

Student Teaching

A Journey in Narratives

K.J. Fasching-Varner, H.B. Esworth,
T.H. Mencer, D.R. Lindbom-Cho,
M.C. Murray and B.C. Morton (Eds.)

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ive of
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Willow tea; the
Chinese willow, used by the
tēa, v.t. To take or drink tea.
tēa ball. A small perforated ball
of silver, used in making tea in a cup.
tēa'ber'ry, n. The chokeberry.
tēa'board, n. An inveterate drinker of tea.
carrying a tea service.
tēa bug. A board or tray for
by puncturing the tender, more
most valued leaves with its long
boscis.
tēach, v.t.; taught (tat), pt., pp.; teaching.
[ME. *techen*; AS. *tēcan*, to show, to teach
1. To impart instruction to; to educate
guide the studies of; to conduct the
course of studies; to impart knowledge
to; to instruct; to inform.
2. To impart the knowledge of;
to impart information concerning
intelligence or information concerning
to instruct, train, or give
communicate and cause another to
to instruct, or handling
atics; to teach
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SensePublishers

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
1. Introduction <i>Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner, Hillary B. Eisworth, Thomasine H. Mencer, Desiree R. Lindbom-Cho & Martha C. Murray</i>	1
2. Know Thy Self <i>Kathy Le</i>	11
3. Powerful Moments <i>Mackenzie Segrest</i>	25
4. Fears <i>Katie Lowder</i>	37
5. Balance: Is it Obtainable? <i>Jessica Daigle</i>	57
6. Weathering it All <i>Katherine Steinhardt</i>	71
7. An Alternate Path <i>Nicole Chellino</i>	85
8. The Power of Questions <i>Kasey Ball</i>	101
9. If I Can Get Through This, I Can Get Through Anything <i>Katherine Golemi</i>	107
10. Gaining a Critical Perspective <i>Margaret Bates</i>	119
11. Conclusion <i>Hillary B. Eisworth & Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner</i>	131
Afterword	137
Updates	143
References	145

WILLIAM AYERS

FOREWORD

Former distinguished Professor University of Illinois at Chicago

For some of us education and freedom are so closely linked that it becomes all but impossible to consider one without the other popping into view. The relationship is so deep, so seemingly intrinsic, and so profound that they are essentially the same thing, concerning themselves in various ways and at all times with the fullest expression of human development. Education at its best rests on the twin pillars of enlightenment and liberation—we need to know more in order to do more; we need to open our eyes more fully if our agency is to develop and expand; we need to nourish our curiosity and our imaginations as we dive into and investigate the world in order to become simultaneously more capable and more powerful in our projects and our pursuits. Knowledge allows people to become more conscious of themselves as actors in the world, conscious, too, of the vast range of alternatives that can be imagined and expressed in any given situation, and capable, then, of inserting themselves as subjects in history, free human beings who are creators and constructors of the human world.

This collection of essays is an essential manifestation of this relationship: these authors are folks who have chosen teaching and are now engaged in the complex work of getting smarter and more aware in order to become engaged and effective classroom leaders. Here they are constructing themselves as people with agency, authors of their own texts and creators of their own lives; they are expressing themselves as authentic experts on their own experiences; they are bringing to light—as only they can—the nuance and detail, color and feeling, joys and the challenges of their calling. At a time when teachers and students of teaching are talked about but rarely listened to, when they are referred to by the elite exclusively in categorical terms or arid statistical profiles, here is a necessary antidote. We now have access to the unique perspectives of student teachers themselves, and it is a wonderfully intimate encounter—warm and close, filled with human energy, trembling and real. They are in search of great teaching, in pursuit of what is worthwhile.

In a wildly diverse society the questions regarding what is worthwhile will themselves be wildly diverse, and yet they will also come always to first questions: what does it mean to be human? What is an educated person? Where are we and where are we headed? What do we owe one another? These questions pursued fully and honestly reveal a radical truth that only free people can access: we are living in history—dynamic, swirling, always in-the-making—and what we do or do

FOREWORD

not do has consequences; we are each a work-in-progress, swimming hopefully toward an uncertain shore; we have a right and a responsibility to question all that we find before us.

These themes re-ignite the basic proposition that in a democracy life is geared toward and powered by a particularly precious and fragile ideal: every human being is of infinite value, each a unique intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, moral, and creative force; each person is born free and equal in dignity and rights, each endowed with reason and conscience, each deserving, then, a community of solidarity, a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood, recognition and respect. This core value and first principle has huge implications for educational policy: racial segregation is wrong, class separation unjust, disparate funding immoral. These things offend the very idea that each person is equal in value and regard, and reflect instead the reactionary idea that some of us are more deserving and more valuable than others.

The democratic injunction has big implications for curriculum and teaching as well, for what is taught and how. We want our students—whether children or adults, elementary school kids or student teachers—to be able to think for themselves, to make judgments based on evidence and argument, to develop minds of their own. We want them to ask fundamental questions—who in the world am I? How did I get here and where am I going? What in the world are my choices? How in the world shall I proceed?—and to pursue the answers wherever they might take them. We favor teaching initiative, courage, imagination, and creativity—qualities that must be modeled and nourished, encouraged and defended—as opposed to obedience and conformity, the hidden curriculum in every authoritarian system.

Participatory democracy encourages all of us to develop the capacity to name the world for ourselves, to identify the obstacles to our full humanity, and the courage to act upon whatever the known demands. This kind of education is characteristically eye-popping and mind-blowing—always about opening doors and opening minds as students forge their own pathways into a wider, shared world.

We note that the times are messy, and that life itself is a *Catch-22*. We did not choose our time or place, and we can not determine when or how we are thrust into the world. Our choice is to step aside and cover our heads, or to embrace the lives we are given, and live them fully. We can dive into the contradictions, seize the little moments and teach/organize/live toward freedom, joy, and justice. One way or another we must eventually love one another or die.

KENNETH J. FASCHING-VARNER, HILLARY B. EISWORTH,
THOMASINE H. MENCER, DESIREE R. LINDBOM-CHO &
MARTHA C. MURRAY

1. INTRODUCTION

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Education in the 21st century, and in particular schooling, is a composite set of contradictions that make navigating a pathway from student to teacher a complex endeavor to say the least. The last decade has seen the most significant articulation of educational reform through legislation such as No Child Left Behind, teacher education reform such as Teach for America and other alternative pathways, school structure reform in the image of corporatized private-interest publically-funded charter schools, and curricular reform such as Common Core State Standards and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) assessments. All of these so-called reforms are oriented around the (neo-liberal) idea that “accountability” helps to eliminate persistent gaps in achievement between over and under represented groups. Advocates of these reforms exist in both neo-conservative and neo-liberal groups, and state by state, they reflect the socio-political agenda of the times. So-called conservative and neo-conservative groups articulate concern for the money spent in education and for wanting a system that reduces dependency on social services; often their concerns have religious and moral foundations. So-called liberal groups articulate concerns for “equality” and “access” yet are often framed by the neo-liberal approach that respects traditional structures with the urge to privatize in order to achieve social gains. To date, neither side has articulated or had any significant impact on persistent achievement gaps despite a decade of this reform. Additionally, we rarely hear from teachers on the ground, and we hear even less from those in teacher training programs.

Perhaps the problem lies with society’s willingness to believe that there is a crisis at all – perhaps the system is functioning exactly as it is designed to function – to benefit some and marginalize many. That is, there are good reasons to believe that modern day educational reforms may be little more than a new type of “reform industrial complex” serving the financial and socio-political interests of sectors already privileged within society. What would happen in a free-market economy such as that of the United States if all gaps in achievement were eliminated and all children not only went to college but also graduated with

advanced degrees? If changes that both political and privatized reformists claim embrace came to fruition, already privileged commercial and privatized sectors and those having privileged identities would lose significantly.

So, what appears to be the context of education in 2013 is a landscape where talking about the challenges, and articulating a reform vision, matter more than eradicating the actual inequities of public schooling that maintain cycles of privilege and marginalization. In this arena, teachers have been made to feel voiceless and, in many circumstances, are used to maintain privilege. Gaps in achievement have remained persistent, as has our reliance on a service-dominated economy that has proven to be significantly beneficial to those in positions of power and wealth. In this backdrop, actualizing reform efforts in real and tangible ways is difficult work, and we wonder ‘who would want to enter the teaching profession?’ Teachers are often in the cross-fire of competing reform agendas, are given little respect in many social and political circles, and are faced with increased pressure coupled with dwindling support and resources. Yet, according to the National Center for Education Information (2011) in 2008, the last year with available data, nearly 147,000 new teachers entered the profession, representing about 5% of the overall teaching force in the United States. New teachers enter this work because they want to make a difference; they do not enter hoping to replicate privileging structures that disadvantage many in public schools. What they have entered is a system that has spiraled far out of control. Their quest to become teachers is admirable if not at times underinformed. Thus, pre-service teacher programs must do more to equip new professionals with the reflective tools to meet the challenges and opportunities of their classrooms, and also to position these developing teachers to speak honestly, truthfully, and consistently about their realities.

In our work as pre-service teacher educators, we strive to balance the truth about the realities teachers face while maintaining a real and guiding belief that change IS possible. While the system may be working as those with privilege would like it to work, our human capacity has the potential to be transformational. In our cohorts, we have suggested that if society can put people on the moon, certainly we have the capabilities to teach all kids to read, count, and reason to a degree that gaps in achievement could be eradicated. While we are aware of the complexities and challenges the contemporary landscape presents, we remain hopeful that with each cohort of pre-service teachers, we have the opportunity to be different and do different – that our teacher candidates can be agents of change focused on equity, and in that process we all serve as models of change.

Our candidates are placed with pedagogical others in the form of mentor teachers and foreign territories in the form of schools. After completing preparation programs, candidates are turned over to practitioners who may or may not be best positioned to help develop and mentor these new professionals. The journey can be intimidating and frightening, even with a program that offers support, collaboration, and a strong cohort of peers.

