A LIFE PRESERVER FOR THE "SINK OR SWIM" YEARS:

AN INVESTIGATION OF NEW TEACHER OBSTACLES

AND THE IMPACT OF A PEER SUPPORT GROUP

Except where reference is made to the work of others, the work described in this dissertation is my own or was done in collaboration with my advisory committee. This dissertation does not include proprietary or classified information.

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A LIFE PRESERVER FOR THE "SINK OR SWIM" YEARS: AN INVESTIGATION OF NEW TEACHER OBSTACLES AND THE IMPACT OF A PEER SUPPORT GROUP

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VITA

Shannon (Lindsey) Brandt, daughter of Phil and Mary Sue Lindsey was born February 27, 1972, in Savannah, Georgia. She grew up in Atlanta, Georgia and graduated from Lakeside High School in June of 1990. Shannon went on to receive her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Auburn University in 1994. She began her teaching career at Wrights Mill Road Elementary School in Auburn, Alabama. While teaching fourth grade she returned to Auburn University and earned a Master's Degree in Elementary Education in 1996. She formed a strong partnership with several professors at Auburn University, providing demonstration lessons for methods courses, supervising lab students and interns, co-authoring journal articles, and collaborating on current issues in education. In the fall of 2002, she began doctoral studies in elementary education at Auburn University. She has been married to Chris Alan Brandt since August of 1997. They have two children, Christian and Caroline.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The high number of teachers leaving the profession after only a few years of teaching has created a need for teacher education programs and school systems to address the obstacles new teachers are facing and look at ways to provide support. School systems lose time and money searching for candidates to fill teaching positions. In addition, student achievement can suffer when teachers do not remain in the profession long enough to gain valuable experience and professional development.

This multiple case study investigated the obstacles perceived by nineteen new elementary teachers in a small southeastern United States community. Interviews and written reflections were utilized to understand the problems the new teachers were facing.

A peer support group was created for the first through fifth grade teachers, and the impact of these monthly meetings was explored.

The qualitative data provided thick descriptions of the participants' beliefs and constant comparative analysis generated five main obstacles: lack of administrative support, loss of empowerment, bureaucratic demands, difficulties with parents, and opposition from veteran teachers. Although identified in previous studies, discipline problems and isolation were not named as significant obstacles in the study.

Data also revealed that veteran and new teachers agreed on the problems that plague new teachers, but the obstacles perceived by the administrators differed. Each group named obstacles outside of their personal control instead of reflecting on their individual weaknesses and areas to improve.

Another major goal of the study was to examine the role a new teacher support group could play in helping the new teachers. The data strongly suggested the benefits of the monthly meetings in the areas of refining practice, resolving problems, and renewing purpose. Key components of the meetings were a trusting community of teachers in similar positions, an agenda driven by the participants' needs, and the opportunity for new teachers to ask for advice and share ideas.

The study may offer support for the need to develop undergraduate teaching programs that better prepare teachers for the common obstacles each will face and for school systems to design effective support for new teachers. In addition, the results may impact school systems to promote communication between new teachers, veteran teachers, and administrators in an effort to understand the obstacles each is facing and to personally reflect on ways to alleviate some of those obstacles.

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I wholeheartedly thank the new teachers who participated in this study. They have become my friends and respected colleagues. A special thank you to my Wrights Mill Road Elementary family for their inspiration and encouragement, especially Sylvia, Malee, and Cindy for being my support group.

My parents, Phil and Mary Sue Lindsey, taught me from the beginning that I could reach any goal I set. Their dedication as teachers, inspired me to enter the teaching profession, but their support as parents has allowed me to realize my dreams. To my husband, Chris, I am indebted. His dedication, unwavering support, faith, and unconditional love made this project possible. My children, Christian and Caroline, have graciously given me quiet time to think and write. Their love of school and learning remind me daily how important a teacher's job is.

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Style manual used

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, (5th ed.) Washington, D.C.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, one of the biggest concerns in education is teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2003). As many as half of the people in the United States who enter teaching leave within the first five years on the job (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) and many researchers describe the struggles of the first year of teaching as a "sink or swim" experience (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Reiman & Parramore, 1994; Weiss & Weiss, 1999). As a teacher who has not only survived, but has also thrived in the classroom for the past ten years, I began wondering why so many of my colleagues enter the classroom with a spark in their eyes, only to leave a year or two later. I remember my own experiences as a novice elementary school teacher: the countless hours spent planning, the uncertainty of each field trip and new activity, the trials and tribulations of developing effective classroom management. Often it seemed the task was too much, but then a lesson would excite my students or an administrator would offer a word of encouragement, and I was recharged, ready for the next challenge.

As I traded my novice status to one of experience, I began noticing that many of the new teachers I worked with were not getting enough of the positive rewards of teaching to outweigh the negative aspects. I observed their defeated looks and listened to their frustrations. As two new teachers joined my grade level, I was cognizant of their trials, including demanding parents, an inundation of paperwork, and difficulties managing the demands of small group instruction.

A wealth of research supports the idea that new teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Menchaca, 2003). Studies have listed external factors for teacher attrition such as family obligations, transfers, and health reasons, but also note internal factors such as school organizational conditions, lack of administrative support, and relationships with parents (Certo & Fox, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Inman & Marlow, 2004). After researching the factors contributing to the high attrition rate, several encompassing themes emerged, and they were consistent with the issues I was seeing in my own school system.

Research consistently cited classroom discipline as one of the main reasons for beginning teachers' dissatisfaction (Hertzog, 2002; Levin, Hoffman, & Badiali, 1985; Meister & Melnick, 2003). Thinking back to my own experiences, I could readily relate to frustrations of student misbehavior. I remember trying many strategies, including putting names on the board, taking away recess, and rewarding good behavior. In fact, one of the highlights in my teaching career happened late in my first year of teaching. It was a three-day professional development opportunity to work with other teachers to develop a multi-faceted, positive approach to classroom discipline. This was a heaven-sent opportunity and eased many of the problems I was experiencing in the classroom. Could I offer the new teachers in my system this same sort of lifeline for working through classroom management and student behavior problems?

Another theme uncovered in the research about teacher's job dissatisfaction was the feeling of isolation. The way our schools are designed makes collaboration with other teachers difficult. Feiman-Nemser (2003) suggests, "Without easy access to one another, teachers may feel reluctant to share problems or ask for help, believing that good

teachers figure things out on their own" (p. 29). And in many schools when teachers do get together it is for a quick gripe session in the teachers' workroom. The isolation new teachers feel can make their problems seem insurmountable. Could I offer the new teachers in my system a peer support group to share, connect, and encourage one another?

Adding to the list of reasons identified in current literature, teachers leave the profession due to the loss of empowerment. Futrell (1999) describes the frustration that many teachers feel because of the "rigid, bureaucratic hierarchy in which teachers are treated like children rather than professionals" (p. 31). I remember the irony of having my classroom thermostat behind a locked box, yet given the responsibility to teach and supervise 24 young children. "Teachers are demoralized by the lack of autonomy and professional status afforded to them and as many as one-half of all new teachers respond by leaving the profession" (Snider, 1999, p. 64). While I became used to asking the custodian to unlock my thermostat when the weather changed, I better learned to exert my voice on issues of instruction, assessment, and other decision making issues. Could I offer the new teachers in my system a chance to be heard and the reassurance that their voice mattered?

Finally, the overwhelming teacher workload and resulting stress has caused burnout for many teachers. It is not uncommon for beginning teachers to work in their classrooms until evening, only to go home with more papers to grade and lessons to plan. The ever-increasing paper trail of documentation can make even the most organized teacher cringe. An elementary school teacher is responsible for a multitude of items, including reports about struggling students, newsletters to parents about the happenings

of the classroom, and even the daily chore of reporting the lunch count. Not to mention the hours required for creating engaging lesson plans. These lesson plans should include small group instruction with each child being taught at their level, a mix of various materials and methods to reach children with different learning styles, all of the skills in the state course of study, along with character education and adequate integration of technology. Meanwhile the makeup of the classroom probably includes students several grade levels ahead and others several grade levels below. Students receiving special education services and students who speak English as a second language are most likely found in the class, too. Despite the instruction teachers receive in college about how to run a classroom full of diverse learners, the reality of the task can be more than some can handle. Inman and Marlow (2004) explain how teachers just entering the profession experience "classroom or reality shock," often mistaking the apprehension they feel as an indication that they made a mistake in choosing to become teachers. Could I offer the new teachers in my system some effective coping strategies, organizational hints, and the encouragement that the job does become easier with each year of experience?

With the influence of my own experiences and corroboration from recent research (Certo & Fox, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Menchaca, 2003), I decided to explore the obstacles new teachers face during their first year of teaching. I set out to begin an induction group to support new teachers in my school system with their classroom discipline problems, feelings of isolation, empowerment struggles, and workload stress. With approval from my principal, the principals at the other four elementary schools, and from district administrators I began an induction group called T.E.A.M. (Teachers Encouraging and Mentoring). Through this group, I wanted to find

out what happens when new elementary teachers are provided the opportunity to come together in a community of learners to work through the challenges facing new teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Currently in my school system, a mentor is assigned by the school principal when a teacher is hired. The mentor is not provided any compensation, release time, or training. While some pairings are the beginning of a supportive, collaborative relationship, many are not. Saphier, Freedman, and Aschheim (2001) compare the mentor-mentee relationship as a blind date: "For too many teachers, the mentoring pairing process results in a 'blind date.' The teachers do not know each other and neither partner has input into the pairing" (p. 36). After studying effective ways of supporting new teachers, Wong (2004a) is critical of the "mentoring only" set up. He states that despite the popularity of mentoring over the past two decades as a means for helping new teachers, the truth is that research does not support its effectiveness.

However, this does not mean that novice teachers should be left on their own. Instead, a multi-faceted induction program has been shown to increase beginning teachers' job satisfaction and lower the percentage that leaves the profession (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Wong (2004a) states, "Educators must go beyond mentoring to comprehensive induction programs, if they hope to redesign professional development" (p. 44). The creation of a peer support group was meant to supplement the mentor program already in place. By establishing this group and soliciting input about new teachers' needs, I could begin to examine the obstacles facing the new teachers in my school system and initiate the establishment of a complete induction program.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study was an effort to explore the successes and struggles of beginning teachers and to examine the role a peer support group played in aiding the teachers. The teaching profession is unique in that it asks a first-year teacher to have the same role as a veteran teacher. Both are expected to teach specified objectives to the children assigned to them. The veteran teacher has not only years of professional development and readings and a reputation, but also the wisdom gained through daily experience in the classroom. Because the beginning teacher has only the training he or she received in an undergraduate program, it is imperative that support be given to help new teachers succeed. "A number of studies have found that well-designed mentoring programs raise retention rates for new teachers by improving their attitudes, feelings of efficacy, and instructional skills" (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Understanding how to best support new teachers in order for them to best serve their students drives the purpose of this study.

Limitations of the Study

Through honest accounts and thick description, the researcher hopes to lessen the effects of the limitations of the research design on the outcomes of this project. The study is limited in that it reflects research from elementary teachers teaching grades one through five in one school system.

The school system in which the study takes place is one of affluence. It is located in a university town, which places a high degree of importance on public education. The community generously supports the schools with both time and money. New elementary

teachers in other school systems would likely identify different obstacles related to their situation, as would teachers in the upper grade levels.

The surveys used in the study were developed and administered by the researcher; therefore, they may not be appropriate for use in other studies with similar aims.

The researcher was also the facilitator and coordinator of the T.E.A.M. induction group. It is assumed that the teachers' responses were not influenced by this dual role.

Additionally, this project followed these new teachers during the first year of the induction meetings. This limited the scope of the results; future research is needed to realize long term effects of the peer support group on the teachers' satisfaction and longevity in the teaching profession.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is two-fold. First, it gives beginning teachers a voice to tell the stories of their struggles and successes and their need for developing supportive peer relationships. Each month the teachers' group provided support for improving practice and handling problems. The monthly meetings empowered beginning teachers to speak their minds and offer their ideas in a safe and nurturing community. All too often, beginning teachers are left to sink or swim and their voices are lost in the clamor to stay afloat.

Second, through the voices of these beginning teachers, this study can enable undergraduate elementary programs and school administrators to better understand the obstacles first year teachers must overcome and the role a peer support group plays in helping teachers meet the challenges. This information can help university curriculum developers design effective preparation. In addition, elementary school administrators

may gain a better understanding of the challenges new teachers face, leading them to offer better mentor programs, induction groups, and professional development.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was driven by two major questions which focused on the problems new teachers face and the ways they interpret, react, and seek solutions to the problems. The questions that guided the study are:

1. What obstacles do new teachers identify?
2. Where do new teachers go for help with problems?
    a. What is the influence of the existing mentoring program on new teachers?
    b. What is the influence of the new T.E.A.M. support group on new teachers?

Definition of Terms

It is my intention to clarify the following terms that are used throughout this study. The definitions presented are not the only ones used in today's literature, but are the ones that best fit the context of this study.

Beginning Teacher, New Teacher, Novice Teacher - A teacher in his/her first, second, or third year of teaching.

Induction group – "A process used by districts to train, support, and retain new teachers. It is a highly organized and comprehensive staff development process, involving many people and components, which typically continues as a sustained process for two to five years" (Wong, 2004b, p. 106).

Mentor - A veteran teacher assigned to a novice teacher by an administrator for the purpose of helping the novice teacher.

Empowerment - The opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and influence the way one performs in one's profession (Melenyzer, 1990).

Autonomy - The degree to which teachers perceive that they have control over decisions that are important to them (Short & Greer, 1997).

Researcher's Theoretical Perspective

Most researchers choose to study issues important to them. I am no exception. Early in my teaching career I recognized the importance of championing my beliefs and finding my voice, not only inside my classroom, but within the larger school culture. The confidence I have about my own teaching definitely influenced my recognition of others' feelings of frustration.

Despite the high level of self-efficacy I felt within my teaching world, I found myself unsure and insecure in the world of research. Originally, I established my role in this project according to my mistaken beliefs of what research could and could not be. In the beginning, my research topic placed me in the role of passive observer and judge. I accepted this role in a quest to make my research more objective. However, two professors separately challenged my idea of how to set up the research design.

The first professor involved me in a study of qualitative research, and I came to understand the innate bias in all research, both qualitative and quantitative. I had misunderstood the positivist claim of scientific truth and the pursuit of validity and reliability. Research did not have to involve statistics and significance determined by a number. Inherently I mistrusted numbers and questioned the idea of truth in quantitative methodologies, but I blindly accepted the claims of the quantitative tradition because I thought that was the only "credible research."

Reading articles such as Bogdan's and Ksander's (1980) "Policy Data as a Social Process: A Qualitative Approach to Quantitative Data" led me to acknowledge that the researcher's perspective plays a role in every type of data collection. Enumerology, "the study of the social processes by which numbers are generated and the effect of these processes on behavior and thought" (Bogdan & Kander, 1980, p. 302) reveals that researchers must insert their own biases when deciding what to count, how to score, and the type of analysis to complete. At this point, I began to realize that I did not have to abandon what I philosophically believed in order to conduct valid research. Instead, I could claim my subjectivity and stay true to my belief that people construct their own knowledge through dialogical relationships. I could align myself with the constructivists whom Schwandt (1994) describes as "deeply committed to the. . . view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind" (p. 125).

Once I began to see that I could place myself as a participant in this study, I could easily answer the second professor who asked me, "Do you think you can passively observe these new teachers, knowing what you believe about how people learn and grow?"

Recognizing that I strongly believe that growth and learning come from the construction of knowledge, not from the transmitting of facts, I reevaluated my role in this project. For years I had embraced the role of community and placed myself in relationships where I could share, trust, and dialogue with others. For this study, I realized I was more interested in the stories these beginning teachers had to tell than the reporting of their problems. Greene (2003) explains what I was looking for:

". . . evaluation practiced qualitatively is a narrative craft that involves the telling of stories – stories about individuals and groups of people in their own complex and dynamic communities, stories that enable understanding of what these communities share with others and what is unique to them. . ." (p. 603).

