look like? Draw a monster. And all the kids, I mean every year, I've had five or six kids that start drawing and then they say, "Oh I messed up." And they look so worried about messing up, and I just take the paper, wad it up, and say, "There you go. There's another piece of paper." And I think that they gradually begin to believe well, it's okay to mess up (Jane, 2008, 3).

Jane also joked with her students often and laughed with them. This created an environment where students did not fear her and were not afraid to tell her anything. She said that her students really enjoyed correcting her when she misspelled a word on the board. Her response was usually, " 'How dare you say that. Teachers don't make mistakes.' And of course, everybody laughs and then we go on" (Jane, 2008, 3). Her students also felt comfortable enough with her to point out when she was not following the standards that she expected of them. She recalled an incident when she noticed the clutter under the table of a group of students and corrected them by saying that there must be a family of pigs living under their table. A student looked at her un-kept desk and said that there must also be a family of pigs living on her desk. Again, laughter ensued.

Because of Jane's own elementary-school experiences, she felt compelled to remain open to her students. Jane recounted getting into trouble as a child because she was not able to read the facial expressions or body language of her teachers, and she was

determined that her students would not have to read her non-verbal cues. She has made it a policy to tell her students about the feelings she experienced. She said:

And I remember that specifically in second grade so at the very beginning of the year, I tell all of the kids when they're with me, the first big meeting that we have, I tell them that if I am angry about something or if they have done something that they're not supposed to, I will tell them in words. They will not have to guess. They don't have to worry about me. I said, if I don't tell you that there's a problem, there is no problem (Jane, 2008, 2).

The open lines of communication between Jane and her students has led to the children having no apprehension about asking her about her feelings. This type of relationship was established during her first year of teaching when her son was diagnosed with bone cancer. She was very frank with her students about her son being sick and how much school she would be missing. She stated:

I talked to them at the very beginning when we first heard. And I told them everything. This is what's going to happen. I may be out of school. When I'm out of school I expect you to still behave the way you've always behaved. You know I didn't even split them. I didn't call green table over here. I just said make two groups and go, and they did. They made two equal groups and they went. And sometimes they changed places, but it didn't matter. That's that trust and responsibility that they're handed at the very beginning of the school year. I think that really helped. It helped me. It helped them (Jane, 2008, 3).

Jane felt that her students were very mature about the situation, and they knew that they had to be "grown up." She relied on her students for support during this period.

Her students asked about her son's health often and wrote him letters. She specifically recalled a little girl who expressed concern for her during this period. Jane recalled:

I had one little girl who had autism that year, and she would say every time I would be out for like two days, ..... she would immediately say, "Has he died?" Every time, and I knew that that was, she was very concerned about him. And she was very worried all the time, and I knew that she wasn't being insensitive at all. She was just worried and I knew that she loved me. And that was her way of dealing with it. And I would go through the whole thing with her, "No, he didn't die. He's fine. Here's a picture of him" (Jane, 2008, 2).

Jane also worried about her students and some of the home environments from which they came. In turn, her students could sense when something was bothering her and did not hesitate to ask her about anything. She recalled one such incident:

I had one little girl that was having a really, really bad situation at home, and I said one day when the kids were here; I said I'm just not in a good mood today, boys and girls. Things didn't go well, and she came up and patted me and said, "It must be hard for you today." And I thought, here's a child that's going through something that is horrendous, and she's patting me. I remember that little girl (Jane, 2008, 1).

Jane's dependence on her students for emotional support was an indication of how she also took the relationships with her students beyond the traditional teacher/student relationships. Jane and her students developed an interdependence in which her students showed as much concern for her well being as she did for theirs. Jane's educational experiences as a child drove her to become the kind of teacher that she did not have. The

emotional distance that she felt from her teachers has caused her to have nearly the opposite relationships with her own students.

*Relationships that fostered shared classroom responsibility*

Jane talked extensively about how she and her students shared responsibility in the classroom. Her relationships with her students extended beyond emotional support and mutual caring. Jane also expected her second-grade students to be responsible and mature. She turned much of the classroom control over to her students and allowed them to develop classroom rules, roam freely around the classroom, choose their own seating arrangements, and organize the classroom. Jane said that she always laid the foundation for this shared classroom responsibility on the first day of school. She stated:

I think that a lot of times we think that they can't do it, and we sort of let that show, and they can't do it. From the very beginning of the year, we talk about, the first day of the year they start off with academics in this class. There's no, let's play a game. Let's color. They start off immediately when they walk through the door, there's stuff on the board ready for them to go. And sometimes it's a shock for the kids, and I have morning meeting almost everyday. Bring them up, talk to them about what's going to happen in the day. From the very first day, I talk about independence and being mature and taking responsibility. .... So, they remember all of those things that we talk about from the beginning of the year (Jane, 2008, 3).

The maturity and responsibility that Jane expected from her students has allowed her to give them shared control over the classroom. Jane said that her students felt free to

monitor their own behavior while simultaneously accepting the responsibility for their actions. Jane did not believe that she had to control the lives of her students while they were at school. She felt that if she trusted her students, they would make good choices.

She stated:

I had a little boy come in and he walked right up to me immediately and said, “I can’t sit at a table with Will because we talk all the time, so where do you think Will is going to sit?” And I said, “You pick your seat out. When Will comes in, we’ll see.” Another kid said, “I don’t want to sit at a table with my cousin because we get into arguments all the time.” I think that kids actually know and are aware of a whole lot more than people give them credit for (Jane, 2008, 2).

Incidents such as these gave Jane the impression that her students were able to take responsibility for themselves. She said that too many teachers are afraid to let their students fail so teachers feel as though they have to control every aspect of their students’ school lives. Jane had no problem with allowing her students to make mistakes or fail, and she constantly assured them that it was okay to make mistakes. She was also tolerant of their activity in the classroom. She said that students were free to move around the room as long as they did not disturb other students. She also encouraged group activities and allowed students to work together. She admitted that sometimes students could get out of control, but she tolerated that. She recalled:

I have three little guys that got so excited about something that they were reading that they couldn’t stop talking. And they got louder and louder. It went on for three or four days. They absolutely could not stop, so I put them behind my desk over there and said you can talk all you want to. Just be a little bit quieter. Just sit

here and talk until you can't talk anymore, then go back and do your work. They did. I really haven't had any problems with that. I know some people do (Jane, 2008, 2).

Jane's students also had the responsibility for creating classroom policies. This shared sense of responsibility allowed her students to make suggestions to her when they saw something that needed to be corrected. Jane said her students felt as if the classroom were as much theirs as it was hers, and they had an equal stake in the policies and procedures. Her students were able to help her with classroom organization, which was one of the areas in which Jane said she was weak. Her students noticed that Jane often misplaced important papers when they sat them on her desk. Four of her students banded together and suggested that she create an "important paper turn in box" which would prevent her from misplacing their assignments. The students even decided where they wanted to place the box. Jane was grateful for the suggestion and for her students' assistance in organization.

Again, these types of relationships existed because Jane was determined that her students not have the type of educational experience that she had. She completely reversed the trend she saw among her teachers and established a relationships of mutual trust and respect. She constantly reminded students that she expected maturity and responsibility, and her they began to behave the way that she treated them. Jane was the only participant who established relationships in which classroom control was shared by both teachers and students. This seemed natural since she seemed as much dependent on them as they were on her. No other participant was as open with students. Jane's belief in her students never faltered, even during a year when she had a difficult class. She said

that she thinks about her better classes and that gives her hope that the next year will always be better.

*Relationships of special interest and reestablishing boundaries*

Laura had to strike a balance as to how closely she wanted to relate to her students. Laura was trained by an extremely strict cooperating teacher who maintained complete control over her classroom, and Laura had hoped for more open relationships with her students. She wanted to be close to her students while maintaining a level of control over the classroom. She was completely taken aback by the 15 precocious children enrolled in her class during her first year of teaching. She was the youngest and newest teacher on the staff in a Christian school, so she attributed their intense interest in her to a novelty factor. She remembered being surprised at how blunt students were to her during her first week of school:

I remember the first week of school, I wore a dress everyday that week, and one of the students raised her hand and said, “We think you would look better in pants.” I mean, they were just opinionated and leaders. But, I learned a lot that year. I think probably the hardest part for me was remembering that I was in charge and that I shouldn’t waiver (Laura, 2008, 1).

A similar incident occurred with that same child as Laura recalled:

The same child that suggested that I wear pants and not a dress, noticed one day when I was wearing lipstick. I just thought that was so odd. To me, it’s odd because these were 11-year-olds, 10 and 11-year-olds, and I walked in. I happened to be wearing lipstick that day. She just blurted out in the middle of

class, “Ms. Lindsey, you’re wearing lipstick.” At the time I thought, “How odd that you are telling me, noticing this.” . . . . So, it wasn’t that profound, but I thought it was interesting that she even noticed. It was the same girl that was noticing what I was wearing that first week of school. “You’re wearing a dress again?” (Laura, 2008, 2).

Laura also recounted how other people were very interested in whether or not she would marry her fiancé and how uncomfortable it made her that other people were paying such close attention to her and her personal life. Laura’s perception was that her students felt too comfortable with her and felt as though they were equal to her. She did not want to establish the kind of relationships that her cooperating teacher had with her students, but she was also uncomfortable with her students being so open with her.

Laura quickly realized that she had to strike a balance with her students. She confessed to being a “drill sergeant” with her students during the first couple of years until parents complained about the amount of control that she had over her students. She also did not want to emulate the behaviors of her cooperating teacher. She began to insist that her students maintain discipline while in the classroom; however, she struggled with how to also allow them to feel free and independent. She recalled:

I don’t want to stifle them. I don’t want to stifle their creativity. I don’t want to discourage them, break their spirit, but they also need to be disciplined. They need their little spirits, that are wild, to be disciplined, to be productive. They can still be themselves, but just a disciplined form of themselves. I think learning what’s too much and what’s not enough is hard, and I go back and forth each day. . . . Just be consistent. Be consistent with what they know you to be. Being consistent

with those rules. You know how it is. One day a rule is so annoying, and the next day you could care less if they're chewing gum or whatever. So, being consistent has been hard (Laura, 2008, 1).

Laura tried to maintain some distance from her students is by not forming intimate relationships with them. She did not treat her students as babies or young children and expected maturity from them. Laura expected her children to follow her rules and stay under her control. She stated that she was more like a middle school teacher in her classroom than some of the other teachers in her school who formed nurturing relationships with their students. She stated:

I think I'm more middle school teacher in that I have high expectations. They need to bring their homework in. If they did not get their homework done at home because there was a situation at home, they're sitting on the lunch room for 20 minutes, they could pull out a pencil and do it. They need to take responsibility, and I'm really hard on them about that because I think that you need to have high expectations because they're gonna rise, most of them are gonna rise to meet those expectations (Laura, 2008, 2).