This book presents a different entry into the teacher education process as the text was designed by student teachers for student teachers. Instead of focusing on the macro-level politics that paint sweeping positive or negative pictures, we join nine pre-service teachers on their journeys to becoming teachers. Their intimate, personal, and engaging narratives share the real life perspectives of teachers in action. The voices in this book are those of pre-service teachers in the Holmes Elementary program, a yearlong urban education Master of Arts in Teaching program at Louisiana State University. Steeped in the traditions of socio-cultural foundations and curriculum theory, the program's commitment is to provide candidates not simply with a theoretical or pragmatic approach to their work, but rather to empower the candidates to be critical intellectuals located within a world of ideas where the cornerstones of their experience are curiosity and risk.

This book is about the experiences of the student teachers and is designed to help others entering the experience to understand the array of emotional and cognitive experiences they might experience on the journey to becoming teachers. While this is not a book about a teacher education program, the context for this book draws from the 2012–2013 experiences of a cohort of 43 student teachers; all of the authors of the chapters in this volume were engaged in a single yearlong student teaching placement concurrent with foundations and qualitative action research courses that resulted in a Master of Arts in Teaching degree.

Since 2011, one of the program requirements has required the candidates to engage in a research project that leads to a publishable manuscript – most often in the form of a journal article. Several candidates found success in publishing journal articles from their work. Many of the topics for research have examined how students, families, and teachers experienced various instructional aspects of schools such as centers, guided reading, grouping approaches, etc. We were motivated as faculty by our pre-service teachers sharing their voices and perspectives that we edited a special edition of a teacher practitioner journal, *Networks* (2013), to hear from other pre-service teachers throughout the world who had research to share with the larger educational community. As faculty, our premise was, and remains, that for change to manifest, teachers (both pre-service and in-service) must see themselves as not just responsible to the classroom and what happens within those four walls, but also to having a socio-political commitment beyond. Sharing research and establishing dialogue situated within research is one way to be so engaged; sharing with others to help them make sense of journey is our way of living the socio-political commitment promise of culturally relevant and responsive practices as articulated by authors such as Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay.

On the heels of the momentum that the Holmes program generated for pre-service teacher action research, the 2012–2013 cohort seriously examined and discussed the seeming lack of materials designed by pre-service teachers for pre-service teacher candidates. Rather than becoming frustrated with this lack of resources the candidates quickly moved from feelings of frustration to feelings of

empowerment – that their voices had a right to be among the pedagogical others who were “telling them” how to be teachers. Nine members of the cohort – Nicole, Katie S., Katie L., Katherine, Margaret, Kasey, Jessica, Mackenzie, and Kathy – articulated a desire to do something different with their research, something that might have the potential to reach people just like them – those interested in what it feels like to be in the student teaching experience. From their desire to write chapters that could come together into a collection, came this volume, the reality of these teacher candidates’ research. Throughout the remainder of the year, each candidate focused on writing a chapter that could speak about the emotional and affective dimensions of student teaching in a way that addressed their fundamental statement of, “I wish I could have read narratives like these as I embark on my journey!” With the support of the program faculty members Kenny, Hillary, and Thomasine, and Graduate Assistant Desiree, the nine documented their journeys in narratives. Their collection of narratives forms the basis for this volume.

The Latin phrases “domidium facti qui coepit habet” and “Cor ad cor loquitur,” come to mind when thinking about this work. “Domidium facti qui coepit habet” suggests that “(s)he who has begun has the work half done.” It is our intention that this text serves to sustain, guide, and support pre-service teachers while also encouraging others to share their voices and perspectives. By connecting professionals through their experiences, teachers understand that their work is not an isolated experience but rather part of a collective effort. “Cor ad cor loquitur,” or heart speaks to heart, is the hope of this text. The voices and narratives are at times raw, at times personally revealing, at times sad, and at times joyful – but the voices and perspectives are consistently honest.

The remainder of this chapter provides a more detailed overview of the program as well as the research and project process. While we want the process to be transparent and while we support each other’s work, we limit the focus on the program to this chapter. While it is important to understand the candidates’ program, the focus of this text remains on the narratives of the teachers. We end this chapter with some suggested approaches for reading this book as well as providing an overview of each of the chapters.

PROGRAM ORIENTATION

Program Organization

Nine pre-service teachers from a one-year Master of Arts in Teaching program in elementary education at Louisiana State University share their student teaching journeys in this volume. The Holmes Elementary Program was founded on and still draws from a core set of principles originating in the 1986 document “Tomorrow’s Teachers: A Report of the Holmes Group.” The Holmes Group was a consortium of deans and chief academic officers at institutions throughout the United States who assembled to contemplate, reflect, and act with respect to the challenges of

preparing teachers and what seemed to be limitations of traditional approaches to preparing educators. The challenges in the mid-1980s have been intensified in many ways in the age of No Child Left Behind, Common Core State Standards, increased pressure on teachers to be “accountable,” and persistent achievement gaps between students in overrepresented and underrepresented groups. The findings from the Holmes Group spanned some 100 pages and became a catalyst for many teacher education programs to rethink their approach to preparing teachers for the late 20th century and beyond. The Elementary and Secondary Holmes programs at Louisiana State University were founded in the spirit of the organizing principles presented in the report of the Holmes group and continue to inform the programs today. In particular the Holmes Elementary program has committed to delivering a teacher preparation program which

1. makes teaching an intellectually sound endeavor;
2. creates relevant and intellectually defensible standards for entry to the profession;
3. connects our School of Education with local schools offering grades 1–5;
4. works to make schools better places for practicing teachers to work and learn.

To accomplish these goals, the program is organized as a year-long Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program which begins directly upon completion of the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree. Coursework during three additional semesters is tailored to move beyond simple methods instruction and delves into deeper issues, concerns, and opportunities in public education. This approach aligns the program with the Curriculum Theory Project of Louisiana State University.¹ The fundamental belief that we aspire for our candidates is “to understand the overall educational significance of the curriculum, focusing especially upon interdisciplinary themes as well as the relations among curriculum, the individual, and society” (Louisiana State University Curriculum Theory Project). The Holmes Elementary program strikes a balance between theory and practice, thus the program’s approach to teaching is based in being a sound intellectual endeavor as opposed to a standardized, rigid, and commercially produced approach to working in schools. We value that neither theory without a context nor practices without foundations can do much to bring about equity.

Candidates are able to take courses in curriculum and socio-cultural foundations that are linked to the field experiences they encounter throughout the graduate year. Through these courses they read scholars such as Horace Mann, John Dewey, Ana Julia Cooper, Gary Bateson, Ward Goodenough, Ken Zeichner, Christine Sleeter, Geneva Gay, Nel Noddings, David Stovall, Elliott Eisner, William Doll, William Pinar, Patti Lather, Lisa Loutzenheiser, William Ayers, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Tyrone Howard, Donna Ford, Cynthia Dillard, Wayne Au, Mike Rose, and Herb Kliebard. Program candidates have had the opportunity to Skype with some of the aforementioned scholars during the previous three years, adding a technological approach to professional development that we call Skype-a-Scholar.

In those interactions, candidates are able to dialogue and to create meaningful interactions with scholars. Candidates begin to see themselves as possessing intellectual capital, unlike many traditional teacher preparation programs.

As part of having a relevant and intellectually defensible standard, candidates are required to document their progression toward the standards set by the Association of Childhood Education International (ACEI), the accrediting body of Elementary Education. Specifically, candidates gather evidence throughout the program that connects to the five major standard areas articulated by ACEI. Furthermore, candidates present their research and insights about teaching at a public defense in April of the graduate year. This defense is attended by faculty who serve to ensure that the candidates have sufficiently met the programs' standards to be recommended for certification.

To connect with the third Holmes group principle, we work as a program to be collaborative with administrators, mentor teachers, students, and families. This remains our greatest challenge. Often mentor teachers tell our candidates that program requirements such as lesson planning, connecting to reading, using assessment data to inform instruction, etc. are "extra" acts and not really fundamentals of teaching. At times, our candidates feel frustrated with what seems to be the disconnect between how practitioners approach their work and how the program critically situates engaged teaching. Despite the challenges, we remain committed to helping not only our candidates, but also working with their mentor teachers and the greater community of professionals in the schools to push everyone toward critically engaged approaches to teaching.

Finally, our relationships with the community and schools along with our own reflective data analysis process helps our program to continually adjust to the changing needs and opportunities of public education. We listen to the various stakeholders including principals, teachers, candidates, as well as students in grades 1–5 and their families, to make instructional and organizational decisions about the program. Our decision-making process always attempts to honor the perspectives of those with whom we work while simultaneously being comfortable with a certain level of tension that helps to push us all forward.

Program Structure

In lieu of student teaching during the final semester of the baccalaureate program, candidates complete a series of courses with an emphasis on pedagogy and content while their peers engage in student teaching. Pre-service teachers then complete a yearlong student teaching internship in an urban setting during the graduate year, coupled with on-campus courses, as a means of continuous reflection on the pedagogical component of their experiences in elementary schools.¹

In the summer, candidates begin the graduate program by enrolling in three courses designed to provide insights into curriculum, the socio-cultural foundations of education, and literacy. During the following fall semester and spring semester

candidates are engaged in the student teaching experience and take six hours of coursework concurrent with student teaching. In the coursework for the program candidates continue to examine relevant curricular and foundational issues and learn about the process of engaging in action research.

Based on the conceptual framework of the School of Education, field experiences are closely linked to university coursework and result in a rigorous graduate program emphasizing reflective practice, collaboration, and classroom-based inquiry. The field supervisors collaborate intimately with the program faculty to ensure a strong balance between theory and practice. The program faculty has a history of being present extensively in the schools to understand the various contexts of the classrooms within which the candidates work so that they can make meaningful connections between the field and coursework. Thus, the graduate year is a collaborative endeavor between university faculty, including the field supervisors and the course faculty as well as public school professionals, designed to enhance elementary students' learning experiences in schools.