Seeking to tell the stories of first year teachers, I engaged and interacted in their community, well aware that my own interpretation and construction of meaning would influence how I recorded and analyzed their stories. My evolving understanding of what research can be, has led to the adoption of the interpretivist point of view for this research project. This researcher is concerned with the ways individuals in certain social contexts understand and act, not with finding wide-ranging laws or large-scale explanations (Feinberg & Soltis, 1998). My position supports Greene's (2003) idea that, "interpretivist, constructivist inquiry is unapologetically subjectivist – the inquirer's worldview becomes part of the construction and representation of meaning in any particular context. Inquirer bias, experience, expertise, and insight are all part of the meanings constructed and inscribed" (p. 598). The way I position myself as a fellow teacher in the peer group, the treatment of my participants as subjects in a dialogical relationship, and the interpretive telling of the group's stories are all aspects of qualitative, interpretivist, or constructivist research. It is this bias and theoretical perspective that I must champion as the catalyst and vehicle for my research.

Role of Researcher and Subject

After adopting the interpretivist point of view to inform my study, I needed to evaluate the role I expected to play in the research. Freire (1973/2002) discusses the role of person as *Subject* and person as *Object.* He explains that the *Subject* is an integrated

person, capable of thinking critically and changing reality through reflection and action. On the other hand, the *Object* is dehumanized with a self-defense reflex, unable to participate in the world around him (Freire, 1973/2002). I have always seen myself as a *Subject*, participating and acting upon my world. As I began this project, I had to decide how I was going to treat the teachers in my study. My alliance with Freire's beliefs that communication can only exist through dialogue and that dialogue can only come about with a trusting, critically thinking relationship, led me to embrace my participants as *Subjects*.

My interaction as a participant in the peer group situates me to speak "with" the participants, not "for" them. Far from the first moment of qualitative research when the researchers were attempting objective interpretations of a strange and foreign "other," (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), I have forsaken the concept of detached observer. My own story is inexplicably told as I relate the stories of those I studied. I am only able to represent the lived experiences of the participants as they told them to me and as I experienced them for myself.

The fact that I am a teacher and had many of the same experiences as the participants allowed me to employ reflexivity throughout the research. Not only did I seek to make sense of the experiences of the beginning teachers, I also tried to understand my own similar experiences. Schwandt (2001) explains that reflexivity "can point to the fact the inquirer is part of the setting, context, and social phenomenon he or she seeks to understand" (p. 224). Even though I have ten more years of experience in the elementary classroom, I became a member of the teaching community that these first year teachers

embraced. Therefore, my role is to speak "with" the participants in my study, telling their stories with my story inevitably woven throughout the tale.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature reveals common themes among the experiences of novice teachers in America, including schools' efforts to assist novice teachers through mentoring and induction programs. This review of the literature is organized into three main sections: Section 1) Teacher Attrition; Section 2) Obstacles for New Teachers; Section 3) Teacher Retention Efforts.

Teacher Attrition

When First Lady Laura Bush decided what issue she most wanted to focus on during her husband's first presidential term, she identified teacher recruitment as her priority (United States Department of Education, 2001). She is quoted as saying, "States and school districts really have to go out of their way to recruit. It's a national issue in the sense that every one of us needs to say how important teachers are" (Family Education Network Interview with Laura Bush, n.d.). As a former librarian, aware of the nation's education problems, the first lady recognized the shortage of teachers as a major issue. In remarks made to the House Education and Workforce Committee in 2002, Laura Bush states, "We must do more to attract our best and brightest to the teaching profession – and then, provide incentives to keep them in the classroom." She goes on to quote education experts who report that over the next decade American schools will need more than two million new teachers. Because many schools are already finding it difficult to staff their classrooms, 42 states have a policy in place allowing them to issue emergency credentials

to people who have never taken education classes (Chaika, 2000). In addition, many school districts are offering incentives such as college scholarships for a commitment to teach and monetary signing bonuses (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Even though many agree that a teacher shortage is on the horizon, the cause of the shortage is debatable. The 2003 report of The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) says America's teacher shortage is actually a teacher retention problem. Richard Ingersoll, part of the NCTAF team, says, "Teacher turnover is the real but long-overlooked story behind the so-called teacher shortages that have plagued many schools periodically" (as cited in Colgan, 2004, p. 25). The NCTAF report explains: "The real school staffing problem is teacher retention. Our inability to support high-quality teaching in many of our schools is driven not by too few teachers entering the profession, but by too many leaving it for other jobs" (NCTAF, 2003, p. 23).

In fact there was a steady increase in the number of new teachers entering the profession during the 1990s, but during that same time, teachers were leaving the profession at a faster rate (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Menchaca, 2003). National Center for Education Statistics figures show that about one-third of America's new teachers leave teaching within their first three years on the job (Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004). In addition, the NCTAF report says that 14% of beginning teachers leave the profession entirely after only one year of teaching. Even more alarming, the report says that the accumulative attrition rate is 46% at the end of five years. Concurring that teacher retention is in a state of crisis, Darling-Hammond (2003) points out the problematic effect this attrition rate has on school budgets and staffing. One study in Texas estimates that the cost of the state's annual turnover rate of 15.5 percent is around

$329 million a year (NCTAF, 2003). In addition to the astronomical financial costs of teacher attrition, the less measurable impact of losing quality teachers just as they are gaining experience and refining their practice becomes a detriment to student achievement. With taxpayers and students paying the price, researchers have focused their efforts on teacher attrition.

According to research, there are many reasons teachers do not return to their teaching positions. Some can be classified as "movers" because they simply transfer to another school, move to another district, or accept a different position. Others are considered "leavers" because they leave the teaching profession entirely. Of these "leavers" some leave for outside reasons such as the birth of a child, a spouse's transfer, and retirement (Luekens et al, 2004). These motives are inevitable and can be found in every profession.

But of greater concern are the teachers who leave because of dissatisfaction with their jobs. Many studies have surveyed and interviewed teachers in an attempt to establish the primary reasons for their discontent (Billingsley, 2004; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Williams, 2003). The reasons sited are numerous and include stresses due to being unsupported, unprepared, and a general sense of loss of empowerment (Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002); large class size, limited instructional resources, and the inability to meet student needs (Certo & Fox, 2002); student discipline problems (Langdon, 1996); and lack of time to accomplish all that is expected (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Obstacles for New Teachers

Classroom Discipline

One issue seems more prevalent with new teacher dissatisfaction than the others: student behavior. Discipline problems in the classroom have long been identified as the most problematic issue novice teachers face in their beginning years of teaching (Hertzog, 2002; Levin, Hoffman, Badiali, & Neuhard, 1985; Love, Henderson, & Hanshaw, 1996; Meister & Melnick, 2003). In Gee's 2001 study of 24 preservice teachers and 36 graduate students with teaching experience, the strongest concern for both groups related to discipline and classroom management. In another study conducted by the education foundation called the Boston Plan for Excellence, researchers found the most commonly expressed frustrations of teachers just completing their first year were student misbehavior, classroom management, and discipline issues. The teachers interviewed also revealed they had lowered their expectations for how long they would remain in the teaching field. In addition, public opinion polls over the past 34 years show parents ranking discipline as one of the top two problems facing public schools (Rose & Gallup, 2002).

With classroom discipline identified as a significant problem for teachers, it is understandable that undergraduate education programs would strive to equip their preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively maintain discipline. However, research indicates that new teachers do not feel prepared in the area of classroom management and discipline. In a survey of elementary school teachers, more than 90 percent reported they needed more training in classroom management (Wolery, Werts, Caldwell, Snyder, & Lisowski, 1995). Britt (1997) examined the

perceptions of 35 first- and second-year teachers on several current issues pertinent to their profession. "They voiced a need for more courses in classroom management and discipline, because their preservice training had not prepared them for the vast demands of teaching and the specific jobs required in specific schools" (p. 1). "Preservice teachers simply don't get enough classroom management training before they go into the classroom," says Linda James, a staffer in NEA's Teacher Quality Department (O'Neil, 2004). Jones and Jones (2004) agree, "Despite significant research and the associated dramatic increase in methods for effectively motivating and managing students, many teachers have received only a limited amount of useful information about how to organize and manage classrooms in order to maximize productive student learning and behavior" (p. 8).

Many colleges that do require a classroom management or discipline course discover that their graduates, likewise, feel inept to handle classroom discipline. Studies report that the knowledge acquired in teacher education programs does not provide student interns with practical procedures for resolving discipline issues (Chamberlin & Vallance, 1991). Kager (as cited in Adler, 1996) suggests that the needs of preservice teachers are developmental, requiring teacher education programs to concentrate on procedural knowledge and standardized practices, as opposed to reflective inquiry. After analyzing the results of the National New Teacher Study: Beginning Teachers' Concerns, Meister and Melnick (2003) suggest, "New teachers need more direct experience in the school setting and continued assistance in discipline, time management, and communication skills. Although the majority of the students believe they had some preparation in these areas prior to completing their teacher certification program, they

were less confident of their acquired knowledge and skills when they became inservice teachers" (p. 3). The teachers in the study felt they learned about classroom management in the confines of a college setting where emphasis was placed on normal management issues.

Furthermore, the management issues of today's classrooms are far from "normal" because of the diverse population and the inclusion of special needs students. One of the basic reasons classroom management continues to be a major problem in U.S. schools is that teachers are asked to instruct a wide range of students, many of whom come to school with varying degrees of emotional distress and inadequate personal skills (Jones & Jones, 2004). "Teacher preparation programs need to focus more directly on handling disruptive students and students with special needs. These are areas that beginning teachers indicate some level of preparation but clearly not enough to make them feel comfortable when they have their own classrooms" (Meister & Melnick, 2003, p. 89). Even in classrooms where the students appear to be from the same cultural group, students will display individual differences influenced by diversity in intellectual and physical abilities, as well as, day-to-day living experiences in the home. These differences direct the ways students behave; therefore, it is important that beginning teachers understand diversity in order to be effective managers of student behavior and meet the needs of all students (Love, Henderson, & Hanshaw, 1996).

With ever increasing demands on teachers' abilities to manage a diverse student population combined with a lack of effective preparation in classroom management techniques, new teachers consistently report frustrations over student behavior. These

frustrations are a leading cause of teacher dissatisfaction and directly contribute to the large numbers of novice teachers exiting the teaching field.

Teacher Isolation

Albert Shanker (1990) suggests that the most important reason teachers leave the classroom is not classroom discipline, substandard salaries, or oversized classrooms, but "the narrowness of the teacher's world which denies the possibility of satisfying exchanges with other adults and the sense that one is part of a thoughtful community of professionals" (p. 210). He notes that we do not have vast numbers of former doctors, former lawyers, or former engineers, but that former teachers abound.

Being a new teacher is as difficult now as it has ever been. Often, new teachers are given difficult classes, and they find they are not prepared to handle the diversity of behavior and learning styles of their students (Brownell, Yeager, Sindelar, vanHover, & Riley, 2004). Frequently, they suffer emotional isolation when they are assigned classrooms in the peripheral of the school (Menchaca, 2003). Additionally, much of the work of teachers is done in isolation from colleagues, an experience described as "sink or swim" by many (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Reiman & Parramore, 1994; Weiss & Weiss, 1999). Gold (1996) reports that struggling novice teachers often experience loneliness, isolation, stress, fatigue, and disillusionment. It is no wonder that so many teachers are giving up on the profession in their first few years as a teacher.

Schools are traditionally designed to limit interaction between teachers. The cellular design of school buildings, which Little refers to as "individual classrooms connected by a common parking lot" (p. 256), and the rigidity of school schedules prevent teachers from observing each other (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). Often

they are cut off from their colleagues because most of the day is spent in their isolated classroom. This means that teachers seldom see what others are doing and have little to compare their own teaching to. Sarason (1982) explains: "The teacher is alone with problems and dilemmas, constantly thrown back on personal resources, having little or no interpersonal vehicles available for purposes of stimulation, change or control" (p. 162). The physical isolation has created an environment where teachers are expected to cope with and handle their problems on their own. Working it out alone is the accepted practice in classrooms across the country.

Without collegial stimulation and support, teachers are not only deprived of advice, but they are also denied praise for work well done and are left without the stimulus of new ideas. "Satisfying relationships and a sense of community are inextricably intertwined with good teaching and job satisfaction" (Williams, 2003, p. 73).

While most teachers find student learning and student relationships rewarding, interaction with other teachers can provide different rewards in friendship and improved instruction. Especially when rewarding interactions with students are scarce, the exchanges with other teachers can be the primary source of intrinsic rewards (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986).

Teacher isolation is a salient problem for all teachers, but a lack of collegiate interaction is especially relevant to novice teachers. The perception that teachers should be left on their own to solve problems can be devastating to new teachers who have not developed a repertoire of solutions and alternative approaches. The stress and uncertainties that are inevitable during the first few years of teaching cause many to question their abilities and practices. Without peer support, praise, and mentoring, new

teachers lose confidence and many leave the profession entirely. Colgan (2004) cites an interview with a first-year teacher in Boston whose sentiments are shared by many: "Not having been in a collaborative place this year, I am exhausted. Isolation takes the fun out of my job. I want to talk instruction!" (p. 25).

Teacher Empowerment

Most teachers enter the profession embracing the notion that they will have control over the daily happenings in their classroom. While sometimes overwhelming, the opportunity to make decisions and affect outcomes is welcome by most teachers. In a study of exemplary North Carolina teachers who have established lengthy teaching careers, Williams (2003) discovered that despite their differences in background and personality, "these teachers describe teaching as a nonstop quest for novelty, variety, and new approaches—an art that offers endless opportunities for creativity and personal expression" (p. 72). They embrace the ability to make changes and recognize that it is their personal initiative, not that of policymakers, that creates school improvement and reform.

Even as teachers realize that it is their personal initiative that makes reform successful, they must be resigned to the fact that education is consistently at the forefront of every politician's agenda. Federal and state governments legislate everything from the number of fat grams allowed in school lunches to the types of standardized tests required by fourth graders. "The problem with most existing education legislation and all too much of the new reform regulations is that they essentially tell teachers what to do" (Shanker, 1990, p. 214). Shanker suggests that if other professions were treated as such, it would be called legislative malpractice. However, in the arena of education, legislators

frequently pass bills outlining what teachers need to do in complex situations instead of allowing them the professional practice of analyzing the facts and exercising judgment. A piece of legislation or educational reform can prevent a teacher from carrying out instruction in the way he or she sees fit. The loss of empowerment is felt in the day-to-day decision making in the classroom and also in the realization that teachers' professional voices are often not sought or considered in the creation of education legislation. "The expertise and judgment of classroom teachers is silenced when they are required to implement a program mandated by the state, but not invited into a discussion about how that program fits into existing school culture in their school community" (Gratch, 2000, p. 44).

Not only do teachers feel powerless when legislation mandates their teaching, but they also feel slighted when administrators and other teachers impose their ways of teaching on them. When a teacher is required to do what everyone else is doing, his or her creativity and personal style may fall by the wayside. This lack of autonomy can make a teacher question his or her professional status.

Empowerment versus Isolation

Teachers are presented with a culture that perpetuates the conflict between empowerment and isolation. On one hand teachers want to be left alone to best decide how to teach their students. They want the feeling of empowered decision making and the freedom to express creativity in their teaching styles. On the other hand, teachers want and need interaction with other teachers, learning from each other and sharing successes as well as frustrations. "The work of teachers is both solitary and communal" according to Williams (2003, p. 73). Most teachers spend their days in a classroom with

little interaction with colleagues, accepting responsibility for their actions and the fate of their students. However, teachers are likely to work in teams or grade level groups, and administrators often expect teachers in their schools to adopt similar practices, present common activities, and communicate shared expectations. Finding a balance where autonomy empowers a teacher but does not create isolation can be a challenge.

