Thriving, coping, surviving, hoping: Negotiating the first year of teaching

Debrah Jean Fordice

University of Northern Iowa

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THRIVING, COPING, SURVIVING, HOPING:
NEGOTIATING THE FIRST YEAR
OF TEACHING

A Dissertation
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

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Dr. Lynn E. Nielsen, Committee Chair

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Dr. Deborah Gallagher, Committee Member

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Dr. Ana Donaldson, Committee Member

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Debrah Jean Fordice
University of Northern Iowa
August, 2008
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all who commit their lives to teaching.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have given me support and encouragement during my research. I would specifically like to thank my family, friends, co-workers, doctoral advisor and committee, and the four participants in the study.

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THRIVING, COPING, SURVIVING, HOPING:
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Approved:

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Debrah Jean Fordice
University of Northern Iowa
August, 2008
ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study, I examined how four teachers negotiated their first year of teaching. All four teachers graduated from the same teacher preparation program, and secured general elementary positions in the same school district where they conducted some or all of their clinical coursework. I explored the factors that shaped the practice of these first-year teachers.

Annie, a 23-year-old, single, female marathon runner, with a vision to work with children in an inner-city setting, secured a position as a first grade teacher at a school where 85% of the children lived in poverty. Rachel, 24 years old, newly-married, and expecting her first baby, had substitute-taught for one year before securing her job as a second grade teacher in another downtown school. Ben, a 23-year-old single male, envisioned since childhood to become a teacher in order to be a positive role model for children. His first job was in fifth grade at a rural school. Connie, a middle-aged mother of five, had home-schooled her three oldest children. She accepted a long-term substitute position in a school close to her home where her youngest son was to start kindergarten.

From the summer before until the summer after their first year of teaching, I collected data through semi-structured and unstructured interviews, classroom observations followed by stimulated recall sessions, focus groups, and blog entries. I discovered that although in many ways our teacher education program prepared the participants to teach well, they experienced some common challenges and surprises that they negotiated in unique ways. The intersection of their teacher identities, teacher
visions, and personal and professional contexts determined how they negotiated their first year of teaching. Implications for teacher education and teacher induction are discussed.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Although universities award diplomas, and states grant teaching certificates to graduates who complete teacher education programs, research shows that novice teachers often are not well-prepared to teach within the contexts of the positions they secure (Associated Press, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005; Goodlad, 1990a; McNeil, 2003; Tyson, 1994). "Teachers maintain that the university failed to prepare them for the school realities they encounter, and professors say that teachers discard the principles they have learned at the university in favor of questionable ‘practices that work’ in the short run" (Cohn & Kottcamp, 1993, p. 286).

How, then, do teachers negotiate their first year of teaching? This dissertation explored how four first year teachers who graduated from the same teacher education program and secured general elementary teaching positions within the same district described their teaching experiences, shaped their instruction, described their satisfaction with their instruction, and applied what they learned in college to their practice.

What I Wanted to Know

The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers negotiated their first year of teaching given their current conditions in their elementary schools. I explored the following questions:

1. How did the new teachers describe their teaching experiences?
2. How did the new teachers shape their instruction?
3. How satisfied were they with their instruction?
4. How did what they learned in college apply to their practice?

Using qualitative methodology, I explored the experiences of four first-year teachers from the summer before their first year of teaching to the end of their first academic year. I collected and analyzed data through interviews, observations, stimulated recall sessions, focus groups, and written communications. As I wrote the interpretations, in order to maintain confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for all cities, schools, students, participants, and other teachers.

**Why I Wanted to Know This**

The American Education Research Association Panel on Research and Teacher Education reports that research examining the connections between teacher candidates’ beliefs and graduates’ performance as teachers is virtually nonexistent (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). “There are still only very few studies in which the graduates of teacher education programs are followed into the first years of teaching” (p. 16). I designed this study to follow four teachers—all former students in my college education courses—from the time they secured their first teaching positions through the end of their first year in order to deeply explore their experiences.

Having worked in both staff development and teacher education, I have a particular interest in the emotional and intellectual health of teachers. While I see energy, enthusiasm, and anticipation in our university students studying to be teachers, I see classroom teachers who are tired and disillusioned. Teachers discover much of what constitutes the profession of teaching as they experience their first teaching positions
(Cohn & Kottcamp, 1993). The demands are so challenging that forty to fifty percent of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

When I began this study, I anticipated that my students would experience a difficult transition to teaching. Having been a public school teacher for eighteen years myself, I know how hard the job is, particularly the first year. Friends of mine who teach elementary students complain about the recent local trend toward more standardization and accountability. They feel a strong loss of autonomy and a decline in teacher morale as the district places increasingly more control on what and how they teach.

Student-centered theory and pedagogy taught in teacher preparation programs is at odds with the test-driven climate currently found in schools (Donovan, Bransford, & Pelligrino, 1999; McNeil, 2003). In the summer of 2004, I was part of an instructional team with a biology professor and a chemistry professor to lead a week-long inquiry-based science workshop for teachers of grades four through six in our community. Throughout the week, I incorporated the inquiry-based pedagogy that I use with my undergraduates in their science methods course. The written reflections of these veteran teachers revealed that the constructivist philosophy and pedagogy (i.e. children constructing and reconstructing meaning in relation to their developing understanding of the world, with the teacher as the guide for furthering understandings rather than the dispenser of presumed external understandings), was either new for them, or a reminder of a kind of teaching and learning that was once central to their practice, but then minimized amidst an era of accountability. Since constructivist teaching is central to our
teacher preparation pedagogy at Riverside College (pseudonym), I wondered to what degree the new teachers would transfer it into their professional practice.

A Preview of What I Found Out

I was pleasantly surprised to find that all four participants were free to implement most of the practices they learned in college. What I did not expect to find was how much the first-year teachers struggled to structure their classrooms so that they could employ those practices. For several reasons that this dissertation details, although their formal teacher preparation program gave them strategies for teaching, their readiness to teach depended on far more than what they learned during their four years of college. Although the four teachers experienced the same campus coursework and professional development school (PDS) experiences through their teacher preparation program at Riverside, their first years of teaching were strikingly different from one another’s. The images they held for their future teaching practices, their personal and professional (clinical) experiences that shaped their teacher identities, and their personal and professional contexts of their first year positions all interplayed to form their paths of negotiation as they progressed through the year.

Myself as an Educator and Researcher

My passion is teaching future elementary school teachers. I have experienced the rewards and challenges of teaching children, and I share those experiences as an inspiration to future educators. My combined experiences of teaching children in public schools for eighteen years, studying educational leadership at the masters level and curriculum and instruction at the doctoral level, leading staff development for a
comprehensive school reform model, teaching in an undergraduate teacher education
program, being married to a teacher, and raising two children, one of whom is labeled
with a cognitive disability, have provided me with a first-hand, multi-perspective look at
the state of education in the Midwest over the past twenty-five years.

I remember well my first year of teaching. I arrived at school an hour early every
morning to organize for my class of 24 second graders. I was with them all day, teaching
them every subject including physical education and art, eating lunch with them, and
going outside with them for recess. I stayed after school every day for an hour or two,
and still took a big bag of student work and lesson planning materials home with me
every evening. I loved my students, I loved teaching, and I was proud to be a teacher. In
my rural setting, I taught every second-grader within seven miles, and I could teach them
whatever and however I wanted. I developed my curriculum from scratch. The only time
the principal walked in was once a month to hand me my paycheck, yet at the end of my
first year of teaching, he asked me to write the curriculum guide for second grade in the
district. As a first-year teacher, I felt capable, trusted and autonomous.

During the next eighteen years, I added the teaching of elementary music, middle
school music, high school choral music, fourth grade general education, and sixth grade
general education to my resume. I received a masters degree in educational leadership
and became a school designer (provided professional development) for Expeditionary
Learning Outward Bound, and those were the years that primarily shaped my philosophy
of what constitutes good teaching.
It is important for me to make my educational philosophy explicit here for two reasons. One, it is the way I teach and thus is what my pre-service teachers study and practice. Two, it explains my beliefs about knowledge and the construction of it, which tie directly to my aspirations as a qualitative researcher: to connect deeply with my participants in the mutual exploration and understanding of their experiences.

My philosophy of teaching and learning is grounded in beliefs that educational environments and structures should be constructivist, filled with authentic opportunities for learning and assessment. Furthermore, classrooms should be models of inclusive and democratic societies. Finally, learning should be meaningful and emotive, based upon student interests and integral to larger societal needs.

Learning happens best within an environment where the teacher(s) and students construct understandings together. Students and teachers should feel free to ask questions of each other, and to try new skills and improve existing ones. Assessment should be inseparable from instruction, ongoing, and mutual (between student and teacher) from the establishing of expectations to final evaluation. It is the teacher's role to facilitate, guide, and gradually release the responsibility for learning to the students.

All students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, or ability, deserve a rich and holistic curriculum, and should experience learning in a fully inclusive environment. Teachers should model unconditional acceptance of and compassion for all people. A classroom should be democratic, allowing for mutual construction, negotiation, and assessment of norms. Every day should include time for class discussion about these
processes. Teachers and students should work together to persevere through hardships and overcome adversities, regarding them as powerful learning experiences.

In a successful learning environment, the building of character/citizenship and the development of academic knowledge and skills are inseparable. When student interests and passions are the foundation for learning activities, motivation is intrinsic and students’ personal growth naturally emerges from that motivation. The learning process is as important as the content. Ideally, deep, authentic, service-based projects should be the vehicle through which students grow to understand both concepts and processes.

Learning experiences should be purposeful, emotive, risky, and collaborative. They should cause one to personally reflect upon what is happening, and time for reflection must be purposefully and frequently provided. Instruction that is geared only toward learning new facts that lack depth, context, or are of little relevance to the student limits the potential to produce significant, positive change in people and society.

In order for classrooms to be places where students and teachers construct meaningful learning within a democratic and inclusive environment, there must be support for this philosophy. Teachers who have the artistry, ability, and desire to bring this philosophy to life must not only be allowed, but encouraged to do so by their colleagues, administrators, and community. Finally, the ideals of the kind of classroom I have described can only truly blossom within a larger society that reflects them. Once the seed is planted for powerful lifelong learning within an inclusive and democratic society, it is time for the society to make room for those seeds to grow.
As a researcher in the field of education, I have a passion and obligation to do my part to share in that responsibility. If teachers do, in fact, have the artistry, ability, and desire to teach well, and there is something standing in their way, I hope to illuminate what that something is and seek ways to resolve the problem. In this particular study, I deeply explored and interpreted what might be getting in the way of first year teachers—former students for whom I care deeply both professionally and personally—as they tried to put their learning into practice, and how they negotiated around those obstacles and challenges.

The Participants, the Setting, and Our Interactions

The Participants as Students

I taught all of the participants during their semester in the urban professional development school setting. During their urban PDS semester, I spent nearly four hours with the pre-service teachers daily in a block of four integrated courses: social studies methods, science methods, reading applications, and interdisciplinary curriculum. The block of time alternated between theoretical study and classroom practice, and a co-teacher and I facilitated instruction as the college students observed, discussed, planned, taught, and reflected with each other and with us.

These college students at the urban PDS were in their junior year and had already taken coursework in foundations of education, educational psychology, learning differences, and multicultural education. Each of these students also experienced a semester at a private, parochial PDS where they integrated language arts and math methods, connecting theory and practice through daily work with elementary students.
The collaborative work in our PDS allowed the general elementary education majors to benefit from the theory and strategies that pre-service teachers in the special education program studied in more depth, such as instructional adaptations and examination of the functions of behavior.

The sequence in which the participants experienced the professional development schools varied from student to student depending upon scheduling needs. After their PDS experiences, the pre-service teachers took an assessment course along with general education courses and/or higher level education courses specific to their teaching endorsement areas. They each culminated their teacher preparation program with a student teaching experience in an elementary classroom for sixteen weeks.

In our urban professional development school, pre-service teachers studied and practiced an inquiry-based pedagogy for teaching science, an integrative, problem-based approach for teaching social studies, and the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies (through a readers’ workshop model) to apply across the curriculum. They learned how to build a strong classroom community of learners, as all of the activities we did together in the college classroom they then used to build community within the elementary groups they taught. Finally, they studied theory about metacognition, followed by specific practices for reflection and peer critique.

All of the participants, while at Riverside, progressed through a portfolio assessment process based upon a blend of the Interstate New Teacher and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards, Iowa Teaching Standards, and Riverside Teaching Standards, comprising a total of thirteen standards. Before gaining full admittance to the
education program, the pre-service teachers provided a portfolio that demonstrated basic (pre-service teaching level) proficiency in at least three of the standards. Before they were admitted to student teaching, they demonstrated basic proficiency in all thirteen standards. During student teaching, they exchanged older portfolio artifacts for more recent ones, and continued to add artifacts. In all stages of portfolio review, the students wrote reflections for each artifact as evidence of standard proficiency.

The Community Setting

All of the teachers who became participants in this study attended Riverside College. All of them gained employment in the same city as the college, and those schools and their neighborhoods became the specific contexts for the study. The city employs many people in manufacturing positions, and is growing significantly in technology-based employment opportunities. Other major employers are in publishing, health care, tourism, and education.

There is strong support for education in our community, both in the K-12 realm and in higher education. There are eleven elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. There is a united parochial education system, with five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Four colleges offer four-year degrees, a community college offers a two-year degree program, and three seminaries offer degrees in religious fields.

Because of the combination of strong support for education in our community and the strong service mentality of the education faculty at Riverside College, Riverside formed successful professional development school (PDS) partnerships for teacher
education and school renewal with three public elementary schools and one parochial elementary school. Riverside has the only professional development schools in the state, recruiting nearly 200 education majors spanning the freshman through senior classes, approximately 150 of whom major in elementary education.

**Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie**

As our graduates secured their first teaching jobs, there were four who secured general elementary positions in our city of Dellen. For convenience of interviews, observations, and focus groups, and to localize the study to one school district, these were the four people I asked to participate in the study. All four were eager to help me with my research and looked forward to the year of dialogue.

I began in the summer of 2007 by asking each of them about their visions for the year. As I detail in the methodology chapter, I met with them each once or twice per month over the course of a year for an interview, focus group, and/or an observation and follow-up stimulated recall session. Since we already had formed personal as well as professional relationships while working together at the Finley Elementary School PDS, the participants shared their words and emotions freely with me, making their stories rich and revealing.

Annie, a 23-year old single female, secured a position at Finley Elementary School teaching first grade. Ever since her experience in an after-school program in downtown Delmont, a large city in the center of the state, Annie had envisioned herself working with inner-city children, so she was thrilled to be offered the position. She had worked at Finley as an Americorps worker and in the PDS, and she looked forward to
both the challenges and rewards of working in a school where 85% of the children lived in poverty. Since Annie’s graduation in December, she worked as a fitness instructor at a local health club. Annie had recently broken a personal marathon record.

Rachel, a 24-year old newly-married female, had graduated a year before the study. Not finding full-time employment, she had substitute-taught for a year mainly in the Dellen public schools, and primarily at Finley Elementary (her favorite school) where she ended the year with a long-term substitute position in kindergarten. Rachel’s first classroom of her own was in second grade at another downtown school, a brand new magnet school for the arts called Payson Elementary, where over 90% of the children lived in poverty. A month before starting her first teaching job, Rachel found out she was expecting her first baby.

Ben, a 23-year-old single male, had grown up around schools and teachers as his mother taught kindergarten. He had envisioned himself as a teacher ever since he could remember, wanting to be a positive role model for children and help them become respectful citizens. His first job was in fifth grade at Sunnydale Elementary, a rural school with a reputation of educating wholesome, healthy, outdoorsy children. Upon reviewing his class roster in August, the secretary at the school said he had a perfect class.

Connie was a middle-aged mother of four girls and one boy. After homeschooling her three oldest children in Texas and then relocating to the Midwest, she missed home-schooling so much that she decided to become a certified teacher. She accepted a long-term substitute position in the school close to her home where her
youngest son was to start kindergarten. Connie hoped that doing a good job as a long-term substitute would secure her a classroom position within the district in the near future.

Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie all studied and practiced constructivist, student-centered teaching while at Riverside. As their former teacher, I was anxious to see to what degree these practices would transfer to their own classrooms during their first year of teaching. This excerpt from a focus group held on August 15, 2007, just a few days before they began their first year of teaching, reveals what they had learned about good and bad teaching practices while in college.

Deb: Based upon what you learned at Riverside, describe good teaching practices.
Connie: Multi-intelligences.
Annie: Interactive.
Annie: That’s another thing that I feel like I learned at Riverside, or that Riverside stresses in their classes, is really adapting to all different learning styles.
Rachel: Personalizing it to the kids that you have. To each child.
Connie: And not just who we’re comfortable teaching.
Deb: Okay. Based upon what you learned at Riverside, how do you define poor teaching?
Connie: Reading from the book.
Rachel: Worksheets.
Connie: Worksheets.
Annie: Worksheets.
Ben: Yelling.
Connie: Oh, yeah! Controlling. Something I have issues with.
Rachel: Like thinking that things can only be done one way.
Connie: And one right answer.
Rachel: Yeah. Exactly. And it doesn’t matter what your perspective is, your background is, there’s only one answer. Like you’re not open.
Ben: Talking behind teachers’ back or kids’ backs...not professional.
Now it was time to see which practices and norms they would employ, and what exactly those practices would look and sound like, once their own students walked through their classroom doors.

Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapters II through V, I present the individual accounts of Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie. In Chapter VI, I examine the relationship between teacher identity, vision, and context. In Chapter VII, I detail the negotiation path of each participant. Chapter VIII details the impact of curricular standardization and standardized testing on the context of elementary school teaching in the United States. Chapters IX and X discuss the implications of the study for teacher education and teacher induction. I end with a summary of the dissertation, followed by a detailed chapter about the methodology for the study.
CHAPTER II

ANNIE

I just have this really, really strong feeling in my heart that I'm really passionate about working with inner city kids. I'm just really passionate about it. I see them, and I really want to reach out to them. I just have this really strong feeling, and my brain just starts moving one hundred miles an hour because I think of all these ideas that I could do to make them feel better about themselves—to help them. (12/18/07)

What Led Annie to Her First Teaching Position

Annie accepted her first teaching position at Finley Elementary School, a downtown school in Dellen where 85% of the students were labeled to be in poverty, the mobility rate was 54%, and 40% of the students were labeled as minority students, predominantly African-American. She had dreamt of teaching there since she served there two years previously for Americorps. The principal, Ms. Miller, wanted her at Finley, too. Ms. Miller “knew after the first week Annie worked at Finley for Americorps that she wanted her on staff” (5/23/07).

Annie came to my front porch for our first interview dressed in a white athletic shirt and black running shorts, her thick, smooth, brown hair pulled back high in a pony tail. With her eyes wide open, a smile that spanned her entire face, and broad, animated hand gestures, Annie shared what excited her about her first teaching position.

...the environment that I’m going to be in – the background that the children come from. I’m really excited about being in the school, being downtown, and being in this environment with a lower socioeconomic status. I LOVE that—I love that environment and I love having the opportunity to reach out to these children that come from maybe less than desirable situations. (5/30/07)

Annie added rapidly, with a quick giggle, “...and I’m really excited ‘cause I’m good at it--I can love ‘em, and I know that.”
As Annie’s former teacher, I was quite relieved to see this fresh passion for teaching in her that I had not seen since her time at the Finley Professional Development School. Even then, I carried with me a strange feeling about a peculiar misalignment between Annie’s exhuberant charisma when teaching children and her overall subdued--almost sad--presence overall. Annie prepared stellar lesson plans and made magic with children that seemed unnaturally natural. I recall her huddling with her group of six third graders during a lesson where they were about to explore what would happen to five different *mystery powders* when they added vinegar to them. Through the observation of chemical reactions, the students learned about caring for their own and each other’s safety, sharing materials with their partners, taking turns, and appreciating the marvel of science.

I remember the day that Annie somewhat carefully and apologetically announced her wedding engagement, not to the whole PDS group of collegiates as others may have done, but privately to me. She had known her fiancé for years, and her parents adored him. As I held her hand and complimented her on such a beautiful ring, her eyes looked up while her head tilted down and her chin tucked in. Annie did not display the smile and excitement one would typically expect to see from a new bride-to-be.

The Annie I knew then and the Annie seated on my front porch were two different people. She had recently broken the engagement, moved away from her parents and into an apartment downtown, and set a new personal marathon record. Feeling liberated from a life of pleasing others, she felt a powerful sense of happiness and independence. However, this liberation came at a cost, for her parents loved her former fiancé and
greatly disapproved of the break-up, “losing not only a daughter, but also a son” (5/30/07).

Annie’s older sister, who had given up trying to please her parents several years ago, was at the marathon’s finish line on May 27, 2007 where Annie crossed it at a time of three hours and 55 minutes. The older sister noticed that Annie “seemed to be much stronger and doing the race for herself” (5/30/07). This marathon record, broken just three days before our first interview, was a timely symbol of growth and accomplishment for Annie. She had persevered through trials and come out a stronger person.

You have to like pain to be a marathon runner. I think about that a lot. I really don’t mind pain. I have a high pain tolerance, and that’s why I like to run marathons. By mile 18, you feel this pain that you’ve never felt before. And you have to learn to like it to keep going. Well, not necessarily to like it, but to deal with it. Yeah, this really hurts, but I can deal with it, and I will be stronger when I’m done. You just have to have this different mindset. Marathon running has really changed my life. (12/18/07)

Annie was no stranger to pain. After leaving her fiancé and moving her belongings out of the home where she had lived with her parents all her life, Annie found herself homeless for a few nights, sleeping in her car, crying and praying for direction. She asked the owners of a local bed and breakfast if she could rent a room there until she found work and a place to live. The owners welcomed her into their home for a month, generously including her in their family meals and conversations.

During this time, Annie found a part-time job teaching classes at a local health club, enjoying the opportunity to exercise daily while she taught others how to live a healthy lifestyle. She soon found her first apartment, above a downtown Mexican restaurant, one of several recently renovated apartments targeting young professionals.
earning a low salary. She could see the city library from her upper-level balcony, and as an avid reader she frequently spent time there checking out books and enjoying the convenience of its wireless Internet. When the Finley first grade job came open, she thought it was time to realize her vision for helping children in poverty. Most importantly, this was her decision.

She was a bit hesitant, however, to leave her now full-time job that she enjoyed as a fitness instructor. Her most recent teaching experiences of student teaching and substitute teaching in a rural area where all of the students were white and middle class made her question whether the teaching profession was really for her. However, she had loved her work at Finley during Americorps and PDS, and thought that teaching at Finley would be a perfect fit for her. Annie’s experiences as an Americorps worker at Finley both motivated and challenged her as she envisioned teaching there.

One thing I’m concerned about is how the kids come and go there all the time. For example, when I was there this past year working for Americorps, the last week of school third grade had six new students come in. And I know that that’s going to happen to me in my classroom. And just how will I adapt? You know, when they’re coming and going so quickly, how will I incorporate them into the classroom? How will I ensure that they’re immediately learning and that they’re getting immersed in what they need to be immersed in? I’m really nervous about that. I’m really, really excited about getting the parents involved, but I’m a little nervous about it as well because I know that it’s going to be a challenge, maybe even communicating with the parents...they may not get the letters if I send them, they may not have a phone to answer my calls, so that’s going to be another challenge that I’m a little nervous about. As far as behavior, I’m really not nervous about that at all. I know it’s going to be a challenge, but I’m not really nervous about it.

While Annie was an Americorps worker at Finley and at another local school, she was also a volunteer for other city organizations, including a shelter for homeless women and children, and the Boys’ and Girls’ Club. Active in her church at home, Annie had several
church-related volunteer experiences as well. She volunteered one summer at a Methodist church camp, and taught regularly in Summer Bible School and Sunday School. But the volunteer experience that most shaped her desire to teach was an after-school program in Delmont, near where she attended college before transferring to Riverside.

It was called Shalom Zone, and it was once or twice a week for a year. I went down to inner city Delmont and just made myself available to children after school, basically to just get them off the street and provide them a mentor, and get children food and do some academic stuff with them. And that’s when I felt like I knew I had a talent, or I knew I had SOMETHING inside of me that was urging me to work with children—in particular, inner city children. It still took me a while to figure it out; it took me a good year and a half to figure out that I wanted to go into education. (5/30/07)

Once Annie had decided to pursue education, she transferred to Riverside. She had “done some research, and [she] knew that Riverside had some interesting things in their education program, the PDS…” (5/30/07). During her time at Riverside, Annie continued to immerse herself in service opportunities with urban children. The sum of these experiences—Shalom Zone, Americorps, the homeless shelter, the Boys’ and Girls’ Club, and the Finley professional development school—led her to what she envisioned as a suitable teaching position for her: being a first grade teacher at Finley.

I saw Annie during the first time she was together with the entire Finley staff during their opening in-service day. The Finley “School in Need of Assistance” (SINA) Committee had asked me to lead the faculty in their opening in-service day for the 2007-2008 school year. As a partner in our professional development school and a past Expeditionary Learning school designer at Finley, I was greatly invested in the morale of the faculty and the academic experiences of the students. There had been substantial faculty turnover, and the morale had declined due to curricular mandates and paperwork
associated with their identification as a SINA school according to No Child Left Behind’s regulations. They wanted to spend their first afternoon together building community.

For the first activity, the faculty sat in a circle in order of date of hire to reveal the Finley Story as interpreted by the people who comprised it. I was shocked to look just halfway around the circle to see a teacher, and former college student of mine, who was hired just one year ago from Riverside. This meant that half of the staff had one year or less experience at Finley. Most of those new hires were first-year teachers or paraprofessionals. Annie, having been hired early in the summer, already had seven people behind her in seniority.

Each person in turn shared his/her name, date of hire, a key event in the world or at Finley at the time of their hire, and one reason they liked being at Finley. When it was Annie’s turn, she shared this.

I remember exactly where I was. It was May 19 at 7:19, and I was driving in my car, and Joy called me and told me I had the job, and I screamed. But then I thought, “Maybe I shouldn’t have done that.” I was really excited to be at Finley because of the kids, and now I’m also excited to be here because of the staff. It’s so comforting to hear what you’re all saying about how much you love teaching at Finley. (8/22/07)

Through this sharing session, Annie publicly revealed her genuine excitement to work at Finley, and expanded her vision of its perfect fit. The faculty was warm, open, and appeared to embrace the challenges of working at Finley. She had perceived these qualities when she was a PDS student and Americorps worker there, noting that the “the teachers work really well together; they help each other out, they do a lot of team teaching, collaborating, bouncing ideas off of each other, and I know that from experience of being there myself” (5/30/07).
Annie’s Summer Preparation

The young woman next to Annie at the community-building in-service, Eva, was hired around the same date as Annie. Over the summer, Annie and Eva had become close friends and important support sources for one another. Eva had one semester of substitute experience, so like Annie, this would also be her first full-time teaching job. On a midsummer day, I ran into Annie in a main college gathering space, where all she could talk about was her new friend and teaching partner, Eva. “We get together all the time socially, and when one of us is at a teacher supply store, we call the other one on the phone and say, ‘I am getting these cool supplies for you!’” They had been planning their first grade curricula together all summer.

Annie also shared that she had been at Finley every day since mid-June, setting up her classroom. Even before June, she had taken the opportunity to do some of her own professional development.

When I found out I got the job I decided to contact some teachers. I talked to some professors from Riverside and asked them if they knew of any teachers that would be good to go and observe. I got some suggestions, I called some different teachers from the Dellen Community School District, and I went and observed some teachers FOR THE MORNING. So for a good three hours I was in the classroom observing, taking notes, writing down everything that they had on the walls, things they were saying, things they were doing, watching the Morning Message, guided reading groups—I know that’s really important at Finley so that was one thing I really wanted to make sure I saw. So, that’s one step I’ve taken. I’ve observed kindergarten AND first grade classrooms; I’ve gone to some different schools for that. Also, I scheduled some times to get with the principal to get some questions answered so I can start working on things this summer. I’ve made sure I can be in the school also to be working on my classroom. I’ve gone to the library and got a stack of about twelve books that I have started reading about literacy, about writing, about first grade, about what parents want their first graders to learn, so I’m going to try to read just as much as I can over the summer, take advantage of my time so that I can learn more and prepare myself to be a better teacher. I’ve talked to a Riverside professor who knows a lot of literature,
and asked her what books I could be reading and she gave me some suggestions. One of the teachers I observed I made sure—I really, really appreciated her classroom and the way she taught—so I made sure I could stay in touch with her throughout the summer. So, we’re going to meet a couple of times and I’m going to meet with her. I’m going to meet with her and her cooperating teacher and watch them plan a little bit and see what they do, and then at the same time, I’m going to meet with my two other team teachers from Finley and work with them, too. So those are just some things I’ll be doing to keep doing professional development to prepare myself for the school year. (5/30/07)

Annie was hired early in the summer and deliberately used the entire summer to prepare for her first position. She observed other classrooms, talked with other kindergarten and first grade teachers in the district, asked the principal or other office staff about everything from who her mentor would be to what her code for the copy machine was, co-planned curricula, and set up her classroom.

The day before school began, her classroom physically appeared exactly as she had described it in May, and she was ready to make the things happen inside of it that she had dreamt about. This indeed was a room that beckoned people in from the hallway, filled with colorful posters and bulletin boards, and attractive displays of books and materials around every corner. Upon entering the room, there was a bulletin board posting rotating jobs such as Mini-manager. There were five rectangular tables in the center of the room with four chairs around each table, neatly printed nametags at each spot, and in the center of each table a bright blue bin filled with inviting new glue bottles, pencils, markers, and scissors. There was a kidney-shaped table with chairs neatly tucked into it, and another rectangular table with paper and other writing supplies nearby. The teacher’s desk and computer station were in the back corner of the room. In the corner by the windows, in an area separate from the work tables and material shelves, was a cozy
rocking chair and an easel with a calendar that would mark the time this new community
of children-plus-Annie would spend together.

I want my classroom to be bright and vibrant. I want to have a little reading
corner with a library in my classroom, and I want to have a little writing center, so
I'm picturing having a table and maybe four or five chairs around the table where
students can go there and do writing workshop stuff. I want to have, for Morning
Message, a nice carpet on the floor where students can sit, and maybe a
chalkboard or a board that's full of calendar stuff, and weather stuff, with a
rocking chair...I also kind of want like a little corner to sing and do music and
stuff. I really want to focus on having things on my walls that will be very
positive... things so that my students know that we're all special, we're all
friends, we're a team, we're a family. (5/30/07)

Annie also envisioned what a typical school day might look like well before our
first visit on my front porch in May. At the center of her vision was a strong ethic of
caring for one another. She got some ideas from watching other teachers right after she
found out she got the Finley job. She began explaining it to me as something someone
else did, but quickly shifted over to making it an integral part of her vision, speaking in
first person. Annie hardly paused to breathe while she eagerly shared her plans.

I want to start the day out with the students greeting one another. I saw this in a
classroom I observed and I thought it was really, really neat. The students came in
from the buses or whatever...they put their stuff away...the Pledge of Allegiance
was done, and one thing that I want to do is teach the kids the Pledge of
Allegiance in sign language, so that's one thing we'll start the morning out
working on that, we'll just learn one or two signs every day. And then from there
we'll go to the carpet where the kids will sit in a circle and I will say good
morning to the first student. I'll say their name, "Good morning, Deb. Would you
like a hug or a handshake?" And so the student will say, "Good morning, Miss
Camden. I would like a hug." And then I will give the student a hug, and then that
student will do it to the next student, and it will go all the way around the circle.
After that I want to just really briefly talk about how it went. How was our
morning circle? What are two things that went really well, what's one thing that
we could do better? And then we'll go into reading a book maybe— I want to read
to them right away, maybe just a short book with a message to start the day off.
And then we can go into the morning message stuff, maybe do a little bit of
music, maybe do some type of community building activity to start the day and
then we’ll go into some guided reading groups, some academic kind of stuff, I don’t know if we’ll do reading right away or what. Probably, until we have specialists. I don’t know... I want to do centers with the children, and that could probably be while we’re having guided reading. Maybe I could have a guided reading group while the other students are circling around at the centers. And then, that’ll take much of the morning. Another thing I want to do in there, I don’t know if I’ll do this in the center or if this will be another thing on the side – I want to do some writing workshop stuff, so really, really focus on literacy: reading and writing. As far as the other subjects, math, science, and social studies, you know, we’ll put those in somewhere, I’m not sure where, if it’ll be in the afternoon, I don’t know. But throughout the day I really, really, really want to keep doing community building activities every single day, not just one time in the morning; whenever I feel the need that we need to do something, we’ll get up and do some community building activity so that in my classroom the kids feel SAFE and they feel like they can be comfortable and they can be themselves around every student in the classroom and I think by doing and leading community building activities it’s going to help the students feel that way... So I really am going to focus hard on doing stuff like that: building self-esteem, building a comfortable, safe environment. (5/30/07)

However, perhaps more than her vision, more than visiting classrooms and talking with teachers, and more than her repertoire of instructional strategies learned in college, it was her overall positive mindset that gave her confidence to face whatever challenges lay ahead as she began to bring her vision to life.

In some ways, I feel like I’m at a point in my life where I’m ready to go head on with this, and I’m gonna give one hundred percent, and I think that’s really preparing me for a new job. Like, alright, I’m ready to give it my all, and we’ll see where it goes. But I’m just at that place in my life where I’m like that with things right now. I think just having that mindset that I’m ready to tackle anything. I feel like I am ready for working with other people, and I’m ready to collaborate with my teaching partners, and I’m ready to, behaviorally, in my classroom, just tackle it. I think that I’m just at that point in my life where I’m just ready for a challenge like this. (8/15/07)

Days 1 and 2

Curious about how the first day was going, but not wanting to intrude on Annie’s important first day with her students, I stood in the hallway and peeked into her
classroom. The eleven boys and seven girls were huddled in small groups of three to four students each, looking at something I couldn’t see that was between them in the middle of their tables. Annie was saying, “Look closely. What do you see? Tell each other what you are thinking.”

The students in first grade had been distributed amongst the three first grade classrooms according to their needs. Although the staff tried to keep each classroom as heterogeneous as possible when deciding which children should be in which classrooms, each classroom was given a majority of a certain formally or informally labeled population. This was done so that special education teachers could spend more time in a general education classroom supporting the specific children on their roster. One of the rooms had most of the students who were reading at or above grade level, another had students who were reading below grade level, and another had most of the students who were identified with behavior disorders, and/or students on behavior plans but not identified for special education. The latter was Annie’s class.

At the end of Day 2, Annie came back up the stairs and into the school building after carefully seeing that all of her students were safely connected with whoever was supposed to take them home from school. I asked her how things were going, not at all expecting to hear what she was about to say. Her eyes welled with tears. “Yesterday was okay but today was terrible. I am wondering what I got myself into.” After she expressed frustration with having no control, she told me she was headed upstairs to find the counselor, hoping he could help her with strategies for three boys who she said “had
anger issues.” As she walked up the stairs, she reiterated, “I don’t know whether I should have gone into this” (8/29/07).

In an interview a few weeks later, Annie gave me the details of the main event of Day 2 that had surprised her.

I guess I didn’t think it was going to be this hard. And it’s consuming. Some of the behaviors of my kids really, really caught me off guard. Like the second day of school I had a kid get really, really aggressively angry and put everybody else in danger, so I had to channel him to one side, and he was throwing things and throwing chairs and throwing cubes and screaming really, really loud, and he was out of control. You probably could have seen my heart beating out of my chest because it was going so fast. And I was trying to stay really calm and just get the kids to the side, and I would just tell them, “No, we’re just going to ignore him, and let him calm down, and Mr. Russell is going to come get him,” and Mr. Russell came and couldn’t catch him! Because he was running around the classroom and diving under tables and screaming, “No! I hate you! I hate this school! I hate everyone here!” And I was like, oh my goodness! It was crazy, it was so crazy. And then Mr. Russell finally took him out, and then I just started teaching…well, I kind of talked about it a little bit, but then I didn’t know what to do; it was the second day of school. And all of a sudden, here he comes, running back into the classroom, and Mr. Russell’s running in after him, trying to catch him! And finally, he dives under a table, and then Mr. Russell goes, “Kids, MOVE!” And so all the kids took off, and so Mr. Russell grabs the table and pushes it, and dives underneath and grabs him and cradles him in his arms….He grabbed him hard, and then he still got away. And then he ended up having to cradle him, like a baby cradle, and then he was kicking and screaming and yelling all these bad things. I thought, okay, he’s gone, but now I have all of these kids that I have to teach; what do I do now?? Actually, all I could think of was, I sat down and I said, “That was really scary, wasn’t it?” Because I didn’t know what else to say, and I said, “Let’s talk about how we act when we get angry.” (9/21/07)

Annie reflected upon this event and others where she was challenged to make instant decisions under pressure. She did not want to go from day to day reacting to unpredictable situations. Instead, she realized that she needed to focus upon her vision to make her classroom a safe, nurturing environment for her students. “That’s probably been my biggest surprise is trying to handle that. And that’s why I think maybe just building
community is so important in my classroom. I try to build community and make it safe so that they’re not throwing chairs” (9/21/07). She began by “just letting the kids know that it’s safe there, and it’s okay to get angry, but we have to control it” (9/21/07). Those moments where the children lost control did not scare her off; they instead motivated her to work even harder to build the classroom community she had envisioned. Her dream of a safe, nurturing classroom was only going to come true through relentless, deliberate, proactive effort. Although Annie had hit Marathon Mile 18 on Day 2 of teaching, she was determined to fulfill her vision. I wondered whether she was consciously aware that the mindset shift of her marathon running may have been exactly what she was using to propel herself forward in her teaching at this time.

You have to be able to change your mindset, because when you run a marathon you get to this point where you don’t even want to go on. This is stupid! And you say all these mean things to yourself, like, “This is really dumb. Why am I doing this? I’m really stupid for running this.” And then I think, “Oh, yeah. I can’t tell myself those things because I’m never going to finish.” And then you start telling yourself really good things like, “My legs are strong. I run like a deer. I am really graceful.” (12/18/07)

Building Her Vision for Community

Annie quickly shifted her mindset from doubt to determination. Resolved to enact the vision she had established well before the year began, she immediately and methodically implemented a collection of small yet powerful practices to build the foundation for a safe and nurturing environment where children could learn. She facilitated a morning greeting so the children could start each day positively and have a chance to connect with each other by name and with a hug or a handshake. “We sit in a circle and I start and I turn to one kid, and I say, ‘Good morning, Keegan.’ And he says,
‘Good morning, Miss Camden.’ And I say, ‘Would you like a handshake or a hug?’ And he says, ‘I would like a hug.’ And then we all, well, usually they all want a hug” (9/21/07). Annie brought her guitar to class and softly strummed as she strolled around the classroom while the students individually worked at their tables. “I just walked around them and played and they would move their heads, but they kept working. So I did that to get them used to all of it, and they love it” (9/21/07). She played games with her students to help them learn about and trust each other. “So if we have a little time, I’ll say, ‘Okay, sit on the carpet, and we’ll play…’ stuff like that. And it really gives them a chance to laugh, and to have fun together, and then when we’re done we’ll take some deep breaths, and then, okay…it’s back to work!” (9/21/07)

Annie wanted to establish expectations to make a classroom environment that was not only safe, but conducive to learning. She explicitly taught techniques and cues to her students through relentless repetition and unswerving consistency. These techniques included the use of sign language and whispers to cut down on the noise level, following a chart for small group rotations, listening to a timer to signal quick transitions, and knowing that when background music was on, it was time for quiet work. She questioned herself, however, whether by the very nature of being so relentless she was actually not being nurturing enough. When describing her mission to me, she told me with a bit of a nervous giggle about a boy who “always shouts out. So, you know, they have to raise their hands. And I won’t talk to them unless they raise their hand and I call on them. Is that mean?” (10/24/07) She based her actions, and the time it took to
explicitly teach her expectations and build a caring community, upon her students’ need
students’ need for explicit instruction in how to interact with one another in school.

I just think in any school, but especially the more urban schools, where you really
have to take into consideration where the kids are coming from--what their night
looked like, what their morning looked like--you have to build a solid foundation
that grabs them, and you have to make your kids respect you, and let them know
that you’re not there really to be their friend, but to provide them with structure,
discipline, and LOVE. And I feel like that’s really helping my class. (9/21/07)

Another teacher helped her reflect upon the importance of making explicit to the students
how their actions would help build a safe and respectful classroom. For example, when
reinforcing the use of quiet voices, she told them that it was out of respect to others and
not just some arbitrary rule.

And one teacher said to tell them, “Right now, we need to have zero voices so we
can learn, or that students who are working on this can really focus on what
they’re doing, or they can work really hard on their work, or so that it can be quiet
around them.” To give them the opportunity to be a friend. I use that a lot,
actually. (9/21/07)

Annie also took time to frontload with proactive reminders before the children
began any new activity. In the form of reminders and questions, she would help them
focus on what they were supposed to do and how they were supposed to do it. “Before we
get started with centers and reading, I have a question for you. Remember, we did it
yesterday. What’s something you can do in handwriting today?” (10/24/07) Within her
reminders, she often highlighted children, pointing them out as positive models. “What
are you supposed to be finding? I saw somebody doing this. Juan! I saw you doing this.
What are you supposed to be finding in the books?” (10/24/07)

For transitions between instructional activities, Annie also repeated directions,
referred to the centers rotation chart, and set a timer. She hoped that her students would
eventually make efficient transitions without all of these devices, but she held fast to her position that for now they were necessary. “I would love to make it more free-flowing, though, so that I don’t even have to set a timer and tell them to switch, but my kids need structure right now” (10/24/07).

Annie believed strongly that these practices would lead to the classroom she envisioned, so she justified the time it took to teach and reinforce them. Annie also deeply believed in the power of being positive, and identified herself as a person who liked to hear positive words. “I think a lot of it is just how I am. I think it’s stuff I like to hear, so I think they probably do, too” (11/20/07). She squeezed kind, positive words into every possible corner of a phrase as she taught, with her assertive yet loving voice.

(Hunched together in a small reading group, Annie whispers and looks at each of them solidly in the eye): I want you to remember how to use your voices. Say, “Good morning Miss Camden,” using your quiet voices. (Annie and each student, one at a time, whisper, “Good morning Davis.” “Good morning, Miss Camden.”) And you remembered that there was a big dog, right? And you followed with your eyes. Good job. D-d-dog. Good job. I’m glad that you remembered that. Good try! Good try! I’m sorry to interrupt… I’m sorry to interrupt… Jimmy… I’m really sorry to interrupt our group right now. Jimmy, you need to be at your center right now. Thank you for following directions. (Whispers) I’m sorry about that. Ooh, good for you. Kiss your brain. You made it all the way around. Try it again. Try it again. What is it? I heard you say “We love you.” I love you, too, but it says, “We love TO…” Go ahead. Move over, Ashley. Good job. Ready? (10/24/07)

During the span of three, 20-minute reading groups, Annie modeled the use of nice language by saying “thank you” 51 times, “please” 16 times, and “good” 49 times. It was her vision that by hearing nice words, students would start using them, and along with other practices she put into place, the classroom community would become more caring. This kind gesture of expressing appreciation was so important to Annie that she added, “When someone says thank you, I’ll say, ‘Thank you for saying thank you’” (12/18/07).
Annie also brought it to everyone's attention when a child used caring words or actions with another child. “When Nathan will say something positive to Jimmy, for example, I’ll say, ‘I just heard something really nice from this table. Can you say that again so that everyone can hear it?’ So, just pointing out positive things all the time. I think that really helps” (11/20/07).

Annie’s students began to practice what Annie had been modeling. At first, their efforts were mechanical.

Annie: I just heard a really good thing from Ashley. She said, “Who’s gonna go first, me or you?”
Nathan: (To Jimmy): Do you wanna go first?
Jimmy: (Gesturing toward Nathan): Maybe you should go first.
Nathan: (Voice lilting): Okay, thank you, Jimmy.

Mimicking as they were, Annie’s students were trying on the language and actions of thoughtfulness. In another instance, while the class was seated in a circle on their carpet and Annie modeled a math game with a partner, one of her students comforted Annie as she wasn’t getting as many beans as her partner. He put his arm around her shoulders and said, “It’s okay, Miss Camden, it’s okay if you don’t win.” Annie noticed the beginning of this transformation, and at first felt a little strange seeing herself in them.

So, the classroom community I wanted to build is a real safe environment where kids just feel really comfortable, but it’s not ME always saying the nice things and doing the nice things to feel safe. I want everyone to be doing it. So I see that ALL the time. And I try to model it a lot, but the kids are doing it now. It’s really funny. (11/20/07)

Annie reflected on how the students had developed a respect for her and for each other as she shared about a situation that would predictably have ended in a problem. It
did not. Because the children were beginning to take responsibility for each other, no chairs were thrown this time.

When I see kids acting out, or when I see kids doing something they’re not supposed to do, I am real strict and stern with them, and I’ll say, “You know what? That’s not going to work in here. That’s not going to work with me.” And today Jimmy started to get angry because he got reprimanded at recess, and he came back in and was real grouchy and he was starting to get his anger, and you could just see it in him. And the kids, well, somebody just turned to him and said, “Now Jimmy, that doesn’t work with Miss Camden.” And instead of him getting really angry, which he did in the past, he was still upset, but he didn’t throw things and get mad, and I thought, well that was a nice reminder for him. (11/20/07)

Annie giggled a little, almost as if she were embarrassed at their parroting honor of her. “So we talk about it a lot, and just the other day I heard somebody was being mean, and somebody said, ‘That makes me feel angry when you do that’” (11/20/07).

Within about a month, the children moved from a trying it on phase to a phase where they would brainstorm solutions with Annie to proactively help each other. Annie beamed, remarking that her “kids are amazing” (12/18/07). She asked a child who often gets angry, “What can the class do for you when you are feeling angry? What can we do for you? Because we are your friends, and we’re here to help you.” The children suggested things. “We can pat him on the back.” Annie then asked the child if he wanted them to pat him on the back when he was angry. He said no, so Annie modeled respect for him by saying, “Okay, that’s not going to work. He doesn’t want you to pat him on the back.” Then she asked the child to give the class some ideas. And he said, “Well, maybe they can just…I don’t know, maybe they can just tell me.” He didn’t want them to look at him, though.
So I said, “Okay, how about this? When he gets angry, nobody looks at him. But what if they SAY to you, ‘Jimmy, I care about you.’ So let’s try it. Pretend you’re angry. Aaaahhh!!! Now Nathan, you try it.” And I said, “No, don’t look at him.” So he turned his head, and he just goes, “Jimmy, I care about you.” And they’ve been doing that. They did it all day yesterday, and they did it all day today. And they’re doing it for other people….Isn’t that amazing?! (12/18/07)

Annie wanted her students not only to think about what they could do for others, but also to reflect back upon things they had done. Throughout the day, Annie took several opportunities to help the children think about what had gone well and what could be better. “After [the morning greeting] I always say, ‘What are two things that we did really, really well today in the morning greeting?’ And they’ll say something, and then I’ll say, ‘What’s one thing that tomorrow we can do better?’” (11/20/07) This debriefing was not isolated to the morning greeting. It followed nearly every significant activity of the day. Annie wanted the students to become continuously reflective, be able to identify strengths and challenges, and to learn how to set goals for improvement.

And I do that with everything. After a math lesson, “What’s two things that went really, really well today?” And they’ll say, “We played with the cubes really well.” And I’ll say, “Yes, we did. What could we do better tomorrow?” I do that all the time. And then at the end of the day, “What went really well today?” And they’ll always be, like, “We sang really beautifully!!” (11/20/07)

**Struggling with Balance**

Annie persisted, relentlessly affirming, reminding, repeating, and redirecting. She believed that establishing strong classroom norms in efforts to build community was paramount. However, as she kept telling herself, “even though we’re far behind in curriculum, I’m trying not to get upset about it, because we’ll get there,” she still had a nagging feeling that the time they were spending playing trust games and pointing out
kind words was robbing the students of time to read and do math problems. She felt pressured to use every minute of every day to its academic fullest.

I have high expectations for my kids. Like, for example, with reading. I WANT all of them to be at a Level 20 by the end of the year. And I’m just trying to do the best I can to get them up there. I was in a huge hurry because we were wasting reading time…the first reading group should start at 9:45, for every group to get a good, solid, 20 minutes, and they came BACK [from music] at 9:45. Or 9:48. So we were really running behind. (10/24/07)

Annie knew how long she wanted her reading groups to be, and she got nervous when they didn’t start when they were supposed to. She felt she was spending too much time teaching the children how to be nice to one another, and not enough on reading and writing and math activities.

Caring…and Writing and Math

A few days before the winter break from school (12/18/07), I waited in the hallway for an appropriate transition time before entering unobtrusively to observe a math lesson. From what I could hear, Annie and her students were doing something with the letter $W$. I moved within sight distance, caught Annie’s eye, and she motioned for me to come in. As I entered the room, the students tried out their newest $W$ word, $W$-elcome, each individually from their chairs at their tables, timidly smiling at me.

Touched, I thanked them, saying, “Oh, my, you make me feel so good to come here and visit!” Annie affirmed, “See! I told you! When you say ‘W-elcome’ to someone, it makes their heart warm! W-a-r-m! That’s another ‘W’ word!” Then, she went right on with the lesson, having children draw Ws on the easel and on their papers, soliciting more $W$ words from the crowd. Students shouted out, “Good-WILL!!” And Annie celebrated, “Will!! Good! GoodWILL!!” The children kept going. “Williams, like my last name!”
“Winter!!” And with each gleeful response, Annie excitedly smiled at them, shouting affirmations such as, “Good!” “Yes!” “Kiss your brain!”

I certainly had never seen a plain old W handwriting lesson be so exciting before. As I watched further and noted many more generous and thoughtful interactions than I had seen in past visits, I was moved at how Annie and these children had transformed this Mile 18 classroom of chaos into a caring community where learning was safe and fun. The same students who had thrown cubes across the room in anger two months ago were now sharing them respectfully with partners to count tens and ones. The same students who were grabbing things to go first and then hoarding them were now asking their partners if they wanted to start, and nicely sharing materials as they played. And the same students who were running around the room totally unengaged in the lessons in September couldn’t wait to fill their tens frame with beans in December. A little white girl with long, blond, uncombed, hair; two little black girls with dozens of braids ending in bright, dangling, plastic barrettes; and a little boy with brown skin and enormous brown eyes who used to be too shy to use his English but now couldn’t ever stop talking, clustered around Annie. Their eyes smiled up at her as their arms proudly stretched out high and straight to present her with wide-lined manuscript papers filled with Ws. Their very best Ws were circled so Annie could agree. This was a classroom where anyone would feel W-elcome.

Annie’s Emerging Practice of Small Group Instruction

The more Annie’s students took responsibility for their own actions and for each other, the more Annie could structure her classroom to maximize instructional time. In
order to work with individuals or small groups of children, she had to carefully plan for how the students could still learn something without her right there with them. First, she did a lot of team-building in small groups and with the whole class to prepare them to work together as she envisioned what her reading and math lessons would be like. “I kind of go in and out, in and out, back and forth. The first couple of weeks I did a lot of stuff with just building in their teams, and then we’d do community building with the whole class” (9/21/07). By so doing, Annie helped the students transition from small and whole group games that helped them primarily learn about each other to small and whole group activities where they would primarily learn new skills and content with each other.

She also created learning centers so that whatever students were not working directly with her could engage in meaningful numeracy and literacy activities. It took a lot of persistence for her to teach the structure so that her students could work at the centers independently.

I have eight centers, and it’s taken forever for them to get down, but we’re finally in the routine that when we’re in center time, I have a chart up, and on my chart in the middle of the chart there’s two rows, and I have everything velcroed on there. The center is on a card, and on the side are their pictures. So they know who they’re with, and they know where they go first, and they know where they go second. So now, it’s to the point where I can say, “Okay, go to your center board and start centers.” And then they start centers, and they can do it. (9/21/07)

Annie made it clear to her students that when she was working with an individual or a small group of students, everyone else was to be responsible for their own learning and not disturb her or the students with whom she was working unless it was an emergency. “So during centers, a kid will raise his hand and go like this (signs toilet) and I’ll just nod my head. So I don’t hear a word, and they don’t have to interrupt” (10/24/07). For the
first several weeks that the students worked at centers, Annie consistently reinforced her expectations until the children could work at the centers independently. At first, students would come up to the reading table to try to get her attention, but if she had already started a reading group she would reply with firm reminders such as, “Latasa, please do not bother me during reading group. Is it an emergency?” or “I’m sorry; we’re going to eat lunch really soon, okay? Do not bother me during reading group” (10/24/07).

Once the centers were running fairly smoothly, Annie could teach skills to the student or students with whom she was directly working. During small group reading instruction and centers time, Annie met with students grouped according to what level they scored on diagnostic reading tests and probes. At the beginning of the year, the students had already been grouped by text level readability in the reading series that the district uses. “I knew what text levels they were at when they came into first grade. So I sat down with the reading recovery teachers who had pulled my fifteen kids, so they know them pretty well, and figured out who would fit well together” (11/20/07). To plan for her lessons, Annie first browsed through the nonfiction room at Finley to select multiple copies of texts that she thought each of her reading groups could handle.*

I go with whatever I think will interest them... I’m pulling nonfiction books, but I’m pulling books that are around their text level. But I’m mapping where they’re at so they’re not the same level as where they started. So I’m doing this little map to keep pushing them up higher and higher and higher. So I don’t really HAVE a strategy... I just pick levels and keep pushing them toward it. (10/24/07)

*Finley uses money from fundraising, grants, and state funding for Schools in Need of Assistance (SINA) to purchase multiples copies of leveled nonfiction texts to support the district’s chosen reading intervention program, Every Child Reads. This program uses nonfiction texts to teach children decoding, writing, and comprehension skills.
There were no lesson plans that came with the sets of books she chose. So Annie sat in her apartment at night, analyzing the words, pictures, and format of the book to determine what skills she would work on the next day with each group. An example of Annie’s thought process when planning follows. “See, a lot of these words we were labeling have the t-h sound in it. And right before this, we did the, them, and then, which all have t-h, and I just kind of pulled it out.” (10/24/07) In class the next day, Annie’s plans were enacted.

Annie: So they put a little label on it so that you know that this right here is what, Juan?
Juan: Teeth.
Annie: The teeth. How’d you know that word was teeth?
Juan: Because it has th-th-th.
Annie: Yes, it has th-th-th at the end of it. Good for you! Good for you. Come here and I’m going to give everyone a word on a sticky note. Don’t say it out loud. Say it in your head when you get it. Say it in your head when you get the sticky note. Davis. Can you tell me what word is on your sticky note?
Davis: Mouth.
Annie: Can you find it on the picture? How did you know that word was mouth? What are two clues—two clues—to tell you that that word was mouth?
Davis: Because there’s (points to book)...
Annie: Okay. You looked at the picture. But, just looking at the word, how did you know that word was mouth? What clues gave it away to you?
Juan: Because it has the t-h and it has the m-o.
Annie: It has an m at the beginning, and it has a t-h at the end, so you knew it would sound like this: m—th. Right?

Often Annie taught skills that presented themselves in the moment; ones that she had not originally planned to teach. “A lot of the time I’m just thinking, ‘Oh, this would be good right now, so I’ll do this right now’” (10/24/07). However, it bothered Annie that she was not recording in writing what she had taught. She felt that her teaching was unorganized.
“I’m not writing it down like they’ve learned this and this and this, so I’m gonna teach this next; I just kind of pull things out” (10/24/07). As the months went on, Annie gradually devised a planning system that made her feel more comfortable, allowing her to both plan ahead of time and later note what she added spontaneously during the lesson.

I recall our first interview on my front porch when she expressed her fears about planning for all of the subject areas. However, even then she had faith in herself that she would find a way to handle it. “I have all these things I need to integrate and I’m not sure how to do it, but I think you just learn as you go... I think you’ll figure it out and find out what works for you and what works for your students” (8/15/07). Annie did figure it out as the year progressed. She created a binder to record her guided reading group plans, in hopes of reusing them as a framework in the future, adjusting them as needed for each new student group.

Then I don’t have to go back and think, “Oh, what did I teach out of this?” And then, I mean, it’ll probably be real informal because a lot of times, yeah, like today, I looked through the books and I thought, I can teach this and this. But once they read it, THAT’S when I find out what they need to LEARN. (11/20/07)

At the same time she organized her guided reading binder, she developed several drafts of a guided reading lesson plan template. She was trying to develop an original one to perfectly suit her needs.

I’m trying to find a GOOD guided reading lesson plan that I feel comfortable working with, and I haven’t found one yet. So I have kind of put my own together from the Connie Hebert thing, and I went to an in-service on Friday. So, I need to put all those things together. Because I do; I want to have a lesson plan. And a lot of people have given me some; it’s not like I haven’t had people helping me. I’m just picky. I have to feel comfortable and organized with it. And I don’t feel good with any of them yet. So maybe I just need to make up my own and take bits and pieces. (11/20/07)
Annie had been inspired by Connie Hebert, a national reading expert who worked with Finley throughout the 2007-2008 school year (hired through their SINA funding), modeling reading strategies with the Finley students while their teachers watched. In fact, by February, Connie’s modeling propelled Annie into thoughts of becoming a reading specialist herself. Annie described Connie as a “powerful” teacher, explaining, “When I saw her, I thought, “Wow! I could be doing that. That’s really good!” (10/24/07) Annie could not wait to try out Connie’s strategies with her own students. One of Annie’s favorite things to do was go around to each student, one by one, to hear them read. Annie tweaked Connie’s strategy by adding the dimension of whispering, because being quiet enough so others could concentrate was one thing Annie’s students did to care for one another in their classroom.

(Annie to students): When I come around behind you, I want you to read outloud. I’ll whisper your name so I know what you’re going to read. (Whispers) Shawna? (Annie whispers each student’s name, and they whisper back what they are going to read about. She then goes from student to student, crouched down behind them with her arm around them, and they whisper-read aloud. She coaches them to use the picture, sound out sounds, follow with their eyes, etc.) (10/24/07)

By hearing each student whisper-read aloud daily, Annie noted aloud to the students what they did as they read.

I’m finding something that every student does differently. Like, Shawna, she wasn’t using her finger to point to the words anymore. So I said, “I really like seeing you move with your eyes and not your finger.” And she was using picture clues to help her figure out the word. I just like going around and finding something that every kid is doing. (10/24/07)

As Annie observed her students read, she made mental notes of who needed help with what. Then she found times throughout the day to work with students individually, in pairs, or in small groups. “I just know the kids who don’t know their sight words; that
are having problems reading fluently in a low-leveled book. So I’m pulling them and just giving them extra pushes with it” (10/24/07). These groups changed daily depending upon her observations of what they were struggling with. “So, my one little boy that I pull in the mornings, he’s not the only one that I’ll pull. There’s another girl that I pulled this morning, and just did sight words with her” (10/24/07).

Annie, constantly reflecting, found every possible time in her schedule to give intensive attention to her students who needed what she called “extra pushes.” Realizing that sometimes students were off task because they were struggling to read, Annie took advantage of the opportunity to spend time with those children. “So then I started pulling those kids... I pulled one kid at a time who was sometimes being disruptive—I’d pull them and have them read to me” (11/20/07). Annie also carefully analyzed her students’ written work, giving extra help to students showing patterns of errors. “And I’ve just noticed in her work that she reverses her numbers a lot. Like for 17, she’ll write 71. And so I thought, “Oh, I’ll have her come back here today.”” (11/20/07)

Based upon Annie’s observations of her students who seemed to struggle with math, the district math facilitator and Finley’s instructional coach conducted formal diagnostic tests to see which students needed regular, documented math interventions and which students needed reinforcement beyond the regular math instruction.

And they said if there’s anybody you have concerns about, especially in first grade, they should know how to count from one to 31, and they should be able to pick up wherever; whatever number you tell them to start at, they should be able to count to 31. So I was watching for students that I didn’t think could....And, I had her test nine of my kids, and six of them needed it. Three needed the intensive intervention where I’m documenting it, for the counting. And the other three just need reinforcement of the lesson. So I pull the intensive ones Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and the other three I pull Tuesday-Thursday. I really like
doing this because I feel I can give the kids more attention, and make them feel good about what they’re doing. (10/24/07)

Annie provided math interventions for three or four children each day while the other children worked in math centers that she had developed. Annie noted that “it’s not the same group” every day (10/24/07); she constantly observed her students’ performance and written work to decide who she would work with during math center time each day.

Annie even started to pull students aside for extra help first thing in the morning. Stumbling upon her words as she implicitly apologized for breaking the rule she had learned in college to not use worksheets, Annie confessed that she placed “something to do” at every child’s seat (11/20/07). She was not happy with herself that it was admittedly work to keep most of the class busy so she could give extra help to a few students, but she justified it because she wanted to provide all the additional support she could for her students who needed it.

And there’s always morning work on their desk, just to...it’s just...to give them something to do...which I need to fix, but, um, so they have something on their desk... in the mornings, the reason I have them do work, is because I’m pulling students individually. There’s one student that’s in my lowest reading group, and he’s a little behind, so I’m doing his own; like, he gets three, he gets basically three or four reading groups a day, so that he’s getting quadruple-dipped. So I work with him and I need something for the other kids to do. (11/20/07)

All of the intensive extra help in math and reading began to show results—results that pleased and somewhat surprised Annie. She humbly denied credit for the results, however, attributing the growth to developmental readiness or parental help.

And the LIGHT bulb just turned on for him! I mean, that’s what it was. It just clicked. Things clicked for him. And he took off. So I moved him up in a reading group. He’s going to graduate from Reading Recovery...he’s been just—it’s weird to see him grow that much! He just shot up! It’s amazing. (11/20/07)
He probably needed probing when he was reading. He needed help, he used his finger, and so I had him in my lowest reading group. He was tested on Friday at a 12. I mean, that's just phenomenal! No one's seen that before. But, his mom is doing so much work with him. She reads with him at home. (11/20/07)

Annie also helped the students develop academically by purposefully teaching them to be conscious of their thinking processes. Throughout lessons as the opportunities arose, she asked children to verbally explain to the group how they arrived at an answer.

Annie: How'd you figure that out??!!
Keegan: Because I had 4 in my head, and then I added 5 more, 4 5 6 7 8 9...
Annie: And then you knew you needed to add 1 more, right?
Keegan: Yeah.
Annie: So then you had 6 fingers up. Good for you. Kiss your brain.
(10/24/07)

If students had trouble focusing, Annie reflected upon the students' lives and how their experiences affected their thought processes. “I try to be empathetic, and just be really patient and loving, and put myself in their shoes” (11/20/07). Then she explicitly taught them how to shift their thinking so they could concentrate.

I pulled her aside and I said, “You know, I know it’s hard for you to stay focused. What can I do to help you? What are you thinking about during math?” And she said, “I’m thinking about playing with my friends, or playing with my cat.” And I said, “Okay. That’s good. Those are good things. It’s okay if your mind drifts off, but when those thoughts come up, I want you to say, ‘Oh, yeah. I’m having thoughts about something other than math, and I need to save that for the end of the day.’” And she’s been working on that. She’ll tell me, “Oh, yeah. I’m going to save that for the end of the day.” I mean, she’s really working on it!! (12/18/07)

Annie, figuring out through small group work and interventions what worked for her students, began to take more liberty with the curriculum she used for whole group instruction. For example, when previewing the mandated, scripted whole group reading lesson from the district’s MacMillan literature-based reading series, an inspiring thought came to her to help her students better connect to the reading, and she acted upon it. She
acted upon it because she knew her students would learn more from the adaptation than from the scripted prompts.

Today in the manual, we were supposed to be doing the strategic read where I stand in front of the class and follow every prompt in the book, but today... I just had them get with a partner and buddy read. And it was REALLY GOOD, because the book is called, Bet You Can’t, and it’s a dialogue between a brother and a sister, and there’s a talking bubble. And so I put them together with a buddy, by picking their names with popsicle sticks, and I had them read. And then I stopped... and we talked about the different bubbles, and how many characters are in this book—two. So I said, “Okay. I want one of you to be the boy, and one of you to be the girl; and the boy reads what the boy says, and the girl reads what the girl says.” And so they LOVED it. They had a lot of fun with it. And then at the very end—I did not talk about this—but the bubble comes from both of their mouths—it’s one bubble but there’s two lines—so they should have said it at the same time, and they DID it! (10/24/07)

Despite her adaptations and interventions that cultivated academic and character development in her students, Annie still was not sure if she was teaching the right things. Although she questioned the mandated pacing of the math curriculum, she did find comfort in knowing what she was supposed to teach and when. Even though she adapted some of the scripted whole group reading lessons, she followed the pacing and sequence of the reading manual when planning. However, without a teaching manual for social studies, having to plan lessons using only the first grade student books, she was insecure about whether she was teaching the students the appropriate content.

Loving Teaching?

This self-doubt and questioning was typical of Annie. Holding herself to very high expectations, she often said, “I don’t like this. I need to find a better way” (10/24/07). Even when the children had taken more responsibility for themselves at the learning centers, Annie felt “like a lot of the kids are just goofing around. And maybe
that’s just me having too high of expectations...I don’t know. It’s not as smooth as I want it to be” (10/24/07). She was not satisfied with the organization of materials and displays in her room, calling it a “cluttered mess” (10/24/07). While watching the video-recording together after an observation, Annie admitted, “It kind of was nice to watch it, because sometimes I think I’m not really doing anything productive, and it was very productive” (10/24/07).

Annie had a hard time telling herself or others that she was a good teacher. She began to realize her own teaching potential, but she was hesitant to commit to being a teacher for the long term. She waffled back and forth between the language of “loving” and “liking” teaching, catching herself loving it first and then qualifying what she had said: “Oh, I love teaching guided reading. I like teaching guided reading” (10/24/07). It was as if Annie was afraid to love her job. She questioned her identity as a quickly-blossoming teacher.

I don’t know if 100% of me is a teacher, so I can’t say 100% YET. I think it’s more than I think it is. I think it’s more than I want to say. Because sometimes I wonder, do I really want to be a teacher? But I do. And sometimes I think, “I’m a really good teacher!” And I think I’m more than what I really think I am. But I don’t know what I am. (12/18/07)

It was in December when I noticed Annie getting emotional when talking about her students. During interviews, her eyes filled with tears and her voice softened as she talked about her kids. Times like these were propelling Annie into the “love teaching” zone.

So today she was really working on math, and she came up to me and she said, “Miss Camden, look!!?” And she had them right...she had them all right! And to see her smile, and to see her glow, and for me to say, “I am really proud of you...” It makes me want to cry. To tell a little kid you’re so proud of them and to see them...whoa... (12/18/07)
During a focus group in February, Annie shared with the other participants how hard it was when her students left Finley to move to another school. Her class had shrunk from eighteen to eleven. “Today I just had a student who we all of a sudden got a call and they said they weren’t ever coming back. And that’s happened with four of my seven that have left. You don’t have any warning.” (2/1/08). Annie went on to explain her fear of letting go of her class at the end of the year.

This morning I was crying because I can’t believe she’s gone. I can’t believe I’m not going to see her again. I feel like we’ve gone so far. Like today, we were walking up our stairs. And I was thinking in my head, “How am I going to leave these kids at the end of the year? I don’t want to leave them.” That’s how I feel. I think maybe I’m too attached to them or something. How am I going to leave these kids?! (2/1/08)

Annie would miss her students because of the community she had built with them and the intense, personalized instruction she had given them. Annie was just as passionate upon getting new students, wanting to ensure that both her instruction and the environment would be ready for the new student’s arrival. At a focus group in February, Annie asked the other three first-year teachers, “Do you find that when you’re getting a new student, do you feel like you have all the stuff you need to get them? I feel like I have to have everything ready for them. I have to get them a cubby, I have to get their folders ready…” (2/1/08). Annie asked Connie specifically about a student that was transferring from LaMont to Finley. Connie had actually taught a writing intervention to the student who would join Annie’s class. “I should find out some stuff from you. I know he has ADHD, he’s been tested for seizures, he doesn’t talk very well…do you know what his reading level is?” (2/1/08) Annie wanted
to be poised to provide her new student with appropriate instruction from the very first
moment he entered her classroom.

Always Wanting Better

Annie never settled for mediocre teaching. She admitted to Rachel, Connie, and
Ben that she was not content with her math instruction. She followed the procedures
taught by the district math coordinator and prescribed in the manual, but the process
didn’t feel right for her. “I don’t like Trailblazers. I don’t like anything about it. They
teach us that we’re supposed to do the ‘Launch, Explore, and Summarize,’ but I don’t
know if I’m just not that good at it…” (2/1/08). Rachel shared how she and her teammate,
having felt some of the same frustrations, now structured math instruction in small
groups. Annie, leaning forward and nodding intently, liked Rachel’s approach to teaching
math. Annie shared, “I always start my math with an intervention group. I’m teaching the
intervention, so everyone else is at math centers for fifteen minutes. But then, I could turn
them into math groups like you’re doing” (2/1/08).

Annie looked for every possible way to maximize instructional time. She shared
her increasing frustration with being interrupted by other staff members during
instruction. She asked the other first-year teachers,

Do people come into your rooms a lot, and bother you, and ask you questions
while you’re teaching? In the middle of reading groups or during a math lesson?
Reading teachers, guidance counselor, some random teacher for a question…I
think that’s really rude. I don’t know why people do that! That bothers me. That’s
hard. Today they did it during my reading group, and then they left, and I said,
“I’m sorry we were just interrupted, because I had no idea what I was just
saying.” And then a girl goes, “You said…” and I go, “Thanks for listening.”
That’s really hard for me, and then I don’t have the guts to say anything. It is
Finley’s culture. I think everyone feels really comfortable around each other, and
they think they can just pop in whenever. It didn’t bother me for a while, but it
really does now. A teacher came in today and stood there and started over me while I was teaching my guided reading group. Finally, I went, “Can I help you with something?” And she put this paper down and asked, “Do you think this will work for scheduling?” And I thought, “Come on!” And that’s when she left and I said, “I’m really sorry we were just interrupted.” Because I tell my kids that: don’t interrupt somebody. (2/1/08)

The interruptions bothered Annie because they broke her intense concentration on her students. They also provided a non-example of what she tried every day to teach her students: don’t interrupt someone. Although she appreciated the friendly culture of the school, she valued effective instructional time for her students more.

Annie continued to reflect not only upon the quality of her instruction, but upon her methods of building classroom community. In January, after her first formal evaluation, Annie was disturbed by something the principal had noted.