She contrasted herself to another teacher at her school who was considered as being more of a primary school teacher:

Well, the teacher that comes in in the morning is more of a primary-type teacher. She gets their attention by doing a little singsong ditty, you know (sings a little song). And it's real sweet, and with these fourth graders, they're okay with it. But that's not my style. Her style is great. She's wonderful, but I'm different in that I kind of treat them more as if they're closer to middle school age than elementary

age, and I manage them in a way that is appropriate for their age and maturity level (Laura, 2008, 1).

By treating her students in a way that she perceived to be middle schoolers, Laura established a balance in which she could give them some responsibility while still maintaining control over the class. Laura admitted to being afraid of losing control of her classroom, and she did not feel comfortable with students feeling free to comment on her appearance.

Laura said that she retreated from her students completely while she was suffering from depression. Laura did not feel comfortable being open with her students and took measures to hide the depression from them. She recalled:

I was a lot more melancholy. My personality typically, as a teacher, I'm not melancholy. I'm more excitable unless I know the kids can't handle it. Then I try to stay more calm. I just don't think they picked up on it. I think they were so young that they didn't realize that there was something wrong. I didn't talk about the fact that I was depressed. I just tried to live and not talk about it with them. .... I would always try to keep my mind focused on them and what they needed. The chores of teaching. So, I guess occupying my mind and remembering, like I said, that five minute thing worked too (Laura, 2008, 3).

Laura was relieved that the students in her classroom during her second year of teaching were not as intuitive as her first class. She thought this kept them from noticing how that she was suffering from depression. Her first class was very interested in every aspect about her, and she was more comfortable with students who were not so interested. In her second year, Laura always waited for students to leave the room before she put her

head on her desk and cried, and she was cognizant of her actions when they were in the room. She also said that her students did not notice the change in her behavior after she was diagnosed with depression. This class was simply not as interested in her, and the distant relationships worked for her and helped her cope with depression.

### *Summary*

Clara, Jane, and Laura all established the relationships with their students that fit their comfort levels. These relationships included nurturing, openness, and distance. Clara's tendency to mother her students and treat each of them as individuals came from her experience as a mother. She stated repeatedly that she was a better teacher because she was a mother and saw the nurturing side of teaching as important. Jane, on the other hand, saw it as important to be open and frank with her students. Her perspective was based on the distance that she felt from her teachers while she was growing up. She also depended on her students for support. She expected maturity and responsibility from her students, but she left it to them to demonstrate that they were capable of handling the responsibility. In contrast, Laura expected maturity from her students while maintaining her distance from them. These three teachers formed relationships with their students that solved problems for them. They sought balance with their students that was in keeping with their life experience and personal comfort levels.

## **Teacher Training**

The participants all talked about their teacher training and how it affected initial years of instruction. For the most part, the participants were very pleased with their training, and their comments indicated that it did impact their teaching. While there were some negative feelings about feeling unprepared for actual classroom environments, the participants were satisfied with the structure and intensity of the programs they went through while preparing to teach. They were also able to implement some of the instructional practices that they learned during their programs. Their student teaching experiences as well as their coursework proved to be of value to them.

The participants were pleased with several aspects of their programs, including a year-long internship in the same school, an intense program, and interactive activities with a focus on writing and literature. The three participants who spoke of these aspects of their training all felt very well prepared for their first year of teaching. They were able to use what they learned to solve some of the problems that they encountered.

### *Year-long student teaching*

Jackie was very happy with her student teaching experience and felt that it prepared her for her first year. She attended a liberal arts college in which she was able to complete her final year of field experience and student teaching in the same school. She recalled:

I actually had a unique experience when I was blocking and student teaching through the university. I participated in a year-long cohort through a partnership with the university and an elementary school, and so I was involved with a group

of about 20 other student interns. We spent our entire year at the school. We blocked at that school, and then we also student taught at that school, which was different from traditional placements where you block at one school and then you student teach in another school. So, we spent the entire year there, from the first day of school, even early workdays with teachers, all the way until graduation. So, that was a very neat experience. I did my blocking in fourth grade, and then I did my student teaching in first (Jackie, 2008, 1).

Jackie felt that she and her peer preservice teachers were able to see a full school year from the perspective of a teacher. She recalled that they also had their college classes on the school site. She said that they were learning best practice strategies and were able to put those strategies to use right away in their student teaching. She also said that their cooperating teachers were using similar practices in their classrooms.

Jackie felt as though this experiment was beneficial to her. She stated, “Some people said that that experience might not be beneficial because we weren’t switching schools, and we were spending all of our time in one, but I think it was the opposite. You got to see the full picture” (Jackie, 2008, 2). Jackie also used this experience to develop relationships with the school’s administration, faculty, and staff. She said that this really helped her become a part of the school community.

Jackie was able to take full advantage of the year-long student teaching because she continued to substitute teach at the school after she graduated from college, and she was hired there for the next academic year. She was completely familiar with the school culture because of the prior year, so she felt as if this was the ideal situation. The school also began to adopt a new curriculum during her first official year, so Jackie was being

trained on how to use new materials along with veteran teachers and therefore, did not feel disadvantaged. Jackie did not see any disadvantages to staying in the same school for the year, and she continued to hold that view after she eventually transferred to another school. She recommended this student-teaching model for all beginning teachers.

### *Instructional strategies*

Gary was also very pleased with his training. He studied biology and English education while preparing to teach. He said that having two disciplines was a benefit to him when he first began to search for jobs. He was offered jobs teaching science, English and a position in special education. Because of his extensive background, he was able to decide in which direction he wanted to focus his career. He stated:

Because I have a background in biology, and in grad school I knocked out a lot of my requirements as an undergrad because I decided I wanted to go to that program. I still had to take the same number of hours, so I was able to diversify a little bit more. So, I had taken a few classes in special ed. I didn't have any special endorsement. I had a minor in biology which was entirely from my freshman and sophomore years. The principal saw that (Gary, 2008, 2).

Gary recalled from his training the many instructional practices to which he was exposed. His biology and science training really benefitted him when he began teaching science at the elementary level. He was also able to arouse interest in creative writing among his high school students when he taught writing. He was a firm believer in hands-on activities, and he was able to remember the strategies that he learned and use them with his students. He recalled:

My master's program included a lot of hands-on, the hands-on. But I mean, doing the actual assignments that we'd be asking our students to do. I thought that that was really fantastic. I thought that that was really the smartest way to teach teachers how to teach, is to have them actually do the kinds of assignments they'd be asking. And so, a lot of those were writing assignments. I was in for secondary English, so that's been my focus. I always enjoyed creative writing (Gary, 2008, 3).

Gary continued to use the strategies that he learned, but he admitted that he did not find all of his classes useful. He specially pointed out his educational psychology classes as being unbeneficial and never progressing beyond that of advance placement psychology classes in high school. Apart from this, he found the majority of his training had been very useful and was glad that he diversified.

### *Intense programs*

Like Gary and Jackie, Jane was also pleased with her training, and she interned at the same school in which she found her first job. However her training helped her in a different vein than the other participants. Jane recalled that her program was very intense and required many hours of lesson planning and hard work. She realized that professional teaching was not as difficult as her training, which made her first year very easy. She recalled the program:

It was so difficult. I remember somebody said that the head of the department over there said, "I want your skin to be pale and gray from all of the time you spend in the library." And that was absolutely true. The beginning of the program

was very tough. We had papers constantly, and the reflections that you have to do. I hate that word now. "Reflection." When somebody says let's reflect on their teaching, I just want to choke them. No, let's just think about it. But we had all of these thick books that we had to write all of our reflections about all of this stuff and the program that I was in was, they said 15 months, but it was constant. Constant classes all the time (Jane, 2008, 2).

Jane felt intensely well trained, which was the primary reason that her first year was so easy. She also realized that she did not have to do detailed lesson plans and write reflections on all of her teaching, which lightened her workload during her first year. She also found the lightened demands helpful since she was also dealing with her son's life-threatening illness during her first year of teaching. Her training, her colleagues, her student teacher, and knowing the school environment as a result of student teaching there all helped her get through the difficult first year.

Jane was also pleased with the quality of the courses that she took during her training. She said that professors were able to excite her about subjects which she had not previously enjoyed. She said:

I think it was absolutely wonderful. I have never felt, not one time, that I was ill-prepared for any of the subjects. I couldn't do math very well when I first started at the university, and I had this amazing professor who explained things in a way that I realized that I could do math, and I could explain it the kids, and it started to make sense to me. And it started to be fun, and I had never liked math before, and it was exciting. The reading teachers that I had over there, literacy professors were incredible. We had to read, oh God, I don't even know how many books. I

still have them. I kept all of the books that they said that we needed to read. So, the content area people that I had at the university were unbelievable. They were fantastic. And I have never felt ill-prepared for any of the subjects (Jane, 2008, 3).

Jane's experiences pointed to the benefit of an intense comprehensive program. The long hours of work during her program prepared her for the worst possible situation upon beginning her professional career. She found it to be easy in comparison, and she was able to use her training to prevent problems during her first year. Jane stated that she had complete confidence in her teaching because of her intense training.

#### *Negative aspects of training*

Jackie, Gary, and Jane all expressed satisfaction with their training programs in terms of the design of the program, the content, and the intensity. Clara and Laura felt less prepared for their training because of their coursework and student teaching experiences. Ironically, coursework and student teaching were the two areas Gary and Jackie found to be most useful. Clara, while she felt prepared for instruction, did not feel prepared for the daily classroom tasks that don't involve teaching. She stated:

What they did not prepare me for was the day-to-day big picture of teaching. They give you the theories. They give you the philosophies, but the day-to-day, lesson planning and time management and discipline. Those kinds of thing. They throw you in there, and you do on-the-job training, which you do with student teaching, but even when you're doing your student teaching, you have that safety net. You're not totally responsible for everything that goes on in that classroom.

So, that was a challenge and learning how to do that, and also learning the curriculum (Clara, 2008, 1).