When needs for independence interfere with the ability to develop relationships with peers and administrators, many teachers report that autonomy is more important, and that they can find satisfying relationships outside of the workplace (Williams, 2003). Williams' study addressed the conflicting needs of exemplary veteran teachers in regard to independence and connectedness. About half of the teachers in Williams' study say that even though they value the relationships with colleagues, they often find them difficult to achieve. One teacher explains how being required to work with partners can dampen her enthusiasm. When teachers are asked to teach the same way across a grade level or to carry out a standardized lesson, they lose the feeling of empowerment, which lured many of them to teaching in the first place. These issues are exacerbated even more when novice teachers try to find a comfortable balance between fitting in and expressing themselves.

Administrative Support

As new teachers enter their first teaching assignment or as veteran teachers begin teaching at a new school, a period of adjustment takes place. Besides the daily workings behind the classroom door, the teacher must learn to fit into the existing system. Feiman-Nemser (2003) brings to light this process of enculturation with an emphasis not only on the new teacher "learning the ropes," but with the question, "Who is 'teaching the

ropes'?" She says, "Whether the early years of teaching are a time of constructive learning or a period of coping, adjustment, and survival depends largely on the working conditions and culture of teaching that new teachers encounter" (p. 28). An unhealthy school climate where teacher apathy or teacher competition exists can be defeating to even the most idealistic novice teacher.

It makes sense that teachers who see their schools as good places to work are more likely to stay in teaching (Billingsley, 2004). One of the factors found to influence teachers' satisfaction with their school climate is administrative support. A large amount of research has addressed what characteristics of a principal are most desired by teachers. Williams (2003) asserts that effective principals are those who can value individual creativity and lead a school community to embrace shared goals and high expectations. It is important to teachers to feel emotionally supported by an administrator through open communication, the development of trust, and the showing of appreciation (Gold, 1996). In addition to this type of emotional support from administrators, Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross (1994) named instrumental support, such as helping teachers find needed resources and space, as positively correlated to job satisfaction and school commitment.

Teacher Retention Efforts

The topic of teacher retention has become problematic enough that school systems all over the country are investigating, budgeting, and implementing efforts to keep teachers from leaving the profession. Teacher retention efforts have included pay incentives for the best teachers, bonuses for those working in difficult schools, and the implementation of professional support programs. The emerging consensus among educators and policymakers is that the answer to the teacher retention problem is

effective mentoring and induction programs (Carver, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). As early as the 1980s, Florida was a pioneer in teacher induction and began mandating participation in induction and mentoring programs by tying it to licensing requirements. Today, more states and districts, especially in urban locations, are mandating some kind of support for teachers, and a recent government study recognized 26 states with induction programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). These support programs vary widely in scale, objective, organization, and success (Colgan, 2004), but a clear association exists between teachers' likelihood of leaving their position and the support they receive through induction or mentoring (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

Mentoring Programs

Mentoring programs have been studied for their effectiveness in utilizing the leadership and expertise of veteran teachers by pairing them with new teachers. According to the National Education Association (NEA), new teachers who participate in induction programs like mentoring are nearly twice as likely to stay in their profession. Some even believe that mentoring programs can cut the dropout rate from roughly 50 to 15 percent during the first five years of teaching (Brown, 2003). While many see mentoring as a part of a larger induction program, numerous schools utilize a mentoring only approach for supporting new teachers. Research can be found to support the positive impact of mentoring on new teachers. Recently, the mentoring program in the Boston Public Schools was studied and results indicated that the programs which paired teachers with mentors who taught the same subjects, same grade level and at the same school worked best (Guiney, 2001). A similar program in Chicago reported the benefits of their mentor program, also noting the importance of proximity and time to work

together (Brown, 2003). Ingersoll and Smith (2004) came to a similar conclusion with their study of the data from the 1999-2000 National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) representing over 3,000 new teachers. They found that some types of support for first year teachers were more highly associated with decreased teacher turnover. The strongest factors for the successful programs were having a mentor from the same field, having common planning time with other teachers who were teaching the same subject, and having regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers.

Besides the focus on the pairing of the mentor and mentee, several studies have emphasized the importance of the training of the veteran teacher to serve in the mentor role. Because of the isolating culture of schools, mentoring can be an unnatural activity for teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Just because a teacher can excel in the classroom, does not mean she can verbalize what makes her practices successful or analyze what needs a new teacher may have. Effective mentoring programs recognize the need for mentor training with ongoing support for the mentors as they carry out the work of supporting the novice teachers. As experienced teachers take on new leadership roles, they should be granted opportunities to clarify their vision of good teaching, to analyze effective models of mentoring, to develop skills in observing and talking about teaching, and to learn to assess new teachers' progress as well as their own effectiveness as a mentor. The investment made in preparing mentors not only benefits the novice teachers, but strengthens the climate of the school by renewing and retaining experienced teachers, too.

Clearly one of the most important roles of a mentor is to help a new teacher with his or her specific problems. However, in her study of when and how new teachers ask for help, Hertzog (2002) found that novice teachers were aware of the need to "fine tune" their practice of teaching, but that many chose to go to others experiencing similar experiences rather than expert mentors. She attributed this to the novice teachers' need to seek relationships that would be collaborative and supportive. Another explanation is suggested by Feiman-Nemser (2003). He believes teachers may be reluctant to ask for help because they are misled to believe that good teachers figure things out on their own. The fear of appearing incompetent resigns many teachers to working their problems out themselves.

We cannot assume that a new teacher will go to his or her mentor when help is needed, nor can we assume that an assigned mentor has the time and/or expertise to help novices improve their teaching. With the understanding that even the best designed mentor programs are limited in their ability to meet every need of the novice teacher, more and more school districts are using mentoring as just one component of a more comprehensive induction program.

Induction Groups

There is much confusion and misuse of the words mentoring and induction (Wong, 2004a). In fact, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) report that the words are often used interchangeably and that over the past two decades, mentoring has become the dominant form of induction. The narrow approach of mentoring is far from the multi-faceted components of induction. While a mentor is a single person whose function is to help a new teacher, induction is a more comprehensive approach to set new teachers on a path

of professional development and lifelong learning. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) define induction as programs that offer support, guidance, and orientation for beginning elementary and secondary teachers during the transition into their first teaching jobs. Similarly, Menchaca (2003) describes induction as the process of providing adequate training and support for beginning teachers in the period including the first one to three years of teaching after receiving certification or a teaching license. Additionally, some schools include teachers new to their system, no matter how many years of teaching experience they have.

Mentoring is often a component of induction programs, but many argue that mentoring alone is little more than a safety net for new teachers (Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003). Feiman-Nemser (1996) found that after reviewing the two decades of research on mentoring, few studies existed that revealed positive consequences of mentoring. Wong (2004a) is also critical of the "mentoring only" set up. He states that despite the popularity of mentoring over the past two decades as a means for helping new teachers, the truth is that research does not support its effectiveness. However, the broader notion of induction has emerged in many school systems and much of the recent literature avails the benefits of induction on teacher satisfaction and retention (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Holloway, 2001).

While most agree on the purpose induction programs serve, the actual content and organization of induction programs vary widely. Variables such as the length of the program, the types of assistance provided, the involvement of administrators, and the formation of cohort group networking have all been identified in the research (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Kelley, 2004; Menchaca, 2003). Studies conducted over the past 20

years support that a variety of different well-conceived and well-implemented teacher induction programs have been successful in increasing the job satisfaction, efficacy, and retention of new teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). But the research concerning just which factors best predict the success of these programs in aiding new teachers has been limited (Kelley, 2004).

One recommendation from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) report, *No Dream Denied, A Pledge to America's Children*, is that professional support should be as close to the school site as possible. While district-led support programs are important, new teachers are more likely to stay in their jobs if their support is school-based. Wong (2004a) notes that no two induction programs are exactly alike, and each program should cater to the individual culture and specific needs of its school. When the decisions about the goals and activities associated with an induction program can be made by people acutely aware of the teachers' needs, the program can better meet those needs and serve the teachers in positive ways.

A qualitative analysis of another successful induction program was conducted by Carver (2004). The program she describes is a collaborative learning community with voluntary attendance for new teachers who meet every two weeks. It involves participation from the school's lead instructional administrator and many opportunities for teachers to benefit from peer interaction. According to Carver, the induction program was highly successful as demonstrated with increased attendance over the two-year study, participants' positive statements, and the program serving as a model for neighboring schools. Carver lists the keys to the program's success as trust and a meaningful work

agenda. She notes that it was extremely important to the participants that "the pressing needs of those in attendance dictate the substance of the meetings" (p. 60).

A third successful, yet different, approach to an induction program highlights the use of a counselor to provide psychological support for first year teachers, in addition to technical assistance provided by mentor teachers. The study by Reiman, Bostick, and Lassiter (1995) evaluated the success of an innovative program in the 32nd largest urban school district in the United States. A series of support groups were established, integrating the roles of counselors and teachers. The researchers noted reflection and the interprofessional nature of the program as important components of its success.

With various types of induction programs analyzed and many different approaches leading to positive results, one can surmise that induction programs do not follow a strict formula for organization. However, the aforementioned studies reveal the benefit of having on-campus, collaborative, and reflective support groups to provide a smoother transition into the teaching profession for beginning teachers.

Self-efficacy

No matter what programs are offered to new teachers, some people are better equipped to handle the stresses and obstacles that new teachers face. Self-efficacy refers to people's convictions about their own capabilities for executing a course of action that leads to a desired outcome (Bandura, 1994). A teacher with high self-efficacy is likely to provide the most effective learning environment for his or her students (Yost, 2002). This correlation is grounded in the idea that a person with confidence is more likely to try innovative and challenging ideas. Their high expectations can impact the results they achieve.

Teachers enter the field with various levels of self-efficacy. Some are confident that their preparation and experiences have prepared them for the task of teaching; others are anxious and fearful of meeting the demands in the classroom. No matter what level of self-efficacy teachers have, it should be the desire of administrators to increase all teachers' confidence to achieve their desired results. Bandura (1994) has identified several influences on people's beliefs about their self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experience, and social persuasion.

Pajares (1996) furthers Bandura's research by listing mastery experiences as the most influential source of efficacy. He simply states, "Success raises self-efficacy; failure lowers it" (1996, p. 2). Bandura's second influence is termed "vicarious experience" and is explained as seeing people in similar experiences succeed in managing their demands. Seeing someone else model the successful performance of a task can convey to others a similar capability of success. The final influence on self-efficacy outlined by Bandura is social persuasion, which includes the judgments of others. Positive feedback can enhance self-efficacy, but will only provide a temporary boost in efficacy if personal attempts continue a pattern of failure (Schunk, 1991).

Within the encompassing topic of teacher retention efforts, self-efficacy must be recognized and explored as a means to help teachers be effective during their first years of teaching and to continue with the profession for years to come.

Reflection

A major trend in professional development for educators is a heightened expectation for teacher reflection (Cady, Distad, & Germundsen, 1998). In the early and mid-1980s, Schon began to write about the importance and impact of reflective thinking

in education. Since then, experts in supervision, staff development, and teacher education have recognized the role teacher experiences play in their development of professional knowledge (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). This understanding has led to an emphasis on teacher reflection.

Sparks-Langer and Colton (1991) offer an explanation of reflection by suggesting its opposite. They contend, "The opposite of reflective action is the mindless following of unexamined practices or principles" (p. 37). Agreeing on what reflection is and more importantly what actions it entails is more difficult.

Good teachers have always analyzed their instruction and altered their teaching, but most have done it alone (Distad, Chase, Germundsen, & Brownstein, 2000). However, recent studies have identified the benefits of reflective practice within a group. In a study of Minnesota teachers, Cady, Distad, and Germundsen (1998) examined the benefits of bringing together new teachers with veteran teachers, administrators, and teacher educators to reflect regularly and systematically on instruction and classroom issues. These induction groups met once a month and followed a planned method of reflection. The researchers report, "Teacher reflection in a collaborative environment enhances professional development and planning. Teachers gain insight from the experiential knowledge of their colleagues as their practice is confirmed and honed" (p. 459). Milner describes reflection as an interactive process in which critically engaged dialogue is imperative. Interactive reflection can play a significant role in the retention and increased effectiveness of new teachers.

Call for Further Research

Much research exists about the alarming rate teachers leave the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Menchaca, 2003). In addition, a wealth of research can be found about why these teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs (Billingsley, 2004; Inman & Marlow, 2004; Williams, 2003). However, the need for systematic inquiry on beginning teachers' mentoring or induction experiences has been evident for many years (Nugent & Faucette, 2004).

With a strong need established for the mentoring and induction of new teachers, school districts around the United States are searching for ways to retain their new teachers and to improve their effectiveness in the classroom. Wong recognizes that "no two induction programs are exactly alike; each caters to the individual culture and specific needs of its unique school or district" (Wong, 2004a, p. 45).

Additional research is needed that focuses on the needs of new teachers and the ways a school system can meet those needs. This study seeks to understand the needs of new teachers in a particular school system and to explore the influence a peer support group can have in meeting those needs.

III. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the design of the study and is organized into six sections: overview of the study, design of the study, the participants, the setting, data collection, and data analysis.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the successes and struggles of beginning teachers and to examine the role a peer support group played in aiding the teachers. Nineteen teachers participated in the study, meeting formally once a month. To explore and interpret the teachers' attitudes and perceptions about their teaching experiences, I used the following questions to guide my research:

1. What obstacles do new teachers identify?
2. Where do new teachers go for help with problems?
    a. What is the influence of the existing mentoring program on new teachers?
    b. What is the influence of the new T.E.A.M. support group on new teachers?

Design of the Study

A qualitative design was chosen as the research method for this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that despite the complex evolution of qualitative research, several connected themes are present, including: 1) The researcher is situated in the natural setting of the research; 2) the researcher interprets practices in an effort to make the participants' world visible to the reader; 3) the varied representations and thick

descriptions of the participants' world allow all to make meaning for themselves; 4) the intimate role between the researcher and what is studied is embraced; and 5) the research is flexible, allowing for themes to emerge in order to gain a better understanding of the participants' world. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explain that the qualitative researcher stresses the socially constructed nature of reality.

Specifically, this qualitative study used a multiple case study design to examine the experiences of novice teachers and the impact of a peer support group in a small university town during the 2004-2005 school year. The research questions focused on a particular set of people in a particular context, therefore, meriting a case study design. Yin (as cited in Schwandt, 2001) argues "that a case study strategy is preferred when the inquirer has little control over events being studied, when the object of study is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, when boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear, and when it is desirable to use multiple sources of evidence" (p. 23). My research met each of these criteria, it is a multiple case study because it involved more than one participant.

Participants

Prior to this study, Human Subjects' approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board for the protection of Human Subjects at Auburn University (see Appendix A1). Permission to use teachers in the school system was granted by the superintendent, and permission to use teachers at the five elementary schools was obtained by the individual principals.

New teachers in this school system are required to attend a "New Teacher Orientation" meeting the day before the other teachers report for the new school year. At

the New Teacher Orientation prior to the 2004-2005 school year, I introduced myself to the teachers, explaining my research project and inviting the new elementary teachers to become a part of the T.E.A.M. (Teachers Encouraging and Mentoring) peer support group. Consent forms were signed by interested teachers.

Two weeks after the start of the school year, principals from the five elementary schools were asked to recommend novice teachers for participation in the T.E.A.M. (Teachers Encouraging and Mentoring) support group. Four of the five schools sent only new teachers who were in their very first year of teaching. This group of brand new teachers consisted of 15 teachers. One of the principals also chose to send non-tenured teachers in her building who had been at the school two years or less. This added four additional teachers to the T.E.A.M. group. The group of participants included 12 Caucasian females, 6 African-American females, and 1 African-American male. Feminine pronouns are used throughout the study in an effort to not identify the one male participant. As stated earlier, 15 teachers had no full-time teaching experience prior to the 2004-2005 school year. Of the remaining four teachers, two had one year of experience and two had two years of experience.