And one of the comments she said to me was, “You know, I noticed that you say things like, ‘You need to raise your hand. Don’t forget to raise your hand. Thanks for raising your hand.’” And she said, “I think you say that too much.” But I’ve been thinking about it. I didn’t tell her that that’s my way of managing them. That’s my way of giving them positive reinforcement, too, like, “Don’t forget to raise your hand. Thanks for raising your hand! Or don’t just shout out!”...And I’ll say that all the time, and I’m thinking, gosh! Maybe I’m really saying too much or something. The principal was saying that I’m saying things too much, and I think, well, that’s the way I teach. So am I doing something wrong? I told her that I think that’s what they need. But she thought maybe I could just pull back a little bit. Because maybe I am having them rely on me too much to tell them what to do. And so when they go to second grade, they’ll be shouting out and blurting out all the time. When I hand my kids off next year, it’s kind of weird because they have to start all over because they have to learn a new teacher’s style. And a lot of teachers might not be as...(2/1/08)

Annie did not take her principal’s comments lightly. The principal was asking Annie to consider changing something central to her teaching: her relentless reminders. Annie viewed her practice differently, wondering if by being so intentionally proactive she was actually hurting her students in the long run. She knew that she would not have these
students forever, and that they may not be able to adjust well next year if their teacher
didn’t remind them about certain behaviors before they happened.

However, she noted that her students were self-monitoring their behaviors better
in other classes than they were at the beginning of the year.

My kids are doing a lot better at specialists...it was always really hard for my kids
to go somewhere else for 45 minutes, because they would come back after a
horrible time in specialists, and the teacher was really angry. But now their
behavior is a lot better. I think it’s a combination of the kids acting more
responsibly and the teacher knows how to handle them now. (2/1/08)

Annie found comfort as she reflected upon her students’ ability to transfer their positive
behavior outside the classroom and with other teachers. She thought perhaps she was
doing the right thing with her proactive reminders after all.

Knowing Enough to Know that She Doesn’t Know Enough

Two thirds of the way through the school year, our conversations shifted.

Although I came to the interviews with questions, Annie, without my solicitation, took
the lead to offer her new insights. Gradually yet strikingly, Annie had come to a point in
the school year where she realized that she knew enough about teaching to acknowledge
that she was doing some things well. However, being a person who was always hard on
herself, she believed she needed to improve her instruction—to figure out a way to more
effectively teach her students now—now that she knew her students but didn’t know
exactly what to do next.

I’m just really frustrated with the way I do instruction right now. I feel like there’s
a lot of wasted time. I feel like I need to find better ways to be more effective and
to teach things. I need to change the way I do instruction. Every weekend I think,
okay, I’m going to change this and this and this. So many times I’ve changed
things around in my room. And then I feel like I’ve changed so many things
around and the kids have to adjust to the changes, and I want to be more
consistent, and better at planning lessons, and better with instruction. I think I felt better about instruction before, but the kids are growing now and I feel like I need to keep moving with them. I don’t know why I feel that way. I mean, I kind of get the vibe that the other first grade teachers feel that way, too, but I feel like I feel it more than other people, but that’s probably natural. (2/15/08)

Although Annie wondered why she felt this strong internal pressure to catch her instructional know-how up to her students’ progress, she wondered whether this feeling was more prevalent for her than for other teachers. She felt caught in a cyclical battle of needing to make changes, but needing to base those changes upon how they affected her students. In other words, she needed to try strategies out before she knew if they were worth doing.

And I have to really experience it before I really know what I’m doing. I’m the type of learner that needs to do it, and then I’ll know what I’m doing, which is really hard, because I don’t really know what I’m doing. It’s not something that they can say, okay, you teach this first, and then this, and then this. It’s just not that way. (2/15/08)

Annie had a sense of direction. “I feel like as the year goes on, I’m starting to see more of what the kids should be learning, so I can come up with more things of what I could be doing for them” (2/15/08). She had learned “through professional development...through assessments, and from talking to other professionals” what her first graders needed to do next; she just wasn’t sure exactly how to structure the instruction.

Annie was resourceful. She didn’t give up. She went to the library and checked out some professional books. She Googled ideas on the Internet. She asked other teachers for ideas. This was all very time-consuming, hard work. She admitted that it would be a lot easier to plan good instruction after knowing the full first grade curriculum. It would help reduce the cycle of trial and error in which she found herself continuously revolving.
“That’s why I think I’d like to be in the same classroom with the same curriculum. Because like after I taught today, I think, I wouldn’t do that again. After you do it, then you know what works. You don’t really know until you do it” (2/15/08).

Although Annie felt that her instruction needed improvement, she felt very secure about her ability to develop a caring classroom community. Her focus shifted to being a better planner and instructor. “I feel like I’m good with developing social skills, and teaching kids how to be loving and caring. I think I’m good at that. But I don’t know that I’m really good at instruction. I just don’t feel like I’m really good at that. And yeah, you’ve come and observed me, but I try to be really on top of things” (2/15/08). When I asked her what the obstacle was to improving instruction, she replied, “Time. Time. It’s just time. I always take a whole bunch of stuff home with me every weekend, and I go into school, because I want to feel like I’m on top of things. And I never get everything done” (2/15/08).

**Never the Easy Path**

Annie had no real intention, as of February, of staying at Finley for another year. That would be nice; that would be easy; but Annie was not about nice and easy. The inner-city urge in Annie made her bound for Washington D.C.

But sometimes I have this feeling like I really would like to be in the same school for the second year, and know what I’m doing....But I have every intention of moving. Just because it’s a lot more than just a different place to work. It’s something I want to do for me. I want to live in a city. I want to move far away. Just do that for a year or two, you know, because I’ve never done something like that before. And teach in a different area. More urban. (2/15/08)

Annie had a specific vision for a specific context, and was taking proactive measures to align the two by applying for jobs in Washington D.C. “I guess when I look at school
profiles, I'm looking for a really high percentage of students on free and reduced lunches...and I'm looking for a really high African-American population, which I should be able to find pretty easily in D.C.” (2/15/08).

Annie made decisions very deliberately. She had urges to work with African-American children in a setting that she knew would challenge her. She likened those urges to the way she was drawn to certain clothing styles or friends, and then realized that those urges had a source in her experiences.

I guess I can’t explain it any better than saying like it’s just like going shopping and looking at some outfits, and it just doesn’t appeal to me. Even looking for friends; I know what I like and some things I’m just not attracted to. I’m not attracted at all to teaching a high Latino population. Or even a high Caucasian. For some reason it gets me really excited to think about teaching African-American children from low income families. I don’t KNOW why. I guess just from my experiences, like the Shalom Zone. That’s what that was; it was mainly African-American, low-income. And that’s where I found that I was really passionate about it. It’s not that I don’t like certain people. I’m just drawn toward different things. (2/15/08)

Those specific urges motivated her to read about what it would be like to teach African-American children from low-income families, and her readings reinforced her vision to teach in an inner-city classroom. “I enjoy reading about teaching urban children. This book I’m reading now is something like teaching reading instruction to urban children. It talks about how urban families view reading in the home and how important it is to their child” (2/15/08). Annie believed that her experiences at Finley gave her a foundation upon which she could build her success in Washington D.C. “I think I work in a diverse classroom as far as behaviors and learning styles. I feel like I have a lot of experience. Not a lot, but a year” (2/15/08).
Annie had the desire and the fortitude to succeed in Washington D.C. Her vision trumped the many personal factors in her life that could hold her back. She had spent nearly a year trying to make amends with her mother after breaking off her engagement, yet she intended to move several states away from her. She was now in a serious relationship with a man who may or may not move with her out East, but fulfilling her vision was so important to her that she was going to go regardless of his decision. “This is something I really want to do and I’m not going to let anybody stop me. So when I’ve been searching and applying, I’ve had every thought in my mind: I’m going alone” (2/15/08).

Annie had learned a lot about her personal and professional self since she started teaching. Living on her own gave her plenty of time and space to reflect on who she was and who she was becoming.

It’s just been different living alone, and just being with me, and learning about myself, and thinking I don’t like myself, and here I am with me. I’ve learned a lot about that and I’ve learned a lot about myself, and that’s been hard the whole year. And teaching has been part of it. Learning who I am, and learning who I am as a teacher, and learning who I am as a daughter and a friend, and who I want to be... but it’s all stuff that I’ve learned from, and I’ve learned more about myself than I EVER have, ever before. It’s all stuff that I feel like I’ve grown from....I feel like it makes me a stronger person. (2/15/08)

Annie’s personal hardships had made her a stronger person than she was a year ago. As a professional, she guarded her students’ instructional time. Like the times when other faculty interrupted her instruction, she questioned whether it was better for children to be removed from her classroom than for supports to happen within her classroom. She recently had communicated with the guidance counselor and the intern counselor to set up a time to talk about when the best times would be for them to meet individually with
her students to develop relationships with them. Annie’s ability to rise above her own personal challenges helped her to muster the strength to communicate with them, placing her students’ needs above the potential political implications that may occur as a result of her advocacy. “I feel intimidated, and I want to make sure I don’t make anybody upset, and then at the same time I don’t want to be taken advantage of” (2/15/08). Although Annie had become secure enough in herself to take action, she still worried about others’ perceptions. She cared about what others thought and felt about her.

Knowing Enough to Make Recommendations for Teachers-to-Be

Throughout her first year of teaching, Annie learned many things about teaching while on the job that she wished she would have studied in college. She provided specific suggestions for Riverside, based primarily on a combination of her recent professional reading and faculty development sessions where first-year teachers discussed their curriculum.

I wish I would have known more about how to do small guided reading groups, and how to do whole group reading, like with MacMillan. And maybe something more with discipline, and different behaviors. Maybe do some case studies or something, and analyze students’ behaviors and find out why are they acting this way, and where is it coming from, and how do you handle it? How do you have the rest of your kids handle it when a kid is having an emotional breakdown? Those would be good things. Also, how to do shared writing. How to start a mini-lesson with your kids and then have them go back to their seats and expand on it. I feel like that’s all stuff I’m exploring and learning. (2/15/08)

Annie showed me the book she was currently reading, raving about how interesting it was. “It gives you really good ideas. It gives you scenarios and talks about how when this happened, here’s how one teacher reacted, and here’s how another teacher reacted, and here’s the outcome” (2/15/08). Annie noted that its content interested her because it
supported her teaching philosophy about the importance of building relationships with students “before you do anything else” (2/15/08). Annie thought it was important for me to know that her teaching partner’s college required the book for every education major, not for one specific class, but as a program-wide focus. “I thought that it was a good idea to have a book required for everyone across classes. Elise said that just occasionally a professor would say, ‘Today we’re going to talk about Love and Logic.’ So every professor would integrate it into their class. Isn’t that cool?!” (2/15/08) Annie thought that Riverside should have a common focus book that faculty and students experienced together. She found that reading professional literature refined and fortified her vision for teaching.

Annie also suggested that there should be more time for group reflection in college. She thought it would be good to provide “more time to reflect with other people in a whole group discussion, just for people to sit around and talk about what they did and what they saw, and how do you handle this” (2/15/08). Annie, now an in-service teacher at our PDS, thought that our plan to have the PDS students observe the team of first grade teachers—all in their first year—was a good idea. “I think for me, it’s nerve-wracking, but I think it’s a really good idea for students to come in and observe first-year teachers” (2/15/08).

Retrospectively, Annie had some advice for what teachers could do during the summer before their first year of teaching.

And I would say if you get a job before the school year’s out, go observe people. And ask for suggestions of people to observe. Observe quality teachers. And then go with a bunch of questions to your principal, and just shoot ‘em all out there. Find out what you can do, and what ideas you can work on throughout the
summer. Ask if you can take home all the curriculum books for the summer, which I did, but I procrastinated because I was more concerned about how I was going to make my classroom look, how I was going to set everything up, what I was going to hang on the walls, and how I was going to do behavior. Now if I would look back, I would have spent more time going through the books, and figuring out how to read the MacMillan books, and how to follow the Trailblazers manuals. I would look through all of those and not put it off. (2/15/08)

Annie’s advice reflected her shift in her 2/3-of-the-year thinking from a focus on environment to instruction. Looking back, she believes that her current instruction might have been stronger if she would have taken more time to become familiar with the curricular material before she started teaching rather than trying to learn it and teach it at the same time.

The Tea Party

By spring, Annie had supplemented her language arts and math curricula with a large repertoire of strategies and structures beyond those suggested in the teacher manuals. Early in March, her students held a tea party with their parents where they shared poetry, songs, and stories. Annie planned to replicate the sense of celebration that her students felt as they shared their learning with their parents. They were going to have another tea party at the end of March, but this time they would share their writing. Annie had been experimenting with writers’ workshops and other strategies to develop the children’s creative and mechanical writing skills.

One day in early March, Annie introduced the genre of autobiography to her class by modeling pre-writing using a tracing of her fingers in which she wrote five interesting things about herself. Annie blushed and giggled as we watched the video recording of herself modeling this, noting how picky she was about the expectations.
Do you notice I’m just writing this on a finger? I’m not writing it all over; I’m not writing it really sloppy, because these are things your parents are going to see at the writing tea party.... You notice how when I traced it, I spread my fingers so that I could do the space in between each finger, and then I wrote in every finger, right in the middle of it. I didn’t write right on the lines. You’re going to get a piece of paper and you’re going to do the same thing. You’re going to trace your hand and then you’re going to write five things about yourself that you don’t think people know. Now, remember, your parents are going to be your audience. Your parents, at the writing tea party, are going to be the ones who will be listening to this. So you want to write things that even your parents might not know about you. (3/4/08)

Clearly, Annie hoped the students’ parents as their audience would motivate the children to do quality work.

Reflecting deeply as usual, upon hearing herself emphasize their parents so much during her explanation, she questioned the extrinsic motivation of creating good writing for an audience rather than oneself. “Is that good or is that not good? Because then you’re motivating them for what someone else will see and not for themselves. I want them to do things not to impress other people” (3/7/08). Soon after she made this comment, she was relieved to hear her response to a child who said they needed to do “really, really awesome, good handwriting!” She replied, “Really, really, really good handwriting. And we do that because we’re in first grade, and we should have good handwriting in first grade” (3/4/08). Annie had structured a very noble form of motivation, albeit extrinsic, through a long-term vision of excellence and celebration into which all of their writing efforts could accumulate. Leave it to Annie to wonder how this could be better.

Quick, Deliberate, and Proactive

Annie left nothing to chance. She structured each day with rituals and quick transitions to avoid any potential waste of instructional time. After personally greeting
each of her students in the hall by their lockers, bending down to compliment someone on their new haircut or beautiful smile, Annie expected them to come into the classroom and get right to work. “Would you please put your pink agenda in the white tray? And start your [Daily Oral Language] please. You know what to do when get done with your DOL….Keep working, Davis. Shawna, please get started on that DOL. Jimmy, right here” (3/4/08). Annie taught with a quick pace, alternating between whole group instruction and individual practice, always giving instructions, reminders, and feedback in between.

We’re going to go ahead and start even if some of you don’t have this done. I want you to continue to finish it. Make sure you have this written down with the corrections made…and right now, I don’t hear any voices. Good job. Kiss your brain. That’s how it should be during DOL time. It’s a time for you to think about what you’re doing, and to make those editing marks. Thank you. I will come around and look. (3/4/08)

Although Annie taught with a quick pace, she interjected humor, positive affirmation of their efforts, and time for them to verbally express their thought processes.

Annie: Give her a round of applause!! Whew! (They all clap.) Good for you! Shawna, what do I do to make it a capital letter using my editing marks?
Shawna: Put three lines.
Annie: Is she right? What did she just say?
Class: Put three lines.
Annie: Thanks for listening. Alright, that’s one mistake. We need to find two more. Nathan?
Nathan: ‘Fast’ is supposed to be ‘faster.’
Annie: (Acting astonished): Oh, my goodness! How did you know that?!
Nathan: Because if it’s ‘FAST,’ it doesn’t make sense. (3/4/08)

Even though Annie strongly believed in the importance of building and sustaining a community within her classroom, she needed affirmation that ten to fifteen minutes at
the beginning of the day spent in a mixture of reading, math, and community-building activities associated with the calendar was a worthy use of instructional time.

We used to do a lot with the calendar, but I took a lot of it out. Now we just do the Morning Greeting, calendar—and I think the math things are important; the tens frames to see them keep building on them, the straws—it just takes up time....This takes maybe fifteen minutes; ten to fifteen minutes. (3/7/08)

To Annie, every precious minute counted. It was her responsibility to ensure the best use of the time she spent with her students.

She also took proactive measures to ensure that all of her students would maximize the time that she structured for them. Annie traveled purposefully from student to student, whispering in one’s ear, setting a timer for another, and placing a reassuring hand on another’s shoulder. She knew how to encourage each of her students to try.

Watching her dart gracefully from child to child in order to prepare them for whatever was coming next, I wondered what she whispered or why she set the timer.

Usually I’ll go up to [Jimmy] in the morning and say, “That’s really nice handwriting,” or something. Probably something about his DOL. Steven takes forever to finish his DOL. I’ll think you’ll see that everyone else finished before him. So, I set a timer for him. It doesn’t really help (chuckles once). He just is really slow when he writes. (3/7/08)

After the students had written a sentence, Annie conferred with each of them individually, helping them to self-assess their work, seizing another opportunity to layer academic and character development. “He wrote really sloppy. Usually he does a really good job. He’s really learned to self-monitor and grade himself, but not in a degrading way. He used to be really mean to himself. He’d give himself a bad grade if he did one little thing wrong. But he’s really worked on that a lot” (3/7/08).
Every child knew what to do when they finished their DOL sentence. Some students helped others who were not yet finished with their sentence, others paired up to practice sight words using flash cards, and others worked with flash cards independently. Even for these five to ten minutes, Annie struggled over the best use of her students’ time.

I’m torn. Usually, there are three students that go over and help other people with their DOL when they’re done. I don’t know what’s more important. Is it more important for them to help them with their sight words in the morning? Or is it more important for those kids to get their DOL written down? So, a lot of times, Travis doesn’t write his DOL because he’s with Allie working on sight word flash cards. And I think, “Well, what’s more important? Because he’s not writing his DOL down, he’s not getting practice on handwriting and making capitals at the beginning of a sentence and a period at the end, but he’s working on the sight word cards that he needs to know that he’s not getting practice with at home.” So, he hasn’t been doing DOL that much. He’s been working with Allie. (3/7/08)

These children were comfortable helping and being helped by each other. They trusted each other. The effort that Annie had spent in building classroom community had transferred to the learning of new concepts and skills.

Encouraging Responsibility

Constantly amidst Annie’s instruction, she stopped to address disrespect or irresponsibility. Using a strategy from a book she recently read, Annie gave children choices to develop their ownership over their behaviors. Without missing a beat in her autobiography pre-writing demonstration, Annie quickly and gently provided choices immediately when the problems occurred, helping the student maintain integrity.

What I’m going to do is think about things that people don’t know about me. Keegan, I’m going to give you a choice. You can put that in your locker, or you can lay it down so it’s not bothering you. (He lays it down.) Thank you. I’m going to write five things, one on each finger, that people don’t know about me. Because remember, an autobiography is about yourself. (3/4/08)
Annie also helped the students develop responsibility by providing opportunities for them to be leaders. For example, she asked Davis if he would begin the Morning Greeting. Davis knew the routine and looked confident while leading it. The other students responded as if this was a typical Morning Greeting time when one of them was responsible to be the leader.

Annie: Davis, could you please start the Morning Greeting? (A few students stay at their desks to finish their work.)
Davis: Good morning, John. How are you today?
John: Good. How are you?
Davis: Good. Thanks for asking. Would you like a hug, double hug, or a wink?
John: Hug. (They hug.)
Annie: Good job, guys. I like how you said ‘Wink.’ We haven’t said that in a long time. Go ahead, John. Pass it on.

Now it was time for Allie to be a leader. Travis, a new student, didn’t know the Morning Greeting well yet, and as he tried to greet Allie, she mouthed the word to him to help him along. Later, Allie had a whole-group leadership opportunity as she led the “What’s your weather today?” reports.

Allie: What’s your weather like today? Davis?
Annie: (To Davis quietly and privately): I’m going to give you a choice. You can sit respectfully and NOT play with your sweatshirt, or you can go back to your seat until you are going to be respectful.
Allie: (Calls people’s names quickly): Beth?
Beth: Sunny.
Allie: Yeah!!! Keegan?
Keegan: HAPPY!!
Annie: Sunny. Thank you for sharing.
Allie: Yeah!!!!
Keegan: What’s your weather like today, Miss Camden?
Annie: I’m sunny! Thanks for asking!
By providing students with options and leadership opportunities, Annie promoted responsibility and continued to build upon her vision for classroom community.

**Spring Reflections**

In April of Annie's first year of teaching, school district officials announced they were going to cut eighteen elementary teaching positions—the eighteen teachers with the lowest seniority. I came to interview Annie ten minutes after she heard that Elise, one of her grade-level teammates, and Mary, a second grade teacher, would not return to Finley next year. Annie, having signed her contract earlier in the summer, had enough seniority to keep her position.

It's terribly sad. They're expected to come back to school tomorrow and teach after being told they're not going to have a job next year, and they have to start looking for a new job. Which on top of all this other school work you do at night and take home, now they have to start applying for something else? I feel horrible for them....I feel a little relief, but at the same time I feel like, what do I do? What do I say? (4/2/08)

Annie was no longer bound for Washington D.C. She now wanted to stay and refine her practice within her current context.

When I started hearing there were cuts here, I thought, I don't want to leave here. And I like where I live. I really want to teach in the same school for a second year, and be a second-year teacher, ideally in the same grade, in the same classroom, in the same school, with the same teaching partner. I really want that. (4/2/08)

Annie, knowing she would return to her same position in the fall, began to look ahead to summer when she would plan and organize her second year of teaching. “I think about getting things ready over the summer: what I can do differently, what I can do the same, and what I can do better... I’m raring to go for next year!” (4/2/08). Along with improving her teaching practices, Annie wanted to make more time for herself that
second year. Even though she did not have a husband or children at home to care for, she
did have other things to do besides plan for teaching. Annie hoped to spend less time
planning and more time taking care of herself and her home.

Like tonight, I’m thinking of what we can do for math tomorrow, but I’m also
thinking that I have laundry to do, I have dishes to do, I want to lay down and
read my book that I’m reading that’s really good and that I haven’t read in two or
three weeks. I don’t want to work on school stuff when I get home. I have to find
a balance; I have to find out what my priorities are. (4/2/08)

Reflecting back on her teaching practices over the first year, Annie noted that a
lack of time was the main reason she did not employ all of the best teaching practices of
which she was capable. “And I’ll think, ‘I just can’t think right now about what I’m going
to do. I just don’t have time to think about this, so I’ll just do it the way it is in the book.’
Even thought it’s probably not the best way, I just don’t have time to do that when I have
all these other things to work on” (4/2/08). In general, Annie was still not satisfied with
her instruction. Although she noted several things she felt good about, she reflected,
“There are still things that I teach very traditionally, and I don’t want it to be like that. I
want it to be more exploration” (4/2/08).

Annie was most pleased with how she had learned to deeply know her students—
 enough to anticipate their needs and respond to them proactively. “There’s so much body
language in people, and especially children, and especially my children in here; being
able to read that so you can respond the way that they need you to respond, which I don’t
say I always do a good job of doing that, but I try to do that” (4/2/08).

Annie acknowledged the important role that her teammates, particularly her close
friend, Eva, had in making her first year of teaching successful. Without Eva, Annie’s
first year of teaching would have been lonely. Annie’s relationship with her parents was still healing since Annie’s break-up with her fiancé, and Annie lived alone.

That’s been actually ideal for me, to have somebody that I’ve gotten really close to. She knows my personal life, for the most part...because if you have something that bothers you at school, or if you’re teaching something and you don’t know how to teach it, and you have no one to talk to, I would hate it. (4/2/08)

Annie had struggled all year with her students’ behavior challenges. However, seeing the growth in the children’s caring for themselves and each other was the biggest reward for Annie in her first year of teaching. Annie had enacted her vision to build a caring community, although her marathon mindset would always drive her toward higher ambitions.

I mean, they’re not all where I want them to be, if I have this vision, not all of them, but it’s just really cool to see the students be loving the way I’ve tried to show them to be loving, and to be caring. Like watching them with the new student today, and just hearing them saying nice things to each other...I see how these students have changed and really self-monitor what they’re doing. They now see that when they’re angry they don’t have to destroy the room or hurt someone else...just to see them learn these things is a big success. (4/2/08)

Liberation: Bound for Washington D.C. Afterall

In mid-May I received an elated e-mail from Annie. She was bound for Washington D.C. for a summer teaching job.

Deb,
Guess what?! I'm going to D.C.!!! (at least for the summer) I'm moving June 5-driving out! I got a summer teaching position in D.C. Everything is set. I have a place to live, I have a job! Now I just have to pack and get rid of things! I'm moving into a fully furnished place in Takoma Park, MD. It's the best deal! I don't have to sign a lease. It's fully furnished for people visiting, transitioning, etc...Utilities included and rent is very reasonable. Ahhhh! I'm so excited. I'm taking just the things I need and I am driving out -- all by myself! How liberating! Oh man, I am so excited! :)
Talk to you soon,
Annie (5/10/08)

The principal told me that she was worried Annie would love it so much out there that she would not return to Finley. Annie had successfully gone through the application screening process for employment in the Washington D.C. public school system, and had been invited to their June 14th teacher fair. Annie planned to attend the job fair, telling Rachel, Ben, and Connie that it could lead to teaching there in the fall.

I kind of have no idea what fall is going to look like. I'm packing my jeep up and leaving tomorrow for Washington D.C. I'm teaching urban youth in D.C......I've applied and been accepted to the D.C. public schools and I have a teacher fair on June 14...it's invite only, so I was invited to go to it, but you wait in line to interview with principals, and then more than likely get offered a job. (6/4/08)

Although Annie would consider accepting a position in Washington D.C., she would miss her first grade students from Finley. Annie had carefully planned her class closure for the year. "We've been talking about it for a while, and we did some community things...to end the year together. Yeah, it feels done, and I felt like we closed the year in a good way. Yesterday was really hard for me and for the kids" (6/4/08).

Annie had made memory books for her students, including shared writings, pictures of the children working together, and a picture of Annie in her rocking chair "holding up a sign that says something that I said a lot to them throughout the year" (6/4/08). Annie did not tell us what she told her students. That was a special secret reserved for one first grade community.
CHAPTER III

RACHEL

Rachel: (Replying to Annie): I know what you mean by that point in your life because I feel like I'm the total opposite. I just got married, I found out I'm pregnant, so...

Group: Yeah! Congratulations!

Rachel: Thank you... so that's all hitting me, and being a first year teacher...

Annie: Yeah, you've got a lot goin' on!

Rachel: ...and then it's like my teaching partner is-- this is gonna be her fifth year-- so she's SOOO experienced, knows everything, knows what to do, what not to do, and it's like... I DON'T know what to do, and I almost feel like I just want to back away. I just need to get started and get into it-- I think that's my thing. I've done all I can, and I'm sure there's more to do, but I feel like I just need to get started so I know exactly what I need to do to further get myself ready. There's a lot on my plate right now. (Focus Group, 8/15/07)

Where Do I Begin?

Rachel, having graduated from Riverside the previous year and taught as a substitute teacher since then, was almost finished with her end-of-the-year, two-month substitute teaching position for a kindergarten class at Finley when she got the call for which she had been waiting. It was Cheri, the principal of another downtown school, Payson Elementary, offering Rachel her first full time job to begin in the fall as a second grade teacher. One month later, Rachel married Mark. Another month after that she found out she was expecting a baby, and a few weeks later she began her first year of teaching. In less than three months, Rachel had cumulatively leapt from substitute teacher, to new bride, to expecting mother, to full-time teacher.

I assumed Rachel would be more than ready to begin her first full time teaching position. Rachel was no novice to the culture of schooling. Both of her parents were teachers. Thinking back to when Rachel was in the Finley PDS, I remember that she
often made connections and disconnections between what she was learning in class and what her mother did as a teacher. Rachel admired her mother’s colorful classroom and clever instructional materials, and often during breaks from college, Rachel spent time helping in her mother’s classroom. While growing up, teaching was the main career to which Rachel had been exposed both during her time at school and her time at home. Reflecting back upon her memories of her parents as teachers, she recalled “how much they loved it, and how much there was work, but it was kinda like fun work, too” (8/15/07). Rachel appeared confident in her career choice, and demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to make an outstanding teacher. A teacher at Finley requested Rachel, from a group of eighteen PDS students, to be her student teacher after watching her teach in the PDS.

Rachel sat at the end of the table during our first focus group, just two days before the new teachers’ first in-service day. Leaning with her elbows on the table, supporting her chin and cheek in her hand, Rachel sighed often. Although she had been excited to secure the teaching job that she was about to begin, she was worried about just that: beginning it. “I just want the kids to come, so that I know what to do after that. Like after that first day, I think I’m going to be sooo much better” (8/15/07).

As for now, Rachel was frozen. She did not know how to take the first step. “When I got the job, I was so excited. I was, ‘Oh, my god, I’m gonna have my own classroom!’ And now I’m just like...I don’t know what to do. I don’t know where to start” (8/15/07). The hesitation in her voice and the apprehensive look in her eyes surprised and saddened me. I assumed that her year of substitute teaching, including a
position for a couple of months in the same classroom, would make her feel at ease as she
prepared for her own class. However, as she reflected, she noted that in none of her
teaching experiences—college nor subbing—had she ever been responsible to set up a
room, determine a schedule, or figure out how to establish classroom norms.

I think that substitute teaching helped me a lot to know what other classroom
teachers did; like how they set up their rooms, how they structured them, how
they had things. But it’s so hard, because you see all these things that you like, but
now I want to incorporate all those, but it’s hard because you don’t know how
they started that. Like Morning Meeting—you walk into a classroom, you do
Morning Meeting, and [the students] KNOW what they’re supposed to do, they
have high expectations, they have the rules...how did they get there? You don’t
know that. So I think that with my student teaching, I learned that, too, because I
came in for the spring, and they knew the rules. I don’t know how to set that up.
(8/15/07)

In addition to not knowing how to begin a school year, Rachel’s teaching vision
had been shaped through the lens of one particular school building. Almost all of
Rachel’s clinical and substitute teaching experiences had been at Finley, so she felt very
much at home there. She had spent a semester there for the PDS, a semester there for
student teaching, and was one of Finley’s primary substitute teacher requests. Rachel’s
long-term vision was to secure a full-time position at Finley some day. “Finley has a
special place in my heart, and that is where I want to end up” (11/27/07).

Now, no longer at Finley, Rachel hoped that she would soon learn to feel a sense
of belonging at her new school.

I want to get to know this stuff because I’m missing my old staff. I feel like it was
my staff, but I miss everybody there, so I want to get to know everybody here, so
I can adjust and get acquainted and feel like I’m part of this staff...and I mean I
don’t know the school. I don’t know how they’ve done things in the past...and
probably I’ll learn this at the staff teachers thing, too, like kind of how they set
things up or whatever. (8/15/07)
Payson School, about to open its doors for its first academic year, was a magnet, charter, Expeditionary Learning (EL) School, with a curricular center around the arts and Every Child Reads (ECR). Rachel knew she had a lot to learn. “We’re an EL school, we’re an ECR school, and I mean, we’re everything, and it’s like, wow! Where do I even start?”

(8/15/07)

The new Payson Elementary School was the architectural envy of many other teachers in the school district. Situated in the heart of downtown Dellen, it was built adjacent to the old Payson School which was recently torn down due to its age. The old Payson had no green space and was a downtown eyesore where children played outside next to a main downtown street on a small, concrete area. For the new site, the district had purchased enough property to have ample playground and lawn area. This building, now a visual highlight filling two square city blocks of downtown Dellen, would provide a space for children to learn by day, and host community functions in the late afternoons and evenings.

Upon entry through the outside doors arched with stonework from the old Payson, there was a grand, sweeping double staircase on the left. Not something I had ever seen before in an elementary school, my first thoughts were that it would make a perfect backdrop for the musical *Beauty and the Beast*. The left stairway led to the pod of second and third grade classrooms—two of each—as well as a resource classroom for special education. The pod was large and open, with a roomy and comfortable common area with two stations of computers, four computers per station, as the focal point around which all of the classrooms aligned. It touched me to imagine that this airy, sparkling, and inviting
building would soon be the daytime home for children who lived primarily in cramped
downtown apartments. Over 90% of Payson’s students lived in poverty, and many were
transient.

This transience would challenge Rachel in her first year of teaching. She was
shocked later in the year when within a period of two weeks she lost two students and
gained five. She found out about one student’s pending departure accidentally the
evening before the family planned to leave.

I had a little girl who was [an English Language Learner] (ELL), and she didn’t
speak much English at all. And they came for the parent celebration for the end of
our expedition, and it just so happened that the ELL teacher came and was talking
to the mom, and the mom told her that they were leaving the next day to go back
down to Mexico. (2/1/08)

Rachel would soon discover that students would come, go, or both; regardless, it was
going to be her job to help them learn both the classroom norms and academic skills.

Typical of urban schools, over half of the faculty had been there only a year or
two. Several veteran faculty members with ample seniority in the district had voluntarily
transferred over the summer to a new elementary school on the west side of town where
the city was rapidly growing with expanding subdivisions of large, single family homes.
The principal had told me that Payson would need a variance from the district guideline
that new teacher mentors must have five years or more experience. Payson did not have
enough teachers in their building with that qualification to mentor all of their new
teachers. Rachel wished she had a mentor in the building, *before* the school year started,
to help her figure out where to begin.
On August 15, less than a week before her students would arrive, Rachel and I sat in her spacious, new classroom at Payson as she literally walked around in circles in attempts to organize and set up the physical space.

I don't know...I thought, okay, if I get my room ready, then I can look at my curriculum. I don't have my room ready, and it's a week 'til school. So, I don't know where to start...how to set up the room. I don't know where to put things, and there's so much storage in this classroom, too. So if I put it here, will I remember that it's there, or should I put it here? I have to get labels, but there's just so much s-p-a-c-e to put things. I've made a big dent, but I don't feel like I have...and an empty bookcase? (Points) You're not supposed to have an empty bookcase, but I don't have any more books, so what am I supposed to do? (8/15/07)

Without a clear sense of direction in this empty room, Rachel could only envision the children-filled classrooms of her clinical and substitute teaching. Hesitant about the very near and daunting future, she clung to the hope that the children themselves, and their presence in her classroom, would give her a focus.

I think that getting the kids in here and understanding what I really want to do will help me to know how I want to set up my room. It sounds weird that I want kids to be here to know how I want to set up my room, but I think I need to do that. I don't know what else I can do until they get here. And maybe that's just now, like once they get here I'll be like, oh my god, I really wish I would have had everything done. But I don't know what else to set up or do. (8/15/07)

Having resolved that the children would provide her with a sense of direction for her classroom set-up and instructional planning, Rachel focused on what to do the first day. She felt a strong need to take a lot of time the first few days to get to know her students, but she felt pressure within the school culture to immediately begin academic work. "I just think for the first couple of days they should just relax. Because I mean I want to get to know my kids. I don't want to have to do what everybody's telling me to
do for the first couple of days” (8/15/07). To negotiate this tension, Rachel searched for something she felt would not be too academically taxing on the children as they eased into a new school year, something that would help the children get to know each other as they began their expedition, and something that she felt comfortable teaching. In the Finley PDS, Rachel had learned some of the instructional practices that ground learning expeditions, so she felt comfortable using them as a starting point.

We’re supposed to start our expedition the first day of school. I guess if I start with a Building Background Knowledge Workshop that’ll be okay, because it’s just inquisitive questions and kind of just wonderings, but starting everything the first day of school--I just think that’s crazy. (8/15/07)

Rachel firmly believed she needed to spend the majority of the first few days building classroom community. Yet, she questioned how to do that and how much time to spend doing it. Having never been explicitly taught how to structure Day 1, Rachel had all kinds of questions that revealed a tug between her desires and pressures.

Do you overview stuff, like okay, we’re gonna be learning about this, we’re gonna be learning about this, maybe just look at the books, just skim through, see if they have any questions or whatever, do you do that or do you just start, “Okay! First lesson: here we go,” when the kids don’t even really know you? I mean, I think that’s the way it’s gonna have to be because you don’t really have that much time, but...I don’t really want to do that. (8/15/07)

Her vision was to have the first few days be more relaxed, but she felt heavy pressure to begin reading and math. “I guess I just so want to be able to take the time to get to know them, and I’m so afraid that I won’t have that time...you need to start this, you need to get going on this” (8/15/07).
Negotiating Her Pressures

Pressure from Herself

The other second grade teacher, Amy, the daughter of the principal, was a vibrant, energetic teacher with five years of experience. Amy’s confidence, expertise, and efficiency made Rachel feel like she needed to work extra hard to prove herself as a good teacher, too. Rachel noted that the principal “already knows that [Amy]’s a good teacher, whereas I feel like I have to prove that I deserve that position. I have to SHOW that I’m a good teacher” (8/15/07). Rachel feared that Amy’s creativity, energy, and experience-based foresight might suppress Rachel’s confidence to suggest ideas for instructional activities. “I think it’s gonna be hard because she knows exactly what she wants” (8/15/07). To add to this pressure, Rachel was on a timeline to prove herself, knowing she would go on maternity leave three-fourths of the way through the year. “So, that’s gonna be a challenge. Especially at the end of March, I think. I have less time to prove that I should be here” (8/15/07).

After a couple of months, however, Rachel became comfortable and autonomous in her new setting. She no longer felt the need to prove herself. Rachel counted on her teaching partner for curricular support, and Rachel and Amy had “established that we are going to do different things, but yet we can come together to do some things together” (10/11/07). It was simply a matter of time that allowed Rachel to establish her own sense of credibility in her teaching position.
Pressure from Students

Rachel's experiences from the very first days of her school year are best represented in her own written words from her WebCt posting to Annie, Ben, Connie and me, dated September 2, having taught four days thus far.

Date: Sunday, September 2, 2007 1:13pm
Sorry everyone...I haven't been writing...I've had some rough days and when I come home all I want to do is eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and go to bed. I have been in bed by 8:30 every night! Whew!

So a little bit more detail on my first day of school. It definitely started out bad which only caused it to go down. I have a boy with autism in my classroom and his dad brought him to school and he was not wanting to come into the classroom. I heard the para from the other 2nd grade classroom took 15 minutes to just get him out of the car. I was pulled out of my classroom as soon as the kids came in to help my boy with autism come into the classroom. He said he had a headache and wanted to go home for a nap. His dad asked me (in front of [the boy]) if he could take him home and bring him back in a 1/2 hour! I don’t know if he thought this would be better but it took all of my positiveness to convince him that that would not be a good idea!!! Cheri (my principal) has worked with children with autism a lot so I was trying to get a hold of her for help but it was the first day so it was very hard. So I spent the first 1/2 hour of the day with Keith outside of my classroom while my kids bonded with the special ed teacher who was in my class doing morning meeting. I went back in the classroom at about 9:35 and the special ed teacher took my spot with Keith out in the hall. I had 25 minutes with my class and then I had to take them to little sessions that other teachers were giving on the expectations for the school. For example we sat in front of the bathrooms and listened to a teacher (along with the other 2nd grade class --so about 40 students trying to listen to one teacher in a loud open area -- about how to go to the bathroom). It was pure chaos and I didn't even know my students' names to tell them they needed to pay attention. After we went through those sessions it was time to use the restroom and go to lunch. The kindergartners took a long time to eat which put the rest of the grades late which meant we had to wait. I had about ten minutes to eat lunch and that was the only time away from my kids since we didn't start specialists on the first day! The afternoon was crazy and that is a wrap for my first day of school!

My second day went better. The instructional strategist got an earful (not a mean one) from me Monday after school and so she was in the room in the morning for a while. It was going good then. It still takes them ten minutes to
line up to go to the hall/bathroom/anywhere, but I have started taking a minute of their recess time for every time they have to sit back down because they can't line up. Let's just say on Thursday they had to sit on the wall outside for five minutes. They didn't like that too much.

Thursday day was great...well as great as it could be for having Tuesday be the worst day. I stuck to my expectations and we went over them before doing anything. We have not done any curricular things besides math (since we can't get behind on Math!!). So this week we will be starting Spelling and large group reading. I don't expect to start guided reading for at least 3 weeks! My kids can't handle that at all!

We started expedition on Friday and they loved the mystery piece. We are doing Butterflies and they are enthused! I am hoping that this week will be better and I am trying to stay as positive as I can.

Ben -- I am so happy for you that you have a great class! Know that I am jealous, but I wouldn't trade my class. I know that they will come around.

In another entry dated 10/31/07, Rachel revealed her two primary coping mechanisms to the other three first year teachers in the study and me: (1) coming in early to avoid taking work home, and (2) sharing teaching stories with the third grade teachers.

Date: Wednesday, October 31, 2007 7:05pm

Sorry I've been so bad at getting on here and writing my thoughts and fears... I have been so busy with my class during the day that when I get home at night I don't want to think about school. Tonight is the first night in a long time that I have brought school stuff home. Now, don't go thinking that I don't have stuff to do; it's just that I get to school around 7 so that I don't have to take things home. I feel more prepared when I get to do my planning in the morning. My kiddos are slowly coming around. I don't feel as though I can say that I like coming to school each day, but I MAY be slowly getting there. I love the people I work with and that HELPS SOO MUCH!!! The third grade teachers that I work with are a riot and we always have a good laugh at the end of the day. Our kiddos always seem to leave us with some story that we can share together at 3:45!! ;)
Two weeks before Rachel wrote that WebCt posting, I asked her how many students she had on her current roster. She replied with a chuckle, "Fifty....Nineteen."

Her students were "coming around," spending more time each day engaged in instruction. Rachel noted that classroom management was still a challenge for her. "It just seems like everybody has their day. If one person’s having a good day, the other person’s not. There’s always at least somebody who’s not doing anything to follow directions” (10/11/07). Their behaviors frustrated Rachel, and this frustration made it difficult for Rachel to find energy to motivate her through the day. “I’m frustrated by 9:30 and they’ve only gotten here by 9:00” (10/11/07).

Rachel sought help to relieve her frustration and increase instructional time. She felt she needed someone to assist her when the behaviors of the students were too difficult for her to handle alone in the classroom. Rachel noted that other teachers at Payson, including her teaching partner, had expressed the same concerns at a faculty meeting. “That was Amy’s question too. What DO we do? What are the procedures for this?” (11/27/07)

Rachel forged ahead as she attempted to teach without stopping for multiple interruptions. She read to the students without flinching as she escorted a child who was disrupting the group back to his seat. A few minutes later, as the same student stood on his head near his desk and made loud grunting noises, Rachel escorted him to the hallway just outside the door, where the boy made faces and large arm and hand gestures at the students through the door-length window.

Rachel: I mean, he was IN THE WINDOW, doing all sorts of things…but I don’t have anywhere else to take him. I don’t have time to go all
the way down to the office; I don’t have an associate that can take him out...that’s my biggest problem all the time because I don’t have anybody in here to help me discipline. And if I call somebody, then he has to sit there and disrupt my whole class until they get up here to take him out. So that’s really frustrating.

Deb: That’s what I was wondering when he went out. Is there a place that he goes to, or...

Rachel: Well, I usually put him up at the tables, but then they’re messing around and not doing anything there.

Deb: So you wish...

Rachel: …that I could have a better plan of what to do when I need help, besides calling someone. And I don’t. Like I could go over and get Mr. Smith, but usually he’s in the middle of working with a group of kids, so I don’t want to interrupt him, take him away from his group to ask, “Will you take one of my kids?” Sometimes, if I see the special ed teacher over here, I’ll take them in there and set them right in there when she’s in there, which works sometimes, but if she’s not in there…and the BD teacher is over in the corner; if I see him in his room I kind of take them down there, but a lot of times I don’t see him in there either, so I don’t have a choice but to just sit ‘em right out there until somebody comes.

Deb: So, how often does that happen? I mean, is it a daily occurrence that somebody’s out there – at least?

Rachel: Oh!! Multiple daily occurrences. (10/11/07)

Rachel felt overwhelmed and alone as she struggled to find a way to make her classroom a place where children could learn. Out of respect for the principal, Rachel felt that asking her for help would not be the best solution because she was busy with so many other things. So she asked Kay, the instructional strategist, for support and encouragement for both herself and the children.

Kay is amazing. I don’t really talk to the principal a lot, because her plate is full and she has enough going on without me having to go down there every day, whereas I feel like, the instructional strategist, I CAN go down to her any time I want, and she (snaps finger) is right there. Like, when I need a student taken out, I call her. And then, she’s also the one I send them down to when they’re having a good day. So, she’s on both ends, kind of. She’s like my out-of-the-room associate. (10/11/07 SR)
Kay suggested strategies that Rachel could use in her classroom to reward positive student behavior. Kay suggested a punch card system whereby groups of students who were following directions would receive a punch on individual cards. Rachel noticed that the students quickly responded to the punch card system.

Those are positives. Like, Group 1, 2, 3, 4... you know, if they’re all ready, like if I say, “Get out your math books,” and they’re all ready, they get a point. As a group, they would get a point. And then over here, the “I did it!” chart, they have sheets in there with 1 through 20 on them, and for every time they personally do something, like if they bring back a book, or something like that, they get a punch. And once they’d have 20, they’d have lunch with me, have me call home, or go tell another teacher in the school. But it’s been raised to 50 because they’re doing really good on it... yeah, the first week or two, I didn’t ever think they were going to get to 20, but, now, it’s like, they’re reaching 20 every other day. So, I’m going up to 50 now. (10/11/07)

Rachel also noted that keeping track of all of the punches was cumbersome, and was thankful that Mr. Smith, the paraprofessional in Amy’s classroom, helped her with the recordkeeping. “So, after like three days he’ll say, these kids have five punches, these kids have ten, whatever. So, that’s kind of nice that he does that, too” (10/11/07).

Although Mr. Smith was technically assigned to work in Amy’s classroom with a boy entitled for special education services, he assisted Rachel with instruction and for handling behavioral challenges whenever he could. “When the kiddo is gone that he’s supposed to work with, Amy said he can come over here, which is really nice, because I don’t have an associate at all... so he’ll come over during centers in the morning, and that’s really helpful just to get them on task, to get them doing things” (10/11/07).

Rachel struggled most when trying to work with small groups, and she negotiated this pressure by structuring small group time when she could have another adult in the room to focus on the children with whom she was not directly teaching.
My kids are not independent enough to work by themselves. They just can’t do it. They’re worrying about what everybody else is doing; they can’t worry about just themselves. So I’m interrupted so many times. Even though I go through literally every step of what they’re supposed to be doing, they can’t do it because they’re so worried about what everybody else is doing. (10/11/07)

Rachel’s greatest consideration when planning for instruction was how to teach with the least disruption possible. “So when I look at things, I plan for management. It’s the biggest thing” (11/27/07). When she anticipated that she would be interrupted by children who did not understand how to do an activity, particularly with the scripted math lessons, she modeled the whole activity through first.

I think, ohhhh... I really don’t want to do this lesson because it’s going to be chaotic, but I try my hardest to try to find the best way possible that it’s going to be less chaotic. Like today we played a game, and usually you just model, “Here are the pieces; here’s what you do.” No. I modeled EVERY STEP of the game. THEN I had somebody come up and play the game with me. You go the extra mile because you want them to know exactly what to do so you won’t have questions. (11/27/07)

Guided reading instruction was an even bigger challenge for Rachel because she had no paraprofessional assistance during an hour block of small group rotations. While she instructed one group, another would be in the common area outside her classroom. “So I’ll say, okay, read pages one to three, but then I’m not monitoring their reading because I have to go out and help kids on the computer” (11/27/07). Frustrated with the sole responsibility of managing students who needed supervision but were not with her in a reading group, Rachel admitted that guided reading was the first thing she would remove from her daily plan on days where there was a late start or early release due to inclement weather.
In October, reflecting back to how she felt so overwhelmed with behavior concerns the first few weeks of school, Rachel noted that she was now able to focus more on instruction and less on handling disruptions. She realized that although she needed and valued the help from the instructional strategist and the paraprofessional, she had made some changes within her own teaching that helped things go more smoothly throughout the day. She kept trying new things in hopes of finding the best solutions, admitting that although constantly changing the routine created confusion, she could not keep doing things that were not working.

(Giggles) I guess I hoped they’d be further, but I’m happy for where they’ve come from. I can’t be disappointed about how far they HAVEN’T come. They’ve definitely reached part of my expectation. It’s hard because I keep changing the routine to make it better, and then they have to adjust to the routine. But if I didn’t change the routine then it’d just be chaos anyway. So I guess I just have chaos all the time because I keep changing things. So by next year November, maybe I’ll have a consistent routine! (11/27/07)

One strategy that Rachel changed was to acknowledge positive behavior of individuals rather than of groups. “There would be one person who wasn’t getting ready at all, and then I couldn’t give that group a star. So now I’m doing just more personal, individual achievement. So if you’re ready, you get a star” (12/17/07). In order to motivate individuals to receive her recognition, Rachel pointed out positive behavior in peers, saying things such as, “I like how the people are quietly getting their things out; they’re not doing a lot of talking” (12/14/07). Often she identified positive behavior with specific students’ names. “Carla and Keith are showing me that they’re ready. Beth is showing me that she’s ready. Brian and Keith are showing me that they’re ready. If you need a model, look around” (10/10/07).
Rachel tried different strategies to help the students transition more efficiently. She rang a bell to signal that it was time to move to the next reading center. She also helped them focus during transitions by challenging them to make the switch within a certain time frame. “And then we need to go to our first math station. So, you have one minute. Let’s see if we can do it in one minute” (12/14/07).

Rachel tried to help the students accept more responsibility for their actions. In mid-October, I heard her tell a student. “You have two choices. One: to do what we’re going to do; or two: to leave. What’s your choice? Good choice” (10/10/07).

Deb: So, you gave him two choices. You can either make a book, or...
Rachel: Go to the office.
Deb: And is that pretty typical of what you do?
Rachel: Mm, hmm.
Deb: Just give them choices? I mean, for everybody? Or just for him?
Rachel: No. Everybody. Everybody. (10/11/07)

Rachel also tried to motivate students to think ahead about being responsible. “This is a time when you can show me that you’re going to be responsible” (10/10/07). She offered special--more delicate or expensive--materials to students who thought they could use them responsibly. “You know what? I have these really cool crayons. Raise your hand if you think you’re responsible enough to use my really cool crayons” (10/10/07).

Rachel noted, however, that these strategies would not motivate all of her students. She had discovered that several of the students in her classroom were afraid to fail. Sometimes they would shut down to avoid potential failure. Realizing this, Rachel began to purposely use the words “try your best” as she gave directions and observed them at work. By December, Rachel was not even aware she was saying these words
several times during instruction. She incorporated the “try your best” language primarily into her verbal and written expectations for student work.

Rachel: (Holds up a student’s self-portrait)  
Students: Oooooh!  
Rachel: I like the polka-dot dress.  
Students: Me, too!! I’m going to put that on mine.  
Rachel: So it looks like this person tried hard as well...(showing them HER drawing) I can’t draw noses very well; I’m trying really hard, though. Noses aren’t my strength. (12/14/07)

As long as you do your best. That’s all I care about, remember? Remember our rubric...to get a 4 you need to fill up your paper, do your best work, which means you’re going to try your hardest; words or pictures in the background describe me, it looks real – no stick people in your portrait. (12/14/07)

**Acting Upon Her Students’ Needs and Strengths**

Although many of Rachel’s students were afraid to try certain things, she noticed that most of them loved anything to do with music or drama. She could not believe how well they could remember new things if she presented them in song or with rhythm. “I couldn’t remember what the fourth and fifth [verses] were. (Snaps fingers): Right there! They knew exactly what it was. I couldn’t think of it, for the life of me, but they sang the whole song: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5!” (10/11/07) So after being given a set of “Dr. Jean” CDs, Rachel was thrilled to find a corresponding website filled with musical ideas for the classroom.

Deb: And where did you get that idea from?  
Rachel: drjean.org. Because at the beginning of the year, [the principal] ordered us Dr. Jean CDs. We got three of them, and I went on there one day to get words, and it was on there. And that’s where I got the whole Halloween thing, too...and she has monthly things that you can do, and that was one of the monthly things. One of the monthly things was tips for lining up, for getting things out...so
anything that I can do that I can find, they love. She’s awesome! Have you ever seen her CDs?

Deb: No.
Rachel: (Gasps widely) Just a sec! (Goes to get CDs)
Deb: They’re your new favorite thing?
Rachel: Oh, my God!....We’re incorporating music and stuff, and these are all initiative things: Birthday Song, Dismissal Line-up – that’s what we do – Have a Seat…like we do the Macarena Mac every day (to the tune of One Little Indian): “One, Two Three, Four…” Like we do 1s, 2s, 5s, 10s… ’Who Let the Letters Out?’ is hilarious! Who let the A out? (Short A sound): A, a, a, a, a. I know Amy went to a conference of hers, and she came home that night and she was like, “I bought ALL the CDs!” This one’s Amy’s, but I think she has more. Yeah. They’re way cool. (10/11/07 SR)

Rachel began to adapt other daily routines as well to better meet her students’ needs as the year went on. For example, she noticed a pattern that every day after recess, the instructional time was more chaotic than during the rest of the day. “We don’t have recess until 2:00 in the afternoon, so it’s a long time. So I started doing exercises. We’ll take our chair and do bends down and stuff, and get up on the chairs, and they really enjoy that” (12/17/07). Another thing she started doing more often was simply reading aloud to the children. This was something that Rachel thought was important, and something both she and the students enjoyed. “I read a book. That’s how I was raised. You read a book. My kids love to listen to books. Love it. So whenever I get a free moment, I read a book. They just sit there so peaceful. If I could read for eight hours and they would sit, I would do it because they LOVE just listening to a story” (11/27/07).

Rachel was learning more about her students’ strengths and challenges. Students wanted to show her what they knew, and when they showed her, she was pleasantly surprised. “He had his hand up EVERY TIME! And it AMAZED me because I didn’t…I would have never known that he knew all of the vocabulary. (10/11/07 SR) She also
discovered that the students empathized with each other and seized opportunities to help one another.

And it was funny. Today I asked for volunteers to read, just because on their report cards, they have “Volunteers to read” as one of the assessments, so I kind of just took notes to see who had volunteered to read, and it was amazing to me—the people who can’t really read were volunteering. Which, I’m not gonna say, “No,” and it was cool because their partner would help them out. Like, my little Shelby... *a, the, in* are basically the words that she knows. She volunteered to read... and her partner said each word, and she could say it. So she didn’t, and at first I didn’t like that, because, you know, she’s not reading, but then I thought, you know what? If it gets her through it—if she feels proud that she could volunteer and that she could read, then that’s all that matters. Because I know that she can’t read, but that she can show her class that she can read; that’s fine. So, it was kinda cool to see, and the girl who helped her out is usually the one who would say, “She’s not reading it! She’s blah, blah, blah!” So, that was the one who was helping her, so I was really impressed by that, too. And, it’s funny, because the ones I think would be my most challenging kids are the ones that help — that CAN read — and WILL help the other ones out. So, if it builds them up to be able to do that, then that’s awesome. (10/11/07)

As the year progressed, Rachel looked for opportunities for students to help each other, and in turn help her. She proudly noted that students who got their work done early would work with students who needed help on the computers. “That gives them a little responsibility, too, and they love it. They love helping them out, which is nice” (2/1/08). This peer help served two purposes: to build community and to help Rachel with management. All of the students had something to do so she could focus on her small group of students for guided reading.

**Pressures Produce Low Energy**

Although Rachel had identified her students’ needs and strengths, the current context of her life—the pressures of being a new wife and a fatigued, expectant mother, along with the challenges of being a novice teacher in a challenging setting—greatly
reduced her energy level. "I go to bed at like 8:30 because I’m so dead tired" (10/11/07).

During her professional development school semester at Finley, Rachel was bubbly and full of life, but now she dragged herself through the day. Rachel had to find ways to cope with her exhaustion.

Her ability to improvise as she taught was one key to negotiating these pressures. "I’m so improv in this classroom... I plan main ideas, but this stuff? I guess I’m not a very good planner; I’m just a more of a... I know what I’m gonna do and then I just go off of that" (10/11/07). Rachel improvised during instruction for three reasons: (1) she was good at it, (2) the energy that it took for her to teach left her with little reserve to plan outside the school day, and (3) she wanted to spend the early evening time with her new husband.

I am just so overwhelmed every day with the class that by the time the end of the day comes around, the last thing I want to do is stay here at school and plan. Especially when Mark’s working nights right now, and he leaves at 6:00, so if I don’t get home before 6:00, I don’t see him until the following night. Because I leave before he gets home. (10/11/07)

Rachel typically talked for a while with the third grade teachers after school, and then left—without taking work home—to begin her 30-minute commute. She had more energy in the morning, thus found the early morning time more productive than when she was worn out in the evening. "I have to get here at 7:45 every morning so I can get my stuff done, because I don’t want to take it home" (10/11/07). She realized that she was sacrificing things in her classroom by leaving things at school, but she considered her quick and empty-armed after-school departure a matter of survival during her first year. She apologized, “There’s my disastrous desk. It’s never clean. Never, ever. I can’t ever
clean it” (10/11/07). Upon trying to find a blank student progress report to show me, she admitted that although she knew she had one in her file drawer, it might take her a while to find it because she had not yet put labels on her file folders.

Although Rachel enjoyed occasional days away from teaching to attend professional development sessions, she disliked the huge amount of planning that it took to prepare for a substitute teacher. “I think it’s almost harder to plan for a sub than actually just to come in. I h-a-t-e planning for a sub” (2/1/08).

Rachel compensated for her lack of time to organize materials and her minimal planning outside the school day by finding ways to make her planning as efficient as possible at school. She relied heavily on the teacher manuals, her fellow teachers’ ideas and resources, and materials from professional development sessions relevant to her current instruction. The combination of these accommodations allowed her to prepare almost all of her lessons before school and during her planning period.

Although Rachel was a creative pre-service teacher, her current life circumstances caused her to choose pre-made lessons as much as possible. The scripted and ready-to-go lessons in the teacher manuals—lessons the district expected her to teach anyway—provided her with considerable relief. “I like MacMillan because it’s really structured. I don’t have to plan really anything. Monday you do this, Tuesday you do this” (11/27/07).

Her second-grade teaching partner and her third-grade teaching friends also provided her with efficient curricular support. Amy had a lot of books and other resource materials that she shared with Rachel. Amy also offered to prepare and teach phonics lessons one day ahead of Rachel, and then pass on the plans and materials. “Today we did
chunk words, and that's pretty laid out. Amy does it one day, and the next day I do what
she did, so that works pretty well because she just passes it on and I don't have to do
anything!” (11/27/07)

Guided reading was the most challenging hour of the day for Rachel to plan. It
involved planning for three different groups that rotated for twenty minutes each, and
each lesson took her nearly a half-hour to plan. There were no teacher manuals or lesson
plans ready to go for these guided reading sessions, and as a first year teacher, she was
starting every lesson for every group from scratch. She also had to prepare reading
centers for the students who were not directly with her at the reading table, and for these
reading centers, like the lesson plans, she was daily building from nothing. Furthermore,
she faced the logistical frustration of trying to plan instruction around a hodge-podge of
pull-out services that occurred during her guided reading hour. Thankfully, she finally
found a bit of relief in a professional development session in late November.

I just had a guided reading session with Kay Arlen, which was really good. I
haven't put it in place yet. I just got done switching my groups...because the BRI
(Basic Reading Inventory) scores and where they are kind of changes. But it's
hard, because you have kids going out for Title I, you have kids going out for
special ed, you have kids being taken for speech, so you can't plan to have them
the whole twenty minutes because they're going, going, going. And even if you
plan to have them when they come back, then they're late, or they have to go to
the bathroom, or YOU'RE not on time because you're doing other things. So I
just don't like it. But now I have a guided reading plan that I got from Kay Arlen
that I need to put in steps, which I think will help a lot, because I didn't really
know how to plan. (11/27/07)

Rachel explained that Kay Arlen had given her a template for a guided lesson plan,
broken down into time segments. This template was a welcome gift to Rachel, because
now she had something that would guide her planning. At least she would no longer be
Starting from nothing, as she could fill in the time segments for each lesson according to the books she was using for each group.

**Rationalizing the Challenges**

Rachel was exhausted, especially during the first trimester of her pregnancy which coincided with the first two months of school. At this time when she struggled to find ways to cope with the many pressures in her life, she often referred to her students' many challenges when describing her teaching experiences. I wondered if perhaps Rachel was subconsciously rationalizing the challenge of meeting her students' behavioral and instructional needs by explicitly naming and labeling those challenges she faced on a daily basis. Rachel had read the students' cumulative files and talked with the special education teachers and the students' previous general education teachers so that she could understand why the children were presenting so many challenges in her classroom.

Although Rachel explained that the school population was “very high transient, like, Chicago here, Chicago there...very low income, I think it’s like 98% for free and reduced lunch, high 90s...” (8/15/07), she was quick to note that race and status did not affect her instructional decisions.

I worked at Finley for so long that it's not even a thought for me. Because I see them both. I see African-Americans who have more money than some of the white children, so it doesn’t even factor in. So I think that’s a good thing that I can overcome that and just look at them for their abilities and not for anything else. I mean, I’ve never been one to look at somebody because of their race, their status, so...yeah, we’ll see. (8/15/07)

However, Rachel’s interpretations of her students’ abilities, based upon labels primarily of a deficiency model (i.e. inherent in the student) did affect her instructional planning. Rachel gently talked about her students using formal and informal labels such
as “doesn’t speak any English,” “on the spectrum,” “low,” “ADHD,” “depression,”
“gives up,” “lead poisoning,” “passive-aggressive,” “hard for her to take directions,”
“cannot pay attention,” “power struggle,” “physical aggression,” “shuts down,” “very
good,” “very smart,” and “these kids.” Rachel talked about her students lovingly and with
good intentions, sometimes using these phrases to preface her explanations, and other
times providing a complete explanation within a series of labeled descriptions.

...and he’s really low, too. They say he might be having ADHD and depression.
So, Grandma is sole guardian in Chicago. He lives with Mom here in Dellen. And
so, Grandma doesn’t want him on anything. But, I mean, he can DO a good job,
he just...(10/11/07 SR)

And other times he’s like, "Boing, boing, boing, boing!" (makes bouncing
motions with her hand). His mom thinks he has lead poisoning because he’s just
passive-aggressive. He’s very low...he’s engaged for 15 minutes, but after this,
it’s chaos. (11/27/07)

She’s on the spectrum, too. And ADHD. If you sit one-on-one with her, then she
knows what to do. But it’s very hard for her to take directions. You have to give
specifically one step at a time; she can’t do multiple steps in a direction.”
(12/17/07)

“I love him, but sometimes...he has ADHD. I know he does. He cannot pay
attention.” (12/17/07)

“I’m up to 21 students now, and I would say six or seven are very needy...and
none of them are for BD. They’re all on Stage work.” (2/1/08)

Rachel admitted that she struggled to weigh her students’ behavioral and instructional
needs when determining grouping for instruction. In one case, a child displayed behaviors
that Rachel interpreted as potentially detrimental to himself if she placed him in the “top”
math group. She feared he would become too frustrated and give up. Yet, she also
thought it was important to consider the potential disadvantage he might pose to the
others in the “lower” group due to being “so smart.”
He’s very smart. Especially in math; he’s so smart at math. He could probably be in the top group, but because of his behaviors, I don’t put him in there because he’d be constantly... I don’t know. If I challenge him too much, he’ll shut down and he won’t do anything. For spelling tests, if he doesn’t know the first word, he won’t take the rest of the test. He shuts down. So that’s why I have him lower, because I don’t want him to get frustrated, but I still want—he can give the answers all the time. Like addition problems—he’s just whipping them out.... He’s very good at math....see, he can get it right away, and then he just blurts out the answer. (12/17/07)

**A Win-Win Solution**

Rachel was extremely frustrated with her math instruction. Although she expressed appreciation that the lessons she was supposed to follow according to the teacher manual were well-laid out, her students were not making the progress she had hoped they would. It bothered her that her students did not have their math facts memorized. She also felt she could not meet all of their needs through whole group instruction. Her students were not keeping up to the district math pacing schedule.

Rachel was concerned that her students’ math computation skills were below grade level, and felt a sense of urgency to provide support that they may not be getting at home. She justified the drill-based review by noting that her father taught her math facts this way, and she needed to take the place of the father for some of her students.

They’re all still using their fingers, which I’m not against, because if you can figure out the answer, then that’s fine. But...they’re ALL still using their fingers. These things should be starting to come naturally (snaps fingers). And I know math was really hard for me, but my dad was anal about math. There were so many nights when I would just have to sit at the kitchen table with him and get run into the ground with math. So, I know what some of them are going through, I guess. But some of them don’t go home and get that help. (12/17/07)
The district math curriculum was not a program that focused on memorizing facts, yet Rachel believed that her students needed to be able to compute more quickly in order to solve the complex and open-ended problems posed in the math lessons.

Math is so structured for Trailblazers...it’s alright. I just realize that the kids are not...I know that it has a spiraling [curriculum] so we can only spend so much [time]...I think right now we’re supposed to be done with Unit 7 by tomorrow, and we’re starting Unit 7 next Monday. So...(giggles)...ah, well, you can’t really keep on track when none of your kids are getting it. Because even if it does spiral around, you want your kids to at least have something. (11/27/07)

Rachel’s teaching partner, Amy, also wanted to make some changes in her math instruction. Together, Rachel and Amy created a plan whereby they would team, including instructional assistance from the paraprofessional, to teach math through small groups and math stations.

Starting Monday, we’re also starting math groups. We’re putting both [classes] together, and there’ll be eight groups. Both of the teachers will teach a lesson, and then we’ll have a support group, so they’ll do the extension kinds of things, and then there’ll be a games one, and then the DPPs, and the math facts one. So I’m hoping this will work. (11/27/07)

The math lesson Rachel would teach to each group would be from the manual—the same one she would use if she taught the whole group at a time—but adjusted in the difficulty level of computation according to the students’ developing skills. Rachel reflected, “We’re thinking our kids aren’t getting as much because it’s whole group” (11/27/07).

Rachel believed that spending twenty minutes with four students at a time would be better than spending sixty minutes with everyone because she could observe, diagnose, and instruct to individual needs immediately.

She was right, and she was thrilled. She had found a solution to make her math planning efficient as well as effective. Rachel appreciated how the new math lesson
structure was “all laid out. I can come in the morning and know exactly what I’m going
to be doing” (12/17/07). She expressed pleasure as this new structure made her feel like a
better teacher.

With this, I feel like I can actually understand what they’re understanding. I
KNOW when they’re not getting something. I love it. I LOVE it! I can almost
work one-on-one sometimes with them while the other three are working on
something. Oh my God, it’s so much easier. And if I do the lesson with them, then
Mr. Smith will do the extension activity or the worksheet that goes with that. So
instead of my hour being me standing up and giving a lesson for 45 minutes, and
then giving them the practice for 15, and none of them knowing, and me walking
around like a crazy person because none of them know what they’re supposed to
be doing, this is so much easier. (12/17/07)

The paraprofessional also appreciated the new structure, as it engaged the students more
effectively in instruction. His role shifted from the disciplinarian, and the person who
provided extra help to those who Rachel said “didn’t get it,” to a proactive instructor with
more autonomy. He saw positive results, and affirmed the teachers’ new plan with
feedback. Rachel shared her interpretations of his feedback.

There’s a lot less behavior problems than if it’s whole group …and he knows my
kids, so that helps, too. I think he does enjoy it, because he has the power out
there to decide what to do, which is good. And he always comes back in saying,
“They all got it! They all got it!” Which is sooo rewarding to me because this is
really working. Before it was, “Okay, take it out to Mr. Smith. He needs to
explain it to you.” And now they’re all getting it; they’re all flying through it.
(12/17/07)

This small group math structure helped Rachel feel more proficient as a teacher.

She was relieved to be able to keep up with the district pacing schedule, even though she
was spending one third of the time that she used to in direct instruction with students.
“I’m not going to get behind when I’m doing small groups, because I KNOW what I’m
going to get done” (12/17/07). Rachel also noted that she was more confident that her
students would be able to complete the frequent curricular assessments with both accuracy and pleasure.

And they loved it. Meera goes, “Your baby’s gonna love doin’ this!” And I’m like, what?! Where did THAT come from? She LOVED it, which makes me happy, because it’s an assessment. So I hope they’re going to know how to do it now. If I really look at the assessment, and I know what they’re going to do, I can teach it. (12/17/07)

The creation and implementation of the new small group math structure was a pivotal point in Rachel’s beginning teaching. She finally began to feel connected to both the curriculum and her students.

During a focus group in February, Rachel shared her joy for teaching math. While the other three participants struggled with math instruction, Rachel reported, “I love my math groups. I could do that all day” (2/1/08). As others listened curiously, Rachel explained her team’s math structure and its success.

Math, we started math groups...LOVE IT! OH! My kids’ math scores have gone up way higher than they were because I don’t do whole group anymore. I started out with four groups...the four groups got to be a lot to plan, and the less planning I have to do, the better, so I keep the two high groups in my room and do a thirty-minute lesson, and the other two groups go out. One does math practice, and one does Kathy Richardson, and then THEY switch after fifteen minutes. And then I get the low kids. And I do the high kids first so that if I mess up the lesson, they can still follow me. Whereas with the low kids, I know already with the high kids what they didn’t get, so I know what I really, really need to go into. So, it works really, really well. On the assessments, I’m now getting Ms [Meets expectations] and Es [Exceeds Expectations] instead of all Ns [Nearing Expectations] and Bs [Below Expectations]. (2/1/08)

Teacher Identity in Question

Now halfway through the school year, Rachel’s students were much more engaged in instruction than they were at the beginning of the year. She had figured out structures and strategies to help them learn. Although Rachel felt more comfortable with
her teaching, it bothered her that she still preferred to leave her work at school. She saw that other teachers—even veteran teachers—took big bags of work home every day. She enjoyed teaching during the day, but she wanted to spend her time at home with her new husband, and relaxing so she could recuperate energy for the next day.