Clara went on to explain that learning the theories was beneficial to her, but she did not learn how to implement them into her teaching. She said that she was not able to apply theory to practice during her student teaching because she was working in an environment that had been established before she entered it. She felt as though she was working within the parameters of the classroom created by her cooperating teacher. By the time she had her own classroom, she did not have the benefit of implementing practices under the supervision of a trained professional. Although she felt that she was well trained, she did not feel prepared for many of the non-teaching tasks of running a classroom every day. She explained some of the ways in which she felt unprepared:

You know the day you come in, and you're like Holy Crap. What do I do with these kids? .... This is gonna sound funny, but ..... you realize, I got these kids for six hours. What do I do with them? How do I set my day up? What do I do? What do I do? How do I do the lunch count? What do you mean I have to have lesson plans laid out for two weeks? What do you mean curriculum? I don't know what to teach. What do I teach? Fourth grade, okay. You just come in. You're thinking that first couple weeks when you're setting up your classroom (Clara, 2008, 2).

Clara said that she simply learned as she went along. She mentioned all of the areas in which she was not familiar, but she did not feel that her children were affected by her lack of knowledge of the school. She depended on her colleagues and principal to learn certain aspects of the school. However she recalled that much of what she learned

was after the fact. She asked questions after certain issues were already presented to her.

She recalled:

I didn't know. I was like, oh I was supposed to have a goodie bag for them on their desk? Oh, good idea. I wish someone told me. I had to have a letter sent home introducing myself? Great. I'll do that next year. So, those are the things, those day to day things. What do you mean? Okay I have to wear gloves when I clean a bloody nose? Gotcha. I didn't know that. Oh they need a Band Aid. Where do I get a Band Aid? What do I do if I have a problem with a kid? Do I send them to the office? And it's different from school to school. And the principal can only give you so much guidance, and you don't want to act like a dumbass in front to the principal. You can't tell them you don't know these things, and so you don't ask him. And sometimes, you're afraid to ask. I have not had that experience. I'll ask anyone, but I think there are some teachers who come in here and they close their door and they're treading water because they don't know. Where do I get these books? Oh, we have a book room. Oh, oh, okay. Those are the questions you ask. Do we have a gifted program? How is the special ed. program set up? How do you refer a child for special ed. if you know that they're having problems? How do you know if they're having problems? Who do you talk to? If they're coming in with emotional problems? Do I talk to the guidance counselor? There's all these questions that, from experience, you learn how to do it, but that first day, you're thinking (Clara, 2008, 2).

Many of the issues Clara spoke of were specifically related to a particular school. Jackie's and Jane's student teaching experiences in the same schools in which they began

their careers , which may have prevented similar problems for them. Clara was able to deal with most of these issues because she was not afraid to ask for help when she needed it. She recalled all of the aspects of the school about which she had to learn and used that information during subsequent years. She felt that theory-laden training did not provide her with answers to the day-to-day questions that arose in her teaching.

Laura did not mention her coursework and seemed fairly confident in her teaching. Her primary issue during her first year was her own development as a teacher. Laura constantly sought ways to strike a balance between extremes. Her classroom management, practices were affected by the student teaching portion of her training. Laura recalled being assigned to a strict cooperating teacher who did not tolerate any off-task behavior from students. Although Laura felt that this teacher was too strict, she admired the classroom control that this teacher had and wanted to be as controlled in her own classroom. Laura recalled:

I really respected her, and I really saw the need for order. There has to be order. I agree that kids can learn when there's controlled chaos, but it needs to be brief periods, and you have to accommodate those kids who need that silence. .... Even during class parties, it was very organized. Everybody sat in their seat. She would come around with the napkins. One child would come around with a handful of chips. Another child would come around with a cupcake. Nobody ate until everybody was served. You sat in your seat quietly and ate during the party. .... I saw other rooms down the hall where it was wild, chaotic, crazy, and the kids had more fun. But I really don't think that the kids had a horrible time that were in that controlled setting because they were used to it. All year long, it was like, well

this is a little bit better than normal classroom time, so they never complained about, “Well, why can’t we run around and do crazy stuff like other classes did?” So, I saw the need and she was able to keep control of the class, because you know, once a group of kids goes wild, it’s hard to rein them back in (Laura, 2008, 2).

Laura struggled between the strict classroom control of her cooperating teacher and allowing her students some autonomy. She said during her first year, parents complained that children were not allowed to talk from the moment they entered the classroom. The parents expressed that they spoke to their friends when they arrived at work and could not comprehend why their children could not do the same thing. She recalled that she was comparable to a drill sergeant during her first year and that in subsequent years, she had to give her students more autonomy. She said that this was partly because of the success of her cooperating teacher in maintaining control and partly because of her own personality. She wanted control, but she realized that her cooperating teacher was too strict.

### *Summary*

The participants used aspects of their training to help them during their initial years of teaching. They were very pleased with the structure and intensity of their preparatory programs and the intensity. Both Clara and Laura indicated that the actions of their cooperating teachers left them unprepared for their beginning year. The implications are that student teachers would benefit from a variety of experiences and seeing the school year from the very beginning until the end. Jackie is certain that this is the reason

for her level of preparedness. Teacher training programs can benefit from following similar designs.

### **Issues or Concerns with Administrators**

Nearly all of the participants relied on their administrators as a source of support during their initial years of teaching. Administrators supported them with concerns ranging from discipline problems to decisions about their personal lives. All of the elementary principals who worked with the participants proved to be a resource for them. The sole exceptions were high school principals in another state. Rose stated that she always felt supported when parents challenged her. She stated, “If we had a parent who was questioning our take on something or along those lines, the administration would back us up and support us and not hang us out to dry, which is nice” (Rose, 2008, 2).

Jackie also sought support from her first principal when she had discipline problems with her student. She endured disrespect from her students during her first year of teaching and turned to her principal to help resolve the problem. She felt completely comfortable turning to her principal, since she had known him from her student teaching experiences. She stated:

I had several students with special needs and some significant behavior problems. And so that was a pretty big challenge in itself. I felt like I had pretty good classroom management skills, but also being a first-year teacher, you have a lot of things on your plate that you’re trying to juggle. I probably had weekly meetings with my principal, and/or assistant principal just to get feedback from them (Jackie, 2008, 2). .... And I did that first year, and those meetings centered around the discipline issues because I had a pretty rambunctious bunch or whatever. I mean, I had several kids that were really a hundred percent all the time; something was going on. I initiated those (meetings). I would stop in and say,

“This is better. This is not better. What do you think? Tell me what to do.” Those were very positive meetings and more like brainstorming and, “Alright Jackie, that sounds good, or, try this.” Again, that’s because I was in a school where I knew those individuals because I’d been there the whole year before blocking and student teaching, so I felt very comfortable going to them and saying, I can’t do this or this isn’t working. Help me (Jackie, 2008, 2).

Clara was pleasantly surprised when her principal supported her after she forgot to dismiss her students on time, causing them all to miss school buses to transport them home. She recalled:

I’ll never forget that. I also was trying to build a community in my classroom, and we were having our class meeting, and my kids missed the bus. The entire class missed the bus. I freaked out. I was like “RUN!” Of course they all missed it. It was a very rural area where the kids live everywhere, and so my principal and several other teachers, bless their hearts, we drove all these kids home, and I got back to school (Clara, 2008, 1).

She recounted her feelings when her principal entered her classroom to speak to her about the incident. She stated:

I’m thinking I’m dead meat. He’s going to kick my hinny. He just looks at me like what did you do, but immediately, which I love him for, he did not punish me. He didn’t criticize me. He didn’t shout at me. He’s like, “Okay, let’s get these kids home.” We got them home. People helped me find; They knew more than me. I’d only lived there for a couple months before school started. I didn’t know the community. We all do that, and as soon as we get back and we’re all back

together, that's when I burst out crying, and he just looked at me and said, "If that's the worst thing you do all year, it's alright." So, that was good. That let me know I can make mistakes. You know, it's okay. This isn't brain surgery. I didn't kill anyone today (Clara, 2008, 2).

Clara also recounted the advice that her principal had for her as a new teacher in terms of her instruction. As a new teacher, she felt that she had to be perfect at everything, but her principal helped her to prioritize. She said:

You want to do so much. You want to do everything. He came in, and I was there over the summer, and planned all summer, and I was in my room setting my room up all summer, and he came in and he said, "You know you can't do it all." His biggest piece of advice for me that I think was the most helpful was he said, "You need to pick one or two things that you really want to do well." Whether it be, I really want to do well at setting up my literature circles or I really want to do really well at doing hands-on math, or whatever it is. He gave me that piece of advice, and you don't expect that (Clara, 2008, 1).

Clara, Rose, and Jackie felt very comfortable with their first principals, allowing them to rely on their principals for support when they felt they needed it.

However, Laura developed a special relationship with her principal during her second year of teaching in a Christian school. She and this principal had common backgrounds.

Her principal helped Laura make the decision to get married after she agonized over the decision for the entire summer when the first school in which she had worked

closed down. Laura needed to either marry her now-husband and move to a new state or accept a job at with this principal. She recalled:

It was a lot of stress, and so here comes August or July and the school had closed down that I had been teaching at. This man was waiting for me to say yes. I was flipped out, freaking out. You know. This is forever. I didn't believe divorce. There are a few instances where divorce is okay, but I wanted to do my best to keep that from happening. I guess I was just overwhelmed by the decision of a forever relationship with this person. And it wasn't going the way I thought it was supposed to go. So, I went ahead and interviewed for a job. I met this great principal. She hired me. We hit it off in the beginning. She had been through depression. We had talked about the depression, actually in the interview. It just seemed like the right fit (Laura, 2008, 2).

The relationship with this principal evolved to resemble a mother/daughter relationship after Laura accepted the job and decided to marry her husband. Her principal and colleagues were very supportive of the decision that would take her away from the school mid-year; however the parents of her students were not pleased. She had discussed the issue at length with her principal, but still felt nervous telling her. She recalled:

Well I say I probably was more scared to tell the parents and the other staff than her, but thinking back, I was nervous to tell her. I know I was because I remember being surprised that she took it so well. She actually sent out a letter to all of the faculty and the parents saying, "I'm proud to say Miss Lindsey will be getting married, .... I'm blessing her in this. We'll miss her, however it will be fine." The parents, like I had mentioned in the last interview, there was one parent that really

was open about how it was kind of not fair to the kids because every year a teacher left, and a new one came and the kids never had the same.... The same teachers weren't there from year to year for the most part. It was such a transient staff because they weren't paid much. Yeah, it was parents that I worried about more (Laura, 2008, 3).