Given that the guiding principles of the program are grounded in the School of Education's Conceptual Framework (reflective practice, inquiring pedagogy, and effective professionalism), candidates are encouraged to think reflectively and analytically on course readings and activities in their field experience classrooms, as well as their past experience in schools. This emphasis continues during the student teaching year to support reflective practices throughout the candidates' teaching careers. The graduate program involves extensive collaboration and dialogue among peers, public school teachers and mentors, and graduate faculty members. With the support of their mentor teachers and graduate faculty, candidates are encouraged to question, reflect upon, and challenge their beliefs and practices. In addition, graduate faculty and supervisors support and often help facilitate the exchanging of ideas between interns and mentor teachers as a way to improve instructional practices.

Research Component

The typical capstone project of the graduate year is an action-research project resulting in a publishable manuscript. In the fall semester, candidates enroll in a graduate seminar where course readings center on action-research. Concurrently, candidates reflect upon their experiences as student teachers and examine an aspect of the teaching-learning process that is of interest and provides a rich opportunity to enhance knowledge and practice. In this focused inquiry candidates integrate what they know about the social contexts of schooling, various theoretical perspectives, and their own values and beliefs about teaching and learning. Data collection for this action-research project continues throughout the year. Both mentor teachers and graduate faculty support students through the process of data collection and analysis. Candidates work closely with graduate faculty during the spring semester as they craft a publishable manuscript and prepare their findings

for presentation at two university-sponsored conferences for graduate student research.

The first conference, entitled Curriculum Camp, is a function of the Curriculum Theory Project. Curriculum Camp is an opportunity for graduate students throughout the Southern United States region, and in particular Louisiana, to present their research. Curriculum Camp brings many graduate students together, along with supportive faculty and mirrors the conditions found at many conferences. Papers are organized into sessions, there is a campfire session featuring keynote speakers, and many opportunities for mentoring and dialogue. Since 2011, candidates in the Holmes Elementary program were required to submit a proposal to Curriculum Camp. Over the past two years, over 50 candidates from the Holmes Elementary program have had the opportunity to present their research, including the nine chapter authors in this volume.

The second conference, the Holmes Elementary Conference is the program capstone experience and serves as the public defense for the candidates in the program. Approximately six weeks after Curriculum Camp, the Holmes Elementary Conference occurs for an audience of faculty, peers, mentor teachers, and family members. The conference day concludes with a theatrical production written, directed, and performed by the candidates to express their experiences in school. There is a keynote speaker and the candidates use a theatrical style similar to the Neo-futurists of Chicago, Illinois, and their long-standing production *Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*.

THE “BOOK” PROJECT

Based on conversations with graduate faculty about the yearlong student teaching placement and expectations for the 2012–2013 academic year, nine pre-service teachers decided to work collaboratively to develop a book-length manuscript documenting their experiences. The idea to write this book arose from the frustration of feeling engaged by the readings and scholars presented in the program, but at times wishing for resources written by their peers – student teachers. They wanted to know how others beyond their program experienced what it means to become a teacher. While many ‘pedagogical and curricular experts’ had a positive influence on our candidates’ development as teachers, the candidates also realized that they would have benefited from a resource written by those in the journey itself.

In the fall of 2012, these candidates and program faculty began meeting to create a vision for a project that would result in a book exploring issues about student teaching in the 21st century. The book would be written through the lenses of the pre-service teachers’ experiences as they moved from “student” to “student teacher” to “teacher”. Candidates generated a list of topics that would be explored through individual reflection and journaling. The topics included expectations for the student teaching year, the student teacher-mentor relationship, the first day of

INTRODUCTION

field experiences, and challenges in the classroom. These topics then led to an initial narrative exploring the question, “What were my expectations coming into student teaching?” What emerged was a tension between an ideal vision of teaching they had imagined, and the reality of classrooms that reflected a number of challenges that appeared to be in conflict with their vision.

Candidates’ narratives on their expectations vs. reality served as a point of discussion, analysis, and departure. Initially, the intent was to find common themes within their experiences and each theme would serve as a chapter focus. As the weekly meetings continued, the candidates and graduate faculty decided that each chapter would tell the story of one of the candidate’s journey through student teaching. Candidates agreed to use class research time as an opportunity to critique each other’s work, engage in dialogic feedback, and process the overall experience together.

As candidates began to journal and reflect on the year in the field, different themes for each candidate emerged that were reflective of both their experiences in the MAT program as well as in their personal lives. Candidates were grouped and paired with a graduate faculty member, who served as a reader of the developing narratives and provided feedback and posed questions encouraging further exploration and analysis of ideas, concerns, and experiences. As graduate faculty, we felt it was important not to censor the ideas and feelings of our students, but to honor the tensions and contradictions they were living in their daily work in the classroom. This approach allowed our candidates the opportunity to speak directly to you as the reader, sharing the varied emotions encountered throughout their field experiences. This process resulted in a collection of narratives offering readers a candid glimpse into the journey of student teaching, each journey focusing on a different aspect of becoming a teacher in the 21st century.

READING THIS BOOK

This book is organized as a series of nine individual narratives. What unifies these narratives is the experience of student teaching as cohort members of the same program. Each chapter, however, is reflective of a candidate’s personal experience, thus this book is not necessarily intended to be read in sequential order.

We have organized the chapters into three major themes. “Senses and Feelings” is the first theme and focuses on the important role our human senses and emotions play in the experience of student teaching. For Kathy, coming to knowing herself as a person and teacher emerged throughout her journey. Mackenzie focused on how to seize the “small” moments of student teaching to learn more about herself as a teacher. Katie L. worked through the emotion of fear and how to work with, through, and beyond fear to better serve children. Finally, Jessica used her background as a dance teacher to help understand how to achieve both professional and personal balance in elementary school teaching.

“What Have I Gotten Myself Into?” is the second section and provides honest and candid challenges that candidates often experience throughout their program. For both authors in this section, the challenges of placement and poor mentoring lead to alternate placements, which ultimately shaped their experience. A new placement and experience for Katie S. affirmed her choice to move forward, yet she realized the importance of reflecting upon her initial experience as a means to continue becoming a teacher. Nicole, on the other hand, looked back on her year of student teaching to question if teaching was really the right choice for her. Nicole helped us understand the importance of exploring multiple professional and personal options before committing to the work of being a teacher.

In the final section “Finding Voice, Charting Your Own Path,” authors deal with ideas related to voice and how to make their own mark on the profession. Kasey explored the power of questions when reflecting on issues she could not control within the context of her work. Katherine used reflective writing to provide a self-support system that helped her to endure the many challenges she encountered. Margaret used the negative stereotypes about teaching within the community to motivate her to engage in critical analysis of her teaching as she worked toward the best possible outcomes for students.

Note that the descriptions above that we are providing are not intended to impose meaning on the experiences, but rather to help provide a structure. As editors of this volume, we recognize that personal experiences, understandings, and contexts will influence how you relate to any given chapter and any given author. In fact, several chapters could easily live across all three of the organizing structures, and we have simply made a choice about location as a means of unifying the particular sections.

NOTE

- ¹ It should be noted that from the program’s inception through 2011, candidates engaged in a year long student teaching experience that was divided into two distinct placements. In the first semester, they were matched with a teaching partner from the program, and in the second semester they switched to an individual placement. This approach changed in 2012 to a single year-long placement. This single-placement approach became necessary because of the growth of the program and our inability to secure the number of placements needed for double placements. The candidates, students in grades 1–5, mentor teachers, and principals have had a strong positive response to the new model, and the program has opted to remain with this single placement. In this organization, the candidates experience a single classroom context for the year and build relationships with students similar to what they will experience as teachers.

KATHY LE

2. KNOW THY SELF

Willow Creek Elementary

I was not a typical Holmes student in her early 20s, fresh from completing undergraduate courses. When I completed student teaching I was in my late 20s, (ok, well, actually I was 30 years old to be exact), and my son Kyle was 5 years old. I grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and I completed primary and secondary education in both private and public schools around the city. I began my post-secondary education straight out of high school when I was only 17 years old. After a few years at Louisiana State University, I could not quite decide what I wanted to do with my life, so I took a break from school. In the midst of my break, I became pregnant and gave birth to the best thing that has ever entered into my life. When Kyle was three years old, I decided to return back to college and obtain a degree. Education was where I knew I wanted to be. I began constructing a foundation for my son and myself.

For the past few years, as a student and as a mom, my attention was always directed to either my studies or taking care of my son. I did not give myself much thought. I was in full speed mode with the intention to graduate and begin teaching as soon as I could. When I started my full year of student teaching, I began reflecting on, and writing about, my experiences through my writing. Through this process, I began making personal discoveries about myself. To grow as both an educator and as a person, I needed to be open-minded to learn all that I could about myself. I noticed many self-reflections in my writing about who I am as a person. The reflection helped to demonstrate my beliefs, interactions, reactions, and also instruction within the classroom. Since this awareness about who I am was a substantial part of my weekly reflections, I chose to focus my writing on self-discovery.

The format of my writing revolved around general and well known quotes that are meaningful to me. Quotes could be read and interpreted in so many ways but are mostly dependent on the perspective of the reader. What I liked most about these quotes was their meaningful and underlying messages hidden underneath the formations of those letters, just like hidden messages behind every life experience. I started searching for quotes that related to self-discovery and education, and from that, I was able to intertwine my experiences. My first step into myself began with a quote from Aristotle.