As many teachers with whom I have talked also openly admit, Rachel questioned whether teaching was in her long-term future. “Mark will ask me, well, what do you want to do? And I say that I just want to go to a job where I don’t have to take anything home. I want to leave the job there” (12/17/07). She was particularly concerned about how she was going to balance her new role as a mother, especially knowing she would put closure on her first year of teaching while her newborn was at childcare. “If I go on my due date and I take six weeks there will only be four weeks left of school, which isn’t too bad” (10/11/07).

Rachel wondered if she questioned her long-term commitment to teaching, or if she just missed Finley so much that she was not developing the sense of belonging at Payson that she had felt at Finley.

I just miss it. And I think that might be holding me back from being more into here. I’m trying; it’s not like I’m not doing things because it’s Payson, but I just really like Finley. It has a special place in my heart. I’m not saying that Payson won’t after a year, but I just had so many things at Finley going for me that I miss that. (10/11/07 SR)

Rachel always made it apologetically clear that she did not dislike Payson; she just loved Finley. “Not that I don’t feel support here…I just feel more familiar and safe there. Not that I don’t feel that here…” (11/27/07). A new magnet school, housed in coveted facilities and furnishings, and with grant funding for all kinds of new instructional
equipment and materials, was not as important to Rachel as the relationships she had already established at Finley. “The resources probably aren’t as much as I get here…but I just feel more camaraderie there…I think I could do without the tangible things if I felt more at home and more support there” (11/27/07).

Sources of Support

As Rachel worked to find ways to motivate her students, increase her planning efficiency, and help her reflect upon her long-term career plans, she turned to her best friend from college and her new third grade teaching friends at Payson. Although Rachel’s husband provided her with personal support, he lacked understanding of Rachel’s world of teaching. She admitted that it “doesn’t really help to talk to him, because he has no background at all” (11/27/07). Beth, however, could empathize with Rachel. They went through college together, shared an apartment, and then both became teachers. Beth had secured a job at a local middle school, and she and Rachel shared their school stories daily. “I have that half hour drive home, so I usually call Beth to get it out of my system so when I get home I am done, and Mark doesn’t have to hear about it” (11/27/07).

During the school day—particularly right after each day of school—Rachel found her strongest support and empathy in the third grade teachers.

The third grade teachers are definitely my relief. And I think also for support for ideas and stuff, because we kind of bounce things off of each other. And laughing about funny stories that happen. Like, every day after school we have a little pow-wow out there and we just tell funny stories....(10/11/07)

Laughing, Rachel added that “we all pretty much think that we’re all just holding on as best we can and keep on going through the day! Just keep truckin’ through!” (11/27/07)
Needing a Break

By February, Rachel began to wish that she could have a fresh start with a new group of students the following year. However, this would not happen, because all of the teachers at Payson looped with their students, meaning they taught them for two consecutive grade levels. Rachel’s students’ behaviors challenged her patience and energy level, and she had a hard time imagining another year with the same group. “For this year I’m not really liking the looping. I’m not” (2/1/08). Looking ahead to when she would get a new group of students, she worried as well. “And I look at the kindergarten class and I think, ‘I am not going to get a break! They’re crazy!’ And that’s who I get in two years” (2/1/08).

Late in her pregnancy, Rachel coped by looking forward to her maternity leave. Even though it overwhelmed Rachel at the beginning of the school year, and made her sick and exhausted as a beginning teacher, she admitted that she was glad she got pregnant when she did. “I’m ready for my six weeks. I think it’s God’s plan that I got pregnant THIS summer, because I really need the six weeks” (2/1/08).

Rachel needed a break. Her job was now harder than ever due to the current make-up of her class. Her classroom was ever-changing due to the high student mobility rate. “I’ve lost two [students] and gotten five in the past couple of weeks” (2/1/08). A student had recently transferred in—a student with a history of conflict with another student already in Rachel’s class. At the same time, a student transferred from a different school, and his file also had documentation of behavior challenges. The chemistry between three students in her classroom had a negative impact on the whole class that
was unprecedented this year. “The behavior of those three and others joining is definitely the problem in this classroom...and I’m only one person. If I had only one of those three kids, fine. If I only had one of them—I can handle that. But I can’t handle all three together” (2/28/08).

Rachel was only one person, yet she was simultaneously a new wife, about to be a mother, and a teacher whose days were filled with tension. Her husband understood her struggles at school and how anxious she was to have the baby. He knew she needed a break. “He sent me flowers for Valentine’s Day, and the card said, ‘One light pink rose for our daughter who’s on her way, a dark rose for the years we’ve been married’—(laughing) he rounded up to one—‘and the orange flower is to get you through the afternoon’” (2/27/08). Her husband wasn’t the only who understood her challenges at school. “And a parent volunteer came in here, and she’s in here a lot and she knows this class. She said, ‘Oh, honey, you’re going to need a lot more orange flowers than that’” (2/27/08). Rachel, unable to sleep at night and physically uncomfortable during the day, had an even harder time dealing with her frustrations at school. “I hope [the baby’s birth] happens on Sunday because I’m kind of gearing up like this is my last week here. I so don’t want to be here. I’m so uncomfortable” (2/27/08).

**Only One Person**

Rachel was uncomfortable not only in body, but in spirit. She was uncomfortable with the expectations placed upon her daily. “I’m supposed to get these kids off of Stage Three and get them on an intervention, but I’m only one person; I can only do so much” (2/27/08). Rachel felt uncomfortable asking for help from others, fearing she would be
judged as an inadequate teacher. "So it's kind of frustrating. At Finley, they have [a
student intervention specialist]. They have this guy that can come in and get the student
or that can talk to them and take the time to do that" (2/27/08).

About a third of the students in Rachel's class were "good and followed directions
probably 98% of the time" (2/27/08). Occasionally after a time when students were
cooperative and productive, Rachel surprised her class with free time.

Sometimes when we really get something accomplished in math or whatever, I'll
say, "You know what? You guys did awesome in math! We're going to take a
bathroom break, and we're going to come back, and you can get out something to
do like drawing or coloring a picture," because they love to do that. (2/27/08).

Rachel felt bad for those students she describes as compliant 98% of the time, because
often they lost privileges along with the rest of the class.

The first grade invited us down to their expedition celebration. We lost it. I said
we could have gone down, but they were out of control, bouncing around the
room and talking extremely loud. I said, "Sorry. We will do guided reading. You
just lost going down to first grade." They were like, "Uh! Come on! It's not all of
us!" "You're right. It's not all of you. But I can't send half the class down. I am
only one person. I cannot split myself in half." And I DO feel bad....But what am
I supposed to do? (2/27/08)

Emotional, tired, and frustrated, Rachel hit a low point mid-February. She yelled
loudly at her students, "SECOND GRADE!" Rachel admitted, uncomfortably and
apologetically:

I had a whole big huge breakdown. The special education teacher was in here, and
the sub over here (points next door) was in here, and the third grade teacher was
in here, and I was bawling. They were saying, "It'll be okay." We honestly
couldn’t come up with anything to do. They’d say, "Try this." And that's when I
decided, okay, I'm not going to get frustrated. I'm not going to yell. I'm just
going to take it like it is, and we'll see how it goes. (2/27/08)
Rachel’s goal was to be more tolerant of her students’ behaviors—to not let their behaviors upset her so much. She appreciated any support she could get from colleagues and parents in her endeavor to help her students learn to respect themselves and each other. “It’s ‘Shut up!’ or ‘Don’t touch my desk!’...or ‘Don’t touch me!’ or ‘He kicked me!’” (2/27/08)

One day a parent spent nearly two hours in the classroom to see how her daughter was behaving in school. “I had one parent come in here today and sit with their kid...she had her crying back here at her locker. She had her up against the lockers, and she said, ‘You will not behave like this. I should not have to come into school because you don’t know how to behave. You know how to behave.’” (2/27/08).

Rachel’s challenges went beyond student behavior. As a classroom teacher, she experienced an excess of “busy-ness and tedious stuff” (2/27/08) that she had not dealt with as a college student or substitute teacher.

...the specialists ask if they can change their time, the nurse has to get dental sealant time in, the librarian comes in to tell me that this kid didn’t return their books, and I can’t keep track of 21 students, nor can I be responsible for their actions....They say first year teaching is going to be hard, but I had no idea that it was going to be this kind of hard, tedious stuff. In PDS we’d do lesson plans and we’d get to teach it. There’s not anything that interrupts you. Like the scheduling, I mean you would figure it out, and we would figure it out, and we would do it. Go to this class, go to that class. Even in student teaching I didn’t get that. [The cooperating teacher] liked to know what was going on with all of that, so I didn’t handle it. The interventions stuff--I didn’t handle that. (2/27/08)

Rachel, frustrated with the many pressures of classroom teaching that she tried to learn about and balance all at once, thought perhaps a teaching position where she could work with small groups all day would be better. Yet, she acknowledged that every different teaching position has its challenges.
I don’t think I’d like to be a Title I teacher, though, either. That’s a lot of reading plans. I’d like small groups, I think; I think. I don’t know. Like I almost think I’d like to be a special education teacher, but then that’s a lot of work because of the IEPs. But then they have the small groups. They don’t have the whole class. (2/27/08)

She thought that at Finley it would be easier to be a classroom teacher. She would have the student intervention specialist’s help if she needed it. She also would feel like she could let her professional guard down more than she could at Payson. Other than with the third grade teachers, Rachel felt uncomfortable to share her frustrations, and feared that discomfort was not going to go away.

Here I feel like I shouldn’t complain because it’s not that bad. It IS that bad. So I just think the overall easy-going kind of culture. I mean, they’ll help you out, but I don’t feel comfortable talking to people. Maybe it was because I was at Finley for two years, kind of, and I just feel more comfortable there. But I’ve been here for almost a year every day. (2/27/08)

Rachel limited her adult conversations to the third grade team and the second/third grade special education teacher because they were “not uptight about anything” (2/27/08). She stopped going to the teacher’s lounge for lunch. “I don’t like eating down in the lounge anymore. I don’t feel like I can talk. So basically, the third grade teachers and I and [the special education teacher] will all eat lunch together.” (2/27/08)

A New Life

Rachel sent me this ecstatic email on March 15, 2008. Her baby had been born just three days earlier.

Deb-
I went in on Monday morning at 1:00 and stayed until 8:45 when they sent me home. Went to school on Tuesday and called the doctor....Dr. Bunge saw me and said he would induce me on Wednesday morning!!!! Mark and I went in at 7 a.m....and she was born at 11:52!!! It was wonderful!!!!I'll attach some of my
favorite pictures. OH...her name is Katelyn Jane. She weighed 8 pounds even and was 21 inches long. We came home yesterday, on my birthday! Talk about a wonderful present! Mark and I survived our first night and she is still alive. :) :) Better go and get some feeding done! :) How ironic that on February 27, the day of my last interview with Rachel, with frustration she repeatedly pleaded, “I’m only one person.”

Now Rachel had a new life. I called her on the phone when the baby was six days old. Rachel was enjoying being a mom, noting that it was still surreal, as if she were “babysitting someone else’s baby 24/7” (3/18/08). However, Rachel was having a hard time fully focusing on her daughter, as thoughts of school concerned her. Upon the principal’s request, Rachel had met with the principal shortly before her maternity leave to discuss her teaching and life challenges. The principal asked Rachel if she intended to leave teaching, to which Rachel replied, “I have a lot of stuff going on in my life, but I’ve never said I was going to quit” (3/18/08). Rachel wanted things to be better at school, but she also wanted to savor the first weeks of her daughter’s life without the stress of wondering what others were thinking about her teaching, or what stresses she would face upon her return to school late April.

During the first week of Rachel’s absence, her substitute teacher and the paraprofessional struggled to make the environment conducive to learning—so much that the principal planned to come into the classroom each day to help build community and set expectations. This support was what Rachel needed long ago, but she was hesitant to ask, fearing she would be judged as incapable of handling a classroom on her own. Rachel reflected upon her teaching as she held her new baby girl in her arms. Rachel wished everyone would understand how challenging the student composition of her class
was, and acknowledge that she had tried everything she could to help them cooperate and learn.

Rachel’s Final Stressors and Her One Release

Hey all-
I’m doing pretty good. Stressed from all of the end of the year things plus other stuff. But Katelyn is getting me through it all! She can’t wait to meet all of you on the 4th!! Yeah!!
Rachel (5/17/08)

Rachel’s return to work was difficult. Her students’ behaviors challenged her more than ever, and Rachel just wanted to be home with her baby. The teacher who substituted during Rachel’s maternity leave agreed that her class was exceptionally demanding.

“I had [my long-term sub] write a letter and tell about her experiences while I was gone, because nobody believes me that this class is horrible....I’m just so glad the year is over” (6/4/08). Rachel got through the “end-of-the-year reporting, like putting things into their curriculum folders, their problem-solving folder...all these folders,” (6/4/08) and had no trouble detaching from her students at Payson. She only cared about one child now.

“I can’t wait. Today I was driving the car and I said to Katelyn, ‘Just today and then we get to spend time together!’”

As for the fall, Rachel was “99.9% sure I do not want to work at Payson....it’s not a good situation” (6/4/08). Rachel’s eyes slowly welled up as she admitted, “Physically, emotionally, and mentally, I cannot go back there” (6/4/08). With retrospective disbelief, Rachel shared details with the other participants of her challenging context during the last month of school, calling her experiences horrible and unfair.

I kept thinking...when I was at Finley, I was the number one sub there. They called me all the time. I did two long-term subs there. I subbed there all the time. I
had no problem. The teachers loved me. And then all of a sudden I go to another school which is the same students, and all of a sudden I’m a horrible teacher. How did that happen? (6/4/08)
CHAPTER IV

BEN

Honestly, if I'm not a teacher...just being a role model for kids...I mean, I think I was just born to do that, honestly. (9/20/07)

Ben Miller was one of two male students in the thirteen-member PDS class of Fall 2006. A striking, clean-shaven, athletic, young man with neatly cut, nearly black hair, Ben walked into the PDS room at Finley 2 years ago wearing a crisp button-down shirt, a pair of neatly-pressed khaki pants, and a bashful, humble smile. Ben was the only person in my 10 semesters of teaching the Finley PDS who called (and still calls) me “Mrs. Fordice.” All of the other students called me by my first name--the typical way students address their instructors at Riverside.

I watched Ben persevere through his first PDS teaching unit: chemical testing with third graders. Ben’s group of eight students fought, refused to engage in the activities, and talked back to Ben. Ben respectfully never raised his voice during instruction, but instead talked privately with students to learn what the causes of the disputes and disengagement might be. Upon debriefing with me back in the PDS classroom, Ben spoke tenderly of the most disruptive students, asking how he could best help them. Now a first-year teacher, Ben reflected back on how he persevered through those initial clinical teaching struggles. “I know you can’t let things ruin your day. When I was at Finley...kids were disrespectful to me, and you just can’t take things personally” (9/20/07).
Ben did not expect to face those instructional challenges in his first teaching position at fifth grade at Sunnydale Elementary where he had spent a couple of months as an Americorps worker. The students of Sunnydale, a school five miles outside of town, had a reputation of being wholesome, rural farm children.

I did my Americorps there for a month and a half about a year ago, and from what I know it’s mostly farm kids or rural kids, and I know the transportation is mostly bus, so I’m thinking everyone lives out in the country. I mean, that’s just from my personal opinion right now, and just what I’ve heard people talk. A lot of people’s kids come to school with scrapes or bumps on their arms, so, you know most of the kids are outdoors, outside rather than just being in the city. And I’ve heard the kids are great. I’ve talked to a fourth grade teacher out there, and she said the kids are just wonderful out there. I’m excited already to start. (6/13/07)

Ben noted that he grew up with the same circumstances, affirming that Sunnydale was a good fit for him. “When I was a kid I was always outside until dark pretty much, playing sports or running around with the neighbors, not causing any trouble, but I was always outside having a good time” (6/13/07).

From little on, Ben was a “good kid” (9/21/07). His mother was a parochial school kindergarten teacher when Ben was in elementary school, so Ben had little choice but to be compliant. “I wasn’t really bad because my mom was always around school so I really didn’t do anything bad” (6/13/07). In fact, Ben admitted that being around school all the time caused him to develop a great respect for teachers and eventually led him to become a teacher himself.

Growing up, I was always in the school system. I went to a parochial school, and my mom was a kindergarten teacher there, so just going there before school and after school and just developing relationships with the other teachers, I mean that right there is my experience. That’s why I want to be a teacher. Those teachers just had an influence on my life; just the respect level I had for them....I was
always there just talking to them about things and the school system, so I kind of liked growing up in the school setting. (6/13/07)

Ben, feeling “really blessed for now” (8/15/07), envisioned Sunnydale to be a place where he could teach children how to respect and be respected, just as he remembered from his own grade school days. He anticipated minimal challenges such as those he faced at Finley as a PDS student, or at Wilson or Payson as an Americorps worker. “I think from what I’ve heard the kids there are really respectful, so I think things are gonna be good from the get-go” (6/13/07). Focused on starting the year perfectly, Ben thought often about what the first moments of his first day of school might look like. “I think about that every night—just how as soon as the students step in that door the first day, how I am going to interact with that, and set expectations right away, so I constantly think about that” (6/13/07).

After the first day of school, Ben shared with Annie, Rachel, Connie and me that his students were even more respectful than he imagined they would be. As the other three participants shared their struggles on our WebCt page, Ben thoughtfully softened the opening and closing of his otherwise unbridled and upbeat story.

It must be Sunnydale.... I had an awesome first day!! The kids were very respectful and polite. It felt like my best teaching day at PDS (X) a 100! I give total credit to the fourth grade team at Sunnydale for creating wonderful students. Honestly, I could not have asked for a better day. I hope it stays this way....We went over procedures and they came up with consequences if they broke the rules. I even got in a reading lesson and a math lesson. In math the kids were conducting their own survey on their shoe eyelets. As the teacher I discussed key vocabulary words for the lesson. I helped them with the two variables in the survey but after that I let the students go free....I told them as a class they need to figure out the next step. It was amazing to see the students work together to retrieve the data. I believe the constructivist approach was taking place in Mr. Miller's class. It was hard not budging in....I don't know, maybe I just had a lucky day and tomorrow won't be so great. Even so, my
students today have motivated me to become the best teacher I can be. (WebCt, 8/28/07)

On the next day—the same Day 2 where Annie was at Mile 18—Ben’s students’ angelic compliance continued to amaze him. “We practiced walking through the hallways: perfect” (8/29/07).

Ben attributed the positive start to his first year of teaching to more than a respectful class. He felt overwhelming support from a variety of sources: his own parents, his friends, his college instructors, another young male teacher at the same school, his veteran-teacher mentor, and the entire Sunnydale faculty. One of Ben’s first tasks was to set up his classroom—half of a small trailer behind the school—with the help of his mother and father. “And my parents plan on coming up for maybe three or four days just to help me get organized, and I’m really excited about that (smiles) because I think, you know, having that support through your parents, well, it’s great” (6/13/07). He envisioned that as the school year progressed, he would readily ask college friends and teachers for help. “I just feel like Riverside College, if I have a problem, I can just come up and talk to anybody on the staff, just anybody, like the friendships that we’ve made over the years” (8/15/07). He also took comfort in the fact that a young, male teacher, a former Riverside peer, would join him on staff at Sunnydale. “I also feel like just having another male out there, he’s as young as I am, so that’s gonna be great, too” (8/15/07). Ben counted on guidance from experienced staff at Sunnydale. Even before the school year started, Ben had met his mentor: an on-site, veteran female teacher, who “said if you ever need anything, feel free to ask....She sounded like she’s there for me if I ever need anything, so it sounds like I have great support out there” (8/15/07). Ben noted that “the
whole entire staff is great. I can just about go to anybody if I have a question” (9/21/07). Ben optimistically entered his first year of teaching in a context that promised to be filled with respect and support.

A month later, Ben continued to marvel at how smoothly teaching was going. He struggled to adequately express how pleased he was; his first month of teaching had actually surpassed his brightest vision.

It’s honestly everything I pictured it would be and better right now. I knew there would be, I guess, I don’t know, everything’s going smoothly right now, everything’s fallen, I mean, I don’t even have the right words to say! It’s just perfect right now. I mean, the kids are great, staff’s great, the respect level between teachers and students is wonderful. (9/20/07)

The majority of Ben’s clinical and Americorps experiences were in schools—including Annie’s and Rachel’s—where many children needed explicit guidance and encouragement to care about themselves and others. Therefore, he did not take for granted the respect his current students immediately showed toward him. “Maybe the kids are so respectful to me, that I LOVE teaching right now…even if I was in a LaMont or a Finley or a Wilson, I think I would still love it. But it would definitely be harder” (9/20/07).

Role Model

Ben became a teacher to be a respectful role model for young children. The week after he accepted his first teaching position, he identified that “being a role model and helping them make good decisions, both academically and socially, is what I’m looking forward to” (6/13/07). Ben viewed his own elementary teachers as role models, and enjoyed being a role model for young children when he was in high school. “It was a K-12 school setting, so just being a role model in the school system for the younger
kids....We were always interacting with the little kids...so I felt like I had a really positive influence over kids" (6/13/07). More specifically, he wanted a chance to impact children like himself who needed some guidance during early adolescence. Ben’s vision was to mirror the teacher who helped shape him to become the respectful young man that he is.

If I were to think back to then as a teacher, I would be really disappointed in myself, because I was kind of being the class clown, causing trouble for the teacher, and she really turned me around....I think she had such a high demand for respect that I think it really turned me around both academically and socially....I think that kind of turned me to be more of a leader in the classroom instead of a follower, so that’s what I’m really looking forward to do: turning the kids into leaders rather than followers. (6/13/07)

Ben acknowledged the supportive Sunnydale community—parents who were positive role models as well—as key to his vision to shape his students into respectful leaders. “After meeting the parents on Monday I caught a glimpse of where my students come from. Two words come to my mind: Family-orientated. I think that makes a huge difference. During one of our community building games, many students had said their parents were their role models” (8/28/07). Ben viewed himself as a partner role model, working with the Sunnydale families to develop another generation of respectful community members.

Within the context of a supportive school community, Ben took the opportunity to help his own classroom of students become respectful, responsible role models for others. “I gave them the talk about being role models for the younger students. We covered playing fairly at recess, lining up at the door, transitioning between classes, raising hands, telling somebody to be quiet respectfully” (8/29/07). Ben smiled
reservedly with his typical humble pride, admitting that “it’s kinda cool to see fifth
graders holding the kindergarteners’ hands” as they escort them to the bus after school
each day” (9/21/07).

Ben’s most clear example for how to be a positive role model as a teacher was
Allen Jackson. Mr. Jackson was one of the few male teachers at the Finley PDS. He was
also a Riverside graduate, and was in his third year of teaching during Ben’s PDS
semester.

Well, I just remember from Finley, Mr. Allen Jackson... he was my biggest role
model. And he would call himself General Jackson for the first couple weeks of
school. And he said, “I don’t care if the kids don’t like me. I’m not here for that;
I’m not here for friendship. I’m here to be your role model; to be your teacher.”
(8/15/07)

Ben admired how Mr. Jackson was both respectful and firm with his students. During
Ben’s student teaching experience, his supervising and cooperating teachers encouraged
Ben to be more strict. Ben, acknowledging his own goal for improvement, believed that
he could draw upon the model he had seen in Mr. Jackson, as well as his “experience at
Finley, and working at the Wilson playground, and just a variety of kids” (8/15/07) to
start his first year of teaching with a firm approach to classroom management.

I think if you get to know your students right away from the get-go, I think your
students are going to trust you as a teacher, and respect you a lot more. And I
think you really have to practice the ground rules, the rules of the classroom, the
expectations, and just make sure everyone’s familiar with that so we’re on the
same page. That’s what I’m looking forward to doing right away. (6/13/07)

Pressures: Image and Instruction

Because Ben had heard about the “good kids” he would teach at Sunnydale, he
felt compelled to be a strong enough role model to maintain that reputation in his
students. During a focus group the week before school began, Ben acknowledged his fear of this responsibility.

Ben: No, I just feel like, you know, we’re at four different schools, yet, I feel like, well maybe it’s my responsibility, like, the secretary looked at my classes. I only have twenty kids in my class, and she said, “Wow...not a kid – no behavior problems at all.” So I feel like, I’m really fortunate compared, I mean, just, you know, maybe compared to what you guys are at right now...you GIRLS are at right now.

Connie: I’ll play devil’s advocate here, Ben. If you don’t have any (chuckles) behavior problems now...what are you gonna do when one develops?

Ben: Well, that’s the thing, I feel like this whole thing....It’s my fault, yeah. (8/15/07)

In addition to upholding the “good kid” image, Ben felt an immediate pressure to meet the academic needs of every student in his class. While Annie, Rachel, and Connie needed to spend much of each day explicitly teaching social skills, Ben’s students already demonstrated the necessary social skills to work independently and cooperatively in a classroom setting.

Ben: I don’t know, it’s just, I mean, my class is so great, it’s just fun, I can joke around with them ...

Connie: That academic pressure is...

Ben: Yeah, it’s all me. Exactly. (9/21/07)

Without behavior concerns, he felt there was no excuse for any of his students to receive poor instruction. After just the second day, Ben realized that his students had different needs, and he made it his mission to plan instruction accordingly.

Already I need to start adapting the lessons for the students. The students who are very intelligent complete their task before I can turn around. Then I have a few students who take a long time completing the task but they can do it. I just need to start taking my lessons to the next level by challenging my higher students. (8/28/07)
Initial Planning and Teaching

Ben quickly developed an efficient, straight-forward, and predictable instructional approach for the subject areas that needed less teacher guidance. He assigned Daily Oral Language (DOL) practice sentences, spelling workbook activities, cursive writing sentences, and math Daily Practice Problems (DPPs) as independent practice exercises. Ben assigned the exercises in each of these practice books in chronological order, writing the daily pages on the board for the students to complete when they were not working directly with him in a small group instructional setting.

I have the kids do two DOL sentences in the morning. That’s the first thing they do when they come in. And then we have this handwriting for cursive packet they have to do, so I assign them two or three pages in it, and then they have this spelling workbook that has different activities with their spelling words so I do that, and we do some math DPPs, or if there’s other, I mean it’s not, yeah, it’s kinda like busywork but it’s actually beneficial for these guys. (9/21/07)

For guided reading, Ben asked a grade-level team member for help to select literature. “I just went off her expertise, kind of her knowledge about small reading groups” (9/20/07). Using the books Miss Heinemann suggested, Ben facilitated literature circles using the strategies he learned and taught in the St. John PDS and during student teaching.

Ben was the least familiar and most frustrated with the district math curriculum. The Trailblazers model of math instruction focused on problem-solving using diverse strategies, many of which were different than the ones Ben learned during his own elementary math instruction, and different than those he learned and practiced in the math methods course and math department courses at Riverside. As a teacher, Ben learned the math techniques right along with the students. He wished he could have been introduced
to it before beginning his job. “If you could have the Trailblazers series ahead of time, and get it in classes at Riverside; teach how to teach the Trailblazers series as a part of a class...I think with my math methods class we just did like little things like I’m not even teaching at all right now” (9/20/07). Feeling like his math instruction was not as effective as it should be, Ben wanted to experiment with a small group approach for math. He and his mentor, who experienced some of the same math frustrations as Ben, discussed a possible structure to facilitate this.

So, here’s our whole idea about the math. We’ve got kids who are done right away with their work and they do the extensions, and then we have kids who are really struggling. So we were trying to think kind of like guided reading: guided math lessons. And I kind of tried that today. She gave me some ideas of how I could have different stations set up for the kids, because I had four different groups. And one station, it was kind of a math game, but it was Connect Four. I didn’t have anything else there to really throw together...it was one of those last minute things...and in one group there was a higher-level thinking book for more extensions that kids were working on...and then one group was up with me at the chalkboard...and I split the kids up like how they were doing math-wise academically so I could focus on, like the kids who needed to work on the mixed fractions, we worked on that, and the kids who were more advanced, like we were working with longer division, and doing remainders, and I loved that. I love that--four or five kids with working them—you just get more interaction. Because I feel like when I’m teaching math, when I have that big circle and I have twenty kids, it’s really hard for them. If a kid’s really struggling with math, they don’t want to be there—they’re off in their own little world and they don’t want to do this, probably because they don’t have the confidence to say it in class. I REALLY enjoy that small group work. So that seemed to go really well. And that’s almost something I can do, maybe twice a week, I don’t know. Maybe I could it more often. (10/31/07)

Ben felt like a more effective teacher during small group instruction. “I honestly loved that today. Just being able to work with the different groups, and then they felt confident, like, ‘Oh! We got this problem!’ And man, they love that!” (10/31/07)

However, as the year went on and Ben had more and more responsibilities and
obligations related to his teaching position, he did not have enough time to create engaging math learning centers. Without meaningful activities for the students who were \textit{not} with Ben for small group instruction, he resorted to teaching math in a whole group setting most days.

He wanted do more for his students, but he was too overwhelmed to get ahead in his planning. "I just feel like I’m grasping for air!...I just feel like I’m drowning some days. Not every day. Almost every day" (10/31/07). It seemed like every time he found time to get ahead, something came up that set him behind again. "I have to move, move, move...keep going! When they’re at specialists, I’ll think, here’s a time when I can get set up, and I’ve got a meeting to go to, or something comes up: BAM. And I get distracted” (10/31/07). Although he realized that the “distractions” were all well-intended to help children, he became frustrated when he could not incorporate new information into his teaching. “And I went to a guided reading session three or four weeks ago, and they gave us different ideas for what we could be doing for guided reading, and it was like, why didn’t we get this BEFORE school started instead of in the middle? Now I don’t have time to get that planned in” (12/17/07). There was no way Ben could learn everything in time to infuse it into his teaching. He had a hard time keeping up with all of the content that he was already incorporating.

It’s really hard, though, when you’re reading and you have four different groups, and they’re reading different books; how do I stay up to beat with all the reading with the kids?....I can’t get ahead of them....Once I teach fifth grade again, I’ll know the books and I’ll be fine. I feel like I’m just trying to survive with that, too. (10/31/07)
Teaching was much more intense and complicated than Ben thought it would be. By late fall, his outlook was no longer idealistic; it was now clouded with disillusionment.

The Onset of Disillusionment

Our interview in October had a completely different tone than the one in September when Ben could not find the words to describe how perfect everything was. Now, the words were simply, “And you know, I thought at first, my class is perfect, but it’s not.” And he quickly added, “but they’re the reason I keep coming back” (10/31/07).

It certainly was not the mounting paperwork that brought him back. Nor was it the many assessments for district curricula, standardized tests, and the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing. The meetings that pulled him away from his classroom more than he desired were not part of Ben’s vision. Ben went into teaching to be a role model for children, but soon discovered that teaching involved much more than that. “Kirsten McBeth, my old principal... was saying, ‘Teaching’s just not the same anymore, Ben. Just be careful. And I can kind of see where she’s coming from now” (10/31/07). Although Ben stated he was “not going to complain about that, because it’s for the good of the children” (10/31/07), he understood now why people were asking him last summer if he was ready for his job.

Ben had no idea the job would be so hard. However, he was not one to give up. He also did not want other people to know he was struggling. Ben had always impressed people with his laid-back nature, an impression that Ben wanted to maintain. “Everyone says I’m a calm... you take things so calmly, you’re so laid back, and well, deep down inside I’m worried. So I don’t like to act fearful, because that would show a weakness a
little bit, so I want to act like I know what I'm doing” (10/31/07). For the first two months of teaching, people around Ben had assumed he needed typical first-year teacher help, so they gave it to him. Now that he was not asking for help, they assumed he didn’t need it, and they stopped offering. “I mean, the support is there; it’s just, it’s there for me if I want it…” (10/31/07).

He did want it; he just didn’t ask for it. All of the support that he felt two months earlier began to gradually fade away. He had little time to talk with the young male teacher. “I thought that I’d hang out with him quite a bit, but I see him for about thirty seconds a day just because he’s in the building and we have different class schedules” (10/31/07). He wished he could collaborate more with his team teachers, and although they “check base—we’re pretty much on the same lesson for math and for our MacMillan stories,” they “don’t sit down and plan things out as a group” (10/31/07). Ben felt alone, yet he knew that if he would ask for help, he would get it. “I really am honestly totally on my own, really….Not that I don’t have the support or anything, but I am pretty much on my own” (10/31/07). He even limited how much he shared with his parents, in fear that they would worry about him.

Still “Good Kids”

As Ben felt overwhelmed and increasingly on his own, wondering whether he was doing a good job, little things like unsolicited compliments from other teachers gave him the boost he needed to persevere.

For instance, the other day, one of my kids who is usually a trouble-maker, one of the teachers said, “Mr. Miller, I need to talk to you.” And I’m like, “Oh, great.” He said, “Your student did the nicest thing. There was an adult coming in, and kids with books, and he held the door for them the entire time and waited for
them.” And I was like, man, that makes me feel good. Little things like that, I mean, that makes me feel good as a teacher, too, kinda saying, well, maybe they really are learning how to behave or be respectful. I mean, that’s what I really want them to do, is just become more respectful as citizens, in the classroom and outside the classroom, too. I think it gets you such a long way in life. If you’re a nice person and you know how to interact, it can make a world of difference, really. (10/31/07)

Compliments from other teachers affirmed his vision and efficacy for helping children become respectful citizens. “I always hear compliments from other teachers, like specialists, saying, ‘Oh, you have such a nice, respectful class,’ which I still like to hear. As a teacher, you don’t always see that side...maybe the kids really are doing better” (12/17/07). These compliments also reinforced his ability to make a good impression on his colleagues, as he was “always worried about what other people think” (9/21/07). Although they may not have known he was struggling to continuously improve his classroom practice, they noticed and acknowledged that his class was a respectful group of students.

At this critical time when Ben began to question how well he was doing as a teacher, these compliments from other teachers sustained him. Parents also gave him timely, positive feedback that boosted his sense of value as a teacher as well.

After parent-teacher conferences, almost every parent said they were glad that my kid was in your class because they enjoy having you as a teacher. So that was a positive experience for me....I always wanted to know how the kids talk to their parents about my teaching. (10/31/07)

Now he knew. The other teachers, parents, and students were glad he was a new teacher in their school.

Ben hoped that he could continue to please teachers and parents as he worked to prepare his students for middle school. Ben, having this group of twenty students for their
last year of elementary school, focused on helping them develop respect for themselves and others so they would be able to deal with potential middle school pressures.

My main goal is to hopefully get fifth graders ready for middle school next year. I know the guidance counselor came in today and she was talking about transition, and I noticed that a lot of kids were maybe nervous for sixth grade, and bullying, and being made fun of, and I want them to feel successful, both academically and socially so they can be prepared for the challenges they’ll face. So I really just want to push the respect level and just being respectful in all areas of life.

(9/20/07)

Ben purposefully infused opportunities to give his students a sneak preview of middle school classroom life. By capitalizing on his students’ desire to grow up, he could also reinforce respectful behavior for now. Ben remembered what his own junior high school experiences were like, noting the high level of compliance necessary to be successful in instruction that was more lecture-based and teacher-centered than elementary school.

Today in social studies, the kids were being kind of loud, and I said, “Okay, we’re going to pretend like we’re in middle school, and we’re going to sit here and we’re going to take notes off the board, and that’s how we’re going to act.” And for the first time, it was like dead silence, and kids were writing down what I had on the board, and we were talking about it. And that actually worked. So I thought maybe I should do a little of that to get them focused, and then maybe we could break off from there. As much as you don’t want to do that, I told them, “In middle school, this is what’s going to happen. You might get a lecture, you’re going to have to take notes, we’re going to prepare you for middle school.”

(12/17/07)

Ben had a three-pronged motive: (1) to get his students to act more respectfully now, (2) to be socially and academically poised for middle school, and (3) to earn respect from his students’ parents and future teachers, who would appreciate his efforts to ensure that the students could listen respectfully and follow directions for whatever work their middle school teachers assigned.
Ben's team teachers and he began a rotation system for math that Ben liked for the same three reasons. They grouped the students into three levels according to their scores on math assessments and the MAP tests. Ben had what he called the "middle group." Ben noted that with the rotation system, more of the students were engaged in the instruction. "There's new faces, and they were kind of intimidated by the other kids, so now they're listening and paying attention rather than feeling uncomfortable" (2/1/08). He thought the transitions from room to room also gave the students a glimpse of middle school.

But Were the "Good Kids" Progressing Academically?

We had our meeting this morning about the state tests, and I don't want to say I'm nervous, but I hope my kids do well. I guess I can use that excuse, like it's my first year of teaching, but I don't really want to use that excuse....I mean, I'll take responsibility for where my kids are at and where they're going. I'm not going to make an excuse of, well....I'll probably feel the same way, too, like you can't teach everything in that small amount of time. (10/31/07)

First year of teaching or not, Ben wanted his students to do well not only on standardized tests, but on the district's curricular assessments and daily assignments. He knew even before he started the year that this responsibility was important and challenging. "I really want the kids to succeed academically, and I don't want any kids to feel bad about not learning in school, so just trying to meet the needs of all the students I think is going to be a big challenge" (6/13/07).

Ben thought about his students' various needs as he planned for instruction, always asking himself "which kid is going to need the most help, and which kid is going to need to be pushed further academically?" (10/31/07) He struggled the most trying to help all of his students learn math.
I’d say the math [is most challenging] because I have kids that are so diverse. I have some that look at the problem and they can do it by themselves. And then I have kids who just really struggle. We’ve been working on mixed fractions and improper fractions...I have kids who still struggle with that, and kids that it’s way too easy for them. And we do the extensions at the end of the packet, but it’s just not enough. (10/31/07)

He blamed himself for not creating more engaging lessons, admitting he wasn’t quite sure how to teach all twenty of his students exactly what and how they needed to be taught.

I almost feel like I’m not meeting the needs of everyone like I should be, but it’s really hard to adapt your lessons for everyone....I guess it’s maybe my problem. I should make the lessons more engaging and more challenging for every student. I guess, just trying to find harder problems? I guess that’s where my main concern is right now. (10/31/07)

Ben’s main problem was that he was trying to teach the whole class at once. Ben felt much more effective as a teacher during small group instruction, but the math curriculum was supposed to be taught in a whole group setting. “I just feel like when I’m teaching up at the board, or using the overhead, it’s hard to keep everyone’s attention” (12/17/07). He asked the district math curriculum specialist for advice.

Carla said, for a math intervention, you could bring those kids over during silent reading time and do some math problems. And today I did that, and that was kinda fun. We were working on long division, the forgiving method. And they really liked that. It was actually Luke and Jim, and just being able to do that they felt successful, and they would see what they did and say, “YES!!” And that is a great feeling, when you’re working with one or two kids at a time, and you can just really focus in on them, but it’s so hard when you have twenty kids. I just feel like I’m not getting anything done. (12/17/07)

A month later, Ben instant-messaged me one evening to give me an update on his progress with his math instruction.

bMiller33 (10:26:30 PM): For math I have been lettings the kids work a little more independently.
teacherteacher47 (10:26:40 PM): Oh?
bMiller33 (10:26:40 PM): I just float around helping others.
teacherteacher47 (10:26:53 PM): That's working well?
bMiller33 (10:27:23 PM): I asked her about things and kind of followed her advice.
teacherteacher47 (10:27:51 PM): What did she do differently than what you had been doing?
bMiller33 (10:29:28 PM): Maybe a little more independent work.
bMiller33 (10:29:37 PM): Letting the kids explore
teacherteacher47 (10:30:27 PM): Okay -- does small group work fit into the picture anywhere?
bMiller33 (10:30:39 PM): Rather than trying to have everyone's attention focused on me. Let the kids work in partners (IM 1/20/07).

Ben appreciated any affirmation he could get that small group work in math was desirable. It was especially important to him that the district math coach had modeled and verbally reinforced exploration and partner work. Ben needed both permission and encouragement to get away from the whole group approach that he used most often for his math instruction.

It was not solely the children who needed math interventions, or extra help in general, that Ben worried about. He also wondered how to challenge “the kids who always get everything done” (10/31/07). “Really, what can I do as a teacher to challenge them? That’s a big issue right now with me” (10/31/07). Ben regretted the lack of time he spent with the students for whom the learning came easy. He felt cheated out of developing a relationship with them. “And the higher kids, they’re on their own. Like Michael. Sadly, I thought of this. When do I get a chance to sit down and talk to him and to get to know him? I feel like he’s not even been part of my life” (12/17/07). The pullout programs for enrichment added to Ben’s feelings of disconnection from his students.

[My mentor and I] both feel like we get kids pulled out all the time, just for little things, like if they’re in a higher level group for science, or little things like
writing, they’re always gone...it always seems like the whole entire class is not there at the same time, so the community is kind of different. (10/31/07)

To add to the frustration, the extra time that Ben spent with what he called the “lower” reading group, at the expense of students who could do their assignments without assistance, was restricted to a specific curriculum—one that Ben thought lacked student appeal and higher-level thinking. “I’m having a hard time with my lower group because you do these comprehension questions, and the book they read, they’re really not into it, and it seems like we’re just going through the steps now” (10/31/07). Ben wanted to spend time enjoying literature with all of his students, regardless of their reading ability. However, the conversations about books were off limits to the students who struggled to read. Instead, they spent their instructional time reading stories from a prescribed curriculum. Throughout his first year, Ben pondered about how he could provide a greater quantity and quality of instruction for his students who struggled, feeling “like they’re not getting enough—like maybe I should be giving more and trying to help them out” (2/1/08).

Ben wanted more than to facilitate math interventions during silent reading time, partner students to figure out math problems, send kids out of the room for enrichment, and read dumbed-down literature with his students who struggled with reading. His real goal was to create a system whereby he could work directly with one group of students while effectively engaging all of the other students in learning. He thought that having a paraprofessional in the classroom would help monitor the students during small group instruction who were not working directly with Ben. “I guess if you had an associate, that would be nice, because you could have them working with a group and the kids would
probably be more on task” (10/31/07). However, this was not an option for Ben, as none of his students qualified for paraprofessional assistance.

Ben knew that he could, without paraprofessional assistance, create engaging learning stations through which his students could rotate during small group instruction. “I remember when Mrs. Midland watched me student teach, and she said I should have centers up around the room for kids to do the learning” (10/31/07). At the beginning of the year, Ben’s mother “had this center book on math games and reading so we created seven or eight centers for them to do, so that helped a lot” (9/20/07), but their effectiveness had worn off over time. “I’ve just got to develop more fun math stations for the kids to do. Those math stations that I created at home, they were okay for a while, but now the kids have done them all, so it’s time to move on” (12/17/07). The centers Ben and his mother had made were primarily ones that individual students used at their desks. Ben wished he had more space in his small portable classroom to set up permanent spaces for learning centers, “…but I guess you just have to work with what you have” (10/31/07).

However, even if he had more space, Ben’s real problem was that he could not find the time to develop the centers in the first place. He did bring in a small table for a puzzle that students could work on if they finished their work early. “I thought that was kind of a nice idea because there’s a lot of kids who get done with their work fast, and the kids who WANT to do the puzzle but they don’t have their work done; they are kind of motivated to do that, too” (10/31/07). The puzzle was something that did not require preparation time outside of class. “So, I DO like doing that, being creative, too, but it’s
just the whole thing about trying to find time” (10/31/07). We both laughed forgivingly as Ben confessed that he “was going to put up a fall bulletin board, but fall’s going to be almost over now” 10/31/07).

Because he really wanted to work with small groups of students, Ben negotiated by assigning individual practice work that was readily available, easy to plan, and that he believed would benefit and motivate his students.

Trailblazers doesn’t push a lot of repetition, but I think students need that. Like the whole idea of doing division problems. Yeah, they understand the problem, but they also need repetition....And maybe I need to look at a different curriculum just for that seatwork. Honestly, the kids like doing that. As much as I thought they would hate doing that, they LIKE solving problems and trying to figure them out. (12/17/07)

Ben needed these practice exercises because he didn’t have enough time to develop and create the learning centers that were his ideal. He rationalized their use, at least for the time being, on his observation that the students actually enjoyed completing them.

Just when Ben was the most worried about whether his students were progressing academically, he received the good news that he needed to boost his confidence. His students’ mid-year Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) scores were higher than the beginning-of-the-year scores for all but three of his students in both math and reading. “I was scared to death, thinking, ‘Please, God...’. They showed some growth, even if it was just a few points. And it’s still just mid-year” (2/1/08). The higher scores were proof to Ben that he really was teaching his students well, even though he felt like he was in survival mode.
Too Many Demands at Once

Early in the year, Ben had a sinking sensation that he may not be able to devote enough time to teaching in the long run. He was barely finding the time as a single man to plan lessons and create instructional materials for the present.

I could spend all night in my classroom just getting ready or preparing lessons... but right now, not having a family, I can spend a little more time. But I couldn’t imagine having a family right now and going home and trying to spend time with the family. It’s a lot of work and you don’t understand—I don’t think people understand how much work it really is. (9/20/07)

As the year progressed, pressures that he had not anticipated arose. The words of his former principal—“Teaching’s just not the same anymore, Ben. Just be careful...”—echoed in Ben’s head as he reflected on his teaching experience thus far.

I guess there’s just so much beyond the teaching part—the actual just sitting down and teaching a lesson....There’s so much paperwork that you have to do, and there’s always meetings you have to go to...I could probably talk on forever about this. I just feel like there are so many little things that you have to do to stay on task with the teaching world, it’s like, where do you find time to actually do things? I should probably talk more about it, but, I don’t know...I feel so overwhelmed sometimes. Well, this is due...get this into the office by tomorrow... things like that. Paperwork. ECR strategies have got to be turned in. My classroom roster; how’s the environment in the classroom; just little things like that all the time that you have to do....All the things you have to do, and all the things you’re accountable for, and if they don’t meet their test results, then what do we have to do to improve, and just little things like that....It’s tough. (10/31/07)

Ben appreciated in-service meetings that taught him new teaching strategies. However, he was too busy trying to do all of the other non-instructional things that he had no time to figure out how to apply his new learning into his classroom context.

When Ben did have evenings without an agenda, he was often too tired to do schoolwork. He found that the demands during the day, such as when “the buses were
late, and the announcements were going on, and the book order came in, and it was Take-
home Folder Thursday” (9/20/07), absorbed all of his energy. For years including now,
Ben worked out daily and was physically healthy. During his college coursework and
clinical work, he had never experienced the pressures he was feeling now.

There's so much you have to do. When you student teach, it's really not that big a
deal. PDS--it's not a big deal. But when you have that entire class of twenty kids,
it's just really tough. It's a totally different ball game when you're the teacher and
you have a hundred different things coming at you at once. (12/17/07)

Ben knew even before the year began that he was going to need to work hard to
get and stay organized. "I have a portable...I have just this little bit of space, and I have
all this paperwork and my hands-on materials, and I don't know what to do with it; it's
just gonna sit there" (8/15/07). A month later, Ben wished he "had another
cupboard...there's a lot of little things that just keep piling on" (9/20/07). Finally,
approaching November, he made a plan to purchase one himself when he had a break
from school.

I just feel like I have so much paperwork coming in, and I'm just throwing it in
the corner of my closet. If I need something, I'm going to be lost, and I don't want
to do that. I want to be organized. So maybe after Thanksgiving break or
Christmas break, when I have some time off, I can get one of those for more
paperwork.(10/31/07)

This need to get a cabinet to store his paperwork was a symptom of Ben's overall
mounting problem. As paperwork increased, the space to pile them decreased, and papers
just got thrown into the corner of the closet. Metaphorically, the paperwork represented
his overall pressures, the decreasing space his decreasing support systems, the throwing
into the corner his survival tactics, and the new cabinet hope for the future. By mid-year,
Ben was looking ahead to Year 2 when he would be able to incorporate everything that was presently unmanageable.

I feel like I could be doing so much more, but maybe that's just the way you feel your first couple years of teaching. I get this idea, like, oh, next time I'll teach it this way, or I hear an idea from a different teacher and I think, that's a great idea. So, I'll just have to wait until next year to do it, I guess. There's so much you have to do. (12/17/07)

**Diminishing Sense of Support**

Unfortunately, the more Ben's pressures increased, the more his sense of support decreased. With each passing week, he felt more alone. Ben had started the year thinking that he would have people in and out of school with whom we could talk and plan: his fifth grade teaching mates, and just about anyone on the Sunnydale faculty for that matter. By mid-year, however, Ben realized that very little of this support remained. "It's just frustrating, I mean, I still like going to school each day, but it's just the same thing over and over....Honestly, I don't feel that support. I just feel like I'm kinda lost" (12/17/07).

Some of the in-school support systems that Ben had envisioned had not fully evolved. The young male teacher was in the same school, but not readily available for support. Although Ben respected the older faculty members at Sunnydale and had turned to them at the beginning of the year for advice and resources, he didn't relate very strongly to their teaching styles. Many of the faculty members at Sunnydale had been there for several years, so he had little day-to-day contact with novices like himself. He wanted to nurture his own developing approaches, and he longed to share his experiences with other new teachers.
I like going to the first-year teacher meetings. There are some pretty cool people my age, and we can kind of talk about how the day really goes. And that’s AWESOME. I love talking about that. It’s just nice to be able to talk with someone your own age. A lot of teachers have kids older than me, and I can’t really relate to that. I’m so used to...like I have to teach like my mother, or my father. (12/17/07)

Back at Sunnydale, Ben had no opportunity to observe other teachers that could help him apply what he had learned in college to his classroom. Furthermore, his physical classroom placement that he used to view as a positive place of privacy progressively felt more like an exclusionary location of isolation.

I honestly feel like, being in a trailer, it’s my classroom and every once in a while someone will come in to get a student, but it’s kind of nice because I’m left alone. People have to walk out to come and get to me. (9/20/07)

The guidance counselor, Angie George...at the beginning she was out there making sure things were going okay for me, and she was glad I was out there, which made me feel good. I just feel like I’m in my own world out there. (10/31/07)

During a focus group in February, Ben explained his predicament to his fellow first-year teachers. “I don’t see anybody. It’s just me. It’s so lonely. I don’t see anybody unless I go inside at the end of the day. I feel so lonely” (2/1/08). Removed from the action within the main school building, it was easy to forget about Ben.

Ben also had envisioned that he would plan instruction with his teammates like he did during PDS and student teaching. That did not happen, and he missed it. “I’m so used to doing that: sitting down with somebody and going over lesson plans...I really just feel like I’m by myself. I mean, it’s fine, but right now in my life I kind of need that support and that guidance” (12/17/07). In Ben’s typical respectful manner, he was quick to add that “they’re both great ladies.” They got along well, and he knew they were always
available to answer his questions, but Ben really wanted to plan together and share ideas. It was daunting for Ben to realize that he was responsible to plan everything for every day, all week, all year, by himself.

Ben needed even more than to team for lesson planning. He needed to talk. Ben wished he could “just sit down with another fifth grade teacher and plan; to just sit down and talk about things; but I don’t. I mean, everyone else has their own life” (12/17/07). Alone in the trailer, Ben missed the professional companionship to which he was accustomed.

He was discovering more every day about life on his own, and missed the structure that others provided for him while he grew up, and most recently at college.

I honestly miss having that structure, like in college, where you have to do this, like even though it got stressful at times, PDS is nothing compared to what it’s like in the real world. I was so used to having that structure. Okay, I have all my stuff; I have to do this. But now that I’m in charge, I’m not used to that at all. It’s totally my responsibility and I think, “What do I have to do?” I’ve heard people say that teaching and life is like finals week ALL the TIME. It really is. There’s always something going on. It’s crazy, and it’s hectic. That’s kind of what life is. It’s like finals week, really, when it comes to teaching. (12/17/07)

Gone were the days of syllabi and scheduled classes. Ben not only had to figure out how to plan his own instruction; for the first time ever he had to figure out how to plan his own life. Although it felt like finals week, he was far from completing anything. He was just beginning.

But without the relationships of close-by family and friends, he had no idea where to begin. His good friend with whom he frequently socialized and shared teaching experiences at the beginning of the school year was no longer part of his life. Ben noticed
that the end of that relationship coincided with the beginning of his sense of
disconnection with his other support systems.

It’s just so different not having someone to sit down and talk to about your
problems. It was nice when I could sit down with Allison and talk about things.
Honestly, as soon as we stopped talking, that’s when school was not the same.
And that’s when I was writing on the WebCT all the time, and things were going
good. Now it’s just like, ugh. I feel kind of like the grinch, almost. (12/17/07)

For the first time in his life, Ben found himself alone—a potential grinch—without a
tangible network of friends or family. Everyone had moved to different towns after
graduation, and he was hours away from home. “I don’t know how to say this. All my life
I’ve had friends growing up…and it’s just a totally different world when you don’t have
them. When my brother and my friend were up here this weekend, honestly, it was the
best weekend I’ve had in probably two or three months!” (12/17/07)

Feeling increasingly alone both in and out of school, and searching for a sense of
direction, Ben found comfort at weekly church services.

And I’ve been going to church, and honestly, that’s a big part of my life. I go to
mass, and I look forward to it. I love going to Sunday mass…and just having that
kind of relationship with…a lot of people my age don’t have that; they don’t go to
church at all. My brother hates going to church. My friends don’t even go to
church. But I enjoy going there. I feel like I’m going to have a better week at
school. I feel at peace with myself. Is that kind of sad that I…? (12/17/07)

His final, hesitant, and incomplete question (wondering if it was sad that he…), and his
omission of the word “God” as he described his deepening spirituality, encapsulated his
human state of loneliness and his reluctance to admit to it. Ben had been thrown into
more than first-year teaching. For the first time, he was experiencing life on his own, and
it was an enormous challenge to face the demands of teaching and loss of constant human
companionship at the same time. And there was almost nobody that he could talk to about
any of it. "This is a transition in life. This is the first year on my own, really. You almost need a year of that to survive, too, before you start teaching. It's totally different. I'm on my own, really. I don't have any support. Honestly, this is as much as I get to talk about things right here. Me and you. This is what I need" (12/17/07).

There's a Will...But What's the Way?

Despite his lack of support and companionship, Ben forged ahead. He remembered his parents' advice to "'just work hard, and good things will happen.' I totally agree with that. It's just knowing what to do that's the hardest part. I WANT to do things better, but I don't know WHAT to do" (12/17/07). Ben thought all the time about what he might do to be the best teacher he could be, but wasn't exactly sure how to apply the ideas that he had. "I just always feel like I'm thinking and thinking, and then...it's just hard to fine-tune" (10/31/07). He had vague and broad theoretical understandings that he was still figuring out how to apply in his classroom. "And then the whole side of the constructivist approach...I mean, I'm still learning that whole approach, too. Because it's hard for me to not tell them the answer, and let them go back and figure it out by themselves" (10/31/07). Ben had read articles about constructivist teaching and developed student-centered, constructivist lessons to teach his small groups during PDS. However, he struggled to apply constructivist principles with his whole classroom. He knew he was still learning, yet he wanted to be a good teacher right away. In the meantime, he experimented, applying what he could.

And the whole idea of multiple intelligences...I've got some ideas for whole group reading. We've got auditory tapes, and I'll pull a few kids in who have a hard time reading so they can just listen to the tape....And then for one of our small reading groups we did a kinesthetic thing where they had to act out – one
Ben acknowledged his status as a learner as well as a teacher. He appreciated staff development sessions that he hoped would extend his understandings and make up for gaps in his pre-service learning.

It’s also nice how the district provides these district days with a lot of different activities, like the different reading strategies, because like I said before, I didn’t have my reading endorsement, so there’s a lot of things that I’m just picking up too, and I have no idea, so I feel like I’m a student still while I’m teaching. (10/31/07)

He tried to be patient with himself, but wanted to maximize every one of his students’ learning experiences now. He wasn’t exactly sure what every one of his students needed, and wondered whether he should know that by now.

That’s the thing about trying to adapt your lessons to the different levels the kids are at. I suppose you get better at that the longer you do it, too. But I’m still trying to figure out where my class is at and what they’re good at. I still don’t have a good...I mean, I know where some kids are at, I mean you can see sort of where they’re at, but I’m still trying to learn exactly where they’re at. I don’t know how long that really takes. (12/17/07)

With his parents’ voices in his head—“just work hard, and good things will happen”—Ben experimented to find his own teaching style and systems. He was most comfortable planning lessons just a few days before teaching them. “It seems like no matter how hard you plan things, it seems like it’s gonna change...usually I set up for two or three days ahead of time just so I can get ahead of myself, and that seems to go pretty well” (10/31/07). Ben found it difficult to fit in everything he was supposed to teach. So, he made choices about the relative importance of the different topics within the
fifth grade content. He tried hard to come up with creative ways for his students to learn the skills that the district’s fifth graders were expected to learn.

I don’t feel like what we’re doing is not worthwhile. I mean, for fifth grade, they push newspaper articles, and it’s the whole idea of trying to find time. Because I have kids and I [say], okay, I’ll assign you a topic, and you can go from there. It could be sports, or weather-related, or what’s going on in the school like an interview. And we’ve had the opportunity to do that. It’s just...I don’t know...maybe I need to make a set time that no matter what, we’re going to do this. (10/31/07)

Ben became comfortable integrating reading strategies into other subject areas. “We did Native Americans, so we just had tons of nonfiction books about the different Native American groups, and the kids absolutely LOVED that!” (12/17/07). However, often the creative methods took more time than completing practice exercises from texts. Ben felt pulled in two directions: (1) to design instruction that addressed the district’s curricular goals in creative, engaging ways, and (2) to complete ready-made practice exercises from workbooks and textbooks to ensure that his students learned all of the skills for which he would be held accountable. “I’m trying to incorporate more of the English lessons. Today we did singular and plural nouns, and I’m trying to fit in little things like that to fill in more time, so there’s no dead time, like the whole idea of trying to get in every academic minute there is” (10/31/07). Through hard work and determination, Ben applied what he understood for now, acknowledging that he was learning how to better plan and teach all the different subject areas as the year went on. He thought it would be nice to specialize in fewer subject areas, having recently heard about other fifth grade teachers in the district who “just teach three sections of math and two MacMillan courses...it would make planning so much easier” (2/1/08).
Being a Male Elementary Teacher

During our very first interview back in the summer just after Ben had accepted his job at Sunnydale, he admitted that much of the reason he got the job is because he was male. It even outweighed his lack of a reading endorsement.

I mean, to be honest, in the Dellen Community Schools...unless you’re a male like myself, it’s gonna be hard for anybody to get a teaching job without their reading endorsement because every time, even when I was at Sunnydale, when they talked to me, they said, well, we really don’t look at anybody without their endorsement, but since we knew you, and you’re a male, and you’re a nice guy (laughs)...we’re gonna give you a shot at an interview. (6/13/07)

The interview team members at Sunnydale were not the only people who thought it was good for a school to have male elementary teachers. During a focus group in August, Connie, Rachel, and Annie used words like “good,” “thrilled,” and “cool” to indicate their support of more male teachers at the elementary level. However, they really didn’t explain why they thought it was good or cool, other than the fact that there aren’t many male teachers.

Ben: Do you have any males at your school?
Connie: Yeah. Actually, a bunch.
Ben: Really.
Connie: Yeah!
Rachel: That’s good.
Connie: Yeah! I’m thrilled!
Annie: (To Ben) Do you?
Ben: Yeah, well, Dave Wendt...he’s at...
All: Oh! Really! Great! (etc.)
Rachel: Oh, he is, is he at Sunnydale?
Ben: Yeah. And the PE teacher, and the music teacher, so...
Annie: Well, that’s cool.
Connie: Two of the three third grade teachers are male, and my daughter gets one of them, and then a second grade teacher, so they’re all in the lower grades, too, I’m like, that’s really cool! You don’t see a lot of guys signing up to teach six and seven year-olds. You just don’t. (8/15/07)
Unsolicited, Ben offered his interpretation of how the students were responding to him as a young male teacher. “I think being a male influence with the kids...I feel like the kids enjoy having me... and in an appropriate way I’m always kidding around with the kids. (10/31/07) Ben added that “not everyone has a good male influence in their life at home...it’s just different how they act toward me...other classes, too. I’ll say hi and they say, ‘Oh, I can’t wait to be in your class, Mr. Miller!’” (12/17/07) Ben’s vision was to be a positive male role model for all of the children at Sunnydale. He recalled that “just having different coaches and different student teachers in my class, I looked up to them so much, just being a role model and having that male influence. I thought they were the greatest guys in the world” (12/17/07). Ben wanted to make the same impact on children that the positive male role models made on him in the past.

Ben was glad that he was not the only male teacher out at Sunnydale. He anticipated that he would need another man to talk with about the hard work of elementary teaching that most of his male college peers had not understood.

...and he’s only a year older than me, so you know, not to be biased or anything, but just having another male to talk to sometimes helps a little bit, too. I’m looking forward to that. It’s nice, because a lot of my friends, besides my PDS friends that I had at Riverside, I mean...having another teacher to talk to is great because they really don’t know what’s going on in the classroom, and they think it’s kinda like baby...I mean, you hear, Ben, it’s just teaching. But it’s a lot of work, and a lot of responsibility, so, just having that support, someone to talk to, if there’s a problem. Just getting it off your chest—that’s what I’m looking forward to. (6/13/07)

Ben added that it had never bothered him that most of his peers in his teacher preparation program were female. Sometimes there were only one or two male students in a class of
fifteen, but he had “always been around education, so that was kind of acceptable. I guess
I was so used to it, I didn’t really know any other way” (12/17/07).

Nevertheless, Ben was relieved that Dave would join him on staff at Sunnydale so
that Ben could “talk to him in more of a guy way rather than talking to a woman”
(12/17/07). In fact, at the Sunnydale holiday staff social gathering, Ben ended up being
the only male present. After a few pleasant hellos, Ben chose to spend most of his
evening at the bar with his brother and friend from home rather than socialize with all of
the women. Without his niche of male teaching companions, Ben felt distant from his
staff. He envisioned how difficult it would be to blend into any new staff without feeling
close to at least someone to talk to—subtext: someone male to talk to.

I felt so out of place. Dave wasn’t there because he had a game, no Michael
[music teacher], no James [PE teacher], no guys were there...if I went to a
different city and didn’t know anybody, I might have a hard time going back to
teaching Year 2 without the support of having someone to talk to. I can see how
easy it would be to be turned off. So easily. (12/17/07)

Ben, alone in the trailer all day with his increasingly hormonal fifth graders, often
attended music, PE, and recess with his students—places where male teachers were
present.

I just feel a lack of maturity with my fifth grade boys. Their way of flirting is
awful and they’re in each other’s face....During gym class I always stay with
them, and for music I hang out with them once in a while, and for recess I come
out there and hang out, and if a kid accidentally knocks a ball away, they get mad
and start crying. They don’t know how to act. (2/1/08)

While this “hanging out” with his class during recess and specialist times gave Ben an
opportunity to observe his students in different settings, Ben also viewed these times as
chances to be around other male teachers for companionship and to observe their
interactions with his students. Earlier in the year he had commented about Dave’s high energy level and how much the students adored him. “The teachers say, ‘I can’t stand being with Dave because he is so full of energy!’ He’s hilarious! But he’s good with the kids, absolutely, they love him. He’ll give them high fives all the time, and he’s good” (9/21/07). In the fall, Ben teamed with the music teacher to coach flag football. This gave Ben a chance to interact with another male teacher as well as some of the other children in the school outside his class.

A Family Approach

Ben defined various faculty roles in terms of family members according to gender and/or age. Rather than assuming responsibility for every aspect of teaching his students, particularly his female students, he thought it was healthy for children to have brother figures, mother figures, and father figures in their lives, working together to support the students’ development.

Because of his young age, Ben defined his role as the brother figure. “It’s different how they act toward me than they would toward an older male. I still feel like I’m really young. They have brothers or sisters my age. Sometimes they talk to me like I’m their brother or sister” (12/17/07). Ben’s ideal role as a member of the Sunnydale family extended beyond the school day. “Even if it was something outside of the classroom. If it was a family setting and they asked me to do anything, I would help them out” (12/17/07). Ben pinpointed how his relationships with some of his high school coaches and teachers who would “all go out to Dairy Queen or something like that”
shaped his brother figure image. At the same time, he acknowledged that his brother figure role did not suffice for everything his students needed.

That's where I get that family orientation. And as a brother figure, I honestly feel like the students are like my younger brothers or sisters, and that's how I look out for them. Hopefully that works, but sometimes I honestly feel like they need someone more mature to handle situations. (12/17/07)

Ben had no intention of assuming all of the responsibilities for counseling the girls in his class. He didn't view this as a fault or lack of skill on his part. In his ideal family approach to teaching, there were simply some things that female teachers could handle more delicately. In Ben's family approach, the women in the building assumed the role of the mother.

Sometimes I feel like they need a female in this situation. Not that I'm not a loving, caring guy—I do—I care about every kid in my class. I'd do anything for them. It's just how to handle certain situations; it's almost like being a Mom figure; they would know how to handle certain situations. And I'm still just a young guy (chuckles). (12/17/07)

Ben thought it was good that the fifth grade team had a male teacher and two female teachers. Depending upon the situation, the students and teachers could decide who would be the best person(s) to handle it. "It's nice to have two other female teachers around to be mother figures so the girls can go to them with their problems, because I don't know about girl problems. There are certain things I don't know" (12/17/07). Ben also felt that he needed to hold back showing affection to his female students—showing affection was something the mother figures could do but he could not. "Sometimes students need that mother figure in their life so they can show that affection, which I really can't. I try to listen to your problems, and I can tell you this, but it's totally different coming from a male" (12/17/07).
Not only did Ben feel like he had to hold back affection when interacting with his female students—he felt like he needed to purposefully maintain a distance from them.

Ben detailed the uneasy feeling he had one day when a girl in his class wanted to stay in for recess.

Ben: For example, they always say you should never be alone with somebody, but today, there was a student named Callie, and I also thought about this, like what if someone walked in? I was at my computer and she was standing at her desk. She didn’t get her homework done, so she said, “I’ll stay in and get it done.” And that was her responsibility. So I said, “It’s alright, you can go outside.” And she said, “No, I’ll stay in and get it done.” I guess you always hear about bad things that happen. I would never want to be in that situation where someone would think that. So I never really give hugs; I always give a high five or a handshake.

Deb: Is that because of their age or because you’re male?
Ben: Male. And that’s just how I act, too. Even though if a little elementary kid would come up and give me a hug, I would probably do that, but if a fifth grade girl would come up and hug me, I would never do that. It’s always a handshake or a high five. I know Annie talked in her class about giving a hug or a handshake each day, and as much as kids want to be hugged, I would never do that at all. It’s always a handshake or a high five.

(12/17/07)

Ben was caught between wanting to be a nurturing, caring role model, and having to be careful and distant to keep respectable impressions. He thought it was unfair that male elementary teachers were automatically viewed as more suspect than women. “I always feel bad when you hear in the paper about a sexual abuse case because it puts a bad rap on guy elementary teachers. But it could happen in the case where it was a woman, too. I don’t want to be looked at like that...I always have a heads up on the situation”

(12/17/07).

Ben’s male students’ parents were pleased that he was their sons’ teacher. He noted, however, that being a male role model was not all it would take to ensure good
teaching and learning. "...every parent I've had of the guys, they're so glad you're teaching our kids. They say nothing but good things about you. Well, that's good, but hopefully academically that's what they're looking for" (12/17/07). Ben became disappointed after discovering that sometimes his being male didn't help his boys connect to him or the learning. "It's just hard to motivate him. And I thought that with being a guy and liking sports, I thought it would be no problem connecting to him, but that hasn't been the case at all" (12/17/07).

To help some of his male students engage in classroom activities, Ben attempted to capitalize on their interest in athletics.

We're trying to find the mean, so a few kids play basketball, so I had a few basketball problems, like "Jimmy scored 50 points in one game, and 13 points in another..." I kind of try to relate it to that. And then, these guys in my class that think they're tough; I had them see how many push-ups they could do in ten seconds, for three sets, so they did push-ups and we found the average; just little things like that. I try to do that all the time. (12/17/07)

Ben was an athlete himself. He enjoyed "refereeing basketball, junior high games, all the time, on the weekends, or one or two games here and there" (12/17/07). Ben explained that this was a way for him to be involved in both the schools and athletic activities.

Ben's Stages of Classroom Management

At the beginning of the year, Ben called his students perfect. After a month of school, Ben noted that it was only "three or four times I've had to stop the class because they were getting a little antsy, but like I said, it just takes a reminder...nothing too disrespectful" (9/20/07). He had no trouble teaching a small group while the other students did independent work at their desks. He set the expectations and the students
followed them. "I just told them right way from the very beginning...maybe they just respect me so much, or they were trained in the beginning, I mean, from fourth grade, or third grade. I don't know; I've been lucky so far" (9/20/07).

Another month later, students began to be more talkative, not just in Ben’s class, but in the school as a whole. Ben was disappointed in their lack of attention to the rules, and didn’t understand why they didn’t stop their constant chatter.

The talking sometimes gets out of hand and I have to raise my hand and say give me five all the time. And it seems like it’s happening all over school, too, not just in my class...some days after everyone leaves I just sit back at my desk (spreads arms out wide, closes eyes, and grins a wide grin) and go, "YES!! Freedom!" But I guess that’s just a part of teaching. After I tell them, I just don’t understand why they don’t just stop. But I guess I’ll just figure that out as I go on in my teaching. (10/31/07)

Along with the talking, Ben was disappointed in the way the boys behaved toward the girls. "They are flirting in the wrong way and it’s becoming disrespectful. General Miller had a few things to say to the boys at the end of the school day and it wasn’t in a happy voice" (11/5/07).

Ben reflected that he had become more confidently and consistently strict, “not afraid to tell them what to do in a more stern voice so they can respect the rules” (10/31/07). By late fall, he had rearranged the physical room arrangement several times because “the whole idea of the pods was not...they were talking and in each other’s face” (10/31/07). He had settled on a U-shaped arrangement where he could be more central and they could better focus on the lessons. Ben took more control over his class as they progressively stretched the rules, but believed he simply could not control everything. “I only have twenty kids, but I can’t control all of their actions and their thoughts and what
kids say...Like if a kids’ gonna say a bad word, or do a bad action...they could easily do that” (10/31/07). The physical space limitations of the trailer magnified the potential for negative interactions. “I wish I had a bigger space so I could just spread people out and not worry about being on top of each other. And they’re always looking at each other, too, because there’s nowhere to go” (10/31/07).

Another month or two later, Ben’s disappointment in his students’ behavior, particularly that of the boys, turned into frustration.