The principals provided professional and personal support to both new teachers; however, as Clara recounts, this support extended to the entire faculty. Her principal responded to the requests of the faculty to have more time to discuss professional issues of concern with each other. She stated:

The one thing I think that our principal's done. He's set up a blog, and so the teachers can blog together and talk to each other. And I think that's a great way we can just kind of. If I don't see teachers, we can get on there and we can say, "Oh what do you think about whatever that's going on?" But it's just for the teachers. It's not for anyone else. And that is a nice way to communicate, commiserate. Support. So, I think that's nice. I think that's important. You need that connection (Clara, 2008, 3).

Some principals were a great source of support for these teachers during their initial years; however not all of the participants had positive experiences with administrators during their initial years of teaching. Gary began teaching high school in an inner-city school in another state. He began to suspect drug use with some students enrolled in his summer school class during his initial placement. He turned to the school's administration about the suspected problem and was met with a response that left him surprised. He said:

They just kind of blew me off. In there, I had several kids that I thought were high in class, and these weren't permanent principals. I think that they were, again I don't know, they were either like vice principals earning some extra money or teachers that were working on their administrative endorsement. But it was pretty surprising. It was pretty depressing. I kind of got told at the end that I'd failed too many kids. That I'd not passed them for the class (Gary, 2008, 3).

He didn't fare much better when he accepted a full-time position during the regular academic year at a school in the same school division. He felt that the principal's inaction contributed to the drug and gang problem at the school. He said:

Oh, you know, when I first had my interview, he was really good at presenting himself. He talked about how he'd really improved the school and he'd gotten rid of a lot of bad teachers, and I think in the end, it probably scared off a whole hunk of good teachers, actually. He talked about discipline and how much he'd done to improve discipline in the school. I hadn't seen it before, so my comparison is still from my high school or my own experiences as a high schooler years before and mostly in small towns. So, he was almost laughed at by students. He would drive up in the golf cart. He'd holler to go to class, and he'd drive off. He wouldn't follow through (Gary, 2008, 2).

These incidents demonstrated how important the principal or administrator can be to beginning teachers as they started their careers. Principals who took special interest in beginning teachers have the ability to put the novice teachers at ease as they became acclimated to their schools.

### **Minor Problems**

The participants also mentioned minor issues that posed problems for them at certain points in their early careers. An example of a minor issue was Gary's exposure to gang violence while teaching high school. Gary's size and stature often intimidated students involved in gang activities, and Gary defused several situations which could have turned violent. Laura mentioned another minor problem that she experienced with a male student teacher who was assigned to her. Laura was taken aback by this preservice teacher's lack of enthusiasm and his text messaging during class time. This intern was also routinely arrived late. Laura said the student teacher blamed his tardiness on his carpool, and Laura felt that she had to speak to the director of his carpool about arriving to school on time. She said that she did not know how to deal with the text messaging issue and therefore, never addressed it.

Laura was also the only participant to speak about salary issues. She stated that her first job at a Christian school paid \$16,800 for the school year. It is worth noting that this occurred during the 1999-2000 school year when the average teacher salary was considerably higher. Laura said that she was able to survive because she shared an apartment with a female friend from college and her parents helped her financially.

Other minor issues that arose during interviews were the lack of diversity at the schools and problems motivating students. The participants mentioned that they wished their schools were more ethnically diverse because they felt their students would benefit from exposure to other cultures. They also took the blame whenever they felt that students were unmotivated and did not want to learn. They all said they tried various

tactics to get their students excited about school. These issues were only mentioned by certain participants and did not warrant their own category.

### **Summary**

The participants in this research discussed a number of problems that concerned their personal and professional lives. Both types of problems affected their teaching careers. The problems they faced primarily dealt with the school curricula, children with special needs, differentiation, student discipline, workload and time management, parents, student poverty, and their administrators. They also made reference to the types of relationships they formed with their students.

Some of the minor issues they faced were also mentioned. The primary categories represented the areas in which they had the most difficulty. These participants were able to use their available resources to cope with and solve problems. They relied on colleagues, administrators, and their own personal experiences and lives to deal with problematic situations. All of these teachers remained in the teaching profession for their initial five years, and they were successful in tackling their problems.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Conclusion

The research question was, “What problem-solving approaches do beginning teachers use to remain in the profession beyond the initial five years?” The sub-questions were (a) what problems do elementary teachers face during their first five years of teaching, (b) how do elementary teachers cope with these problems, (c) what problems are elementary teachers currently experiencing compared to the problems of their first five years of teaching, (d) how are elementary teachers dealing with current problems, and (e) what plans do elementary teachers have for remaining in the profession?

As Heppner and Krauskopf (1987) argue, before the process of problem solving can begin, one must perceive that a problem exists. Problem perception implies some level of awareness about the need for a cognitive, behavioral, or affective response to something that is not right or apart from some standard norm. The participants in this study perceived problems in certain areas during their initial five years of teaching and problems in their current teaching careers. The primary categories in which these teachers experienced problems were: (a) curriculum, (b) differentiation, (c) discipline, (d) student poverty/student personal issues, (e) children with special needs, and (f) time management combined with workload. Another issue centered on personal problems that affected professional practices. Like Heppner’s and Krauskopf’s (1987) description of problem perception, the participants saw the need for either an affective, behavioral, or cognitive response to situations within those categories that were making it difficult for them to manage their classrooms. Their systematic and long-term responses to these situations constituted the problem solving or coping strategies they used to deal with these issues.

Problems can stem from internal or external demands. Likewise, coping and solving strategies can take the form of cognitive or affective responses. Laura's depression was an example of an internal demand, while the disruptive student pulling out a chunk of Clara's hair constituted an external demand. An example of an affective response was Rose's praying while retrieving her students from lunch, and a cognitive response was Gary's decision to divide his students into leveled reading groups and allowing them to choose a novel on their reading level to read.

Upon the perception of various problems, the participants all responded in ways that led to coping with or solving the problems. Their responses address the primary research question which refers to how they overcame problems. All of these participants continued to teach after they perceived various problems. While the abandonment of the profession would have been a legitimate problem-solving strategy, none of these participants took this option, even though Gary considered it. Therefore, all of the participants solved or coped with their problems by using a method other than leaving the profession. Their problem-solving strategies included turning to colleagues and administrators for support, trying various methods, following their own convictions, anticipating a better year in the future, judging and treating children individually, and drawing upon their own backgrounds and personal lives.

### **Answers to the research questions**

The participants faced problems dealing with the curricula of their schools, differentiation of instruction, student discipline, student poverty and external issues, students with special needs, and the workload in conjunction with the lack of time. Curriculum was reported in the literature as an area in which teachers have reported problems. Teachers were frustrated by the pressure to ensure that their students scored highly on high stakes tests (Hale, 2005). The participants reported that they felt pressure to have their students produce high scores on state-mandated tests. Their concerns did not arise from the tests but rather from their concerns about children who were capable of passing but did not. They also reported problems with pacing guides as reported by Souto-Manning and Dice (2007). The government mandates imposed on teachers (Webb, et. al., 2004) were consistent with Gary's reporting of the school division's demands after his school was labeled as failing.

Classroom management, discipline, and workload were also a prominent issue from the review of literature. It has been reported that teachers can spend upwards of ten percent of instructional time dealing with discipline problems (Schaffer, et. al., 1992), and this was consistent with the data from Jackie, Rose, Clara, and Gary. These participants developed strategies for dealing with discipline problems that included meetings with administrators, compromises with difficult students, and sending students out of the classroom. Hale (2005) found that teachers were better able to maintain discipline in their classrooms if they set behavioral expectations on the first day of school and reinforced their expectations throughout the year. Jackie learned to set her expectations at the beginning of the school year and remind her students of classroom

rules often. The research also indicated that teachers often altered their instruction to maintain classroom control (Simmons, et. al., 1999), but the participants in this study refused to forgo best practices to reestablish control.

Nieto (2003) and Webb, et. al. (2004) found that teachers spent much of their own time planning lessons and assessing student work. The participants in this study provided consistent data. They all discussed the amount of work and the personal time that was consumed by assessments and planning. Gary reported that many of the administrative responsibilities that he was assigned were an unnecessary waste of his time. Rose also reported that administrative tasks took much of her planning time, and these issues raised stress levels which was consistent with the findings by Dadley and Edwards (2007). The participants realized that assessment and planning were a part of their job responsibilities, but they resented tasks that did not directly benefit their students or tasks that they felt were not their responsibility.

The second sub-question asked how the participants solved their problems. Heppner and Krauskopf (1987) found that a problem is a situation in which a person responds to internal or external demands. Problems may require routine or creative responses, and Berg, et. al., (1999) found that people develop problem-solving strategies to deal with everyday problems based on their life experiences. These solutions were derived from focused procedural knowledge that people acquired through life experiences. Individuals also encode information (Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987) that may aid them in solving a problem, but they sometimes request additional information to make decisions about the parameters of the problem and to evaluate possible solutions (Berg, et. al., 1999). Berg et. al. (1999) found that people drew on their experiences as a

means of generating strategies to solve hypothetical problems. This suggested that experience is crucial to generating strategies for solving problems. The participants in the present research all drew upon their experiences as students and the information they had stored in their long-term memory to generate strategies to solve their problems. These teachers recalled situations from their own education or background and relied on prior knowledge or their own world views to generate the best strategies to solve the problems.

There were very little differences between the problems that the participants had during the first five years and the present. These teachers did remain in teaching beyond their initial five years, but none of them had taught for more than ten years. Buckley, et. al. (2005) found that a problem that plagued experienced teachers was the loss of autonomy, however only one of the participants reported a “loss” of autonomy as a problem. The participants in this study had never been in situations in which they had a great deal of autonomy. Gary’s situation occurred after the school division intervened as a response to the school’s failing status. Besides the findings of Buckley, et. al. (2005), there is no research suggesting that experienced teachers have different problems than beginning teachers. Experienced teachers may be better able to solve problems after gaining years of experience. Jackie demonstrated an example of this when she decided to become strict and maintain discipline in her classroom after several meetings with her principal. The participants also dealt with the massive amount of assessment in various ways. At the beginning of their careers, they felt as though they had to grade everything their students completed. The data led to the conclusion that the participants are now better able to deal with the same kinds of problems that they faced during the onset of their careers.

The next sub-question centered on their dealings with current problems. Berg, et. al. (1999) found that age did not increase the number of problem-solving strategies generated by people. Their findings indicated that older adults had more experiences, but they were not able to generate strategies at the rate that younger adults did. These findings may suggest that younger adults attempt more possible solutions to problems, while older adults continue to draw upon prior experiences and use the same strategies that worked in the past. The findings in this study supported Berg, et. al.'s (1999) findings. Jane was the oldest of the participants, and she admitted that she was still at a loss when she has an unmotivated class. The younger teachers seemed to generate different strategies to address problems. This was evident in Gary's actions when he developed leveled reading groups. Laura also demonstrated this when she created enrichment packets for students who completed work earlier. The younger teachers developed these strategies well into their teaching careers, and Reynolds, (1995) found that teachers were well into their second year before they showed any signs of effective classroom management.