K. LE

“KNOWING YOURSELF IS THE BEGINNING OF ALL WISDOM” – ARISTOTLE

At the age of 15, I thought I knew everything! I ran away from home at a very early age and began supporting myself independently. My drive was my pride and stubbornness. Even after having a child, I thought I knew everything about my world, about my goals in life, and ultimately about myself. But can you ever truly know everything there is about yourself and the world around you? This yearlong student teaching placement uncovered so many questions, concerns, and emotions about who I am and who I want to be. Some might think of student teaching as being a journey of transformation from being an intern to an educator, but I saw it more as a journey of discovering myself and accepting both the weaknesses and strengths brought to light through experiences, interactions, and also personal reflections.

As humans, we have a way of taking in and interpreting all kinds of information and creating a mental structure or model of things in our minds. For instance, you see an apple and can immediately recall many characteristics of it. You are familiar with its smell, its taste, its feel, and its many descriptions, all recalled from your own experiences from eating apples and brought to light in the instance you see the piece of fruit. As experiences with apples broaden, so do the mental representations, shifting to include not just one kind that is red but a variety of apples with different colors, texture, and tastes. Depending upon your experiences, memories, or stereotypical conceptualizations, you start with a basic cognitive structure about the “thing” or “experience.” Then, as time progresses and your exposure to those things and experiences increases, your cognitive structures begin to shift. Those structures can be chipped away, added to, or even transformed into whole new structures.

My mental representations about education started very early from my direct experiences as a child. As I progressed through grade school, secondary school, and then post-secondary school, my ideas about what school was and what school meant shifted with each new experience, but the image or representation remained largely intact. It was not until I began to view the world with an educator’s viewpoint that I really started the transformation from what I used to think and know about education to how I perceive things now. I was becoming an educator and while we are all life long students in many ways, my new role as an emerging professional changed my perspective. In fact, my whole set of ideas about education has been reshaped, and I no longer hold the same mental representations as I first did when I began the Holmes program.

During undergraduate courses in education, we read a multitude of articles and narratives on education that portrayed an idealistic view of an elementary classroom. The romantic version of a classroom presented was one where students were behaving like angels, and the teacher bestowed her magical touch on all her students using her creative activities and hands on lessons. This optimistic view of a classroom was added to with each education course I took. My interpretations of

those articles and lectures were supportive of my mental representation of education. This was all *before* any direct exposure to public school classrooms as a teacher. The exposure began slowly with just a few observations throughout one semester followed by tutoring sessions once a week with one or two students. The ideal image of a perfect classroom still remained intact until I began to have more substantive experiences within a classroom.

My special education courses enabled me to start having direct experiences in the field earlier than my classmates. Those experiences with both students and teachers slowly began to chip away at what I remembered about elementary classrooms, and my vision of an ideal classroom. The reality was that not every classroom had perfect angels or a model teacher for that matter. By the time I was approaching my student teaching experience, I no longer had the ideal expectation or vision for a particular classroom. What we may know about school from our own education is nothing like how you experience school as a teacher.

One lesson I learned was to be open to the changes and interpretations of our mental representation of education in a school setting. We all hold our ideal vision of a perfect classroom, yet we must remain open to new experiences and take them in as a way to broaden our own mental image. We cannot predict who our future students will be so it seems pointless to try to hold onto a specific, inflexible perception of the reality to come.

In her book *The Essential Conversation*, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) discussed the effects of ghosts in the classroom as being our past experiences with education that resurface later in life as an adult when we are forced to revisit those memories during parent and teacher conferences:

Every time parents and teachers come together, their dialogue is to some extent related to their early childhood experiences, which get rehearsed and replayed in the classroom of their children. These ancient ghosts invade the classroom, crowd into the conversation, and often make it difficult for the adults to place themselves in time and space. (p. 4)

This phenomenon occurs between teachers and parents during conferences and other encounters, and causes one to ponder what emerges in conversations with students based on our own ghosts of the classroom. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) advised us to

Make the unconscious content conscious but never letting it overtake or overwhelm the focus on the immediate moment in the child's life. It is a perilous equilibrium that must be struck between the ghosts of the past and realities of the present, between adult retrospectives and child perspectives. (p. 40)

Lawrence-Lightfoot would agree that we should not allow our past experiences with education to be the sole dictator of our perceptions and present actions within our classroom.

K. LE

Coming into student teaching with a more open mind and less emphasis on any preconceived notions, I was able to integrate my specific situations with learning opportunities for myself. Instead of dwelling on the imperfections of this experience, I decided to take another approach. I wanted to learn as much as I could about what to do, what not to do, and most significantly who I was that caused me to do or not to do any particular thing. Since knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom, as Aristotle suggests, this chapter focuses on discovering one's self through the multitudes of experiences both within and outside the classroom during my student teaching practicum.

“LIVE AS IF YOU WERE TO DIE TOMORROW. LEARN AS IF YOU WERE TO LIVE FOREVER” — MAHATMA GANDHI

Since I left home, I have embraced the motto of living each day to the fullest. But, I was missing the other half of Gandhi's wise advice. I still needed to learn as if I were to live forever.

One great way of learning about oneself is through deep reflections. Reflective practices not only allow us to critique and improve on our lessons and instruction, but reflections also give us the opportunity for cathartic relief, given that teaching is a very stressful career! I highly recommend anyone in field of education begin practicing reflective writing as soon as he/she can. Reflection does not just have to focus on the classroom and the students. In my case, reflective writing about student teaching merged with my personal life as well – the starting point to my journey of self-discovery.

The first few weeks of student teaching involved a lot of reflective thinking and writing. My supervisor required us to reflect weekly on everything that was happening, and I took this opportunity to use her as a resource. I reflected with questions and concerns that crossed my mind throughout the week. During my first few weeks of student teaching, I asked my supervisor random questions such as: *How am I supposed to assess the students when my time is spent trying to redirect their attention to the teacher and keeping them on task? How can I learn to pace myself when it comes to planning and wanting to get everything done in one night? When you have a class structure that is centered on constant redirection and whole class instruction, how can you ever have time to do anything else? At 2nd grade, am I to hold their hands and guide them through everything?* My beginning reflections dealt with classroom management and simply learning how to adjust to this new experience of student teaching.

I was blessed to have a great university supervisor, and she always commented and answered my questions within a day or two. Having constant communication between an experienced educator really helped me transition through the first few weeks of school. I had many questions and doubts about things going on in the classroom and about how this experience was affecting my personal life. I wondered if the responsibilities of school would take over my life and leave no

room for personal or social activities, and if I was getting too overwhelmed and anxious since I had been dreaming a lot about teaching and the students. Her feedback not only reassured me about my progression in the classroom but also encouraged me to try new things. This weekly dialogue between us was a support that I needed to break through the initial stages of student teaching.

Since I am the type of student who likes to know everything in advance, usually having my assignments done a week before the due date, I could have been crushed within the first few weeks of student teaching. Luckily for me, intensive summer graduate courses transformed my mindset about knowing everything in advance. Over the summer, I learned to slow down. I combated my overwhelming habit of mapping the future with scheduling and planning all of the reading and writing assignments to focusing on only one thing and only one day at a time. That was my way of surviving! Slowing down and focusing on one thing helped me to breeze through three weeks of six graduate credit hours and learn significantly along the way.

So, for the first few weeks of student teaching, I applied that same thinking. I took it a day at a time. I pushed the priority of collecting data and assessments, writing weekly sketches and detailed lesson plans to the back of my list. My priority was to first familiarize myself with the students and their classroom procedures and routines. I took that time to situate myself within this new environment and I did not overwhelm myself with background assignments and duties into which I knew I could slowly transition. I immersed myself with the students and getting to know who they were. That decision made my life as a student teacher much easier! Slowly the responsibilities of planning and data collection became part of the process, but until then, I enjoyed the most inspiring part of teaching: the students.

I recommend taking student teaching one day at a time. A teacher's world is as perfect as the plans he or she makes. We cannot predict the future but we can live in the moment. Once I learned the value of living for today, I became less stressed about life and my teaching experiences and more focused on authentic engagement and the love of learning from my students' eyes. Learn as if you were to live forever!

“[KIDS] DON'T REMEMBER WHAT YOU TRY TO TEACH THEM. THEY
REMEMBER WHAT YOU ARE”— JIM HENSON

In trying to remember some of my teachers, I do not recall the specifics that I learned from them. I do, however, remember their personalities or habits. Some were soft spoken, patient, or kind. I even remember those who were rude and quick to snap at students for little things. Since going to school was an integral part of my childhood, I remember more about who the teachers were than what I was taught. John Dewey (2004), the father of progressive education, believed that “the school must represent present life – life as real and vital to the child as that which he

K. LE

carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground” (p. 19). Since the interactions between a teacher and a student are a vital part of a child’s life, it makes sense that the adults the kids interact with on a daily basis become more important than what they taught.

Teaching is not simply instructing young minds to absorb mounds of information. The art of teaching is to build relationships with those young minds and to influence them to take in as much information as they willingly can and, more importantly how to make decisions with that information. Dewey is famously and often quoted about the idea that we are not in school to prepare to live but we are living now. Because education is a social process, relationships are formed and then maintained throughout our process of living. To be successful in any relationship, a person must know and understand both her/his qualities and flaws. By being more aware of those personal features, relationships can then thrive at deeper levels and influences. Only when a teacher is true to him/herself will the natural effects of instruction and knowledge take place and hold value to each child.