It’s really almost been like a headache....I’ve just been disappointed with the kids’ behavior. They’re constantly fighting with each other, and throwing snowballs outside at recess...just little things like that going on. Even though I tell them a thousand times not to do it, it’s still taking place. (12/17/07)

Thinking back on his own behavior as a fifth grader, he remembered that he wasn’t his typical good kid self during that year. He acted out then just as his fifth grade boys were now. “But that was honestly my toughest year. I was always trying to act out. When I think about me I feel bad for my fifth grade teacher now. I was always trying to be silly and impress girls, too” (12/17/07).

Ben wondered what to do to remedy the problem. He had caught himself slipping into a reactive, inconsistent mode of classroom management, and didn’t like it at all. Ben had described his worst teacher as someone who was always negative and yelling, and confessed that he sometimes reacted this way himself with his own students.

...and that’s not what I want to be, and sometimes I find myself in that situation. I’m yelling, I need to stop, that’s not exactly what I want to be...and I find myself in that situation and I don’t want to be there at all! But I find myself yelling. And whose fault is that? It’s probably my fault for not being organized, or planned, or directions not well–written or understood, so I really take the blame on myself for whatever I do. Like today, I was at my desk, and the students came back in really noisy, and...did you mention the Riverside staff sitting on your shoulders?? I
honestly felt like there were two people on me, one saying, “Ben! You should do something about this situation!” And Ben’s like, “No. Just let it go. The day’s over with.” (12/17/07)

By mid-year, Ben admitted that he missed the compliance of the first month of school, and decided he needed to become more proactive. “I’m so used to having everyone facing forward and listening...I’m so used to having things like the old school way of teaching, almost, but that’s not how things are, really” (12/17/07). He took some of the blame for becoming reactive when his students, much to Ben’s surprise and dismay, chose to behave disrespectfully.

You get out of that habit of saying, “Show me how...” and I think to myself, “You don’t need to yell...” I could say, “Class, show me how fifth graders should line up.” That does work; I just kind of got out of that habit and I should get back into it. What does it sound like; what does it look like; if you can hear my voice, clap once—if you can hear my voice, clap twice. I’ve kind of lost touch with that. Maybe I just need to start doing that again and see how things go. (12/17/07)

Just when his students’ behavior seemed to be at its lowest point, Ben had a guest speaker share about her trip to Africa. The students’ respectful listening and the speaker’s feedback gave Ben hope. “When someone else comes in to teach the class, they are perfect. So, thank God, maybe I am teaching them to be respectful” (2/1/08). The guest speaker told Ben that he had one of the most respectful classes that she had ever seen. That news went a long way to rebuilding Ben’s identity as a positive role model, and restore his vision and efficacy to help students become respectful and responsible citizens.

Ben’s Short-Term Negotiation

Upon experiencing the combination of rising pressures, decreasing support systems, and a decreasing sense of efficacy, Ben negotiated by looking ahead to the
future. At a focus group in February, Ben smiled and made all of us laugh as he asked Connie, Rachel, and Annie, “Are you guys ready for summer?” (2/1/08). Even though he presented it as a joke, deep down this was a loaded question for Ben. He looked forward to summer not only for a break, but for a chance to get organized and get ahead to prepare for Year 2.

This summer I really have to take advantage of every opportunity to sit down and plan for the coming year. You just don’t know...like last summer, when we met and you asked me what I was doing to get ready, if I would have known it was going to be like this, I would have been spending a LOT more time! I really didn’t think it was going to be this hard. And I’m sure you knew what was coming for me, or any other teacher, too. I remember Dr. Brandt made a comment once when I saw him in the library. He said, “So, Ben, are you ready?” And I said, “Oh, yeah. I’ll be ready.” And he was laughing, “Yeah, right. No one’s ready.” (12/17/07)

Now Ben knew what Dr. Brandt meant. Last summer, Ben didn’t even know what he wouldn’t be ready for. Now that he knew what he wasn’t ready for, he had no time to get ready for it. His only hope was to make it through the year and use the summer to prepare. “It’s like, if I can just get by now, and learn how to teach it, it would make life so much easier” (12/17/07).

Since Ben had to create every lesson and prepare every material from scratch this year, he looked forward to repeating units and reusing materials next year. “And it’s kinda nice knowing if I stay in teaching, Holes, I read that book before, I know exactly what’s going on....I kind of read The Island, so I kind of know what’s going on, so I think once you have the experience you’ll be able to kind of know what to do” (9/20/07). Ben hoped he would stay in fifth grade for his second year of teaching, “even if I have to move to a different school,” so he would not have to learn all new content. Ben despaired
that an assignment to a new grade level “would be like starting all over again” (10/31/07). Ben hoped that if he was a fifth grade teacher again, even somewhere other than Sunnydale, he would be more organized like a second-year teacher whose tidy room he envied. “And this one is in her second year... she has everything organized, and her desk always seems neat, but I don’t know” (10/31/07).

Plans to Move Up

When Ben and I met for our first interview during the summer before he started teaching, he expressed great satisfaction with teaching children, despite the low salary. However, the phrase “I guess” that Ben used three times, implies that Ben may have been speaking words he had heard and thought were expected of him. Perhaps he was trying to believe that the happiness of being with children was, in fact, all he would need to remain a teacher.

I had a lot of relatives who were teachers before, and they got out of the school system because they said there was no money involved. I guess I’m really not too concerned about that; I guess as long as you’re happy in life, I mean, you’re with the students, and I guess that’s what makes you happy. After student teaching, and when you have parents come up to you saying that you made an impact on their life, that means a lot to you, and that’s kind of the reason why you do it right there....I’ve just had such a positive experience in the school system (chuckles) so far... it hasn’t let me down yet, so hopefully...(6/13/07)

Ben hoped that his lifetime of happiness within schools—the only professional context he had ever known--would extend to his own professional teaching and keep him there.

By mid-September, Ben conveyed a clear long-term goal to move up in the system to become a guidance counselor or administrator. By so doing, he could remain in the context that he knew so well, and still work with children in some capacity. However, he believed it was important to get some teaching experience, first.
I don’t know, I thought about doing administration eventually, or moving up eventually, or maybe guidance counselor, but I don’t know, right now I have no idea. I like what I’m doing right now, and I’m still young, and I don’t want to think about administration right now, because who would want a young principal? It would be pointless without that experience....I would like to move up...to get my administration or taking masters courses. I want to keep moving up eventually. (9/20/07)

Because he had this long-term vision of moving up in the system, he worried about his formal teaching evaluation observations. He knew that he needed to successfully demonstrate all eight state teaching standards and all 42 competencies within his first two years of teaching in order to get his standard teaching license. He wanted to make sure that he could follow all of the steps necessary to poise himself for graduate school.

I think coming up in the next week or two [the principal’s] gonna watch me. I’m actually a little nervous about that, just because it’ll be my first time, and the whole process about how I’m still on my probationary license for two years, because I want to get my...it seems like before you can even start taking masters classes or anything like that, you have to have anywhere from two to five years teaching experience, so I just want to get my license and move on from there. (10/31/07)

In a conversation we had mid-year, Ben revealed his internal struggle of wanting to be a teacher while sensing a social pressure to move out of the elementary classroom. He wanted to make deeper connections with the students than he felt able. He felt he needed to keep a distance from the girls at school. I asked him if he thought that social pressure was unfair, and he responded with this somewhat sad explanation. He so wanted to work with children, but felt that he would always have to prove himself as a man who could be trusted.

I mean, honestly, to make connections with the kids, to just try to relate to them, yeah, I think it is [unfair]. And that’s why I don’t know how much longer, I mean, I want to teach for a while, but I don’t know if I should just be in the classroom. Maybe I should venture out after I get experience, you know, try to work my way
up in the education system. I thought maybe about being an athletic director, or a
counselor, but you’re still working with kids, too. I’ve never felt like people think
I’m a bad person at all. I’ve always felt like I’ve been respectful and mature. I feel
like I carry a certain demeanor about myself. (12/17/07)

Being male may have put Ben at a hiring advantage for an elementary school position,
but it also placed him in a permanent position of defense. Growing up around schools,
Ben had received the implicit message long ago that young male teachers in elementary
schools are acceptable, but once they get a little older, their presence there is strange.

Well, you don’t really see too many male elementary teachers staying in it too
long, really. They’re always in administration or something else. I don’t know if
that’s just part of the social norm...when I go to a math meeting and there’s an
older gentleman teaching fifth grade, I’m surprised he’s not a principal or
something like that, because you’re so accustomed to seeing that. (12/17/07)

Ben also sensed that his students’ fathers wondered why a young man like Ben would
become a teacher.

I kind of felt, at teacher conferences, that some of the dads, although they enjoyed
their kids having me for a teacher, I felt like they were thinking, you’re a teacher?
I kinda get that feeling. I don’t know why. Because honestly, if you think about it,
who can really teach? Who has the patience to be with kids, and just cares so
much? Not too many people can do it, I don’t think. (12/17/07)

Simply put, Ben loved children, but he couldn’t freely nurture them. It was
difficult for Ben to care so passionately about doing the very thing he couldn’t be openly
fervent about. Very few people understood his dilemma, and he hadn’t shared this tension
with many people. He wanted me to tell him that of course, it was perfectly fine to be a
man and teach young children. And he needed everyone—students, parents, fellow
educators, and friends—to show him respect for it.
Accepting the Challenges and Giving Himself Time

In late February, Ben seemed much more light-hearted than he had in December. He laughed often, made jokes, and broke into full, crinkly-eyed smiles. He still had big challenges, but he had moved beyond disillusionment to acceptance. He now understood that challenges such as classroom management, instructional pacing, and paperwork were part of the job. I asked him if he had purchased the cabinet for his paperwork, and he replied, “There’s really no point right now. I have my stuff in the corner in the back of the room, and that’s good enough for now….maybe it doesn’t bother me so much anymore because it just grew to be a part of me, really (laughs)” (2/20/08). Ben also assumed that although these challenges would always be there, their intensity would decrease over time. Veteran teachers seemed to be able to get most of their work done during the day without coming in over an hour early or staying late like Ben did.

“Teachers say, ‘Oh, just wait, in a few more years you’ll get the hang of it.’ I see a lot of teachers leaving right away….How do you do that? They have the routine down, and they’re ready to go” (2/20/08). Ben looked forward to summer when he could get ahead on “different worksheets for the reading, different questions, study guides; and I just want to keep them organized so I can just pull it out of my file cabinet and have it. I just feel like I’m rushing every night” (2/20/08).

Ben now understood that being a teacher, especially out in a trailer, was a solitary job. However, more than the isolation, the insecurity of wondering whether what he was doing was instructionally sound haunted him. He marveled at how the staff trusted that he, a first-year teacher, knew what he was doing. “Being in the trailer by myself, I could
be doing nothing and who’s gonna know?” (2/20/08) Since his grade-level team didn’t plan together, Ben made instructional decisions on his own, hoping they were good ones.

“I want my kids to be successful. I hope I’m doing what it takes for them to be ready for middle school. I’m kind of worried about that. I hope I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing” (2/20/08). Although his mentor helped him understand the district’s expectations and the evaluation process, and his team let him know what units they were on if he asked, Ben had done all of his own planning from Day 1, and he took that job very seriously. Yet, he hesitated to ask for help because he didn’t want to burden his teammates. “It’s almost scary to think it’s all my responsibility. If I sat down with a fifth grade teacher saying, ‘Can you please help me with this?’ I’m sure we could do it, but I feel like such an obligation” (2/20/08).

One of Ben’s biggest questions was what and how much homework to assign.

I don’t know how much homework is appropriate for fifth grade….I always try to assign small group reading homework, like discussion questions, or look up some vocabulary words, and then I always try to have a few math problems, too. And once in a while they’ll have a social studies sheet. So I think that’s going OK, but I hear people saying that assigning homework is not really teaching. It really isn’t. I’m kind of confused on that. What homework is actually necessary, and what is appropriate? What’s going to benefit the kids? I mean, they have to have some kind of homework to do. They shouldn’t just go home and do absolutely nothing. They should have a little reading, or be doing something. (2/20/08)

Ben inferred that homework should give his students practice with facts and skills for which there wasn’t enough time during the school day. He “heard the fourth grade team gives them a lot of homework at Sunnydale, and then I’ve heard that once they get to middle school they have a study hall, so they have hardly any homework” (2/20/08).

Homework is something Ben had always done as a student, and completing it earned him
respect from his teachers. "And that's why I feel like I was respected by faculty, because I was respectful and I did what I was told to. Even as a student, I always tried to be prepared and came to class with my work done" (2/20/08). Now, as a teacher, Ben carried on the ritual of assigning homework to help children develop responsibility and the chance to earn respect from their teacher.

As a teacher with little contact with other adults, Ben missed the kind of feedback he had always received from his teachers, even through college. Ben wished other staff members could see him in action. If he had the opportunity, he would like to be in the main part of the building with the rest of the staff: "...that way I feel like other teachers could peek in and see how things are going....I mean, it's sad to say that there are some paraprofessionals in Sunnydale and I don't even know their names yet because I rarely ever see them. I feel like I'm totally in my own world" (2/20/08).

Sometimes Ben ate lunch with his mentor and "a paraprofessional" because of common lunch schedules. The conversation often gave Ben helpful ideas for interacting with children who were not being respectful, and Ben noted that "it's nice to sit with adults, too, because you're with kids all day" (2/20/08). Even though Ben valued the adult company, he often used lunch time as work time. "Sometimes I eat in my classroom, or I don't even eat at all, sometimes. Every once in a while I see Dave, but you shove your food in and you gotta get going, gotta make copies" (2/20/08).

After a day without adult interaction, Ben went home to an apartment where he lived alone. "You could make a reality TV show out of my life....I come home and go to Riverside, work out a little bit, come home, make supper, do a little work, watch the
news, go to bed (laughs)!” (2/20/08). Ben added that he needed to relax after school because the days were very taxing. “If I want to make time for myself to get my work done, I can. But throughout the day, it’s so chaotic, it’s rush, rush, rush, and then you want to go home and have time for yourself” (2/20/08). Ben looked forward to talking on the phone with his parents, “but I don’t complain anymore” (2/20/08). Ben had settled into his single, new teacher life.

He had become good friends with James, the physical education teacher, and Michael, the music teacher. They chatted at school briefly a few times each week, and also got together socially outside of school. Ben valued conversation with other male teachers so much that he used part of his preparation periods for it.

A lot of the teachers, during their specialists of PE, art, or music, they like to go back and work. It’s kinda like your prep period, but it’s kinda like my kind of time to talk to a teacher, too. So I’m in the gym for 15 minutes talking to him while the kids are warming up or stretching. And the music teacher, too. I’ll talk to him for a few minutes before he has to get going. (2/20/08)

Ben reflected, “It’s kinda like a guy thing, almost,” admitting that he didn’t chat with the art teacher when he took his students to art. “She’s really nice, but I don’t really connect to her. I say hi to her” (2/20/08).

**Questioning and Developing Instructional Practices**

Now two thirds of the way through the school year, Ben had enough teaching experience to ask himself how to make his teaching better. Through trial and error, he had seen that some practices worked while others were ineffective. For example, he questioned some of the practices he was using to supposedly help his students become better writers. “I’m at the point of wondering if Daily Oral Language (DOL) is even
worth doing. It doesn’t transfer. They can say ‘Put a capital there.’ But then on their
work, they don’t have it. Why is it not transferring?” (2/20/08) In general, Ben
questioned how well he was prioritizing content choices and time allocations; “trying to
decide what’s important and what needs to be taught in the class....I just feel like it’s trial
and error with this being the first year” (2/20/08).

Ben had experimented more with learning centers during small group instruction.
The biggest obstacles to having successful learning center time every day were the
availability of the library and the computer lab, and the noise level of the trailer.

I know a lot of teachers have centers, but they’re in the classroom, and it’s not
noisy. I am just so easily distracted as a teacher, let alone the kids trying to read,
too. I don’t have enough space. Last week I had one group go to the library, and I
had one group go to the computer lab, and that seemed to work pretty good
because then I just had one group with me and then one group was in the
classroom working on a language arts center—spelling and a little English
assignment—and that seemed to go pretty good. But the library’s not always
open, and the computer lab’s not always open. But when it was, that worked
perfect because it wasn’t noisy. When everyone’s in the room and they’re
working in small groups, it’s so noisy. Even if the kids are whispering, it’s just
noisy compared to a classroom. It’s noisy just to walk around. (2/20/08)

Ben was not about to give up, though. He had some ideas for quiet centers such as a
newspaper center where students would read, highlight important information, and write
a response. He also wanted to create more centers so that students could work in pairs
instead of small groups, where “they could just literally whisper to each other” (2/20/08). Ben also wanted to explore the idea of a student-created class Web Page that could serve
as a center for practicing communication skills.
Reflecting on His Vision

Ben’s vision for teaching—to teach his students how to be respectful and responsible citizens, and to help them with their problems—had not fully come to fruition. Although he was pleased with his students’ progress and most of them were usually responsible and respectful, it wasn’t the perfect class he had hoped it would be. “I just want kids to sit in their desks and answer every question appropriately and be perfect, but that’s not the real world” (2/20/08). Respect was so important to Ben, and when his students showed respect, he regained hope for his vision.

Today, the girls that were giving me a hard time lately, I handed them an assignment and they said, “Thank you.” I was like, “You’re welcome.” That made my day. They looked at me and said, “Mr. Miller, thank you.” I was like, “OK (smiles). You’re welcome.” Just little things like that make a huge difference. I was like, can you do that more often? The world would be a perfect place. Just the whole idea of being respectful, I was like, wow. It’s a huge difference. (2/20/08)

Because his students were more talkative than he had envisioned, he wondered if he should change his approach. He wondered if he should be more like “General Jackson.”

I think next year, the whole idea of not smiling, I’m going to be more strict...maybe that’s not me, though, that’s not who I am. You have to kind of teach how you are and use your personality. But Mr. Jackson always told the kids, “I don’t care if you like me or not. You’re here to learn.” I wish I could have watched him teach more often, because I think he was good with the kids. (2/20/08)

Ben didn’t really want to be a General Miller. He wanted to be an effective educator while capitalizing on his own strengths and pursuing his own dreams. He wanted to be a Counselor Miller—someone who had time to listen to children and to whom they could come with their problems. “I wish I knew about what’s going on in their home life...that’s kind of the counselor role. I wish I could do that…” (2/20/08).
Ben was frustrated that he never had the time to really listen to his students. “I feel like when they have a problem, they come and talk to me, but I have to rush to get through it because I gotta get going to the next subject; I really can’t help the child that much” (2/20/08).

Ben’s vision to become a counselor was stronger than it had been mid-year. He talked at length about his desire to work with individual students.

I feel like I don’t get to know my students that well with an entire classroom...I can really influence a student in a more positive way like a counselor figure. If they have a problem they can come and talk to me....I think it’s a cool profession to listen to kids’ problems and try to help them out with what’s going on with their life. (2/20/08)

Ben knew that within five years he wanted to have his masters degree in something. “I don’t know if I’ll be teaching or counseling or something. I’d like to be in education, still,” but for now, it was “one day at a time” (2/20/08).

**Expecting Too Much?**

Ben had, one day at a time, built a rapport with and between his students. He admitted that his expectations for the students to be respectful were high, and that perhaps he shouldn’t let little things they said and did bother him so much. He reflected, “We’re almost like a family. You have them throughout the entire day, and throughout the year. My mom always says, ‘I bet you’re proud of them.’ And I’m like, sometimes I’m not really proud of them, but after watching this [video recording of teaching], I mean, you really are. I just have such high expectations” (3/17/08).

With a broad smile that made his eyes sparkle, Ben watched the recording of his mid-March math lesson introducing the concept of probability. Pleased with his students’
behavior, he frequently interjected comments such as, “They’re still doing pretty good,”
or, “I think for the most part they’ve been on task so far” (3/14/07). Watching while
removed from the responsibility of instruction helped him see his students from a
different perspective. He noticed that almost all of the students were taking notes from
the board, working well with their partners, and generally self-regulating. “I thought it
was worse than this. I mean, it wasn’t too bad!” (3/17/08)

Students had entered the trailer after their noon recess, the first day they were able
to remove their jackets after a long, cold winter with near-record snowfall. It reminded
me of my own experiences of teaching sixth grade in the spring, when hormones began to
run rampant and the dynamics of the classroom shifted. This pre-spring day in Ben’s
classroom, a boy, flushed from recess, approached a female classmate’s desk where she,
her bottom slouching far forward in her chair and her flip-flops flat on the floor, applied
layer upon layer of lip gloss. “You better fix your attitude. I was mad at you at recess,” he
smirked in a flirty little tiff.

Ben noted that peer pressure became more prevalent as the year went on, making
They were using their time wisely.’ And kids will say, ‘Yeah, that’s because they’re
smarticles’” (3/17/08). Ben, recently noticing that one particular girl was being drawn into
a negative clique of girls, physically separated the clique and her when he rearranged the
classroom. One of these girls was a growing concern for Ben, as she had become more
disrespectful, she was not doing her homework, and her MAPS scores were leveling out
rather than going up to indicate progress since mid-year.
I don’t know if I’m the one that can reach her. I don’t think she likes (pauses) GUYS, I mean, I don’t know. [The guidance counselor] thinks it’s her way of showing that she likes me, but I don’t know. I don’t think so. Before this year she was like a mute. She didn’t talk to anybody, and now she’s starting to come out a little bit. She’s really concerned about her weight and her image. (3/17/08)

Ben was “pushed a little bit” (3/17/08) by her passive defiance, finding it difficult not to take her disrespect personally.

Reflecting on Instruction

Ben’s first reaction was always to focus on the students’ level of respect. However, when I asked him questions specifically about his instruction, he provided detail about his planning and facilitation. He shared that he tries to prepare lessons well enough so the students trust his teaching. “I don’t have the stuff in front of me. People assume that I know what I’m doing. It’s not like if they had questions, this guy is reading out of the book, he doesn’t know what he’s doing. So, I just try to be prepared so I can go with the flow” (3/17/08). He noted a point in the lesson that other teachers had warned was tricky, so he had prepared to model that step with students. He observed that he did a good job of “walking around and not singling out one person” (3/17/08). The questions Ben asked the students required them to use their background knowledge to explain their predictions for coin tosses and dice rolls.

Ben also noted things he would have done differently. He wished he would have involved the “clique” in the modeling of the game in order to better engage them in the lesson. He also wished he would have previewed the writing they would do after the activity so they could have formulated their thoughts more clearly during the activity. If he could redo the lesson, he would “bring in some weather charts; more visuals. I think
that’s what I lack a lot: visuals” (3/17/08). Embarrassed, he thought he used the word “okay” too much, especially when giving directions. “You do that for each number that you roll, okay? I just want to see what you came up with, okay? So you want to count the number of times you got each number, okay?” (3/14/08). Upon contemplating why he used the word, he thought he was trying to make sure the students felt comfortable with the next step. But he definitely thought he said it too often and planned to limit its use.

Ben identified several strategies from the lesson as ones he learned in his teacher preparation program. He started the lesson by asking what the students already knew about probability. Later in the lesson, he told his students, “Don’t worry about being right or wrong here, okay?” (3/14/08) Later, Ben explained to me, “I kind of remember some of the professors at Riverside saying, ‘Even if they answer it wrong, try to relate it, or try to correct it for them in the right way” (3/17/08). At another point in the lesson, Ben asked his students to “share with a neighbor which word you came up with” (3/17/08), recalling the think, pair, share strategy he had used during his PDS semesters.

Spring Reflections

When the district announced it would lay off several first-year teachers, Ben worried he would lose his job in the district. He ideally wanted to keep his same position, but hoped he would at least have a position somewhere in the district. “I don’t really care...I just want a job....I’ve taught there before, and I’d like to give it a second shot to see how well I could do again.... I think going to a different school would be like starting all over again” (4/1/08). Ben commented that he would also like to be a teacher
in the main building at Sunnydale, as he had grown to know the staff a little bit more and wanted to teach next to other teachers.

Ben attributed his isolated location out in the trailer as the reason it took him so long to feel a part of the staff. “It just took me a while to open up to them, just being new....Being out in the trailer is not ideal....To collaborate and to actually think you’re a member of the school? If I want to be honest, I’m still all by myself out there” (4/1/08).

Ben wished his team could be physically available to one another, and collaborate more. Ben envisioned an ideal teaming arrangement describing, “There should be three fifth grade rooms right by each other in a pod, so you can float around and make sure everything’s going good. You meet in the morning and make sure you’re on the same page rather than a free-for-all or survival” (4/1/08).

Ben knew that there was a possibility that he would be teaching at Sunnydale next year, but not in fifth grade. There was a potential opening in second grade, where he would partner with his friend, Dave. This possibility excited Ben.

If I were on the same team as Dave, it would be a whole different story....It would be awesome, how well we would plan together; it would be perfect....If I was with Dave, I would feel more comfortable sharing my ideas. Sometimes I think my ideas aren’t the best, like, oh, the new guy’s gonna talk. So I just kind of keep my mouth shut. (4/1/08)

Ben thought it would be great to have a male teammate of his same age. Even though he got along well with his teammates, there was something missing that he couldn’t identify.

“I’m starting to get to know [Catherine,] my teaching partner. She’s a really cool girl, too. I don’t know. Maybe being male is different; I don’t know. I haven’t figured it out yet. I probably will never figure it out, either” (4/1/08).
Ben reflected that teaming with Dave would be one step toward reducing his loneliness. Ben hoped that some day he might have someone to come home to that would also appreciate his school challenges. “Like if you have the TV on and you’re correcting papers or planning for the next day, you can sit down and talk. That seems nice. I don’t know how that is. Sometimes I get home and I don’t have any motivation to do it. I kind of need that” (4/1/08).

Near the end of the year, Ben’s images of classroom practice no longer focused solely on developing respect. Although his descriptions of practice lacked detail, he talked about children collaborating and being actively involved in the lesson. He also talked about the importance of encouraging children to take risks, and modeling.

I’ve been trying to teach for fifteen to twenty minutes, just giving examples, and then having the kids try to go back and work on it themselves and do group work. Not always just sitting in your desk and working independently…like think-pair-share; always trying to get all the kids engaged rather than just one or two of the kids who answer the questions….No answer’s a wrong answer. Don’t make kids feel bad, no matter what answer they give. Just try to be positive and supportive with them. If you have a problem on the board, show how to do it. If you’re going to do an activity, make sure you have done that activity to show exactly how to do it. Model it for the students. (4/1/08)

Ben reflected back upon his biggest challenge of the year. It was his inability to connect with Janie, a girl in his class. This bothered Ben deeply, because the basis of his teacher identity was his role modeling for students and his connection with them. His ability to develop rapport with children and his deep interest in hearing about their lives continued to inspire him to become a counselor when “after two years of teaching I’ll get off probation and go from there” (4/1/08). One day after Ben had a little breakthrough with Janie, he celebrated, “She actually smiled at me and she came up to me and talked
about things. That was the first time in three or four months where she actually talked to me. As a teacher, I can’t connect to her….I’m so confused about her behavior. I can’t figure her out” (4/1/08).

Ben’s biggest success of the year was the positive feedback he received from parents. Being removed from the main flow of the building, he interacted little with other staff members and received minimal feedback on his teaching. Therefore, positive emails and conversations with parents meant a lot to Ben.

I’ve gotten so many positive comments from the parents. Even though you don’t think you’re doing a good job, they’ll say, “My son or daughter just loves having you as a teacher.” That is a big deal to me...the parents sending me an email and saying I’m glad you’re my kid’s teacher, and you’re such a nice guy -- that means a lot to me. (4/1/08)

“It’s Been a Fast but Long Year”

Ben was relieved to find out mid-May that he would keep his fifth grade teaching position at Sunnydale for his second year of teaching, and he was ecstatic to hear that his classroom would be inside the school. “I’ve got a brand new big classroom now, so I’m out of the trailer next year! I’m going to spend some time in there just getting everything set up. I’m just looking forward to next year” (6/4/08). Ben was ready to have a fresh start, confessing that May was his hardest month of teaching. “Being in fifth grade, the kids seem like they run the school, so they don’t really care, and I had more behavior issues at the end of the year” (6/4/08).

Ben summed up May as “a blur...I don’t really remember much...I didn’t really like the closure. It just went so fast. We were just doing so many things” (6/4/08). Part of the blur was because of Ben’s busy time outside of school. Ben had begun coaching
softball as well as working part-time at a golf course, and admitted that in May he “had no life, really” (6/3/08). Ben looked forward to the summer when he would have more time for himself.

He also anticipated spending more time preparing for school this summer than he had a year ago. Knowing all of the work in store for him, he intended to get a head start. “I’m just looking forward to the whole paperwork situation—filling out everything right away and not getting behind. You don’t know until you experience it. When I think back, I think, gosh, there’s so much I could have been doing, but now I know what to do” (6/4/08).

Ben ended the year wishing he had been more strict, and less of a brother figure to his students.

Like I said at the beginning of the year, it was so easy at Sunnydale. Oh my God, it was the easiest job in my life. They were so perfect, and then I maybe let my guard down, and they felt comfortable....That’s what’s hard. You want to be friends with them, but you can’t. And I just feel, I swear to God, they’re like my little brothers or little sisters. They treat me like I’m a brother....I’m glad we’re done because I don’t think I would have ever gotten any more schoolwork done with them anyway. (6/4/08)

Confused about his role as a teacher, and realizing that being a role model didn’t cure his students’ disrespect, Ben struggled with his long-term vision for teaching. “I want to do something with education...but I just haven’t decided yet what I want to do” (6/4/08).
CHAPTER V

CONNIE

*And I really, really, REALLY want my own class. Really. (10/06/07)*

Teaching Roots in Home-Schooling and Parenting

Connie sent me an email on July 27 saying she had interviewed for and accepted a beginning-of-the-year, long-term substitute position at a school three blocks from her home. It was getting to the point in the summer where she decided that it would be better for her to take a long-term substitute position rather than risk securing no position at all. Having already applied for several positions and interviewed for two, Connie believed she could prove her teaching competence far better in action than in an interview. “I'm really pleased. I think it's a good opportunity for me to work close to home, and it will (if I do a good job) be a good gateway into a full-time position” (7/27/07).

Connie and her husband had a little boy who would start kindergarten at the same school, LaMont Elementary, in the fall. Connie’s four daughters ranged in age from eight to seventeen. The family had moved to Dellen a few years earlier, and Connie, after home-schooling their three oldest girls in Texas, enrolled in the teacher education program at Riverside.

Mainly it was the experience of teaching my own children, when due to circumstances at the time, home schooling seemed the best option, and it worked well and that led it to continue for four years. And that’s when I realized that when it was time to put them back in school, because we were in the right time and place here in Iowa to put them back in the publics schools, I realized that I missed it, and I wasn’t going to keep them home just so I could keep doing it, when it felt like they were where they needed to be. But at the same time I realized, you know, that I can do this...I can do it better than some people had been doing it with my own children. And I should go do that. And I had the opportunity to go back to school as well, so I took it. (8/13/07)
Connie reflected that her personal relationships with her children allowed her to tailor instruction around their needs and interests. “And that was the advantage to teaching my own children, that of course you can’t have especially right off the bat with all 25 kids in one class” (8/13/07). From her experience of home-schooling her own children, Connie learned about choosing a variety of curricula and strategies to match her children’s needs and interests. She also discovered that none of her children learned the same way or preferred the same approach. “I used bits and pieces of different home-school curriculum...we looked for a math, and found one that worked really well for one...the older one I had to do a lot of one-on-one with” (8/13/07).

As I listened to Connie tell stories about raising and teaching her children, the oldest of whom will start college next year, it struck me that this woman had life experiences far beyond most of our teacher education students. Furthermore, she constantly reflected upon them. In our PDS at Finley, she brought a nurturing sort of maturity to the group that the other students admittedly valued. Connie had gone to college about twenty years earlier as a reluctant and disillusioned elementary education major. She dropped that major when she realized how oppressive and regimented teachers were taught to be. At that point in her life she realized that she had neither the desire to stifle her creativity, nor the patience to work with children in a classroom setting.

I didn’t want to be the kind of teacher they were training twenty years ago, mostly the kind I grew up with, where it’s control, and it’s rigid, and it’s “follow the book,” and I really wasn’t interested. That seemed pretty boring. And I remember thinking, “Doing the same thing every year? Year, after year, after year? I don’t think so. I don’t want to do it. Especially with a bunch of noisy kids.” (8/13/07)
With interest and talent in music, she switched to music as her major, but did not envision it as a career for her. Once she began having children, she stopped taking courses to stay at home and raise their family.

When her children were of school age, and she and her husband realized that their public school education was not motivating their children to learn, Connie decided to home-school them. She loved it so much that she missed it after they moved to the Midwest and enrolled their children in public schools. Her positive experiences with her own children, other children in her extended family, and children in her church made her decide, without a doubt or thought of pursuing any other major, to become an elementary teacher—this time for good.

Although she felt her home-schooling was successful, she believed that formal teacher education would give her the knowledge and skills she would need to teach in a public school setting.

What I had been doing before on my own was largely experimental. I was having to go on other people’s anecdotal experiences and feel my way. I didn’t have professional training; I didn’t have a qualified mentor that I could go to—I had acquaintances that were doing the exact same thing that I was doing, only in their own way. That was helpful, but in the long term probably not as helpful that it should have been. So gaining the background knowledge in educational theory and what research has shown now that is different even than what it was ten years ago. (8/13/07)

Connie noted that going back to school after beginning college twenty years ago, she was “a lot more willing to be engaged,” and she “was exposed to a lot of really, really good teachers” who gave her the confidence to proceed with her degree when she questioned whether she was proceeding with it too late in life (8/13/07).
Reflecting upon her philosophy of teaching, her entry into teaching as a middle-aged woman with children was foundational to her beliefs about what constitutes good teaching. In fact, she had a hard time talking about teaching without talking about her own children. Her identity as a teacher was formed through, and now inseparable from, her identity as a parent. “This is where I have a problem separating the classroom from my own kids. Because part of it is helping students learn what they need, or figure out what it is they need to know…and underneath it, try to help them care. Try to help them WANT to know it” (12/17/07). Connie told a story about her daughter to illustrate her point, noting “how much time I spend thinking about it, and how much of my conversation, even with my own kids, is somehow related to their learning, or my teaching, or sly teacher strategies slid in under the supportive mom front” (12/17/07).

Connie was aware that her teacher role extended to more than her own children and students; it extended to many aspects of her life.

It’s Teacher when I’m even behind the piano at choir practice. Teaching a few of these rowdy adults what proper group etiquette would be when you disagree with what the choir director has just said. Teaching my kids how to ask a question without making it sound like an argument. How to get what you need without making it a confrontation. (12/17/07)

Parent-Teacher

Connie’s long-term substitute position was as a fifth grade teacher in a school whose demographics had shifted dramatically over the past few years toward a higher percentage of non-white students and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. The school drew from various neighborhoods of opposing socioeconomic levels. Some of the neighborhoods were comprised of grand, old single family homes like Connie’s in a
historic preservation district, and others primarily of run-down duplexes and apartment buildings either on steep, narrow roads on the bluff, or crowded row houses in the downtown “flats,” or low-lying riverfront area of town. Although some students actually lived closer to Payson, Rachel’s elementary school in the middle of downtown, the boundaries for LaMont had been drawn to purposefully integrate students from these varied socioeconomic backgrounds.

Well, the boundaries are bizarre. I mean, I was telling my husband that one of my kids lives in those apartments on Bridge Street where all the stabbings are, and she lives on that block on Bridge Street. And he said, “Bluff Street goes to LaMont?” Why? Because on a map everything is flat. I mean that’s crazy! She does a lot of walking. If her mom can’t pick her up, she walks down to Bridge Street from LaMont. That’s crazy. She’s a stone’s throw from Payson. Literally. A stone’s throw from Payson. (9/21/07)

The principal had told Connie that LaMont gets about one hundred new students per year out of a total of 340 students, and Connie added “that’s almost always going to lead to some kind of problem in school, whether it’s not knowing how to behave, or not being able to behave, or just not being able to function because of the stressors at home” (8/13/07). Even though Connie anticipated her teaching position would be challenging, she believed her parenting experience had toughened her enough to handle almost anything. “There were things I knew I could handle because I had a sixteen-year old look me in the face and say something I did NOT want to hear” (11/19/07).

Many times our conversation would turn to her oldest daughter, who was in the middle of making some important decisions that put stress upon the entire family. Connie portrayed her identity as parent-teacher as she shared, “I can’t tell you how many times I’ve turned to my husband just within the last month and said, ‘What didn’t we teach her?
What did we forget to do?” (12/17/07). During a focus group in February, Connie gave advice to Ben, who was struggling with disrespect shown by a female student.

With my own girls at that age, if they answered a normal question with that tone of voice or rolling their eyes, I would say, “Now, say it again three times without rolling your eyes. Do it again. Smile, and say it again.” But you’ve gotta stay happy the whole time. Because if she gets an emotional response from you, she won. (2/1/08)

Connie countered her inability to separate parenting and teaching with the lack of teaching that she perceived from some other parents. “Because so much of being a parent is being a teacher. Which is why so many kids are in SO much trouble. The parents aren’t doing it” (12/17/07).

This same belief is what led the LaMont administration and faculty leaders to decide that they would strategically teach the students all of the social skills they would need to create a safe and studious school environment. These school-wide procedures would be taught to all LaMont students by all LaMont staff members. Connie felt comfortable as she related this explicit teaching of social skills to her own parenting experiences.

They don’t have the same home life, and what may be acceptable at home, we have to be careful about saying it isn’t acceptable, but we do have to tell them it’s not acceptable at school to say, “Shut up, you idiot.” If it’s okay at home, go for it, but it’s not respectful. We talked about the necessity of actually teaching it. I really liked that. It’s so much better than just saying, “No, that’s bad. Don’t do that.” Cause that’s what we do with our kids at home, as they grow up, and we see them starting to do things. Mine is starting kindergarten. “Okay, Andy, take your finger out of your nose.” I don’t slap his hand for it, because he doesn’t know. (8/13/07)

However, she felt unprepared as it dawned on her that she had to be the one to teach and reinforce all of the procedures to 25 students starting on Day 1. “We just did a three-day
in-service at LaMont, and they handed me a ten-step packet of, are these procedures in place, in process, or not at all? Not at all (makes motion like she’s checking off a list), not at all, not at all, not at all, not at all, not at all...” (8/15/07).

**Her Tenuous Role as a Substitute Teacher**

Connie knew she was not the only one experiencing anxiety about the first days of school. Her prospective students and their parents knew that Mrs. Fisher, the teacher for whom Connie would substitute, was having a baby late summer and would not be back at school until Thanksgiving. “For this class, it’s all new, and what’s more, they know that their regular teacher isn’t me, and won’t be there. So they have a lot of the same feelings of anxiety and stress that I will have” (8/13/07). Connie faced many fears and tensions as she prepared to assume the role as the temporary teacher for a class of students who by all reports from other teachers and the principal was going to be quite a challenge. The fact that this was her first teaching job made her position even more tenuous.

So I’m starting the year in someone else’s class. And the teacher will come back after the first trimester....but, it is making me nervous. Because it’s not just if I do it wrong, I can switch and do it another way. And I’ll have to defend why I’m doing it a different way, because someone’s gonna come in and say, wait a minute, that’s not the way I wanted it done. So, it’s a little ticklish. (8/15/07)

Connie had not only the pressure to do a good job—she had the additional pressure to do a good enough job to hand over the class in proper form to the reigning teacher upon her return in three months.

It was the first day of in-service when Connie realized just how challenging the other teachers perceived her imminent teaching situation to be. Within the context of the teachers’ conversations about this year’s fifth grade *behavior problems*, everyone found
out that Connie was not the experienced teacher that her physical appearance and the demands of the job made them assume she was.

I think today just kind of made me look at it a little differently, because people at the in-service, I don't think many of them knew that I was a new grad. I think they just assumed, oh, she's been around, we just don't know her, and some of them, including the lady running the in-service (chuckles) found out today that I just graduated in May, and her eyebrows just went up to the ceiling. And I was like, oh, thanks for the vote of confidence. Oh goodie....This came right after discussion with the other fifth grade teacher and two of the fourth grade teachers, and there are a lot of behavior issues coming from that fourth grade. There are three classes now pulled into two, which means a lot of the kids who probably (high voice) should be separated from each other aren't going to be, because there's just no way to do it. And that's when she turned and said, "And you graduated..." and I said, "In May." And she said, "Of this year?!" "Yeah." And she said, "Ohhhh-kay...." like, oh so this is gonna be a lot more work for me, kind of thing. And you know, she didn't say that, and, and, ...and I realize there are two ways I could have taken that, like, OH, wow, you come across as being, having so much more experience, and I could have taken it that way, except that it came right after the behavior problem....(8/15/07)

Connie had one more week to prepare for a class of students that (1) should have been smaller and strategically separated but there was no extra classroom space, (2) should have been led by an experienced teacher but she was on leave, and (3) should have been helped by someone before now. Connie realized she had one week to figure out how to be that someone.

The typical novice teacher experiences, therefore, were magnified for Connie due to her temporary yet testing situation. During the time when she needed the most direction and attention, she felt lost and anonymous.

See, right now, I can't log on to Centerpoint, I don't have an email, I don't have a code for the copy machine...I'm nobody right now. I don't have a name on the door; I may not even GET my name on the door. I don't have a nametag. I'm seriously considering making my own. I don't want to be a pain right now and ask too many questions, but at the same time...(8/15/07)
The principal did ask a district administrator if Connie could attend the district in-services for new teachers, but was told there was not enough physical space in the rooms to even accommodate all of the new teachers who had contracts. While Connie was "hearing things from the guidance counselor" and "hearing things from two special ed staff," (8/15/07) nobody gave her "the code" to address the challenges ahead of her.

But they’re telling you, you know, some kids don’t like it if you walk too close to them, and some kids don’t like it if you touch them. And do I learn this the hard way, or is someone going to give me the code? How do I figure this out? Is it the first time I try to touch somebody and he says, ‘Don’t touch!’? But I hate to make all these first mistakes the very first day; that could do damage. So, yeah, that feels very stressful. (8/15/07)

Connie had no mentor teacher assigned to her, because she was “just a sub” (8/15/07). However, she was curious and reservedly excited that the principal had included her in the observation rotation for new teachers.

What does that mean? Is that just her being nice? Because that’s paperwork for her. This is a woman whose planner is completely filled with micro-print every day; it’s completely full. But she put in me; she’s got a ton – there were nine people in her first-year teacher track meeting, so she’s got a huge load of first and second year teachers to worry about, but she’s putting me in there. (9/21/07)

Connie’s first teaching position ever, seemingly valued by some but not others, had the added fragile dimension of being transitory. This dimension made her position second class as the lack of a nametag, doorplate, chair at the in-services, and mentor implied. Although the principal made every effort to elevate Connie’s status, Connie felt devalued overall. She also felt confused. Was she to teach like she wanted to teach, or like the teacher on maternity leave taught? Just how much autonomy could and should she have?
Novice-Foster-Parent-Teacher

Connie’s identity was in flux, progressively more complicated than substitute parent-teacher. It was now more like novice-foster-parent-teacher. Her task was not simply to take over as interim for a healthy, already-in-motion situation. Connie had the responsibility to begin the school year and teach (her?) reportedly defiant and academically challenged fifth graders—many from families labeled as dysfunctional by the teachers—explicit social and academic skills. She decided that it would be best for the children and the real teacher if her focus would be preparation for a smooth transition at the end of November. In Connie’s mind, this meant she would need to try to implement the teacher’s classroom management system and teaching methods. At the same time, she regretfully admitted that she would need to negotiate her beliefs and practices in order to make this happen.

I want some continuity for those kids. And my style’s very different. From talking to the other fifth grade teacher, I’m getting the impression that my style is very different from that teacher’s, and I don’t want them to have to switch really drastically between two completely different styles. So, there’s going to have to be some compromise. There are some things I just can’t do. (8/15/07)

Connie’s primary concern was classroom management, and she worried that she would not be able to facilitate the behaviorist nature of the system that the teacher on leave would use upon her return. Honoring the teacher’s system even though she did not prefer it, Connie explained that she was trying to figure out ways to make continuity between me and Mrs. Fisher possible, and yet comfortable for me. I’m not going to use a totally different disciplinary style, because it’s not fair to them. And that means I’m going to be using a classroom management system that wouldn’t be my choice. So I’m a little nervous about how I’m actually going to pull that off, because I really think a teacher needs to believe in it, and I’m not sure I DOOOO! [It is] a ticket system.
Like where they have to go up and take a ticket out of their little pocket...I can’t change her system that’s worked for her. And she probably has mental adjustments she has made to it, because I’ve heard really good things about her, so she must have adjustments that she’s made. (8/13/07)

Connie was also concerned about how to arrange the classroom and organize it for instruction. She could not readily find materials that she needed, and once she found them, she was unsure about whether she should move things to places that made more sense to her. She explained that she was “trying to organize what’s there into a way that I can locate it and the kids will be able to locate it without too much confusion; there’s going to be plenty of that anyway” (8/13/07). Although the desks had been arranged in rows according to a diagram Mrs. Fisher left for the custodian, Connie wanted her students to work collaboratively in pods. She freely proceeded to do so, because she had permission from Mrs. Fisher as well as support from the other fifth grade teacher.

And two things I’m already going to do differently than the teacher would do it on the first day, and she told me that’s fine. She’s not going to be there on the first day, so it doesn’t matter to her what I do. I’m glad she said that, because now I won’t feel guilty about it. She doesn’t assign seats on the first day, and I’m going to. Um...(long pause) and she has them in rows, where every chair is separate. And it’s 25 chairs in there! It’s all desks. There is no floor space, there’s no room to move...it’s very crowded. And the other fifth grade teacher already has her desks arranged in pods, and I’m going to. (8/13/07)

After meeting with Mrs. Fisher, Connie felt more at ease to adjust her teaching style as well. Although Mrs. Fisher used a lot of worksheets for independent practice, Connie wanted to focus on more verbal, group activities. “And I asked her the day we met, ‘Do you do literature circle activities?’ And she said, ‘Oh, yeah. Yeah.’ Alright. Good. We’ll be doing a lot of that and less of [worksheets]” (8/13/07).
Foster Teaching

Connie reflected upon how she should best begin the school year, knowing she would need to get to know her students quickly in order to have an impact on them before the end of November. She revealed a strong sense of urgency to improve her students’ academic performance while she was there, as she stated, “I know that’s one of the things I’m going to be judged on, is how well my kids are doing. Not right away, but soon” (8/15/07). Yet, she worried that the children had too many new things to handle and thus she should be careful not to introduce too many things at once. “Maybe not as much time as I really want to, but I’m not going to throw five new subjects at ‘em, and a new teacher, and new rules, and new expectations, and new classrooms, because about a third of the population hasn’t been there” (8/15/07). Weighing these pressures along with the advice from the other fifth grade teacher, who was across the hall and present daily, as well as from Mrs. Fisher, Connie decided she was going to take the time to get to know her students before plunging into reading, writing, and math.

[My team member] said, oh yeah, we start on all the subjects right away, and that’s not what the teacher I’m subbing for had said, so actually between learning that at 4:10 and driving over here I decided, you know what? (Slaps table): I’m not going to! She also told me I did not have to be on the same page that she is, it’s okay if they’re off by a couple of days as long as they’re not on different units, it’s okay. So I’m gonna put my foot down, and I AM going to take the time. (8/15/07)

Having decided this, Connie’s thoughts became more focused and positive. “I know how to teach. I know how to connect with students. Probably not every student, but I know how to try. I’m familiar with the curriculum because my student teaching was
here, and [PDS] classes were here...” (8/13/07). Connie thought of a way to connect to her students who came from Chicago or other places outside of Riverside.

I feel like I have something I can connect with those students because I was not born and raised here. And I’m willing to bring that up right away so that the students who were not born and raised here in Dellen are not going to feel like they are the only ones. And I don’t want the students who are born and raised here to feel like it’s us, meaning them and me, against the students who are from elsewhere. Because I’m from elsewhere. And it’s okay to be from somewhere else. (8/13/07)

During Connie’s student teaching, classroom management was a challenge. She admitted that she would somehow need to compensate for her weakness. “Planning is my strength, and management is a major pitfall in that class; a major pitfall” (8/13/07). She offset her limitations with her positive attitude and quick thinking as she employed proactive strategies to engage the students.

Connie often positioned herself as a learner to give the students confidence. She told her class, “I did a little bit of Trailblazers last year, but not nearly as much as the rest of you did. It’s not the way I learned it in school, either. I need you guys to stay on your toes. You’ve caught me messing up before” (9/28/07).

She also used humor to lighten lessons, identifying humor and warmth as two personal attributes key to her teaching. “That helps with the kids who want to like me, and it helps with the kids who don’t” (2/19/08). She joked when Eva volunteered to model a math problem on the overhead projector, “I hereby bestow upon you the authority of the pen” (9/28/07).

Connie prepared the children for speedy transitions, and then debriefed afterward to help them identify behaviors that led to reduced instructional time.
Connie: ...Thank you. When I say “go,” you will have one minute to get out your math books and notebooks and pencil. Go.
Simon: (Gets out materials). Done!
Nathaniel: Did she say math books?
Shira: Don’t touch it!
Simon: I don’t know!
Shira: I don’t have no book!
Chelsea: I can see your books, but not your faces...Good! You did it in 55 seconds. You saved five seconds.
Kyra: Five seconds to spare.
Connie: What could you have done to make it faster? (9/28/07)

Of all the proactive strategies to help students engage in the learning activities, Connie believed that building classroom community was paramount. However, she struggled to find the time to spend on activities that would help the students learn, trust, and care about each other. During a focus group in late September, she reflected that although she was reminding her fellow first-year teachers to take time to build community, she had a hard time remembering its value herself.

Connie: It’s funny that I can say that to you, and I should be able to say that to myself.
Annie: I know. And I...
Connie: “This first period, I wouldn’t worry about curriculum.” You know, I should be saying the same thing to myself.
Annie: I know. And I’m the same way. Last night I was freaking out about it.
Connie: I really should. It should be the same. It should be exactly the same. (9/21/07)

Connie blamed the schedule, over which she had little control, for not doing Crew, a community-building practice we did daily during PDS where we shared with each other our joys and challenges of the day.

I’ve been wanting to do [Crew]; I don’t know why I haven’t, except that I feel so constrained by the schedule. But we’re not very productive anyway, so what’s the point of sticking to a schedule that’s not producing much?...I have to follow a
certain schedule, because they’re pulled out for spelling for something, and I have to have math at this time because two of them are pulled out for math at that time. And then after lunch we have oral lit, during which time some of them are pulled out, and then at 1:15 we have English during which some of them are pulled out. [10/1/07]

Connie, unable to act immediately proactive enough to handle the many needs of her students, instead found herself reacting to behavioral situations. “And everything is so behavioral. It’s exhausting. Because I don’t like spending my whole day handing out consequences” (10/1/07). Being put in charge of a large group of students who came into the year without the motivation or ability to follow the school procedures, Connie noticed that she was “always being the nag. ‘Stand in line! Be quiet! Stop talking!’ But they have to in the hallways….people stop and yell at them if they don’t. It’s not just something where I can let them go” (10/1/07).

Although she did not like resorting to reactive, controlling measures, she took comfort in the fact that she was not the only one who struggled with the class; the students came with a school history of challenging behaviors.

[The principal] actually said to my face last week when we were having all these problems, “Not that I’m glad that you’re having a hard time, because I’m really sorry that you are, but I’m glad that the fourth grade teachers are able to see that it wasn’t just them last year; that it wasn’t just that they couldn’t manage them. Because they were handling these same kids in three smaller groups, and they couldn’t handle them, either. We tried to tell them it’s not them, but they didn’t believe it, just like you don’t now. (10/1/07)

Even the teacher assigned to help all of the other teachers with behavior concerns had trouble when working directly with Connie’s group.

And I mean [the behavior teacher] even commented on it, and if anybody has a handle on behavior, it’s him. You’d love him. He’s not a mean guy; he’s not a controlling guy. He knows how to let them have fun, and they love him. But, at the end of our review on Thursday, he said, “Dang it, guys. You’re showing me
that we can't play games because when we're done, you won't move on to what
we need to do next. And we can't play games with you in class if you won't come
back when we need you to.” I can't remember the exact words he used, but I
thought, dang it, if [he] can't do it, how can I do it? (10/1/07)

Foster Parenting

So Johnny hands me a pass, or tries to, because it’s stuck to his hand, and says,
"Take this off my hand. It’s stuck.” And I said, “What did you get on it?”....I pull
unmentionable things from his desk every day...and he said, “The glue from the
rat trap.” So Cassy and I both went, “Okay, ummmm...Clorox wipes, you take his
hand, I’ll take the pass...” “Johnny, tell me, what happened? Where did this come
from?” “Well, I knocked it off the table by my bed and it fell in the rat glue.” “Is
this like a glue trap? Is it like a tray that holds glue?” “Yeah, we’re trying to catch
the rat.” “Oh, do you have a pet rat?” Thinking maybe they have a pet rat...not
that that’s the best way to catch it...and he says, “No. It’s a wild one and we’re
trying to kill it. They told us not to go in that room, and my mom made us sleep
there.” He’s sweet, but he’s dirty. He’s tiny; he’s half the size of the other fifth
graders. His little brother is a lot bigger. This is a dad with a criminal history...I
suspect it’s dealing. So today Johnny and another boy pushed and shoved another
fifth grader until the fifth grader fell and Johnny kicked him in the face. (9/21/07)

Johnny’s aggressive behaviors later that day made sense to Connie. Although she did not
excuse him for kicking another boy in the face, she understood his potential sources of
frustration. She knew that many of her students’ home lives, like Johnny’s, were less than
ideal. She also understood that there were cultural differences between how her students
and her own children were raised. After I commented that three of her fifth grade girls
sucked their thumbs nearly the entire time I was there observing, Connie explained:

It makes some people crazy...they will publicly say, “Thumb out of your mouth!”
As soon as they see it, “Get that thumb out of your mouth!” I’m not quite
comfortable with that. Jackie told me it’s a cultural thing, that the African-
American families don’t really have a problem with it. But our deal with it at
school is they’re gonna get made fun of. They’re not going to be able to suck their
thumb in middle school. I mean there’s a lot of just tolerance for it. I never hear
anyone commenting on it in class, ever. I’ve never heard a student ridicule anyone
in class, and that amazes me. That’s not gonna happen in middle school. She’ll
hear it. And Nell, she’ll probably just quit. Jillian, I don’t think she can. It’s so
much a part of her. (10/1/07)
Connie added that she didn’t

...think anybody at home makes her move beyond her comfort level. Her comfort level’s about third grade, hence the thumb-sucking, and the need to be at Danielle’s side. Her behavior is erratic. Some days she acts like she’s had no sleep the night before, like she’ll literally put her head down on her desk and sleep. (10/1/07)

Connie’s philosophy that teaching and parenting are inseparable came to life in her foster-parenting as well as foster-teaching of her class. She took it upon herself to teach the same things about healthy living that she had taught her own children. So she told Jillian, “You need to get your fingers out of your mouth. It’s very germy...you touch things, and you pass things, and that spreads germs” (10/1/07).

Connie realized that she needed to move beyond the shock of her students’ behaviors, and to stop comparing their behaviors to those of her own children. However, this was difficult, frustrating, and exhausting.

You know what? My kids know better. I don’t have to stand over my kids until they pick it up. Okay, this time, go do this, and I’ll come back in a little while and see what you’ve done. It frustrates me that as soon as I turn my back, they’ll start talking, even when they’re in the hallway and they know they’re not supposed to be. (9/21/07)

Although all her life Connie had been a parent-teacher for her own children, she felt alone with her huge pressure to be both the parent and teacher for a whole classroom of students that she would soon leave behind. “Somebody asked me today, one of my friends from out of town, ‘Do you have any triumphs to balance all this stuff?’ ‘No,’ I was responding back online, ‘It’s sad, but the triumphs are pretty grim’” (10/1/07).
Connie wished the parents could do more to support her efforts at school. For example, she needed parental support to make sure the children were at school every day. “There’s been truancy; she and her cousin ditched one day, and since then, we had to call the police to get her brother to school, because they got away with it. Nothing bad happened to them” (9/21/07). Connie also wanted her students to complete homework, but in some cases there was not support for that at home. “They have to do their homework at school, after school, three days a week, because Mom can’t get them to do it at home. So we are now parenting. We are making Matthew do his homework” (9/21/07). For one of her students who qualified for special education services, Connie struggled when the parents would not show up for IEP meetings or sign paperwork for medication.

Johnny needs so much help that he’s not getting – he’s already kicked a boy in the face today, and his parents are very belligerent with the principal about it. I’m sure they’re not going to show up for the IEP; we have to do that twice before we can go ahead and hold one without him… the meds are sitting in the nurse’s office, and the parent won’t make the phone call to get the permission to have the meds at school. So he’s not getting his meds. (9/21/07)

When Connie did see her students’ parents, the interactions she witnessed between them and their children was contrary to the interactions Connie had with her own children.

So, I walked over just in time to see her mom grab her by the arm, and yell, ‘You go pick that right up there! I’m not gonna take none of that angry shit from you!’ …and her mom shook her one more time and went over and picked up the sweatshirt that she’d kind of thrown into her locker, and she kind of said something else and then turned and stalked off. (9/21/07)

It was obvious to Connie that the conflict between her students’ school and home norms was enormous, and she needed to help her students understand that there were certain expectations for behavior at school. She told her students, “Here at LaMont… this
is the way we do things...this is the way we want to be seen in our community”

(11/19/07). “So we will bring that in a LOT. Mainly, it’s a way of giving them something
to hook onto so they understand why they should behave in a certain way. It’s a
behavioral issue of instruction” (11/19/07). Connie struggled to be strict with her students
as she taught and reinforced the school’s behavioral procedures, noting that because she
had always “been a laid-back parent,” at school she felt like “a Nazi at times” (9/21/07).

“I’m not used to having to be this mean -- but evidently, I'm not being mean enough”
(8/28/07).

Connie found that being an on-demand mother of 25 tested her patience more
than the long-term responsibility of being a laid-back mother of five. “They need me
NOW. They do not share at all. And I really get snappish—and they know it now—when
I’m helping somebody and they’re yelling at me from the other side of the room. ‘Mrs.
Paulsen. Mrs. Paulsen!!’ And nobody’s bleeding. It’s just, ‘I’m done!!’” (10/1/07). I got
tired just watching Connie try to respond to all of the impulsive demands of her many
students.

Jack: Miss Paulsen?
Jesse: I’m done.
Chelsea: Done!
Connie: Who needs more time?
Jack: I do!
Michael: Brad left the room...
Connie: Thank you, I know he did.
Students: (They work on their math problems, softly talking throughout.)
Jack: I’m done, Miss Paulsen!
Callie: I have a question!
Connie: Tom, turn around. If you are finished, silently check your answers
with a person near you. That would be silently.
Beth: I’m only on number 1.
Connie: That's just fine. I'd just like the rest of you to please be considerate of those around you who are still working.

Jack: Tom put his notebook on the overhead!

Tom: No, I didn't!

Mishra: Ooh! Ooh! Spider! Spider!! (9/28/07)

Balancing Ongoing Foster-Parenting with Paced Foster-Teaching

Connie noted near the end of her novice-foster-parent-teacher time at LaMont that her class had more productive instructional time than at the beginning of the year. “I was pretty happy when it got down to 50/50, because half of my day was actually spent doing productive things instead of ‘Sit down. Stop that. No more. No.’” (11/19/07). This ratio came only with great effort. She struggled throughout her temporary time with her students to teach them the strictly paced and assessed district math curriculum, knowing they often did not understand the concepts. “I see the panic on their faces, and I resent being the one that has to make them feel it” (12/17/07). She wished she could pace instruction according to her students’ needs rather than to a predetermined timeline.

I see this in very general terms. Pacing is important because you have to be able to manage your time. In my big general picture, it shouldn’t have to go much deeper than that: than figuring out how much time you have, and how much material you have to cover, and making sure that you pace it so that you can do that. But the district paces for you...what ABOUT my kids who aren’t getting this? They can’t LEARN the next part without learning this. But according to THIS schedule, I’m two weeks behind. (12/17/07)

Connie was frustrated not only because the district pacing schedule for math disregarded her firsthand, contextual understanding of her students’ needs; it also did not take into consideration the high mobility rates of some schools—like LaMont—and the assessment schedule and format around which students’ math groupings and interventions were determined. “Some of these kids weren’t here last year. Or, if they were here, they had
other problems to deal with...so I have a hard time continuing to assess them on things I personally haven’t taught them” (10/1/07).

From Distance to Investment

Although all of the signs at the beginning of the year told Connie that she held a second class position as a long-term substitute teacher, she grew to love her students—her students. In September, Connie told the other first-year participants that she would purchase materials for the students “if this were my class” (9/21/07). During the first month of her long-term substitute position, she waffled in her understanding of her role.

But really, I believed this at one point, so I don’t know why every other day I don’t. Really, I know, that most of their learning is probably going to come second and third trimester, when their teacher comes back. Because it’s going to take that long to get them to a point where they can sit down and not talk for fifteen minutes at a time. I feel like my job is just going to have to be to have them ready, and to try to give some background knowledge. (9/21/07)

Connie’s confusion became clear to me. She was not only trying to prepare for another teacher; she was trying to be another teacher. She reached a frustration level early October when she admitted that she could no longer put on an act—she could no longer deny her personal investment as a parent-teacher with her students.

Connie: I’ve gotta survive. And I’m just not good enough to adapt to someone else’s style my first time out of the gate, and make it work for me. I figured I would be doing her the better favor if I could get some kind of system going where they would be responsive to follow instructions, even if it didn’t quite match hers, than if it were just chaos when she came back, because I couldn’t manage hers.

Deb: Mm, hmm. Do you feel like they’re coming around?
Connie: Sometimes.
Deb: Do you feel like you’re their teacher at all?
Connie: (Quickly) Yes.
Deb: Okay. Like, how much percent? 100 percent?
Connie: Oh, yeah.
Deb: I mean...
Connie: Yeah.
Deb: You’re really...
Connie: Mm, hmm.
Deb: That’s how it feels.
Connie: It’s gonna be hard to leave.
Deb: Mm, hmm.
Connie: Even though they’re stinkers, it’s gonna be...(begins to cry)...yeah. It’ll be hard to let...I, I, I’m very invested. It’s very frustrating. (10/1/07)

In Late November, looking back upon her accomplishments with her fifth graders,

Connie was at peace. “At first I was wondering if people were just telling me, “Oh, it’s a really tough group,” to make me feel better, and, no. Now I know. I do have some peace now that I really did okay” (11/19/07). After her last day with her students, Connie reflected upon her experiences, expressing her tension between trying to be the novice-foster-parent-teacher that she was, and the experienced, more behaviorist teacher that she did not want to be.

I did not do things the way she likes to have things done. Was I really worried about that? No. But I guess because I was in survival mode most of the time. I was treading water...just trying to keep my head above water sometimes. So, if things have to change, they have to change. But there are so many things from just watching her part of Thursday and then Friday morning, I thought, “Dang! (Whispers) I wish I could have seen her do it. (Loudly): Dang!! I wish I could have seen her DO that!!” That would have helped me....I still wouldn’t have done it exactly her way. I would have done it ME...it still would have been ME, with my twist on it. But, it would have given me more of a foundation where I didn’t feel quite so.... (11/19/07)

The Time for Mistakes

Connie liked to make decisions that resulted in good learning for her children and students. What she did not like was when she knew she was making mistakes, or not accomplishing what she should, and although she had asked for help, too much time
passed without improvement in the situation. For both her own children and her students, she believed that learning was all about “figuring out what you need, and how to get it, and what you know, and what you don’t know, and what you need to know to get to where you want to be. And if you don’t have the answer, who does?” (12/17/07)

Although she valued the learning that resulted from making mistakes, she did not want her children--or herself--to wallow in mistake-making for long. She encouraged her own children to be proactive about their learning in order to avoid failure, warning them that otherwise “you’ll get it the hard way on your own, making mistakes, and not even knowing for months that you’ve made a mistake” (11/19/07).

Remembering how afraid she was to ask for help as a child, Connie connected that fear to her ongoing sense of hesitation that impacted her teaching.

I’m a little reluctant to leave myself open for criticism. Not wanting to be wrong is part of it; not wanting to say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing out of ignorance. So I wait. And I hated asking questions in school....I probably learned at Riverside that if I didn’t know what to do, it was up to me to find out. And if I didn’t like the situation, I needed to do something to change it. (2/19/08)

Relating her own student experiences to her teaching, Connie reflected that a key characteristic of poor teaching is making children flounder for too long without timely feedback. Another major teaching fault, according to Connie, is making students afraid to ask for help. Describing the worst teacher she ever had, Connie noted that he would yell at us if we asked questions. He would give us homework, and then check it by looking to see if we had done it. He’d go over a few if people had questions, but if someone said, “I need help with number three,” sometimes he would be in the mood to do it, and he would do it, but then if someone else said, “I don’t get that,” he would get mad: “I just explained that. Why weren’t you paying attention?! If you had been paying attention, you would get it! Or are you saying that I didn’t teach it well?” I was like (in a whimpering voice), “I’m not saying anything!” So, he would not grade our homework, but he would check
problems here and there, so you thought, I guess I did okay. And then you’d take
a test on it. And then you didn’t get the test back; you’d start the next unit. And
you’d think, “Okay, well I felt okay about that test; I’ll be okay.” And then you’d
take the next test, and then you’d get the first test back and find out you got a D.
So you’ve been doing it wrong now for three weeks, but you didn’t know it.
(12/17/07)

Connie’s disdain for the lack or lateness of feedback applied to her own teaching as well.
She was frustrated by the cumbersome, lengthy, test-based processes that were necessary
to give her students the help she knew they needed.

My last day in that classroom... was our grade-level meeting... going over the
MAP scores. Mid-November. And we are just now figuring out which kids need
math interventions. And I’ve been watching them struggle, and struggle, and
struggle, and get nowhere for three months. And we are NOW deciding who
needs help. She needed help in August. THAT frustrates me. We really couldn’t
figure this out before now? (12/17/07)

Connie wanted to help her students, but she did not have much experience in diagnosing
students’ specific academic challenges. Furthermore, even if she could figure out exactly
what they needed, due to her students’ demanding behaviors, she could not logistically
structure one-on-one or small group interventions without help from extra personnel.

A New Opportunity

Ironically, shortly before the end of Connie’s long-term substitute position, the
principal offered her a half-time, diagnostic-heavy job as the EIS person at the same
school. Connie thought it stood for Early Intervention Specialist, but was not sure. She
commented about how paradoxical it seemed that “they would call me a specialist,
because I don’t know what I’m doing day to day. I have to figure it out as I go”
(12/17/07). This new job entailed working with a total of about a dozen students per week
in one-on-one or paired settings. Through a specific district problem solving process,
these students had been identified as needing intervention. Connie’s job was to work with these students for a six-to-eight week period as one of eight data points, or documented steps to determine whether entitlement for special education was necessary. She also taught two small groups of students who needed significant interventions in reading.

Connie had admitted that she was a bit out of her comfort zone as a diagnostician. Her new job required her to immediately recognize and respond to each student’s specific needs, and this ability is something she had admired in other teachers but was not yet confident she had.

I’ve always wondered, just sitting in on team meetings with other teachers and other grade levels, and hearing other teachers say, “Yeah, we need to do an intervention with this little group”….Okay, how do they know that? How do they reach that decision?....I was looking at this kid and I was seeing a problem, but I don’t know what the problem is. AND I don’t know what the solution is. So how do you get to that point where you can identify the problem and then know what solution, what to do? (12/17/07)

Connie, tending to second-guess herself and overanalyze things, was her own worst critic. “I’m still questioning it a little too much…I’m wanting to know a few too many ‘why’s, and that’s going to lead me in circles” (12/17/07).

As Connie worked one-on-one with a student, she clearly was drawing upon some diagnostic and responsive skills from somewhere.

I wanted her to see it done a different way. I wanted her to see that ‘3’ can look like this, three in a row, or it can look like one above the other and two below, and it’s still ‘3.’ So, again, I was thinking, I really need to play with this and let her see how many ways we can make it using different squares. (12/17/07)

Although Connie could not identify any specific source for her ability to plan such immediate next steps, she certainly proved she could do it. And she knew that she could only plan ahead in a limited manner from one session to another. She created most of her
instruction on the spot, and she was good at it. Yet, she missed the structure of long-term planning and anticipated that once she got to know her students better, she would be able to do more of it.

Obviously Lizzie knows how to add; it just doesn’t really mean anything to her. So I need to start helping her see relationships. But I couldn’t plan that in advance because I didn’t know what she needed. I’m not really comfortable with the day-to-day planning; it feels like I’m flying by the seat of my pants. But that’s all I’m really able to do right now. If I knew enough, I’d rather plan for a week at a time.” (12/17/07)

Connie compromised by noting immediately after one session what she could do next time. “So every day I write something down to do with the student the next day, based on what we did that day” (12/17/07). Connie’s new job forced her to plan instruction according to what she observed the students doing rather than what paced curriculum manuals and programs told her to do. Hesitantly free, she finally had complete autonomy to artfully design and facilitate student-centered instruction.

I was thinking at that point: next week we’re going to do ‘one more.’ We’re just going to work with one more….I was thinking, ah, we’ve got this relationship here [between the numbers] and she’s not seeing it…it’s another piece of the puzzle she’s not getting. I don’t usually know what my next step is. It’s amazing where their holes are. Like they know all this, and then suddenly they can’t do this and this because they’re missing something here. And there’s all these other steps that should follow it. (12/17/07)

Connie became increasingly more confident in her own diagnostic skills. “I’m learning how to diagnose without someone handing me a paper on a kid and saying, ‘Here’s the problem; fix it.’ I’m learning how to figure out what the problems are, which is going to be very valuable” (12/17/07).

Connie also found victory in her new opportunity to decide how to motivate students to engage in the learning. She showed me a folder of a student recently exited
from the intervention roster. Connie had not worked with this student; the folder was
given to her as an example of what and how she might document interventions. This
particular folder included a card where the Early Intervention Specialist was to mark once
every three minutes whether the student was on task and following directions.

I’m not doing that. I’m not going to fill in little numbers every day so that they
can earn a thousand points and get a sticker. How about giving them a sticker just
for coming? So, I don’t do that. And some of the kids were a little outraged right
away…and I said, “I’m sorry; that’s not my game.” (12/13/07)

This new EIS position offered Connie a chance to make her own decisions and
develop skills she could not practice when she was a long-term substitute. However, her
feelings of being a second class teacher remained. In the pecking order of student
services, Connie believed that her position—one that provided intense academic
intervention for students who supposedly needed it most—should compare in value to the
other support programs and positions.