The final research question dealt with the plans that the participants had for remaining in the profession. Four of the six participants had future plans that did not include continuing as a classroom teacher. Only Clara and Jane wanted to remain in their present positions as classroom teachers, although Clara has admitted toying with the idea of serving in some kind of supervisory capacity while working with preservice teachers. She said that if there were a way that she could do this without having to take classes first, she would do it. The other participants all had other plans. At the time of the interviews, Gary had already been accepted to a graduate program to pursue a Doctorate

of Philosophy in gifted education, which supports Lortie's (2002) and Margolis's (2008) findings that men enter teaching with no plans to stay for the entirety of their careers. Gary was moving to another part of the state and would not continue teaching school.

Rose had just completed her math specialist certification and said that she was searching for a math specialist position within the same school division. At the time of the interviews, Jackie was serving as a substitute principal at her school and was not sure as to whether or not she would return to the classroom. She said that her plans eventually included becoming an administrator at the elementary level. Finally, Laura said that her husband has requested a transfer to another part of the state, and the following academic year would be her last at her present school. She said that she may decide to have more children and remain home with them once she and her husband moved. The future plans of Rose, Jackie, and Laura supported the findings of Fowler and Mittappalli (2006) which indicated that teachers leave for career advancement (often within the school system) and personal issues. The participants who planned to leave classroom did not feel forced out of teaching because of problems.

### **Conclusions for each participant**

The participants all recognized from the onset of teaching that they would have problems as teachers. They developed solutions to these problems by relying on their own experiences and personality characteristics. The participants talked about their own experiences as students in school, as well as aspects of their personal lives. Their own life situations and personality characteristics shaped their outlooks on their teaching careers. Their own strengths helped them to solve their problems.

*Conclusions for Clara*

Clara is the mother of three young children and talked extensively about how being a mother had made her a better teacher. She was clear in stating that people who do not have children are capable of being effective teachers, but she spoke about how the nurturing component of teaching was much more present in her teaching after she had her own children. Several of Clara's decisions in terms of dealing with or involving parents were made based on what she would tolerate as a parent. For example, she said that she does not want to have to sit with her children to complete an unreasonable amount of homework; therefore, she is very careful as to what she will assign for homework.

She was also the only participant who repeatedly used the word "love" when referring to her students. Clara made very little distinction between her children and her students. Her need to protect her students resembled that of a mother protecting her children. She said when she had a difficult student who pulled a chunk of her hair out, she was primarily concerned about the other students in the classroom and sent them to other teachers for their protection. She was also willing to spend her own money on her students to ensure that they had adequate school supplies. She said that she attempted to foster social interaction in her classroom by placing her students in groups and having them work together often. This created a community atmosphere in her classroom that may resemble a family. Clara also said that she did not involve parents in issues that are clearly classroom matters, and she handled those situations herself. She in turn, said that she does not want her children's teachers to contact her about issues that are the teacher's problems.

Clara said that her natural propensity to be organized has helped her to manage her family and career. Her parenting skills carried over into her teaching, so she was able to manage her career and her family with great ease. Teaching came very naturally to Clara and she learned as she went along. Clara did not dwell on prior mistakes and used them as learning opportunities. Clara constantly sought ways to improve her teaching, but she never had a negative view of herself as a teacher. She settled on becoming better as she went along.

### *Conclusions for Gary*

Gary had some positive experiences as a student in school, but he spent most of his time bored. He said that he would often read and write his own stories in school to cure his boredom and became very interested in literature. Gary began his career as a high school English teacher and later, by happenstance, found a position teaching elementary school. From the onset of Gary's career, he held high standards for his students and was pleased that they wanted to learn. He was also pleased that they enjoyed reading novels rather than the short stories in basal readers. His high level of autonomy at the high school level allowed him to design his own curriculum and teach what the novels that he enjoyed.

The high expectations that Gary set for his students did not diminish after he began teaching the fifth grade. He noticed the wide range of academic abilities, but recalled his own experiences in school with teachers teaching to the average student. He was determined that his gifted students not experience the same boredom that he experienced and began to differentiate his instruction to meet the needs of all children.

Gary's recognition for needed programs to serve gifted children was made clear when he saw the wide array of programs for academically challenged students and near absence of comparable programs for talented and gifted children. He then became an advocate for gifted children and was determined to serve their needs along with the needs of his other students.

Gary maintained his high standards for all of his students and did not stray from his convictions. He also challenged his students to perform at their best and to modify their behavior when it was undesirable. He demonstrated these aspects of his character by continuing to hold morning meeting in his classroom after the administration recommended that he discontinue it as a means of creating more academic time. He saw the benefit of these meetings to his students and refused to discontinue a practice that had a positive affect on his students. He was also very disappointed when he was told that he could not incorporate aspects of his visit to Malawi into the curriculum. However, he still hosted a representative from Malawi and invited him to speak to his students.

Gary also challenged his students on several occasions. An example of this was when Gary was warned by the previous teachers about an extremely sensitive student. Her was told not to play competitive games and to avoid placing this student in situations where he would experience failure. This student was prone to extreme emotional outbursts and would cause disruptions in class. Gary decided that the student would not grow if he were never placed in situations where he would have to learn to manage his anger. Gary challenged this student by developing a plan in which the student would leave the classroom until he calmed down and would then be able to return to class.

However, Gary did not stop playing competitive games, and this student eventually left the classroom at fewer instances and for shorter periods of time.

Gary drew upon his own experiences in school and what he thought was best for his students to deal with many about the problems that he encountered. His own love of writing and reading literature shaped his teaching and led him to focus on improving the writing of his students as a staple of the curriculum. He alleviated the excessive grading by working with students individually during class time, and allowing them to make corrections during class. He said that he was leaving classroom teaching to pursue a doctorate degree in gifted education and ultimately train teachers to serve gifted and talented children.

#### *Conclusions for Jackie*

Jackie credited much of her success and problem-solving skills to the student teaching portion of her training. Several times during the interviews, she mentioned the experience she had student teaching in the same school for an academic year. She then subbed at the school and was hired there for her first few years of teaching. Jackie said that she was very familiar with the school environment, the faculty, and administration of the school which was why she quickly felt a part of the school community. She stated that she and her student teaching colleagues were treated as a part of the faculty throughout the year that they were interning. She was fully acclimated into the teaching process and was completely prepared for her first year.

Jackie said that the level of comfort she felt with the school led her to turn to her principal and colleagues without hesitation when she had problems during her first year.

She said that she initiated weekly meetings with her principal and assistant principal when she was having problems with students disrespecting her. Her gregarious personality and her familiarity with the school's administrators led her seek help when she realized that she was having a problem. Her first year of professional teaching was more comparable to the second year for most teachers because she had the year-long student teaching experience at the same school.

Jackie was also fortunate to be hired at the same time that the school was adopting new curricula and textbooks for several subject areas. She noted that she was trained in the use of many new materials at the same time that older faculty members were; therefore, their years of experience were not as much of an advantage to them in teaching the new curriculum. Jackie said that she felt just as comfortable with the new materials as the other faculty members did. Jackie's colleagues also noticed the leadership characteristics of her personality and turned to her to represent them to the school's administrators.

This was the foundation for Jackie in developing her leadership skills, and it led her to become involved in the local education association. Jackie's love of teaching and her school caused her to become involved with several committees and take on a lot of responsibilities in the school. This high level of involvement did not wane until she started a family, at which time she said that she had to devote more time to her son. However, she continued to pursue higher career goals and wanted to work in education administration eventually. She was a substitute principal at the time of the interviews and stated that she felt completely comfortable in this position.

Of all the participants, Jackie spoke the least about her personal life and her own educational experiences. Jackie also seemed to be the participant most able to separate her personal life from her professional life. She stated that she wanted to be a teacher from the time she entered preschool and never considered other options upon entering college. She relied heavily on what she knew from her student teaching experience to guide her through her first year. Jackie was a strong proponent of year-long student teaching cohort models since she felt this experience alleviated many of the situations that could have posed problems for her during her initial year of teaching.

#### *Conclusions for Jane*

Jane talked extensively about her own educational experiences and was determined to create a classroom environment that was much different from those that she knew while growing up. Jane had to spend her childhood trying to gauge the moods of her teachers and was often disciplined due to her failure to read the body language of her teachers and her failure to understand the unwritten rules of classroom conduct. For this reason, Jane established a completely open environment with her students in which she told her students exactly how she was feeling and one in which they felt free to talk to her about anything.

Jane was open with her students about her son's illness during her first year of teaching, and she felt that her students handled the situation very maturely. She relied on her colleagues and student teacher that year as well as the emotional support from her students. Her students made cards for her son and asked about him often. The students understood that this was a difficult time for her and served as a system of support. Her

relationships with her students became interdependent, and her students felt just as comfortable talking to her as she felt talking to them. Jane made it clear to her students at the beginning of each school year that she would always tell them when something was bothering her so they would not have to ever guess as she did with her teachers.

Jane eased into her job because she also began working professionally at the school where she conducted her student teaching. She also said that her university training was so difficult that professional teaching seemed easy in comparison. She spoke about all of the work, reading, and lesson planning required during her university training and saw professional teaching as a relief from the high demands of her training. She said that she felt completely prepared for anything as a result of her university work. She used many of the practices she acquired during her course work to instruct her students and enriched her classroom environment with books to foster a love of reading among her students. Jane would often try different instructional methods that she learned in her university classes and informed her colleagues of how effective these practices were with her students. She said that her colleagues would try any practice that she felt worked well with her students. Jane's teacher training was a clear benefit to her during her initial years and prevented many problems for her.

Jane also worked with two colleagues who became her mentors while she was teaching. These two colleagues taught the at same grade level and helped her to make it through difficult times. Jane said that her primary mentor, Barbara, was someone she could talk to whenever she was having difficult times. She stated that she had a difficult class one year that left her wanting to leave the profession, and it was Barbara who encouraged her to remain until the next year. Jane said the next class was one of her

favorites, and she was glad that her mentor talked her into staying. She also said that she and her mentor conducted classroom-based research together, and they both stayed abreast of the latest research in early childhood education. She said that she and her mentor often talk about anything in their personal lives that was bothering them as well. Jane and her mentor have developed a very close professional and personal relationship, and this has helped her through many difficult situations.