With different situations and experiences I encountered at my student teaching placement, I often questioned how my actions reflected my personality. I wondered how the kids viewed me. By placing an emphasis on who I am, I came to understand my actions towards the students, especially my impulsive reactions. I noticed some entries in my reflections about specific things that happened in the classroom and whether my reaction to something was right, too strong, or even mean. For instance, I wrote about an incident involving a little girl and a plastic ring. That day, a parent brought in cupcakes to celebrate their child’s birthday. On each cupcake, there was a plastic ring. I noticed a few students were playing with their rings during my lesson. I gave a warning to the whole class that if anyone was caught playing it while I was teaching, I would take it and throw the ring away. In the middle of my lesson, I noticed a girl holding it in her hands. I called her name and directed her to throw her ring away. She did so without any hesitation. Immediately, I felt horrible. I began to think of other reactions or consequences that I could have implemented. I questioned my immediate action and wondered whether it was the right thing to do: *Was I being too mean and quick to make her throw it away? Should I have taken the ring and returned it at the end of the day? Would the students take me seriously if I did not follow through on my warnings?* There were many doubts about my reaction to that one particular situation, and that was just the first of many. Even with more experiences and increased confidence in the classroom, I still struggled with justifying my actions. Often, I found myself asking both my mentor teacher and paraprofessional if I responded the right way, or if I was too harsh on the students. My concerns were not because of my lack in confidence in my ability to teach and manage the classroom, but more so of how I was viewed as a person. I cared about whether I unjustly projected reactions on the students or if I allowed personal stress to influence how I treated the students.

In *The Dreamkeepers*, Ladson-Billings (2009) discussed culturally relevant practices in the classroom and how students perceived and remembered their teachers. Being culturally relevant incorporates the cultures of both the school and the students' lives as a means of transforming traditional school-home relationships and potential outcomes for students. Culturally relevant practices bring students' histories, cultures, and backgrounds to bear on instructions and lessons. Teachers with culturally relevant practices have high regards for others, and attempt to connect with each student individually. Teachers who are culturally relevant place a focus within their practices on engaging the whole student. Ladson-Billings (2009) interviewed a group of students and asked them what they liked about their class. The students replied, simply, their teacher. Ladson-Billings continued by asking the students what they liked about their teacher and they described with excitement the various forms of eye contact, relationship building, expectations, and supports that these teachers provided. How one is as a person does correlate with who one is as a teacher. Personality emerges and is reflected by how students feel and interact within the classroom, highlighting the importance of the idea that who you are is important to knowing that you teach children and not subjects – our work is a human enterprise.

I like things to be organized, well planned out, and prepared to leave little room for errors. I was blessed with a week's worth of complete control without my mentor teacher at some point in the student teaching experience. She was on personal leave for an out-of-state trip. A substitute teacher was present, but her role was to support. I was not nervous at all. In the back of my mind, it was my mission to show my mentor teacher how well I could run this classroom while she was away. I wanted to show the students how my instructional techniques would be more engaging and meaningful with each lesson. I took the challenge and succeeded so well that when my mentor teacher returned, I suggested another week of primary responsibility so she could settle back into routine. Without hesitation, she agreed. I loved every minute of it! I thought to myself, "This is what I want and yearn to do!"

I was very proud of the students. I saw their potential in classroom behaviors and work abilities. By the third week, my mentor teacher once again took center stage. I worked on a behavior intervention plan that needed my attention, and so I could not teach whole days as I had been for the past two weeks and I noticed things began falling apart. My routines and procedures were no longer implemented. The classroom became chaotic and disorganized. As things shifted back to the old ways, I became frustrated and stressed. I think of myself as a nice, compassionate, and loving person, and I know that I take to heart the successes and failures of the students. But, what I did not realize was that who I am influences everything that is done in the classroom, and I only began to notice this trend once I took frustrations and anger out on the students.

I blamed the students for the return to the way that things were. I fussed at them for not doing things procedurally the way we had established during my teaching

time. I fussed at them for minor things such as side talking, not lining up properly, and taking too long to do things when instructed. I punished them. I took away their recess just to teach them how to line up properly. I took away talking privileges due to excessive side conversations. I went from being a nice, patient, and loving teacher to one who yelled for minor infractions and dictated the classroom military style. Although my mentor teacher and paraprofessional stated that I was not as harsh as I thought, I still felt ashamed. I wanted to figure out why the students were being so “bad” and how things changed in such a short amount of time. I began reflecting and venting to other adults about how I was feeling. Through my conversations with my supervisor, my boyfriend, and also my classmates, I realized my frustrations stemmed from losing control of what had been. I blamed the students when it was not their fault. Their behaviors were a result of the inconsistencies of the adults teaching them. How were they supposed to know how to behave when there were two instructors in the room with different teaching styles and techniques? There were competing agendas that the children could not possibly negotiate. They were confused as to who was in charge since I randomly jumped in to teach at times, while other times being less involved. One day, for example, my mentor teacher may have taught and then the very next day I taught. I realized I was wrong for taking my frustration out on them. I learned that once I have control, I do not like to let it go and had to reflect on how to work through that. Another thing I learned was that I was quick to blame those who are mostly unable to defend themselves, and who were easy targets to my faults.

I blamed the students and took out my frustration on them when, truthfully, I was frustrated with my mentor teacher. I was angry that the time and effort I had put into making the classroom run so smoothly was quickly dismantled and things settled back, from my perspective, to a state of disarray. By taking the time to reflect and understand the basis of my troubles I learned things about myself that will definitely help me in the future. I learned to let my desire for complete control go since the classroom was not my own. I also learned to confront conflict and go straight to the source instead of letting my feelings affect those in a more vulnerable position than me.

Reactions to situations reflect who we are inside, and then influence students’ perceptions of us. Students store memories of experiences in their minds and paint a mental portrait too, building their own representations of the meaning of education and schooling. Their mental portrait is how they will understand and remember not only their experience, but also who we were as teachers. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) discussed the experience of how an artist portrayed her in a still painting and what was captured through the artist’s view and perception. Lawrence-Lightfoot talked about the feelings when recognizing herself in the portrait, or at least the essence of herself, while simultaneously not recognizing herself either.

The concept of an artist capturing an image of a person is similar to how students observe and translate a teacher’s words and actions to paint a portrait in

their minds. When reflecting on experiences in the classroom, especially those involving reactions, you will be familiar with some things, will be shocked and embarrassed by some others, and may not be able to face some other things. Your translation of your own reactions may be interpretive, but those reflections of your interactions and conversations with your students will take you to a deeper understanding of who you are. You recognize something essential while also realizing that the other hands that contribute and bring their own perspectives that shape the image. Being proactive and more aware of your personality may help you to avoid situations in which you might act impulsively, a type of reaction that is not often positive, moving away from the fundamental and essential qualities of the students and learning you hope to influence.

I realized that I was quick to react negatively whenever I was discouraged and overwhelmed. There were times when I got so frustrated with the students for not getting or understanding something that I walked away angrily and asked my mentor teacher to step in. I felt as if there was a brick wall dividing the students and myself at times – what I said or did, they simply did not get. One day, I reacted vocally to my students. I cannot even recall what the lesson was about or toward whom I was projecting my anger, but I became very ugly and said, “If you do not want to learn or even try to learn, then why am I wasting my time waking up at 5:30 every morning to come here to teach? I could just stay in bed, sleep in, or do something else.”

After some reflecting, I realized my frustration was more towards myself for not being able to connect with my students on a level where they could learn from me. I felt like I was failing them. I started feeling remorseful for taking my anger out on them. It was not their fault for not understanding the lesson. If they were not learning, then I was doing something wrong. I tried seeing things from their point of view. I took a step back. Refreshed, I jumped back in with a different spin to the lessons. Most of the time, being able to step back and refocus seemed to help me overcome some of my frustrations. Since I have realized how easily frustrated and overwhelmed I can get when I am unable to make a learning connection, I am less stressed. As I worked on controlling my reactions to students, I also learned how to express my feelings more appropriately.

Another weakness that I have discovered through my writing is that I keep things pent up inside. As I responded to writing prompts given to me by my professors to help initiate this writing process, I realized my writing style lacked emotion, similar to a descriptive report. My writing was very structural: write an introduction; list a statement; give evidence, reasons, or explanations to back up my statements; and close with a conclusion. There was no emotional connection or reflection of my life in the writing. I wrote based on what I thought people would want to read and hear. I realized, by engaging in reflection, that in this process I had to reveal my vulnerabilities even when they expose things I work hard to keep to myself.

K. LE

Exposing my vulnerabilities was particularly prompted when we were given a writing prompt by the professors to consider “the hardest thing about teaching.” Even before I started writing, I thought I knew what I wanted to write about. I thought my main focus would be on balancing my life as a graduate student while student teaching fulltime and also being a single mother to a five year old son, a very personal part of my life. My writing revealed things of more importance to me that were hidden deep inside my thoughts. I began my writing with a hook. I wanted something to captivate my readers’ attention. So I began with my own question:

Have you ever had a craving for something ooey-gooney and chocolaty? Or maybe something fried and crispy that just satisfies all taste buds? Mmmmm, just describing it, I am already wanting to sink my teeth into a warm, fresh baked cupcake with chocolate icing! I admit I have a sweet tooth and a weakness for anything fried, but I know better than to indulge within my sinful desires on a regular basis. I treat myself from time to time. I do try my best to balance my diet with fruits and vegetables and whole grain options, but there are times when I will succumb to all my senses’ yearning and devour something so sinful but yet so delicious and satisfying. And it is always worth it! In everything you do in life, there must be a balance. It is not always easy finding the middle grounds, and so, the hardest part of student teaching for me is finding a balance between my personal and professional life.

After an hour or two of editing and perfecting that introduction, I confidently continued. My next paragraph painted a picture of my usual daily routine. Then, I confessed about neglecting both my personal and professional life to “maintain a balance so that neither part of my life is being negatively affected.” Then...came honesty and a realization of what really IS the hardest part of teaching:

Another hard part about student teaching in particular, is the negative income. I must be able to not only feed and provide for myself but for my son as well. I AM a very prideful person. I’ve been living on my own since I was 15 years old, a sophomore in high school. I am proud to have made it this far without having to rely so much on others. Luckily for me, after the split from my son’s father, my parents agreed to financially support me until I get through college. Right before starting my first graduate semester, my parents were no longer able to continue financially supporting me. What a blow! I cried and cried for weeks. How is a single mom supposed to raise her family while being a full time student and without an income? I was already sacrificing so much of my time to schoolwork that I wasn’t going to give up my weekends to try to make some money. My only option was to maximize my school loans and apply for government assistance.