And then I find out that the speech therapist comes when I’m supposed to have
her, and then the computer people came and said, “She’s supposed to be in
keyboarding at this time.” Okay. Fine. Then this isn’t worth much, is it? If Mentor
is late, Mentor still gets all of Mentor’s time….I was thinking, I know they need
this, but….” (12/17/07)

Settling into LaMont

During a focus group in February, Connie’s tone was relaxed and less emotional
than her past few interviews. She matter-of-factly noted ongoing behavioral concerns.
“We just got the edict that we are no longer allowed to have our kids out in the hallway
without adult supervision” (2/1/08). Her perception of parental neglect that Connie felt
was hurting her students no longer surprised her. She told the focus group about one of
her students whose mother would not sign paperwork for medication for ADHD because the mother’s boyfriend would not allow her to do so.

Although she knew what to expect and felt comfortable in the school, Connie was not yet comfortable being a specialist. She summed up her challenges in one word: uncertainty. Connie liked to know what she was doing. Having no clear vision for either her substitute or specialist role, she created her short-term vision and understanding for her teaching position as she taught.

I like security about what I’m doing. Having to learn it on the fly—I don’t like that. I like having a course syllabus (smiles). I like having that course syllabus to refer back to and see, “Now, when was that going to happen, and how much was this worth?” Nobody really knows what my job is. I’m not really good at creating things as I go. (2/19/08)

Connie explained that the official purpose of her position was “to provide an intervention that will hopefully address the need of an individual student who is at risk academically and will hopefully fill that gap so it is not necessary to move that student on into any kind of special education or to be removed from the classroom anymore” (2/19/08). However, the “unofficial purpose,” as she called it, was primarily to “get the eight-week intervention done so we can move this kid to assessment and get him into special ed where they need to be” (2/19/08). Constructing the mechanisms and understandings of her job up as she went, Connie was learning that others viewed her interventions as the last step before children were assessed to determine eligibility for entitlement for special education.

Connie’s teacher identity was shifting. She was “building relationships with teachers” through her specialist position (2/19/08). The teachers appreciated Connie for
the interventions she provided for their students. Connie shared a recent conversation with another teacher. "'Have your ears been ringing? We were discussing you in our math meeting; Kudos all around!' And I said, 'What for?' And she said, 'Just for being here, mostly!'" (2/19/08)

Although Connie's new position forged relationships between her and the other teachers, it denied her the opportunity to develop deep relationships with children. Connie wanted her own students. She could not form significant relationships with the students whom she only taught for one half hour, three times per week, for a few weeks. She could not be a parent-teacher for these children.

I don't have the ownership of a class. Some of these kids I'll have for a while longer; some I'll get for eight weeks and that's it. So I do my best with them. I can't function without a personal relationship, so I do my best to establish some kind of personal relationship, but I just don't have the ownership of it. (2/19/08)

Connie, longing for relationships with her students as well as her own space and more teacher autonomy overall, hoped to secure a full-time general elementary education position for the fall. "You have the class—the students. They're yours. You have the space, the room, the territory, the land. You have it, it's staked out, it's yours" (2/19/08). Upon hearing that there would be a third grade position open at Ben's school next year, Connie quickly and freely exclaimed, "I'll apply! I want a classroom!" (2/1/08)

However, if she had to decide between a classroom position outside the district or keeping the part-time specialist position at LaMont, she would stay at LaMont. Her role as a mother took over to help her daughters through personal problems and health concerns. She wanted to be close to home and available for them. Connie admitted that
the timing of her part-time position had “worked out well. This was good. This was good” (2/19/08).

Connie’s identity as a foster-parent-teacher was shifting as well. She found herself constantly reflecting back on her time with the fifth grade, wondering if she had been too lenient with behavioral expectations. Since her shift to her strategist position, Connie had substitute taught in some challenging classrooms on her days off, including the middle school which her fifth grade students would attend next year. She realized that these one-day subbing experiences had toughened her up since her long-term substitute position. “I subbed at Carter last week for a very rough group…it was rough, but I handled it much differently than I did my fifth grade class at first. I was firmer with them. I wasn’t wishy-washy at all” (2/19/08). Connie had learned that her ongoing battle with hesitation had prevented her from being consistent with the fifth grade class earlier in the year. Through her one-day substitute teaching experiences, Connie had learned to reply to students’ questions with definite, consistent answers.

Because that’s always my big panic; what if I don’t know? When they’re asking me if they can do something, what if I don’t know? I’ve always been like that, in Block [PDS] and everything. What if I don’t know? Because inevitably they’ll ask you, “Can we do this?” And if I say, “Well, I’m not sure…” As soon as you leave that opening, they’ll go for it. I’ve just learned to be a little bit more decisive. Like I told this class, “Well, that’s nice. When she comes back, she’ll let you again. But I’m not going to.” (2/19/08)

After subbing in other buildings, when Connie substituted for a day in her former fifth grade classroom, she realized all that she had learned about being decisive and consistent. She had learned this retrospectively from her fifth-graders.

I’m definitely less of a mom to them, now, and that’s good. I found out when I walked back into class that day to sub; by the end of the day I knew that I was
cured. I am no longer a nice, soft person. I’m cured. I’ll never be that soft again. I’m not mean; I’m not a battle-ax, I’m not mean just because I can be, but I didn’t let them walk all over me. I called them on stuff that they were pulling, and they were like, “Why are you being so mean?...You’re being mean, Mrs. Paulsen!” I said, “Pat yourself on the back. You did this.” And they didn’t get it at first. And then somebody finally did. (2/19/08)

Being in the same school building with the children she had taught for the first trimester naturally prompted Connie to watch the fifth graders’ behavior and compare it to how they behaved when she was their teacher. She was relieved to conclude that it wasn’t her after all; their classroom teacher struggled with this group as well.

For a long time I have been chasing this thought around—for months—that I had created this monster by being too lax and too hesitant and not jumping on it fast enough—I created it....But I’ve seen them in the hallways, and I know about the discipline problems that are ongoing, and mainly I watched how they were responding because I knew I was being more like her when I subbed than I had been before....So I realized: she’s good, she’s consistent, she’s tough. If that were my creation, she would have done more with it by now....That particular group of kids came to me the way they were, and they’re not much different. (2/19/08)

Although her identity was shifting at school to feel more like a teacher and less like a parent, she still mixed parenting and teaching. When problems occurred, she drew upon her instincts as a mother to overcome them.

This may have been what got me through a very difficult situation. This was a separate situation, but I applied it today, with [my daughter]. Okay, if I don’t want to be part of the problem here, I need to help her find a solution. And I know I did it in my fifth grade classroom, and I did it with those two fourth graders when they got extremely obnoxious. I could kick them out or I could try to fix the situation. (2/19/08)

Watching Connie interact with a third grade girl during a math intervention, Connie’s facial expressions were tender, always smiling, and with a smooth and unlined face never grimacing, even when Lizzie’s responses were far from accurate. Lizzie’s eyes studied
Connie’s face, looking for clues and finding reassurance in Connie’s attentive eye contact and gentle vocal tones.

As Connie watched the video recording of that lesson, she beamed a broad smile when Lizzie understood a concept. “She did it without looking. Her eyes were on me. She’s very honest. She’s so much faster than before! Without thinking about it, she’s got it now” (3/13/08). Connie’s understanding of her students’ learning styles and needs shaped her instruction more than the prescribed lessons in the teacher manual did. “She hates subtraction. And it worries her. She starts looking lost. Really, we’re supposed to be working on subtraction, but we’re not going to until she’s comfortable. We play with it a little bit” (3/13/08).

Placing short stacks of Unifix Cubes next to big stacks, Lizzie found differences between the two, and Connie created verbal number sentences to match Lizzie’s counting, removing, and adding of cubes. At times, Connie required Lizzie to identify whether the operation in Connie’s question was addition or subtraction. “What would we have to do to this stack of five cubes to make it as big as this stack of eight cubes?” (3/13/08). To that particular question, Lizzie responded, “13.” Connie immediately responded, “That’s what you would get if you added them together.” I asked Connie how she so quickly knew what Lizzie was thinking to get 13. “Oh, I know her. I was reading her, and maybe all I was doing was trying to plant something positive. She’s afraid of subtraction” (3/13/08). Because Connie knew Lizzie’s comfort level, she anticipated that Lizzie would add rather than subtract.
Connie was forming relationships with her students, even though she only taught them for eight weeks. The children soaked up all of the attention from Connie, perhaps not knowing the overall time with her would soon end. She told me what Lizzie does when Connie picks her up from her classroom. “She does this little act. When I go to pick her up, she [makes a face and sighs and squirms]. Then she’ll walk to the door and grab my hand and walk down the hall holding my hand, practically skipping the whole way.” (3/13/08) For her fellow classmates, Lizzie put on a show of resistance to Connie, the intervention, and/or removal from the classroom. Once out of sight from her classroom, Lizzie immersed herself in her private interactions with Connie.

As a one-on-one parent-teacher and growing diagnostician, Connie appeared comfortable with her teaching, and understanding of Lizzie’s fear of math. Following Lizzie’s confident and accurate response to a math question, Connie tried to reassure Lizzie, connecting Lizzie’s experiences with the Unifix Cubes to the abstract nature of written equations. “Did you know that’s all that math is? It’s just basically counting on, counting back, putting some on, taking some away, dividing one thing into lots of small things; that’s all it is, and you’re doing really well at it” (3/13/08). I asked Connie why she told this to Lizzie, and she compassionately replied, “I’m trying to tell her she’s speaking the right language. It’s a foreign country—it really is! Minus?? The whole concept is, ‘Huh? Why did you switch to Greek?!’ She gets that look on her face. Bless her heart” (3/13/08).

In April, Lizzie was doing so well with her math that Connie, smiling broadly and with a twinkle in her eye, announced that the interventions she facilitated for Lizzie were
working so well that Lizzie would likely not be entitled for special education. Another one of Connie’s students, Sammi, Connie named as her greatest success story of the year.

Sammi. She’s a workhorse. I have her for reading, and she’s gone up several text levels, and is going up faster than she was. She’s reading harder books, and she’s getting through them in the same amount of time. She’s going up a level every week. She’s a lot more confident. (4/3/08)

Connie enjoyed the rewards of her part-time strategy specialist position. She saw progress in students like Lizzie and Sammi—progress directly related to Connie’s strategies and caring support. “It’s getting better. I’m not as overwhelmed as I was….I’m still caught in the learning curve. I’m planning more as I go” (4/3/08).

Connie’s conversations about her teaching, even after four full months of being a strategy specialist, still leaned heavily toward her three-month experience at the beginning of the year as a long-term sub with her challenging fifth grade class. Perhaps because those months were so formative in Connie’s early teaching, and as a substitute teacher now having the opportunity to return to that classroom after other teaching experiences, Connie continued to reflect upon how much she learned about herself and about teaching through that position. “I learned a lot in those three months. One of the things I came away with is how much is dependent upon the classroom environment; how maintaining an environment that is not just survivable, but tolerable, for every student. That’s just as important as the lesson preparation” (4/3/08).

Connie reflected upon how she would go home to her husband, her supportive sounding board, as she admitted she would tell him, “I’m sorry. I’m going on and on and on about it. And bless his heart, he always said, ‘That’s okay. That’s okay” (4/3/08). Connie couldn’t imagine the first year of teaching without her encouraging husband.
"You shouldn’t be alone. You need the support. You need someone to vent to. You need someone to bounce ideas off, and someone to tell you you’re doing a good job" (4/3/08).

Connie had often shared the challenges she and her husband had with their teenage daughters. Connie emphasized how important it was to not take things personally as a parent. Toward the end of the school year as Connie reflected back on her teaching, she used similar language to describe how she perceived her growth as a teacher. “I’m getting better at not getting flustered, and staying objective, and staying neutral. Neutrality is needed….And I realize looking back that what I always needed to do—and this sounds so defensive—was to not give the students the power to make me angry” (4/3/08).

Despite Connie’s challenging teaching experiences at LaMont, she kept hoping for a teaching position to open there for her. She wanted to stay close to home for her own children’s sake, and even though eighteen elementary teachers had just been laid off, Connie believed that if she was patient and loyal to the district, things would work out. “I’m staying here, so when enrollment comes back up in August, which it always does, I can get a job” (4/3/08).

Connie’s Final Hopes and Reflections

In mid-May, Connie shared hopeful news that she would secure another long-term substitute position at LaMont in the fall.

Hi everyone,
My EIS position ends on May 23, and is not being renewed next year - so, on my birthday I become unemployed! Hopefully, the long-term sub position I'm being considered for will be offered. Other than a little let-down, I am ready for summer!
Connie (5/13/08)
Connie did secure the long-term sub job for the fall: a half-time long-term substitute position teaching students labeled as gifted and talented. The job would go through January of 2009, and Connie thought this was a good option during this time of lay-offs in the district.

Connie ended her first year of teaching as an informal assistant in a classroom where the teacher was on maternity leave. Disheartened, she was asked to spend so much time assisting with behavior issues that she was unable to follow through with her own students' interventions. Some of the children with whom she had worked so closely became entitled for special education without her even knowing it.

I got to watch a bunch of people undermine the long-term sub....People were blaming her for things that had been developing for seven months....I wasn’t able to do my interventions with those four kids because they really needed another adult in there handling people throwing chairs and crawling under desks and threatening to kill themselves....And then they just started entitling my kids without telling me.

Connie’s challenging experience as a long-term sub in fifth grade helped her empathize with this long-term sub who took the blame for things out of her control.

Reflecting back on her first year of teaching, Connie noted that she was “tougher. Not as emotional. Not cold, but just not as easily swayed....Maybe stronger’s a better word” (6/4/08). She told Annie, Rachel, Ben and me that in order for her to know if she really wanted to keep teaching, she needed to first become the teacher in a general elementary classroom with her own students. She had not yet had this experience, nor would she next year. Reflective and hopeful, she noted, “Nothing that I’ve experienced so
far has made me want to change my thinking” (6/4/08). She added, “In August I will be looking forward to fall. Right now, I’m not....I’m doing the mom thing” (6/4/08).
CHAPTER VI
NEGOTIATING TEACHING:
THE INTERSECTION OF IDENTITY, VISION, AND CONTEXT

Each of the four first-year participants learned and practiced how to teach at Riverside College in the early 2000s. Each of them began their teaching careers in the 2007-2008 academic year in the Dellen School District. Although these common experiences contribute to how these teachers negotiated their first year, my premise is just that: their Riverside experiences contributed to the negotiation rather than solely determined it. The teachers described, shaped, and reflected upon their experiences in relation to their teacher identity, teacher vision, and professional as well as personal life contexts. To explain and exemplify this three-way intersection, I first refer to literature about teacher identity and vision and their relationship to people’s past and present contexts. Then I highlight some of the contextual factors that influenced the participants in this particular study.

Literature about Teacher Identity and Vision Development

The concepts of teacher identity and teacher vision are so closely related that it is challenging to discuss them separately. Each heavily depends upon and influences the other. Synthesizing basic definitions from the literature that follows, teacher identity defines what a person is, while teacher vision defines what a teacher hopes to do. The contexts of one’s past and present personal life, and the context of one’s professional teaching position, determine the degree to which the teacher can be him or herself and enact his or her vision in the process of teaching.
Danielewicz (2001) defines teacher identity as “the way individuals conceive of themselves so that teaching is a state of being, not merely ways of acting or behaving” (p. 3). She contends that “becoming a teacher means that an individual must adopt an identity as such” (p. 9). In order to imagine oneself in the process of teaching, one must draw upon one’s identity. Alsup (2006) discusses teacher identity development in terms of the “integration of the personal self with the professional self” (p. 4), emphasizing how critical it is to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities for discourse about the two selves. Palmer (1998) places teacher identity at the pinnacle of teaching success—more important than techniques—as the key to connecting with students.

After three decades of trying to learn my craft, every class comes down to this: my students and I, face to face, engaged in an ancient and exacting exchange called education. The techniques I have mastered do not disappear, but neither do they suffice. Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this ‘I’ who teaches—without which I have no sense of the ‘Thou’ who learns. (p. 10)

While teacher identity defines who a teacher is, teacher vision describes what a teacher wants to happen. Hammerness (2006) defines teacher vision as “images of ideal classroom practices” (p. 1). Her premise is that teacher vision may be an important key to understanding how teachers balance subject matter and student needs, and bridge the gap between vision and current practice. Navigating these tensions is challenging but central to improving practice and sustaining a passion for teaching.

Britzman (1991) identifies four contexts, or what she calls chronologies to becoming a teacher: (1) the chronology negotiated throughout any person’s cumulative classroom life, (2) student experiences in the university and teacher education, (3) student teaching, and (4) novice teaching. Using Britzman’s chronologies as a framework, I will
discuss what the literature has to say about teacher vision and identity development before I analyze its connections with my participants’ experiences. Because of the various clinical structures that the literature addresses, often not singling out student teaching as a separate clinical experience, I address the second and third chronologies together and call it *pre-service teaching*.

**The Impact of a Person’s Cumulative Classroom Life on Teacher Identity and Vision**

Teachers begin to develop their identity and vision for teaching not when they begin their college education courses, but from the first time they are in a classroom setting as a pre-school or kindergarten student. Unlike most other career fields, nearly everyone who goes into teaching has already interpreted the meaning of teaching through many consecutive years of personal observation. In other words, people do not grow up watching doctors, lawyers, or accountants every day, but they do grow up watching teachers. Lortie (1975) calls this powerful identity and vision-shaping force the *apprenticeship of observation*.

However, students can only interpret and rehearse in their mind the enacted part of a teacher’s job because that is all they see. Therefore they form only partial and often misconceived perceptions about what it means to be a teacher. These preconceptions are based upon observations of explicit teacher actions such as transmitting information and encouraging students. The apprenticeship of observation is so powerful that even after formal teacher education, and particularly when a teacher is under extreme pressure, it typically dominates teacher practice.

Constantly I’m always drifting back to high school, which is really strange. It’s like, I’ll see the teachers in my high school, particularly in English. You just sit.
They ask questions, you paraphrase *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. There wasn’t anything creative, there wasn’t anything stimulating. You sit around and read your book and discuss it in class. In a lot of respects, that’s what I’m doing at this point because I don’t have a lot of resources to draw on. (Britzman, 1991, p. 83)

As exemplified in this quote of a student teacher and research participant in Britzman’s study, the apprenticeship of observation takes over when a teacher has no other solid practice from which to draw. This tendency to teach as one was taught perpetuates a status quo of teacher practice.

**The Impact of Pre-service Teaching on Teacher Identity and Vision**

Prospective teachers enter their teacher preparation program with the phenomenon that Lortie (1975) described, the apprenticeship-based understanding of what it means to be a teacher. Feiman-Nemser (2001a) and Hammersness et al. (2005) note the importance of immediately asking education students to examine their preconceptions about teaching that they developed through their own schooling experiences. By so doing, possibly for the first time ever, future teachers take a behind-the-scenes look at teaching. As students progress through their teacher preparation programs, they continue to analyze and adjust their vision of teaching in light of what they study about how people learn, broadening their definition of teaching to include the many influences—political, economic, and social—that affect instructional planning, facilitating, and assessment.

Although examining and talking about teaching in a college campus classroom may begin to clarify misconceptions about teaching, it is not enough to prepare people to be teachers. This is mainly because the missing component in the teaching-learning process—the actual P-12 students—are not available on campus. Hammerness et al.
(2005) highlight the problem of enactment that pre-service teachers experience as they attempt to put their university classroom learning into practice. There are many variables that occur while on the job that seem to interfere with the act of teaching, yet these variables are what constitute teaching. The authors contend that pre-service teachers, therefore, can only learn how to be teachers by teaching. Ideally, they should have the opportunity to hone their teaching skills through a series of guided clinical experiences where they continuously cycle through observation, practice and reflection. The authors note that teacher education programs cannot possibly provide the background for everything teachers will encounter in their profession. However, the program can lay a foundation for lifelong learning as future teachers discover through their preparation programs that inquiry and reflection are the basis for ongoing teaching improvement.

Unfortunately, just as pre-service teachers expand their images of what they hope their classrooms will someday look like, and anxiously enter their clinical settings eager to try out their learning, what they see may not align with the images of good teaching that they have created through their college studies. To add to the conflict, clinical education students are told not to question or contradict the practices they see. "The institutional representatives that Goodlad's team interviewed generally said that the college of education is in no position, or does not choose, to disrupt existing practice in the grades" (Levin, 1990, p. 75). This congeniality leads to conventionality as teachers-to-be assimilate their cooperating teachers' ways of teaching and interacting with students, maintaining and reinforcing practice that may not align with current learning theory. Without an opportunity to try out best practice as studied on campus, the nearly
two decades of preconceptions built as a preschool through college student, and the reproduction of practice reinforced through status-quo clinical placements take over, minimizing the likelihood that transformative teaching practices will occur in the budding teacher’s future classroom.

Goodlad, in his study of twenty-nine institutions with teacher education programs, found there to be little connection between campus learning and clinical practice. Citing only occasional examples of teamwork between university and school-based faculty for “effecting the transition from college classes to school classrooms and sharing norms” (1990b, p. 33), he suggested a partnership approach to provide observations connected with the subject matter of each course, accompanied by discussion; individually arranged visits to settings of your choice; observations and hand-on experiences with at least six different methods of teaching; a year-long induction into school practice, at least half of that as a member of a cohort group assigned to a practice school, accompanied by theory-related-to-practice seminars—and more. (1990a, p. 298)

Tyson (1994) concurred that

the process of learning to teach seems to be accelerated if students are made to interpret events in the classroom soon after they have experienced them, if they are given the chance to see manifestations of theories soon after studying them, and if they get quick and honest feedback on all aspects of their work. (p. 161)

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) agree. In order for pre-service teachers to make theories and practices concrete—to bring their visions to action—they need to have reflective practice within clinical settings under close supervision by expert teachers as well as university personnel, allowing pre-service teachers to apply, analyze, and adjust their practice on an ongoing basis.
Professional development schools: Partnerships that build teacher identity and vision. The idea to partner P-12 schools with university teacher education programming began in the late 1980s with the Holmes group, provosts and deans of education of top U.S. universities who originally met with the goal to brainstorm ways to improve teacher education. They soon directed their attention to two concurrent goals of renewing K-12 education and teacher education. In the past decade, hundreds of professional development schools have developed across the country as a way to blend the educational theory of university instruction with day-to-day practice in schools (Teitel, 2004). In PDS programs, pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and university faculty collaborate in P-12 schools to improve education. The benefits are many, including intensive clinical work for cohorts of pre-service teachers, built-in staff development for in-service teachers, collaborative professional inquiry, and improved education for P-12 students (Levine, 2002; Murrell, 1998; Teitel, 1997). In terms of teacher vision and identity development, the collaborative, reflective, and practicum-based nature of PDSs provide a rich environment for pre-service teachers to see themselves as teachers and discuss teaching every day with others who are also shaping their teacher visions and identities.

One advantage of professional development schools for teacher preparation is the opportunity for students to work closely and rigorously with fellow pre-service teachers to develop the habits and skills needed for successful teaching. PDS learning communities offer the opportunity for group problem-solving of daily teaching dilemmas (Zeichner & Miller, 1997). Mantle-Bromley (1998) identified "a learning community" as a key component of the success in a PDS that she studied, describing how the pre-service
teachers "listen[ed] carefully to their peers’ experiences and recommendations" (p. 51).

In a study examining a variety of clinical structures, PDS pre-service teachers noted the camaraderie and support within their PDS structure as key program strengths (Sandholtz & Dadlez, 2000). In this four-year longitudinal evaluation of a PDS, the students viewed their PDS cohort as critical for emotional support, ideas for classroom management, and sharing of teaching strategies.

Another benefit of professional development schools is the opportunity to develop a habit of reflection as an integral component of effective teaching (Rock & Levin, 2002; Ross, 2002). With ongoing guidance from the university professors and P-12 teachers, PDS students reflect daily upon connections between learning theories, teaching methods, and classroom application. A large-scale longitudinal study tracking development of teacher competence from pre-service enrollment to the third year of in-service found that teacher education programs integrating practical experience and theoretical study, including mutual reflection, strongly impacted beginning teaching practices (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). “Teachers had internalized the interpersonal approaches used during their pre-service programs, particularly clinical supervision and small group work, as intra-personal approaches to self-evaluation” (p. 209).

There are several studies in which pre-service teachers in professional development schools self-report positive outcomes of their PDS experiences. In one study, when compared to students in a traditional program, PDS students felt fewer concerns upon entering the teaching profession, greater self-efficacy, greater ability to make an impact on student learning, and a greater ability to handle student problems
(Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001). In two studies reported by Thompson and Ross (2000), students who had completed extended student teaching experiences in a professional development school identified that the depth, time, and quality mentoring of their experiences helped them make connections between theory and practice, learn to collaborate, and develop a habit of reflection. Students in the study of a Maryland PDS reported confidence in their classroom management and understanding of the impact of reflection on their practice (Neubert & Binko, 1998).

**Teacher education: Pedagogical principles that support teacher identity development.** The underlying problem, according to Britzman (1991), is that “teacher education must be conceived as more than a technocratic problem of training,” rather than a process wherein future educators may “reflect upon what we take for granted” and envision the educative process as transformative rather than reproductive (p. 219). Passing on technical tricks for classroom management, and knowledge in the form of predetermined content, preserves education as controlling rather than a transformative, constructive endeavor between teacher and students. This preservation once again ties directly to the apprenticeship of observation; many of us grow up to learn that the teacher has control of knowledge and actions by virtue of his or her dominant position in the classroom.

Implicitly, both teachers and students understand two rules governing the cultural tensions of life in compulsory education: unless the teacher establishes control, there will be no learning; and, if the teacher does not control the students, the students will control the teacher. This power struggle, predicated upon the institutional expectation that teachers individually control their classes, constructs learning as synonymous with control....When the double pressures of isolation and institutional mandates to control force teachers to equate learning with social control, pedagogy is reduced to instilling knowledge rather than coming to terms
with the practices that produce both knowledge and our relationships to it....The
fact is, not everything depends upon the teacher, and when the teaching stance is
constructed as if it did, the teacher's work becomes confined to controlling
classroom life and exerting institutional authority as if it were pedagogical.
(Britzman, 1991, pp. 223-225)

In order to break the status quo and control-based cycle of teaching, Danielewicz (2001)
and Alsup (2006) contend that pre-service preparation should emphasize teacher identity
development.

Danielewicz (2001) outlines ten pedagogical principles that “do justice to the
complexities of teaching and learning” while developing teacher identity (p. 195). Five of
the principles are structural, or how the students learn. The first structural principle is
discourse richness and openness, which she emphasizes is best when pursued from many
perspectives or roles. The second structural principle is dialogue and a dialogic
curriculum, entailing the co-construction of meaning through discourse. Such dialogue
develops the identities of all involved. She proposes that some of the dialogue be written,
as in the form of letters to one another. The third principle of a structural nature is
collaboration. “Collaborative learning creates a social context that helps students
negotiate entry into the academic discourse community and acquire disciplinary
knowledge. But, at the same time, their joint efforts will produce new knowledge,
conditions, and theories” (p. 149). Danielewicz names deliberation as the fourth structural
principle, informed by Dewey (1938) and his proposition that learning activities should
be based upon student interests and subject areas, be active and cooperative, and develop
both cognitive skills and moral integrity. Danielewicz’ fifth and final structural principle
is reflexivity, meaning that students continuously revise their assumptions and beliefs; they reconstruct themselves through reflection.

Danielewicz (2001) also names five principles that are performative in nature, or what the students are able to do or be like. The first principles she calls "theorizing in practice." If students practice theorizing, that is, explaining their rationale for their instructional decisions, they will be more apt to solve their students' educational problems in the future, and hold on to prior convictions, maintaining some autonomy by looking for strategies that work even with prescribed curricula.

It is the theoretical ideas that are transferable, flexible, and applicable to many different situations. Specific practices can't be imported wholesale or conducted the same way in two different contexts, or even on two occasions within the same class. Good teachers adjust to the contingencies of the moment. Without theory, there isn't anything to guide or drive those split-second decisions. Theory is transmutable, and leads to creative, realistic practice. (pp. 162-163)

The second performative principle Danielewicz (2001) names is agency, or believing oneself is capable of action. According to Danielewicz, new teachers must be able to withstand "outside factors—social conditions of school, poverty, troubled students, low wages, a mandated curriculum" (2001, p. 163). There is a cyclical relationship of growth between agency and identity; in other words, identity develops agency, building stronger identity which promotes stronger agency, and so on. Teacher education programs promote agency through structures that encourage the development of supportive relationships where mutual feedback is key: "...students must know through experience—feel it in their bones, see it in the faces of their peers, hear it in the words spoken back to them—that they are acting for real and that their actions have meaning and impact, now, in the present—and later, in the future" (p. 167).
The third performative principle is recursive representation, or the trying on of teaching over and over through various experiences as the teacher education program progresses. Danielewicz (2001) notes that workshop style courses help foster students’ self-representations. “The workshop environment shifts attention away from the teacher as someone who dispenses knowledge toward the students as participants who construct knowledge and meaning in the context of a social community” (2001, p. 169). Workshop teaching offers students many opportunities to interact with many different audiences in order to complete tasks.

Authority is Danielewicz’ (2001) fourth principle of performance. Authority, in terms of voice and power, is generated through a network of relationships. With students, teachers present information as discourse rather than as truth to be accepted. As students practice using voice, they gain confidence, which over time leads to authority. The fifth performative principle is enactment, or student-centered instruction in the form of long-term projects that require collaboration.

At the heart of all of these principles, and central to teacher identity pedagogy, is discourse (Danielewicz, 2001). Co-construction of meaning, collaboration, cooperation, reflexivity, the ability to theorize in practice, the having of agency, recursive representation, and authority all involve interaction with others through discourse. Recognizing also that “everything—social structure, institutions, communities, selves, social practices, identities, culture—is constituted by discourse, through discourse, and in discourse,” Danielewicz proposes that pre-service teachers must learn to “work
deliberately and self-consciously within this universe of discourse to foster particular identities” (p. 137).

Alsup (2006) followed six pre-service English education students over two years in their education program to investigate how forming a professional identity affected the process of becoming a teacher. In addition to interviews, Alsup collected lesson plans, philosophy statements, literacy autobiographies, teaching metaphors, and observation notes from their pre-service coursework. She found there are various forms of discourse that contribute to professional identity development, and concluded that the intersection of personal and professional experiences in relation to teacher identity development is complex. Based upon her conclusions, she recommends that teacher educators take purposeful steps within methods courses to integrate personal and professional identity development. She offers contextually adaptable practical teaching ideas to facilitate the expression of what she terms “borderland discourse,” or “transformative teacher identity discourse allowing pre-service teachers to develop integrated, holistic, professional selves” (p. 5).

This discourse is at the borders between the established, status quo discourse and personal, seemingly conflicting discourses. Borderland discourse is integrative discourse that allows the pre-service teacher to combine professional and personal selves and bring about positive transformations within themselves as teachers, and to get even loftier, to education as a whole. (p. 40)

Alsup found that the more borderland discourse her participants had, the greater was their likelihood of becoming teachers. “When the participants discovered this borderland and engaged in these new discourses...they found that they could embrace viable subject
positions as teachers. To put it in simple language: They began to feel like teachers” (p. 38).

Britzman (1991) highlights the tension that pre-service teachers experience as they attempt to be the teachers they want to be, and do the practices they envision as good and right, amidst what she terms the “discourse of the real” (p. 195). This discourse is excessively practical, and encourages developing teachers to adjust to and protect the status quo. It is a stable, hearty, cyclical, self-feeding discourse that teachers use to rationalize the work they must do within given constraints. Britzman, applying Bahktin’s (1981) explanation of conflicting discourses specifically to teaching, discusses “the struggle between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses” between which clinical teachers—fledglings precariously and simultaneously immersed in study and practice—find themselves caught. Bahktin (1981) noted that usually

an individual’s becoming, an ideological process, is characterized precisely by a sharp gap between those two categories: in one, the authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.) that does not know internal persuasiveness, in the other internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, nor by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code. The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness. The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power we might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. (p. 342)

Britzman (1991) illustrates how one of the student teachers in her study was involved in that messy process of rejecting normative visions of what it means to be a teacher and negotiating visions yet to come. She became the site of struggle between her past and present, between rejection of dominant cultural norms and the potential to reconstruct acceptable and validating ways of being in the educational world. (p. 75)
Teachers most fully experience this *discourse of the real* when they cross the borderland into their first professional teaching position. The context in which they teach, along with the contexts of their past and present personal lives, determines the degree to which novice teachers maintain the identity and fulfill the vision with which they enter the profession. Before examining the specific influences that affected how each of the teachers in this study negotiated their first year of teaching, we must also consider how context interacts with teacher identity and vision.

**The First Year of Teaching: A New Intersection of Identity, Vision and Context**

Once a teacher secures a certified teaching position, no longer under the direct guidance and influence of a supervising university or cooperating teacher, a strong identity and vision is necessary to sustain him or her through conflicting discourses and other challenging experiences that they will undoubtedly encounter. Teaching blends a new understanding of identity (who one is), and vision (what one hopes to do) with context. Dostal (2002) explains Gadamer’s notion of *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstein*, or *effective historical consciousness*. Our *historicity* is the focus of Gadamer’s explanation of a hermeneutic circle.

The actions we take also react back upon our action-orienting understanding. They become part of what we understand when we understand our past and ourselves as well as part of how we anticipate our future. Hence, not only are we always deciphering the story of stories of which we are a part so that we know how to go on, but also we are always already in the process of going on. To this extent, our understanding of these stories is an understanding from the middle of an ongoing narrative. We have to reflect on and understand ourselves in the middle of continuing to live and act as we have already understood ourselves. Put otherwise, we live or write our lives according to the meanings we think they have possessed and understand those meanings according to the ways we continue to live and write our lives. (p. 80)
Gadamer’s concept of effective histories applies here to the intersection of a new teacher’s personal (past and present) and professional contexts with their teacher identity and vision. Novice teachers layer the new narratives of professional teaching onto all of their personal ones that have cyclically contributed to their understandings, including their sense of self and their vision for teaching. Immersed in the steep learning curve of the first year of teaching, they continuously reconstruct their teacher identities and visions according to their personal and professional experiences. Palmer (1998) contends that *integrity* allows teachers to effectively and holistically synthesize “all the forces that constitute [one’s] life” (p. 13) into one’s identity, and to align them with one’s vision.

By *integrity* I mean whatever wholeness I am able to find within that nexus as its vectors form and re-form the pattern of my life. Integrity requires that I discern what is integral to my selfhood, what fits and what does not—and that I choose life-giving ways of relating the forces that converge within me: Do I welcome them or fear them, embrace them or reject them, move with them or against them? By choosing integrity, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am. (p. 13)

A strong but flexible teacher identity and vision are key to how teachers negotiate their first year of teaching within their personal and professional contexts.

The importance of a strong identity. Weiner (2006), a teacher educator who taught in public schools for fifteen years, eight of which were in New York City, stresses the critical role of a strong teacher identity upon entering the profession.

I’ve observed in my own personal history and in the experiences of most of the student teachers and first-year teachers with whom I’ve worked that the key task into the first plunge of having your own classroom is a clear sense of identity. You need to figure out who you want to be when you are the teacher, to create an identity as a teacher that is consistent with your personality, values, and beliefs. (p. 12)
A beginning teacher who has a strong sense of identity is better able to withstand the pressures s/he will undoubtedly face. Kozol (2007) says the key to successful beginning teaching is to “navigate the contradictions [the job] presents without entirely forfeiting one’s personality or undermining the ideals that make our work with children a ‘vocation’ in the truest sense rather than a slotted role within a spiritless career” (p. 203).

Palmer (1998) concurs with Kozol (2007), saying that “in every story I have heard [from students], good teachers share one trait: a strong sense of identity infuses their work” (p. 10). Knowing oneself provides the foundation for deeply and personally knowing one’s subject and students.

When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth. (p. 2)

More than techniques, tips, or tricks, a teacher’s effectiveness depends upon the degree to which a teacher knows him or herself. Palmer encourages educators to move beyond questions of what, how, and why to who.

The question we most commonly ask is the ‘what’ question—what subjects shall we teach? When the conversation goes a bit deeper, we ask the ‘how’ question—what methods and techniques are required to teach well? Occasionally, when it goes deeper still, we ask the ‘why’ question—for what purpose and to what ends do we teach? But seldom, if ever, do we ask the ‘who’ question—who is the self that teaches? How does the quality of my selfhood form—or deform—the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world? (p. 4)

Kottler and Zehm (2000) affirm Palmer’s premise that teaching involves a blend of technical expertise and personal dimensions. “What you do is certainly important, but so is who you are” (p. 6).
The importance of a strong vision. Even if new teachers have a strong identity and solid instructional skills, in order to be and feel effective they also must be able to enact their visions for teaching within their given contexts. According to Hammerness (2006), finding a school context in which one’s vision can be most fully realized is a significant challenge. Teaching can be positive, motivational, fulfilling, and inspiring if a teacher’s vision is close to his or her practice – “reasonable and navigable” (p. 7). On the other hand, it can be problematic and depressing, bringing feelings of “doubt, disappointment, and even failure” (p. 8) if the vision is too distant from the practice at hand. This often leads to switching schools or leaving teaching altogether. Ingersoll (2003) talks about the phenomenon of migration wherein nearly half of teacher attrition comes from leaving to go to another school, citing lack of administrative support, low salaries, student discipline problems, or lack of autonomy as reasons for moving. Johnson and Birkeland (2004) found in their study of teacher retention that “the most salient factor is whether teachers feel successful in teaching” (p. 46).

A successful teacher, according to Kottler and Zehm (2000), will “flex his individual self to accommodate the rigid demands of the environment in which he lives and works” (p. 47). They emphasize that although identity is an inner core that grounds a teacher, it is changing and dynamic. A teacher builds his or her identity upon several images (i.e. parent, spouse, teacher, writer, craftsperson), and new experiences add to those images of self.

Hammerness (2006) identifies five specific factors that affect a teacher’s ability to negotiate vision and practice within their new professional context. These factors are the
amount of collegial support, the degree to which others in the school share one’s vision, the ability to choose professional development opportunities that support one’s vision, and the degree to which one’s vision reflects one’s own experience as a student (p. 28).

Finally, the state and national context of high stakes accountability impacts teacher vision: “the relationship between vision and context: the struggle teachers go through in attempting to balance their dreams with the demands of the broader educational environment” (p. 28). Hammerness concluded from her longitudinal, qualitative study that the primary reason teachers left their positions for those in other schools was to improve their chances of realizing their visions.

**Context impacts teacher identity.** School context also affects a teacher’s identity development. Gratch (2001) discusses the importance of socialization experiences in teacher retention. She presents an analysis of three novice teachers’ stories and “the complex relationships between the cultural form existing in their schools; responses to mandated education practices and development of self-concept” (p. 122). Gratch interviewed and observed the teachers during their first year to explore two guiding questions: (1) “What does it mean to be a teacher?” and (2) “How do teachers become teachers?” (p. 123). She concluded that

> teaching climate is a critical factor in responding to legislative pressures as well as in development of self-concept. The success of each teacher in terms of meeting the needs of students, is influenced by the success of the teacher in responding to the external forces mentioned above as well as the ability of the teacher to reflect on internal beliefs and expectations for self as teacher. (p. 124)

The relationship between Gratch’s participants’ school cultures (isolated or supportive), and experiences with administration and legislation (conflicting or supportive),
determined how the participants responded to those experiences (resistance or adaptation). Based upon her findings, Gratch concluded that teacher education programs must more purposefully help pre-service teachers become reflective practitioners by providing ample time for reflective and critical discourse about teaching, and by structuring time to communicate with in-service teachers in order to gain the skills they will need to evaluate and respond to external pressures in a time of high accountability.

Zeichner and Gore (1990) discuss three different approaches to teacher socialization research (functionalist, interpretivist, and critical). Within their discussion, they explain that the critical paradigm, rooted in schools of thought from Marxism, aims not to explain or interpret, but to transform. Within this paradigm, there are two branches, one emphasizing reproduction (structure) and the other emphasizing production (agency). Zeichner and Gore present a view of the critical paradigm that encompasses both, acknowledging the role that schools play in the reproduction of society and culture, as well as the potential to change class and gender relationships.

A central purpose of critical approaches is bringing to consciousness the ability to criticize what is taken for granted about everyday life. Class, gender, and race relations become key foci, given the historical and contemporary alienation of particular groups. A vital concern of those operating within the critical paradigm is social transformation aimed at increasing justice, equality, freedom, and human dignity. Reality is viewed as socially created and sustained. Research which professes to be critical must be ideally participatory and collaborative. (p. 5)

One key finding in Zeichner and Gore’s (1990) literature review of teacher socialization pertains to my study and supports Lortie’s (1975) theory of the apprenticeship of observation: teachers’ prior experiences as students themselves are more influential in their socialization than are their formal teacher preparation programs
or in-service professional development experiences. Another key finding was that “at least some of the variation that exists in socializing experiences among students is a result of differences in the institutional environments of colleges and universities” (p. 15).

Zeichner and Gore note that because of the teaching that occurs through the hidden curriculum, the impact of teacher preparation programs on teacher socialization should not be disregarded.

**Context impacts vision for teaching.** Zeichner and Gore (1990) cite dozens of studies that refer to the bidirectional nature of classroom influences on teacher socialization. First, teachers influence student actions and students influence teacher action. Second, contextual constraints of school environments such as student classroom groupings, materials, and time structures affect and are affected by teacher actions. Third, and closely tied to the contextual characteristics of a school, are the collegial influences that create and are created by the school culture. Other reciprocal influences on teacher socialization are the teacher evaluation system and those conducting the evaluation, interactions with parents, and larger societal issues such as labor divisions and work discrimination issues.

**The Role of Context in the Negotiation Paths of the Four Participants**

The Riverside College curricular experience was one set of many factors that influenced how each participant in this study negotiated the first year of teaching. Although I include an overview within this section of the Riverside curricular impact on the participants’ first-year teaching experiences, I reserve for the implications chapters the participants’ detailed reflections about how Riverside courses and experiences did or
did not prepare them well for their teaching positions. Here, I suggest a more broad combination of factors that influenced how the participants described their teaching experiences, how they shaped their instruction, and how satisfied they were with their instruction. These factors were (1) their experiences before college, (2) their experiences during college, (3) their professional environments, and (4) their personal factors (i.e. past and present personal experiences and attributes). Common connections and disconnections to their college coursework and clinical experiences clearly surfaced on an instructional strategy level for all participants, and I will discuss these further in the chapters to follow. It was more complicated, however, to identify the deeper sources of strength that helped them negotiate the first year of teaching. Unique to each individual, his or her path to negotiate the first year of teaching depended upon the intensities and combinations of individual factors related to teacher identity, vision, and context.

Experiences Before College

The participants were affected to varying degrees by their own preschool through high school experiences. Connie, for example, with her parent-teacher identity and her vision to teach her students to identify what they needed to know and how to find the information, described her worst teacher as someone she feared and who never provided timely feedback. Ben’s teacher who “turned him around” from a mischievous fifth grade flirt to a respectful student leader probably had much to do with his teacher identity formation as a role model and his vision to teach his class to be respectful citizens. Other experiences that contributed to the participants’ teacher identity development were paid or volunteer work. Annie’s work as a camp counselor, Sunday
School teacher, and Bible School leader allowed her to try on teaching, and she liked how it felt. Her later experiences as an Americorps worker, as a volunteer at the women’s shelter, in service at the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, and especially her work at the Shalom Zone were powerful influences that affirmed her identity as someone who helps inner-city children, and shaped her identity as an inner-city worker. Ben’s high school experience as a mentor for the pre-school children reinforced his identity as a role model. Connie’s work as a church choir accompanist and as a Sunday School teacher strengthened her identity as a parent-teacher. The influence of Rachel’s work in a daycare for four years while she attended college was less clear, probably because Rachel’s identity during the beginning of her teaching was in flux, and her personal and professional experiences so new and overwhelming, that she could not make clear connections between her past experiences and present self-concept.

Finally, Connie’s raising and home-schooling of her own children played a vital role in her teacher identity development. She already viewed herself as a teacher simply by being a parent. It made sense for her to take on the role of parent as a teacher, because the two roles were inseparable to her.

Experiences During College

During their time at Riverside, the participants took some of the same courses, either at the same time or at different points throughout their program. Some of their general education courses such as Math as a Liberal Art, Approaches to Literature, and United States History 1865 to Present were common experiences for the participants because education majors are advised to take general education courses that also satisfy
teacher certification requirements. These general education courses impacted the participants in different ways, however. Connie, always comparing her midlife college experiences to her traditional ones of her younger days, learned from the instructors’ pedagogies and feedback. She noted that the effective instructors encouraged her to enter teaching as a middle-aged woman, and they modeled teaching practices that she admired. “I was exposed to a lot of really, really good teachers. And that helped. It made me feel confident that maybe I wasn’t too old to be doing this” (8/13/07). Rachel, contrastingly, remembered very little from her general education courses and considered them requirements to get through.

The participants had more to say about the foundational level education courses, including Foundations of Education, Educational Psychology, Multicultural Education, and Introduction to Exceptionalities. This is where they formed initial relationships with the education department faculty beyond those with their advisors, and began to think of themselves as teachers. They observed in the schools and began to envision themselves in their own future classrooms. During these classes, they also began their four-stage portfolio review process to eventually demonstrate proficiency in thirteen teaching competencies. For each artifact they entered into their portfolio, they wrote a detailed reflection about the experience that the artifact represented. Ben noted that the portfolio process as a teacher did not intimidate him because Riverside’s was more thorough. “I just feel our portfolio at Riverside was pretty detailed with your artifact and your context and how you relate it to your teaching, and I think that helped us prepare well, and I don’t think it’s as detailed, honestly, as the one at Riverside” (Ben, 6/13/07).
The clinical stage of their teacher preparation, including their endorsement area courses but particularly their semesters in the professional development schools, were more influential in the development of their teacher visions and identities than their general education or foundational teacher education courses. The participants had much to say about how challenging yet helpful the PDS experiences were for their current teaching positions. Their experiences in the schools gave them background knowledge and confidence to plan, collaborate, and adjust to the minute-by-minute demands of teaching.

I’ve been in elementary schools; the PDS. I’ve seen the benchmarks and standards. I have an idea of what I need to be doing throughout the school year, so that’s helped me a lot. So I feel good about that. (Annie, 5/30/07)

It was outlining everything in PDS, where here, it’s like I have to come up with all of that. We had to come up with it, but there was so much guidance, which is good, because you need that to start with. (Rachel, 8/15/07)

I guess I feel like I’m ready to write lesson plans and collaborate with my peer teachers, just because in our PDS programs we worked with each other all the time on collaborating, so I feel like I’m ready to do that, so…that’s what I feel strongly about. (Ben, 8/15/07)

That was the best, because that was where we were actually learning on site, and seeing it live, and doing it live, and yet in a very structured, safe way. It didn’t always feel safe, but it was (big smile)….Now I know that I can think on my feet. (Connie, 8/13/07)

Their final clinical experience, sixteen consecutive weeks of student teaching in one classroom, impacted each participant’s teacher identity and visions differently because their student teaching placements were all in different contexts: different grade levels, different schools, different towns, and with different cooperating teachers as mentors. For example, Annie rated her student teaching experience in a rural school 45
miles west of Riverside as less helpful for her urban first grade position than was her urban PDS experience, and actually identified her experience at Shalom Zone as most influential. Ben said his student teaching experience was more important for his teaching than PDS, followed by Americorps. Rachel placed student teaching above the PDSs, while Connie placed her PDS experiences before student teaching in order of preparation impact for her long-term substitute position. They agreed that student teaching was the only clinical experience they had that provided the critical experience of managing and teaching a whole classroom.

Professional Environments

The participants’ professional contexts included many factors that shaped their instruction, some of which supported their teacher identities and visions, and some of which did not. While Ben was the only participant in a rural school, the three women were all in urban settings. Of the four participants, Annie was the only one with a strong collaboration with her grade-level teaching partners. The physical location of their classrooms shaped their instruction as well. Ben, alone out in the trailer and rarely seeing any other teachers, planned and taught in isolation. As an intervention specialist, Connie was limited to a corner of the library between some bookshelves. Rachel was in a pod of large classrooms in a brand new building, within close proximity of both her teaching partner and her third grade teacher friends. Annie was across the hall from both teaching partners.

The grade level, type of teaching position, and team composition also impacted their planning and facilitation. Ben and Connie worked with hormonal early-adolescent
students, while Annie and Rachel taught children who were six, seven, and eight years old. Connie’s status as a substitute, and then as a part-time intervention specialist, affected her teacher identity differently than did the full-time general classroom positions of the other three novices. Rachel’s teammate—the principal’s daughter—had five years of highly reputable classroom experience. Ben’s teaching partners were long-term veterans at Sunnydale who had collected a lot of books that they freely shared with him. Annie’s teammates were all first-year teachers, supporting one another through experimentation and close communication. Connie was on her own, the sub and the specialist as temporary and transitory teacher identities.

Each participant’s school culture and professional development focus also impacted how he or she shaped instruction. Each school had its own unique environment, morale, discourse, structures, and priorities. Rachel, in a charter school, had more curricular freedom than did the other three participants. All of the teachers there were undergoing Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound (ELOB) and Every Child Reads (ECR) school reform together. Because Finley was a School Identified in Need of Assistance (SINA) according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the school received extra funding for resources and professional development. Annie, therefore, learned to use nonfiction materials from the book room for read-alouds, Picture Word Induction Model (PWIM) posters, and strategies from a renowned reading expert who paid regular visits to Finley to improve teachers’ guided reading instruction. In Ben’s rural school, there was no prominent faculty development focus; teachers fine-tuned their individual instructional strategies. In Connie’s school with the highest mobility rate of all the
schools in Dellen, the main professional development focus and discourse was the explicit teaching of specific social skills.

The amount of initial and ongoing mentor support was another contextual factor that shaped the first-year teachers’ instruction. Ben’s mentor was a veteran teacher who took a very active mentor role before school and throughout the first few months, and then the support tapered off. Rachel had no mentor for a while because there were too few teachers at her building with enough years experience to qualify for mentorship. Annie’s mentor was right upstairs from her and provided ongoing “I’m here if you need me” support. Connie, as a sub and specialist, had no mentor at all.

The type of parental involvement also shaped the new teachers’ experiences. Ben’s students’ parents helped him on field trips and affirmed his teaching with their compliments. Connie’s students’ parents were told they could not go upstairs by their children’s classroom due to past intrusiveness, words, and actions that negatively impacted the learning environment. Rachel remembered the words that her students’ parents used to label their children, and either purposefully or subconsciously shaped her instruction around those labels. Annie’s students’ parents watched their children’s take-home folder for notes, communicating back and forth in mutual support of classroom management and instruction.

Finally, the professional substitute experiences that Rachel had before beginning the year affected her novice teaching experiences. Being a sub, she had learned to improvise, and because she could adjust quickly within instruction she was not concerned about detailed planning. However, her positive experiences of subbing at Finley made her
question her current teacher identity as she wondered whether her dissatisfaction was because of her new school or teaching in general.

*Past and Present Personal Experiences and Attributes*

Finally, the participants’ personal attributes contributed to their first-year experiences by affecting their interactions within their given teaching contexts. Ben’s experiences were different than the others because he was a male teacher in an elementary school. Teachers at Connie’s school assumed she was a veteran teacher because she was middle-aged, and her parenting experiences grounded her substitute teaching. Rachel, as a new bride and expectant mother, had different pressures than did Connie, a mother of five who had already celebrated a 20th wedding anniversary, or Annie and Ben, the single 23-years-old each living on their own and exploring significant relationships. These different pressures affected the time they had outside of school for instructional planning.

Past and present personal experiences also intersected with their teaching contexts to shape their teaching. How, when, and why they each identified themselves as future teachers impacted their teacher identities and visions, which in turn, depending upon their alignment or misalignment with their contexts, affected their levels of satisfaction with their teaching. Ben and Rachel had parents as teachers, and this affected their instructional decisions. Connie was a parent, and this permeated her instruction. Annie had a recent falling out with her parents, causing Annie to turn to friends and colleagues for familial support. Annie and Ben, being active athletes, had more physical energy than did Rachel, who was pregnant, and Connie, who spent her outside-of-school time
cooking and chauffeuring for her active family. The participants' spiritual beliefs and levels of involvement in church and community service activities also impacted how they shaped instruction and how they spent their time outside of school.

The Intersection of Teacher Identity, Vision, and Context: Reflections and Preview

In this study, I discovered that the intersection of teacher identity, vision, and context was significant to how these new teachers negotiated their first year of teaching. It was an intersection that occurred sharply at the beginning of the year, reoccurred daily, drew deeply from their past and present understandings, and shaped their interpretations and actions. These four teachers' narratives of intersecting identity, vision, and context provide insight into how a teacher negotiates his/her first year of teaching.

When I began this study, I was not expecting to find this complex intersection. I assumed our dialogues would be more about the new teachers' ability—more accurately, permission from the district—to apply the learning theory and practices they had studied in our teacher education program. As their stories indicate, that was far too simplistic an assumption.

Based upon my own experiences in the school district, my staff development with schools in the Midwest, and now my daily immersion in a School in Need of Assistance, I expected to hear tales of limited autonomy. I thought the participants would be disillusioned by curricular constraints that limited the artistry of their teaching, as Eisner (2002) warns. After all, those were the narratives of my life as a veteran teacher and staff developer. For the new teachers, however, those narratives of control lay in the background of awareness rather than the foreground of concern. Although the
participants expressed their frustration with pre-determined pacing schedules and prescriptive assessments, stories of constraint were not the bulk of their reflections; stories of survival were.

The curricular teacher preparation experiences at Riverside were the primary common experiences between the four participants. However, those college experiences resulted in varying levels of alignment with their professional teaching experiences because of the participants’ individual teacher identities, visions, and contexts. The three components aligned most naturally for Annie, and therefore she thrived in her first year of teaching. Annie’s functional intersection was not the norm for this group of teachers who experienced the same formal teacher preparation and taught in the same district. Rachel, Ben, and Connie, experiencing misalignment between their teacher identities, visions, and contexts, negotiated by adjusting their identities and/or visions to fit their personal and professional contexts. In the next chapter, I detail the intersection of identity, vision, and contexts separately for Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie as I see them, and by so doing, interpret more deeply how each participant negotiated the first year of teaching.
CHAPTER VII

NEGOTIATION PATHS

In the previous chapter I discussed the intersection of teacher identity, vision, and context in the negotiation of the first year of teaching. In this chapter, I detail Annie’s, Rachel’s, Ben’s, and Connie’s negotiation paths. Based upon their individual identity-vision-context intersections, I also detail how they negotiated five main teaching challenges they shared in common.

The Intersection of Identity, Vision, and Context Forms Negotiation Paths

Background to the Interpretation Process

Moir (1999) studied the phases that novice teachers go through as they negotiate their first year of teaching (see Figure 1). Teachers begin the year in the anticipation phase, where they romanticize the teacher role and hold idealistic views of how they will accomplish goals. They then move into the survival phase, where they are overwhelmed with the many unanticipated challenges and the constant need to develop curricula. Typically mid-year before the winter break, they reach a phase of disillusionment, where they realize that things are not going as well by now as they had envisioned. During this phase of waning self-esteem and rising self-doubt that often includes the first parent-teacher conferences and first formal teacher evaluation, they question their commitment to teaching and their ability to manage and teach a classroom of students. After a winter break when they have the opportunity to rest, reconnect with family and friends, and organize materials and plans for school, they return to school invigorated. During this rejuvenation phase that often lasts into spring, novice teachers shift their focus from the
classroom management concerns of the disillusionment phase to instructional concerns.

The final phase, occurring during the last six weeks of school, is the *reflection* phase.

During this time, novice teachers are invigorated as they reflect upon successes and challenges of their first year, and begin to envision their second year.

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![Figure 1. The Phases of a First-Year Teacher's Attitude toward Teaching.](image)

I compared the experiences of my participants to Moir's phases. I found that all four participants proceeded through most or all of these phases, although at different times, for different lengths, and with different intensities. Moir's explanation of novice teacher phases inspired me to explore my participants' intersections of teacher identity,
vision, and context over time. I noticed clear connections between Moir’s phases and the parts of this intersection. For example, teacher vision is central to Moir’s anticipation, rejuvenation, and reflection phases. The survival phase highlights the impact of the professional contextual factors of teaching, while the disillusionment phase reflects the strength of one’s teacher identity.

I wanted to see how key factors of each participant’s identity, vision, and context impacted the negotiation of his or her first year of teaching. First, I reviewed each participant’s story carefully to identify these key components and events. I listed and numbered them in chronological order under the categories of identity, vision, and context, and then used those key events to narratively summarize their identity, vision, and contextual paths from Summer 2007 to June 2008.

Based upon the narratives, I created line drawings separately for identity, vision, and context to more transparently illustrate their negotiation paths. I labeled the components of the drawings as follows:

Identity
- strong
- questioning
- weak

Vision
- fully focused
- partially focused
- unfocused

Context
- positive
- challenging
- negative
Next, I layered the identity, vision, and context lines to highlight the relationships between the three components. Finally, I funneled from each of the three templates to merge the participant’s intersections of identity, vision, and context to portray a visual of the overall negotiation path. After I did this entire process for each participant, I used the final figures to compare and contrast the negotiation paths of the four participants.

Thriving Annie: Questioning Identity, Fully-focused Vision, and Positive Context

Annie’s teacher identity: Questioning. Before the school year began, Annie articulated her teacher identity that had its roots in her experiences at the Shalom Zone. “I knew I had something inside of me that was urging me to work with children—in particular, inner city children. It still took me a while to figure it out; it took me a good year and a half to figure out that I wanted to go into education” (5/30/07). Ready to “tackle anything,” (8/15/07) her personal and professional selves aligned to face the challenges ahead.

After her second day of teaching, or Mile 18 of her marathon, she questioned her identity as a teacher, admitting, “I don’t know whether I should have gone into this” (8/29/07). Annie’s identity was as a positive, independent, deliberate, strong person with a marathon mindset to help inner-city children. However, she questioned whether she “liked or loved teaching” (10/24/07). She was not yet willing to commit to fully being a teacher.

I don’t know if 100% of me is a teacher, so I can’t say 100% YET. I think it’s more than I think it is. I think it’s more than I want to say. Because sometimes I wonder, do I really want to be a teacher? But I do. And sometimes I think, “I’m a really good teacher!” And I think I’m more than what I really think I am. But I don’t know what I am. (12/18/07)
Annie admitted she was good at “developing social skills, and teaching kids how to be loving and caring” (2/15/08), but she questioned her ability to instruct well. Knowing that helping children learn how to care was an important part of a teacher’s job, but wanting to be better as an instructor, Annie’s teacher identity was gradually becoming stronger. She was an effective facilitator of caring, but wanted to be better at academic instruction.

Later in the spring, when Annie heard the teaching force would be reduced, she realized that she did not want to lose her job. She wanted to be a first grade teacher again, and try to be an even better teacher than she was the first year. “I really want to teach in the same school for a second year, and be a second-year teacher, ideally in the same grade, in the same classroom, in the same school, with the same teaching partner. I really want that” (4/2/08).

However, just one month later, she was offered a summer teaching position in Washington D.C., as well as an invitation to a job fair for a position for the 2008-2009 school year. This was her chance to be a teacher in a real inner-city setting. Knowing she wanted to “do something with education; with kids” and “teach for a while” (6/4/08), her identity as a teacher grew stronger. (See Figure 2.)

Annie’s vision: Fully-focused. Annie articulated a fully developed vision for teaching well before the beginning of the school year. She created her own professional development opportunities when she observed in others’ classrooms and read books about teaching strategies. After Day 2’s trials, her vision for teaching became stronger as
she grew even more determined to build a classroom community, making it “safe so that they’re not throwing chairs” (9/21/07).

As the fall months progressed, Annie provided relentless, proactive reminders so the children could meet the high expectations she had for their respect for themselves and each other. Through the Morning Greeting, playing guitar, using sign language, and playing background music while the students worked, she enacted her vision for a warm, nurturing classroom environment. The students began to emulate her actions and words, trying on the kindness Annie consistently modeled. Annie was almost surprised at how

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**Figure 2. Annie’s Teacher Identity: Questioning.**

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<td>Strong Identity</td>
<td>Marathon Mindset</td>
<td>Going to teach in Washington D.C.</td>
<td>Improving instructor</td>
<td>Questioning Identity</td>
<td>Reaction to Day 2: Questions career as a teacher</td>
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clearly her vision was coming to life. "I want everyone to be doing it. So I see that ALL
the time. And I try to model it a lot, but the kids are doing it now" (11/20/07).

Through her deliberation and consistency, Annie’s students learned to respect
themselves and each other enough so that she could provide intense small group
instruction to students while the rest of the class worked at learning stations. With this
instructional freedom, Annie experimented with visions for her own teaching that she
learned from observing Connie Herbert teach guided reading groups. Still, she was not
satisfied with her instruction, particularly in math. She had only a partial vision for how
math lessons should look, and hoped she would be able to teach first grade again next
year so she could refine her math instruction.

In February, after a formal evaluation by the principal, Annie questioned her
vision for building community through her relentless, proactive reminders. "The principal
was saying that I’m saying things too much, and I think, well, that’s the way I teach. So
am I doing something wrong?" (2/1/08) Annie worked hard to enact her images of ideal
classroom practice, and reflected deeply when they were questioned. Because being
relentlessly positive was central to Annie’s identity, she continued to give the proactive
reminders through the spring.

As the year progressed, Annie added to her teaching vision from advice in books
she had read. She structured little reading and writing units around final celebrations of
learning: tea parties with parents and friends. Meanwhile, she questioned whether the tea
party celebrations reflected solid learning theory, as the students were doing the work to
show their parents. She wanted to teach them to respect themselves enough to care about their work intrinsically. "I want them to do things not to impress other people" (3/7/08).

Looking back at the beginning of the year, Annie was pleased with how much her students had learned in nine months to care for themselves and each other. "They now see that when they're angry they don't have to destroy the room or hurt someone else... just to see them learn these things is a big success" (4/2/08). Annie's vision to build a caring classroom community—the vision that had sustained her all year—had been realized. To the very end of the year when Annie deliberately sequenced a series of closure activities for her class, her vision for a strong community of learners guided her planning. (See Figure 3.)

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**Figure 3. Annie's Teacher Vision: Fully-Focused.**
Annie’s context: Positive. Annie was thrilled to secure a teaching position at Finley. “I’m really excited about being in the school, being downtown, and being in this environment with a lower socioeconomic status” (5/30/07). The Finley staff was positive and supportive as well. Annie, being single and having plenty of uncommitted time, spent most of the summer at school preparing for her job. There she became close friends with Eva, and the two of them became mutual sources of personal and professional support. When the boys in Annie’s room had their anger outbursts and she wasn’t quite sure what to do, she sought the help of the guidance counselor. The negative experience of her second day of teaching was a shock to Annie, but the positive context of supportive staff and friends helped her persevere. There were many more surprises to come, but Annie’s context, along with her solid vision and marathon mindset, helped her thrive in her position. She even began to consider moving to Washington D.C. to teach in a large, inner-city school district.

As the school year progressed, Annie’s students became part of the positive context. She had taught them to care for each other. She began thinking ahead to the last day of school and how hard it would be to say goodbye. “And I was thinking in my head, ‘How am I going to leave these kids at the end of the year? I don’t want to leave them’”(2/1/08).

The close-knit and supportive staff culture in the school sometimes crossed a line that Annie wished she could hold sacred. It bothered her when during intensive, small group instruction in her room, another teacher would walk in and ask her a question. This
interaction modeled interruption rather than the respect that Annie relentlessly modeled and explicitly discussed with her children.

In March, there were still a few students in Annie’s room who she hoped would become more respectful of themselves and others. This part of her context continued to challenge her. She offered quick choices to students that gave them some autonomy while allowing her to maintain high expectations for behavior and maximize instructional time.

Near the end of Annie’s first year of teaching, she reflected upon her need to spend less time outside of school planning for instruction. Although she lived alone, and had no family to care for, sometimes that freedom of time caused her to spend too much time on school things.

I think I could try to spend more time planning and spending time on how I could meet these needs, and how could I meet these needs, and I say this, but I also don’t think it’s reasonable, really, because I also need MY time. There should be a balance there, but I don’t think I’ve found it, yet. It just stresses me out. I’m doing too much. I need to work on trying to balance that. (4/2/08)

At the end of the school year, Annie accepted a summer teaching job in Washington D.C. The day after school was over, she began her drive to the coast by herself. She felt liberated and invigorated, having finished a successful year at Finley and excited for the adventures awaiting her. (See Figure 4.)

Annie’s intersection of teacher identity, vision, and context. Annie entered the school year with a vision for strong community, an identity as someone who teaches inner-city children, and a context of supportive staff members and a close friend as a team teacher. On Day 2, she experienced the shock of children’s extreme anger outbursts, causing her to question her identity as a teacher. However, she persevered, and her steady
success with handling challenging situations eventually pushed her to consider new challenges in more urban settings. With her marathon mindset, she continued to enact her vision of classroom community by setting high expectations and providing relentless, proactive reminders. Although she questioned her identity as a teacher, she continued to envision and experiment with new strategies for teaching. Reflecting back on the year, Annie was pleased with the caring community that had developed in her first classroom. She looked ahead to summer for planning, and to Year 2 when she would refine her teaching practice and take more time for herself.

Annie thrived through her first year of teaching. Although she questioned whether she would remain in teaching, her marathon mindset and her strong vision for classroom
The community helped her persevere through challenges. The combination of her personal context of living alone, and her professional context of collaboration with colleagues and friends, provided her with the energy she needed to enact her vision for teaching. (See Figure 5.)

**Figure 5. Annie's Intersection of Teacher Identity, Vision, and Context.**

1 = Focused vision to build community in identity-aligned, inner-city school context
2 = Tough context causes her to question her teacher identity, but her strong vision for community provides a long-term focus
3 = Supportive faculty/friend context helps her realize her vision for community, which in turn improves the classroom context
4 = Vision loses focus as she questions her instructional skills and relentless, proactive reminders; context of ongoing behavior challenges and staff interruptions troubles her; still questions teaching as a career, but knows she wants to work with inner-city children
5 = Focus on new instructional vision improves learning context and strengthens her teacher identity
6 = With a summer job in Washington D.C., Annie anticipates enacting her vision for a safe community as a teacher in a real inner-city setting
"For me, [living alone] has worked for me now. If things would be different, I know I would make it work. Maybe that’s what it takes, is to have that attitude. I mean if I was married and if I had kids, then I would make it work. I think it just has to do with the kind of person you are. Like this morning I was upset before I got here, and I didn’t want to come, but I tell myself things, like, ‘Annie, you can DO this.’ Those are self-help things I’ve learned, you know? ‘You’ve gotten through this mess,’ or ‘You can make it through this day,’ or ‘Those kids need you.’ Today I got a new student who is homeless. And that’s where I have such strong compassion for so many things. These kids NEED you. You have to be this person, and pull whatever you can out of yourself so you can do it. I mean, if I was in a different situation and I didn’t have the ideal things that I have now, I would still do it, but I would find ways inside me to pull it out. That’s how I survive. That’s how I AM.” (Annie, 4/2/08)

Annie’s overall negotiation: Thriving. Annie began the year with a solid vision and identity. Even though the extreme behaviors of Day 2 shocked her and made her question her teacher identity, her vision to build a caring classroom community sustained her over time, helping her endure and overcome daily hardships. Her personal and professional contexts worked in her favor to give her the time and support she needed to constantly improve her practice. Overall, Annie thrived through her first year of teaching because her teacher identity, vision, and contexts positively aligned. (See Figure 6.)

Literature supporting Annie’s negotiation. Alsup (2006) contends that teachers develop from their own teacher identity a personal pedagogy.

...the material, practical, classroom manifestation of this identity. In short, a personal pedagogy incorporates a teacher’s multiple subjectivities or identity strands, including personal educational experiences, core beliefs and ideologies, and educational theory and research as a philosophical foundation for classroom decision-making, at the levels of both curricular planning and daily practice. (p. 127)

Because of Annie’s strong and clearly-articulated vision for her teaching, and her choice to secure a position in a context where she could enact that vision, she was able to create a personal pedagogy early in her career.
Annie was clear and consistent when she set, enforced, and reinforced classroom expectations. Yet she did so lovingly; the students were able to feel safe without feeling threatened or manipulated. Weiner (2006), a prominent teacher educator who previously taught for eight years in schools in New York City, argues that a teacher’s control comes from their moral authority, and that “moral presence depends on having a clear sense of how you want your students to regard you and how you regard them in the capacity as the classroom leader” (p. 13).

Annie was also whole-hearted. “When teachers seek ways to fulfill their obligations to their students rather than anger or alienate them, they demonstrate wholeheartedness” (Weiner, 2006, p. 21). When Annie woke up in the morning and the first
thing she thought was “about what I can do to make things easier for them; to make things better; to make things go smoother,” (11/20/07) she was being whole-heartedly reflective.

Annie’s whole-hearted empathy and love-based structure extended beyond building a safe classroom environment to facilitating instruction. She structured small group work, centers, and interventions to help students develop their own responsibility for learning, practice communicating, and shape stronger relationships between students with diverse abilities and backgrounds. She adapted curricular materials as necessary to make them interesting, even if it meant straying from the scripted lessons. Weiner (2006) highlights the exact skills that Annie demonstrated—facilitation of small group work, adapting of curriculum, and building of community—as essential to successful urban teaching. She claims that in order for “urban teachers to be even moderately effective with all of their students, they must be skilled in all three realms” (p. 71).

Annie’s vision and identity shaped and were shaped by the practices she employed in the classroom. Dewey (1938) proposed that learning activities should be based upon student interests and subject areas, be active and cooperative, and develop both cognitive skills and moral integrity. Eisner (2002) promotes a student-centered curriculum that focuses on the complexities of each individual. Of the three curricular focuses that Marsh and Willis (2003) detail—student, subject (content), and society—Annie focused primarily on the student and secondarily on the subject. For small group lessons and interventions, she watched and acted without a lot of pre-planning. For whole group work, she focused more on the subject, trusting that the teacher manuals provided
the appropriate content. However, within the planning and/or enacting of the lesson, she combined her foci on the student and subject by adapting the manuals' lessons to suit the needs of her students.