The level of autonomy that Jane's students had was a result of her restrictive classroom environments as a child. Jane's difficulties were solved by remaining open with her students and relying on her colleagues and training. Jane was also able to rely on her students for support. She did not have plans for leaving teaching and said that she could not imagine doing anything else for a living. Jane's love of teaching and the emotional attachments that she developed with her students made teaching a natural part of her life.

#### *Conclusions for Laura*

Many of Laura's problems during her initial years of teaching stemmed from her personal life, and this in turn, shaped her teaching. Laura did not have many of the experiences of the other participants because she began her career in a Christian school in another state. Laura never realized situations in which she had to differentiate. She often forged through the curriculum even when her students did not grasp every concept. She stated that she covered as many concepts as she could in class and assigned the concepts that she did not cover for homework. She did not have to prepare students for high-stakes testing, so she was able to move her students through the curriculum without ensuring that all students acquired all of the skills. She said that as long as she filled out forms

stating that she covered the standards, her principal assumed that the students knew the material. She also did not have to deal with children who had difficult home lives. These conditions left Laura with few professional problems during the beginning of her career.

The primary problems for Laura were clinical depression and her decision to marry her fiancé. These problems affected Laura's professional life in that she felt the need to hide her depression from her students. She also broke off her engagement and decided to take another job once the first Christian school in which she was employed closed down. She interviewed at another Christian school that summer and became very good friends with the principal of that school. While Laura was open with her principal about her marital decisions, she did not discuss these issues with many of her colleagues at the new school. Laura felt the need to separate her professional and personal lives, but they were inevitably intertwined. She eventually turned to her colleagues to help her deal with her depression, and her principal talked her into marrying her fiancé.

Laura eventually coped with these problems by doing self reflection. She said that while suffering from depression at her first school, she would put her head on her desk and cry whenever her students were not in the classroom, and she worked out a system whereby she would try to go for five minutes without worrying. This method helped her through the day to day struggles of dealing with depression. Laura became engaged after her first school closed down, but decided to break off the engagement in favor of accepting a job at her second Christian school. She held open discussions with her new principal about the dilemmas she faced. She faced further problems after this decision because some of her colleagues and the parents of some of her students questioned her about taking a job and leaving to get married so soon after she started. Laura's principal

defended her when she faced these problems, and Laura left feeling very satisfied with her decision.

Laura talked about her students making comments and suggestions about her physical appearance, and she said that she was taken aback by such boldness from children. She also spoke about the people passing judgment on her when she decided not to marry her fiancé. She said that people continued to pass judgment on her after they were married, and she did not like having these people watch and critique what she was doing in her private life. Laura recalled that as a teenager, she read things that other students had written about her on the bathroom walls of the school that she attended. This greatly upset her, and these incidents demonstrated her lack of tolerance for anyone making judgments about her. She admitted that the incidents with her students were minor, but her memory of them and her inclination to talk about the events reiterated her irritation with people passing judgment on her. She stated that she had to remember that she was in control of her classroom and that her students were not.

Laura was able to cope with her problems with the help of her colleagues and principal. She eventually overcame her dilemmas with the curriculum once she began teaching in public schools and had to differentiate to ensure that all students met the standards required for state-wide testing. Laura quickly adjusted to the different needs of the students in the public school by turning to colleagues for advice and assistance when she needed it. She used resources from her school division to supplement her instruction. She also consulted with other teachers and decided to scale down the curriculum for students who were not successful in meeting the fifth-grade standards. Laura's dependence on her colleagues helped her manage her initial teaching years; however, she

was careful to maintain distance between her and students to prevent them from feeling the freedom to make comments about her.

### *Conclusions for Rose*

Rose's primary problems centered around discipline and the lack of parental support. She relied on her colleagues and administrators to help her through these issues. Her most profound problems occurred during a year when she had eight students on behavior plans in a class of 15 students. She turned to her colleagues to help her through that year. Her colleagues took students out of her classroom so that she could manage the rest of the students and cover the material. Rose also stated that she often prayed when she went to retrieve her students from lunch. She wanted to leave teaching after that year and said that the need for an income was the only factor that prevented her from leaving.

Rose also turned to her principal when she had difficulty contacting parents. She said that the parents did not care if their children could not read or write, and she felt as though parents viewed her a babysitter and school as a day care where their children could get a free breakfast and lunch. Rose's principal arranged for her and other teachers to conduct home visits to conference with parents. She stated that this did not stop her from having high expectations of her students which led to them earning higher standardized test scores. Rose stated that she did not lower her expectations for these students just because they were from disadvantaged home environments. Rose maintained a strong belief in her children, and they proved that they were able to achieve and learn in school.

Rose also learned to deal with different kinds of parents once she moved to a school populated by middle-class children. She said that she was very careful about what she sent home to parents and was much more exact about grading. She said that middle-class parents would argue with her over points on an assignment that would not result in a letter grade change. She was able to adapt to the environments in which she found herself and based this on her financial need to maintain a career. She also had to deal with open classrooms in her second school and dealt with that by practicing stricter classroom management to ensure that her students did not disturb other classes.

Rose's future plans included searching for a math specialist position in her school division. She was excited about math, which she taught along with language arts, but also thought she might like to return to a self-contained classroom and teach all subjects again if she were to remain a classroom teacher. Rose relied on her colleagues and her own resolve to overcome her problems. She remembered her need for an income and decided to cope with her problems rather than leave teaching.

## **Summary**

The participants either had professional problems or personal problems that had a great impact on their professional lives. They drew upon their experiences to help them deal with their problems. There was also a great reliance on colleagues, mentors, administrators, students, and friends. The participants loved teaching and attempted to do what they perceived was best for their students. Gary was the sole participant who considered leaving teaching when he felt that he could not cope with professional problems, but he stayed and coped with his issues by doing what he thought was best for

his students. The other five participants continued to love teaching despite personal and professional problems.

### **Findings related to the review of literature**

The participants in the study raised issues that are prominent in the body of teacher retention literature as well as issues that were not included in the literature. A prominent issue in the literature was that of inadequate teacher salaries, however the participants only mentioned this issue as a passing remark. Clara stated that she could not teach for a living if her husband did not earn a substantial salary, and Rose said that she had to work to earn a living. Gary said that he would like to earn more money to start a family, but he was not leaving the profession to earn more money. Laura was the sole participant to speak extensively about her beginning salary which was \$16,800 during her first year of teaching during the 1999-2000 school year. She did not complain about the salary since she was able to manage financially with help from her parents. However, salary was not a primary concern for any of the participants.

Achinstein and Barrett (2004) wrote about teachers becoming acculturated to their school environments. This issue was only a concern for Laura and Rose as they had to adapt to open school environments from previously working in individual classrooms. Gary was also not accustomed to the violence and drug use that occurred at the high school where he began teaching. He only taught there for one year and had no problem adapting to the elementary school environment once he moved. The other participants did not encounter problems with school enculturation. Clara experienced what Veenman (1984) identified as the “reality shock” of teaching as she felt that her training did not

prepare her for the daily tasks of teaching. The fact that she was once a student in the elementary school where she taught made her feel less of a stranger in the school. Jackie also capitalized on her familiarity with her school since she had student taught there the previous year.

Parents were an issue that was prominent in the literature and among the participants. The participants of the current study held similar opinions of parents as the participants in the Quartz and TEP (2003) study and the Buckley, et. al., (2005) study. They all viewed parents as important to the education of children. The parents in these studies were not cooperative, but the teachers would have liked to have had closer relationships with parents. Clara mentioned that she understood the plight of parents who had their own issues or were working multiple jobs and did not have the time to devote to their children's education. The participants felt that they were supported by their administrators in their dealings with parents. This is in contrast to Webb, et. al.'s (2004) and Buckley, et. al.'s (2005) studies in which parents and students were increasingly viewed as clients and often imposed their demands on the school and the curriculum. Laura alluded to such parents when she spoke about parents at the Christian school who wanted to know exactly how funds were being allocated. In this case, parents really were clientele, since they were paying tuition and bombarded with fund raising events. The participants did not have major problems with parents; however, some of them thought parents were not as involved as they should have been.

Discipline was mentioned by the participants, but their issues primarily centered around specific children rather than an entire class of unruly children. Jane was the only participant who mentioned a class as a whole, but these problems were focused on

motivating students who refused to do any work. All of the other participants had specific children who were disruptive. There was very little information in the literature on interactions between teachers and individual disruptive students. Prior research has focused on teachers' management of an entire class. The closest incident to a "whole class" discipline problem in this study was Rose's year of having over half of her class on behavior plans. She did not view this as a "whole class" problem and recognized that specific children were particularly problematic. She removed certain children from the classroom and managed to proceed with her lessons. The misbehavior of a large number of students was not an issue for these teachers, and they all learned how to deal with the specific children who were most disruptive.

Some of their discipline issues centered on students with special needs being integrated in general education classrooms under the inclusion model. However, other special-needs children proved to be an asset to the classroom environment. Gary witnessed this when he paired a gifted child with a child afflicted with autism. He talked about how these two students complimented each other, and he felt that pairing them was a successful aspect of his career. These findings were comparable with the findings of Idol (2006) who found that teachers actually prefer inclusion of special-needs children in their classes. However, the findings of Webb, et. al. (2004) were underscored in this study as well. Like the participants in the Webb, et. al. (2004) study, these participants did not feel like they were given adequate training to deal with special-needs children. They learned as they went along and dealt with special-needs children on a case-by-case basis. They felt as if they had adequate administrative support, but they said the resources

for special-needs children were limited in their schools. They would have liked for special-needs children to have had more access to special resource teachers.

The specific concerns of male teachers arose in the literature; however, Gary did not encounter many of the problems mentioned in the literature. He was not seen as the school disciplinarian since he was in a school with other male teachers and a male principal. He also stated that he felt completely comfortable with his students and did not harbor fears of inappropriate contact with his students. Gary was typical of the men that Lortie (2002) studied in that he entered education with no plans for remaining a classroom teacher for an extended period of time. Gary said that he told his principal during his initial job interview that he would teach for five or ten years and then leave to pursue a doctorate. Gary also attempted to leave early when he was not happy with changes that occurred in his school, but he stayed due to personal and health issues. This aspect of Gary's career was the only consistency with the literature on male elementary teachers. Gary did not mention the effects of working in a feminized profession (Hansen & Mullholland, 2005). He joked about being given more French fries than the female teachers, but he was very serious about wanting to be recognized for his accomplishments as a teacher. He stated that he did not want to be praised simply because he was a man teaching elementary-aged children.