In addition, 22 veteran teachers and 9 administrators gave their opinions about new teacher obstacles. These written reflections were anonymous and used to provide a greater understanding of the new teachers' beliefs about veteran teacher and administrator support.

Setting

Participants were employees of a single school system in the southeastern United States. It is an affluent, growing system closely tied to a large state university in

proximity and partnerships. During the 2004-2005 school year, the system population was approximately 4,800 students with over 300 classroom teachers. The system consists of nine school campuses: a high school, a junior high school, a middle school, five elementary schools, and a kindergarten. The research for this study was conducted at the five elementary campuses which serve grades one through five.

Data Collection

Data collection began on August 8, 2004 and concluded on April 15, 2005. Multiple sources were used in the study including surveys, written reflections, semi-structured interviews, group discussions, and observations.

Surveys

I developed a survey instrument in order to collect baseline data for the project (see Appendix B). The initial survey was given at the New Teacher Orientation which is held the day before all teachers report for the start of the school year. The statements on this survey focused on plans the teacher had made in the area of classroom discipline and the influences of those plans.

Expert advice was sought in the development of the survey. Three veteran teachers, one first-year teacher, one administrator, and one professor/researcher offered suggestions and clarifications for the survey.

Open-ended Reflections

At each monthly meeting, participants were asked to respond to reflection questions which focused on their attitudes, experiences, needs, and obstacles (see Appendix C). Each month I developed the open-ended questions in response to questions and discussions the group previously proposed.

Because of the reoccurring claim from new teachers that veteran teachers and administrators were not providing adequate support for the obstacles they were facing, I developed another written reflection. This reflection elicited anonymous responses from veteran teachers and administrators about their perceptions of the obstacles new teachers face (see Appendix C).

Semi-structured Interviews

Three rounds of interviews were held during the study. Fontana and Frey (2003) describe the essence of my interviewing approach: "the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain" (p. 75). Each interview was tape-recorded, transcribed, and typed verbatim.

The initial interviews were conducted during the first month of school as a means to begin relationships, gauge teachers' attitudes, and elicit ideas for the support group meetings. Interview questions were fully developed after analyzing the initial survey data. An initial list of questions is presented in Appendix D1; however, a semi-structured approach was implemented, allowing for flexibility in follow-up questions.

The original interviews sought to uncover the processes that new teachers go through in creating and modifying their classroom discipline approaches. In addition, questions were asked about teacher satisfaction, teacher-to-teacher relationships, and specific discipline issues that had arisen in the classroom.

Additional, less structured interviews were conducted with various teachers each month. These interviews were conversational in tone. Questions were determined based on the issues the teacher wanted to discuss.

The final round of interviews was conducted in April, near the end of the school year. These interviews were semi-structured, and some of the same questions from the original interview were asked. However, during the course of the study, the focus changed from classroom management to the overarching obstacles new teachers face. Therefore, the interview questions in April were less concentrated on classroom discipline and more open to the teachers' own perception of obstacles (see Appendix D2).

Group Discussions

During the monthly meetings, the agenda included the opportunity for the teachers to discuss their successes, frustrations, questions, and concerns. Usually I initiated the round-table discussion by posing a question to the group, for example, "Who has a funny story to share?" or "How did parent conferences go?" As the teachers responded, I would take notes and ask for clarification or elaboration. Often the group discussion flowed naturally from one topic to another and from one teacher to another with little direction from me. I did act as participant, sharing my own experiences with the group. Seventeen of the 19 participants shared often during these discussions, but the other two rarely spoke to the group.

After each meeting I used a researcher's notebook for elaborating on my notes, recording observations and anecdotal information, and reflecting on the issues discussed.

Data Analysis

The constant comparative method as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was utilized to analyze the data collected. In this form of analysis, the researcher searches for patterns, notes tentative categories, and compares new data to the previous data in order to refine meaning. This constant comparing is a process of identifying, coding, and

categorizing the patterns in the data (Miles & Huberman, 2001). Throughout the study, I continuously analyzed the data for patterns, reading each text separately and then reading across texts, looking for patterns. I revised my thinking to include new data as it was collected. The process of constant comparison was vital in shaping the direction of the study, forcing me to abandon the original focus of classroom discipline and redirect to the numerous obstacles that were being revealed within the data.

My initial attempts at categorizing the data proved to be frustrating. At the onset of the study, I predicted that classroom discipline was going to be the most significant problem for the new teachers. The data from the initial surveys and interviews did not match my expectations. Although classroom discipline was named as an obstacle, it was not paramount to the new teachers' frustrations. However, the data revealed other considerable obstacles perceived by the teachers. This revelation led to a revision in the purpose of my study, requiring the submission of a revised consent form to the Internal Review Board (see Appendix A2).

As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), I revisited the literature and identified the "crucial issues" (p. 165) concerning beginning teachers. These issues provided a framework to categorize the data I was collecting. Pouring through each line of the transcribed interviews and analyzing the written responses of the reflections, I looked for units of meaning and then combined related ideas into categories. The obstacles that new teachers reported fell into categories that included classroom discipline, parents, veteran teachers, isolation, administrators, instructional expectations, empowerment, and bureaucratic demands. The data also conveyed the success the new teachers felt in the areas of classroom discipline, parents, veteran teachers,

administrators, empowerment, and instructional expectations. The realization that similar categories existed as both obstacles and successes led to one of the themes of the study--the paradox of new teachers' experiences.

Midway through the school year, analysis of the data revealed that the new teachers believed their administrators and many veteran teachers did not understand the obstacles facing new teachers. This led to the development of a written reflection for administrators and veteran teachers concerning their perceptions of obstacles facing new teachers. Nine administrators and 22 veteran teachers gave their opinions.

Confirming the beliefs of the new teachers, a discrepancy among the identified obstacles existed between the teachers and administrators. Veteran teachers identified external problems, which were similar to the new teachers' ideas, such as support, parents, colleagues, time, and demands. However, the administrators' responses centered on problems found within the teachers, such as, lack of confidence, discipline problems, and inability to manage time. The recognition of this discrepancy led to the second major theme of the study which addresses the differences in the attitudes of teachers, especially new teachers and administrators.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the obstacles elementary teachers face in the course of their first year of teaching. I began with the idea, grounded in research, that classroom discipline would provide the most significant obstacle to the effective teaching of the participants. As the study progressed, it became evident that other obstacles were present and provided more anxiety to the novice teachers than the narrow issue of student behavior. This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section in this chapter is devoted to research question number one and seeks to identify and understand the many obstacles to teaching that the participants named.

The second section of this chapter continues to look at new teacher obstacles. Veteran teacher and administrator perceptions of new teacher obstacles are presented. The similarities and differences between the new teacher responses and the responses from veteran teachers and administrators are explored.

The third and final section of this chapter explores the second research question, "Where do new teachers go for help with their problems?" The influence of the school system's mentoring program and the new T.E.A.M. induction program are described.

Throughout this chapter, the accounts of the 19 participants are interwoven in an attempt to tell their stories and honestly describe their experiences as new teachers.

Section 1: Obstacles for New Teachers

Classroom Discipline

Four weeks into the 2004-2005 school year, I arranged interviews with seven new teachers from four of the five elementary schools. It was apparent that the teachers were transitioning between the first two phases of Mauer and Zimmerman's (2000) "Five Phases of First-Year Teaching." These phases are described as:

> 1) The Anticipation Phase. During student teaching, the role of the teacher is often romanticized. Soon-to-be teachers are idealistic and want to make a difference. This phase continues into the first few weeks of actual teaching; and
>
> 2) The Survival Phase. After the first few weeks, beginning teachers often become inundated by situations and problems they did not anticipate. They also find that it takes enormous amounts of energy and time to establish a routine, determine what works, and develop curriculum. (p. 27)

The expectations of the new teachers concerning the overall behavior of their classes did not meet the reality. Several expressed surprise in their students' lack of ability in following directions. "I have to stay on them constantly to get them to do what I want them to do," one teacher explained. A second grade teacher said, "I would just like to put a list on the board of simple tasks I want them to complete and then have them follow the list without having to ask me a million questions."

Several teachers mentioned their surprise at how slow and deliberate they had to do things. A few contributed their misguided expectations to teaching in a grade different than their preservice experiences. "The third graders in my internship could handle more responsibility than these fifth graders," said one

teacher while a second grade teacher claimed, "I never had to tie shoes when I worked with fourth graders, but now it seems like all I do is tie shoes and open milk cartons." But expectations did not always match reality even for teachers who had interned in the same grade they were now teaching. "I even had to tell them where to put their backpacks," lamented a second grade teacher who had prior experience in second grade.

Being that it was their first year of teaching, all of the teachers I interviewed were testing out someone else's ideas for classroom management. It seemed important to the new teachers to use the same approach as the rest of the teachers on their grade level. Only one teacher attributed her discipline plan to another source. She credited her plan to the one she observed her internship teacher use; however, it was not significantly different than the system her grade level used. While the method of keeping track and the ways of reporting to parents differed, the basic premise of the discipline plans being used was a systematic list of consequences, beginning with verbal warnings and escalating to the involvement of a parent or administrator.

When asked how these "color cards" or "star charts" were going, teachers commented with phrases like, "pretty good," and "fairly well." However, a couple of teachers were already recognizing the need to revamp their plans to meet their needs and the needs of their students. A first grade teacher told me, "The cards don't work. Proximity isn't working. It worked when I interned, but it isn't working now. I've taken away recess. I even made them all put their heads down the other day." In the same interview I asked her what her

discipline philosophy was and she replied, “I don’t know. I thought I knew, but now I don’t know what works.”

During conversations like this, my role as mentor surfaced and I found myself offering advice and support as much as listening and observing. I asked this teacher what she planned to do, where she was going to go for help. She was not sure and did not want to go to her mentor because it was her discipline plan she was trying to implement. I shared some ideas of things that had worked in my classroom and cautioned against the whole group punishment of loss of recess when it was really only a handful of students causing the problems.

Throughout the course of the study, student behavior was mentioned by teachers as obstacles to their teaching; however, the problems were never as major as the literature suggested. Typical comments from teachers were, “I would like to see my students cut down on excessive talking while I am teaching and during transitions,” and “How do I make sure all of the other students are working while I am teaching a small group?”

As the months passed and the teachers revised their classroom discipline plans, their comments were more positive. In November a fourth grade teacher said, “We have finally settled into a routine and I have found what makes them tick. Everyday is not perfect, but I don’t consider my students’ behavior to be a problem.”

Another teacher claimed, “I have more consistent and clearer expectations now and am using more positive reinforcement. I can see a difference and management isn’t a problem anymore.”

Also in November, “Once I realized I could break away from the color cards my grade level used, I felt more comfortable with my own approach. I thought it was embarrassing and often hurtful to change their cards and I think they could tell I didn’t believe in it. For the past couple of weeks, we are using ‘team points.’ That seems to be working for now.”

In a survey given in January, only 1 of 15 teachers listed classroom discipline as their biggest struggle of the year, while 3 listed it as easier than expected. However, stories surfaced during our monthly T.E.A.M. meetings about students with extreme behavior issues. For example, one teacher kept us up-to-date on the student who crawled under his desk and refused to join the classroom, and another teacher told us about her student who ate paper constantly and had outbursts nearly everyday. These cases did not seem to create the anxiety one might expect. When asked how she was handling the child with severe behavior problems, one teacher smiled, “Oh, it’s not just me handling it. Our counselor, assistant principal, principal, and even central office people are in on this one. I don’t feel like it is just my problem and that makes all the difference in the world. They recognize what is going on, and I have help when things get out of control.”

Classroom discipline seemed to be something these teachers felt empowered about. “I keep changing what I am doing to monitor their behavior.

Each time I am getting better and better at seeing what works. I love having the control to make my own decisions." In addition, the teachers felt supported and recognized that many of the behavior problems were isolated cases of children with severe problems, not a reflection of the teacher's ability to maintain discipline. "I have one student that doesn't respond to normal management, but her teacher last year had the same trouble and all of the rest of the students are doing great, so I feel good about myself as a teacher."

The current research suggests that classroom discipline is the most significant obstacle to new teachers (Hertzog, 2002; Levin, Hoffman, Badiali & Neuhard, 1985; Love, Henderson, & Hanshaw, 1996; Meister & Melnick, 2003); however, the data from the participants in this study does not support this. The findings from this study suggest that setting up and adapting a classroom discipline system can be challenging, but these teachers were successful in making changes and creating a plan that works. As a whole they felt supported and empowered in the area of classroom discipline, and resigned it to a minor obstacle to their teaching.

Parents

Unlike classroom discipline, the issue of parents is rarely mentioned as a cause for teachers leaving the profession. However, research does exist concerning the fears preservice teachers have about working with parents (Gee, 2001), the need for more training in the area of communication with parents (Epstein, Sanders, & Clark, 1999; Hiatt-Michael, 2001), and the link between student achievement and parent involvement (Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, Miller-Johnson, 2000; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000).

While it may not be the reason given for leaving the profession, the problems teachers have with parents are multi-faceted, ranging from not enough support at home to a constant critique of the teacher's job. Throughout the school year, the participants in this study listed parents as an obstacle to not only their effective teaching, but also to their confidence. A phone call between a new teacher and a disgruntled parent was related at our October meeting. "This parent called me out of the blue last night, at 9:00 no less, and just started yelling at me. It was over something so minor . . . about a note I sent home about bringing snacks for our field trip. She told me that all new teachers are alike. She said that her son had a new teacher last year, too and that it was horrible. I felt like crying, but I just listened to her and cried when I got off the phone." With this story, several other teachers shared altercations with parents and offered advice on how to deal with them.

One of the disadvantages of being a new teacher is a lack of reputation. Parents in this tight-knit, well-educated community take a strong interest in the day-to-day happenings in the classroom. When a student is assigned to a new teacher, anxiety is often present and many parents feel the need to more closely monitor the new teacher. Overly involved parents and pressure from parents were listed as obstacles by the teachers. One example is when a parent asked a teacher to report her child's homework to the parent each night. This third grade teacher wanted to tell the parent that her child needed to be responsible and copy the homework off the board just like the other students, but not wanting to make the parent mad, she consented to the parent's wishes.

Many teachers felt unfairly judged by the parents. One first grade teacher told about her hurt feelings when she learned that a parent went to the principal, complaining

about the lack of graded work being sent home. "If only this parent had bothered to come to my classroom, she would have seen the projects hanging all over the room, the group work on display, and could have seen the play we performed in social studies. They don't want me to teach the old way, but they expect to see worksheets coming home each day. I can't win!"

Another new teacher agreed, telling how a parent questioned her giving a test on a Friday. According to the teacher, this parent had a complaint with everything. "If I gave the test on Monday she would say that isn't good because of the weekend. Tuesday would not be good because it is too close to Monday. Maybe I should just offer to give the test on Saturday. I'm up here all weekend anyway."

The problems these teachers were listing concerned overly involved and critical parents, but another matter relating to parents was the lack of support or help. While less prevalent as a complaint, a few teachers commented on their frustration with parents who they believed did not support the education of their child. "I don't know how much more I can do for this child when his parents don't do their part. I have met with his mom and gone over things she could do at home to help, but after the first day or two, she doesn't do her part. He is so far behind and I don't think I can overcome what he has to deal with at home," explained a third grade teacher. "Their parents just don't seem to care," said another teacher about the lowest achieving students in her room.

Lack of confidence in dealing with parents was also evident as supported by this statement in January, "My biggest struggle is dealing with student issues that require immediate parent contact. I tend to drag my feet to see if a situation will get better. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't and I'll think why didn't I just call the

parents. I guess I am afraid to contact them because it's ultimately a criticism of their child I'm calling with."