Nel Noddings (2005) best describes the community-based practice that Annie envisioned and enacted. Nodding's premise is that the aim of education should be a moral one: to care for oneself, other people, animals, plants, the earth, and human instruments and ideas. She argues that the development of structures that allow caring relationships to grow should be at the heart of school improvement. Nodding's educational theory is that "the living other is more important than any theory" (p. xix).

I recall the many times Annie questioned whether the time she spent playing games, modeling kind words, and pointing out caring actions was important enough to justify the time taken away from academic instruction. Annie would be reassured by Nodding's words. "We cannot ignore our children—their purposes, anxieties, and relationships—in the service of making them more competent in academic skills. My position is not anti-intellectual. It is a matter of setting priorities. Intellectual development is important, but it cannot be the first priority of schools" (p. 10).

Annie gave life to the components of moral education that Noddings (2005) details. Moral education emphasizes modeling, dialogue, and practice. Noddings defines dialogue in a similar way to Freire (1970), as a "genuine quest for something undetermined at the beginning" (p. 23). Annie exemplified this when she asked Jimmy and the class how to help Jimmy when he became angry. She was facilitating a dialogue with them, as she did not know what the solution would ultimately be.
Noddings recognizes the need to provide opportunities for students to practice caring. “When we discuss teaching and teacher-learner relationships in depth, we will see that teachers not only have to create caring relations in which they are the carers, but that they also have a responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care” (p. 18). Annie’s students began by mechanically trying on caring actions such as asking a partner if s/he would like to go first, and as the year progressed, their caring interactions became more spontaneous and natural.

Noddings (2005) likens a teacher’s understanding of each child to “parents who are engaged in the task of raising a huge heterogeneous family” (p. 177). Annie knew and loved each child in her class deeply, and acted daily upon that knowledge and love. Her student-centered instructional focus permeated every decision she made in the classroom.

**Coping Rachel: Questioning Identity, Partially-Focused Vision, and Challenging Context**

Rachel’s teacher identity: Questioning. Rachel questioned her teacher identity from the summer before she began her first year of teaching until her last day of teaching. She assumed three new roles of wife, mother-to-be, and teacher almost simultaneously. Overwhelmed with so many major life changes, being a new teacher was just one part of her life. In contrast to Annie who said, “I’m just at that point in my life where I’m just ready for a challenge like this” (8/15/07), Rachel replied, “I know what you mean by that point in your life because I feel like I’m the total opposite. I just got married, I found out I’m pregnant, so that’s all hitting me, and being a first-year teacher…” (8/15/07).
Having substitute taught for a year primarily at Finley both for individual days and for a long-term leave, Rachel identified herself as part of the Finley School community. She wondered whether her doubts about teaching came from the career itself or her placement at Payson. "[Finley] has a special place in my heart. I’m not saying that Payson won’t after a year, but I just had so many things at Finley going for me that I miss that" (10/11/07).

Rachel’s strongest sense of teacher identity developed after a successful implementation of a small group math structure. She was proud to exclaim that the paraprofessional who worked with a group out in the pod’s common area “always comes back in saying, ‘They all got it! They all got it!’ Which is sooo rewarding to me because this is really working….And now they’re all getting it; they’re all flying through it” (12/17/07). Rachel had collaborated with her teammate to create a successful environment for learning. She told the other participants, “LOVE IT! OH! My kids’ math scores have gone up way higher than they were because I don’t do whole group anymore” (2/1/08).

Although she saw herself as a strong math teacher, the challenges of the rest of the day still left her feeling exhausted. Less than a month before her baby was due, her husband’s Valentine’s Day card illuminated the three identities Rachel juggled, and teaching was presently the least positive identity. “He sent me flowers for Valentine’s Day, and the card said, ‘One light pink rose for our daughter who’s on her way, a dark rose for the years we’ve been married’—(laughing) he rounded up to one—‘and the orange flower is to get you through the afternoon’” (2/27/08).
It was at this time that Rachel had an emotional collapse causing her to question her identity as a general elementary teacher even more. “I had a whole big huge breakdown. The special education teacher was in here, and the sub over here was in here, and the third grade teacher was in here, and I was bawling. They were saying, ‘It’ll be okay.’” (2/27/08) Rachel’s personal and professional challenges had converged to reach their lowest point. Danielewicz (2001) captures many of Rachel’s doubts as she writes,

They need to feel capable of action as teacher, first and foremost, as motivation, to keep them invested in teaching when outside factors—social conditions of school, poverty, troubled students, low wages, a mandated curriculum—cause them to question their sanity in choosing a profession as a teacher. (p. 163)

Rachel considered her options. She thought perhaps she would be a better teacher if she could teach small groups all day, but again, she was unsure. “I’d like small groups, I think; I think. I don’t know. Like I almost think I’d like to be a special education teacher, but then that’s a lot of work because of the IEPs. But then they have the small groups. They don’t have the whole class” (2/27/08).

Two weeks later, Rachel gave birth to her baby girl and all thoughts of teaching options subsided as her identity fully shifted to motherhood. Rachel e-mailed, “She weighed 8 pounds even and was 21 inches long. We came home yesterday, on my birthday! Talk about a wonderful present! Mark and I survived our first night and she is still alive. 😊😊 Better go and get some feeding done!” (3/15/08) Rachel wanted to forget about her teaching self for a while and just be a mom. Two months later, at the end of the school year, Rachel gladly left her classroom behind. She looked forward to the summer to spend with her new baby, wishing she did not have to return to teaching in the fall. (See Figure 7.)
Rachel's teacher vision: Partially-Focused. Rachel began the year unable to envision how she would begin. “When I got the job, I was so excited. I was, ‘Oh, my god, I’m gonna have my own classroom!’ And now I’m just like...I don’t know what to do. I don’t know where to start” (8/15/07). All of her clinical practice and professional substitute experience had been in settings where things had been set up for her. Classrooms were always set up. Groups were always predetermined. Materials were already there. She had seen a lot of different classrooms, but not through the blurred new teacher eyes through which she now tried to focus. “But it’s so hard, because you see all
these things that you like, but now I want to incorporate all those, but it’s hard because you don’t know how they started that” (8/15/07). She thought that having children there would give her a sense of direction. “I just want the kids to come, so that I know what to do after that. Like after that first day, I think I’m going to be sooo much better” (8/15/07).

After the first challenging and exhausting weeks, she expressed hope that her students would “come around” (9/2/07). Without clear images of classroom practice, Rachel experimented with a variety of different teaching strategies. She used musical CDs and sang Dr. Jean’s songs. She found opportunities for her students to help each other, often finding that “the most challenging kids are the ones that help” (10/11/07).

Rachel sought out ways to reduce her exhaustion and decrease the amount of work to take home. She relied on her ability to improvise as she taught, saying, “I know what I’m gonna do and then I just go off of that” (10/11/07). She appreciated the lesson plans in the teacher manuals because they provided a simple structure that required minimal planning. “I like MacMillan because it’s really structured. I don’t have to plan really anything. Monday you do this, Tuesday you do this” (11/27/07). She used a guided reading lesson planning template to help her structure guided reading. Rachel capitalized on her passion for reading to children by taking the opportunity to read to them often. “So whenever I get a free moment, I read a book. They just sit there so peaceful. If I could read for eight hours and they would sit, I would do it because they LOVE just listening to a story” (11/27/07).

Rachel stated that she had no real long-term vision or theory upon which she based her instructional decisions. She giggled nonchalantly, taking things in stride as she
reflected in late November, hoping that she somehow would settle into a vision for her practice.

They've definitely reached part of my expectation. It's hard because I keep changing the routine to make it better, and then they have to adjust to the routine. But if I didn't change the routine then it'd just be chaos anyway. So I guess I just have chaos all the time because I keep changing things. So by next year November, maybe I'll have a consistent routine! (11/27/07)

Rachel employed a range of strategies to encourage students to maximize their time for learning. She rewarded individuals for being ready to listen to instructions. She timed their transitions. She had the students do exercises to tide them over until their late afternoon recess.

Rachel was aware of varying student needs, and expected them to perform to the best of their ability. “As long as you do your best. That’s all I care about, remember?” (12/14/07) She knew all of the labels that had been assigned to her students by other teachers, parents, grandparents, or herself. She used the labeling terms to rationalize their behaviors, and tailored her instructional decisions to how she perceived their needs. “He could probably be in the top group, but because of his behaviors, I don’t put him in there because he’d be constantly...I don’t know. If I challenge him too much, he’ll shut down and he won’t do anything” (12/17/07).

Rachel and her teammate, based upon their students’ lack of success with math, developed an original vision for math instruction. “Both of the teachers will teach a lesson, and then we’ll have a support group, so they’ll do the extension kinds of things, and then there’ll be a games one, and then the DPPs, and the math facts one. So I’m hoping this will work” (11/27/07). For Rachel, this vision was successful for two reasons:
it was easier to plan and teach, and it was better for the students. "I feel like I can actually understand what they're understanding" (12/17/07).

Six weeks before her baby’s due date, Rachel looked forward to her maternity leave, envisioning a change of pace. "I'm ready for my six weeks. I think it's God's plan that I got pregnant THIS summer, because I really need the six weeks" (2/1/08). Once her baby was born, Rachel purposefully tried not to envision teaching so she could focus on her infant daughter. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 8. Rachel’s Teacher Vision: Partially-Focused.
Rachel’s context: Challenging. “We’re an EL school, we’re an ECR school, and I mean, we’re everything, and it’s like, wow!” (8/15/07) Payson Elementary was a complicated place to begin a teaching career. A new magnet school for the arts, the staff of young teachers studied Expeditionary Learning, Every Child Reads, and arts-based instruction. Rachel’s teaching partnership with the principal’s daughter, who was highly regarded for her teaching skills, made things even more complex, as Rachel felt that she had to prove her own worth as a teacher.

The first two weeks overwhelmed and exhausted Rachel. She wrote to the other participants on our WebCt, “Sorry everyone...I haven't been writing...I've had some rough days and when I come home all I want to do is eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and go to bed. I have been in bed by 8:30 every night! Whew!” (9/2/07). Rachel’s students’ behaviors made it challenging for Rachel to teach, and at first she didn’t know what to do when students were extremely disruptive.

The instructional strategist offered to help. “When I need a student taken out, I call her. And then, she’s also the one I send them down to when they’re having a good day. So, she’s on both ends, kind of. She’s like my out-of-the-room associate” (10/11/07). Her teaching partner’s associate also helped in Rachel’s classroom when he could. The third grade teachers befriended Rachel and made teaching more enjoyable for her. “Our kiddos always seem to leave us with some story that we can share together at 3:45!!” (10/31/07)

Rachel’s day at school began early. “Now, don’t go thinking that I don’t have stuff to do; it’s just that I get to school around seven so that I don’t have to take things home. I
feel more prepared when I get to do my planning in the morning” (10/31/07). Rachel’s new husband worked nights, so Rachel wanted to leave as soon as she could when the school day was over. She took as little work as possible home so she could spend her evening with her husband until he left for work.

The school culture at Payson was different than the one she remembered at Finley. She hoped that with time she would develop the same sense of belonging she felt at Finley. “I’m trying; it’s not like I’m not doing things because it’s Payson, but I just really like Finley. It has a special place in my heart. I’m not saying that Payson won’t after a year, but I just had so many things at Finley going for me that I miss that” (10/11/07). She also was not in favor of the looping structure at Payson, particularly of keeping (the majority of) her current class for another school year.

Classroom management continued to be Rachel’s biggest challenge. “So when I look at things, I plan for management. It’s the biggest thing” (11/27/07). In math lessons that started as a whole group and then went into partner work, Rachel modeled the entire process first to avoid confusion. “I think, ohhhh…I really don’t want to do this lesson because it’s going to be chaotic, but I try my hardest to try to find the best way possible that it’s going to be less chaotic…” (11/27/07).

Rachel felt that her class make-up in the second trimester of the year was more challenging than ever. The class makeup had changed due to the school’s high mobility rate. Within two weeks, two students moved out and five moved in. The new composition of students was nearly impossible for her to teach, and her classroom had no paraprofessional assigned to it. “The behavior of those three and others joining is
definitely the problem in this classroom...and I’m only one person. If I had only one of those three kids, fine. If I only had one of them—I can handle that. But I can’t handle all three together” (2/28/08).

As Rachel’s due date drew near, she found comfort in knowing her context would change from the chaos of her classroom to a different world of new motherhood. She was ready. “I hope [the baby’s birth] happens on Sunday because I’m kind of gearing up like this is my last week here....I’m so uncomfortable” (2/27/08). Two weeks later, just a few days before the baby’s birth, Rachel’s level of discomfort increased when the principal asked her if she intended to leave teaching. Rachel replied, “I have a lot of stuff going on in my life, but I’ve never said I was going to quit” (3/18/08). Rachel longed for a context where she felt less pressure and had more control of her circumstances. A few days before the first day of spring, Rachel found that context as she held her little baby girl in her arms. After the last day of school, Rachel found her ideal context as she moved her things out of her classroom and drove home for summer vacation. (See Figure 9.)

Rachel’s intersection of teacher identity, vision, and context. Rachel began her first year of teaching almost simultaneously with her two major life changes of marriage and pregnancy. She struggled both emotionally and physically to cope with all of her new challenges. Never having the experience of starting any of her own instruction, but having a lot of experience stepping into situations where everything was set up for her and she could effectively take over, Rachel was unsure how to set up her classroom until the students arrived. To add to all this newness, she was also learning the new pedagogies, structures, and culture of Expeditionary Learning, Every Child Reads, and
Figure 9. Rachel’s Context: Challenging.

arts-based education. Unable to focus as she was faced with so many new things to learn, Rachel became overwhelmed and exhausted.

Mid-fall, Rachel realized how much she missed the familiar, comfortable environment of Finley Elementary School where she completed all of her clinical work and did most of her substitute teaching. Trying, however, to make Payson her home, she experimented with a range of instructional and behavioral strategies, and sought support from the instructional strategist and the paraprofessional who worked in her teammate’s classroom. Committed to spending time with her new husband before he left for his night job, Rachel did everything possible to make her planning and instruction efficient enough
to limit her schoolwork outside the school day to the hour or two before school each morning.

Rachel’s high point for her vision and identity was mid-year with the creation of an original small group math structure that made her feel like she was really teaching. Although classroom management was still her biggest consideration for instructional planning, she found that the students were engaged during math and making impressive academic gains. She found such success with the small group structure that she thought perhaps she should consider a different kind of teaching position where she could teach small groups all day.

Several weeks before her baby was due, Rachel’s class composition had become more challenging than ever with the sudden addition of two boys who, with another student already in Rachel’s class, presented challenging behavioral issues. One day Rachel lost her patience, yelled, and later broke down crying. Rachel continued to cope by envisioning a change of pace when she could stay home with her new baby and husband every day.

Once her baby was born, Rachel wanted to focus on her daughter and leave her teaching behind her—at least for those six weeks. Before Rachel’s maternity leave, her principal, knowing Rachel was struggling with her classroom, asked her if she wanted to continue teaching. Rachel, now at home caring for her baby, did not want to worry about her principal’s question, but she could not stop thinking about it. Once back at work, she could only make it through a situation she called “horrible and unfair” by anticipating the upcoming summer with her baby.
Rachel coped through her first year of teaching. She was unable to form a clear teaching vision to start the year, and wondered whether she had chosen a suitable profession for herself. Her group of students challenged her with significant academic and behavioral needs. Pregnant, exhausted, and wanting to spend some evening time with her new husband, Rachel had little energy or time outside the school day to plan for instruction. She relied on her improvisatory skills to cope, one day at a time, until she could stay home with her infant daughter. (See Figures 10 and 11.)

**Literature Supporting Rachel’s Negotiation.** Rachel’s combination of an unclear vision, an uncertain teacher identity, and complicated personal and professional contexts caused her to be reactive to classroom challenges and successes. When she felt support, she initiated practices that made her feel success as a teacher. When the context was the most challenging and she felt alone and hopeless, Rachel looked ahead toward her maternity leave.

Danielewicz (2001) discusses the interaction between identity and agency. When a novice teacher like Rachel believes she is capable of action, she has a sense of agency, which in turn builds teacher identity. Entering the school year with so many changes and pressures, Rachel could not focus. She thought that once the children came, things would be alright. However, without a stable, proactive vision for practice, she had no core theory or rationale from which to draw. Therefore, she coped by improvising and reacting to both successes and challenges as they presented themselves.
1 = With mixed and new identities of wife, mother-to-be, and teacher, in the context of a new school undergoing many school reform models, and lacking experience in structuring a classroom, Rachel could not envision how to begin the school year.

2 = Overwhelmed and exhausted particularly with classroom management problems, Rachel sought and received help from other people within the school context, and envisioned and implemented a variety of instructional strategies.

3 = Rachel envisioned and implemented strategies to cope with her challenging context. The success of her small-group math instruction strengthened her teacher identity. However, overall, the new composition of her classroom after two students left and five came in made classroom management more challenging than ever.

4 = Within the context of a very challenging classroom composition, Rachel coped by envisioning her maternity leave.

5 = Rachel’s principal’s question, the classroom experiences she describes as “horrible and unfair,” and her positive personal context as the mother of her infant daughter made Rachel question her teacher identity and diminish her vision for teaching.

Figure 10. Rachel’s Intersection of Teacher Identity, Vision, and Context.

...stay home with Katelyn. And it's not because I don't want to teach. It's just that I had such a bad experience that I think I need time to get over it. And maybe by the end of the summer I WILL be over it....Maybe it'll be different at a different school. I'm not saying I'm gonna give up teaching because I had such a horrible experience, but I can't see myself doing the same thing over again. (6/4/08)
Coping through the intersection of her (1) unfocused initial vision, (2) questioning of her teacher identity, and (3) challenging personal and professional contexts

As class composition makes the context even more challenging, vision weakens and identity shifts toward motherhood

Begins with unclear identity and vision, and challenging context

When context improves with staff support, teacher identity improves and vision for practice begins


**Figure 11.** Rachel's Overall Negotiation: Coping.

I have found no literature about the development of teacher identity or vision of substitute teachers. However, I have a theory for why Rachel struggled to have a clear vision for teaching or solid identity as a teacher. All of her teaching experiences up until now had been temporary. She knew that she was going into a classroom to substitute for a day or two, or at most for a couple of months. In this capacity, she had no use for a clear, sustainable teaching vision--in fact, she could not have employed one if she had it--because she saw it as her job to follow through with whatever the absent teacher wrote in the lesson plans. The more she could adapt to whatever was the theory de jour for instruction and classroom management, the better a substitute teacher she was. Having a
full year of practice at this before becoming the one person responsible to plan and teach her own students for two consecutive years, her practice by nature had grown to be improvisatory and reactionary. To leap from day-to-day teaching to a two-year commitment was almost unimaginable.

Danielewicz (2001) says pre-service teachers need ample opportunity to theorize in practice. Perhaps Rachel, like many other teachers who study educational theory in college, needed more practice with Danielewicz’s first performative principle: theorizing in practice. Danielewicz proposes that if students regularly reflect upon their practice and explain the reasoning behind their instructional decisions, they will develop a stronger teacher identity. The fragmentation of coursework in teacher education is prevalent in teacher education literature (Alsup, 2006; Associated Press, 2006; Bradley, 1995; Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness, & Beckett, 2005; Cohn & Kottcamp, 1993; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Goodlad, 1990a; Goodlad, 1990b; Levine, 2006; Sirotnik, 1990; Teitel, 1997; Tyson, 1994). We cannot assume that pre-service teachers automatically connect the theory learned in courses called Educational Psychology or Exceptionalities or Multicultural Education to their clinical settings. We must ensure that they do by providing frequent structured settings to verbalize those connections.

The high point of Rachel’s year was the creation of the small group math structure that constructively engaged students in the lessons and connected directly to deeper conceptual understanding. Hammerness (2006) emphasizes the importance of vision in teacher retention. Rachel’s vision for her math structures and instruction was strong, and
therefore her teacher identity was the strongest when working with small math groups. This combination was powerful enough to make Rachel wonder if she was better suited for a teaching position where she worked with small groups most of the time. Alsup (2006) encourages teacher educators to provide opportunities for discourse with those practicing in the field. If Rachel had more opportunity to observe and discuss small group teaching positions with the in-service teachers at St. John or Finley when she was in her teacher education program, she may have pursued such a position in the first place.

Hammerness (2006) reminds us that finding a context that supports one’s vision is key to teacher retention as well. This is why understanding the intersection of identity, vision, and context is so vital to prepare teachers for their classroom positions. One must see teaching in action (Hammerness, 2006), talk with teachers in the field (Alsup, 2006), and theorize in practice (Danielewicz, 2001). In other words, a teaching context is necessary in order to develop teacher vision and identity, and a teacher vision and identity are necessary in order to sustain oneself through contextual challenges. Rachel, upon beginning her first year without a solid vision for teaching or teacher identity—and in an extremely challenging context—coped by minimizing her stressors and placing her focus on her new family.

Surviving Ben: Questioning Identity, Partially-Focused Vision, and Challenging Context

Ben’s teacher identity: Questioning. Ben knew since he was a child that he would be a teacher some day—a teacher like his mother. He respected the teachers in his parochial school, and they inspired him to become a teacher. He hoped to be a teacher that children would respect as well. He wanted to be a role model for children.
Ben’s first and only interview was for the job he secured at Sunnydale. Ben believed his being male was key to getting the job, noting that “they said, well, we really don’t look at anybody without their endorsement, but since we knew you, and you’re a male, and you’re a nice guy, we’re gonna give you a shot at an interview” (6/13/07). Ben’s gender impacted his teacher identity as he struggled to balance the demands of the work with his non-teaching friends’ perception of the job. He was glad there would be at least one other young male staff member at Sunnydale.

...and he’s only a year older than me, so you know, not to be biased or anything, but just having another male to talk to sometimes helps a little bit, too. I’m looking forward to that. It’s nice, because a lot of my friends, besides my PDS friends that I had at Riverside, I mean...having another teacher to talk to is great because they really don’t know what’s going on in the classroom, and they think it’s kinda like baby...I mean, you hear, “Ben, it’s just teaching.” But it’s a lot of work, and a lot of responsibility, so, just having that support, someone to talk to, if there’s a problem. Just getting it off your chest—that’s what I’m looking forward to. (6/13/07)

The respect that Ben’s students had for him also affirmed his teacher identity. “Maybe the kids are so respectful to me, that I LOVE teaching right now...” (9/20/07). Ben said he felt “like an older brother” to his students (9/20/07). On one hand, this feeling was positive as he valued the family atmosphere of the school and community. However, Ben often referred to his age as a limitation for his current career opportunities.

I don’t know, I thought about doing administration eventually, or moving up eventually, or maybe guidance counselor, but I don’t know, right now I have no idea. I like what I’m doing right now, and I’m still young, and I don’t want to think about administration right now, because who would want a young principal? (9/20/07)

In order to compensate for his age and novice teacher status, Ben tried to appear confident. “Everyone says I’m a calm...well, deep down inside I’m worried. So I don’t
like to act fearful, because that would show a weakness a little bit, so I want to act like I know what I'm doing" (10/31/07). Ben did worry about how well he was doing as a teacher. Late fall when he began to question his teacher identity because the students were talkative and sometimes disrespectful to each other, other teachers and parents affirmed his identity as a good teacher. "After parent-teacher conferences, almost every parent said they were glad that my kid was in your class because they enjoy having you as a teacher" (10/31/07).

Mid-year, Ben had enough teaching experience to know he related well to children, but at the same time felt pressure to do more than "just be in the classroom" (12/17/07). "I mean, I want to teach for a while, but I don't know if I should. Maybe I should venture out after I get experience, you know, try to work my way up in the education system. I thought maybe about being an athletic director, or a counselor, but you're still working with kids, too" (12/17/07). At parent-teacher conferences in December, Ben had a feeling that the fathers wondered why he was a teacher. By saying, "I don't know why. Because honestly, if you think about it, who can really teach? Who has the patience to be with kids, and just cares so much...not too many people can do it, I don't think" (12/17/07), Ben implied that a teacher's ability to care for and teach children—regardless of the teacher's gender—should be the criteria for one's worth as a teacher.

The scores on the Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) tests in January affirmed Ben's teacher identity. Nearly all of his students improved since October in both
math and reading. Having wondered whether he was doing a good job, he was relieved by the scores that showed growth since the beginning of the year.

However, at the same time Ben felt more confident about himself as a classroom teacher, he wished he could spend more time just talking with his students.

I feel like I don’t get to know my students that well with an entire classroom...I can really influence a student in a more positive way like a counselor figure. If they have a problem they can come and talk to me...I think it’s a cool profession to listen to kids’ problems and try to help them out with what’s going on with their life. (2/20/08)

In April, Ben again expressed an interest in pursuing a career as a counselor. His deep interest in his students’ lives had helped him develop rapport with his students—all but one. Ben was frustrated that what he did best—being a role model for students—did not work for Janie. “As a teacher, I can’t connect to her....I’m so confused about her behavior. I can’t figure her out” (4/1/08). However, Ben acknowledged that his relationship with Janie was an exception to his rapport-developing ability. At the same time that he struggled with her, he received affirming feedback from parents about how their children loved being in his class. These affirmations strengthened Ben’s teacher identity.

Ben struggled the most in May with his teacher identity. He sometimes felt he was too hard on his students. He also wondered whether he was too close to his students to maintain the level of respect that he inherited at the beginning of the year when he had the *perfect class*. (See Figure 12.)

Ben’s teacher vision: Partially-focused. Ben envisioned his classroom as a place where students respected each other and the teacher. He emphasized, “...being a role
model and helping them make good decisions, both academically and socially, is what I’m looking forward to” (6/13/07). He planned to set clear expectations right away so the classroom would be a place of respect, and the fifth graders would be role models for the children in the school. A month after school began, Ben’s vision had been enacted. He reflected that “it’s kinda cool to see fifth graders holding the kindergarteners’ hands” as they escort them to the bus after school each day (9/21/07).

By mid-fall, however, Ben was disillusioned. His students were not as perfect as he thought they were at first. Ben became a bit more strict, “not afraid to tell them what to do in a more stern voice so they can respect the rules” (10/31/07). Ben was also unsatisfied with his instruction.
I almost feel like I’m not meeting the needs of everyone like I should be, but it’s really hard to adapt your lessons for everyone....I guess it’s maybe my problem. I should make the lessons more engaging and more challenging for every student....I just always feel like I’m thinking and thinking, and then...it’s just hard to fine-tune. (10/31/07)

By mid-December, Ben was overwhelmed with the many demands of teaching and already looking ahead to next year as a chance to improve instruction. “I get this idea, like, oh, next time I’ll teach it this way, or I hear an idea from a different teacher and I think, that’s a great idea. So, I’ll just have to wait until next year to do it, I guess. There’s so much you have to do” (12/17/07). His parents encouraged him to work hard, and Ben agreed that good things would happen if he did so. However, he was unsure exactly how to focus his hard work. “It’s just knowing what to do that’s the hardest part. I want to do things better, but I don’t know what to do” (12/17/07). Surviving through the first year, he looked forward to the time he would have in summer to get ahead on things like “different worksheets for the reading, different questions, study guides; and I just want to keep them organized so I can just pull it out of my file cabinet and have it” (2/20/08).

Ben kept planning, a few days at a time, hoping he was teaching the right things well. “I want my kids to be successful....I hope I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing” (2/20/08). He held high expectations for their behavior. In the early spring when the fifth graders started flirting more with each other, Ben worked hard to help them maintain respect for each other. In mid-March, he admitted while watching a recording of his lesson, “I thought it was worse than this. I mean, it wasn’t too bad!” (3/17/08) In April, Ben talked more about instructional practice than behavior or respect, sharing how
he was trying to have his students collaborate and explore after he modeled a skill or activity. However, in May, his toughest month of all, he could not enact his vision of respect. His students acted “like they [ran] the school” (6/4/08) and caused Ben to end his year dealing with several behavior issues. (See Figure 13.)

![Figure 13. Ben's Teacher Vision: Partially-Focused.](image)

**Ben’s context: Challenging.** Ben’s first teaching job was in a rural school filled with *wholesome* children. The school secretary told him his class was *perfect*. While the other colleagues reported how challenging their first days were, Ben wrote, “It must be Sunnydale.... I had an awesome first day!! The kids were very respectful and polite. It
felt like my best teaching day at PDS times 100!” (8/28/07) Ben attributed the positive behavior of his students to the family orientation of the community, as “many students had said their parents were their role models” (8/28/07).

Ben’s beginning-of-the-year context also included a supportive staff. To Ben, things seemed almost too good to be true. “I don’t even have the right words to say! It’s just perfect right now. I mean, the kids are great, staff’s great, the respect level between teachers and students is wonderful” (9/20/07). Ben had found a context where he could fulfill his vision of helping children become respectful, responsible citizens.

By mid-fall, however, things no longer seemed as ideal as the beginning of the year. He was overwhelmed with all of the work. “I just feel like I’m grasping for air!...I just feel like I’m drowning some days. Not every day. Almost every day” (10/31/07). His students were more talkative during class times when they were supposed to be working independently. “I thought at first, my class is perfect, but it’s not…but they’re the reason I keep coming back” (10/31/07). He also felt alone out in the trailer. Although Ben knew that teachers would help him if he asked, they assumed he was doing alright on his own. He rarely even saw other teachers.

Ben wished his context was more collaborative. He missed the team planning of his PDS and student teaching experiences. “I’m so used to doing that: sitting down with somebody and going over lesson plans...I really just feel like I’m by myself. I mean, it’s fine, but right now in my life I kind of need that support and that guidance” (12/17/07).

Ben was also alone in his personal life. He had no friends that understood teaching or were interested in long conversations about it. He noticed that it was when his
personal context became more isolated that he began feeling disillusioned at school as well.

It’s just so different not having someone to sit down and talk to about your problems. It was nice when I could sit down with Avery and talk about things. Honestly, as soon as we stopped talking, that’s when school was not the same. And that’s when I was writing on the WebCT all the time, and things were going good. Now it’s just like, ugh. I feel kind of like the grinch, almost. (12/17/07)

The students’ minor disrespect for each other, for the school rules, and for his authority disappointed Ben. “They’re constantly fighting with each other, and throwing snowballs outside at recess… just little things like that going on. Even though I tell them a thousand times not to do it, it’s still taking place” (12/17/07). Although he admitted that his students were generally respectful and cooperative, student disrespect was the teaching challenge that bothered Ben the most.

In February, Ben again expressed his feelings about being out in the trailer, away from the main action of the school. “I don’t see anybody. It’s just me. It’s so lonely. I don’t see anybody unless I go inside at the end of the day. I feel so lonely” (2/1/08). He wished he could see other adults throughout the day, and he wished other adults could “peek in and see how things are going” (2/20/08).

Nobody saw the papers piled in the corner of his room that, laughing, he said, “just grew to be a part of me, really” (2/20/08). He was too busy to concern himself with them, now. Ben had learned to prioritize things for his own survival, balancing the demands of teaching with his personal needs. “If I want to make time for myself to get my work done, I can. But throughout the day, it’s so chaotic, it’s rush, rush, rush, and then you want to go home and have time for yourself” (2/20/08).
He set a goal to create learning centers so he could teach small groups while the other students did something besides busywork at their desks. However, that meant more noise, and the trailer was inherently a crowded and noisy place.

I know a lot of teachers have centers, but they’re in the classroom, and it’s not noisy. I am just so easily distracted as a teacher, let alone the kids trying to read, too. I don’t have enough space. When everyone’s in the room and they’re working in small groups, it’s so noisy. Even if the kids are whispering, it’s just noisy compared to a classroom. It’s noisy just to walk around. (2/20/08)

When teachers in the district were laid off and others were shuffled to different schools and classrooms, Ben envisioned the possibility for a second-year team teaching situation that would align more to his vision for collaboration, and support both his personal and professional context. “If I were on the same team as Dave, it would be a whole different story….It would be awesome, how well we would plan together; it would be perfect….If I was with Dave, I would feel more comfortable sharing my ideas” (4/1/08). As for the end of his first year of teaching, although Ben had met more of the faculty, he still felt isolated. “It just took me a while to open up to them, just being new….Being out in the trailer is not ideal….To collaborate and to actually think you’re a member of the school?” (4/1/08)

Ben was relieved to hear the news that he would teach fifth grade at Sunnydale again, with a classroom inside the building. Although May was “a blur” (6/4/08) to Ben due to the field trips, behavior issues, and his two new jobs outside of school, Ben looked forward to a fresh start next year. (See Figure 14.)

Ben’s intersection of teacher identity, vision, and context. Ben, having considered himself a teacher and role model since well before college, began his first year of
teaching with a strong vision to help students be respectful, responsible citizens. He found a school context where he could feel part of a supportive community.

However, his classroom was out in a trailer. This isolation, in combination with living on his own for the first time, made Ben lonely both at school and home. He wished he could collaborate more with other teachers, and hoped he was doing alright with his teaching. The parents affirmed his teacher identity by telling him how much their children enjoyed him as a teacher.

It bothered Ben when his students became more talkative and showed minor disrespect to each other, adults, and the school rules. Ben realized his class was not
perfect after all. He wished that he had more time to counsel his students when they had problems, and he sensed the tension of the gender issues embedded in elementary school teaching. As he struggled to keep up with all of the demands of teaching, the decline in student respect and his sense of loneliness caused him to become disillusioned and to question his teacher identity. Ben was at his lowest point of morale around the winter holidays.

In February and March, Ben seemed more at peace with his personal and professional life. His students' improved scores on a test that measured progress over time reassured him. He did not worry as much about the piles of paperwork, and he made time for himself to relax at night. Teaching was hard, but he had accepted it as such and looked forward to the summer as a time to regroup and envision improvement for Year Two. He considered school counseling as a potential step sometime in the future.

At the end of the year, Ben’s vision for his current classroom focused more on instruction than developing respect. He began to look ahead to a possible reassignment to another grade level, perhaps teaming with a young male teacher with whom he could more closely identify. Although he still felt isolated out in the portable classroom, he finally began to feel more a part of the Sunnydale faculty.

Ben survived through his first year of teaching. At first, Ben’s teacher identity of being a role model, vision to teach respect, and professional context at a wholesome, supportive school all seemed perfect. However, he soon realized that he was alone out in the trailer and alone at home, and having nobody with whom to share his joys, challenges, and concerns, he became disillusioned, questioning whether he would stay in
teaching or become a counselor. Without complaint, Ben accepted his situation and envisioned the summer as a time to plan and organize, and the year ahead as a chance to refine his practice. (See Figures 15 and 16.)

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**Figure 15.** Ben's Intersection of Teacher Identity, Vision, and Context.

1 = With a strong identity as a role model and a vision to teach respect, and in the context of a family-oriented, wholesome school, Ben's first year of teaching had a strong beginning.

2 = As students became more talkative, and the outreach of staff support dwindled, Ben began to question his teacher identity. He realized things were not perfect after all.

3 = Alone, overwhelmed, and disappointed, Ben was disillusioned. He questioned his current efficacy and considered other long-term positions in education.

4 = Having accepted teaching as a challenging job, and adjusted to life on his own, Ben looked forward to the summer to maximize instruction within the context of his portable classroom.

5 = Students' challenging behaviors during the last month of school made Ben question his role as a teacher and his ability to enact his vision to develop respectful citizens.
"I relate well with kids. Kids can come and talk with me about anything, for the most part. I connect well with kids, even if it’s about movies they watch, books they read, their family life, I can really connect with them like an older brother or some kind of family member. I need to work on my organization skills, and I want to collaborate more with the teachers so that we can be on the same page. It’s just that at this point now it’s almost too late. From the beginning, I want to really collaborate with the teachers. That’s not where we’re at all, and I want to be at that point...also I want to create more centers for the kids next year so they have some more fun time. Sometimes I think they get bored with their regular work, so I just want to keep the lessons and the activities more engaging to the students. I really need to work on my organization skills and collaborate with other teachers to get some ideas. Maybe attend more workshops and other classes, too. I think I’ve gotten to know the staff really well. I’m a friendly guy, so I think everyone at Sunnydale likes me, so that’s a bonus. My mentor says I don’t complain about things, and I’m respectful at meetings. That’s the kind of person I am; that’s the qualities I bring."

(Ben, 4/1/08)
Literature supporting Ben’s negotiation. Ben’s alignment of his vision to teach respect, his identity as a male role model, and a professional context that would allow his vision (Hammerness, 2006) and identity (Britzman, 1991) to flourish, made his first several weeks of his teaching career ideal. However, in a few months, without blaming anyone, Ben realized he was alone on many levels. He lived alone, he taught alone, he was out in a trailer alone, and he was one of very few male elementary teachers in his building. I believe that the latter layer implicitly impacted Ben’s negotiation path much more than he explicitly articulated over the course of the year. I focus on the gender literature here to support my belief and to provide insights into how his pressures to be a role model connected to his feelings of isolation.

Although Ben, without any hesitation at all, identified himself as a role model, and envisioned his instruction to center on respect and responsibility, he did not articulate any specific practices or methods for doing so. He knew that his being male helped him secure the position, and believed it was because most elementary teachers are female, and children need the opportunity to learn from men as well. Although Ben talked a lot about the importance of being a male role model, even when I asked him directly, he could not explain specifically what that meant. Allan (1993) found this phenomenon to be the case in many of the male elementary teachers he interviewed. “Many men felt they were given a hiring preference because of the public’s demands for more male role models, but were at a loss to identify exactly what this work consisted of” (p. 122). Sargent (2001) said the concept of male role model came up in every single one of his interviews with 39 male
elementary teachers. None of the men could explain what it meant, but they all knew they were doing whatever it was simply by being male.

Allan's (1993) participants perceived “an important need for increased involvement of adult men in the lives of children, owing to the increasing number of single-parent families, or families in which fathers have limited interaction with their children” (p. 115). School administrators in a study by Riddell and Tett (2006) noted that “in some primary schools there are no men at all. Not even the janitor and that is not a good idea” (p. 51). Riddell and Tett report that in the 2002-2003 school year, 88% of U.S. elementary teachers were female. The data in their study also showed that male primary teachers’ minority status gave them career advantages “on the grounds that they would provide a role model for the male pupils” (p. 78). DeCorse (1997) found a theme of celebrating male elementary teachers as father figures for young children. Ben identified himself several times as a brother figure to the students, an adaptation to DeCorse’s theme based upon Ben’s perception of himself as young.

Ironically, at the same time men are explicitly celebrated for being male and teaching elementary children, they are implicitly pushed by society into other careers (Allan, 1993; DeCorse, 1997; Gerson, 1993; Jacobs, 1993; Sargent, 2001). Allan (1993) explains the dilemma men face within the context of elementary teaching.

The man who is too ‘masculine’ would be suspected of being an incompetent and insensitive teacher, while the man who is nurturing and empathic would be stereotyped as feminine and ‘unnatural.’ Thus, paradoxically, an initial hiring advantage to me carries with it certain disadvantages, insofar as it places men in an untenable situation. (p. 126)
This dilemma contributes to what Allan calls the "revolving door" where male teachers are channeled into more male-dominated jobs within the field. Ben already sensed a strange feeling from the fathers of his students. Riddell and Tett (2006) document this gender-based issue as one reason men leave elementary teaching. "Issues around the protection of children become conflated with ideas about masculinity, leading to mistrust of men as classroom teachers" (p. 78).

Since our society limits the extent to which males should touch or nurture young children, male elementary teachers compensate by acting as the male role model (Allan, 1993; DeCorse, 1997; Gerson, 1993; Riddell & Tett, 2006; Sargent, 2001). Sargent shows that "men are being forced to 'do teaching' by doing a kind of safe form of hegemonic masculinity, albeit one that is closely monitored, through the use of compensatory activities" (p. 154). Allan's (1993) research illuminated the same phenomenon.

They must assert—and especially model—'being a real man' in ways that are personally sustainable, that have integrity, and that are also acceptable to those who evaluate them on this important job criterion and control their careers. At the same time they feel pressure to conform to stereotypically feminine qualities to establish the sensitive, caring relationships necessary to effectively teach children. For these men, gender is highly problematized, and they must negotiate the meaning of masculinity every day. (p. 114)

When Ben and another young male teacher coached the fourth graders in after-school sports, they compensated for their inability to nurture students in the same way the women in their school could. Riddell & Tett (2006) note that sports-related activities are common compensatory activities, allowing men to contribute to their school and relate to other male elementary teachers. Sargent (2001) notes that as men purposefully distance
themselves from children, “they participate in the reproduction of the myth of stoic, distant men. This means they are participating in their own marginalization” (p. 68). Ben limited physical contact with his students to high fives and handshakes, always aware of others’ perceptions. He also assumed that the female teachers in his team would handle certain problems with girls, and even called the female teachers “mother figures” as does Sargent (2001).

When the men in Sargent’s (2001) study talked one-on-one with him about the tenuous gender-based tension, they accepted it as the way things are. However, when discussing it in focus groups, the men expressed anger and frustration with how society limited the quality of their interactions with children based solely upon their being male. Sargent reflected on the power of discourse about these gender-based struggles. “Teachers generally have few opportunities to exchange ideas regarding their teaching, and men teachers, in particular, are especially isolated from others” (2001, p. 147). Nielsen (2006) contends that teacher education programs should structure opportunities to deconstruct gender issues, because “an awareness of gender discourse can better prepare men for the contradictions and conflicts they may face as they manage their masculinity in an occupation built upon the assumption that workers will draw from discourses of femininity” (p. 5).

The loneliness that Ben felt was not only due to being male. He was also alone at home, and physically alone in a portable classroom. However, I believe that Ben’s negotiation path would have been significantly different if he had a male grade-level teammate with whom he could plan and talk. It may have reduced the loneliness that
primarily caused his disillusionment, which in turn made him question his teacher identity.

Hoping Connie: Questioning Identity, Partially-Focused Vision, and Challenging Context

Connie's teacher identity. Connie's teacher identity was in question before she began teaching. Since she had not secured a full-time teaching position by July, she decided to accept a long-term substitute position in her own children's school. Being a mother was Connie's strongest identity, and she liked the idea of being at the school where her youngest of five children would start kindergarten.

At the beginning of the school year, Connie lacked a sense of teacher identity. All signs told her that she was not a teacher. "I don't have an email, I don't have a code for the copy machine...I'm nobody right now. I don't have a name on the door; I may not even GET my name on the door. I don't have a nametag" (8/15/07).

Connie struggled to be the teacher she wanted to be while attempting to realize the vision of the teacher for whom she was substituting. In early October, she reached a frustration level, admitting she could no longer pretend to be someone she was not. Furthermore, she could not longer hide her investment in the children. "Even though they're stinkers, it's gonna be...(begins to cry)...yeah. It'll be hard to let...I, I, I'm very invested. It's very frustrating" (10/1/07).

Connie struggled with classroom management for the entire three months that she taught the class. She questioned her own identity as a teacher who could engage students in learning. After she finished teaching in November, she resolved that anybody with this particular group of students would face the same challenges. "At first I was wondering if
people were just telling me, “Oh, it’s a really tough group,” to make me feel better, and, no. Now I know. I do have some peace now that I really did okay” (11/19/07).

Connie merged her teacher and parent identities, always teaching her children and parenting her students. She referenced challenging times with her oldest teenage daughter, saying, “I can’t tell you how many times I’ve turned to my husband just within the last month and said, ‘What didn’t we teach her? What did we forget to do?’” (12/17/07). As a parent-teacher, Connie saw her students struggle and wished their parents would take on more of a teaching role as well. “Because so much of being a parent is being a teacher. Which is why so many kids are in SO much trouble. The parents aren’t doing it” (12/17/07).

In mid-December, Connie began a new teaching position as an Early Intervention Strategy Specialist. Now she questioned her teacher identity in a new way. She thought it was ironic that “they would call me a specialist, because I don’t know what I’m doing day to day. I have to figure it out as I go” (12/17/07). Her major focus now was as a diagnostician, something she did not identify herself to be. Like at the beginning of the year, signs showed that her position was at a lower status than many other teaching positions in the school. “And then I find out that the speech therapist comes when I’m supposed to have her, and then the computer people came and said, ‘She’s supposed to be in keyboarding at this time.’ Okay. Fine. Then this isn’t worth much, is it?” (12/17/07)

Her part-time specialist position gave her time two days each week to substitute teach. Through her single-day substitute jobs, she practiced being the firm, decisive teacher that in hindsight she wished she would have been with her fifth grade students.
“I subbed at Carter last week for a very rough group...it was rough, but I handled it much differently than I did my fifth grade class at first. I was firmer with them. I wasn’t wishy-washy at all” (2/19/08). One day she went back to that fifth grade class as a single-day substitute teacher, and discovered that her teacher identity had lost some of its parental weight.

I’m definitely less of a mom to them, now, and that’s good. I found out when I walked back into class that day to sub; by the end of the day I knew that I was cured. I am no longer a nice, soft person. I’m cured. I’ll never be that soft again. I’m not mean; I’m not a battle-ax, I’m not mean just because I can be, but I didn’t let them walk all over me. (2/19/08)

By mid-March, Connie acknowledged that she had become more of a specialist. She knew each of her students’ strengths and challenges, and planned lessons accordingly. She seemed confident and satisfied with her work, and she had developed relationships with them despite the six-to-eight week time she spent with each child.

“When I go to pick her up, she [makes a face, sighs, and squirms]. Then she’ll walk to the door and grab my hand and walk down the hall holding my hand, practically skipping the whole way” (3/13/08). In April, Connie proudly declared that Lizzie would likely avoid entitlement for special education. After the year ended, Connie admitted that she felt effective as a teacher. However, she made it clear that she could not decide whether she would remain in teaching until after she had a classroom of her own. (See Figure 17.)

Connie’s teacher vision: Partially-focused. Connie believed that for the sake of the children, she would need to postpone implementing her own vision for teaching, and instead be a vehicle for the vision of the returning teacher. Connie did not know exactly how she was going to do this.
I'm not going to use a totally different disciplinary style, because it's not fair to them. And that means I'm going to be using a classroom management system that wouldn't be my choice. So I'm a little nervous about how I'm actually going to pull that off, because I really think a teacher needs to believe in it, and I'm not sure I DOOOO! (8/13/07)

A month later, Connie made a goal to engage the students respectfully in instruction by the time the teacher for whom she was substituting would return. “Really, I know, that most of their learning is probably going to come second and third trimester, when their teacher comes back....I feel like my job is just going to have to be to have them ready, and to try to give some background knowledge” (9/21/07). As Connie focused on this goal, she saw herself as “always being the nag. ‘Stand in line! Be quiet! Stop talking!’

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Figure 17. Connie’s Teacher Identity: Questioning.
(10/1/07). She did not like what she saw in herself, but felt it was what she needed to do
to get them ready for their teacher.

The day the teacher returned to school after her maternity leave, Connie watched
regretfully, wishing she had had the opportunity to observe the teacher before her
substitute teaching.

But there are so many things from just watching her part of Thursday and then
Friday morning, I thought, “Dang! (Whispers) I wish I could have seen her do it.
(Loudly): Dang!! I wish I could have seen her DO that!!” That would have helped
me....I still wouldn’t have done it exactly her way. I would have done it ME...it
still would have been ME, with my twist on it. But, it would have given me more
of a foundation where I didn’t feel quite so... (11/19/07)

Frustrated, Connie implied the reason for her partial vision: she had never observed the
teacher’s actions that she had tried so hard to replicate.

Had Connie tried to enact her own vision for teaching, she would have focused on
a problem-solving approach; “figuring out what you need, and how to get it, and what
you know, and what you don’t know, and what you need to know to get to where you
want to be. And if you don’t have the answer, who does?” (12/17/07) She grounded this
vision in her own parenting experiences. However, she realized that she knew her own
children much better than she had ever gotten a chance to know students in her clinical
and substitute teaching experiences. She admitted that she could not envision exactly how
to intervene for a child who was struggling.

I’ve always wondered, just sitting in on team meetings with other teachers and
other grade levels, and hearing other teachers say, ‘Yeah, we need to do an
intervention with this little group...Okay, how do they know that? How do they
reach that decision?....I was looking at this kid and I was seeing a problem, but I
don’t know what the problem is. AND I don’t know what the solution is. So how
do you get to that point where you can identify the problem and then know what
solution, what to do? (12/17/07)
Ironically, her next teaching position that began in mid-December was as an Early Intervention Strategy Specialist. Connie soon surprised herself with how well she could figure out what a child needed and envision a possible solution. “I’m learning how to diagnose without someone handing me a paper on a kid and saying, ‘Here’s the problem; fix it.’ I’m learning how to figure out what the problems are” (12/17/07).

The skills Connie was learning as a specialist would help her as a classroom teacher. She wanted her own class for a full year, because she wanted to develop long-term relationships with her students and have more autonomy to enact her problem-solving vision for teaching. “You have the class—the students. They’re yours” (2/19/08).

In the meantime, as a specialist Connie did have the autonomy to shape instruction according to her students’ needs. Although there were certain concepts she was supposed to teach the students, and specific methods she was supposed to use, her understanding of each student was the most important factor shaping her instruction. “She hates subtraction. And it worries her. She starts looking lost. Really, we’re supposed to be working on subtraction, but we’re not going to until she’s comfortable. We play with it a little bit” (3/13/08).

Connie had learned through both of her first-year teaching positions how important it was for children to feel safe in their environment in order to be able to learn new things. “One of the things I came away with is how much is dependent upon the classroom environment; how maintaining an environment that is not just survivable, but tolerable, for every student. That’s just as important as the lesson preparation” (4/3/08). Additionally, through her single-day substitute teaching experiences, followed by a return
to her challenging fifth grade classroom, she learned that she had refocused her vision, like with parenting, to take things less personally. "Neutrality is needed... And I realize looking back that what I always needed to do... was to not give the students the power to make me angry" (4/3/08). In June, she reiterated her vision for a more firm approach to teaching. (See Figure 18.)

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 18.** Connie's Teacher Vision: Partially-Focused.

**Connie’s context: Challenging.** As a parent-teacher, Connie understood the implications of teaching in a school with such a high mobility rate. She explained,
“That’s almost always going to lead to some kind of problem in school, whether it’s not knowing how to behave, or not being able to behave, or just not being able to function because of the stressors at home” (8/13/07). To add to the complication, Connie’s students would not have their full-time teacher until mid-November. “So they have a lot of the same feelings of anxiety and stress that I will have” (8/13/07).

Just a few days before the first day of classes, Connie learned that her class would be even more challenging than she expected. “And that’s when [the instructional coach] turned and said, ‘And you graduated...’ and I said, ‘In May.’ And she said, ‘Of this year?!’ ‘Yeah.’ And she said, ‘Ohhhh-kay’...” (8/15/07).

A month later, the challenges in her students’ lives became even more clear to her. “So Johnny hands me a pass, or tries to, because it’s stuck to his hand... ‘Johnny, tell me, what happened? Where did this come from?’ ‘Well, I knocked it off the table by my bed and it fell in the rat glue’” (9/21/07). Connie watched another one of her students roughly handled by her mother. “So, I walked over just in time to see her mom grab her by the arm, and yell, ‘You go pick that right up there! I’m not gonna take none of that angry shit from you!’ ...and her mom shook her one more time...” (9/21/07). Connie’s days were challenge-filled with few successes. “Somebody asked me today, one of my friends from out of town, ‘Do you have any triumphs to balance all this stuff?’ ‘No,’ I was responding back online, ‘It’s sad, but the triumphs are pretty grim’” (10/1/07).

Connie did note progress, however, by the end of her long-term position as a substitute. ‘I was pretty happy when it got down to 50/50, because half of my day was actually spent doing productive things instead of ‘Sit down. Stop that. No more. No.’”
(11/19/07) However, both her substitute teaching context and her specialist context were temporary and did not allow her to develop long-term relationships with students. “I don’t have the ownership of a class. Some of these kids I’ll have for a while longer; some I’ll get for eight weeks and that’s it. So I do my best with them. I can’t function without a personal relationship, so I do my best to establish some kind of personal relationship, but I just don’t have the ownership of it” (2/19/08).

In the spring, eighteen elementary teachers were laid off and Connie’s prospects of securing a job diminished. However, she did not give up hope. She believed that she would eventually have an opportunity to secure a job close to home. Her husband, who had been supportive through all of her challenges throughout the year, reminded her that she could financially afford to patiently wait, supporting her priority of attention to their own children. By the time the school year ended, Connie had secured a job for the fall. Although it was a job teaching children labeled as gifted and talented, and not a full time general elementary classroom position, it was a job that would last through January of 2009 and provide her with an opportunity to learn more about teaching. (See Figure 19.)

Connie’s intersection of teacher identity, vision, and context. Connie began her first year of teaching as a long-term substitute teacher. Her strong identity as a mother led her to accept the position in July because it was the school near her home and where her youngest son would begin kindergarten that year. The school context was challenging due to its high mobility rate. As a substitute teacher, Connie began the year without any material signs that acknowledged her as a teacher.
Connie's class had a reputation of being “tough.” Other faculty members raised their eyebrows when they found out Connie was a novice teacher in charge of that class for three months. Connie felt it was her job to implement the behavior management and instructional practices of the teacher for whom she was substituting, and struggled to maintain her own teacher identity. Connie clearly articulated her own vision for teaching, but could not employ it in her temporary setting. By the end of her time with the students, through her parent-teacher identity she became invested in the students, and in hindsight, was at peace with the work she had done.
Mid-year, through her new position as a strategy specialist, Connie became more confident in her ability to diagnose students’ academic problems and provide interventions tailored specifically to them. Having more autonomy in this position, her teacher identity improved. As she substitute taught on her days off, she learned to be consistent and decisive, further strengthening her teacher identity. Connie looked ahead to the following year, hoping she would have a chance to teach her own class of students where she could enact her vision for helping children problem-solve and direct their learning. She wanted to teach the same group of students all year so that she could be the parent-teacher she was, developing deep relationships with her children.

At the end of Connie’s first year of teaching, she was satisfied with her accomplishments. Some of her students did not qualify for entitlement for special education directly because of Connie’s intervention strategies; this strengthened her teacher identity. Connie reflected back on her long-term substitute position to focus her vision for future practice on establishing a safe classroom environment. Despite lay-offs in the district, Connie planned to wait through the summer, hoping enrollment would increase and she would be well-poised for a job close to home. She did not have to wait that long; at the end of May she accepted a position through January of 2009 as a long-term substitute teacher at LaMont teaching children labeled as gifted and talented.

Connie hoped for a future, stable teaching position as she learned from her present, temporary settings. Through her substitute and specialist positions, she became a more decisive, diagnostic, and flexible teacher. She maintained hope for a context where
she could enact her teacher vision to develop deep relationships and be the parent-teacher at school as well as home. (See Figures 20 and 21.)

Figure 20. Connie’s Intersection of Teacher Identity, Vision, and Context.
"Even though [students] may not be in a position to learn, the teacher has to be ready for that opportunity. And there are some you're not going to like. Because they don't respect you, they don't like you, and they don't even want you to like them, because they're safer that way... A good teacher has to stay alert, and keep the big picture in mind rather than the day-to-day hassles, and be able to take a step back and look at what needs to change from their end, because that's the only thing they have control over. You can't control what the kid goes home to; you can't control what the kid comes to school with. The only thing a teacher can control is what they put out.” (Connie, 4/3/08)

"At LaMont, the enrollment is always higher than they think it's going to be because the neighborhood is so transient and unstable. August will come around, and they'll have too many kids, and they'll have to add another teacher... I'm hoping.” (Connie, 4/3/08)
about substitute teacher support focused mainly on tricks and tips for single-day substitute teachers. I did not find literature that related directly to Connie’s scenario as a long-term substitute teacher from Day 1 of her professional career. However, I did find a few sources about how people, including certified teachers who serve as substitutes themselves, perceive the status of substitute teachers.

Lassman (2001) briefly discusses the perception of substitute teachers as lower-status employees, and this supports Connie’s interpretations of how others perceived her. Weems (2003) demonstrates how substitute teachers are often characterized as the “deviant subject.” Lassman found that the substitute teachers she interviewed identified themselves as “third-class citizens” and felt “marginalized within the school contexts in which they serve” (par. 25). The author notes that this marginalization is constitutive of professionalism in classifying/distinguishing the so-called real teacher from the substitute. To the extent that educational reform has constructed a normative professional teacher as one who possesses a particular knowledge base, the credentials to back them up, and the economic benefits given to tenured teachers, substitute teachers are discursively produced as deviant subjects.

This relates to Britzman’s (1991) discourse of the real, explaining the conflict Connie felt between her teacher identity and her tenuous role as a substitute teacher. Over time, Connie increasingly perceived herself as the teacher, having “invested” herself in her students, but always knowing she was working on borrowed time as a novice-foster-parent-teacher. During the beginning of her first year of teaching, Connie had to figure out how to negotiate the political relationships between herself, the teacher for whom she was subbing, her grade-level teammate, the grade-level paraprofessional and special
education teachers, the principal, district administration, and the students. “Fitting in...is a discursive...strategy that substitute teachers employ to navigate through the experience of both demonstrating her authority inside the classroom while being aware of her status as an outsider as a teacher” (Weems, par. 28).

Throughout the year, whether a substitute teacher or a strategy specialist, Connie maintained her vision for teaching while unable to practice it. Many of the factors that Hammerness (2006) says are necessary in order to negotiate vision and practice (such as team support and professional development opportunities) were lacking in Connie’s context. Therefore, rather than trying to implement her vision in her temporary contexts, she postponed its enactment in hopes of starting fresh in a general education classroom during her second year of teaching.

**Seeing the Intersections: Various Solutions to Common Challenges**

The intersection of teacher identity, vision, and context impacted the way each participant negotiated specific challenges they encountered in their classrooms as their first year of teaching progressed. Five challenges emerged that were common to all four participants:

- classroom management
- planning, pacing, and assessment
- small group differentiation
- needing support, and
- emotional and physical exhaustion.

Teacher attrition literature reflects these five challenges (Brighton, 1999; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2004). These researchers speak more specifically about the lack of administrative support and student support services, which two of the
participants in my study identified as contextual challenges. Negative school cultures, unfair assignments, inadequate supplies, and a lack of outreach programs for parents were concerns in Brighton’s study, but not common concerns of Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie. Ingersoll and Smith cite the lack of influence over classroom and school decisions as a primary reason novice teachers quit. Instead, these Riverside graduates wanted a clear sense of direction and were not concerned with this issue for the time being.

The participants each handled the five common challenges differently. In some cases, their classroom management was proactive while in others it was primarily reactive. Some of the participants centered their instruction more upon the student, while others based it more upon the subject or content. Instructional differentiation practices ranged from fully inclusive to fully exclusive. Although all four participants needed support, the degree to which they sought help from others varied. Finally, while all of the participants were emotionally and physically exhausted, some of them felt better by tackling the mounting work while others piled it up, and some of the participants rejuvenated themselves through exercise while others rested. I attribute their diverse negotiations to these five common challenges to their unique identity-vision-context intersections (see Figure 22).

Annie thrives through problems. Annie’s classroom management was proactive: it was her vision to build a safe and caring classroom community. Although her context was challenging, her marathon mindset and her self-identity as someone who effectively helps inner-city children grounded her relentless, proactive reminding and constant
Figure 22. Participants’ Intersections and Their Resulting Negotiations.
modeling of how to say and do nice things. Annie’s strong vision for classroom community sustained her even when students threw chairs and hid under tables: her response was to ask the children how to handle themselves and how to help their friends when they are angry. Annie’s context included the support of an intervention specialist who proactively checked on a few of her students each morning, and helped her in her classroom as needed.

Annie’s instructional planning, pacing, and assessment were student-centered. She used the district’s math pacing schedule as a guide rather than a god, adjusting it according to her students’ needs. In the evenings within her solitary apartment, she took time to create a framework for her guided reading lessons, and then flexed her instruction according to the students’ responses. Building upon her vision to create community, she developed learning centers for her students to explore skills and concepts collaboratively. She embedded her assessments into her individual or small group lessons and used the data to inform her next instructional steps. She was never satisfied with her math instruction, finding it to be the most subject-centered of all.

Annie, with her identity as someone who helps inner-city children, had high expectations for all of the students in her diverse classroom. She wanted all of her students to be reading at grade level or above by the end of the year, and provided ongoing interventions during any possible moment of the day when she could meet with a child or a small group of children. She owned the responsibility for those interventions and conducted them within the four walls of her classroom. Her vision to build a classroom community helped her structure student partnerships where one student would
assist another to revise a journal sentence or read sight words on flashcards. The core structure of Annie’s instruction was small groups, and they varied over time according to student needs. Annie was a marathon runner. She did whatever was necessary to succeed. During the focus group before the year began, she gave specific examples of how she met with the principal to get answers to a long list of questions she had, asked the secretary for a code for the copy machine, and asked other teachers questions about curriculum. She lived her own vision for community by modeling collaboration with others. She and her teammates, all first-year teachers, freely helped each other and shared resources.

Annie’s high energy level was a clear sign of her good health. She exercised several times each week, releasing stress and staying fit. Without a family to go home to each night, she had time to spend extra hours after school and on the weekends to plan and organize. Annie, having spent the entire summer at school preparing to teach, started the year off strong which set a proactive environment for long-term success.

Rachel copes through problems. Rachel, entering the year with an unfocused vision and challenging personal and professional contexts, reacted to the behavior challenges as they emerged. Acting upon the advice of the instructional strategist, Rachel implemented a reward system. Having no person specifically designated to assist with significant behavior challenges, Rachel made decisions (such as time-outs in or outside the room) as students broke rules.

In order to allow herself more time with her new husband and to rest in the evenings, Rachel’s instruction was primarily subject-centered. She used lessons from teacher manuals for small and whole group instruction, and ready-made practice sheets
for independent work. For special activities, Rachel’s instruction was more student-centered as she reinforced social and academic skills through her students’ interest in music and drama. Her math pacing was no longer a challenge when she fully focused her vision for math instruction on the small group structure. Her challenging classroom context and unfocused instructional vision made it difficult for Rachel to consistently and informally assess and intervene as Annie did.

Although Rachel questioned her teacher identity and began the year with an unfocused vision, she had learned from her teacher preparation program about the importance of differentiation. For every lesson plan she wrote in the PDS, she was required to write a variation for children who struggled with writing, struggled with reading, needed power, sought attention, or needed an extra challenge. She differentiated naturally within her small groups as she progressed through a lesson, but because of her challenging student composition and draining personal context, she did little proactive planning for varying needs. She relied on her skills of improvisation that she had so well crafted during her days of substitute teaching.

Rachel hesitated to ask others for help at first, afraid it would imply weak teaching. She needed to prove herself, especially since her teammate already had such a strong teaching reputation. Her husband provided moral support, but knew nothing about teaching. The third grade team provided stress relief and confidentiality. Rachel asked for help when she could not cope with extreme behavior challenges by herself, finding support from the instructional strategist, the paraprofessional, and the special education teacher.
Rachel’s energy level was drastically the opposite of Annie’s. She started the year off with morning sickness that often lasted all day. By the time she got home from work each day, she was too exhausted to do schoolwork. She went into work early instead, and whatever she planned and organized during that time is what was planned and organized. At night, she rested on the couch, and after her husband left for work, she went to bed early.

**Ben survives through problems.** Ben’s *wholesome* school context presented few classroom management problems in relation to the other three participants. His vision of teaching respectful, responsible students was easy to enact in his setting at first. However, as the fifth graders became more flirtatious with each other, and Ben’s being a role model did not automatically stop their disrespect, he became disillusioned with both his teacher identity and vision. He tried to be more strict, but upon realizing it was not his style decided that the mildly disrespectful behaviors did not merit a change in his teaching identity.

Ben’s instruction was an equal balance of student-centered and subject-centered. Planning alone at night and teaching alone by day, Ben worried whether he was teaching the right things and the right way. He used the teacher manuals as a basis for content choice, but then varied the ideas to make them interactive and fun for his students. He always thought about what activities might be a challenge for some children in his class, and tried to differentiate his lessons accordingly. Ben paced his lessons strictly according to the district math pacing schedule, and for other subject areas he checked in regularly with the other fifth grade teachers to make sure he was keeping up.
Ben envisioned a classroom where students were respectful and responsible. This is the classroom he had. When he discovered that he could focus on instructional detail more than he had ever been able in his clinical experiences, he realized that he had more to learn, as there was more to teach. He did not know how to plan instruction so that everyone would be meaningfully engaged in learning all day. Some students regularly finished their work early, and he wished he had the time to create, and the space to accommodate, learning centers where students with varying academic skills could practice and improve their reading, writing, and math in interesting ways. He looked forward to the summer when he would have more time to develop centers that would work in the small portable where even little noises seemed loud.

Ben, the role model, never complained. He respected the needs of his teammates to leave school early and did not want to bother them any more than he had to with questions about planning or assessments. In his context of solitude, Ben did not seek much support, even when he wished for more of it.

Ben, like Annie, exercised regularly. He also refereed some nights and weekends for a fun, stress-relieving diversion from teaching. At first the piles of paperwork bothered Ben, but he gradually learned that they were a way of life in teaching. He accepted the disorganization for the time being, and looked forward to the summer to really get organized.

Connie hopes through problems. Within the context of a challenging and temporary teaching position, Connie had to implement a behaviorist classroom management system that did not align with her vision. Through her identity as a foster-
parent-teacher, she did her best to consider the students’ needs holistically, but struggled the whole first trimester. She was unable to blend her vision for classroom management with that of the returning teacher. As a single-day substitute during the second half of the year, Connie experimented with her classroom management, using those days as an opportunity to set and maintain clear expectations.

Connie’s vision was to base instruction around her students’ interests, helping them identify what they wanted to know and how to find the information. However, for her long-term substitute position, her instruction ended up being mainly subject-centered. Her students needed supervision during collaborative work, so she resorted to practice sheets for independent work, and primarily whole group instruction, making it difficult to differentiate but possible to manage. She struggled with the math pacing schedule and assessment formats, remembering her own math challenges as a student and imagining how her own children would feel if they had to be tested and move on before they understood the concept. As a strategy specialist, within her one-on-one instructional context, she focused her lessons on each student, drawing largely from her own experience as a mother and home-schooling teacher.

Connie’s students had widely diverse learning needs, and as a parent-teacher she wanted to reach out to all of them. However, for the same reason she resorted to busywork and whole group instruction, she could not teach a small group of students without being interrupted or having to stop to handle a conflict between students. Her specialist position allowed her to differentiate from student to student, but each student was taught in an exclusive, labeled setting physically removed from the classroom—the
one to which Lizzie acted resistant until she was out of sight from her classmates. In this one-on-one context, Connie’s vision to help students problem-solve flourished as she had them explain their thinking in their math and reading lessons, asking them what they needed to do, or how they arrived at an answer.

Connie, the foster-parent-teacher, was not initially sure what the questions were to ask for help. Feeling little autonomy, she wanted the code, but attempting to enact her own vision for learning how to solve one’s own problems, she did not ask for it. As a strategy specialist, Connie had all the instructional autonomy she lacked as a substitute teacher. Using her experiences of parenting and home-schooling, as she worked one-on-one with students she was able to problem-solve without needing support.

Connie had a husband, five children, and a grand old home to care for. Her exercise was to run her children from one activity to another. She took a bag of work home every night when she taught fifth grade. As a specialist, she took time between lessons to plan at school, and the materials were few and simple to prepare. She had more time for her family, and in particular for her maturing teenage daughters who had growing problems. They needed their mother and teacher.

**Final Insights**

Each participant negotiated the challenges of the first year of teaching because of the unique interrelationships of his or her teacher identity, teacher vision, and personal and professional contexts. Sometimes contextual factors caused a shift in identity, and at other times a shift in identity was the impetus for a change of context. In some cases,
teacher vision sustained the teacher through shifting contexts, and in other cases, changing contexts shaped teacher vision.

What impact can teacher educators and school leaders have on novice teachers' negotiation paths? What, specifically, can be done to help novice teachers develop their teacher identities and visions, and align their personal and professional contexts to support their early years of teaching? The next few chapters provide insight into these questions. Chapter VIII provides an overview of the broad context of elementary education in order to detail the constraints under which teachers like Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie thrive, cope, survive, and hope. Having explored the local experiences of the four participants, and the broader context of elementary education in our country, Chapters IX and X then offer specific suggestions for our local programs and insights for teacher education and teacher induction.
CHAPTER VIII

THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

The implications of this study, which I will address in Chapters IX and X, relate directly to how teacher education and induction programs can help develop teacher identity, clarify teacher vision, and maximize one’s personal and professional contexts. Before I detail these implications, there is one more consideration to address: the national context of elementary education. Because of No Child Left Behind, America’s teachers and students, including those in this study, currently experience the effects of unprecedented accountability measures. Because curricular standardization and standardized testing impacted the participants’ content and pedagogy to varying degrees (see Chapters IX and X), and because mandated practices shape and stabilize school structures all across our country, it is important to understand how these constraints developed and how deeply they influence elementary education. The national context of elementary education funnels down to state, district, school, classroom, and individual student levels. It impacted the instructional structures and processes of all four of this study’s participants.

Having discussed the negotiation paths of the participants, I now offer a wider lens through which to view the source of some of the participants’ instructional pressures and decisions. I hope to illuminate the cemented nature of curricular standardization and its negative impacts on teachers and children. The participants’ stories, the interpretation of their negotiation paths, and the literature offered here and in previous chapters
combine to ground the implications for teacher education and induction that I suggest in the next two chapters.

The Context of Elementary Education

A Long History of Accountability and Standardization

Standardization of teaching curriculum began in the late 1800s as schools became the central places for learning. Until then, students learned within varying contexts such as churches, homes, or work, and from experts in the field. At the turn of the century, the onset of industrialism, immigration, and urbanization impacted school curriculum. The increased need for employees in commerce and industry, and the influence of Taylor's scientific management movement, shaped a standard high school curriculum that was purposefully differentiated into vocational and college preparatory tracks (Drost, 1967; Kliebard, 1998; Nasaw, 1979; Powell, Farrar & Cohen, 1985; Tyack, 1967).