To this day, I'm still embarrassed with having to use food stamps to buy groceries. How did my life ever turn to be like this? Swallowing my pride, I had to do whatever it took to get through this last year of graduate school. Loans were adequate but only enough to get by with rent and bills. I started cleaning a house on Fridays to bring in some money for gas and unexpected expenses, but by November, I was out of funds and borrowing from family members and friends to just survive. Half way through the year, I downsized from a 900 square foot 1-bedroom apartment to sharing a 3-bedroom condo with two other classmates. Although I still get my own room, the stress and burden of relocating along with the daily torment of my financial struggles have left me broken and on the verge of shutting down entirely. As I sit here typing up this narrative and unable to control my tears, I look over at my son sleeping soundly and reassure myself that I must hang on and continue for 6 more months.

So, maybe the hardest thing about teaching is not about balancing my personal life with my professional life or struggling with financial obligations but the reassurance that all this hard work and pressure will eventually pay off. I have given up so much time with my son and sacrificed so much more financially that I am surprised I have not thrown in the towel yet. Then I think of my son and how our lives will improve so much more once this is all over. And when I am in the classroom, the worries of my son and financial burden seem to fade away. At that moment, the most and only important thing is teaching the students.

Why did I enter the field of education to begin with? Not only to have a career that will maximize my time at home with my family but to also positively affect students' lives. If I give up now, there will be one less loving, genuine, and effective teacher who passionately feels and believes in what she's doing in the classroom.

Can this be the last time where I edit my answer to say that the hardest part of teaching, of student teaching, of the Holmes program, is just being able to get through the year with all the different challenges and struggles that each one of us has and will continue to go through? It's now 10:52 pm, and I'm already late according to my schedule of going to bed to prepare to do this all over again tomorrow.

That raw and unedited version of “the hardest part of teaching” was personally revealing, and a breakthrough to mark the importance to me of this type of writing. I continued to cry even after I was finished with that writing prompt. I do not think my reaction was tears of sadness, but more so a mixture of relief and joy that I was finally able to admit and talk about my current struggles. I am very good at hiding stressful things that are happening in my life. That has always been my defense and coping mechanism. But with teaching, you cannot apply that strategy to resolve the

K. LE

stress and complications that arise from education. Keeping things hidden and disguised will eat you up inside and start affecting your health. Halfway through my internship, I was diagnosed with high blood pressure. Even after reducing my sodium intake and increasing physical activities, I was still placed on medication for high blood pressure. Keeping the stress and challenges of student teaching inside of me was overworking my heart.

I needed to learn how to relax and just simply be happy. My emotional state affected my every action and words toward my students. Noddings (2003) explained the importance of happiness in education as a natural desire, perhaps the greatest aim of education. Teachers are performers with the spotlight shining on them every day, and our mental state should also be of importance. Noddings (2003) placed an emphasis on reflection and how evaluating daily actions can assist us in our pursuit of happiness, which in turn will improve our state of mind to perform and influence us positively on our stage.

I realized the need for honest reflection and could no longer keep up the façade that my life was as perfect as I wanted it to be. By admitting my struggles, I was not admitting defeat but showing strength that I was not afraid to accept reality and ask for help. By vocalizing about my problems, things became easier to resolve. Yes, I still experience financial struggles, but by being aware and discussing it with loved ones, I am receiving the help I need. Also, by maintaining an open communication with my mentor teacher, university supervisor, and professors, I learned to battle and conquer my stress of student teaching and graduate school. Knowing that they too experienced what I was going through and understood my struggles helped me to cope and to relieve my stress and worries. Once the weight of those pressures was lightened, I was able to be happy and to focus my attention on the more positive things in my life.

Children are very good at reading and seeing through people. Children are honest, and will say things exactly how they see it, a quality that we as adults should strive toward. In the process of student teaching I learned to not only accept the good but also the negative aspects about myself, realizing that both ends and the aspects in between are instructive. Since children remember more of who we are than what we teach, we should also try to discover our true selves while learning to find our own niche in teaching.

“OFTEN, IT’S NOT ABOUT BECOMING A NEW PERSON, BUT BECOMING THE PERSON YOU WERE MEANT TO BE, AND ALREADY ARE, BUT DON’T KNOW HOW TO BE” – HEATH L. BUCKMASTER

Have you ever asked yourself why you want to teach? I have often asked myself that question, especially when I have doubted my decision to go into education. When doubts occur I think about all the positives and possibilities I can offer to children, and my doubts quickly diminish. Teaching is not a cookie-cutter career choice. There are many challenges, political influences, and stressors that come

with education. There are negative connotations associated with this career, but the personal rewards and positive effects still outweigh the challenges. But you must be genuine and honest as to the reasons you want to teach. What is your reason? Having summers off, liking kids, or there was nothing else to do are not good reasons to choose teaching as a profession. Those who choose education for the previous or similar reasons burn out quickly, and jeopardize the future of many children.

What if you are unsure about your true reasons for why you want to teach? Being open to self-discovery during your student teaching will help you learn more about why you entered this field of education. Ultimately the reflection you can engage with helps to know if this decision is the right one for you.

My reason for teaching is my passion and genuine caring for each child and wanting to help them accomplish their goals. I love the feeling I get when I know that I contributed to something and that light bulb clicks inside of a child's mind, and he/she gets a concept I am teaching. I love the satisfaction of being able to lend a helping hand or an intellectual mind. As I am teaching and surrounded by those who inspire me, I naturally lose myself in the art of teaching. There is no stress of financial struggles, personal issues, graduate school requirements and assignments or even administrative pressures. There is only my students and I. While I understand the "why" of wanting to teach, I am still in the process of grasping the "how" of teaching.

The second half of the student teaching year I became very comfortable with my role in the classroom. I taught often and felt that I had become a teacher in many ways. At one point, I noticed that my teacher only checked for completion of homework, but never check for accuracy. She allowed kids to partner up with one another and compare answers. This was a good strategy, but what happened when there were conflicting answers or incorrect answers? How would a student understand mistakes just by comparing answers to a peer? I wanted to do something about that so I collected homework, especially in math, to check for accuracy and understanding. I noticed discrepancies in homework completion and the ability to perform in the classroom. Some students mastered the skills in the classroom, but showed errors in their homework. Some students showed no mastery of the skills in the classroom, but had majority of their answers correct on the homework assignment. I wanted to figure out what was happening. My initial concern and spur of the moment idea were the beginnings of my method of individual conferencing.

I went over each homework assignment and called students individually to conference with me. Each conference was different and, no matter how it started or how it ended, each individual meeting gave me another insight into each child and also gave me a view of their progress in what they were learning. That was when I started to feel like I was making the most impact in their everyday learning – I was becoming the teacher I was supposed to become. Having someone to build off of their strengths and also explain to them their mistakes had a bigger impact and

K. LE

longer lasting effect than just a red mark. I realized the benefits of conferencing and was glad to have had the opportunity to engage in the practice.

There are many opportunities while student teaching and none should be taken for granted. Student teaching is where your praxis as a teacher begins to flourish and that person you were meant to be comes alive. By making the most of every situation and experience, we are creating quality experiences. By seeing and experiencing things from multiple perspectives, being willing to engage reflection and expose vulnerabilities, and being open to learn you can maximize not just the experience but position this experience as a foundation for the work you will do as a teacher. Learn so that you may not only know *who* you are as a person and as an educator, but also *how* to be a person who educates the young people you teach each day.

MACKENZIE SEGREST

3. POWERFUL MOMENTS

Children's Charter School

This chapter is about the moments throughout my student teaching year that forced me to step back and take a closer look at myself as a teacher. Each moment big or small forced me to shift my paradigm, and ultimately helped to shape me into the teacher I am today.

Whenever I imagine the job of an elementary school teacher much of my imagination has not been matched with reality. As I look back on a year of student teaching I watched my image of what teaching should look like slowly change and become my teaching reality. When I began student teaching I was very naïve and narrow minded, but I would like to think that my approach to teaching has become more developed and mature throughout the experience. Coming in, I imagined that as a teacher my focus would be completely on my students' needs – that I would be my students' number one cheerleader, and a mom to any student in need. I had great visions and dreams about what I wanted my classroom to look like, what I thought a year of student teaching would involve, and how I thought learning would be accomplished.

Looking back on my student teaching journey I am able to uncover the moments that helped shift my thinking. During my entire professional career as an educator I should be able to look back on my days, weeks, months, etcetera and pull out those moments that help me grow as a teacher, much like I have done during student teaching. To refine our craft we should reflect often and attempt to move toward a reflexivity that allows us to shift so as to experience growth. If we decide we do not want to grow anymore, that is the exact moment when we need to get out of the classroom as our students are no longer our primary focus. As you read about my journey this year, keep in mind that these moments were moments that proved influential to me, and forced a change in my thinking, even though they may seem miniscule to you as a reader. At the outset my advice to you is to listen to, and pay attention to, the moments that influence you.

I came into the world of teaching after attending the same private school kindergarten through twelfth grade. Though my schooling context (factors of race, class, location, type) was very different than the setting where I student taught I feel as though I was able to relate to the world my students experienced in school.

M. SEGREST

In my own upbringing my extended family played a significant role in rearing me, and I related to many of my students who shared similar family configurations.

Three days before school was scheduled to begin I received my internship placement, and it was from what I had ever imagined. I was assigned to be a 3rd grade intern in an urban setting far from my home for the entire school year. Finding out this placement was shocking news because I was preparing to receive a position at a school close to my house. My assigned school was on the opposite side of town from where I lived. This school served a population of learners who were predominately African American and the socio-economic status of the families tended to be at the lower end of the spectrum, with many of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. I was thrilled about the school, students, and grade level. My one worry and concern was the daily commute.