While the participants did not speak about any formal induction programs, they mentioned how important mentors were to them during their initial years of teaching. McCord and Bowden (2003) found that mentors can have a great impact on beginning teachers, and Owen and Solomon (2006) found that mentors and protégées who have interpersonal similarities will have successful relationships. The participants found their

colleagues and mentors to be vital to their beginning years. Jane was most vocal about how her mentors were a support mechanism during her initial years of teaching and remained very close to them throughout her career. Her mentors were of a similar age to her and taught second grade just as Jane did. Laura's second principal also served as a mentor to her since this principal had also suffered depression. This principal's background was so similar to Laura's that she felt she could talk to her principal about any matter. This study underscores the importance of having a mentor of similar interest and personality characteristics, since beginning teachers and mentors often consult each other about personal issues.

Administrators were also important to these participants as they formed their teacher identities and dealt with their problems. With the exception of Gary, the participants felt supported by their principals. Jane and Jackie were very comfortable with their principals, and Laura developed a close friendship with her second principal because of their similar backgrounds. The principals were able to ease some stress of the participants by telling them to focus on one or two subject areas as they began their careers. Jackie's and Clara's principals gave them permission to focus on a couple of subject areas which lightened their workloads and soothed their egos. They had felt as if they did not have to be experts in every subject area at the onset of their careers. This is in contrast to the findings from the literature. The principals that Flores (2006) studied had all expected their beginning teachers to possess all of the necessary skills to teach at profession levels. Reynolds (1995) also argues that beginning teachers should possess adequate professional knowledge when they begin their careers given the responsibility

with which they are charged. However, the participants in the present study did not feel that their students were adversely impacted by the focus on specific subject areas.

The participants also spoke about issues that were not prominent in the literature. Laura spoke about problems that she had with a student teacher who did not demonstrate professionalism, and Gary mentioned the problem of how to adequately challenge his gifted students. These issues were only discussed by individual teachers. The predominant aspect that was absent from the literature was the personal lives and prior educational experiences of beginning teachers and how those factors affected and shaped the careers and problem-solving approaches of beginning teachers. The views of these teachers shaped the ways in which they approached their teaching and their students.

The participants used what they believed to be the best practice for their students based on their own experiences. Jane's strict teachers as a child caused her to maintain an autonomous atmosphere in her classroom. Gary's determination to meet the needs of all of his students caused him to supplement far beyond the curriculum for his students. Clara's parenting instincts led her to view her students as her children. Laura's dramatic personal life forced distance between her and her students. Jackie's leadership qualities led to her to seek the help from her administrators and colleagues when she needed them. Finally, Rose's need to maintain a job helped her to forge through her problems while she was teaching difficult students and in undesirable circumstances.

These situations implied that teachers relied more on their own experiences and beliefs to cope with problems than induction programs, mentors, teacher training, etc. These findings coincide with the pattern matching aspect of problem solving that Heppner and Krauskopf (1987) described. When people begin to develop a plan to solve

problems, they use pattern matching, which is developing a plan based on information stored in long-term memory. They then match the information from their memory to the actions required to achieve the goal and solve the problem. The authors also state that self-appraisal affects how individuals approach and solve problems. Based on experiences, individuals develop beliefs about their selves and their ability to solve problems. Self-appraisal also affects self-esteem, self-efficacy, and locus of control.

The participants relied on information they had in their long-term memories to cope with various problems. Their beliefs about their abilities and their stance on providing the best environment for their students led them to rely on their own experiences or their own situations to address problems. Pattern matching also involves trial and error; therefore, individuals will attempt to match information to certain actions several times to see if the correct information was retrieved from their memories. Jane went through this process when she attempted to find activities that would motivate students who were not interested in learning. Jane tried various activities that she thought would motivate second graders based on her experience with previous classes. She stated that she felt like a failure; therefore, her self-appraisal was affected by this experience. It also served to lower her self-esteem. Gary also used trial and error pattern matching to solve discipline problems in his classroom. He firmly believed that children need to have a half hour of physical activity during the school day and was hesitant to withhold recess from his students. Through trial and error, he learned that withholding one or two minutes of recess had the same effect as withholding the entire period. Therefore, his students were penalized for misbehavior and still had sufficient time for physical activity. He was able to solve his dilemma while matching his actions to what he believed was the best

practice for his students. Pattern matching and self-appraisal were a prominent part of the encoding process for these participants in their problem solving activities.

### **Implications for Practice**

The findings indicated that the personal lives and educational experiences of teachers played a significant role in their teaching and how they encoded and solved their problems. Teacher education programs could serve the needs of their teacher candidates by focusing on what teachers bring with them to their teaching practices. Focusing on the histories of preservice teachers can have far reaching effects in terms of dealing with previous negative educational experiences and beliefs about education. The authors of several of the studies concluded that many preservice teachers have had negative school experiences (Cunningham, 2006; Delpit, 1995; Frank, 2003; Lewis, 2006; Valenciana, et. al., 2006). This was also the case with at least two of the participants in the current research. Both Jane and Gary had negative experiences in school and used those experiences as a guide for improving the educational experiences for their own students. Valenciana et. al., (2006) found that their participants wanted to advise future generations based on their struggles as a way for younger people to avoid the same kinds of incidents.

Teacher education programs could serve their preservice teachers by allowing them to share stories of their educational experiences and stories from their cultures. Delpit (1995) wrote that all participants in a classroom situation can benefit from listening to the stories of others. One could argue that people will only speak about incidents that they vividly remember. However, Heppner and Krauskopf (1987) found

that people retrieve information from their long-term memory when coping with problems. They then match that information to their current actions to appraise the quality of their problem-solving goals.

Under this premise, it is only necessary to use information which can readily be recalled to approach problems. Incidents from a person's history, that may be relevant to a particular situation, are completely useless if they are not at the disposal of the person while coping with a problem. Since the information that can be recalled is all that will be retrieved during the encoding process, it would be beneficial to have preservice teachers reflect on their experiences and apply those to hypothetical or actual teaching situations.

The participants in this research relied on their experiences and identities to cope with their issues. However, there is no evidence to suggest that all beginning teachers will instinctively recall experiences from their own lives to cope with problems. Heppner and Krauskopf (1987) noted that encoding problematic situations can result in two kinds of behaviors; behavior actions or avoidance behaviors. The participants in this research did not discuss avoiding problems. Instead, they faced them and coped with them using information they encoded as well as experiences from their own long-term memory. It may be the case that teachers who exit teaching after a short period of time opted to avoid problems associated with teaching by leaving. Once a problem is avoided, denied, or repressed, no further problem-solving actions are necessary because the problem has essentially been solved. Teacher education programs need to emphasize that teachers have the tools to deal with problems, and those tools can be explored by them sharing their own personal narratives.

Another important finding that has implications for practice was the relationships that the participants had with their principals and colleagues. Jane was the only participant who talked extensively about a mentor. None of the other participants even mentioned having a mentor. Similarly, Jackie and Laura were the only participants who discussed their close relationships with their principals. Jackie was familiar with her principal from the previous year of student teaching, and Laura had very much in common with her second principal which created a bond between them. Authors who researched the impact of mentors and administrators indicated that these two populations can have a great effect on beginning teachers (McCord & Bowden, 2003; Owen & Solomon, 2006; Regan & Hannah, 1993; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Stockard & Lehman, 2004; Wildman & Niles, 1987; Wildman, et. al., 1989).

Jane's relationship with her mentor may have been successful because they had very much in common. They were in the same age range. They both taught second grade. They also had common planning time. Owen and Solomon (2006) found that beginning teachers and mentors who have common traits, have more successful relationships. Stockard and Lehman (2004) also reported that mentors can play a pivotal role in the development of a new teacher, and Flores (2006) found that the lack of mentors can have a strong negative impact on novice teachers. In the Flores (2006) study of the Portuguese teachers, experienced teachers actually isolated themselves from the beginning teachers. Clara reported feeling such alienation from her more experienced colleagues, although she had not felt that their actions were deliberate. Clara and Jane were the only two participants who taught in self-contained classrooms, but Jane often collaborated with her colleagues. Clara's isolation may have been the result of remaining in one classroom and

teaching a given set of children each year. She said that she often made attempts to collaborate and asked her principal for common planning time with her colleagues. She made the attempt to reach out to experienced colleagues. She said sometimes they were receptive, and sometimes they were not.

Administrators were another source of support for some of the participants. Jackie and Laura depended on their principals for professional and personal support. Flores (2006), Regan and Hannah (1993), and Stockard and Lehman, (2004) all found that principals were not supportive to the beginning teachers in their respective studies. While some of the participants were indifferent about their principals during their initial years, Gary expressed extreme disappointment about the principals that he encountered when he taught high school in another state. There was a lack of leadership combined with the lack of a curriculum. He felt that this high level of autonomy was not the best situation for a beginning teacher. He also felt that school violence was an issue because the high school students did not respect the principal.

As Flores (2006) found, many principals expected beginning teachers to already have the necessary skills to manage a classroom and provide adequate instruction. The findings from the current research indicated that beginning teachers are in a much better position when they feel comfortable enough with their administrators to turn to them during difficult times. The implications for practice are that beginning teachers possess greater confidence when they feel comfortable with their colleagues and administrators. Administrators and experienced teachers can make themselves more available to beginning teachers as they become acclimated to the school culture. Some teachers will actively seek assistance with problems, but other beginners will resist out of fear of

becoming a burden to their principals and colleagues (Good & Brophy, 2003; McCormack, et. al., 2006). If principals and colleagues readily make themselves available to beginning teachers, teachers may feel more welcome and have less fear about approaching them when problems arise.

### **Implications for research**

There is a need for further research on specific aspects of teaching and how the personal lives of teachers affect educational practices. According to Heppner and Krauskopf (1987), once a person perceives a problem and determines that the problem warrants a behavioral or cognitive response, the encoding process begins. Encoding involves information that is already processed and stored in long-term memory. One must then collect relevant information to develop a plan or a goal for solving the problem. That goal will drive the person's actions. Pattern matching occurs when those actions are examined using information stored in long-term memory. Pattern matching also accounts for the trial and error process associated with personal problem solving. When the participants employed pattern matching, they relied on experiences from their past or personal lives to develop plans for solving the problem. An example of pattern matching occurred when Clara determined how much information to share with parents based on what she felt she needed to know about her own children from their teachers. Another example was Gary's decision to have his gifted students write their own stories, which is what he did as a bored gifted child in school.