The hidden curriculum served implicit ideals of reinforcing a hierarchical class structure (Apple, 1990). Critical theorists such as Apple argue that this separation of educational paths led by curriculum leaders such as Franklin Bobbitt, Edward Thorndike, W.W. Charters, Ross Finley, Charles Peters, and David Snedden, specifically designed to prepare certain students for certain vocations, careers, or higher education, “defined what the relationship should be between curriculum construction and community control and power that continues to influence the contemporary field” (p. 68). By dividing people into levels within a social hierarchy, the curriculum was the tool that determined socioeconomic status and perpetuated class inequality. Individual student interests and local events were no longer the basis for what was studied and mastered as was the case
before the turn of the century. Preparation for post-high school work or education drove the curriculum.

The invention of the textbook facilitated curriculum standardization and led to other organizational structures in schools such as grade levels, tests, report cards, promotion policies, and attendance records, all of which combined to lead to a diploma or degree (McNeil, 2003). For the same reasons that schools became institutions for learning, a common content became the standard for curriculum. Schools and their curricula were to serve public interests and present ideals for conduct, culture, and democracy.

From the 1920s through the 1930s, some schools began to use textbooks not as curricular guides, but as resources along with teacher-developed units and field experiences. In *Experience and Education* (1938), Dewey explained his interpretation of the relationship between experience and education, as well as the philosophical and pedagogical differences between what were commonly referred to as traditional versus progressive schools. He proposed that “anything which can be called a study, whether arithmetic, history, geography, or one of the natural sciences, must be derived from materials which at the outset fall within the scope of ordinary life-experience” (p. 73). Much of the autocratic interaction in what Dewey referred to as traditional education was comprised of instruction that caused children to lose an interest in learning, rendered them unable to transfer skills learned through drill and in isolation to complex situations, and disconnected school with life outside of it. Experience, according to Dewey, should provide students with the ability and fortitude to persevere when they meet new and
complex challenges. He encouraged teachers to use their relative maturity not to authoritatively impose isolated facts upon the students through meaningless, decontextualized activities, but to employ community resources and to carefully shape, organize, and guide students through worthwhile experiences.

McNeil (2003) highlights political and social influences that affected school structures and curricula during the second half of the twentieth century. From the 1940s through the 1970s, influences of war, politics, and civil rights issues led teachers and students to challenge authority and create innovative structures for teaching and learning. In response to Russia launching Sputnik in 1957, threatening the position of the U.S. as world leader, and to the civil unrest and cultural wars of the 1960s and 1970s, schools were blamed for the inability of the U.S. to compete economically with Japan and to attain higher student achievement scores than other industrialized nations. The National Commission on Excellence in Education initiated the Excellence Movement with the 1983 A Nation at Risk report. Students were required to take more math and science courses and tests in efforts to rectify the falling world status of the U.S. student achievement scores and economy.

Between A Nation at Risk and No Child Left Behind

The Excellence Movement's top-down approach to higher standards for teachers and students produced no gains in student learning and increased the drop-out rate. Following the failure of the Excellence Movement in the mid-1980s, the government allowed schools to restructure as individual entities through site-based management to


determine how to meet the higher goals. Throughout the next decade, several curriculum reform models were developed and disseminated throughout the country (McNeil, 2003).

National organizations such as the National Science Teachers Association and the National Board of the Teachers of Mathematics wrote broad and challenging standards for their content areas. Meanwhile, some states began to develop standards for instruction and assessment across all of their schools. The nature of the standardized assessments increasingly narrowed the instructional focus from the challenging goals established by the national teaching associations to an emphasis on basic skills. In other words, the tests drove the curriculum.

Teachers reacted to this movement for accountability and standardization with frustration and stress (Tyson, 1994). They were critical of having to be held accountable for test scores when so much of what impacted student learning was out of their control. They felt more vulnerable to their administration and less connected to their students. Paperwork consumed their time, and they felt as though they were being assessed more for compliance than for the quality of their teaching. The focus within standardized testing on content matter made student-centered learning a challenge. Under pressures of accountability, teachers preferred quiet and compliant students rather than students who took time to ask questions. With the cognitive focus, they felt there was no time to develop interpersonal relationships with students (Cohn & Kottcamp, 1993).

The teachers that Cohn and Kottcamp (1993) interviewed handled their pressures of accountability in different ways. Some subversively closed their doors and kept teaching in ways they thought they should. Others became nervous, fearful, cynical, or
tired. Some looked to other areas of their lives for meaning and surrendered to mechanical teaching methods, remaining in the profession only to get paid. Still others left the profession altogether.

Cohn and Kottcamp argued that “presenting tests as the single arbiter of our educational system is creating yet another negative, ‘self-sealing’ cycle of tightening control that precludes the basic autonomy needed to respond to changing students” (1993, p. 212). These researchers spoke of the “mystification” of test scores and paperwork as symbols mistaken for educational substance. The tightening control of standardized accountability had replaced teachers’ authority to educate according to student needs.

It is a case of teachers being told simultaneously that they are responsible for student success or failure because they have the knowledge, skill, and authority to make the difference, but, at the same time, that they must follow the prescriptions of others outside the classroom because they are basically incapable of making fundamental curricular and instructional decisions. These mixed messages have taken a terrible toll on teachers. (pp. 249-250)

Ingersoll (2003) also highlights the ongoing clash between the impersonal, bureaucratic, large-scale organization of educational systems, and the personal, individual, and professional decision-making nature of teaching.

**No Child Left Behind**

**Introduction to the legislation.** With the signing into law of the *No Child Left Behind* Act in 2002, strong sanctions for not making enough progress according to specific time frames propelled accountability pressures to unprecedented levels. Now, school reports of achievement as measured by standardized tests are made public, with scores reported by subgroups such as gender, race, general education, and special education, and schools are held accountable for failure to meet certain levels of
proficiency. The federal legislation requires states to develop accountability systems for all districts and schools to ensure that schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP), determined by each state according to the legislation’s guidelines, with the goal of 100% of students taking standardized tests to reach proficiency in math and reading by 2014.

Sanctions for not meeting AYP include state-led corrective action such as mandatory implementation of research-based professional development programs, school restructuring, and withdrawal of Title I funding. Students in schools identified as in need of assistance have the opportunity to transfer to another school and the district must provide transportation for those students (Ed.Gov., 2002). As the number of subgroups increases, the likelihood of meeting the mandate decreases. Therefore, diverse schools such as Annie’s, Rachel’s, and Connie’s are penalized.

In order to comply with the NCLB regulations, schools and teachers must have high expectations for their students. This is noble; we should have high expectations for all students. The problem is that the accountability measures are not designed for sustainability because the government does not provide enough funding for schools to comply with the legislation (Mathis, 2003). Although NCLB is a federal mandate, it is funded through state budgets, and states struggle to provide the funding necessary for personnel and material resources. In seven of the ten states where Mathis reviewed the cost analysis of the per-pupil spending necessary for 95% of all student groups to reach their state test standards by 2014, the states would need to spend 24% more, and in six of those seven states the increases ranged from 30% to 46%. Eight of the ten states
estimated that the costs for remedial or special education would be 100% higher than the costs of general instruction.

Even when student test scores do rise, those scores alone do not indicate that better learning has taken place. On the contrary, if schools narrow their curricula in order to perform well on tests, students are less likely to experience integrative learning, go into depth in a topic, and have time to reflect upon their learning. According to learning theory research, these processes are fundamental to how people learn (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

The relationship between high stakes testing and curricular reductionism. Popham (2004) explains three reasons why standardized tests alone do not accurately evaluate schools. First, the content on the test does not necessarily match the content reflecting state standards. Test development companies have to keep the test content broad enough so that many states can use the tests. Secondly, because norm-referenced tests must have a normal distribution of scores, content important enough for the majority of the nation’s students to learn is eliminated because the majority of the students would score high on those questions. Third, it is impossible to determine exactly why students receive certain standardized test scores. Some test items may measure a student’s “inherited academic aptitudes” (p. 70) rather than what can be taught in school (i.e. the spatial aptitude necessary to identify from a set of letters which one could be folded in half to have two pairs that exactly match). Other items measure cultural literacy (i.e. identifying the meaning of the world field in the sentence “My Dad’s field is computer graphics; not all
children have parents who have a “field”) (p. 73). In summary, standardized test scores
do not necessarily reflect what is taught in school.

Popham (2004) lists three harmful effects of this educational mismeasurement:
curricular reductionism, excessive test preparation, and unethical test preparation
practices. As mentioned before, “skills and knowledge that, only a few years ago, were
regarded by teachers as imperative for students have been cut simply because such
curricular content is not being measured by whatever high-stakes test is used in that
setting” (p. 65). It is common practice for entire schools to devote weeks or even months
before a high-stakes test solely to “outright drilling” (p. 65) for the test. Furthermore, this
test preparation often involves completing exercises identical, or nearly identical, to those
that will be on the test (p. 66). The resulting scores, then, measure the students’ mastery
of the test items rather than their mastery of the knowledge and skills the test is
supposedly intended to measure.

School administrators and teachers, fearing sanctions as legislated through No
Child Left Behind, focus on improving test scores in order to meet state benchmarks for
adequate yearly progress. As a result, standardized tests that measure low-level skills now
drive school structures and curricula. Time that five years ago may have been spent
exploring rich, integrated, meaningful topics in depth is now spent doing fragmented drill
work to prepare for testing. Some schools are reallocating time in the school day by
eliminating kindergarten naps, elementary school recesses, and field trips.

Here are some of the things kids at Garfield/Franklin elementary in Muscatine,
Iowa no longer do: eagle watch on the Mississippi River, go on field trips to the
University of Iowa’s Museum of Natural History, and have two daily
recesses...Creative writing, social studies and computer work all have become occasional indulgences. (From Time, March 2004, as cited in Wood, 2004).

In other words, since creative writing and social studies are not tested on the standardized tests that determine whether or not a school is failing, curricula and its related assessment that does not count toward AYP has become secondary to standardized testing. The Department of Education claims that “overall poor results could indicate that the curriculum needs to be reviewed and aligned with the content upon which state standards are based” (Ed.Gov., 2002). This statement reinforces the movement toward an increased standardization of curricula and narrowing of curriculum, as it disregards student learning in untested areas and/or areas restricted to local importance (Meier, 2004). Giroux (2003) warns of the dangers of a test-driven curriculum that reduces teachers “to the role of technicians who simply implement prepackaged curriculums and standardized tests as part of the efficiency-based relations of market democracy and consumer pedagogy” (p. 124).

The relationship between scientific educational research and curricular reductionism, NCLB legislation mandating research-based curriculum and staff development programs for schools who do not meet AYP has significant implications for curriculum and instruction. The curricula and methods chosen by the state to assist failing schools must have a scientific research base. The National Research Council (NRC) contends that the same scientific processes used in other fields of research can and should be used to conduct research and guide policy in education (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). The Department of Education publishes a checklist for evaluating whether an educational practice is supported by rigorous evidence, separating practices into those that have
strong evidence, probable evidence, or other (Ed.Gov., 2002). It also points the public to websites that list specific programs and practices by category.

However, educational researchers do not agree as to whether the same scientific methods used for research in the physical sciences can effectively and practically work in education due to the many different contexts in which teaching and learning take place. Claims such as the following may be convincing to the general public: “For decades, doctors have required solid research before treating patients. This scientific approach has produced some of the most effective remedies and the most impressive cures in human history” (Ed.Gov., 2002). However, these same words frustrate and bind educators who daily work with children and know the complexities that make every school, classroom, and student different from another, as do the qualitative researchers who study these diverse situations in efforts to illuminate the processes therein (Popham, 2004).

Poplin (1987) discusses how scientific research leads to restricted teaching and learning content and processes. She explains how the scientific method restricts research to the point of blinding researchers (and society in general) to phenomena that cannot be measured scientifically. She notes that the logico-mathematical reductionism required to submit scientific data forces the problem to be reduced to a nature in which the variables can be operationalized numerically. “This, in essence, strips the problem from its context by narrowing the range of variables to be studied” (p. 33). Poplin goes on to suggest that the almost exclusive use of the scientific method in our research on school problems has blinded us to a whole range of issues, including... the way in which students and teachers come to create new meanings in the classroom... the way in which teachers assess students every day on numerous dimensions... the strengths of the students we serve. (p. 36)
According to Poplin, giving credibility only to scientifically-proven practices places further control on teachers, stripping them of their professional ability to make instructional decisions based upon their own observations of their students.

**The relationship between curricular reductionism and social stratification.**

Ingersoll (2003) notes that sociologists identify socialization and stratification as two main purposes of schools. In other words, teachers parent children through the “inculcation of social norms and rules,” and control the “assessment, sorting, and channeling of students into ranks, roles, and statuses according to their abilities and behavior” (pp. 50-51). Tracking, or the placement into certain curricular structures according to perceived ability level, continues to permeate both elementary and secondary education through a variety of programs ranging from special education for those identified with a *disability* to those identified as *gifted* (Apple, 1990; Iano, 1990; Kohn, 1998; Oakes, 2005; Sapon-Shevin, 1996).

As Oakes (2005) points out, although the intentions behind the tracking may be good, the processes and their consequences continue without critical examination, maintained through “deep-seated beliefs and long-held assumptions about the appropriateness of what we do in schools” (p. 5).

It’s true enough that today’s racial practices are quite different from those of the past: rigid tracking replaces Jim Crow segregation; test-counseling, referral-based tracking replaces rigid IQ-based tracking. Yet, as critical social theorists have helped us understand, even seemingly neutral schooling practices interact with race and social class differences in ways that mirror and help reproduce social, political, and economic inequalities outside of school. (Oakes, 2005, p. 293)

Kozol (2007) concurs, explaining that “the overall pattern of reductionist instruction for black and Hispanic children represents the restoration of a practice that has not been seen
on such a widespread scale since the era of those training schools for black students in the southern states during the years before the Brown decision." (p. 168)

According to Apple (1990), the content, processes, and grouping structures within schools reproduce ideologies that legitimize social hierarchies. As long as certain students are taught certain things in certain ways and in certain settings; as long as curricula continues to attempt to “cover” numerous topics in each discipline and throughout each progressive year of schooling; as long as teachers make rules and force children to follow them without question; as long as school structures and shallow curricula disallow students to collectively grapple with deeper moral issues, the hegemony of social stratification and cultural distribution will remain. Due to sanctions related to the No Child Left Behind legislation, the narrowing of curriculum occurs most in schools with a high population of poor and minority students, a phenomenon some call the “diversity penalty” (Kohn, 2004; Mathis, 2003; Wood, 2004).

Schools labeled as ‘failing’ will not receive their label because they have failed. Rather, schools will be branded because they are in poor or diverse neighborhoods, because they are small and rural, because they are underfunded.... Ultimately, the effect will be to shift the purpose away from education for a democracy and away from the provision of equal opportunities for all children. (Mathis, 2003)

McNeil (2000) also argues that high stakes testing is a structure that sorts and classifies. She illustrates how in attempts to score well on standardized tests, poor and minority students are the most disadvantaged in terms of the quality of instructional content, the use of instructional time, the resources purchased for their schools, and the type of interaction with their teachers. The jargon of accountability, making it nearly
impossible for any of the parties concerned to deconstruct these inequalities, perpetuates the discrimination.

When instruction changes in such drastic measures in order to raise test scores, the children’s time is not as well spent as in the more advantaged settings. The author’s research revealed that many teachers in schools at risk of failing spend up to half of every lesson on test preparation exercises, and that many teachers try to give double lessons on a topic: one that gets the students ready for the test and one that authentically teaches them something. Although this is a noble gesture, students still spend only up to half of the instructional time learning meaningfully and collaboratively as do their counterparts in more advantaged schools.

Brantlinger (2003) speaks of ideologies that have elevated the status of dominant groups. In the early to mid 1900s, the dominant group’s story was one of genetics, race, and ethnicity. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was one of cultural deprivation. Perhaps what McNeil (2000) describes as a new form of discrimination has already become the turn-of-the-century ideology: those with lower tests scores benefit from a different school experience—one of more isolated skill work. Kozol (2007) challenges teachers to advocate for children and oppose the bureaucratic measures that oppress and label their students, suggesting that teachers who are unwilling to do so should consider another career.

So here, as in so many other situations teachers face, they have to balance some of their most deeply held convictions against the practical necessity of defending students from the punishments and stigma that the educational establishment seems all too willing to dole out to them...if teachers cannot figure out a way to do this, it is possible that they should not remain within the classroom. Abject capitulation to unconscionable dictates from incompetent or insecure superiors
can be contagious. We should not permit this habit to be passed on to our
children. (pp. 129-130)

In order to enter teaching with a critical mindset of transformation rather than a
status quo attitude of reproduction, a novice teacher must have all three pieces in place.
Novice teachers need a strong teacher identity, a clear vision, and supportive personal
and professional contexts. The alignment of these components will help new teachers
face Kozol's (2007) challenge. The next two chapters detail implications for our teacher
education and induction programs to (1) support the development of teacher identity, (2)
help aspiring teachers clarify their teacher vision, (3) support novice teachers in their
professional contexts, and (4) help new teachers blend their personal life context with a
life of teaching.
CHAPTER IX

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

"...teacher educators must prepare teachers for schooling as it should be while enabling them to cope with schooling as it is" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 40).

Kozol (2007) criticizes the unquestioned and reproductive nature of education when he writes, “Abject capitulation to unconscionable dictates from incompetent or insecure superiors can be contagious. We should not permit this habit to be passed on to our children” (p. 130). The participants’ depth of identity, clarity of vision, and personal and professional contexts determined how they negotiated their first year of teaching. The overarching implication for teacher education is the need to explore ways to help aspiring teachers strengthen their identities, visions, and contexts to increase their likelihood of remaining in the profession.

We should restructure our time and revamp our teacher education curriculum to help future teachers build a solid teacher identity. We need to prioritize our time to place opportunities for deep discourse about teaching as first and foremost. We must promote lifelong habits of reflection. We need to freely discuss how the construct of gender affects teaching. Across all education courses, we must consistently and continuously model and debrief good teaching practices.

We should also take proactive measures to help our aspiring teachers clarify their vision for teaching. We must provide time for them to explore and articulate their visions. Based upon the experiences of the four participants, we should more deeply explore possible answers to these questions: What will my first day of teaching look like? How will I interact with parents? How will I use district-mandated curricular resources while
maintaining a student-centered learning approach? How will I meet the needs of all of my students? In order to help future teachers develop their visions, we need to articulate a unified programmatic vision supported by collaborative inquiry with our partner schools.

Finally, since the personal and professional selves intertwine to form the life of a teacher, in order to support their teaching longevity we must take proactive measures to help them maximize their personal and professional contexts. Although every novice teacher’s personal and professional contexts will differ, teacher educators can anticipate obstacles to transformative teaching and proactively support future teachers. For example, we should promote a focused learning theory as the foundation for instructional decision-making. We should use critical pedagogy in our college courses to promote its use in their future classrooms. We must teach advocacy skills necessary to handle mandated pacing schedules, prescriptive curricula, and fragmented schedules. We can promote an ethic of caring as the basis for classroom motivation and learning. Finally, we should teach how to motivate rather than manage students.

Help Pre-service Teachers Develop Teacher Identity

Develop and Share Teacher Identity through Discourse

No teacher with a weak teacher identity could match Kozol’s (2007) challenge (pp. 129-130). As discussed in Chapter VI of this study, teachers need to first know themselves before they can stand up for what and how they teach. However, traditional undergraduate programs, in efforts to help their students complete all of their coursework in four years, do not structure enough time to develop teacher identity and reflection (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future [NCTAF], 1996). Goodlad
noted that “the rush to cram it all into the limited time available in teacher education programs appeared to abort the emergence of sustained inquiry and reflection” (1990a, p. 265). Specifically, we must spend more time in discourse that supports teacher identity development (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 1991; Danielewicz, 2001).

Faculty discourse about teacher identity. Identity discourse should begin at the faculty level. Goodlad (1990a) recommends that education faculty members talk to each other about their teaching philosophies, working together to develop program content and structures to help students develop a strong philosophy for which they would later be willing to take a stand.

The recommended approach, then, is not to teach future teachers how to adjust to realities beyond their control, although some preparation for adjustment is in order. Rather, it is to create an environment designed to promote frank discussion among faculty members about how to structure and maintain the programs so that students do not become chameleons adjusting to circumstances instead of developing a consistent, defensible philosophy of education. (p. 300)

Palmer (1998) reminds us that this kind of dialogue is atypical of academia, yet worth the risk. “If identity and integrity are more fundamental to good teaching than technique...we must do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each other about our inner lives—risky stuff in a profession that fears the personal and seeks safety in the technical, the distant, the abstract” (p. 12). To those who resist this type of discourse, Palmer adds that “in classical understanding, education is the attempt to ‘lead out’ from within the self a core of wisdom that has the power to resist falsehood and live in the light of truth, not by external norms but by reasoned and reflective self-determination” (p. 31). As education faculty members share their own teacher identities, they build a more unified foundation on which to support their students’ teacher identity development.
I do not know the philosophies of all of my fellow education department members, nor do I know specifically how my courses connect (or do not connect) to theirs in terms of teacher identity development. Filling out curriculum maps informs our department about general course content, but does not help us share and develop our teacher identities as faculty. I do not know, for example, whether discourse in other classes includes curricular reductionism, social stratification as a mechanism in teaching, or the technical role of teachers, nor am I certain other faculty members are aware of these issues or even agree that these are problems worthy of examination. If I do not know these things, then I cannot assume that our students can draw from our program to develop their own sense—a deep sense that goes beyond teaching strategies—of what it means to be a teacher.

University-school partner discourse. Professional development schools offer an opportunity for rich and abundant discourse between college and clinical faculty and students (Levine, 2002; Murrell, 1998; Teitel, 1997; 2004). The university-school partnerships can provide inherent integrative experiences on many levels: clinical teachers with college students, subject area with subject area, special education preparation with general education preparation, and so on. The degree to which teacher preparation programs can maximize the partnership potential for integrative learning depends heavily upon the amount of administrative support they receive for clinical work.

Clinical education is time-intensive, limiting a teacher educator’s ability to earn recognition and tenure through publishing, grant writing, and presenting (Bradley, 1995;
Bullough, Kauchek, Crow, Hobbs, & Stokes, 1997; Daniel, Brindley, & Rosselli, 2000; Goodlad, 1999; Million & Vare, 1997; Teitel, 1998; Zimpher & Howey, 2005). There is abundant literature about how inadequate administrative support for teacher education programs results in fragmented curricula that in turn does not prepare future teachers for the contexts in which they will work (Alsup, 2006; Associated Press, 2006; Bradley, 1995; Bransford et al., 2005; Cohn & Kottcamp, 1993; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Goodlad, 1990a, 1990b; Levine, 2006; Sirotnik, 1990; Teitel, 1997; Tyson, 1994). While professional development school partnerships have potential to reconcile disconnection between campus and clinical experiences, they require significant changes of structure and personnel roles in universities and schools.

Recognizing the benefits and challenges of PDS partnerships, the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) was chartered in March of 2005 to “serve as a means for validating P-12/higher education partnerships and the processes and work of these collaborative ventures” (NAPDS, 2005).

One of Riverside’s faculty members is on the founding board of the NAPDS due to her original development of our PDS program several years ago that now has national recognition. In order to sustain what the four participants in this study identified as a key factor in their preparation for teaching, our administration must continue to recognize and support the intensive PDS clinical work of our education faculty members. Through our PDS partnerships, we prepare teachers while supporting practicing teachers and enriching the education of local elementary students. With redistributed faculty load assignments,
we would also be able to conduct collaborative university/school research to benefit the field of education.

Given support to sustain our professional development schools, our education department should collectively discuss how to maximize the integrative potential of those partnerships to support teacher identity development. Currently, the majority of our elementary PDS activities and assignments prepare our pre-service teachers to create lesson plans, teach them to elementary students, and reflect upon their lessons—all very important teaching skills. However, in order to strengthen the teacher identity necessary to implement and sustain those skills in various professional contexts (see Chapter VI), we must capitalize upon the built-in borderland discourse opportunities within the PDSs. Although the PDS students dialogue daily with elementary teachers and college faculty, the conversations are primarily about instructional strategies and structures. Since teacher identity is critical to success in the field as well, we must structure time for our students to dialogue with each other, with college instructors, and with elementary teachers at the professional development school about what it means to be a teacher.

Develop Teacher Identity by Promoting Habits of Reflection

Kottler and Zehm (2000) offer specific suggestions for reflection that will contribute to teacher identity development. First, they say that in order to examine one’s beliefs about learning, one should journal, using statements such as “I believe __________, therefore I __________.” The authors note the importance of returning to those statements over time to revise them based upon new experiences. Second, they recommend that students take inventory of their strengths and weaknesses, capitalizing
on their assets and developing the “unexpressed potential that is lying dormant” (p. 7).

They go on to tell aspiring teachers that

you have not only the option but the imperative to develop the human dimensions of your personal functioning, as well as your professional skills.... The best teachers are those who have worked hard both to develop themselves as experts in their fields and to practice what they know and understand in their personal lives.... The human dimensions of teaching come together in your commitment to make teaching more than a job. Being a teacher is a way of life. (pp. 19-20)

These human dimensions include “charisma, compassion, egalitarianism, [a] sense of humor (playfulness), smarts, creativity, honesty, emotional stability, patience, [the] ability to challenge and motivate, novelty, [and] empathy” (p. 82).

Palmer (1998) agrees that reflection is paramount for teacher identity development, suggesting that “solitude and silence, meditative reading and walking in the woods, keeping a journal, [and] finding a friend who will listen” help build teacher identity (pp. 31-32). We should include these pursuits as part of teacher education’s in-class activities and outside assignments in hopes of instilling lifelong reflective practices. Palmer speaks about the importance of reflecting to re-member, or put oneself back together, “recovering identity and integrity, reclaiming the wholeness of our lives” (p. 20).

Kozol (2007) informs aspiring and new teachers as he encourages novices to consider the wisdom from remembering that shapes the identity of veteran teachers. “A first-year teacher who is only 22 or 23 years old obviously cannot ‘remember like the old,’ but he or she can learn not only about teaching practices but, often more important, about moral steadiness and personal self-confidence from those who do remember” (pp.
We need to create opportunities for identity-shaping discourse between aspiring teachers and those with experience in the field.

**Freely Discuss Gender Issues in Teaching**

In order to help both male and female teachers strengthen their teacher identities, we must provide opportunities in college to talk about the role of gender in elementary teaching (Nielsen, 2006; Sargent, 2001). Normative societal views limit the potential for both male and female teachers to expand their teacher identities to include interactions stereotypically held as masculine or feminine. Nielsen emphasizes that we should not only talk about gender issues as part of teacher education, but explicitly address the elementary teaching profession *through a prism of gender* (emphases added). When gender is made to be a central construct around which social life is conceptualized, teacher education students can recognize gender as a set of norms, social conventions, and cultural values which parade as expressions of individual choice. (pp. 6-7)

Specifically, Nielsen says that teacher education programs should emphasize “‘an ethic of caring’ as a regulatory ideal of the teaching profession” instead of something reserved for women, “...place the personal narratives of men in the profession in a prominent position in discussions of gender, because the experience of those men may be very different from that of men in the undergraduate teacher education program,” and “problematic gender throughout the program sequence” (pp. 4-5).

Nielsen’s (2006) final point would make females in our program reflect upon why they commended Ben and all other males in our PDS for being male role models. At Riverside, the male to female ratio is one to five. However, in the elementary education program, the ratio is one to fifteen. This issue is the classic *elephant in the room*, a
widespread phenomenon in elementary education (Allan, 1993; DeCorse, 1997; Riddell & Tett, 2006; Sargent, 2001). On our first day of PDS in January of 2008, one well-intentioned female student said to the only male PDS student in the group of fifteen, “You can be a male and show kids that you can be a positive influence.” The implicit message is this: thank you for nobly modeling the positive potential of the male species. This honor limits the scope of male teacher identity. Aspiring male elementary teachers repeatedly receive this message (both explicitly and implicitly) of how important it is to be a male role model for children. However, nobody in our program—not Ben, not other males in our PDS, and not other females in our PDS—has had structured, ongoing opportunity to talk about what being a role model means, how it overshadows other potential parts of one’s teacher identity, or how both male and female teachers affect and are affected by gender constructs. It is time we talk about the elephant in the room.

Promote Teacher Identity by Modeling and Debriefing Good Teaching

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996) noted that although instructors of methods courses talk about engaging ways to teach students, they often do just that: talk about them. Their lecture-based methods neither model nor align with the theoretical research base for how people learn (Bransford et al., 2000). This is not the case at Riverside. In most cases, our students’ comments on instructor evaluations note that we not only talk about good teaching practices and strategies, we do them and we explicitly talk about their connection to learning theory. We must continue to do so. E-mails such as these from students who have graduated illustrate the relationship
between strategies we modeled, confidence we helped build, and teacher identity we helped promote.

02/26/08
...that semester [at the Finley PDS] was the time in my college career that confirmed my desire to be a teacher....I wanted to take the time to thank you for being professors here at Riverside and helping students like me feel competent in our career choice....
Sincerely,
Hayley

09/27/07
Good morning my dear peeps!
I miss you so much I can't even begin to tell you! I think about you all almost on a daily basis. Skills that you taught me pop right into my head when I need them. Amazing how that works....I am not even joking a little when I say that you all have taught me well. I use the reading strategies you taught me from The Strategies that Work book, and have graphic organizers up on a bulletin board. I teach my kids to make connections, visualize, make inferences, question, make predictions, and the rest of the strategies, each time that I teach the "wonderful" direct instruction curriculums that I must. Let me just tell you that I had a student last year who could read 17 correct words per minute at the second grade level, at the beginning of the year, and read 56 at the end of the year (a fifth grader). This is NOT because of some direct instruction curriculum, it is because of the guided reading that I taught him, using those essential and powerful reading strategies. I am convinced that is what worked....
Lisa

This last email reflects resistance to poor practice, refusal to be a technician, and an understanding of learning theory. Lisa's strong teacher identity and strategy repertoire that she developed at Riverside allowed her to expand upon the reductionist curriculum that her school mandated.

Help Pre-Service Teachers Clarify their Vision

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) identify six key criteria for effective clinical experiences:
1. Programs should align their goals with standards for performance and practice.
2. Teachers with which the students practice should be teachers who model good practice and make their thinking explicit.
3. Formative feedback and coaching should occur simultaneously with frequent practice in the classroom.
4. Students should have numerous opportunities to debrief how their classroom experiences connect to the theories they learn in their coursework.
5. There should be a gradual release of responsibility for teaching, beginning with early practicum experiences and culminating in extended student teaching integrated with coursework.
6. Teacher education programs should provide prospective teachers with structured reflection sessions that target ways to improve one’s practices.

Our program at Riverside meets the first criterion by aligning its program and course-level assessment tools program with thirteen competencies for teaching. Students’ ratings and comments on course and teacher evaluations provide indicators that we meet the second criterion. However, as I will later discuss, we need to be even more explicit in our instruction, particularly in the connection between course assignments and future practice. The third and fourth criteria describe the daily processes within our PDSs. The fifth criterion describes our program sequence, although the integrated coursework during student teaching is limited to one weekly seminar so the students can focus on their student teaching responsibilities. We reflect together upon our practices as the sixth criterion entails, but we need to explicitly relate those discussions to their visions for teaching in their future classrooms.

The professional development school experiences—the heart of our teacher preparation at Riverside—provide ample opportunities for our pre-service teachers to see teachers and themselves as facilitators of learning in elementary classrooms. Since our students spend so much time in area schools, one might assume that their visions for teaching would be solidified by the time they graduate. Although our program does
provide many practical experiences that shape teacher vision, we can use both the explicit and implicit feedback from Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie to improve our practices and strengthen our pre-service teachers’ visions even more. This study’s participants lauded the PDS program, yet some entered the profession with visions only partially formulated.

Help Our Students Explore and Articulate their Visions

Hammerness (2006) emphasizes that in order to help future teachers shape their visions for teaching, they need to observe teachers in action and have experienced, innovative teachers share their visions. Hammerness also highlights the need for pre-service teachers to articulate and revise their visions as they learn. Most importantly, she stresses the importance of listening to pre-service teachers’ visions to shape instruction, challenging their initial perceptions and stretching or reshaping those visions beyond the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975).

Hammerness (2006) offers specific pedagogical tools to help pre-service teachers prepare for the gaps they will experience upon entering the profession. One way to give a preview of these gaps is to watch and debrief videos of classroom practice. Another strategy to help future teachers prepare to merge curricular mandates into their vision is to create and deconstruct a Venn Diagram of tested and untested curricula “to attend to tested content…but keep it in its proportional place” (p. 86). Hammerness also suggests that teacher educators conduct research with their students, going beyond observing them in their clinical placements to interviewing them and interpreting their perspectives with them to clarify their visions for teaching.
At Riverside, we model a survival mode of planning and implementing strategies rather than a longevity mode of grounding practice in a core vision for teaching and learning. This is primarily due to the large amount of time our students teach students in small groups, and the minimal time they observe teachers teaching and then talk with us, each other, and the elementary teachers about best practice. We need to structure more opportunities to observe other teachers so that our students can envision how to teach a full class of students.

Annie did not remember observing other teachers in her program. “I guess I’m saying that I didn’t observe anybody; maybe I did and I don’t remember” (11/20/07). Connie emphatically affirmed the need for more pre-service observation experiences.

Deb: Do you think we do enough observing in the PDSs? Do you think we should do more?
Connie: (Quickly; without hesitation): Yes.
Deb: Just going in...
Connie: (Interrupting): Yes.
Deb: …to different classrooms and watching...
Connie: (Sharply, interrupting again): Yes. Because we don’t see a lot of whole group.
Deb: Right. In PDS.
Connie: True. SO true. (11/19/07)

In January of 2008, after collecting and interpreting seven months of data and reading literature about teacher vision, I knew that we needed to allow more time than we had in past PDS semesters for our students to articulate and reflect upon their visions for teaching. We began the first day of the Spring 2008 PDS semester by asking the students to reflect upon the question, “Why am I here?” Six of the fifteen students shared that teaching was the only career they had ever envisioned themselves pursuing. Seven students said they wanted to make enough of an impact on children so their students
would remember them. My co-teacher and I wanted to take more time for reflection like this throughout the semester in order to help the students develop not only their teacher identity, but to examine how their PDS experiences fit into their own teacher visions, or “images of ideal classroom practice” (Hammerness, 2006).

However, as the semester progressed, we had even less time than in the past to fit in all of the content of the four PDS courses. Due to record snowfall, there were nine snow days and three early dismissals that semester. When schools were closed, so was the access to our PDS classroom. Squeezed for time, reflection was the first thing we omitted because we had unit and lesson plans to write, and strategies to study and practice before we could teach the elementary students. Reflection was not a necessity for the moment, so it became a low priority. This semester of limited contact with our students illuminated the irony of how we prioritize our time in the PDS. In the very setting where we have the opportunity to support the college students’ emerging visions with collaborative reflection and explicit connections between theory and practice, we rush to give the students only the skills they need for the day rather than tend to their long-term vision.

In the middle of the Spring 2008 PDS semester, further reading and initial interpretations about the importance of teacher vision called me to action. I knew that we needed to reduce our teaching time and spend more time observing and reflecting together. Since we had three exceptional first year-teachers in the building, I predicted that our PDS students would easily connect with them and begin to envision themselves in their own teaching positions.
Annie, having observed other first grade teachers in the district immediately after securing her position at Finley, commented on the value of observation in forming one’s vision. “You’re thinking, ‘Oh! I could do that! Or, I could see myself doing that.’ You know, it’s like you’re watching and you’re visualizing yourself: ‘Oh, yeah, I could do it like that’” (3/7/08).

We arranged for our PDS students to observe three first-year teachers in our PDS (one being Annie) for several 45-minute periods over the course of a week. For each observation, we asked them to write their reactions to anything they saw, or to anything we discussed in the reflection session afterward, that impacted their vision for their future teaching. Excerpts from those observations and reflections includes the following.

Ms. Smith is an excellent teacher, and I hope that I can someday have a classroom like hers. I want to be as positive a teacher as her, and treat my students with the respect they deserve. I also liked the community atmosphere that she had in her classroom....In my future classroom, I now envision using positive reinforcements, establishing a community, forming mutual respect, and using sign language like Ms. Smith does.

I think it helped me envision what my classroom would look and sound like; being able to see how to manage and teach at the same time....Watching a first-year teacher do so well was inspiring and less nerve-wracking than I thought. I enjoyed watching [the teacher] and her interactions with her students; this motivates me to want to be a strong, enthusiastic teacher.

She was constantly giving positive reinforcement but it was not all mushy....I also liked the way she had her room set up. The whole back wall was a word wall. I envision my classroom to have a large area for a word wall to help the students develop their vocabulary.

I love the idea of giving directions through choice and evoking their thought process.

She didn’t call on a variety of students; I noticed she called upon Kyra a lot. I plan to call on a variety of students to keep them engaged.
This impacted my vision for my future teaching because I never realized that many students may be coming and going from my own classroom some day. I had never really experienced that kind of movement when I was in elementary school and it made me realize that my future classroom may be very different from what I grew up with. I realized that I will need to be extremely flexible and adjust my lessons as best as I can.

After several observation sessions, the three first grade teachers came into the PDS room to talk with our students about the first year of teaching. The honest and eye-opening exchange inspired us to replicate this observation-reflection-dialogue process with other grade levels and teachers of varying experience levels.

**Hindsight: Participant Recommendations Provide Implications for Teacher Vision**

The participants’ suggestions for our teacher education program, often phrased, “I wish we would have…,” most explicitly highlighted the gaps between our teacher education program and the practices they were expected to perform in their professional contexts. Regardless of whether a new teacher endorses or disapproves of the expectations in their professional context, the examination of both good and poor practice, and the exploration of how to comply with mandates one considers unacceptable, are key practices that promote and expand teacher vision. Since many of our teachers secure teaching positions in the Dellen district, it behooves our education department faculty to listen to our participants who identified the gaps between their teacher preparation and their professional experiences. By so doing we can work together to minimize these gaps, and help our students envision and prepare for them while maintaining integrity of theory and practice.

**Vision for how to begin the year.** With no clinical experience of setting up a classroom and planning for the first day, envisioning details about the first day of
teaching is nearly impossible. Kozol (2007) notes that this is a widespread phenomenon, and most challenging in urban settings such as Annie’s, Rachel’s, and Connie’s, where many children are disconnected from and disillusioned with schooling practices before they walk into the classroom on that first day. “They also tell me...that they have been given almost no advice at all on strategies for breaking through that first and frozen moment of encounter with a class that has already undergone the kind of pedagogical battering my students had experienced before I was assigned to them” (p. 15).

The clarity of the participants’ visions for teaching correlated directly with the detail with which they envisioned and articulated their first day of teaching. The time that Annie spent in May observing in another first grade teacher’s classroom solidified her plan to begin Day 1 with a Morning Greeting. Annie had also read books over the summer that shaped her classroom layout and schedule according to the pedagogical practices she intended to use. Rachel, who had substitute taught for a year in several schools in the district, repeatedly stated that she didn’t know how to start. Her vision never included how to structure the beginning of anything, because in all of her clinical and substitute teaching experiences things were already set up for her.

This disparity provides a strong implication for teacher education: if something is to be part of a teacher’s vision, it must be something they comprehend enough to be able to create clear mental images of it. Most of our pre-service teachers student teach during the second semester, by which time the classroom environment has been established.

For most of the participants, the tension between adhering to strict pacing schedules and allowing time to build classroom community clouded their already-blurry
visions for how to start the year. In college they had experienced the power of a strong community of learners and had been taught to take the time to nurture the development of such a community in their own classrooms. However, district officials and veteran teachers in their schools told them they needed to start academic instruction right away and stick to the pacing schedules. The participants were faced with their first and most challenging instructional choice: to do what they believed was right, or to do what they were being told to do. Rachel demonstrated her tension and confusion as she explained, "I mean, that whole classroom environment, and they don’t give you a lot of time, like there’s so much stuff to do, there’s so many expectations. You have to get this in, you have to start math the first day, you have to do this" (8/15/07).

At the beginning of the year, Annie, Rachel, and Connie experienced significant problems with student engagement and student respect for one another. The participants expressed that in college, the challenges of working in a setting much like the ones they were now placed were minimized because they knew they were going to go into a classroom and come out just 45 minutes later. Unlike a full day of teaching in a challenging setting day after day, during PDS it was something they knew they could handle for a short time.

Deb: How well did Riverside prepare you for teaching in an urban situation?
Connie: I think they did okay.
Ben: I think Finley gives you a glimpse of what it looks like.
Annie: From the hands-on experience there.
Deb: But then, what don’t you get?
Ben: Everyday teaching, like, the day-to-day experiences, because you’re only in there for like a half an hour rather than the entire day.
Connie: Yeah.
Ben: Cuz I mean, everyone can do it, because you can just walk away. It’s not your class.

If we listen to the participants’ recommendations, we will restructure the PDS experiences later in each semester to immerse them in longer periods of teaching, thus strengthening their vision for their future classroom scenarios while we are there to support them as college faculty.

Kozol (2007) notes that in order to develop effective rapport with students and meet their diverse needs, a teacher must meet and collaborate with the students’ parents. Upon experiencing his own first teaching job and through observing new teachers across the country, Kozol also notes that most new teachers are not well-prepared to interact with parents. Locally, the participants in my study pointed out the limited contact they had as undergraduate education students with students’ parents. I asked Annie and Connie in mid-September whether they felt prepared through our teacher education program to interact with parents.

Annie: No, not at all. Not at all. So I’m trying to think of, yeah, what, yeah, parental thing...
Connie: I think, weren’t we invited to something once?
Annie: Yeah, I did, but that’s once. (9/21/07)

One parent event during their pre-service experience is not enough to prepare them for effective communication with parents. An in-service teacher at our PDS prepared a presentation for a second-year teacher workshop, including a handout of strategies for collaborating and communicating with parents. We could practice many of her strategies as part of the PDS experience. For example, the PDS students could write a summary of expectations for parents at the beginning of every grade-level unit they teach. They could
write notes in the students’ agendas and make positive phone calls to the students’ parents. Most of the strategies that we could not implement during the PDS could be part of their student teaching experience, such as walking outside after school to make contact with parents when they pick up their child from school, or conducting home visits with the cooperating teacher.

Another way to strengthen aspiring teachers’ visions is to acquaint them with resources such as those they may find in their classrooms and be told to use as guides for instruction. Kaufman, Johnson, Kardos, Liu, and Peske (2002) found that the new teachers in their study preferred to blend an integrative, original approach to curriculum construction with a framework provided in the teacher manuals.

For their own sake and the sake of their students, Mary and some others in our sample wanted their schools to provide them with curriculum materials and methods that had demonstrated success. This suggests that these new teachers were willing to exchange some of their creative license for greater structure, but they were not looking to simply follow a script. Instead, they wanted to retain flexibility within a supportive structure; they wanted some scaffolding to support their own development. They reserved the right to adapt the prepared curriculum and materials to their own unique styles and to the specific needs of their students. Although the new teachers generally acknowledged their limited expertise as classroom teachers, they asserted their authority over what their students needed; they believed that nobody knew their students better than they did. (Kaufman et al., p. 286)

At Riverside, our pre-service teachers have very minimal exposure to teacher manuals through our coursework. We encourage our students to construct original learning opportunities based upon a blend of district standards, student interests, and teacher passion and creativity. When the participants secured their teaching positions, they were given teacher manuals for reading and math, and told to follow them as directed according to the district pacing schedule and subject-area time allotments. For
social studies, science, spelling, handwriting, and Daily Oral Language, they had guides that they were expected to use, but had more flexibility. The participants wished they had worked more with teacher manuals in college, since they were expected to use them as teachers.

Annie: Maybe, like, actual manuals. Like, to look at an actual teacher manual. Especially with Trailblazers [Math], I think it’s really hard to read.
Ben: That’s what I think.
Annie: And you have to figure out where to go in it, and what goes with what in the lesson, and that you have to look for the homework pages and for the workbook pages that you need to pull out, and stuff like that.
Ben: We HAVE to. We HAVE to use them, I mean...
Annie: Mm, hmm.
Connie: We do. We have to use what we have. (9/21/07)

To bridge this gap and help them envision how to blend constructivist teaching with mandated curricula, we should explore teacher manuals for different grade levels and content areas and talk together about how to use them as resources for instruction. To help the students envision how they could potentially use teacher manuals in their future classrooms, we could create a “Curriculum Construction Flexibility Continuum,” ranging from scripted curricula to curricula generated with students, as a way to familiarize our students with teacher manuals. This exercise would help our students connect to learning theory, discuss ways to purposefully resist curricular reductionism and the teacher-as-technician trend, and reinforce the ideals of integrative, student-centered teaching.

Math was the hardest curriculum for all four of the participants to implement. The participants shared a common concern that the math content and pedagogy that they learned at Riverside applied very minimally to the district’s math curriculum. They
described the courses they took from the math department as irrelevant to teaching elementary math. They expressed that through their Curriculum and Instruction in Math course they developed and taught a lot of creative math strategies at varying grade levels, but the strategies were disconnected and not part of a unified math philosophy. The district's math curriculum, *Math Trailblazers*, is a paced, spiraling curriculum with frequent assessments. The program exposes children to a variety of strategies that they expand over time through a divergent, problem-solving approach.

I do not advocate that we structure our math teaching preparation around the *Math Trailblazers* curriculum. It is our responsibility to prepare our students to teach math across the elementary grades and through a variety of approaches. The Trailblazers approach to math instruction is one of many to which the students should be exposed. But as Ben suggests, a sufficient exposure to the local math curriculum would be helpful to the many graduates from Riverside who do secure teaching jobs in the district. “If somehow we could correlate the Trailblazers series with Riverside classes or just maybe extra classes....I mean just to be more familiar with the whole Trailblazers” (9/20/07).

**Vision for how to provide meaningful instruction for all learners.** Although the participants had practiced differentiating their instruction within the small groups they taught in college, they agreed that they lacked vision for the processes and practices for teaching *all* learners in a *whole* classroom—without a cooperating teacher telling them what to do. They were unsure how to group students, because groups had always been set up for them in their PDS and student teaching experiences. The participants expressed a
concern over their minimal preparation for the identification processes for special education, or for teaching in an inclusive setting.

For example, Annie admitted, “I’m really nervous about children who have IEPs, ‘cause I really haven’t had experience reading an IEP, or sitting in on a conference to decide if a child needs an IEP. I’m nervous about that because I don’t feel like I’ve had much experience with it at all” (5/30/07). Connie agreed that “with classes really being as inclusive as they are, I think they should do more [preparation to teach children with special needs]” (11/19/07).

State regulations only require elementary education majors to take one course such as ours that we entitle Exceptionalities. With all of the coursework that our students must take for their general education requirements and their liberal arts divisions, only upon rare occasions does a general elementary education student have or make time to take special education courses. I recommend that we discuss this issue as a department and make serious efforts to infuse more instruction and practice across all coursework in inclusion, co-teaching, and instructional differentiation. We should also examine to what extent our current PDS structures reflect our philosophy of education (once we articulate it) for all children. I am concerned that the current structures may promote a vision for our students that although differentiation of instruction is important for all children, some teachers teach children with special needs most of the time, and others spend most of their time teaching children without identified special needs.

Once the new teachers had learned enough about their students’ needs to begin small group instruction in reading, all four of them experienced the same big problem:
they never learned how to teach guided reading in college, nor how to structure small
group instruction of any kind within a whole classroom. Our students facilitated literature
circles in a setting where classroom management was easy, but never taught guided
reading while engaging a classroom full of students who needed explicit teaching to work
without teacher guidance. “We did a lot of literature circles, but not so much guided
reading instruction. Just literature circles, with St. John’s kids who are highly motivated
to take off and do it!” (Connie, 11/19/07)

Deb: When you were at St. John did you have a chance to observe teachers
teaching reading, or not?
Annie: Teaching guided reading? No.
Deb: Okay. How about teaching any other kind of reading? Whole group?
Annie: I don’t even remember. I don’t think...I don’t know. I don’t think so. We
did readers’ theatre, and we did literacy...er, literature circles.
Deb: But you were doing the teaching.
Annie: Yeah.
Deb: How do you feel when you’re teaching guided reading groups?
Annie: Mmmm...I don’t know. Kind of like I don’t know what I’m doing...when
the summer came and I met [my grade level partner], I told her, I’m like, I
know nothing about guided reading groups. Can you show me how you do
one?

Ben was baffled over the district’s emphasis on guided reading and his lack of
background knowledge of it. “I should know this, but why did they...I mean just to kind
of improve our test scores in reading, is that why they implemented guided reading? I
never had this when I was, I mean I kind of did when I was younger, but not to this
effect, I don’t think...maybe we did and I just don’t remember” (9/20/07). Either guided
reading was not a part of our teacher preparation at the time these participants were our
students, or the participants do not remember it. Clearly, we need to teach it more
explicitly and align the pre-service vision to in-service practice in terms of small group reading instruction and whole group engagement in literacy activities.

I now realize that we must have our pre-service teachers design instruction for a whole room rather than just for their small groups when they create their unit plans. This should include the creation of learning centers or stations to engage students in meaningful, cooperative learning while the teacher works with a small group. Currently, during their PDS practice teaching, the college students only concern themselves with their own small group. This actually promotes an unrealistic vision for their teaching practice, as they will eventually need to also concern themselves with what everyone else in the classroom is doing—not just the small group they are with at the moment.

In other words, since the majority of their PDS planning is for small groups and the majority of their PDS teaching practice is with small groups, we reinforce inaccurate images of ideal classroom practice. Therefore, our graduates enter their teaching positions as outstanding small group instructors who do not know how to structure small group instruction for their class. Even during student teaching, the structures are set up for them. “You know, it’s just never something that was ever left to me to handle....I was never comfortable enough to say, “Would you leave so I could experiment with this wonderful thing?” (Connie, 8/13/07)

With no background knowledge or experience in structuring small groups, most of the participants resorted to occupying the students with seatwork—something they all identified in the first focus group as poor practice and highly discouraged at Riverside.

And nobody was telling me, ‘You’re going to need this stuff when you do guided reading groups.’ When I was student teaching, it was, OH, WOW! This is what
we need those for! To keep these kids busy while these other kids are busy learning something productive; doing something that will prepare them for whatever we’re doing the next day as opposed to just giving them busywork. Unfortunately this semester at LaMont, mostly we’ve done busy work. (Connie, 11/19/07)

Once on the job, they realized they needed learning stations and made plans to create them, but were too exhausted or had no time. “That’s another thing that would have been nice: to work with stations in college. I wish there was something you could read or some kind of class to teach you what to do with centers, or what to do with kids when you’re teaching guided reading groups” (Annie, 2/15/08).

Vision through explicit connections: Course activities to classroom practice. In general, to help our students develop clear visions for their own classroom practice, we need to explicitly connect all of their class assignments in their education coursework to their future classrooms. Countless times throughout the year I was shocked to hear a participant say they never learned this or that, when I know it is something I cover in my own courses. We need to never assume that they are making the transfer between a course assignment and their own future classrooms.

Connie wished her education professors would have been more explicit about the purposes of the strategies they studied and practiced. She wished, for example, someone would have clearly told her about the purpose of learning centers, because at the time she didn’t understand their context. She gave an example of how explicit the message needed to be for her to make sense of the concept. “This is time you’re going to have to plan for, and there isn’t going to be anyone else in the room. You’ll be sitting in the corner with
the children, and unless you plan for otherwise, the rest of your room will be chaos” (11/19/07).

I was stunned when Rachel told me that she had never seen a district progress report (report card) until November 27th of her first year of teaching. When she was in PDS, we had planned and taught both a science unit and a social studies unit based upon the district progress report rubrics. The PDS students, including Rachel, actually placed grades and comments onto copies of the progress reports and gave them to the elementary classroom teachers. To me, this was a tight and explicit connection to local in-service practice. When I reminded Rachel of this, she asked, “Oh... is that what we had for Electricity and Magnetism? ...Yeah! But still, it was like, hmmm... how does this fit in with everything else?” (11/27/07). As Rachel explained to me, amidst all of their course assignments it was not clear to her that this was any more important or real-life than any other assignment, but rather, “Oh! Another handout! Okay! Thank you!” (11/27/07). I was disillusioned because the activity that to me seemed clearly connected to the district was unmemorable to at least one of my students. This example convinced me that we need to more explicitly connect everything we do to their future practice.

Develop a Shared Faculty Vision through Discussion and Collaborative Inquiry

To facilitate the development of clear visions for teaching, education faculty members should develop a unified programmatic vision for good teaching practice. Collaborative inquiry with partner schools where pre-service teachers conduct clinical work should inform, but not limit, a department’s collective vision for teaching. New research about how people learn has implications for bridging learning theory to
classroom practice (Donovan et al., 1999). Donovan et al. emphasize that discourse leading to agreement between the two parties about what changes are necessary is the first step toward educational reform.

Hammerness (2006) affirms the importance of articulating individual and collective images of ideal practice as a faculty.

Teacher education faculty need to articulate their personal visions and develop a program vision; "it means having a sense of the kinds of powerful approaches, ideas, and practices of teaching and learning that a teacher education faculty would want new teachers to encounter, consider, and experience as part of developing their own personal visions. (Hammerness, 2006, p. 87)

Images of ideal practice become more clear to faculty as well as students when they can be realized within the context of clinical settings (Goodlad, 1990a).

Professional development schools that layer practice and research address many of the gaps between teacher education and in-service practice (Abdul-Haq, 1998; Hopkins, Hoffman, & Moss, 1997; Levine, 2002; Mantle-Bromley, 1998; Mantle-Bromley, Gould, McWhorter, & Whaley, 2000; Neubert & Binko, 1998; Paese, 2003; Ridley, Hurwitz, Davis-Hackett, & Knutson-Miller, 2000; Sandholtz & Dadlez, 2000). Several educational researchers note that schools, as centers of research and inquiry, not only bridge the theory-practice gap, but also nourish the intellectual health of teachers (Cohn & Kottcamp, 1993; Donovan et al., 1999; Lecos, Evans, Leahy, & Liess, 2000; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001). Through the processes of collaborative inquiry between universities and schools, all parties involved can continuously question, revise, and deepen their visions for teaching.

The faculty sharing of teacher vision is a viable next step to improve our teacher preparation program at Riverside. If we can confidently express a vision for teaching and
explicitly convey it to our students, encouraging them to reflect upon the practices we endorse as well as those we discourage, we will help them explore their own teacher visions. As we articulate a departmental vision, we should consider research possibilities within our PDS schools. We should maximize our mutually-beneficial partnerships that already exist by having our pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and college faculty conduct ongoing collaborative inquiry into teaching practices.

We are in the process of changing our PDS structures and staffing, making this an ideal time to consider many of these implications. Since several of our department members spend at least half of their teaching load in P-12 schools, one reason for adjusting our PDS schedules is to provide our department with sustained time to collaborate. With our new structures, all of our teacher education faculty will be on campus every afternoon, providing more common time to meet as a department. This will help us to not only keep up with the day-to-day logistics of departmental functioning, but with the deeper, long-term effects of creating an explicit vision for our program.

When teacher educators give aspiring teachers opportunities to surface and explore their visions, the teachers-to-be can probe, examine, and challenge their tacit assumptions about teaching. As we expose the pre-service teachers to new visions, they can develop a sense of possibility. If we focus upon the gaps between vision and practice, we can support them with strategies to understand and come to term with those gaps.
Help Pre-Service Teachers Maximize Any Professional Context

Promote Solid Learning Theory

Based upon research about how people learn, teacher education programs must align their teaching methods with those that their students should implement in their future professional teaching settings. In other words, teacher education should reflect what professional teaching should be (Bransford et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Kottler and Zehm (2000) tell aspiring teachers to develop a solid learning theory that enhances one's teacher identity and vision.

We recommend that you consciously study theories of learning in order to create and build on your own model that is consistent with your philosophy, values, training, and student needs. As you study the various approaches, remember that the most important theory of learning is the one you are beginning to construct for yourself. It is your current explanation of how people, including you, learn best. (p. 29)

Bransford et al. (2000) summarize three key findings in the current research on how people learn. They emphasize how this research should shape teacher education programs as well as professional development and practice. These findings are that (1) people have preconceptions upon which they build knowledge and deep conceptual understanding, (2) effective learning and transfer of subject matter differs between disciplines, and (3) meta-cognition aids in learning.

Based upon this research of how people learn, the authors advise teacher educators to teach future teachers how to uncover, assess, and build upon student preconceptions (see also Duckworth, 1996). They also propose that pre-service teachers learn to teach subject matter using specific pedagogy best suited to the nature of each particular discipline. Furthermore, they emphasize that teacher educators explicitly teach
skills of meta-cognition and employ them regularly in coursework so that future teachers can confidently apply those skills some day within their own teaching (Donovan et al., 1999).

**Use and Promote Critical Pedagogy**

Teacher preparation programs need to deliberately structure study and practice to prepare their candidates to teach diverse populations. Hollins and Guzman (2005) found in a large-scale review of our country's teacher education programs that we do not successfully prepare our teachers to teach in diverse classroom settings. Britzman (1991) contends that the paradigm of teacher training is the root of this problem as it promotes discourses of conformity. We must challenge our pre-service teachers to view education not as cultural transmission and social reproduction, but as a “recognition that multiple realities, voices, and discourses conjoin and clash in the process of coming to know” (p. 33).

To prepare our teachers to effectively and justly teach diverse student bodies, we must also challenge them to examine the implicit messages they potentially could send to children.

The intonations of your voice, a passing glance within your eyes in reaction to a passage in a story that you may be reading to the class, have their effect as well. The secret curriculum in almost any class, in my belief, is not the message that is written in a lesson plan or a specific book but the message of implicit skepticism or, conversely, of passivity or acquiescence that is written in the teacher’s eyes and in the multitude of other ways in which her critical intelligence, her reservations about given truths, or else the absence of these inclinations and these capabilities, are revealed. (Kozol, 2007, p. 86)

We must address language such as high group, low students, and even behaviors used as titles for a group of children. The discourse of the real (Britzman, 1991) is embedded
within all professional contexts and cannot be transformed unless we bring attention to it and to its potential negative effects. Without addressing these structures and practices, we send another generation of teachers into the field that, although well-intended, will carry on the sorting and classifying role that has been a main responsibility of teachers in this country since the inception of public education (Ingersoll, 2003). In order to break this cycle, we must teach our prospective teachers to penetrate the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, and Gordon (2006) note that teacher education programs “must have not only the willingness but also the means with which to support novices in effectively questioning discourses and systems that continually marginalize and demean students of color, thereby perpetuating inequity across the U.S. school system” (p. 407).

Based largely upon the work of Paulo Freire (2000), critical pedagogy encourages a problem-posing examination of the effects that society’s forceful and manipulative teaching of a rigid and pre-selected body of knowledge, skills, and values has on the perpetuation of class inequality. Through critical pedagogy, we can co-construct understanding of the content and processes necessary to fairly and effectively engage diverse populations of students. By experiencing a critical rather than reproductive pedagogy, our students would not only be more mindful of diverse experiences and needs, but also become more open-minded and critical human beings overall, better equipped to advocate for changes in educational structures and practices that contribute to marginalization of groups of children.
Richard Shaull, in the foreword to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) emphasizes that no education is neutral. It either is a tool that functions to integrate students into the current system, conforming them to it, or offers opportunity for critical and creative thought leading to transformation. He adds that the latter will cause tension and conflict, but also holds hope for “a new man” and “a new era in Western history” (p. 34).

Freire (2000) discusses how the elite manipulate the masses to conform to their objectives. Schools, with the captive audience of innocent children, and teachers who are often oblivious to their function as culture-preservers, are vehicles for this manipulation. He quotes, “Within the structures of domination [schools] function largely as agencies which prepare the invaders of the future” (p. 154). Britzman (2000) explains how the curriculum and those who choose it represent and perpetuate an advantaged body of knowledge and people. “The selected knowledge of any curriculum represents not only things to know, but a view of knowledge that implicitly defines the knower’s capacities as it legitimates the persons who deem that knowledge important” (pp. 17-18). Britzman notes that “epistemological sensitivity is rarely a part of the teacher’s education” (p. 43). In other words, while learning how to teach, most prospective teachers lack a critical perspective. Instead, they become unassuming vessels of a privileged perspective.

Freire (2000) talks about the banking concept of education where students are receptacles to be filled by the teacher. The practices within the banking model of education mirror oppressive society in that the teacher knows everything, chooses what to teach and how to teach it, does the thinking and talking, and disciplines, while the
students know nothing, have no choice or voice, receive information passively, and are disciplined. The more students accept what the teacher deposits, the less they develop the ability to consciously and critically examine their world. Thus, culture and knowledge are preserved in a static state with neither truly being developed.

Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality. (p. 81)

The key processes necessary to overcome oppression are dialogue, praxis, mutual examination, and co-recreation (Freire, 2000). Dialogue between members of the oppressed group leads to realization and conviction that there is oppression. The leaders (teachers) of the revolution’s people (students) work together, each as both students and teachers, to “unveil” the reality of the oppression. Together, they examine it critically through reflection and action, continuously re-creating the knowledge and transformation of their reality (praxis). The people’s involvement in the co-recreation of knowledge is key to the commitment toward liberation. Freire emphasizes the primacy of dialogue as the means by which teacher and students co-construct meaning of the world. “Authentic education is not carried on by ‘A’ for ‘B’ or by ‘A’ about ‘B,’ but rather by ‘A’ with ‘B,’ mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it” (p. 93).

Freire (2000) offers some specific strategies for developing and exploring generative themes. These strategies include analysis of taped interviews, dramatizations, discussions of magazine articles, newspapers, and book chapters, and analysis of varying newspaper editorials following a significant event to examine multiple interpretations and
perspectives. Through strategies such as these, the "thematics which have come from the people return to them—not as contents to be deposited, but as problems to be solved" (p. 123).

Shor (1992) emphasizes that open, active, and thoughtful communication is at the heart of critical pedagogy. Such dialogic interaction requires a shift from teacher talk to critical dialogue. In order for deep discourse to take place, classrooms must be places where students feel safe to share and where there is mutual respect between the students and the teacher. Classrooms must be freely participatory. According to Shor, in dialogic education the curriculum is purposefully built upon the interests of the particular student group. The teacher poses key questions or problems to generate discussion from multiple perspectives.

Shor (1992) provides a possible teaching process for such critical dialogue, stressing that the process should be adapted as needed. First, the teacher asks students a question or questions of local, national, or global importance (as opposed to those listed through a specific prepackaged curriculum). According to Shor, it is the critical teacher's responsibility to raise questions of significance—issues that directly affect the society they will form—that are often ignored in textbooks and standardized tests. Second, the students write (or draw, speak, or act) to reflect upon the question(s). Third, the students share in pairs or small groups. Fourth, the teacher facilitates a whole group discussion, adding his or her insights. Fifth, the teacher and students secure newspaper or journal articles, or book excerpts, to bring new information and perspectives to the class. The teachers and students then repeat the entire process throughout their time together.
In my experience at Riverside, the concept of the hidden curriculum is new to our pre-service teachers. Most of our students went through their P-12 years of school without questioning any of the structures and practices that either implicitly or explicitly sorted them into a certain group and eventually led them to pursue a college education. I recommend that our faculty study and implement critical pedagogy in our teacher education program.

Teach How to Advocate for Change and Defend Best Practice

Across the country, there is growing conflict between teacher autonomy and control (Cohn & Kottcamp, 1993; Wien, 2004). On one hand, the public puts its faith in the classroom teacher as the primary source of authority and knowledge in the classroom. However, politicians form educational policies centered on standardized curricula and testing, placing increased controls on teachers and students in terms of content and learning processes. Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie experienced these tensions as they tried to negotiate a paced math curriculum, prescribed curricula, and fragmented schedules that limited their ability to get to know their students and plan instruction around their interests and needs.

Bransford (2006), in a presentation to a group of twenty faculty teams from the Council of Independent Colleges, asserted that teacher educators must teach pre-service teachers how to be inventive within any curriculum they are given, and how to collaborate with others in the school who can help them do so. He also contended that teacher educators must clearly explain that teachers are never going to have a perfect context in which to teach. Therefore, teacher educators must help their students become
change agents so when they secure positions they can advocate for best practice if it is not occurring in their schools. We must teach them to ground their instructional choices in solid learning theory, and then practice how to articulately defend those choices so that others will listen. As Kozol (2007) notes, “The point is not to lose your job! It is to find a way to navigate the contradictions it presents without entirely forfeiting one’s personality or undermining the ideals that make our work with children a ‘vocation’ in the truest sense rather than a slotted role within a spiritless career” (p. 203).

Perhaps we need to create and practice verbal responses together as teacher educators and teachers-to-be. After studying learning theory and previewing the likely encounter they will have with poor teaching practice in their professional contexts, students could prepare what we might call “defense statements,” or an armor of instructional rationale grounded in research about how people learn. For example:

- Pacing that is too fast does not account for motivation theory: children will shut down if they fear failure.
- Having to quickly disseminate fragmented content does not allow teachers and students time to model and practice critical thinking.
- Children learn better within uninterrupted, expansive time frames.
- Children learn better within a safe environment and a close community of learners.
- Specific, fragmented, prescriptive, and paced curricula disallow teachers to make decisions based upon the current and future needs and interests of their students.

We must ensure, however, that defense statements such as these become more than parroted lines memorized in college courses. Prospective teachers need to examine, understand, believe in, and develop a passion for these statements. Only then will they be able to defend their practices and advocate for change when they encounter obstacles to good teaching. As Wien (2004) contends, not only is it possible for teachers to negotiate
the tension between autonomy and control; negotiations that result in the ability to apply
good practice make teaching more enjoyable and sustainable.

My overall conclusion is that it is more difficult for teachers to offer
developmentally appropriate practice in elementary teaching than it was before
the imposition of the standardized curriculum, but that it is not impossible for
teachers who know how to integrate curriculum and who have a sense of authority
and discernment about what is important and what is trivial in a list of
expectations....It is also clear that integrating curriculum is more intellectually
challenging than a linear, segmented approach, and the latter is 'less fun' and both
mentally exhausting and physically draining for teachers. (p. 155)

Finally, we should consider using case studies, including localized, real-world
scenarios, that require the students to practice ownership of their teaching. Liston,
Whitcomb, and Borko (2006) note that

we need to foreshadow, substantively examine, and reflect upon the gap between
schools' realities and the candidates' hopes and aspirations (fed in part, by teacher
education faculty). Doing so may well help our candidates (and ourselves)
understand the internal and external tensions of teaching. (p. 356)

Our prospective teachers will face these tensions. Therefore, we must structure guided
practice within our teacher preparation program to negotiate these tensions, so that when
the teachers are on their own they have some negotiating experience upon which to draw.

For example, students might have an assignment like the following: Think ahead to a
likely scenario as a first-year teacher where you are given [a specific curricula,
schedule, school culture, etc.] in School X. How would you use your strengths to
maximize that context? How would you advocate for change in those structures and
practices? These activities should require the pre-service teachers to synthesize their
knowledge, skills, and values to create a plan that would allow them to maintain the
highest degree of instructional integrity as possible within the context they are given.
Following the creation of such plans, the pre-service teachers should share them with each other to explore a wide range of solutions to a variety of contextual challenges.

Promote an Ethic of Caring

To help our aspiring teachers thrive in any context, we must continue to model through our own teaching the primacy of caring for one’s students during the teaching and learning process. The participants in this study knew that they should spend time developing relationships with their students, but they struggled to balance time to build community and to do academic work. Most of the participants saw the two goals as separate. This distinction has implications for our program and for teacher education.

Caring interaction between teachers and students should elevate the quality of teaching and learning, which in turn should promote deeper relationships. When Kottler and Zehm (2000) say, “Communication includes building trust, showing respect, supporting sharing, promoting acceptance of differences, responding to show you have really heard, moving students to a deep level of thinking, modeling warmth and support, and encouraging the free exchange of ideas” (p. 76), they promote the simultaneous development of cognitive and affective growth through caring communication. In other words, when a teacher forges supportive, interpersonal relationships (teacher-student and student-student) that lead to collaborative, academic inquiry, the excitement of the academic pursuit in turn strengthens those relationships. Academic and affective growth cyclically build upon each other to maximize learning.

Next, we must equip our pre-service teachers to activate their students’ cognitive and affective growth. We need to prepare teachers who care about issues such as equality,
environmental preservation, hunger, and homelessness deeply enough to take action themselves and inspire their students to do the same. We need to explore ways to integrate service learning (Cousins & Mednick, 1999) and Nodding’s (2005) curriculum based around caring for self, others, the environment, all living things, and people’s ideas, into our teacher education curriculum. We need to help our students understand that although education currently emphasizes the development of cognitive skills, education is not intended for intellectual development alone. Great intellect, power, and wealth do not guarantee constructive action. “Neither prudential nor ethical arguments move most affluent citizens. This state of affairs suggests strongly that there is something radically wrong with the education that produced those citizens” (Noddings, 2005, p. 43).

Teacher education must reshape its teaching practices and content to reflect a deeper, more human and holistic approach.

Perhaps the most fundamental change required is to empower teachers as we want them to empower students. We do not need to cram their heads with specific information and rules. Instead we should help them learn how to inquire, to seek connections between their chosen subjects and other subjects, to give up the notion of teaching their subject only for its own sake, and to inquire deeply into its place in human life broadly construed. (p. 178)

Maximize Motivation to Minimize Management: Teach Learning versus Schooling

Children have interests, abilities, and motivations of their own. Knowing this, we should teach our pre-service teachers how to capitalize on their students’ intrinsic desires and then provide their students with “the appropriate amount of support, structure, and expectations they need to be self-directed, responsible learners” (Kottler & Zehm, 2000, p. 66). First, our students should examine the difference between schooling and learning.
Schooling is a compulsory experience in which students are expected to acquire the knowledge and skills of the required curriculum. Schooling demands that students pay attention, listen carefully, take notes, raise their hands to ask pertinent questions, and pass the test at the end of the unit. Schooling is an ‘outside-in’ experience. Learning, however, is an ‘inside-out’ process, in which students construct an understanding of themselves, their beliefs and values, and the world in which they live. Learning is a challenging process of discovery that requires little external push; the motivation comes from within. It is the personal quest for new information, new meanings, new challenges and experiences.
(Kottler & Zehm, 2000, pp. 22-23)

Learning leads to action, positive leadership, self-motivation, and acceptance of differences—all of which I observed in the classrooms of this study. On the other hand, too much schooling can lead to passivity, behavior problems, teacher-pleasing, and labeling children with disabilities—all of which I also observed. We need to maximize the former and minimize the latter.