The teachers in the study were consistent in their reporting that only a few parents were obstacles to their teaching, mainly to their confidence. However, when a teacher did have a problem with a parent it was a major issue that resonated with the teacher for a long time. They took the parents' comments personally and often felt indicted by the critiques. As a parent myself, I could identify with the parents' concerns better than most of the new teachers. Only four of the 19 participants had children of their own, and a few voiced the idea that parents needed to leave the decisions of school to the teachers. In my interpretation, some of the concerns from the parents were legitimate; however, the majority of the teachers did not distinguish between parents that had legitimate complaints and those that seemed unreasonable. Instead, what determined whether a parent was a problem or help was whether their comment was negative or positive.

Despite discussions about how some parents were obstacles for these new teachers, most listed, at one time during the year or another that parents were also a source of satisfaction. Many referred to notes of encouragement that parents had sent, special birthday surprises, and positive conversations as morale boosters and confidence builders. "The other day I had a parent eat lunch and afterwards she told me how much her child was liking school. She told me that she thought I was doing a great job and that her daughter talks about me at home all the time. Just hearing that made all the work I had been doing seem worthwhile, and I found myself more excited about teaching that afternoon. I wish parents knew how much their praise means to us, especially since our students don't ever say thank you."

Just as the negative feedback stayed with the teachers long past the exchange, the positive notes and comments seemed to last as a source of strength. Focusing on the good aspects of parent involvement and not the bad took a deliberate effort from our group. Teachers were quick to rehash the negatives about parents and let one or two spoil their perception of parent support. As one teacher reminded the group, "You can't please them all!"

Veteran Teachers

During the school year, the participants were asked each month to reflect on the obstacles and strengths of their teaching and job environment. Some months certain issues would be more prevalent than others; for instance administrative support was cited more after the first round of formal observations and instructional expectations were identified after results from the standardized reading tests were reported. However, a lack of support from veteran teachers was mentioned by many teachers month after month. Not every participant had trouble with the teachers they were working with, but the majority did. In the literature on new teacher dissatisfaction, isolation from veteran teachers is often named (Shanker, 1990). However, the problem being referred to here is different. This difficulty is not only a lack of support from veteran teachers, but a feeling of opposition. Across schools and across grade levels the new teachers reported that experienced teachers on their grade levels were obstacles to their teaching.

In January several participants listed veteran teachers as a hindrance. "I don't like it when I use my ideas in my classroom and another teacher on my grade level may object to what I want to do." Another wrote about feeling this opposition when "my grade level is not supportive of an idea." This was supported by a third teacher with this

comment: “I am frustrated with grade level decisions--social studies and science--our themes are not up for discussion; it doesn’t matter that they aren’t covering objectives. . . it’s just the way it is.” And still another teacher wrote, “I don’t have a major role in making my class different from the others. Even when I have my new ideas I feel like I have to change things just to be like the other teachers.” Whether the veteran teachers were stifling or not, many of the new teachers had the perception that the power to decide what would be taught in the classroom was held by the veteran teachers on the grade level.

Other reflections probed for general roadblocks or obstacles the new teachers experienced. These were laden with references to veteran teachers. Several of the reflections listed as obstacles, “other teachers,” “grade level decisions,” and “veteran teachers,” without elaborating. Others explained, “Many of the ‘vet teachers’ are not open to a lot of new ideas. Many are caught up with the way things have always been,” and “When I told them [my grade level] that I was going to try a new way to do spelling tests, they said no because the parents would talk. It’s like nothing can change and they don’t even consider that I may have a good idea because I am new.” This was reiterated by another teacher several months later, “My biggest obstacle is doing what others in your grade level and school want you to do. I want to bring new ideas to the table and would like my ideas to be accepted.” That same month, this was a teacher’s response to the obstacles she was facing, “Seeing what others are doing and feeling as I should do what they are doing.” One teacher answered a question about what topics she would like help with in the future with, “How to work with your peers that report everything you say to your principal.”

Despite the prevalence of negative experiences with veteran teachers, there were some instances where the new teacher listed positive relationships with veteran teachers. Early in the year a few teachers commented, "I think the grade level helps me and other teachers not just on my own grade level," and "I feel encouraged by my mentor and peers to try new ideas, strategies, etc." At the end of the year several teachers listed other teachers as one of the best parts of being a teacher. In answer to the question, "What has been the best part of being a teacher this year?" these were some of the responses: "Working with my grade level," "I love the staff," and "new friendships."

Overall, the participants voiced more negative experiences with veteran teachers than positive. However, our group meetings were quite likely one of the only places these teachers felt comfortable verbalizing these complaints, which could contribute to the pervasiveness of the negative comments about veteran teachers.

Isolation

In the current literature on new teachers' reasons for dissatisfaction, isolation is often listed as a primary cause (Gold, 1996; Shanker, 1990). In this study, however, isolation was seldom mentioned as a reason for dissatisfaction. Even though participants often experienced conflict with the teachers they were working with, they did not feel isolated from them. Most of the participants, 16 out of 19, had an assigned mentor. The new teachers reported varying degrees of satisfaction with their mentor, but none reported feeling isolated.

One explanation for the absence of this often cited theme is that the primary purpose of the T.E.A.M. meetings was to support the new teachers and to provide them with a group to share successes, frustrations, and ideas. Since all of the interviews,

reflections, and discussions were related to the participants' involvement with the T.E.A.M. group, they may not have thought to mention isolation as they would have away from the group.

Administrators

In addition to a lack of support from parents and other teachers, the participants named a lack of administrative support and negative feedback from administrators as obstacles. The following were comments in response to a question asking what the participants would list as obstacles or roadblocks preventing them from teaching the way they would like to teach.

"Lack of reinforcement from administration."

"Administration's negativity."

"The biggest obstacle preventing me from teaching the way I want to teach is feeling that what I teach does not meet the 'expectations' of my administrators."

"My biggest struggle is having to prove to administrators that I am an effective teacher."

"Feeling like my administrators don't like me and are out to get me. I feel there is so much pressure to have high DIBEL [Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy] scores and very little emphasis on anything else I am doing and no help for me. . . I get a lot of negative feedback and no positive feedback."

Negative feedback from administrators significantly impacted teachers. Early in the school year, one new teacher revealed in an interview that she felt like she was going to be sick each morning as she walked into the classroom. Because she had involved an administrator to help her solve a behavior problem, she sensed the administrator now

believed she was incompetent. The new teacher perceived the administrator's comments as non-supportive and condemning. She wanted help for handling a behavior problem, but only felt criticism. A major struggle was whether to tell the administrator how she was feeling or to just suffer in silence. She badly wanted to tell her side of the story and change the opinion this administrator had formed about her. Each day she was aware that the administrator was looking for mistakes from her. The teacher reported, "The students and some positive comments from parents are the only things helping me overcome the knots in my stomach and the anxiety I feel when this administrator shows up at my door." Several months later, this teacher was still struggling with the issue and wrote, "I don't feel empowered when I am talking with my administrators. I feel that because of the way I was treated early on in my profession, I am unable to feel comfortable discussing many things with them."

In the final reflection of the year, the participants were asked "What do you wish administrators knew or did?" Of the 13 teachers who responded to the question, three different answers were given. The most common answer came from seven of the teachers and related to the feedback they had received from their administrators.

"I wish administrators knew how to express what you can do to improve without making teachers feel bad."

"Give positive with the negative."

"Keep positive feedback coming – from their mouths it means so much."

"That their positive comments go a LONG way."

"Be positive every once in a while."

"Give me some encouraging words."

"Accentuate the positive. Give suggestions with the negative."

Five teachers gave the second most frequent answer, and they wrote they wished their administrators recognized their commitment to teaching and their life outside of school.

"I wish they knew that I was doing my best to deal with all these great events and scheduled meetings and getting classroom things done."

"I wish they knew I have a life outside of teaching."

"How much time we actually spend preparing and how devoted we are."

"We have another life. They say they understand but don't show with actions."

"We have a life outside of school."

The third answer given for what these new teachers wished their administrators knew or did related to informal observations and was reported by two teachers. These responses were:

"I wish they could spend more casual time in my classroom."

"More informal evaluations."

Not all teachers felt their relationships with administrators were poor. When asked to rate their administrative relationships on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being a positive or strength and 10 being a problem or weakness) the average rating was 3.85, with 14 of the participants answering. However, the range of ratings was from 1 to 10, demonstrating different experiences for different teachers.

On this same survey, teachers were asked how long they believed they would stay in teaching and the teachers who rated their administrative relationships as significant

problems or weaknesses (8 – 10 on the scale), had answers that were very different than the others. Their answers to "How long do you think you will stay in teaching?" were:

"Not another year."

"I used to say for life, but now I don't know."

"I used to think I wanted to teach for 50 years at my school, but now I would quit today if I could."

Of the four participants who listed their administrative relationships as a significant positive or strength (1 or 2 on the scale), their answers to "How long do you think you will stay in teaching?" were very different.

"Until I die! I love teaching, it's the only think I've ever wanted to do."

"As long as I can! I love to teach."

"Till or past retirement age."

"Indefinitely."

The teachers who were pleased with their relationships with principals and assistant principals did have other areas they listed as problems or weaknesses, but the problems did not seem to affect their outlook on teaching the way the problems with administrative relationships had their colleagues. It appears the negative feedback from administrators, whether real or perceived, greatly influenced the teachers, some to the point of wanting to quit.

Instructional Expectations

Another frustration that was verbalized during interviews with the participants, but not as much in written reflections or whole group discussions, was the pressure of instructional expectations. In an interview in October, one teacher lamented that she was

being asked to do many things in her classroom that she was not prepared to do. "I do not know how to do all of the things my principal and reading coach want me to do. They say I should meet with small groups every day and meet with my struggling readers even more than that. How am I supposed to manage five small groups, listen to children read individually and still make sure everyone learned what they are supposed to. They didn't teach me how to do this in college and now I am drowning in whole group lessons, much less the small groups."

Another teacher confided in a November interview, "I am getting mixed messages. On one hand my principal is telling me to teach like everyone on my grade level, but on the other hand she is asking me to do small groups and implement more individualized instruction. She came in and saw me using a reading textbook with the whole class and said I shouldn't be doing that. But, that is what my grade level does. I don't know how I am supposed to teach. I just know that I better have DIBEL scores that are high."

Two other teachers involved me in a conversation in February about their problems with being told what not to do, but never being shown what they should do instructionally. "She tells us that we are supposed to assess where each child is and teach them on their level. We know what that means, but what does that look like in the classroom. I thought I was doing that and working with the ones that did not master the math we were doing, but then she made the comment to me after school that I better not forget about the high kids, that I should be working with them more, too." These teachers wanted the principal or assistant principal, or even the reading coach, to come in and show how to set up their day.

The biggest area of instructional concerns seemed to be the managing of small groups and the accountability that DIBELs scores brought. One teacher announced to the group in the March meeting, "Could anyone share ideas for how to get students reading faster when you have tried everything?" The DIBEL test measures a student's ability to decode sounds and read with speed, but the new teachers often verbalized that it was being used to measure their teaching. When meetings were held to review the mid-year DIBEL scores one teacher described her meeting like the classic movie, *The Godfather*. She described the "boss" sitting with her "henchmen" and delivering the bad news of students who did not bench mark. Another teacher piped up, saying her experience with DIBEL progress meetings was like the popular television show, *The Apprentice*, where Donald Trump announces, "You're fired," to someone. She said she was just waiting to be sent home because her students' scores did not measure the expectations of the administrators. The pressure to teach like a veteran teacher, but have all of the enthusiasm and new ideas of a beginner, were unrealistic to many of the participants and a reason to doubt their abilities.

Empowerment

During the first few months of the school year, the new teachers focused on issues concerning their own classrooms, like managing behavior and completing lesson plans. However, as the teachers settled into a routine they were ready to contribute to the team of teachers they were working with. Beginning in October, and becoming more prevalent as the months passed, teachers made comments like, "They don't seem to value what I have to say," "I don't feel comfortable saying anything because I am just a first year teacher," and "I wish my grade level would take me seriously." While issues related to

veteran teachers, parents, and administrative support have been addressed, these comments were associated with the teachers' inability to accomplish what they wanted. I began to see a pattern of comments and recognized the problem as a lack of empowerment. This led to interview and reflection questions aimed specifically at issues of empowerment, which I defined for the participants as, "The opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession" (Melenyzer, 1990).

In January the participants were asked, "In what ways do you feel empowered?" Of the eleven who responded, six gave responses that were centered on the students.

"I feel empowered by my students. It gives me great joy knowing that 'Susie,' who came in as a blank slate has now absorbed the knowledge needed to master a specific topic, subject, etc."

"Seeing success stories."

"When students produce quality work."

"I feel that I make a major impact in my students' lives. The students are actually learning what I teach them. I make every minute a teachable moment."

"I feel empowered when my students reach goals. Especially when my students remember what I've taught. I feel empowered when I get my students to the point where they try their best!"

"When my students show improvement."

Additionally, four mentioned the empowerment they felt from other teachers' support. They listed the following as ways they felt empowered:

"Sharing with peers and mentor. Trying ideas of veteran teachers."

"Support system throughout grade level."

"Encouragement by mentor, peers to try new ideas, strategies, etc."

"When co-workers offer positive feedback and share ideas."

Two teachers also mentioned parents as a basis for feelings of empowerment. Their comments were, "I am also empowered by the compliments the parents give, letting me know how well I have done in helping to improve their child's learning," and "The support of the parents helps me see that I am doing something right and it makes me want to do even more for their child."

Some of the same positive aspects of empowerment were listed as negatives when the question was changed to, "In what ways do you not feel empowered?" Several teachers who mentioned colleagues and parents as positive sources of empowerment also listed them as negative sources. Their negative comments about colleagues and empowerment included:

"Grade level not being supportive of an idea."

"Because of being the 'new kid on the block,' I find it hard or not so easy to try my own ideas."

"I don't have a major role in making my class different from the others."

"I also don't feel empowered when I feel I need to please people who don't know what goes on in my room."

The comments concerning parents and empowerment:

"Parents and textbooks rule how I teach. When I try to do what I think is best for my students, I feel like I am moving too slow to complete the textbooks or parents are not satisfied with work that is sent home."

"Parental expectations."

"Parents' pressure."

Other reflections listed the following as ways the teachers did not feel empowered:

"When I am given tasks and no explanation."

"I do not feel empowered when I discover or am told a good idea too late to use it. Not always having a creative idea at the right moment."

"Fear of failure."

"Confidence in my own ability."

During the February T.E.A.M. meeting with all 19 participants, issues of empowerment and frustrations with job demands were discussed. The bulk of the conversation blamed the extraordinary burden placed on new teachers by administrators, parents, and the day-to-day requirements of the job. One teacher voiced, "I don't think they [administrators] remember what it is like to be a new teacher. There are so many things I want to do, but don't know how to do yet. Other times, I know how I want to teach but I don't have the time to prepare because I am so weighed down with other stuff that they say I have to do." Another teacher chimed in, "Yeah, I feel like I have to do all of the same things the other teachers have to do, which takes me a ton longer because I am doing all of these lessons for the first time. But I also have to do all of the new teacher stuff that they say has to be done. It seems like I have to go to twice as many meetings and remember to complete this form and do this new teacher thing; yet, I don't get any help." The majority of the new teachers agreed with these statements.

Bureaucratic Demands

As the school year came to a close for these new teachers, they were asked to reflect on the single worst part of being a teacher. Their resounding answer was the demands outside of instruction. While the topic rarely came up for discussion during our meetings, it was consistently listed as a struggle for the teachers on their reflections. It seems paperwork demands were being experienced by all, but they were not seeking help in ways to handle the problem.

Their responses to the question, "What has been the worst part of being a teacher this year?" illustrate just how prevalent the frustrations with bureaucratic demands were.

"All of the extras that seem to be expected of teachers."

"The worst part has been all the paper work and all the extras that are required."

"The worst part of being a teacher is having to deal with all of the extra things."

"The exorbitant amount of time you spend preparing."

"The time spent on 'extra stuff' besides teaching."