I remember thinking, “How in the world will I be able to afford driving to and from school every day with a negative income!” I was experiencing my own challenges of socio-economic status as a student. Knowing that teaching would be my major focus for the entire year I quit my job and decided to live at home to save whatever money was coming in. In my mind, before learning my placement, I envisioned I would be placed at a school around the corner from my house and I would barely ever have to fill up with gas. The money issue being my only worry was an easy concern to get over especially after learning that I was assigned to an ideal placement for my growth.

The actual school setting was exactly what I dreamt of. I have always said I wanted to work in a school completely different from the school in which I grew up. Although I enjoyed my private school with what we characterized as a family atmosphere, I have always envisioned myself working in a completely different setting. I wanted to work in a setting that would help me to challenge every preconceived notion I had.

Since I did not receive my placement until nearly the beginning of school the only place to meet my mentor was at school while preparing the classroom. My first experience was getting lost in a neighborhood near the school. I typed the address into my iPhone and quickly looked at where I would be going. I left my house with anxious nerves in hopes of meeting the perfect mentor teacher. I took the interstate for quite a while through parts of town I rarely traveled. I got off the interstate assuming I knew the directions and did not look at my phone. I turned on a street where I thought the school was and I drove into a neighborhood. I quickly realized I was in the wrong place but eventually found the school after several wrong turns and several driveway turn-arounds.

Driving up to the school it looked much like any other school. I saw lots of activity. Walking in I noticed boxes everywhere, workmen hauling desks into different rooms, and frantic teachers running around. I had no idea where I was going and no one was available to help direct me so I just began wandering. Eventually a teacher noticed I was a new face on campus and she escorted me to my frantic teacher’s classroom. We introduced ourselves and began talking about

our visions for third grade. We arranged the classroom into some sort of order, spoke about our strengths and weaknesses, and discussed the culture and climate of the school. From the first minute I met my mentor she referred to me as her co-teacher, she introduced me as her co-teacher, and showed great excitement about the journey we were about to encounter together – ready or not!

This hectic beginning to student teaching proved to be a moment where I began to learn to give up control. By receiving my placement later than expected, setting up the classroom just days before school, and quickly getting to know my mentor teacher, I learned that teaching often involved a lack of control and great flexibility to “go with the flow”. Having a self-described type-A personality, and being someone who plans EVERYTHING, this lesson was a hard one for me to learn, and frankly one that took a while for me to grasp (probably a lesson I am still learning).

The start of learning to give up control came at the beginning of the school year. I had to learn that although everything was not happening in my timing or the way I expected it to happen everything would work out. As a teacher I have learned that I should never attempt to exercise total control of daily plans, lessons, or my students so that I do not lose opportunities for teachable moments. My act of “giving up” control allows someone else to step in and construct his or her own knowledge, meaning, and experience. I learned through this experience that for my students to make the most of the learning, I could explicitly state everything for them or do everything for them exactly how I thought it should be done. I learned that student learning is enhanced or made richer when students make connections to construct their own knowledge, often in ways that I had not anticipated. I think the trivial task of setting up a classroom is a situation in the past where I would have wanted all control and to do in my own time. I learned that everything does not always work out as planned and involving students in the process is more engaging for the students.

Prior to student teaching I had several expectations about what the experience would be like. I expected to continue my role as a student, learning everything there was to learn about how to be a teacher in a ‘real life’ setting. I predicted this year would be the hardest year of my life but I knew I would survive with the support of an extensive support system. I anticipated I would grow in my teaching philosophies and theories every step of the way. This expectation has become a reoccurring dream and something that four years of college built towards. My hopes about student teaching were held very high but I quickly learned they were not matched with reality.

My initial outlooks of student teaching were derived from experiences during my four years of undergraduate study. During those years I was guided through every step with explicitly stated material. For some crazy reason I believed that

M. SEGREST

student teaching would follow this same process, I would walk hand in hand with a guide until I felt strong enough to run alone. I would better describe my student teaching experience as a practice that I was “thrown” into. As mentioned earlier I was assigned to my school three days before school began which gave me very little time to get to know my mentor teacher’s teaching ideologies and theories. My initial belief of my mentor teacher’s role was that of a role model, someone for me to learn from. I expected my mentor teacher to have a process to ease me into the world of teaching along with a process to handle all the intense paper work that goes along with teaching. I found out this was not how my mentor viewed her role. My mentor regarded the profession of teaching as a very significant profession and considered the extra person in the classroom (me) an asset that she was going to use every minute of every day despite my inexperience. I was to be engaged full time from the very first day, with her, in the act of teaching.

The title of co-teacher empowered me in some ways, but also added an unanticipated layer of pressure for me to perform when I was inexperienced, just out of the college classroom. Beginning the school year as a co-teacher did not provide me much, if any, time to observe my mentor teacher. At first the lack of transition made me feel very anxious. With time I grew excited about this important role and learned to embrace the intensity of partnering with my mentor. I jumped right into planning lessons, testing teaching theories, and managing classroom behavior with real students. Looking back on the way I jumped right into teaching makes me value the way my mentor teacher mentored me. Although at the time I thought this was a crazy way to provide guidance for someone so new to the classroom I strongly believe it provided more confidence with my teaching practices, more respect as an authority figure, and a better grasp on classroom management.

The poignant moment when I realized my teacher viewed me as a capable and effective person responsible for teaching right from the beginning was a moment that shaped my confidence as a teacher. From the first meeting my mentor saw something great inside of me and realized she needed to push me towards greatness in a nonconventional way. My mentor teacher gave up full control and allowed me to have a symmetrical role with her as teacher. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) discusses that respect is built best when seemingly asymmetrical relationships (such as mentor/mentee, teacher/student, etc.) are made as symmetrical as possible. I was given words of encouragement and reinforcement constantly by my mentor as a way to mold my teaching and boost my confidence – but always as an “equal.” My mentor teacher often asked for my insights, opinions, and perspectives on her work, modeling what she perceived as symmetry in our relationship. I came into the year of student teaching feeling that I would always be looked at as inferior. However, I was nurtured as a worthy student teacher and respected as a teaching peer.

The first day, first week, first month of school is a strange blur in my mind. I experienced all types of emotions and experienced a new degree of tired. I learned the importance of sleep, preparation, and eating healthy to avoid sickness. The morning of the first school day of school I woke up very early like I usually do on important days. I got ready in my best professional teacher clothes and intently analyzed my outfit to make sure there was nothing kids could make fun of in my appearance. I wanted to make the best first impression as a teacher. Because my mentor pushed me, I was entering this year as the co-teacher in room 17 and as such wanted my professional appearance to match this title. While my mentor referred to me as co-teacher, I soon realized that naming me such did not mean the students viewed me that way, and I learned that I had to fight to keep this title. I did not focus on becoming best friends with my students or being liked by colleagues. I focused on becoming the best teacher for my students.

The first day began and our students slowly arrived. Some arrived by themselves while others were escorted by proud parents excited to meet their child's new teacher. As the students arrived we greeted them and their parents and instructed them to begin the work on their desk. The morning work included decorating a nametag, writing their name on school supplies, and a get to know you activity. School commenced and we were ready for a great year.

Again, the first day and week are a blur but I do remember thinking we should have rehearsed and practiced establishing routines and rituals. In all of my undergraduate classes I learned the importance of teaching procedures during the first month of school. In my classroom this idea was taught only very briefly.

As I look back on the first few weeks and months of school I can only think about the fact that we did not practice routines and rituals and how much this hurt our students as the year progressed. All the way through my college education classes I learned the importance of teaching routines and rituals for the first few weeks of school and our professors in the graduate year, Hillary and Kenny, had emphasized this as well. While we did not do enough work to establish these routines, I learned what happens without the routines and rituals in place. Consequently I had to learn the importance of re-teaching these routines and rituals, and constantly sticking to them to build consistency. Not until this school year did I really believe and understand the weight of this issue. My mentor teacher briefly explained her 'rules' and procedures then expected the students to remember them. She held all the students accountable for them and the students are given consequences even if they broke a poorly taught rule or procedure. I learned that rules and procedures are less important than explicitly taught and reinforced routines and rituals. I believe that the way the classroom is expected to look, be organized, and function should be taught again and again, and retaught and revisited anytime the need arises. Because of what I have experienced and learned with my student teaching, I will spend the first month with my class creating and implementing these routines and rituals. Staying on top of these routines and rituals in the classroom is the key to becoming successful. Students need to believe and

M. SEGREST

feel that they are in a safe space in order to become vulnerable (in a good sense) with their learning and push beyond the limits.

Experiencing fatigue and a sense of being tired that comes with teaching was something I had never experienced. In the very beginning everything in my body hurt, from my ear lobes to my toenails. I got home and just collapsed on the couch and I remember thinking “what time is too early to go to bed?” I was showered and in my pajamas by 6:00 pm and asleep by 7:30 pm. That routine lasted about a month. Looking back on it now as I am buried in paperwork, papers to grade, and lessons to plan I wished I could just come home and collapse. I quickly came to believe that student teaching is boot camp; they are training us to function, and function well, in a very tired state so that when we have our own classroom we can handle the pressure and workload.

The first month went by very quickly and it became a bit of a mess thanks to Hurricane Isaac. Living in South Louisiana hurricanes are something we experience at the end of nearly every summer. In every young child’s mind is the hope that the hurricanes will be strong enough to cancel school. As a teacher the thought of hurricane days became something to stress about. Hurricane Isaac was coming toward Louisiana and growing stronger and stronger. After much hesitation from the administration, school closed and remained closed for nearly a week. Coming back to school after the week off was difficult. We were a week behind with our curriculum guidelines and in a position where we needed to reteach material previously taught before the weeklong break. Playing catch up was extremely hard in our school – a school the state labeled with the stigma of being a failing school. Our students were labeled “at-risk,” and as teachers we were committed to working extra hard to ensure we were working toward grade level expectations – the hurricane break was working against us. As stressful as the hurricane experience was, it taught me a great lesson in flexibility. So much of teaching is being flexible and learning to deal with the situations presented in front of you. As a student teacher I am very grateful to have learned this lesson early on. Without flexibility you can become easily worked up about every detail going off schedule in the class instead of enjoying the teachable moments that happen along the way.