Further research is needed to examine exactly what information teachers retrieve from their long-term memories when they examine their actions to solve problems. Berg,

et. al., (1999) found that it was important to determine which aspects of experience were retrieved to understand everyday problem solving. They presented hypothetical problems and measured the participants' experience with the specific problem, the number of times they encountered the problem within the last year, and their script knowledge of the problem. It is reasonable to assume that some beginning teachers may not have had any experience with a particular problem as a teacher. Their script knowledge may come from their own experiences as a student in school. An examination of the school experiences of teachers may reveal the scripts that they remember and how they either take on the role as teacher while using the same script or alter the script. Some of the participants in this study attempted to change the script. Jane, for example, knew that she had to read the body language of her teachers and act accordingly. She changed that script and decided to tell her students exactly what she was thinking and how she was feeling. Laura also attempted to change the script that she learned while student teaching. She observed the strict control that her supervising teacher exhibited over her students, and Laura attempted to alter that script by allowing some social interaction. However, she retained the information about this teacher and employed her tactics whenever she felt that her students were out of control. Research on script knowledge and which aspects of experience teachers depend upon when coping with problems could equip beginning teachers with the tools to pull from their own experience when new problems arise. Beginning teachers can be empowered if they recall experiences from their past when problems arise. If they recall relevant scripts, they should have the knowledge that they can alter the scripts if the original script was inadequate or inappropriate.

Another finding was that teachers who were intimately familiar with school environments were better able to cope with problems that arose their first year. Jackie and Jane both benefitted from this situation. Jane conducted her student teaching field experience in the same school where she began her professional teaching, and Jackie spent an entire year at her school before she began teaching professionally. Jane and Jackie felt completely comfortable talking to their principals and colleagues by the time they began teaching professionally. Jane faced problems with her son's illness, and Jackie had problems with her students disrespecting her. Jane turned to her colleagues, while Jackie initiated meetings with her principal and assistant principal. They were both able to appraise the specific parameters of the problems and match their actions to the information that they had stored from the previous year (Heppner & Krauskopf, 1987).

Based on their experiences from the previous year, Jane knew that her principal would be understanding about the amount of school that she would have to miss and Jackie perceived that her principal would offer suggestions about how she could better manage her students. Although the information that they had stored was not related to experience with a problem, they retained the information they had encoded about the schools' environments and the people with whom they worked. A new teacher to a school with no prior knowledge may not have felt as comfortable turning to colleagues or administrators during difficult times. This was evidenced when Clara's students all missed the school bus, and she was petrified to face her principal after the incident. She was pleasantly surprised by how accommodating the principal and her colleagues were in helping her solve this problem. Her fears might never have arisen had she been more familiar with her principal at the time.

The question for researchers, teacher educators, and school administrators is how to provide experiences in schools for beginning teachers prior to their employment. By happenstance, Jackie and Jane were hired at the schools in which they student taught. It is impossible for teacher education programs to know at which school a teacher will ultimately be employed. Further research is needed to determine how beginning teachers can gain familiarity with schools prior to their employment. Stallings (1998) developed a program in her school division in which orientation began the summer prior to the school year with beginning teachers and mentors being introduced and working closely together during the summer and throughout the school year. Further research can investigate how similar programs can be developed and how principals and other administrators can become involved in such programs.

A further area for future research is the roles that teachers' personal lives or personal histories play in their teaching. It is clear that the histories and personal lives affected how the participants identified themselves as teachers; however, this subject is rarely addressed during training. Delpit (1995) wrote that some preservice teachers felt as though their voices were not heard or valued during their teacher training. Research that documented the individual and cultural histories of preservice and in-service teachers would bring to light the aspects from their experiences that actually shape their teaching. This is especially important for minority teachers. Delpit (1995) noted that some White scholars considered personal narratives of individuals to be important only to other people who are members of the same group. Under this argument, the narratives of minority preservice and in-service teachers are not relevant to White people since Whites are not members of the minority group. Frank (2003) also argues that students of color

feel more comfortable when they share their experiences with other people of color. However, both Frank (2003) and Delpit (1995) argue that the voices of minority students need to be heard in university classrooms for majority students to develop an understanding of cultural differences. Delpit (1995) wrote that all students are a part of the university classroom “group,” so White students are equal co-members and would benefit from listening to all stories.

Kooy (2006) also wrote about the stories of female teachers as they reacted to a novel about teachers and teaching. Their stories revealed that they viewed themselves differently than male teachers do. They felt as though there were different standards for male teachers. Even though they were responding to the actions of fictional characters, there were able to examine their identity by reading about a male teacher and responding to him based on information stored in their long-term memories. These actions coincided with the findings of Berg, et. al. (1999) who found that when they presented people with hypothetical problems, they often imposed actual persons and events into the problem to generate strategies. These findings implied that it is difficult for people to generate strategies to solve problems without recalling events from their past. By listening to the stories of teachers and determining how those stories affect their teaching, teacher educators can remind preservice teachers of the vast resources they have to deal with problems that arise during their initial years.

In chapter three, I mentioned my own status characteristics as being an African-American male teacher who only taught in a private school setting and leaving after five years. These facts were disclosed to the participants at the beginning of their first interviews. Laura and I explored my characteristics in depth since we both had

experience teaching in Christian-based schools. Laura informally interviewed me after our third interview. I was able to relate to Laura as she spoke about intrusive and demanding parents since parents posed the biggest problem for me during my initial years of teaching. I was similarly able to relate to Rose's stories of parents arguing over points on an assignment that would not change a letter grade. Laura, Rose, and I all solved these issues by becoming more accommodating to parents. Laura allowed more student autonomy within her classroom after parents complained. I also realized that parents literally paid my salary and that I could not maintain an antagonistic relationship with people who served as my source of income.

I was also able to relate to Gary's stories of being praised simply because of being a man rather than for all of the work that he did. The public too often assumes that male elementary teachers are good role models simply because they are male. The novelty of male elementary teachers actually accounts for the public perception, and the work that these male teachers accomplish is sometimes ignored. Both Gary and I developed very close relationships with our students and gained the trust of their parents.

The participants were able to provide a broader perspective of teaching because of their public school teaching experience. Issues such as high-stakes testing and curriculum mandates were foreign to me, and I gained valuable insight into these issues from listening to the stories and analyzing the experiences of these teachers. As someone who left the teaching profession after five years for career advancement, it was useful to listen to the stories of teachers who remained and were able to overcome problems they had during their initial years. These teachers were able to work through their problems. They

survived the “boot camp” mentality of teaching and escaped the cannibalization of new teachers by the profession.

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## **Appendix A**

### Letter to Participants

Dear [name of participant],

I am writing to ask about your willingness to participate in a research project that has been designed to answer the research question, “Why do elementary school teachers remain in the teaching profession beyond the initial five years of teaching?”. You have been identified as an elementary school teacher with five or more years of professional experience by [name of source], and I would like you to participate in a three part series of interviews part of this research study. I will not use your name, any possible identifying information, or the names of your colleagues or school in my final report. The interviews will be conducted at a time and in a place convenient to you, and the interview questions are attached.

During the first interview, I will ask you to recount, in some detail, your experiences students, parents, administrators, and colleagues during your initial and current years of teaching. During the second interview, I will ask you to reflect on your experiences, and we will discuss how these experiences have led you to continue your teaching career during the third interview. Each interview will last approximately one hour. Transcripts of the interviews will be sent to you within one week of each interview.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please reply to this message or call me at (540)230-1648. I would welcome your input in this study and hope that you will be able to participate. The Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board has approved this study, and you would be presented with an informed consent form at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Troy Jones

**Appendix B**

Participant Informed Consent Form

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**  
*Informed Consent for Participants*  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

***Participant Informed Consent Form***

Title of Project      Still in Class: An Investigation of the Factors Influencing  
Elementary Teachers to Remain in the Profession

Investigator        Troy Jones

***I. Purpose of this Research/Project***

The overall goal of this research study will be to develop an in depth understanding of the factors that have influenced elementary school teachers to remain in the teaching profession.

***II. Procedures***

The data collection method will involve a series of interviews with elementary school teachers with five or more years professional teaching experience. The interviews will be unstructured and open-ended. Interviews are expected to last for between 45 and 60 minutes each. I ask that, during the interview, you make every effort to refrain from using the actual names of other people (be they children or adults). In this way, I can help ensure the confidentiality of anyone that you might discuss.

***III. Risks***

There are no more than minimal potential risks to this study. Every teacher will select a pseudonym for the study, and these pseudonyms will be used as identifiers throughout the study; thus the participants' actual names will only be known to the interviewer. The interview conversations do not deal with sensitive subject matter and will be conducted in a conversational manner. Participants are free to ask that the tape recorder be turned off if there are thing they wish to say which they do not want to be recorded or considered as data.

***IV. Benefits***

There are no specific benefits for students related to participation in this study. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage participation in the study.

### ***V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality***

Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants, and transcripts will use these pseudonyms rather than actual names. Presentations and publications of the research will make use of pseudonyms and will not identify any individual schools or school districts.

### ***VI. Compensation***

There will be no compensation for participation in the study.

### ***VII. Freedom to Withdraw***

Subjects are free to withdraw from the study without penalty. Individual participants can contact Troy Jones at [Jonest@vt.edu](mailto:Jonest@vt.edu) prior to May 15, 2008 to assure that any information provided is not included in project report.

### ***VIII. Approval of Research***

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Teaching and Learning.

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IRB Approval Date Approval	Expiration Date
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### ***IX. Participant Responsibilities***

I voluntarily agree to participate in a series of tape-recorded interviews on the factors that influence elementary teachers to remain in the profession. I understand that these interviews will be transcribed and analyzed, and that possible presentations of the data and publications may follow, with every effort made to protect the confidentiality of individual participants.

### ***X. Subject's Permission***

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to participate in the study:

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 Participant's signature

---

 Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Troy Jones, [jonest@vt.edu](mailto:jonest@vt.edu), (540)230-1648

Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.

## **Appendix C**

### **Possible Categories of Problems or Issues for Beginning Teachers**

## **Possible Categories of Problems or Issues for Beginning Teachers**

- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with salaries
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with being highly qualified
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with high-stakes testing
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with adapting to the school culture
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with the workload
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with working conditions
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with school violence
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with administrators
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with colleagues
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with parents
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with motivating students
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with student diversity (academic or cultural)
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with students' academic abilities
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with assessment of students' work
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with classroom management and student discipline
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with ESL students
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with special needs students
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with level of comfort with students
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with organization

- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with enough supplies and materials
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with time
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with content knowledge
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with pedagogical knowledge
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with the school-adapted curriculum
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with gender discrimination
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with racism
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with sexual harassment
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with an induction program
- Problems, challenges, or issues of concern with mentors