"Grading papers, paperwork."

"The worst part of being a teacher is the 'outside work'."

"The extra meetings and the paperwork."

"I'm never able to get enough sleep."

"Too much outside work."

"Outside time."

These comments represent 11 out of 14 responses. The only other issues attributed to the worst part of teaching were "working with certain parents," "the constant

worry of being judged incompetent since I am a new teacher," and "the attitudes of some of my kids."

In summary, the findings related to the obstacles the participants experienced during their first year of teaching were similar to the findings of previous studies. Lack of support, a loss of empowerment, and bureaucratic demands were named in this study just as they have been in other studies (Billingsley, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Fore, Martin, & Bender, 2002). However, the data presented here minimizes the role of discipline problems and isolation, which have previously been named considerable dilemmas for new teachers (Gold, 1996; Hertzog, 2002; Meister & Melnick, 2003). In addition, difficulties with parents and opposition from veteran teachers surfaced as significant obstacles in this study, but have not been frequently named in other studies.

An analysis of the obstacles the new teachers identified reveals that the majority of their frustrations came from outside sources, not their personal weaknesses. Often the new teachers claimed that veteran teachers and administrators were not aware of their frustrations. In an effort to confirm or dismiss this idea, the researcher gathered the opinions of veteran teachers and administrators about new teacher obstacles. These findings are reported in the next section of this chapter under the heading of "Veteran Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions of New Teachers."

Section 2: Veteran Teachers' and Administrators' Perceptions of New Teacher Obstacles

After hearing complaints from new teachers about a lack of understanding and empathy from their administrators, I presented several questions to administrators and veteran teachers about the obstacles present for teachers, especially new teachers.

Throughout the year, the new teachers who participated in this study were asked to reflect on the struggles facing them. The details of their myriad responses are contained in the first section of this chapter. The topics I categorized from the participants' responses were classroom discipline, parents, veteran teachers, administration, instructional expectations, empowerment, and bureaucratic demands.

Veteran Teacher Responses

Twenty-two veteran teachers gave their opinion about what roadblocks or obstacles prevent *them* from teaching the way they would like. Overall, their answers were similar to the new teachers with demands, parent support, and administrative support being the topics mentioned most frequently.

Also, veteran teachers were asked to name the obstacles they felt were most significant to new teachers. Once again their answers were aligned with the data collected from the new teachers throughout the school year. Even though the majority of the veteran teachers had been teaching for ten or more years, their analyses of today's new teachers' problems were consistent with what the new teachers were feeling themselves. Issues such as parental support, administrative support, grading responsibilities, and discipline problems were mentioned, but the two most common topics listed as new teacher obstacles by veteran teachers were demands and veteran teachers.

The veteran teachers felt the non-teaching demands on the new teachers were a significant obstacle. The veteran teachers not only mentioned being overwhelmed with the bureaucratic demands, which the new teachers also mentioned frequently, but they also listed not being familiar with the standard "non-written" procedures that are a part of the school culture, which the new teachers did not identify as a problem.

"I think the biggest obstacle for new teachers are the demands to teach instructional objectives, deal with discipline, parents, student needs in terms of health, family stability, self esteem, etc. without guidance, support, or time to digest everyday happenings."

"Ignorance of all those nuts-and-bolts non-teaching procedures and policies."

"Time management."

"Time management for classroom and teacher duties like lesson plans, paper work."

"New teachers are coming into a "culture" of a new school. Obviously, there are new names to learn and adapting one's style to fit in with the school's philosophy, which are challenges. But, again, many of the overall obstacles fall into the form of the teacher's and administrator's discussions about past events and traditions in a way that suggests new teachers are already aware of these things. It is common to assume that other teacher's will catch the new teachers up to speed, but not always fair. Teachers and administrators should avoid school jargon and referring to past years without explaining what they mean."

"I don't think new teachers always understand the terms and strategies people talk about. I know I didn't when I was a first year teacher."

Another topic identified by veteran teachers was the lack of support from and intimidation by veteran teachers. This was mentioned by several veteran teachers; however, it appeared they were not talking about themselves, but other veteran teachers.

"Lack of peer support is a problem for new teachers."

"Sometimes novice teachers are viewed as not having enough experience. They are sometimes intimidated by teachers who have been in their positions for a while. The need to conform often is internalized as a way of survival!"

"Lack of collegiality among peers."

"I feel as veteran teachers we need to provide more of a support system for new teachers, so they feel comfortable asking questions and for help when things seem overwhelming."

As a whole, the veteran teachers perceived external obstacles, or obstacles beyond the control of the new teacher as most troublesome. The functions of the school were more to blame for impeding the effectiveness of new teachers than the new teachers were themselves.

Administrator Responses

Nine administrators gave responses that varied from those of the new and veteran teachers in that they were more heavily focused on problems within the control of the new teacher. The most frequent obstacles listed by administrators were instructional objectives, confidence, and time management.

Comments related to instructional objectives:

"Lesson planning is an obstacle for new teachers . . . understanding the pace, sequence, and scope of objectives."

"New teachers just don't have the experience to know which strategies are effective. They are presenting just about every lesson or activity for the first time so a lot of mistakes are made."

"New teachers don't know what needs to be taught like some of the teachers who have been teaching in the same grade level for a long time. New teachers have to study their course of studies and ask for help with planning. They don't have the experience in running the classroom from one activity to the next and sometimes get lost trying to figure everything out."

Comments related to confidence:

"Sometimes they may not be comfortable trying something new because they are afraid of not being successful. Confidence is important! I think confidence might be the biggest obstacle."

"The feeling they should know what to do and if they ask for help that means they are weak."

"I have seen new teachers be very fearful of the students and the parents. When the students sense that their teacher is not sure of herself, it can lead to chaos."

Comments related to time management:

"Knowing how much time to spend at school and on self."

"Most new teachers had no idea how time consuming their first year could be. Many are not organized and don't get everything accomplished when they are supposed to. I often have to remind my new teachers when forms and paperwork are due."

Additionally, administrators listed some obstacles within the school culture itself. The lack of support from veteran teachers, mentors, administrators, and parents was mentioned by administrators, just as it had been by new and veteran teachers.

"In some cases, not all, the negativity and hardened attitude of veterans who have lost their love of teaching really affects new teachers."

"Lack of consistent and on-going mentors."

"Support from parents and administrators."

In summary, the responses from veteran teachers were similar to those of new teachers, but the obstacles perceived by administrators differed. On one hand, it is not surprising that new and veteran teachers have similar thoughts because they share the same job. On the other hand, one would think that veteran teachers would be more sympathetic and helpful to new teachers if they understood their dilemmas so well, but this was not the case as evidenced by the numerous times new teachers complained of problems with veteran teachers.

The data revealing differences between new teachers' and administrators' perceived obstacles could be a contributing factor to new teachers' claims of a lack of administrative support. If principals do not recognize the needs of new teachers, they cannot begin to provide support for overcoming those obstacles.

Section 3: The Influence of Mentoring and a Peer Support Group

The Mentoring Program

The mentoring program in this school system consists of a mentor assigned by the school principal to help a new teacher. Usually the mentors teach the same grade as the new teacher and the pairing is done with little input from the mentor or the new teacher. The mentors do not receive any training nor do they get a stipend. For some teachers in this study, their mentors were a perfect match.

"My mentor has been everything to me. She took me under her wing and always has time to answer my questions. After an administrator suggested that my room was not arranged well for classroom management, she stayed after school and helped me decide where to move desks and tables. She has been great."

Another teacher said, "I have a great mentor. She worked with me last year during my internship, and we have a good relationship of trust."

When asked to rate their assigned mentor on a scale of 1 (positive) to 10 (negative), six out of fifteen gave ratings from 1 to 4, revealing satisfaction with their mentor. However, nine of the participants rated their mentors with a 5 or higher, with three giving their mentors the most negative rating of 10.

"My mentor has not been helpful. She often forgets to tell me the very basic things that I need to know."

"Sometimes I feel like it is the blind leading the blind when I go to my mentor for help."

At the end of the school year the participants were asked what they wished their mentors knew or did. These comments revealed some of the ways the participants felt their mentors were lacking.

One common point was offering encouragement and praise:

"Mentors need to make sure to be supportive in praise. Let new teachers know what they are doing well."

"Mentors need to remember we are new – be easy and positive."

Another frequent idea was help with planning:

"I wish she spent more time helping me come up with ideas and writing lesson plans, instead of just giving me a copy."

"I wish mentors knew how to help new teachers plan for the year."

"I think mentors should spend time in the beginning with new teachers and help them plan lessons."

"I wish my mentor helped me with planning at the beginning of the year. I was lost!"

"Mentors need to remember that new teachers need help with lesson plans and time management."

Several teachers found teachers besides their assigned mentor who provided the mentoring they needed. All of these were discussed in a positive light.

"I think mentors are great, and I picked a teacher as a mentor rather than the one the school gave me."

"I have an assigned mentor, but I really don't go to her all the time. I've just found someone on my own. I would have rather picked my own mentor."

"I couldn't survive without my mentor, but she was one I sought out."

"Although I have an assigned 'mentor,' I have found two other teachers I can go to in time of need."

The new teachers' experiences with assigned mentors varied. A few found their mentors extremely helpful, providing guidance with lesson planning, room arranging, and cultivating a relationship of trust. Others were less positive about their mentor, mainly citing a lack of time spent together, too little assistance in lesson planning, and a not enough encouragement. For several new teachers a beneficial and supportive relationship was formed with a veteran teacher other than the assigned mentor.

T.E.A.M. Peer Group Meetings

During the 2004-2005 school year, a group was established in this school system to provide new teachers additional support. The researcher for this study developed a proposal for the group, modeled after the common themes attributed to successful induction programs in the research. This proposal is found in Appendix E.

Once school system administrators and elementary principals agreed to support the program, the group was given the official name, T.E.A.M., Teachers Encouraging and Mentoring. The new teachers in the five elementary schools were invited to participate and the principals also submitted names of the teachers they would like to see participate. Monthly meetings were facilitated by the researcher, and the dual-role of researcher and participant are revealed in the Role of Researcher Section in the Introduction of this study. The only people present at the meetings were the 19 new teachers and two veteran teachers, one of those being the researcher.

The meetings were scheduled for the last Thursday of the month. Principals approved release time for the last hour of school and helped coordinate parents and resource personnel to cover the participants' classes. The location of the meetings varied between the five elementary schools. Refreshments were provided, and participants were given a book for their classroom library at each meeting. Topics for each meeting came from the participants' needs, timely issues, and principals' input. A typed agenda helped the group stay on topic, but time was given for open discussion and sharing.

Planned topics included methods of managing classroom discipline, parent conferences, observation evaluations, individualized instruction, and assessment. In addition, a week before the meeting, e-mail was sent to the participants and the principals asking for any topics or issues they wanted discussed.

At the beginning of every T.E.A.M. meeting an open-ended reflection was given. Many of the reflection questions were intended to elicit answers to the first research question concerning obstacles to effective teaching. These responses are categorized and revealed in the first section of chapter four. Additionally, these reflections asked for the participants' opinions of the T.E.A.M. group. Overall, their remarks were extremely positive. Specifically, their comments could be categorized into three ways the group was beneficial: 1) refining practice, 2) resolving problems, and 3) renewing purpose. The data from the participants follows.

Refining practice

The new teachers were often looking for ideas and strategies to become more effective teachers. Many of their questions posed to the group were about instructional strategies. One e-mail message sent to the group members asked for ways to help 2nd

graders master multiplication facts. The e-mail read, "My second graders are attempting to learn multiplication and are starting to really grasp the concept. Is there anything that you could send to me or suggest that has worked for you in the past? All ideas are welcome!" Another e-mail asked for ideas to increase reading fluency. Some of the instructional practices discussed during the group meetings were how to manage cooperative learning groups, how to integrate the presidential election into the curriculum, and what to do with the rest of the class while you were working with small groups.

When asked how the T.E.A.M. group helped the teachers, the following responses were related to the idea of refining practice:

"I really benefited from discussion about cooperative groups."

"I always come away with a lot of good ideas for my classroom."

"I love walking through and seeing the different things all of the people have done at different schools and hearing from others."

"The T.E.A.M. meetings are always very insightful! It was great getting election ideas, I actually used the candy bar election in my class."

"I love walking through and seeing all the good stuff! I have gotten a wealth of ideas from this."

"Loved all the positive consequence discussion."

"I have begun to use the Time Wizard and talk breaks – They love it!"

"I have tried the 'Stars in a Jar' idea and it has worked well."

"I have taken several ideas from our meetings. I use the 'I'm ready and I'm looking for the first person ready' idea and modified it for my class."

"I got a lot of great ideas on how to conduct and document my first parent conference."

"I have heard ideas of what other teachers are doing in their classroom and have been able to tweak them to work in my own."

Resolving problems

In addition to getting new ideas for the classroom and for their teaching, the teachers reflected on ways the T.E.A.M. meetings helped them resolve problems. Many of the discussion sessions during the meetings focused on help for specific issues like communicating with parents, how to handle negative feedback from administrators, and how to develop better working relationships with other teachers. During individual interviews, I discovered that many of the participants were hesitant to direct their problems or questions to their mentors or administrators. The collaborative environment of the T.E.A.M. group was a haven for new teachers and their problems. The following quotes illustrate how the participants felt about the T.E.A.M. group's role for helping resolve problems.

"I had a problem knowing how to handle reteaching/retesting children who don't master skills. This group offered suggestions and helped me brainstorm solutions. I feel like I have a much better system now."

"I have thought a lot about the ways to handle student talking that we discussed. I have adjusted several parts of my management plan and I intend to implement a new plan. I use to use recess minutes as a whole group reward/punishment. This didn't seem to work so I've stopped. The group suggested using 'Talk Breaks,' which I have used some. I plan to use 'Stars in a Jar' at some point. I'm fearful of using all my 'tricks'

early on since it was mentioned in our previous meeting that students may need a boost in the spring."

"Talking about how to handle difficult parents really helped me."

"I was getting too uptight about my students talking, but the group helped me relax a little bit about talking during down times."

"We now do the classroom talking time. My students give me my time and I give them their time to talk. It has worked out great."

"Because of the T.E.A.M. meetings I have been able to more identify with how older teachers and principals view new teachers."

"The meetings have given me things to think about and how I might handle them."

"Simply discussing our classroom experiences and getting other people's ideas about what to do has been the most valuable part of the meeting."

"I benefited from the discussion about cooperative groups and the different ways to manage them."

"At the meetings there is a lot of discussion about worries and I think talking them out really helps."

Renewing purpose

The final category of responses that new teachers gave concerning the benefits of the T.E.A.M. meetings is titled "Renewing Purpose." These comments were related to the teachers' attitudes, enthusiasm, and empowerment. After analyzing the topics and discussions from each meeting, it was apparent that the meeting often began with worries, problems, and concerns about things that had recently happened. However, by

the end of the meeting, the mood was much more positive and many of the comments were about plans the teachers had for the future. The refining of practice and resolving of problems seemed to give the teachers a boost to recommit to their jobs. But in addition, the teachers experienced a sense of worth from these meetings and validation that others were sharing similar struggles.

The issue of empowerment was of concern to the new teachers. As mentioned earlier in this study, they often felt their voices were not heard in the decision-making processes in their grade levels and at their schools. At a meeting in February, I asked the participants to raise their hands if they had ever spoken up during a faculty meeting at their school. Not a single hand went in the air. These 19 new teachers were vocal and animated at our T.E.A.M. meetings, yet they did not contribute in the same way at their schools. Some shared that it was a lack of confidence preventing them from speaking up. Others felt they did not have the experience or background to know what to say, and still others believed their ideas were just not wanted. Whatever the reasons these new teachers had for not entering professional conversations at their school meetings, the T.E.A.M. group did encourage and invite their ideas. Several teachers discussed how this sort of empowerment or contribution renewed their self-esteem as a teacher and as a professional.