Once our teachers-to-be understand the difference between schooling and learning, we must model how to integrate mandated curricula and standards with student interests. This kind of explicit modeling need not be limited to methods classes. We can model this for students across all of our education courses, beginning with syllabi that have a framework leading to proficiency in our own departmental and state certification standards, but are completed together in class as determined by the students’ curiosity and needs. We need to model integrative learning.

Final Reflections and Preview

A novice teacher is more able to enact his or her vision if he or she accepts a teaching position within a supportive professional context (Hammerness, 2006). Hammerness reminds us that it is our job as teacher educators to not only provide
opportunities for our pre-service teachers to articulate their visions, but to explicitly encourage them to look for contextual matches to those visions.

But if teacher educators can help new teachers articulate their visions and consider what an appropriate match might be, and help new teachers analyze the visions of the school sites and their potential colleagues, those teachers might have a greater likelihood of ending up in places where they could more successfully navigate the demands, challenges, and emotions, of their chosen profession. (Hammerness, 2006, p. 86)

Teacher educators should help students understand that interviews for their first teaching position are not only opportunities for schools to select the qualified candidates for teaching vacancies, but also for candidates to determine which schools are places where they can be the kind of teacher they want to be, and do the teaching practices they want to do. Teacher educators need to help their graduating education candidates understand that a mismatch between their teacher vision, identity, and context could be detrimental to their longevity in the field.

When my students walk across the graduation stage, thoughts race through my head about the challenges that lie ahead for them. Although they may not know where they are going to begin their teaching careers and who will be in their schools to support them, they have a safety net in the relationships they have built with their college instructors through the close clinical work we have done together. They know they have an open invitation to contact me or any of the education department faculty when they need advice or just need to talk about teaching. The importance of relationships in the negotiation of first-year teaching is paramount, as I will detail in the next chapter.

This chapter focused on what we can do before teachers enter the field to help strengthen their teacher identity and vision, and prepare for potential contextual
challenges. The next chapter focuses on the implications for teacher induction, or how people and structures can offer effective support *during* a teacher's first year. In this study, much of the negotiation of each participant's first year of teaching depended upon the support systems within his or her personal and professional contexts. As seen previously in Chapter VII, upon entering their professional contexts, the participants' support systems--or lack thereof--either boosted or weakened their teacher identities, clarified or confused their visions for teaching, and maximized or minimized their school contexts. Their experiences inform us about the potential that colleges and school districts have to strategically impact first-year teacher success once candidates accept their first teaching positions.
CHAPTER X

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER INDUCTION

"Teaching children is hard work and requires intelligence, preparation, creativity, determination, and perseverance. Some teachers who enter the field don't have these essential qualities and consequently leave classroom teaching in search of a better career match. It is not for these teachers that I worry. Instead, I worry about the bright, eager, and well-prepared teachers who enter the field capable of making a difference but who leave shortly after their initiation, feeling unsupported by colleagues and administrators. For these people we must change our induction practices, reexamine our new teacher support models, and challenge one another and ourselves to be supportive colleagues." (Brighton, 1999, p. 201)

Teacher Induction: Where Identity, Vision, and Context Meet

As I discussed in Chapter VI, the context in which novices teach, along with the contexts of their past and present personal lives, determines the degree to which they can maintain their teacher identity and fulfill the vision for teaching with which they enter the profession. Administrators, mentors, and other teachers either build upon or break down a novice teacher's identity and vision. University instructors can provide a connection between the novice's college and classroom experiences. Professional development structures that support personal wellness and continued growth in teaching provide sustenance in body and mind for the many challenges of the first year of teaching.

The literature to which I refer in this chapter aligns with the experiences of this study's four novice teachers. Gaps exist between entering teachers' visions and their professional contexts. Isolated planning and teaching replaces the collaboration to which they were accustomed in college. Parents, paperwork, and political pressures within the school place stressors upon the new teachers beyond planning and teaching. However, when key people and systems are in place to help the new teachers cope with these
stressors, it is possible to thrive. This chapter explores the background to the main challenges the novice teachers faced, and details support systems that colleges and schools can implement to support novice teachers.

**New Teacher Expectations and Discoveries**

The novice teachers in this study entered the field envisioning the intrinsic rewards of working with children, and did experience them. What they did not envision were the many challenging aspects of teaching that are context-specific and can therefore not surface before the first year of teaching on one's own. In the case of this study, the primary negative factors were excessive amounts of paperwork, mandated pacing schedules, frequent and pre-developed assessments, behavior issues, problems with structuring small groups, and exhaustion.

Although the novice teachers heard about some of these stressors before they began their careers, just hearing about them did not suffice to comprehend their magnitude. Only experiencing them did. Within the context of these experiences, therefore, we must support our effective first-year teachers who want to remain in the profession. If we do not, then teachers may choose alternate positions either within education or elsewhere.

The typical teacher entering the field today has different expectations than those retiring from teaching who entered the field decades ago (Johnson & Donaldson, 2004; Smith, 2008). Today's new teachers expect to have autonomy, hold leadership roles, and be able to change positions within the educational system, perhaps several times throughout their careers. They expect to be acknowledged for their contributions. They
are less accepting of top-down hierarchy and less respectful of conventional organizations than were their counterparts of the past. Novice teachers envision working in collaboration with others.

Novice teachers tenuously try to merge the two contexts of their teacher preparation programs and their elementary teaching conditions. The most recent experiences new teachers have to guide them as they prepare for their first teaching positions are their student teaching experiences, as well as practices and understandings gained through their formal teacher preparation programs. Novice teachers soon discover that many factors besides well-grounded theory and pedagogy influence what and how teachers teach and students learn. The in-service world of teaching is neither a simple continuation nor synthesis of pre-service experiences (Cohn & Kottcamp, 1993).

The demands of the first year of teaching can overwhelm new teachers. New teachers in Brighton's 1999 study identified their top five stressors as meeting the needs of a diverse body of students, keeping up with paperwork, managing one's time, maneuvering political environments, and connecting with parents. These same teachers identified several gaps between their pre-service and in-service experiences. For the first time, they no longer shared the teaching responsibility in a classroom with anyone else. For the first time, there was nobody there to rescue them when things went wrong. For the first time, they were responsible to establish the classroom climate, develop rapport with parents, and establish expectations for student work and behavior. All of these first times of doing things alone made the new teachers feel isolated and unsupported, especially because most of their college clinical work was collaborative.
New teachers enter teaching willing to sacrifice a high salary for the intrinsic rewards of doing socially responsible work, spending every day with children, and helping children grow into healthy adults (Johnson & Birkeland, 2004). However, their vision often quickly shifts as they become “disheartened that the reality is so different from their expectations” (Brighton, 1999, p. 199). The work is more challenging, the children are more needy, and the expectations are higher than anticipated (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Frederickson & Hackworth, 2005; Hansen, Schulz, Stimson, & Wozniak-Reese, 2004; Johnson, 2004; NCTAF, 1996; Smith, 2008; Tyson, 1994).

Even when new teachers find intrinsic rewards, those rewards do not pay for student loans, rent, or emergencies. In their study of fifty first-year teachers, Johnson and Liu (2004) found that many of the first-career entrants lived at home with their parents. One first-career entrant said, “Right now, the salary is fine. I’m single. I’m not sure what my family situation, what my [future] husband’s salary might be or not [be]...so it might be because of salary that I might [leave teaching]” (p. 58). Mid-career entrants admitted that without their spouse’s income, they would not be able to afford to live on a teacher’s salary. The new teachers in their study complained about “negative school cultures, inappropriate or unfair assignments, inattentive or abusive principals, misused time, inadequate supplies, lack of outreach programs for parents, ad hoc approaches to discipline, and insufficient student support services” (Johnson & Birkeland, 2004, p. 94). These conditions on top of low pay in many cases override the intrinsic rewards of teaching and are the primary sources of high rates of attrition.
Teacher Attrition

In March of 2008, the participants wondered how the substantial amount of teachers being laid off would affect their teaching positions for the following year. Ben worried that moving to another grade level would almost be like starting over. Annie agreed, wanting to stay where she was now that she knew the first grade curricula. Connie predicted that with all the lay-offs, her hopes of securing a full-time position were slim. Rachel wondered if an involuntary transfer to another school might actually produce a better contextual fit for her. Whether the participants worried about having to leave, stay in, or find a position, they all worried, adding to their stressors late in the school year.

The teacher shortage idea is conventional wisdom, and innovative ideas for recruitment have been the answer to this perceived problem. Ingersoll (2007) says we must look at retention more than recruitment. The data (involving 55,000 teachers and 12,000 schools in five cycles from 1987 to 2005) say we actually over-produce new teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Attrition, not retirement, is the reason we lose teachers. In other words, teachers quit. Furthermore, the fastest “leavers” (Ingersoll, 2007) are novices.

After just five years, between forty to fifty percent of all beginning teachers leave the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). As of 2006, the U.S. is facing an estimated 200,000 teacher vacancies a year, costing the nation $4.9 billion annually (Levine, 2006). In the large-scale study by Ingersoll & Smith, 19% of the teachers who left their positions within the first five years did so as a result of involuntary staffing actions such as staff
reduction, termination, or school reorganization or closing. Forty-two percent left for personal reasons such as pregnancy, childrearing, health issues, or family relocation. Thirty-nine percent left to pursue a better career, and 29% left due to job dissatisfaction. Of the 29% who expressed job dissatisfaction, on the survey that allowed them to list up to three reasons for dissatisfaction, about three-fourths of the teachers listed low salary. More than three-fourths noted one or more of the following issues: classroom management, lack of administrative support, poor student motivation, and lack of influence over classroom and school decisions.

By the third year of a study led by Johnson (2004) of 50 first-year teachers, 11 of them left teaching altogether due to a lack of support, eight moved to different teaching positions in search of more support, and three were involuntarily transferred to another position in the district. Just a little over half of them (28) remained in the original position where they began just three years earlier. Only 13 of the 50 teachers expressed overall satisfaction and a likelihood of remaining in their positions for many years to come.

**People who Support or Weaken Teacher Identity and Vision**

**Principals**

Clearly, new teachers need support in order to increase their likelihood of remaining in the profession. The participants in this study all expressed a desire for feedback from their principals. They also acknowledged that their administrators were overworked and had little time to provide feedback. However, even little comments from principals went a long way to support what they were doing or affirm an idea they had for their teaching. When I told Connie about the first-year teacher panel we held for the PDS
at Finley, and how I thought it was a beneficial conversation for the first-year teachers, too, she agreed that it was a good opportunity for them “to hear what they’re doing right” (3/13/08). This issue of principal feedback was difficult for the participants to discuss. Admitting to the need for feedback implied a weakness—a sense of insecurity or self-centeredness.

I interpret the participants’ need for affirmation from their principals as key to the sustenance of their teacher identity. Each of the participants reflected deeply on brief comments from their principals, whether perceived by the participants as positive or negative. Although I chose for confidentiality reasons not to include specific comments by participants about interactions with principals, suffice it to say that principals’ words, facial expressions, and conversational tones—and the frequency of interactions—do much to either build up or break down a new teacher’s sense of professional self. These new teachers wanted their principals to know what they were doing, and they wanted to know what their principals thought of how they were doing it.

Research results emphasize the importance of administrative support for induction and retention (Cookson, 2005; Johnson, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland, 2004; Menchaca, 2003; Normore & Floyd, 2005; Ruder, 2005). Based upon firsthand knowledge of the qualities of experienced teachers in their schools, principals can select appropriate mentors for their new teachers, and create teaching teams that mix new and experienced teachers. New teachers recognize the principal as a key source of support and guidance. Menchaca notes that principals must go beyond what the author calls “Band-aid” strategies such as orientation to the building and occasional walk-throughs; they must be
mentors themselves, emulate optimism, and model continuous learning. The teachers in Johnson's (2004) study expressed a desire for constructive feedback from their principals in regards to their teaching performance.

Mentors

Dellen's district mentoring program is, as Ingersoll (2007) describes, at a "basic and collaboration" level. Each full-time first-year teacher in this study had a mentor who, like the participants, was also a general elementary classroom teacher. Connie, as a long-term sub and then part-time teacher, had no mentor. The mentors and first-year teachers gathered occasionally for first-year teacher meetings. The mentors logged contact time with their novices. However, the quantity and quality of mentoring, and the need for an assigned mentor, varied from participant to participant. For example, Ben benefited from early, regular contact with his mentor before and at the beginning of the year. Annie took comfort knowing her mentor was available in the building, but most of her mentoring was built into her first-year teaching team who supported each other daily.

There is an opportunity for universities and schools to partner in the mentorship of first-year teachers, particularly in cases where many of the district's new hires come from local colleges. It became clear to me during this study that the participants could share their affective needs with me because of our pre-existing relationship. The relationship between college instructors and graduates who secure local positions should be capitalized upon rather than tossed aside as a logistical impossibility. Universities and schools should explore alternative financial and time arrangements that allow college instructors to follow graduates through their first year of teaching. School districts should
look beyond their own personnel when spending state dollars budgeted for mentoring programs, perhaps hiring college instructors as adjunct partners with veteran schoolteachers to mentor novices.

This adjunct mentoring idea might solve the limited, surface-level approach to mentoring. Mentor teachers who have their own classrooms to teach are hard-pressed to find time to “use the novice teachers’ teaching as impetus for reflection and future growth” as Feiman-Nemser (2001b) recommends. College instructors, on the other hand, are more likely to have open blocks of time to give constructive feedback to help the novice teachers reflect upon their practice, and to model teaching.

Regardless of how mentoring programs are structured, conversation about teacher identity and vision must be central to professional dialogue between mentors and novices. As novices reflect upon their perceptions of themselves as teachers, they will inherently talk about their teaching practices and reveal their affective needs. Having crossed the border from pre-service to in-service teacher, the novice needs practice in the new discourse. Mentors can facilitate this identity-shaping, vision-articulating opportunity as they provide reflective support for the novices. Support through modeling practice should be linked to teacher identity and vision discourse rather than minimized to building a repertoire of tricks and techniques.

The literature confirms that mentor teachers help reduce attrition and job dissatisfaction. Mentors can serve many functions for the novice, including facilitation of networking, facilitation of reflection, being a role model, being a resource, advising, motivating, protecting, befriending, being an agent of change, and leading (Hansen et al.,
Ingersoll (2003) demonstrates that mentoring programs reduce teacher attrition. He found that after one year of teaching, of the teachers in his study who had no mentor at all, 41% left teaching. However, of those teachers who had what he called the “basic and collaboration” level of mentoring, 27% left after one year of teaching. In this type of mentoring system, a novice has a mentor in their curricular and/or grade level area, face-to-face meetings with other mentors and novices, and structured support time.

In a 2004 study by Norman and Ganser, the authors concluded that mentoring cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Nontraditional and alternatively certified teachers have different mentoring needs than traditional graduates. Teachers in the study also expressed a desire for their mentors to take on more of a counseling than evaluative role. They noted that the strong emphasis on meeting teaching standards minimized relationships between mentors and novice teachers. The new teachers wanted their mentors to listen to meet their affective needs rather than solely focus on content and pedagogy. The researchers also concluded that mentors need to be taught how to mentor, and that they should freely share their trials with new teachers rather than appear to be perfect teachers.

Feiman-Nemser (2001b) warns that counseling alone is not quality mentoring. Through interviews with and observations in a case study of an exceptional mentor, Feiman-Nemser identified specific techniques that the mentor used. She called the mentor’s style “educative mentoring,” building upon Dewey’s (1938) concept of educative experiences, or experiences that promote progress toward subsequent growth-
producing experiences. Educatively mentoring moves beyond comforting and consoling new teachers to using the novice teachers’ teaching as the basis for reflection and future growth. The specific techniques the mentor used included finding openings to discuss productive topics, pinpointing problems to get at the core of stressors and struggles, giving specific and positive feedback to raise the novice teachers’ awareness of their evolving styles, purposefully integrating learning theory into reflection sessions, helping the teachers to focus on student thinking in order to inform practice, thinking aloud to make instructional decisions explicit while model teaching for the novices, and modeling wondering about teaching. This case study supported Feiman-Nemser’s assertion that “unless we take new teachers seriously as learners...we will end up with induction programs that reduce stress and address immediate problems without promoting teacher development and improving the quality of teaching and learning” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a, p. 1031).

Nugent and Faucette (2004) describe a unique induction program that successfully facilitated the transfer from university to classroom. Four first-year teachers, eight interns who worked at the school two days per week, and two university supervisors collaborated to provide support and growth for each other. The university professors provided teacher preparation support for the interns and ongoing staff development (without formal evaluation) for the new teachers. The new teachers were given recognition as mentors for interns. The program effectively blended theory and practice.

The researchers identified themes within the novices’ pre-program, early program, and end of program responses. Before the program, the themes were of
becoming responsible and being exhausted. Early in the program, the novice teachers were glad to both give and receive help from the interns, and had become proud, confident, and collaborative. Near the end of the program, the themes were empowerment and ownership, and finally of missing the interns for their professional discourse and assistance. The relationship between the novices and interns was mutually beneficial.

In a 2004 study of novice teacher’s experiences, the researcher (Massey) was the former reading methods instructor of the novice teachers when they were in college. She found that the novice teachers experienced three very different phases, moving back and forth between the phases and not necessarily in the same order as each other. Although the phases did not progress linearly, all of the teachers went through them.

She called one of the phases “I just do what they tell me.” In this phase, the novices spent a lot of time being trained in different programs, and lacked time to be creative. Because they were overwhelmed with test preparation, their own securities, being observed, and dealing with students with severe behavior problems, they resorted to following textbooks and pre-planned curricula.

Another phase she called “I will NOT do that!” In this phase, the teachers advocated for their students’ needs rather than keeping a certain pace, and created their own materials and ideas. They were most content during this phase, but felt a lot of pressure from others to conform. Test preparation impacted these conflicting pressures, and the third grade teachers felt the most pressure as they prepared students to take the tests early in their fourth grade year. It was during this phase that the new teachers most heavily implemented pedagogy from their pre-service preparation.
“You teach for me!” was a phase in which the novice teachers wanted to watch their college instructor teach their students. They saw their former professor through an in-service lens, joining them with their own students in the daily chaos of teaching. By observing their instructor, the novice teachers were able to connect the specific content of their methods courses to what was now happening in their classrooms.

Massey noted that veteran teachers seemed to better balance mandates with innovation, but new teachers swung extremely between them. Novices resorted to the district’s curricular packages during their most stressful times. Then, when feeling less pressure, they returned to pedagogical methods they learned in college such as comprehension strategies, literature circles, and writers’ workshop.

Other Teachers

The composition of each faculty of the participants in this study impacted these first-year teachers’ sense of support. The faculties ranged from nearly all teachers within their first few years of teaching, to nearly all teachers having worked in the building for decades. One cannot assume that simply being surrounded by experienced teachers guarantees a smooth induction into teaching. Sometimes the experienced teachers offered less support than other novice teachers, and sometimes the fellowship that novice teachers offered each other did little to enhance teaching practice. Although both Annie and Rachel worked in schools where the majority of the teachers were in their first few years of teaching, the novices within those cultures had sharp differences in their teacher identities and visions.
Annie’s two grade-level teammates were her primary source for collaboration, and both of them, like Annie, had solid teacher identities and clear visions for their teaching practices. In Annie’s case, even though her mentor was a teacher who had earned awards for her excellence in clinical collaboration with pre-service teachers, Annie found ample support in her two novice colleagues. They freely exchanged ideas and resources, and reflected with each other about how to improve their practice. Other teachers in the school, regardless of their levels of experience, knew that this teaching team was strong individually and collectively, praised them for their advanced teaching skills, and sought out their ideas. By so doing, the other teachers affirmed the first-year teachers’ identities and solidified their visions for teaching. We can learn from the other teachers in Annie’s school to support new teachers with acknowledgment and affirmation.

Connie’s faculty composition was a mixture of new and veteran teachers. Connie’s team teacher was a veteran who planned on her own and collaborated minimally with Connie. Receiving implicit messages of her relatively low status as a long-term substitute and then part-time intervention specialist, Connie needed someone to affirm her identity as a well-prepared, capable teacher. She also needed someone to help her enact her vision to help children direct their own learning. Without opportunities for collaboration, Connie questioned her professional self-perception and second-guessed her instructional decisions. In the larger cultural network, the district’s messages to Connie implied a non-teacher identity as she was uninvited to new teacher staff development sessions, and had no access to any of the district’s electronic communications and
assessment systems. We can learn from this to support new teachers in any position, or, being aware of the tenuous position of a long-term substitute, provide intensive, short-term support to ensure a steady start for the substitute's classroom and teaching career.

Ben's faculty make-up was primarily veteran, with many of the teachers having decades of seniority in the district. They planned and taught alone, and nobody questioned their teaching. Ben wanted someone to know what he was doing out there in the trailer, and proceeded through the year hoping that he was teaching the right things well. The three other male teachers in the school taught second grade, music, and physical education, so with differing preparation periods and lunch schedules, he rarely had opportunities to connect with them.

Whatever the school culture, implications from this study are that veteran teachers need to proactively reach out to novice teachers to support them. The new teachers may be afraid to ask questions for fear of being judged as incapable. At the beginning of the year when the new teachers' learning curve is the most steep, veteran teachers who know the school's procedures should be available to answer the novices' questions and set a tone for safe collaboration.

One of the key roles of fellow faculty members is to help new teachers transfer the learning from their teacher preparation into the classroom setting. Even novices who come into the profession with a strong theoretical and clinical background need support to transfer the learning into their own setting. They need feedback and facilitated reflection in order to try out their skills, knowledge, and ideas. The school culture can either support or hinder the learning transfer (Donovan et al., 1999). Johnson and Kardos
categorized their participants’ descriptions of their professional school cultures as veteran-oriented, novice-oriented, or integrated.

In the veteran-oriented culture, “the workplace norms were set by veteran teachers who protected individual autonomy at the expense of professional interaction” (p. 141). Veteran teachers worked behind closed doors and did not share ideas or resources with the new teachers. The novice-oriented culture, due to the lack of teachers with several years of experience, was void of veteran mentoring. Interpersonal relationships were strong, but the teachers grew tired of the pace and responsibilities of being the “experts” because they were in their second or third year of teaching. One teacher likened the novice-oriented culture to an emergency room, saying, “It’s all crisis, so there is no room for rookie mistakes” (p. 156).

The integrated professional culture, on the other hand, acknowledged the contributions of the new teachers. A teacher in the Johnson team’s study (2004) described the integrated culture like this:

So I think the young teachers learn from the veteran teachers. And I think the veteran teachers get sparked a little bit from the young teachers coming in, you know, a new, fresh attitude. So it’s mutually enriching in that sense....There’s an expectation that you would mature as a teacher and develop new strategies in various arenas that you may not have had in your bag of tricks to begin with. (Johnson & Kardos, pp. 158-159)

Smith (2008) discusses the power and challenges of multigenerational teaching teams. She describes teachers who are in their “baby boomer” years, currently ages 43 through 62, as resistant to change. The “Nexters” (or “Generation Y” or “Millenials”), on the other hand, are accustomed and open to change. Growing up with home computers, constant electronic communication, and within more diverse classroom settings, the
younger teachers are collaborative, open to new challenges, and idealistic. These contrasting experiences, values, and dispositions make it challenging for novice and veteran teachers to collaborate. Because of this, the traditional practices of planning and teaching in isolation continue, even though other professional fields (i.e. medicine and law) have abandoned isolated practices in favor of a team approach. The potential for teachers to work together to build and model learning environments where students collaborate, fully use technology, and make choices in their learning content and processes requires change in teacher induction. Smith highlights the importance of ongoing professional development and opportunities for career advancement in order to retain teachers and improve education.

Another cultural factor that impacts faculty interaction is the typical gender imbalance in elementary schools. The limited number of men on school faculties reduces the opportunities for men to collaborate with other men who may experience similar gender-constructed limitations in their interactions with young children. A predominantly female faculty composition, therefore, may magnify a novice male teachers’ sense of isolation. (Sargent, 2001).

First-year teachers. To build teacher identity and clarify teacher vision, first-year teachers need to share their successes and challenges, and seek and offer instructional support. A perfect audience for these needs is other first-year teachers. To these novices, other first-year teachers who had the same questions and needs were less intimidating than teachers who seemingly had all the answers, and other first-year teachers became a source of personal as well as professional support.
I have discussed the power of the common experience of first-year teaching for Annie’s first grade team. Principals and district staff development coordinators should replicate this dynamic at the most local level possible. In Annie’s school, it was a coincidence that all of the first-year teachers ended up at the same grade level. Had they not, the principal could have formed a first-year teacher support group on site and met with them regularly to help them reflect upon their growth as a teacher and to help them clarify their images of ideal classroom practice.

In Rachel’s school, the architectural divisions of wings and pods conveniently forged most of the teachers from her pod into an informal new teacher support group. However, given the individual and collective questioning of their own teacher identities and their inability to enact their teacher visions in their challenging urban context, those teachers provided a support system for each other that, instead of being a support system that also supported the goals of the school, was primarily a self-serving support mechanism for survival of teachers new to the school. These teachers helped each other make it through each day, but in so doing reserved little energy to support each others’ long-term teacher health. We can learn from this about the importance of administrative guidance in the cultivation and ongoing support of first-year teachers in the building.

Ben and Connie had no first-year support systems in their schools. Ben was the only first-year teacher in his school, and Connie’s substitute status did not acknowledge her first-year status. In cases where there is no site-level first-year support group, district-level mentorship coordinators should create cross-school, small groups of first-year teachers by approximate grade levels or common interests. Annie, even though she had a
strong first-year network, would have benefited from networking with other first (or second or third) year teachers with an interest in urban education. Ben would have enthusiastically attended a bi-weekly gathering of novice male elementary teachers from across the district. If such professional networks were structured for the teachers to dialogue about how they were developing as teachers, the sharing could strengthen teacher identity, affirm teacher visions, and open possibilities for new visions for teaching. Furthermore, the professional networking may develop into social friendships, providing motivation for recreation that is often missing due to the isolation and exhaustion that the first year of teaching produces.

Upon securing a teaching position, a professional social circle gives teachers a chance to share challenges and successes (Alsup, 2006; Carver, 2004; Cookson, 2005; Hansen et al., 2004; Johnson, 2001). Some new teachers have found their most powerful support in other first-year teachers or teachers with minimal experience, with whom they can most easily identify (Alsup, 2006; Danielewicz, 2001).

Novices meeting with other novices express relief in getting help from each other to problem-solve (Carver, 2004). The teachers in Carver’s study said they valued sharing new classroom tips and strategies, troubleshooting common problems, learning from each others’ strengths, and getting to know one another. Once they moved beyond the immediate concerns of survival in the classroom, they formed a long-range plan to help each other with instructional planning, to observe each other teach, and to analyze student work together. By assisting one another, they became empowered professionals who took responsibility for their own learning.
Cookson (2005) also noted the power of first-year teacher support groups to form
a community to foster the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions for
effective teaching. Meeting for two “sacred” hours per week, the teachers focused on
classroom management, literacy, community relations, and teacher leadership. There was
never any talk of school rules, policies, or evaluation. One teacher reflected, “I learned
that the greatest support any teacher can experience professionally is from other teachers.
We learn from each other, we share each other’s victories and defeats, and we help each
other to improve our classroom practices” (p. 14).

University Instructors

At the beginning of the 2007-2008 academic year, I unexpectedly became part of
one first-year teacher’s support system through occasional online chats when we both
happened to be working on our computers. This teacher was also a graduate of our
teacher education program, but not a participant in this study. Novice23 initiated our first
instant message session at 10:15 p.m. after her first day of teaching.

Mary and I chatted tonight which was really good...its just all the things that
Riverside can't really teach you...not until you're in the thick of it...the sharks have
to get you first...then it feels like you're at the bottom of the ocean but then I'm
sure I'll come out of it...and come back for air. (8/25/07)

Before this communication, on the same evening, Novice23 had already talked with
another new teacher on the phone. Novice23 apparently needed to share her experiences,
find affirmation, and seek advice. She had already discovered after one day of teaching
that she was going to learn things she had not in college.

As the year progressed, we occasionally spent a few minutes at night talking
about her school experiences. These conversations between Novice23 and me illuminated more than the potential power of providing ongoing support for our graduates. They highlighted specific issues such as the challenge of advocating for best practice.

Through these online chats, I provided affirmation to Novice23’s experimentation with innovative instructional methods.

In the following chat several months later, I commended her for expressing to administrators her concern about the lack of student motivation in relation to prescribed, lock-step curricula.
Novice23's need to share with me, and the safety that she felt to do so, made me reflect about the importance of the student-teacher relationships developed during teacher preparation. Within challenging clinical settings where students take risks as they try on teaching, we as PDS instructors are there every day to support them. Knowing the challenges they will face as first-year teachers, and knowing the trust they have in us as master teachers and advisors, it makes ethical sense to continue this support somehow during their induction into teaching.

I am not alone in my thinking. The new teachers in Johnson's (2004) study noted the importance of support from university personnel whom they already knew and trusted. Some educational experts suggest that universities provide support for their graduates as they begin teaching (Goodlad, 1990a; Tyson, 1994). Goodlad proposed that teacher educators meet with teachers throughout their first year in a seminar format. For teachers who secure positions locally, their own teacher educators may be an especially significant support to them. For those who move away from the location of the university, Goodlad suggested that colleges arrange reciprocal, inter-institutional arrangements.

Levine's (2006) national study of 1,206 schools of education found that although 69% of the faculty members and 76% of the deans surveyed believed that the provision of mentoring programs was the most important proposal for improving teacher education, only 3% of the deans reported that their programs provide it for their graduates. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) mandates that universities provide a mentoring program for novice teachers (Goodlad, 1990a; Nugent &
Faucette, 2004). However, most colleges do not provide this support either financially or structurally (Goodlad, 1990a).

**Personal and Professional Development as Support for Teacher Identity and Vision**

**Simultaneously a Student and Teacher: A Continuum of Learning to Teach**

After watching and talking to these four participants for a full year, I am convinced that we must steer students away from a mindset that graduation from teacher education equates to full readiness to teach. Becoming a teacher is a lifelong endeavor. I am not sure that the four participants realized this, and I doubt that I ever told them. I asked my colleagues whether they tell our students that their Riverside coursework and clinical work is just a part of learning how to teach. They said they encourage students to attend workshops and pursue graduate work after they begin teaching, but nobody explicitly said they tell our students that their college years are a part of a long continuum of learning to teach.

Ben implied a sense of surprise as he repeatedly said, “It’s almost like I’m a student and a teacher at the same time.” We should not let this be a surprise. We need to be explicit that teaching is not a pre-packaged curriculum that can be taught in four years. The final thing our graduates need to hear us say is, “Regardless of where you end up, you have just begun to learn how to teach.” The first thing that they need to hear from officials in their school district is, “Regardless of where you went to college, you have just begun to learn how to teach.” Universities and schools must provide a unified message that teaching is a career-long learning adventure.
Feiman-Nemser (2001a) proposes that professional development should be a continuum of serious and sustained learning opportunities over several years from preparation to practice, based around the tasks central to teaching at each stage of development (see Table 1). She suggests that pre-service teachers begin by addressing their preconceptions of teaching at the very beginning of their preparation program, and then gradually begin exploring approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment, with the mindset that this exploration will continue throughout their careers.

When novice teachers face a classroom of students, they are still learning how to teach, and must now consider the school’s goals and outcomes, what materials and resources are available, communication and collaboration with the larger community, and most of all, the needs of their students. These site-specific aspects of teaching cannot be taught in a pre-service program, and therefore schools should provide staff development that allows the new teacher to continue learning how to teach. According to Feiman-Nemser (2001a), schools need to actively support teachers rather than allow them to discover these things on their own.

Feiman-Nemser (2001a) asserts that in order for teaching and learning to improve, norms of frank discussion must replace norms of politeness, and professional learning communities must replace groups that solely provide support. Novice and veteran teachers together can conduct inquiry into their teaching by co-designing curriculum, trying new techniques and debriefing them, and using teacher and student work samples as focuses for discussion. Post-induction teachers who better understand the responsibilities of teaching can then refine and strengthen their content and pedagogical
Table 1.  
*Central Tasks of Learning to Teach.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-service</th>
<th>Induction</th>
<th>Continuing Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Examine beliefs critically in relation to vision of good teaching</td>
<td>1. Learn the context - students, curriculum, school community</td>
<td>1. Extend and deepen subject matter knowledge for teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop subject matter knowledge for teaching</td>
<td>2. Design responsive instructional program</td>
<td>2. Extend and refine repertoire in curriculum, instruction, and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Develop an understanding of learners, learning, and issues of diversity</td>
<td>3. Create a classroom learning community</td>
<td>3. Strengthen skills and dispositions to study and improve teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Develop a beginning repertoire</td>
<td>4. Enact a beginning repertoire</td>
<td>4. Expand responsibilities and develop leadership skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Develop the tools and dispositions to study teaching</td>
<td>5. Develop a professional identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From “From Preparation to Practice: Designing a Continuum to Strengthen and Sustain Teaching,” by S. Feiman-Nemser, 2001, *Teachers College Record, 103*(6), 1013-1054.

Knowledge to better scaffold learning built upon their students’ preconceptions.

University preparation programs rarely provide ongoing professional development after their students graduate. Anderson and Olson (2006) wanted to examine the implications for university-based teacher education programs that are interested in supporting their graduates along a continuum of learning to teach. They interviewed, observed classroom instruction, and observed participation in professional development.
opportunities of fifteen teachers committed to urban education, ranging from two to six years experience. Although these teachers were not first-year teachers, the findings from the study have implications for the professional development of teachers with limited teaching experience.

Anderson and Olson (2006) identified several main themes, three of which apply directly to this study. First, what the teachers needed for professional development depended upon their developmental level.

Although full of commonsense resonance, we have noticed that this fact is rarely incorporated into formal plans for many existing professional development systems. It should be, so that teachers are provided with a range of professional opportunities and guidance about how to match their professional development choices with their own developmental locations. (p. 365)

Second, the teachers’ professional development needs depended upon their workplace context. For example, as I discussed before and was the case in Rachel’s school, teachers in schools with high teacher turnover rates have few teachers with ample experience that can mentor novices. Third, the teachers desired to collaborate with like-minded peers in and across schools for inspiration, ideas, and school improvement. They wanted more teacher-led professional development and opportunities to observe others teach.

Anderson and Olsen (2006) articulate the following implication that, along with Feiman-Nemser’s (2001b) continuum, provides timely and important information for Riverside’s teacher education program that may soon extend to an optional internship-based fifth year of teacher education that leads to a masters degree.

Despite the challenges, teacher education programs housed in universities may be better situated than many professional development providers to support their graduates with ongoing, dynamic developmental opportunities tailored according to teachers’ location along the learning-to-teach continuum. University teacher
education programs know what graduates leave their programs with and may—as is the case with Center X—have ongoing relationships with the schools in which their graduates teach....These programs are also cognizant of which teachers graduated when and, thus, can target professional development to cohorts based on their location in the career cycle. Despite these advantages, there are certainly financial and logistical limitations on what a university can provide for students once they graduate (and cease paying tuition) and become integrated into the teaching force. Although we acknowledge that universities cannot be all things to all graduates, we draw from our findings to offer some suggestions for potentially increasing the appeal, cost-effectiveness, and reach of university-sponsored professional development, particularly for programs with graduates teaching in high-priority urban schools. (p. 370)

A 1995 study by Nielsen and Montecinos also reveals implications for teacher induction. Using the Leithwood Interrelated Dimensions of Teacher Development Model (1990, as cited in Nielsen & Montecinos, 1995), the researchers asked seven master teachers to reflect upon how they progressed from their beginning teaching years to become master teachers. Based upon their conversations with the teachers, the researchers emphasized that staff development should help all teachers, including novices, to develop and solidify one’s educational vision.

The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2001) acknowledges the challenges of the generalist (as opposed to specialist) teacher. With the ever-increasing amount of content knowledge, elementary and middle school teachers cannot be expected to know everything about every discipline. However, it is important for them to “have a foundation of knowledge in each field and a disposition to learn that allows them to explore new territory with their students,” including “the ways in which each core discipline builds knowledge and understanding, uses multiple technologies, conducts inquiries, weighs evidence, and organizes itself” (p. 2).
Promoting Physical and Emotional Wellness

As detailed in Chapter VII, the emotional and physical wellness of the four participants impacted the negotiation paths of their first year of teaching. Since teacher identity blends the personal and professional self, and the demands of the first year of teaching are so great, teacher induction support systems should extend beyond the professional to the personal realm. New teacher induction program coordinators should incorporate activities that bring novice teachers together to not only learn about district policies, procedures, and curricula, but to promote physical and emotional wellness.

District personnel could be employed to lead these efforts. Such activities might include sharing sessions facilitated by teams of instructional coaches and guidance counselors, or nutrition and physical care sessions led by teams of physical education instructors and school nurses. Perhaps part of a district’s mentoring program could involve both the mentor and the novice keeping journals about their teaching, and sharing entries with each other when they meet. Novice teachers could identify their emotional and physical wellness needs, and the district could tailor their induction programs to address them.

Kottler and Zehm (2000) encourage new teachers to determine what stressors they can and cannot control. They note that often they have no direct control over the things other people do to them, the things their professional environment does to them, or what the nature of the job does to them. However, how one responds to these stressors is something individuals can control, such as whether to be hard on oneself, whether or not to fear failure, whether to doubt oneself, whether to be secure or insecure, and whether to
have a positive or negative attitude. The authors note that you can control “what you eat, who you socialize with, how you take care of your body, and what you think about,” encouraging novice teachers to think of each stressor as a challenge and not a problem; as “obstacles to be negotiated” (p. 104).

To negotiate these obstacles, Kottler and Zehm (2000) suggest that new teachers create a personal support system, learn to relax and recreate, eat nutritious foods, get plenty of sleep, engage in positive self-talk, attend professional development opportunities, and journal to trace patterns, vent, celebrate, note strategies, set goals, and experiment with new ways of thinking. Finally, they encourage novice teachers to be passionately committed to teaching by being a creative, artful teacher, being culturally sensitive, and becoming active in professional organizations. Passionate commitment to teaching fosters a strong teacher identity and an ongoing examination of one’s vision for teaching.

Summary

In Chapter X, I discussed the implications of this study for our local teacher induction program, and provided insight for teacher induction in general. Supportive personal and professional contexts impact the degree to which novice teachers can maintain their teacher identity and vision. Administrators, mentors, other teachers, and university instructors can provide contextual support novice teachers need to balance the many personal and professional demands of the first year of teaching. Working together, these parties can create a continuum of learning from pre-service to in-service teaching.
CHAPTER XI

FINAL INSIGHTS INTO FIRST-YEAR TEACHER EXPERIENCES
AND IMPLICATIONS

When I began this study, I wondered how the novice teachers who had recently graduated from our program would negotiate their first year of teaching. I was anxious to hear how they would describe their instruction. I also wondered how they would shape their instruction, how satisfied they would be with it, and how they would apply what they learned in college to their professional practice.

Based upon my own experience as a teacher, parent, staff developer, and teacher educator, I speculated that the first-year teachers might be frustrated with curricular mandates and accountability pressures that would not allow them to capitalize on fresh perspectives and creative teaching strategies. However, none of the participants felt constrained except for the frequent and paced curricular math assessments. In general, the participants were too tired and overwhelmed to worry about mandates. They just needed to know what they were supposed to teach, and whether they were on the right track.

The four participants had very different first-year experiences. After the first few interviews, it became clear to me that our teacher preparation program was just one piece of a large puzzle that contributed to their negotiation paths. I began to list all of the factors that affected their instructional choices, and found that how they taught depended upon the intersection between their teacher identity, teacher vision, and personal and professional contexts.
I searched the literature to see what other researchers had to say about teacher identity, vision, and context. I did not find any literature that implicitly or explicitly portrayed the significance of this intersection as well as did these four participants. The complexities of their human experiences revealed themselves through the decisions each teacher made as a person and professional. Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie showed me that what causes a teacher to thrive, cope, survive, or hope are not creative teaching strategies or well-rehearsed classroom management strategies.

When the teachers described their instruction, they were really describing themselves. The primary forces shaping their instruction were not ideas out of textbooks or commercial how-to books, but deep contextual factors such as with whom and where they worked and lived. Their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their teaching depended upon their ability to enact their vision for teaching, and their vision for teaching was inextricably linked to their teacher identity, which in turn was impacted by their contexts.

The experiences that Annie, Rachel, Ben, and Connie so freely shared provide insight for teacher education and teacher induction. A novice teacher is more likely to thrive amidst the unanticipated and never-ending demands of the first year of teaching if s/he has a strong teacher identity, a focused teacher vision, and personal and professional contexts that provide him or her with whatever form of support works best for that individual. Teacher preparation programs can enhance the development of teacher identity and vision, and encourage prospective teachers to develop certain human dimensions that help teachers flourish. Teacher induction programs can provide structures to proactively support novice teachers.
In summary, based upon the participants’ experiences and related literature, teacher education programs can take these steps to help prepare teachers to remain in the profession.

1. Deepen Discourse
   - Share teacher identities and visions as faculty.
   - Structure time for students to dialogue with each other, college instructors, and practicing teachers about what it means to be a teacher.
   - Structure ongoing discourse about the role of gender in elementary teaching.
   - Listen to pre-service teachers’ visions to shape instruction.

2. Align Vision and Practice
   - Structure ongoing (not only initial) observations of other teachers in an observation-reflection cycle.
   - Have elementary pre-service teachers design instruction for a variety of grouping structures. Include the creation of learning centers to engage elementary students in meaningful, cooperative learning while the teacher is working with one small group.
   - Observe and plan how to start the school year.
   - Explore teacher manuals as instructional resources.
   - Teach advocacy skills necessary to handle paced and fragmented schedules, and prescriptive curricula.
   - Infuse more instruction and practice across all coursework in inclusion, co-teaching, and instructional differentiation.

3. Make the Implicit Explicit
   - Explicitly connect all course assignments to future teaching. Never assume students are making the connections.
   - Examine clinical structures for the implicit and explicit messages they send about who teaches whom.
   - Examine “teacher training” vs. “teacher education,” and “schooling” vs. “learning.” Challenge pre-service teachers to view education not as cultural transmission and social reproduction, but as a critical examination of multiple voices.
   - Connect the cognitive and affective dimensions of teaching. Infuse curricula about caring for self, others, the environment, all living things, and people’s ideas, into teacher education (Noddings, 2000).

4. Develop the Human Dimensions of Teaching
   - Structure coursework that requires students to develop “charisma, compassion, egalitarianism, [a] sense of humor (playfulness), smarts, creativity, honesty, emotional stability, patience, [the] ability to challenge and motivate, novelty, [and] empathy” (Kottler & Zehm, 2000, p. 82).
Teacher induction programs must proactively address the professional needs specific to the novice teacher. However, since a new teacher’s personal context impacts his or her retention in the field, induction programs should go beyond the professional to the personal realm wherever possible. Here I list the considerations as revealed by the literature and the participants, followed by proactive measures to address them.

1. The problem is teacher attrition, not a teacher shortage. Fifty percent of novice teachers quit within five years.
   • We must focus on teacher retention more than recruitment.
2. Novice teachers need affirmation.
   • Principals should provide frequent, constructive feedback.
3. Novice teachers need someone experienced in which to confide.
   • Mentors should counsel, teach, and inform novices.
4. Novice teachers already have a relationship with their college instructors.
   • In applicable locations, schools and universities should partner to provide team support during the first year.
5. Novice teachers benefit from collaboration with teachers of both genders and a range of teaching experience.
   • First-year teachers should be placed on teaching teams that allow for this diversity.
6. Novice teachers need to confide in someone else who relates to their experiences.
   • Districts should forge bonds between first-year teachers through first-year teacher study groups that have the potential to become supportive social networks.
7. The first year of teaching is physically exhausting and emotionally draining.
   • Districts should create wellness programs to support the emotional and physical health of novice teachers.

Finally, the act of intently listening to first-year teachers has implications in and of itself. As educational researchers strive to understand what can be done to improve teacher retention, we must listen to novice teachers before the teachers become part of the 50% who leave the profession within five years. In the final chapter, I detail the methodology that I used to hear and interpret the teachers’ experiences.
CHAPTER XII

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how four teachers negotiated their first year of teaching given their current conditions in their school district. I hoped to illuminate what factors shaped the practice of these first-year teachers. I was interested in exploring the following questions:

1. How did the new teachers describe their first-year teaching experiences?
2. How did the new teachers shape their instruction?
3. How satisfied were they with their instruction?
4. How did what they learned in college apply to their practice?

I begin this chapter by sharing my perceptions of myself as a researcher. Second, I outline my purposes for the study. Third, I discuss qualitative inquiry as an overarching methodology for a variety of research designs. Fourth, I explain how the interpretivist design is well-suited for making meaning of novice teachers' experiences. Fifth, I discuss considerations for maximizing the quality of the study. Sixth, I detail the local context of the participants. Seventh, I discuss data collection and interpretation. Finally, I discuss considerations related to research integrity and ethics particular to this study.

My Research Roles and Dispositions

Glesne (1999) notes that researchers need to define their research roles, and that those roles are "situationally determined, depending on the context, the identities of your others, and your own personality and values" (p. 41). I wanted to interpret my own former students' novice teacher experiences in order to better understand how they
negotiated their first year of teaching. I did this simultaneously as a learner and a researcher, both to deepen my own understandings as well as to help others expand upon theirs.

I value close, personal relationships with my students and hold the assumption that because of my human subjectivity I cannot possibly separate myself from their world. When a human being conducts inquiry involving other human beings, the observer is, by virtue of being a fellow human, connected—not external—to those being observed. These connections naturally influence how the researcher observes, interprets, and communicates events. Therefore, it is not possible to apply scientific principles such as validity and reliability to the study of human participants. Different relationships and personal perspectives make it impossible to reach one, universal, objective conclusion. The dynamics of human relationships cause each interpretation to be unique.

Since I hold these assumptions, my study involved co-construction of meaning through a long-term, in-depth qualitative study. Ferguson and Ferguson (2000) note that good interpretivist studies involve “both the researcher and the participants as co-constructors of the study...[and] reflect genuine and meaningful relationships between the researcher and those researched” (p. 183). Interpretation assumes that the researcher cannot be separated from subjects. I believe that my common experiences and strong rapport with the participants served to strengthen the integrity of our interpretations.

I did, however, need to make a shift away from the teacher role I had with the participants in the professional development school. Seidman (2006) notes that hierarchy and status affect interactions and perceptions between researcher and participants. This
was not at all detrimental to my study; it was just something of which I was mindful as the study began and progressed. Although I was no longer formally evaluating the participants' teaching skills, the fact that I did so in the past may have influenced both how I interpreted events and to what degree they guarded their conversation, whether purposefully or subconsciously. The relationship between the participants and me needed to shift from instructor-student to researcher-participant, as well as educator-educator. I made it very clear in my informed consent form and through every interaction that I was there to learn about their experiences, and that there was no right or wrong in what they said or did. As the year progressed, the meaning of our relationships changed, and the needs of those relationships required ongoing negotiation of rapport. It was a professional growth experience for all of us to work together in a research capacity, reflectively learning together about the experiences of beginning teaching; something of which I fully intend to do more in the future.

My identity as a teacher affected my perceptions and interpretations. I am very concerned about the professional beginnings of new teachers, particularly those whom I have directly taught and from whom I have already learned. The context of this study and the identities of the participants were extremely important to me as I daily work with prospective teachers who are immersed in the current culture of an elementary school. I was a public school teacher myself in this same local area for over a decade. In the early 1980s, I was a first-year teacher like they were, and experienced some of the same joys and frustrations they did.
Another consideration in my research role is my disposition toward a constructivist pedagogy (i.e. children constructing and reconstructing meaning in relation to their developing understanding of the world, with the teacher as the guide for furthering understandings rather than the dispenser of presumed external understandings), and learner-centered views about school structures and culture. When I worked professionally in staff development for Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, I developed strong philosophies about the primacy of a strong learning community within each classroom and among the school faculty. I began to strongly endorse flexible blocks of instructional time, integrated curricula, deep explorations of topics, and student responsibility for learning. Unfortunately, I have not found these types of learning environments in the schools within 100 miles of my home, and I am always on the lookout for them. I went into the study with an expectation that the schools where I observed would likely not meet my standards for student-centered structures and curriculum. Since I had such compassion for these novice teachers and wanted them to be professionally fulfilled, I had to be constantly aware of this predisposition so it did not influence how they perceived their school environment.

**My Purposes for the Study**

I wanted to conduct this study for three reasons: (1) to inform my own practice, (2) to offer the reader insight into how novice teachers interpret their beginning teaching experiences, and (3) to provide reflection and support for first-year teachers. First, I hoped to improve my professional practice as a result of a deeper understanding of our graduates' early teaching experiences. I constantly strive to become a more informed and
empathetic teacher educator and human being. Since the passing of *No Child Left Behind,* I have witnessed a drastic loss of teacher autonomy in our local schools regarding decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. As a teacher educator, I have asked myself what I should do to best prepare our prospective teachers for the conditions they will encounter. In order to inform myself, I wished to deeply explore the experiences of new teachers in our current, local context. I wanted to know how our graduates make meaning of their early teaching experiences and what factors influence their instructional decisions. My assumption was that our mutual interpretations of these experiences would impact my teaching identity, philosophy, and pedagogy.

Second, I hope readers of my study will interpret my interpretations in efforts to expand upon their own understandings of novice teacher experiences. I hope that novice teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, and people involved in school policy who read the study will develop a greater awareness of novice teachers’ needs. Locally, the interpretations of this study could assist in the improvement of our teacher education program at Riverside, as well as the induction programs of area school districts.

Finally, I hoped the participants would better understand their own experiences as together we made sense of them. I hoped that as we proceeded through this study together, they would find opportunities for reflection and support in our mutual attention to their experiences, and in the personal and professional comaraderie of the other first-year teachers in the study. In terms of reciprocity, my listening to them and my facilitating as they shared their experiences with me and each other served as an important source of support for them during their first year of teaching. "The
interviewing process particularly provides an occasion for reciprocity. By listening to participants carefully and seriously, you give them a sense of importance and specialness” (Glesne, 1999, p. 127). The reflections of these participants are very important to me, and now potentially to the readers of this study. I hope the participants also find satisfaction in knowing they are contributing to the research base of the profession.

Qualitative Inquiry

The classic and pervasive purpose of qualitative research has been to adopt, create, and use a variety of nonquantitative research methods to describe the rich interpersonal, social, and cultural contexts of education more fully than can quantitative research. In one sense, this is the major purpose of all qualitative research—to inform our deep understanding of educational institutions and processes through interpretation and narrative description. (Soltis, 1990, p. 249)

Qualitative research is an overarching methodology that encompasses many different forms of inquiry. Regardless of the approach, the intent of qualitative research is to “help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). As opposed to quantitative research which disaggregates a phenomenon into parts that become variables, qualitative research examines how the parts of a phenomenon work together to help us make sense of the whole. The data of qualitative research are descriptive, in the form of “people’s own written or spoken words and observable behavior” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 5). In qualitative research, “the researcher is necessarily involved in the lives of the subjects…. And even more than this involvement, the researcher must identify and empathize with his or her subjects in order to understand them from their own frames of reference” (p. 8).
Eisner (1991) highlights six main features of qualitative research: it is field-focused, the researcher is the research instrument, its nature is interpretive, the product has expressive language (voice), it attends to particulars, and its success is measured by its coherence, insight, and instrument utility. In order to deeply understand the participants, it is important to intimately know and become a part of their contexts. The researcher makes sense of the contexts by engaging in them, and then tries to explain why things happen as they do within those contexts. Qualitative researchers do not remain neutral but display their “signatures” in order to make it “clear that a person, not a machine, was behind the words” (p. 36). The expression reveals the researcher’s empathy for the participants. Qualitative research does not attempt to arrive at general statements, but to illuminate distinct features of what is being studied. Eisner notes, however, that qualitative research can create opportunities for “retrospective generalizations,” or the “encountering or formulating [of] an idea that allows us to see our past experience in a new light” (p. 205). Eisner adds that in qualitative research there is no attempt to find cause and effect relationships, but to persuade through reason and judgment.

Qualitative researchers explore the quality of human experiences as explained by those who experience them, as I did with the novice teachers. These qualities cannot be deeply explored nor understood by gathering and analyzing quantitative data. “Through the use of qualitative research methods, research grounded in the voices and in the contradictory realities of teachers implicitly opposes technocratic research directions that seek to ‘improve’ education without the teachers’ knowledge” (Britzman, 1991, p. 54). As Bogdan and Taylor explain, “Such concepts as beauty, pain, faith, suffering,
frustration, hope, and love can be studied as they are defined and experienced by real people in their everyday lives” (1975, p. 5). Qualitative research allows the researcher and the reader to empathize with the participants’ experiences as fellow human beings, thereby promoting a deeper understanding.

**Interpretivist Design**

In an interpretivist mode of inquiry, assumptions are that reality is socially constructed and the “variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure” (Glesne, 1999, p. 6). Smith and Hodkinson (2002) remind us that we place such social constructions (and reconstructions of those constructions) in line with other reconstructions in efforts to deepen our understanding of the world. These cumulative understandings are not *givens*, but reconstructions bound by place and time. What I attempted to do through this study is take a close look at the experiences of a few people at a particular time and place in history, and as a living research instrument, interpret those experiences.

According to Glesne (1999), the purposes of interpretivist research are to contextualize, understand, and interpret. “The process of contextualizing...does not depend on breaking data apart, but in finding the overarching story in a more holistic approach” (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2000, p. 182). Ferguson and Ferguson note that through interpretivist research we have the opportunity to “think differently about what we already know, to factor in different ways of knowing, different takes on the situation, and different meanings” (p. 181). As the primary instrument in qualitative research, it is
the researcher's job to interpret the data. The researcher inductively “searches for patterns, seeks pluralism [and] complexity” (Glesne, 1999, p. 6).

As Dewey notes, “teaching and learning [is] a continuous process of reconstruction of experience” (1938, p. 87). As a teacher, I bring Dewey’s perspective (that reconstruction is how we come to understand things) to my teaching of students. This view provided the foundation for my research with the first-year teachers. Within the context of this study, the participants and I taught and learned from each other about the experiences of first-year teachers, adding to such understandings already constructed by others before us.

Considerations for Maximizing Quality of the Study

Ferguson and Ferguson (2000) emphasize, “There is no one right way to do qualitative research; there are, nonetheless, wrong ways of doing it” (p. 180). According to these authors, truth is measured in terms of both accuracy (which in this case means through convincing interpretation of both the participants’ perceptions and the consequences of those perceptions) and value. A study’s quality also depends upon its utility and relevance.

Although interpretivist research, by the very nature of interpretation, does not attempt to arrive at an objective truth or external reality, it does attempt to develop convincing conclusions and examine the potential consequences of those conclusions. It is the researcher’s responsibility to interpret and honor the participants’ perceptions of reality. The truth of their world is bound by a synthesis of their values, needs, interests, and experiences, which in turn drives their thought, discourse, and action. This resulting
synthesis of understanding will have consequences for the participants, their students, the local community, and the field of education. How the participants interpreted their professional world reflected and will reflect back to them in an ongoing and reconstructive manner, influencing their instructional decisions and how they interacted and will interact with students, parents, administrators, colleagues, and policy-makers. My research therefore involved the analysis of both their perceptions and the consequences that may result from those perceptions, now and in the future.

The results of an interpretivist study have integrity if they are accompanied by a thorough description of what the researcher did to dig beneath surface-level conclusions. This description should include a report of how the information was gathered, how the phenomenon was captured, and how the interpretations reflect the participants’ perspectives (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2000). “We hear them speak about themselves and their experiences and, though we do not accept their perspectives as truth, develop empathy which allows us to see the world from their points of view” (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 9). My task as a researcher was to “cut through commonsense understandings of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’” (p. 11). I acknowledge that my job as an interpretivist researcher is to propose interpretations given the assumptions that truth is a consensus of meaning and reality is socially constructed.

Finally, this study has potential for emancipatory utility both for the participants and for future study and action. Ferguson and Ferguson (2000) refer to emancipatory utility as “letting them tell their stories,” and beyond that, for “challenging the structures, policies, and practices that disempower and marginalize entire segments of the
population” (p. 184). Based upon the results of this study in relation to trends evident in the literature and through my own informal observations, I have already thoroughly examined and begun to revise my teacher preparation pedagogy. I will share my interpretations with our education department, and we will consider them as we revise our courses. Based upon a general summary of the participants’ challenges, I will share ideas with the local school district administration on how to structure meaningful support systems for novice teachers.

Freire (2000) discusses how cultural action either serves to preserve or transform cultural structures; to perpetuate domination or lead to liberation. Teacher educators can serve as agents of cultural change, taking “advantage of the contradiction of manipulation by posing it as a problem to the oppressed, with the objective of organizing them” (p. 152). I believe that if we expect the future students of prospective teachers to question their world and to think critically, their teachers need to first do so. If we expect future teachers to do so, then their teacher educators must continuously engage in these thinking processes.

Participant Selection and Gaining Access

My intention was to interpret how four new teachers made meaning of their first-year teaching experiences. In order to conduct multiple interviews and observations over the course of a year with each participant, and bring the participants together for focus groups, for their convenience I eliminated all possible candidates who secured positions more than 100 miles away from Riverside. I selected four participants from the group of students who (1) within the past year had earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary
Education from Riverside and not yet held a certified teaching position, (2) secured a position to teach in a general elementary classroom during the 2007-2008 academic year, and (3) resided within 100 miles of Riverside. Since three of the four participants had secured positions within the same school district—the main district with whom Riverside partners for clinical teaching—I chose to localize the study even further. Fortunately, a fourth participant secured a long-term substitute position in the same district. Her participation in the study from a novice and substitute teacher perspective added interesting interpretations and consequences that may not have otherwise been revealed.

I debated whether to limit participation to those graduates who secured placement in a general elementary classroom. I taught all of the graduating elementary education generalists, K-12 music teachers, and elementary special education teachers who secured positions for the 2007-2008 school year, but the nature of the campus and clinical coursework of those three groups and my role within their undergraduate coursework varied greatly. Furthermore, due to issues of accountability, special education policies, and differences between their roles within school faculties, the experiences of novice teachers are different between those teaching in a general elementary classroom and those teaching in a specialist or special education position. This is why I believed the study would be more cohesive if the participants were all general elementary teachers.

It was easy for me to gain access to participants and their schools. The combination of (1) regular informal updates between education department members regarding our graduates’ employment, (2) the positive rapport I had with my students during their pre-service program, and (3) the fact that once they graduate I no longer
evaluate them for grades, helped me gain access as well as approval for research with human participants. Additionally, as a former employee of our city's school district, and as a supervisor of student teachers in the district, I already had developed a strong rapport with the building and district-level administrators who acted as gatekeepers for the in-school observations.

Data Collection and Interpretation

In qualitative research, the interpretation of the data is inseparable from interviewing, observing, transcribing, and even gaining access. Data collection and interpretation are ongoing and simultaneous. As Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggested, I read and reread the data to identify themes, and I developed concepts and theoretical propositions in an ongoing manner. I returned to the literature I had read, and investigated new branches of literature throughout the data collection and interpretation. I immersed myself in the data repeatedly, examining and contextualizing it—breaking it down and assembling it again as a whole—to refine my interpretations.

I collected data for a full year, beginning in May of 2007 and ending in June of 2008. I conducted interviews (six to eight with each participant, 60-90 minutes per interview), focus groups (four: one before the school year, one early the first semester, one early in the second semester, and one the last day of the school year), WebCt entries (primarily through October), and observations and stimulated recall sessions (three for each participant: one early in the year, one midyear, and one in the spring). I also gave each participant a journal at the beginning of the study, encouraging them to record their experiences and voluntarily share them with me. This combination of data sources
provided an opportunity for me to richly interpret the novice teachers’ individual and collective interpretations of their first-year negotiations. Danielewicz (2001), in her study of teacher identity development, emphasized the power of representation through language:

"The most powerful function of language...is its ability to represent a person's thoughts, experiences, ideas, interpretations, through its many forms and gestures, including spoken and written texts....These representations can be actions, behaviors, or performances, simple or complicated, unitary or extended, happening on one form or in multilayered combinations of forms. Whatever their shape and venue, self-representations are not individual or isolated occurrences but are embedded in the flow of social interaction in specific contexts." (p. 168)

For twelve months, I carefully observed and listened to the participants individually and collectively, repeatedly in person and through their audio and video recordings, making meaning of how they negotiated their first year of teaching as reflected in both their verbal and nonverbal representations.

**Personal Documents: Interviews**

Personal documents help place the person in a historical, political, and social context (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). "We gain an intimate view of organizations, relationships, and events from the perspective of one who has experienced them him-or-herself and who may have different premises about the world than we have" (p. 7).

Through multiple interviews, I explored each teacher’s interpretation of his/her identities and experiences before, throughout, and after his/her first year of teaching. Seidman (2006) notes that “interviewing is most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration...it is deeply satisfying to researchers who
are interested in others' stories" (p. 14). As co-constructors of understanding, the participants and I continued to build relationships of trust and support as the year progressed, making adjustments in the interview processes as needed to maximize our learning.

**Collective Participant Interpretations: Focus Groups and Blog Entries**

I gathered the teachers together in person for collective reflection once before, twice during, and once the last day of their first year of teaching. The first focus group was the most structured, and seeing their need to ask each other questions and provide each other suggestions, the next two were more informal and spontaneous. The final focus group after the last day of school was a combination of structured questions to help them reflect upon their first year, and informal conversation.

I also set up an electronic communication site (WebCt) where they could share experiences and insights as desired and when convenient, and where I could interject questions as well. The participants communicated frequently for the first month, and then the entries sharply decreased. As with the lack of journal writing, this lack of WebCt communication provided support for the interpretations described in their chapters regarding exhaustion and the lack of enough time for personal and professional activities.

Merriam (1998) noted that the collection of electronic data is a relatively new phenomenon in qualitative research, and there are unique aspects of it to consider. She emphasized the need to consider the effects of the online medium on ethical practice, as texts can be altered and saved. I assured the participants that I would respect their privacy and their communications by keeping the raw data in its original state (except for
removing names), and between myself and them. The WebCt site could and still can only be accessed by the four participants and me. Merriam also noted that online communication often produces a different perception of the sender on the part of the receiver. In my case, knowing the teachers as well as I did through the PDS experience, having already established a trusting relationship with them, and by maintaining face-to-face contact through ongoing interviews and observations, none of these issues became a problem.

Observations and Stimulated Recall

To develop a contextual and empathetic understanding of each teacher’s experiences, I conducted multiple observations in their classrooms. Observations of each teacher in his or her instructional setting over time provided me with an opportunity to personally interpret their interactions with students and colleagues. I videotaped all of the observations and conducted stimulated recall sessions with the teacher within two days afterward. This further helped us co-construct an understanding of the events that occurred in the teaching and learning process.

Immersion in the Data: Collecting, Categorizing, and Questioning

Interpretation, by contrast, is not derived from rigorous, agreed-upon, carefully specified procedures, but from our efforts at sense making, a human activity that includes intuition, past experience, emotion—personal attributes of human researchers that can be argued endlessly but neither proved nor disproved to the satisfaction of all. Interpretation invites the examination, the ‘pondering,’ of data in terms of what people make of it. (Wolcott, 2001, p. 33)

I lived Wolcott’s quote as I deliberated over the plethora of data before me, reading transcriptions and fieldnotes, listening to audio recordings, and watching video recordings repeatedly. Although I read qualitative research handbooks, I did not follow
any specific research procedures. I thought I had already known my participants well as college students, but experiencing the joys and pains of their first year of teaching with them in person and on paper brought forth unexpected emotion in me and a deeper personal connection with them. I needed to find a way to tell their stories in a way that most fully revealed their human experiences and compelled readers to feel ownership in their struggles and successes to the point of wanting to take action to support them.

The further I delved into my study, the more I related to a critical point made by Gallagher (1995). She discovered, after struggling during her initial qualitative research experiences to make her data analysis rigorous, that the procedures described in qualitative research handbooks often went against the theory behind qualitative research itself. She concluded that although “the process of data analysis is central to conducting qualitative research...coding, managing, and displaying data should be a meaning making process, not a procedure that is to be executed with exacting proficiency” (p. 26). Gallagher found that the act of applying specific procedures made her participants’ lives seem “distant and unreal” (p. 25), and prevented her from personalizing her analysis process.

I stayed close to my participants’ experiences throughout the entire process of data collection and interpretation. I transcribed over 1,000 pages of interviews, observations, stimulated recall sessions, and focus groups myself so that I could hear and listen repeatedly not only to their words, but to their pace, volume, tone, inflections, and moments of hesitation. Additionally, the video recordings of their observations and focus group sessions provided valuable nonverbal information as I could return to them to
observe their facial expressions and body language as they interacted with their students and each other. I preferred to work with hard-copy, color-coded and cut-apart print-outs of transcriptions so I could handle and maneuver a lot of data at once, organizing and categorizing them as patterns emerged literally before my eyes. After examining new data and comparing them to former interpretations, I formed questions for my next interview sessions. I repeated this cyclical collection-categorization-question process each time I gathered data, until about two-thirds of the way through the year when I drafted written frameworks for each participant and for their common experiences through which to infuse additional relevant data gathered later in the school year.

Writing to Inform Data Interpretation and Further Collection

Wolcott (2001) strongly influenced my interpretation processes as he emphasized, “Early writing encourages you to make a systematic inventory of what you already know, what you need to know, and what you are looking for” (p. 24). I began writing the participants’ first-semester narratives in December, and had a partial draft of each formed by early February. I did this knowing that I would gather data for another four months, but feeling a need to begin documenting my perceptions in some kind of organized format. Once I started writing, not a day passed when I did not examine recordings and/or write their stories. I learned firsthand what Wolcott meant when he said, “The conventional wisdom is that writing reflects thinking. I am drawn to a stronger position: writing is thinking” (p. 22). Writing was the single activity that most shaped and solidified my interpretations as I collected and processed the information that the data presented to me.
As I proceeded with my data collection, I personally analyzed both the data and my interpretation of it. Glesne (1999) quotes, “Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise” (p. 109). All of my values, attitudes, prior experiences, and beliefs about teacher education, early teaching, and the current conditions of elementary education were a part of this study; there was no way to separate them from the study. They were all a part of my identity and I was the primary research instrument. However, as Glesne reminds us, qualitative researchers can take efforts to monitor (rather than control) their subjectivity. Informed by Gallagher’s (1995) early qualitative research experiences, I kept a researcher log to record my own thoughts throughout the research process. It was a messy but chronological collection of post-it notes, torn-edged notebook papers, and printed-out emails to myself placed between pages of a spiral notebook where I journaled, sometimes at length and many times simply jotting down a question or an idea.

“Believability does not mean that one applied method accurately; it means that one accounts for his or herself honestly and with integrity so that the reader can judge the believability of the work” (Gallagher, 1995, pp. 32-33). Gallagher informed my methodology through her proposition that qualitative research methods be used selectively as tools to support the researcher’s specific intentions rather than as prescribed procedures used to “insure the believability of one’s results” (p. 33). For example, qualitative research handbooks suggest procedures such as member checks, audit trails, and peer de-briefing, intended to increase research validity. Gallagher (1995) provided convincing arguments supported by reflections upon her own research that question the
alignment of these procedures with foundational beliefs underlying qualitative research. For example, member checks assume that the participants’ interpretations are more accurate than those of the researcher, yet the philosophy underlying qualitative research is that no one person’s interpretations are more accurate than another’s. Likewise, while carefully maintaining an audit trail is valuable for helping the researcher to “discern relationships and subtleties” (p. 30), the thought that another person could retrace an audit trail and come up with the same conclusions—and that that would be desirable—assumes that interpretations are either correct or incorrect. Peer-debriefing sessions also left Gallagher with the “familiar nagging self-doubt” (p. 30) that the opinions and interpretations of others were not getting her closer to any certain truth. She encouraged researchers to use peer debriefing as a conversation that does not focus on “erroneous purposes and artificial structures” (p. 31), but rather as an unprescribed manner in which to enrich a study. Throughout my study, I confidentially shared my questions and interpretations with three fellow doctoral students who were also writing their dissertations and for whom I became a listener. It was extremely valuable to have someone listen as I verbally articulated my interpretations, for my spoken words helped me clarify my thinking, make new connections, or see things differently. Additionally, the listeners offered insights and questions that helped me shape further interviews and identify potential themes to explore.

Ethical Considerations

“The point I would like to make here is that doing qualitative descriptive research places the researcher in face-to-face relationships with other human beings, and ethical
problems of a personal as well as a professional nature are bound to arise” (Soltis, 1990, p. 252). Soltis categorizes ethical issues that may arise during qualitative research as personal, professional, or public. Personal issues include dilemmas that arise in interpersonal contexts such as inadvertently harming another person by one’s actions or inactions. Ethical issues can also arise as a community of professionals works together within professional norms that may impact the way in which the research is conducted. Finally, we must consider the larger public impact as we “raise ethical questions of how we advance or diminish the rights or wrongs of our society by means of our work within it” (p. 251).

As I wrote the participants’ narratives, there were times when the one quote that would have best illustrated a point was also one that could have potentially compromised a participant’s or another person’s professional position.

Studying the personal practical knowledge of teachers, for example, requires a research relationship based upon mutuality, respect, and the recognition of vulnerability of both researcher and teacher. No psychometric measures distance the researcher from the teacher. Indeed, it is for researchers to narrate and interpret the words of others and render explicit their own process of understanding. This type of knowledge production requires the researcher to be sensitive to representing the voices of those experiencing educational life as sources of knowledge, and to be committed to preserving their dignity and struggle. (Britzman, 1991, p. 51)

The participants were incredibly forthcoming in their conversations with me, requiring me to not only strive to best represent their interpretations, but to carefully consider what to exclude from their narratives as potentially harmful information. As noted previously, my first purpose for the study was to inform my own practice. Despite a carefully selected and edited account of what I discovered, the study in its entirety with all of its
details—published or unpublished—helped me to understand what my students may encounter during their first year, and what I can do to help them succeed.

Finally, the results of the study require me to take professional action as a change agent and communicator of the resulting implications to both our college and the school district. I can initiate improvements in our teacher preparation program and in the induction processes of area schools—changes that maximize and align teacher vision, identity, and context—in efforts to develop, support, and retain good teachers.
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