"Being able to share my ideas with others and have them value what I say, means so much to me. I feel like I am helping someone, instead of being the one that always needs help."

"The T.E.A.M. group makes me feel empowered once again. I feel like I have a worth and something to offer. Many of the veteran teachers I try to discuss my ideas with

will tell me that my ideas are just a part of the latest trend and that they used to teach that way, but it didn't work. It's like they don't even consider that I may have something good to contribute, but the other new teachers are very supportive and a few have even told me how they have used my ideas. It makes me feel like I know what I am doing and that I can do more and more for my students."

"I love sharing at the meetings."

Others found a renewed purpose from the support and camaraderie of people in similar situations. One of the most difficult aspects for these energetic, bright new teachers was the feeling of ineptitude. Most were at the top of their classes in high school and college and were not used to struggling. The demands of the job far exceeded their expectations and many felt no one else was experiencing what they were. The T.E.A.M. group made it obvious that everyone had their obstacles and that many of the new teachers were suffering through the same feelings of inadequateness. In the beginning of the school year Mauer and Zimmerman's (2000) Five Phases of a New Teacher were shared. Often the teachers would refer back to phases two and three: the "Survival Phase" and the "Disillusionment Phase." They embraced the idea that their feelings were normal and more importantly that phases four and five, Rejuvenation and Reflection, would come along. Having a safe environment to admit inadequacies and to find commonalities led to the renewed purpose of many.

"It's nice to know other people feel the same way. It's uplifting to hear suggestions/ideas from people 'on my level' since it can sometimes feel intimidating coming from veteran teachers. It makes me want to try new things that may make me a better teacher."

"I enjoyed listening to the other new teachers. Many times as a first year teacher you feel as though there are only a few who can understand you."

"I loved the '5-Phases of First-Year Teaching.' It was reassuring to know that other people feel this way. I am currently in the third phase, disillusionment. I found the meeting to be a wonderful support group where it is okay to express doubts and fears."

"The reflection back to our own favorite teachers was inspiring and made me realize once again what an impact I have on those little ones in my class."

"Hearing that others are struggling has really helped me see that what I am feeling is okay."

"This group has made me feel supported in an environment of people who are going through the same things. And the joys and successes that each one of us have are enjoyed by all."

"It has been encouraging to realize others are experiencing similar problems."

"After each meeting I've felt a renewed sense to try harder and I realize how all teachers struggle."

"Early in the school year, it was very encouraging knowing that other teachers were going through the same things I was."

The need for systematic inquiry on beginning teachers' induction or mentoring experiences has been recognized for some time (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Nugent, 2004). The data from this study support the literature which avails the benefits of induction on teacher satisfaction and retention (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Holloway, 2001). Wong (2004b) states that no two induction programs are alike, and Kelley (2004) states that the research concerning just which factors best predict the success of these

programs in aiding new teachers has been limited. While this study was not designed to determine the factors that contributed to the group's success, it was important to the researcher to create a peer support group that was 1) a trusting, community of peers; 2) focused on topics driven from the ever-changing needs of the new teachers; and 3) provided a forum to elicit advice and share ideas.

In summary, the new teacher participants cited benefits in the areas of refining instructional practices, resolving common problems, and renewing guiding purposes. In the words of one of the T.E.A.M. group participants, "I dreaded coming to that first meeting, but now I actually look forward to coming."

Chapter 5 will provide discussion of and conclusions for this study.

V. CONCLUSIONS

A summary of the purpose, design, and findings of the study is presented in the first section of this chapter. Next is discussion of two emergent themes: the paradox of new teachers' obstacles and the varied perceptions of new teachers, veteran teachers, and administrators. The chapter concludes with implications and recommendations for future research.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of new teachers and to explore the effects of a teacher support group on the new teachers. The first research question guiding the study asked what obstacles do new teachers identify. One of the main goals for the project was to give a voice to the new teachers and to elucidate the common obstacles they experienced. With an understanding of their worries, concerns, and frustrations the school system and administrators can better meet their needs.

A second goal of the study was to monitor the effectiveness of a new support group, aimed at providing novice teachers support. A single school system in the southeastern United States was the site of the study. Despite its reputation for being one of the most successful and innovative systems in the state, the school system did not have additional support in place for new teachers, other than an assigned one-on-one mentor program. The second research question explored where the new teachers went for help,

focusing on the effectiveness of the current mentoring program and the newly created support group.

Many researchers have documented teacher attrition as a national problem (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Menchaca, 2003). While the school system in the study does not face a teacher shortage because of a wealth of qualified teachers applying for positions each year, the effects of teacher turnover are felt. Darling-Hammond (2003) points out the problematic effect teacher attrition has on school budgets and staffing. In addition, whenever a new teacher enters the profession, a steep learning curve exists as that new teacher must not only implement effective teaching strategies, but he or she must also become accustomed to the culture of the school and the personalities of the people he or she is working with. Keeping good teachers should be one of the most important agenda items for any school leader (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Substantial research evidence suggests that well-prepared, capable teachers have the largest impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000b; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Most teachers and administrators will state that teachers improve with experience. In order for new teachers to gain experience, they must persevere through the trials of the first years in the profession.

Many of the woes of new teachers that are reported in the current literature were not as predominant in the school system which was the site of the study. In this system, pay is among the highest in the state, community involvement is prevalent, and behavior problems are not rampant. However, teachers in this system do report significant obstacles and many teachers leave before their third year is complete. This study was needed to find out why these new teachers experience frustration and opposition. By

providing the participants a voice, this study can help the school system better meet the needs of its new teachers. Through the establishment of a teacher support group, this study can begin to offer a solution to the teacher turnover problem affecting this system and many like it.

Restatement of the Research Design and Method

For this qualitative study, a multiple case study design was used to examine the experiences of novice teachers and the impact of a peer support group in a small southeastern college town during the 2004-2005 school year. Nineteen teachers from five elementary schools met monthly with the researcher to discuss problems, share ideas, and learn new practices. Data were collected through one-on-one structured and informal interviews along with written reflections, surveys, and researcher observations and notes. Constant comparative analysis was used to determine categories and themes relevant to the research questions.

Restatement of the Findings of the Study

After analyzing all of the data collected during the course of this study, there was evidence that the new teachers perceived significant common obstacles to their teaching and that the T.E.A.M. support group was beneficial in helping minimize those obstacles.

The first research question focused on the obstacles of new teachers. Many of the prevalent issues discussed in the research concerning new teacher dissatisfaction were not paramount for the new teachers in this study. In numerous studies, discipline problems have been identified as the most problematic issue novice teachers face in their beginning years of teaching (Hertzog, 2002; Levin, Hoffman, & Badiali, 1985; Love, Henderson, & Hanshaw, 1996; Meister & Melnick, 2003). Classroom discipline was listed as an

obstacle for the novice teachers in this study; however, it was not the most problematic issue facing them. Most of the teachers were successful in resolving classroom management problems early in the year, and only isolated cases of severe discipline problems were mentioned. In addition, large class size and limited instructional resources (Certo & Fox, 2002) have been listed as obstacles for new teachers, but were not mentioned by these participants.

Nevertheless, many of the obstacles revealed by the new teachers in this study were consistent with findings from other research studies. These participants reported feelings of a lack of support and a loss of empowerment just as the teachers in Fore, Martin, and Bender's 2002 study. Another issue found in the research and corroborated in this study was the lack of time to accomplish all that is expected (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

In review, the topics related to new teacher obstacles discussed in chapter four of this study included classroom discipline, parents, veteran teachers, isolation, administrators, instructional expectations, empowerment, and bureaucratic demands. Additional findings related to the first research question focused on veteran teacher and administrator perceptions of the trials facing new teachers. This study found that the new and veteran teachers named similar obstacles, mainly those related to the school culture and climate but the administrators listed problems within the teachers as the major impediments.

Findings concerning the second research question centered on the effectiveness of assigned mentors and a teacher support group in helping new teachers solve their problems. For the majority of the participants, the assigned mentor was only adequate in

meeting their basic needs as a new teacher, and even though several participants had glowing remarks for the exceptional job their mentor had done, a handful of others reported that the mentor pairing was detrimental to their development as a teacher. These findings support the research that mentor-only induction programs are not effective for the majority of beginning teachers (Saphier, Freedman, and Aschheim, 2001: Wong, 2004a).

The findings also reported on the effectiveness of the newly created teacher support group. The participants' comments were much more positive about the support group than they were about the mentoring program. They conveyed that the group offered several areas of benefit which the researcher categorized into themes of refining practice, resolving problems, and renewing purpose. This aligned with previous studies that revealed the benefit of having on-campus, collaborative, and reflective support groups to provide a smoother transition into the teaching profession for beginning teachers (Carver, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Holloway, 2001; Reiman, Bostick, & Lassiter, 1995).

The remainder of this chapter seeks to comment on the above findings, offering discussion and implications.

Discussion of the Paradox of New Teacher Obstacles

Despite this study's focus on the obstacles facing new teachers, one of the major themes to surface was the paradox of these topics as not only obstacles, but benefits, as well. At various times throughout the school year, teachers would fluctuate on their stance as to whether something was an obstacle or a help to their teaching. This was often the case with views on administrative support. I believe every teacher accepted the

principal and assistant principal's role as instructional leader, but the reaction to the advice and feedback from the administrators varied greatly. Personality conflicts were obvious because of the way some of the new teachers discussed their meetings with their principals. Teachers at the same school had very different opinions on the principal's effectiveness in giving feedback about observations. One teacher would list the principal's criticism as constructive and helpful and another would cite it as needless and hurtful. The various reactions can be related to the teachers' self-efficacy. When the teacher had confidence in her own capabilities, she was more apt to identify the negative feedback as a chance to grow than an accusation of failure.

This same dilemma surfaced with the relationships of new teachers and veteran teachers. The new teachers with high self-efficacy were able to rise above the negative comments of veteran teachers and quickly learn how to work within the system, without having to compromise their teaching.

Throughout the study it was evident that the levels of self-efficacy varied among the participants. This could explain the reason some found positive in a situation while others found negative. However, there were many times that the same teacher changed her mind about whether something had a positive or negative effect on teaching. Clearly, some experiences are more naturally positive than others, like a note of appreciation from a parent versus a note of disapproval. But, I often heard conflicting comments from the same teacher about similar episodes. For example, one teacher was frustrated when her principal would not help her deal with an upset parent, but two months later she was applauding her principal's "hands-off" approach. Likewise, a teacher labeled the reading coach in her school as "helpful in showing me what I could do with my struggling

readers," but in the same interview said the reading coach, "talks down to me like I don't know what I am doing."

In addition to naming the same issue as a negative and a positive, the new teachers were paradoxical in their naming of obstacles. This apparent contradiction is found in the current research related to issues of autonomy versus isolation. Williams (2003) explained the teacher's need for both independence and connectedness, and stated that finding a balance where autonomy empowers a teacher but does not create isolation can be a challenge.

In this study, similar challenges of balance were revealed. On one hand a principal's advice was seen as a critique that the teacher was not doing her job correctly, but on the other hand the teachers would complain about a lack of support if the principal did not offer any suggestions on how to improve. Similarly, the new teachers would report frustration with parents that did not help their child at home or support the school, but would also lament about the overly-involved parent that helped their child too much and frequented the school too often. Even the issue of empowerment and time demands was a catch-22 when teachers asked for more input into school decisions, but complained that they had too many meetings to attend.

In fairness to the new teachers, a reasonable balance for each of these continuums does exist. But it is my belief that the new teachers would better analyze and adjust to these obstacles if they realized that they are seeking a balance from others that is difficult to achieve. Their negative reaction to a principal's advice may influence a principal to stop offering support at all. If a new teacher is not careful in relinquishing a mentor's

idea for a lesson, the mentor may misread the action and believe the new teacher no longer needs help planning lessons.

The individuals supporting new teachers must also realize the ever-changing need for assistance and not regulate the new teacher to all or nothing in the area of support. Sometimes new teachers want help, advice, and even word-for-word lesson plans. At other times, new teachers want to branch out on their own and need encouragement and freedom to try their own ideas. As new teachers, administrators, and veteran teachers realize that a continuum of support exists and that new teachers are constantly changing their need, the relationships among these groups will improve and the new teacher will find the balance they desire.

Discussion of the Perceptions of New Teachers, Veteran Teachers, and Administrators Concerning New Teachers' Obstacles

Another important theme which emerged from the data in this study was the differences in the comments from new teachers, veteran teachers, and administrators concerning new teacher obstacles. As detailed in Chapter 4 of this study, the new and veteran teachers had similar thoughts about what obstacles most affected new teachers. These included demands, veteran teachers, parental support, and administrative support. These issues were predominantly beyond the control of the new teacher. Deficiencies within the new teacher were not identified as causes for problems.

However, the administrators' perceptions of new teacher problems clearly identified shortcomings of the new teacher, including lack of experience, lack of confidence, and poor time management. These results appear to be disparate to the new and veteran teacher responses until you realize that they also lay blame to an external

cause. The administrators rarely found fault with anything within their control. If they acknowledged a problem, it was not related to the school itself, instead, it was attributed to something wrong with the teacher.

This lack of personal reflection and admittance of weakness was surprising because of the emerging emphasis on reflection and accountability in the schools (Loughran, 2002). Even though the data were collected anonymously, I surmise that many of the respondents were hesitant to admit their shortcomings for fear of seeming less competent or successful than others. As an employee of the same school system in which this study took place, I have witnessed competition between the five elementary schools and between individual teachers. I speculate that the teachers and administrators were apprehensive about being judged against others.

I believe both the teachers and administrators in this study would admit to areas of weakness within themselves and within their schools if they honestly took account of the issues they could control. More work in the area of meaningful reflection and the addressing of issues of competition could help new teachers, veteran teachers, and administrators better understand the needs of each other.

Implications

Several implications may be drawn from the findings of this study which may guide teacher education programs to better prepare graduates for their first year of teaching and help school systems in the planning and implementation of induction programs for new teachers.

First, schools need to recognize the obstacles new teachers face and work to create a culture of trust and support. The new teachers in this study were often hesitant to

get help and to admit struggles to the very people who were there to help them. Administrators, as school leaders, need to communicate high expectations for new teachers, but also encourage teachers to work together, identify areas to grow, and to seek help when needed through the modeling of these practices themselves. Principals should identify the veteran teachers who embrace the role of mentor and should give them the opportunity to work with new teachers, instead of randomly assigning the teacher next door. If the faculty at a school would accept the responsibility of helping the new teachers adjust to their roles and improve their teaching, the new teachers would feel supported and could reflect on their own teaching without fear of being judged. The climate of competition needs to be minimized and replaced with a climate of trust and community. This climate must start from the top, and principals, more than anyone else, can influence the new teachers' attitudes about teaching and also the general attitude of the faculty toward the new teachers.

Second, the role of a new teacher support group is significant in helping new teachers make the transition into their first year in the classroom. The freedom to share experiences with people in similar situations is valuable, and hearing others reveal the same struggles is reassuring. Most new teachers are reluctant to speak up during faculty discussions, but are willing to share ideas and concerns within a group of other new teachers. This empowerment boosts teacher confidence and gives new teachers a chance to contribute to the learning of other teachers. The support meetings also provide new ideas and solutions to problems, which aid new teachers in overcoming obstacles or minimizing their impact.

Wong (2004a) notes that no two induction programs are exactly alike, and each program should cater to the individual culture and specific needs of its school. The monthly reflections and interviews of the teachers were important in determining the content of the meetings. Facilitators of similar groups need to make a concerted effort to elicit the needs and wants from the new teachers in order to best address their obstacles. Release time at the end of the school day was also beneficial in helping the new teachers fit the meetings into their busy schedules. In addition, principal support of the meetings was essential for the success of the group. The teachers who participated in the first year of these group meetings expressed interest in joining the group again to continue as learners, but to serve as mentors, as well. I believe the new teachers of the T.E.A.M. group will be particularly aware of their role in helping with the induction of future new teachers.

A third implication from this study relates to the way teacher education programs prepare their graduates for their first year. Research indicates that beginning teachers do not feel prepared in the areas of discipline, time management, and communication skills (Meister & Melnick, 2003), and the participants in this study agreed. However, they also felt there is a limit to what you can learn from a college or university class, or even an internship. Many of the obstacles identified by the new teachers only exist when a teacher has sole responsibility of a classroom, which does not occur during practice teaching or an internship. The accountability for students' test scores, the evaluation from a principal, and the long-term planning needed for an entire school year do not surface until a teacher is given his or her own classroom. While schools of education should survey their recent graduates and determine areas to better address, a simple

solution to helping preservice teachers better understand the dilemmas of a first year teacher is to involve the two groups. The participants in this study often said, "I just wish I had known . . ." The plans for the future T.E.A.M. meetings include not only the teachers who have just completed their first year, but also the preservice teachers working in the school system who are still a year away from their first year of teaching. As the preservice teachers hear of the struggles, concerns, and successes of the new teachers, they may better understand the dispositions needed and the demands placed on beginning teachers. This can facilitate the attitude of reflection and need for support before the teacher ever begins his or her first classroom assignment.

In summary, the implications from this study include the administrators' role in creating a collaborative and supportive environment for new teachers, the role of a new teacher support group in empowering new teachers and helping them overcome their obstacles, and the role these support groups can play in helping preservice teachers begin their transition into teaching.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study which involved 19 elementary teachers from one school system found that an on-going support group assisted new teachers in overcoming or minimizing the obstacles they identified. The findings of this study suggest new questions for future research. The following recommendations are proposed as an extension of this study.

First, the findings of this study suggest that teachers' self-efficacy plays a role in determining their reaction to perceived obstacles. It would be helpful to investigate the correlation of a teacher's self-efficacy and her feelings toward an identified obstacle. In addition it would be beneficial to explore whether principals are aware of the varied

levels of self-efficacy their teachers demonstrate and if this awareness alters the way they work with different teachers.

Because this study was conducted in an affluent, suburban school system, studies might be conducted to further examine the obstacles new teachers in other situations may name.

In addition, this study followed new teachers through only one year of teaching. Future studies are recommended to reveal the long term impact of support groups on the careers of teachers. Do the teachers who participate in induction programs remain in the profession longer than others, and do they commit to mentoring new teachers more than those teachers who do not have support from induction programs?

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Document A1: Original consent form for participants

Document A2: Revised consent form for participants

Auburn University
Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5212

Curriculum and Teaching
College of Education
5040 Haley Center

Telephone: (334) 844-4434
Fax: (334) 844-6789

CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR
Factors Influencing Beginning Teachers' Choices of Classroom Management Models

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine the factors which influence beginning teachers as they develop a classroom discipline model. This study is being conducted by Shannon Brandt, a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Pamela Boyd, professor in the Elementary Education program at Auburn University. I hope to learn what is important and influential to new teachers in the area of classroom discipline, and therefore, help undergraduate programs and school systems to better support beginning teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because you are beginning your teaching career.

If you decide to participate, I will ask you to complete a survey as you complete your undergraduate degree and again, just before you begin your first teaching position. Then, I may follow the survey with interviews, lasting no longer than 30 minutes, in October and March. If you are willing to share your teacher evaluation scores, I will use them as data, too. Your information will be completely confidential and fellow teachers and/or administrators will not be able to link you to the information you provide.

Through this study, I hope to involve Auburn University and local school systems in creating more effective instruction and development of teachers' classroom discipline skills. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement. You may withdraw from participation at any time, without penalty. You may withdraw any data which has been collected about you, as long as that data is identifiable.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or your school system.

HUMAN SUBJECTS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH
PROJECT # 04-054 EX 0404
APPROVED 4-17-04 TO 4-16-04

If you have any questions I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, please call me at 887-6335 or e-mail me at brandtfamily@yahoo.com and, I will be happy to answer them. You will be provided a copy of this form to keep.

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Human Subjects Research by phone or e-mail. The people to contact there are Executive Director E.N. "Chip" Burson (334) 844-5966 (bursoen@auburn.edu) or IRB Chair Dr. Peter Grandjean at (334) 844-1462 (grandpw@auburn.edu) .

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's signature	Date	Investigator's signature	Date
Print Name		Print Name	

HUMAN SUBJECTS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH
PROJECT # 04-054 EX 0404
APPROVED 4-17-04 TO 4-16-04

Auburn University
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Curriculum and Teaching
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Fax: (334) 844-6789

CONSENT DOCUMENT FOR
Providing a Life Preserver for the "Sink or Swim" Years: Beginning Teachers' Thoughts on Induction

You are invited to participate in a research study to evaluate the role an induction program can play in helping beginning teachers. This study is being conducted by Shannon Brandt, a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Pamela Boyd, professor in the Elementary Education program at Auburn University. I hope to learn what new teachers cite as obstacles in the way of effective teaching and job satisfaction, therefore, helping undergraduate programs and school systems to better support beginning teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because you are beginning your teaching career and are a member of the TEAM (Teachers Encouraging and Mentoring) Induction Group.

If you decide to participate, I will ask you to complete a survey at each induction meeting, approximately once a month. I will take notes at each induction meeting and will include quotations from the discussion as data. Then, I may interview you in March about your experiences being a new teacher and being involved in the induction group. These interviews will last no longer than 30 minutes. If you are willing to share your teacher evaluation scores, I will use them as data, too. Your information will be completely confidential and fellow teachers and/or administrators will not be able to link you to the information you provide.

Through this study, I hope to involve local school systems in creating more effective induction programs for acclimating new teachers to the school culture. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement. You may withdraw from participation at any time, without penalty. You may withdraw any data which has been collected about you, as long as that data is identifiable.

_____
Participant's Initials

HUMAN SUBJECTS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH
PROJECT #04-084EX0404
APPROVED 4-17-04 TO 4-16-06

Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or your school system.

If you have any questions I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, please call me at 887-6335 or e-mail me at brandtfamily@yahoo.com and, I will be happy to answer them. You will be provided a copy of this form to keep.

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu .

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's signature Date	Investigator's signature Date
Print Name	Print Name

HUMAN SUBJECTS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH
PROJECT #04-054 EX 0404
APPROVED 4-17-04 TO 4-16-06

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

New Teacher Survey

Name _____

What school and grade level are you teaching? ____

What school and grade level did you work with during your internship? _____

On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being very worried and 10 being very confident), how would you rate your ability to handle classroom discipline? _____

On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being very poor and 10 being excellent), how would you rate your internship teacher's ability to handle classroom discipline? _____

Place a check in the appropriate box for your answer.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I was introduced to different classroom management models/theories in my undergraduate classes.					
I have observed different classroom management models/theories in my lab and internship placements.					
I will wait to see what kind of class I have before I develop a discipline model for my first year of teaching.					
I have a classroom discipline plan ready for the first day of school.					
My discipline plan will be modeled after a program or expert. (Ex: Discipline with Dignity; Fred Jones' Positive Classroom Discipline)					
My discipline plan will be modeled after what my internship teacher did.					
My discipline plan will be modeled after other teachers I have observed.					
My discipline plan will be modeled after things I experienced in my own schooling.					
My discipline plan will be modeled after the way my parents handled discipline with me.					

New Teacher Survey – Page 2

Please answer the following questions about your classroom discipline plan. If you have not developed a plan, please feel free to answer only what you have decided upon.

Does your plan have a name? (Assertive Classroom Discipline, etc.)

Will you or the students decide upon the rules for the classroom?

Will the rules be posted in the classroom?

What are the consequences when a rule is broken? Broken the second time? Third, fourth time?

Will students be rewarded for good behavior? If yes, how and how often?

Will you communicate with parents about their child's behavior? If yes, how often and in what ways?

What factors/teachers/experiences/etc. do you think have most influenced the way you want to handle discipline in your classroom?

Have you had negative experiences with classroom discipline that have influenced how you do not want to handle classroom discipline? If yes, explain.

APPENDIX C

WRITTEN REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Document C1: October Reflection Questions

Document C2: November Reflection Questions

Document C3: January Reflection Questions

Document C4: January - 2nd Meeting - Reflection Questions

Document C5: February Reflection Questions

Document C6: March Reflection Questions

Document C7: Veteran Teacher Reflection Questions

Document C8: Administrator Reflection Questions

October Reflection

<u>September Meeting Recap:</u>
Favorite teacher reflection/Oprah video (importance of our words to children)
Positive consequences
Parent conferences
Ways to handle student talking (Stars in a jar; Time wizards; Talk breaks; etc.)
Walk through at Wrights Mill Road
Sharing/Visiting with other teachers

In what ways (if any) were you influenced by the September TEAM meeting?

Have you altered your approach to classroom discipline/management since the beginning of the year? If so, in what ways?

What topics would you like to discuss in future TEAM meetings?

Other comments:

November Reflection

October Meeting Recap:

- Teacher tips (from Shannon and hand-outs)
- Hand-outs on time management, etc.
- Discussion about difficult parents; roles in cooperative groups; bullying/the book *Weakfish*; getting along with veteran teachers; etc.
- Walk through at Ogletree Elementary
- Sharing/Visiting with other teachers

In what ways (if any) were you influenced by the October TEAM meeting?

What would you say is the least/most beneficial part of the TEAM meetings? Rank in order from 1 (lowest benefit) to 7 (highest benefit). Put a zero for any aspect you do not find beneficial at all.

_____ Sharing struggles and problems in a supportive environment

_____ Getting practical tips to apply in the classroom (chore chart; stars in a jar, etc.)

_____ Being empowered by sharing successes and offering advice to others

_____ Reading the hand-outs

_____ Meeting teachers from other schools

_____ Touring other schools

_____ Being able to reflect and visit with other teachers

What topics would you like to discuss in future TEAM meetings?

When would you most like to meet?

_____ Continue with 1:30-3:30 _____ 2:15-4:15 _____ 3:00-5:00

January Reflection

Teacher Empowerment = the opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession.

In what ways do you feel empowered?

In what ways do you not feel empowered?

What would you list as the obstacles or road blocks preventing you from teaching the way you would like to teach?

November meeting highlights: Dealing with PEPE feedback; Working with your grade level colleagues; What is a grade?; How to assess and individualize instruction…

How did the discussion/ideas in the November meeting influence you and your classroom? Answer on back.

January Reflection – Second Meeting

What would you say is the biggest struggle you have faced this year?

What has been easier than you expected about this year?

How long would you want to stay in your current teaching position? Is this longer or shorter than what you thought when you first took this position?

How long do you think you will stay in teaching?

Using 1 to 10, how would you rate the following? Use 1 as a positive/strength; 5 as neutral; and 10 as a problem/weakness.

_____ Classroom management (whole class…managing the daily routines and discipline)

_____ Student behavior (individuals…dealing with a student who does not respond to the normal management procedures)

_____ Time management (your teaching time)

_____ Workload management (getting done all you have to do)

_____ Working with grade level

_____ Administrative relationships

_____ Parents

_____ Instruction (creating and delivering effective instruction)

_____ Assessment/Grading

_____ Small group or individual instruction

_____ Balancing "doing your own thing" with "doing what others want you to do or tell you to do"

_____ Assigned mentor

February Reflection

In what ways has this group helped you REFINE PRACTICE?

In what ways has this group helped you RESOLVE PROBLEMS?

In what ways has this group helped you RENEW PURPOSE?

Rank the following with 1 being the most problematic and 5 being the least problematic for you this year.

____ Student discipline

____ Planning instruction

____ Dealing with parents

____ School relationships (administrators/veteran teachers)

____ Extra demands (paperwork, e-mails, outside of teaching "stuff")

March Reflection

What has been the best part of being a teacher this year?

What has been the worst part of being a teacher this year?

What could be done (realistically) to make you more effective as a teacher?

What do you wish mentors knew or did?

What do you wish administrators knew or did?

What do you know now that you wish you knew at the beginning of the year?

What should colleges do to better prepare teachers?

How much of a problem has classroom discipline and management been for you this year?

What are you looking forward to doing differently for next year?

Veteran Teacher Reflections

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions for Shannon Brandt. The results may be used in a research project looking at the impact of a peer support group on new teachers' decision making.

For the purpose of this survey, teacher empowerment can be defined as "the opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession."

In what ways do you feel empowered?

In what ways do you not feel empowered?

What would you list as the obstacles or road blocks preventing teachers from acting upon their ideas and/or teaching the way they would like to teach?

What obstacles do you think are particularly present for novice teachers?

Administrator Reflections

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions for Shannon Brandt. The results may be used in a research project looking at the impact of a peer support group on new teachers' decision making.

For the purpose of this survey, teacher empowerment can be defined as "the opportunity and confidence to act upon one's ideas and to influence the way one performs in one's profession."

In what ways do you think the teachers in your building feel empowered?

In what ways do you think the teachers in your building may not feel empowered?

What would you list as the obstacles or road blocks preventing your teachers from acting upon their ideas and/or teaching the way they would like to teach?

What obstacles do you think are particularly present for novice teachers?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Document D1: August Interview Questions

Document D2: April Interview Questions

August Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- How would you describe your approach to discipline?
- Have you seen any other teachers use a similar approach? Who? When?
- What about this approach do you like?
- How is your discipline plan working thus far?
- Do you think your plan should work for every child?
- Describe the discipline problems you are having.
- How are you handling those students?
- How is your discipline plan similar to the other teachers on your grade level?
- Does your school mandate or promote one discipline approach or plan over another? If yes, how do you feel about that approach?
- Have you made changes in your discipline plan/approach/philosophy since the beginning of school?
- If so, why have you made those changes?
- Have you been assigned a mentor?
- What advice have people given you about discipline?
- What books/articles have you read about managing classroom discipline?
- How does your management plan or philosophy compare to your experiences in your internship?
- How do your students and school situation compare to your internship?
- What would you say was your parents' discipline style as you were growing up?
- Do you remember getting in trouble in school? How did your teachers handle discipline?

April Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- What has been the best part of being a teacher this year?
- What has been the worst part of being a teacher this year?
- What could be done (realistically) to make you more effective as a teacher?
- What do you wish mentors knew or did?
- What do you wish administrators knew or did?
- What do you know now that you wish you knew at the beginning of the year?
- What should colleges do to better prepare teachers?
- How much of a problem has classroom discipline and management been for you this year?
- What have been your most common discipline problems?
- What changes have you made in your discipline plan since the beginning of the year?
- What are you looking forward to doing differently for next year?

APPENDIX E

PEER GROUP PROPOSAL FOR PRINCIPALS

T.E.A.M. Meetings…Teachers Encouraging and Mentoring

These meetings will be geared to first year teachers (but others may participate with principal approval) with the goal of providing support and mentoring in all areas, but especially in the area of classroom management.

All teachers participating will need to secure "leave" time beginning at 1:15 so everyone can arrive at the meeting site by 1:30. The meetings will be scheduled from 1:30-3:30, and the location will vary so that teachers can visit other schools.

We will begin by focusing on strategies to manage the noise level in the classroom and getting students to follow directions. These are the main issues the current new teachers are reporting as problems. The TEAM meetings will be structured in the aspect that we will have specific goals and topics to discuss, but unstructured enough to develop relationships and meet the evolving needs of the group.

Proposed dates for TEAM meetings: the last Thursday of the month (1:30-3:30) and staff days (will need to coordinate with Central Office and principals)

September 30th
October 28th
November 18th
December 16th
January 3rd or 4th (meet on staff day)
January 27th
February 24th
March 24th
April 25th (meet on staff day)

Needs from principals:

- E-mail me a list of names of all the teachers you would like to participate at your school. I will be happy to talk to your faculty about the group if that is beneficial.
- Once finalized by principals, I will e-mail all new teachers (and any others you want to participate) about the TEAM meetings, but it will help if principals "talk up" the group.
- Help find people to cover classes each month (teachers with interns are a good possibility)