Student teaching is a strange learning experience. However, part of the learning challenge is learning how to work with another adult professional and learning how to voice your opinion during the right moment and not bash the other’s opinions in the wrong moments. One component of this challenge is being faced with colleagues who are in constant competition to become a better teacher and in turn

they become unprofessional and create gossip and dramatic situations. My college professors have trained me throughout my courses to be professional in all situations. Throughout my course work numerous conversations have been about not gossiping or not entering situations where gossip may be present. The teaching profession is a profession dealing with people, people have a tendency to gossip, especially a profession with a majority of women. Professionalism is something that should be “worn” from the minute you get to school until about five miles past school. It should also be put back on when writing emails, making phone calls, or encountering anyone in the profession. I have learned that no matter what the frustration level it does not pay to stray from professionalism.

As I think about the first few weeks after coming back to school from the long winter break in December I think about the transition and strain it put on me and I can not help but wonder what strain it put on my students’ lives. Because I have spent every educational moment with my students since the beginning of August and they see me as the co-teacher, what did they think of this long break (the University break is much longer than the school break)? Did they see this long break without me as something that was weird and almost unnecessary? In the weeks leading up to the break I remember my students asking why I had to leave, if I would ever come back to just visit, and if I would still love them when I came back. I received several heartfelt letters and lots of concerned looks and conversations. My eight-year-old students understood that I would be leaving for an extended period of time to work on projects for my “LSU class” but they were not quite sure how to process these feelings. Before leaving I made sure my students knew that I loved them and that I was not abandoning them. We talked about the exact date I would be coming back and how, if they needed to tell me anything while I was gone, all they had to do was write me a letter or tell the other teacher. I explained that I wanted to be a part of their lives during this time but I would be far away. The day I left I was sent off with hugs, letters, and thoughts of what they will do without me.

During the break my teacher stayed in constant contact through emails about almost every event that happened. As the days went on the moments grew more and more chaotic in the classroom, my teacher was not able to fill me in on as many details, she was simply able to say that everyone missed me and they needed me back. Needless to say, I felt wanted but also realized how difficult it is when adults move in and out of students’ lives! It sounded like the place was falling apart without me. I had thoughts of why is my teacher unable do this without me. But the more I thought about this the more I started thinking about how children, all of us, are creatures of habit. My students are used to two teachers and my absence threw off their routine.

M. SEGREST

After transitioning back into the world of my third grade classroom following the long winter break I found out just how hard change can be on a child. No matter how prepared I felt my students were for my time-off I do not feel they were ever ok with me leaving. I do not know if children are ever ok with change or transition, particularly when adults move in and out of their lives. I have learned that no matter how big or small the change may be, students need to be prepared and coached through the change. In the beginning I felt it might be best for my students to not know the days I would be absent because I did not want to disrupt the current day, but I learned that it is better to prepare children for any foreseeable change and prepare them for the transition before, during, and after it happens.

The moment after the break was when I began to notice how crushed my kids were without me. I realized it was not completely me that they missed; it was more or less the consistency of having two teachers in the room. Without their structure in place, their school world was set spinning in a different direction. I realized the importance of routines and consistency; I began to shift my thinking from a thought that kids were people who could quickly bounce back from anything to the thought that kids are people who need consistency and structure. Coming to this realization has helped me as a teacher in the classroom. When I meet the basic needs of love, comfort, and safety learning can happen. When the students were without me they did not have their basic needs met because they did not feel the same comfort their two teachers were able to provide. As a student teacher you have to think through the transitions, particularly when you are only involved for a semester.

Despite the fact that my class has always been made up of several rowdy and at times violent boys, many behaviors escalated after the routine and structure was shifted during my break in December and part of January. Some of the boys formed a makeshift “gang” in what should have been a peaceful learning environment. They bullied the entire class into doing what they want or say. The amount of learning that took place when the “gang” was in action was disturbingly low. The teaching that occurred was minimal. We were fortunate to have two teachers so that one teacher could constantly monitor behavior while the other teacher was teaching and trying to maintain the learning environment. Our students have become very good at learning to focus despite the distractions in the room.

The craziness the “gang” created during the first semester was minimal compared to the manipulated bullying acts that played out early in the spring semester. I believe during the first semester this “gang” was working hard to get together and establish their power in the classroom. There were occasional fights, desk throwing, refusing to work, name calling, etcetera but none of this was surprising to my mentor teacher. All of this, however, was eye opening for me as a student teacher!

During the second semester the “gang” reassembled and plotted out a time to attack one of their peers. The students knew this could only happen during a time when there was one teacher. Regardless of the years of experience my teacher had under her belt, the students were able to play on the fact that she was by herself and they took advantage of the opportunity. After recess, a few of the “gangs” members pinned down another, previously targeted, boy in our class. The aggressors started kicking him and reenacting horrific scenes from when his brother was killed. The attacked student was hurt, however, he was too afraid to tattle right away. Eventually the school got to the bottom of the situation and the web the “gang” created was unraveled.

There are several lessons I learned during student teaching regarding how to handle violent behavior. When I entered the profession of teaching I never expected a major role of my job would be refereeing fights or learning how to calm students down before the issue became a fight. This is, however, something that really happens in classrooms and because it is the reality of the teaching profession today I am very thankful I learned these lessons during student teaching and not during my first few years alone in the classroom. I learned that it is very important to document everything profound, violent, and weird that the child says because it may be helpful later if/when the issues become bigger. I learned that accountability is huge. If students see that nothing happens to one student when they call someone a name they will think it is okay, if nothing terrible or nothing with consequences happens when a child touches or hurts another child they will think that is okay also. This situation can become a tangled mess to unravel later. I learned from the actual experience of watching a child throw a desk across the room (maybe at me). I learned how to handle and how not to handle a situation after a violent action has taken place. I also learned what procedures should be put in place after a violent action to prevent further actions.

One of the most important things I have learned in these violent moments is the need of a guidance counselor. I have shifted my thinking from thinking I can handle and will handle all things that occur in my classroom to the idea that sometimes situations are bigger than me (or you!) and there is a time to call reinforcements. This was a difficult thing for me to learn because all my life I have been taught that I should be able to work anything and everything out with someone. I thought that as a teacher when you give up the control of fixing a situation within your own classroom and hand it over to the guidance counselor you lose all respect and power in future situations. I believe that sometimes it is best to lose all power in violent situations. I have learned that if you are only calling in reinforcements for certain situations you do not lose your importance as a teacher. There are some moments that a guidance counselor needs to get involved because as the teacher not calling in reinforcements could be dangerous and develop into a legal issue.

When I think back to the major bullying incident and other minor bullying issues that happened regularly in the classroom I cannot help but think about how

M. SEGREST

these events affect students. Although some of these issues of violence and bullying appear to many teachers to be ‘routine,’ I am not sure they ever become second nature to the person hurt during the incident. The major bullying incident in our class took a few weeks to unravel, but in the end there really is not a good outcome – the person bullied was still bullied. In the beginning I believed that the best possible situation was to get rid of the bullies. If they could do it once they could easily do it again. In the end, however, those so-called bullies not only needed the academic part of their education, they also needed to learn from these situations and receive help and support to change their behaviors.

When I think about my year of student teaching I think about a combination of days where each and every day of “school” was completely different in its own way. I think about this year in its entirety being a year of learning to deal with masses of stressors in an environment, which is supposed to be a consistent and comfortable place. When I think of what a stressor is, things that go against the norm comes to mind. What things conflict with a normal routine that may lead to stress? My year of student teaching was a constant stressor – or what some people have told me is controlled chaos. Before this experience I assumed the first few days or maybe even weeks would be chaotic, afterward a normal routine would be established, as as a class we would settle into that routine for the rest of the year. Even with great routines and rituals in place, there are many unpredictable moments in the course of any day, and I have learned to work with the constant state of an always-changing environment.

As a person who walks through every detail of all possible situations that might occur while planning, I have learned to roll with the punches. In the chaotic moments I have learned to keep calm and listen rather than react. I have learned to be a person who more frequently takes things in and less of a person who quickly reacts. I have learned that if I strictly plan every minute of every day to suit the learning goals and objectives I forget about my students’ needs and the importance of remaining flexible for them. When adaptable I have allowed my students a role and an important position in the classroom. The classroom has made a change from a place where the teacher was the one solely responsible to a place where students help pick up the pieces and help run and operate class.

The hardest lesson I had to learn during this journey is the fact that when dealing with issues in the classroom they are not something that can work themselves out overnight. Most issues take a while to turn around. More often than not when you tackle one issue many more surface. With teaching you have to be willing to tackle as well as commit to handling all sorts of issues. The issues range from being

hungry, not sleeping enough the night before, forgetting necessary medicine, defiance, academic achievement, etcetera. Although I am a teacher and I believe academics are of the utmost importance, the academics cannot be thought about until comfort and safety issues are addressed. Many of my students come to school and I can instantly tell that something is not right. If the atmosphere established is safe and comfortable the student will open up. Sometimes all it takes is a hug, an ear to listen, or more guidance.

Someone once told me, "I can't save the world so I might as well give up now and relax," in regards to teaching in a difficult school. They advised me to find a job at an "easy" school where I can comfortably teach and clearly make progress with my students. As a tired teacher absorbed in test scores and struggling readers I listened to this person's thoughts in the most respectful way. I let this advice sink in and become fuel for my fire to truly work towards changing the world one student at a time. This "fuel" has become my motivation and drives me toward continuing to teach with a desire to teach in places that others could not handle teaching. I learned that as difficult as the day may be my children need me and I need them. We have built a relationship and we trust each other. The feelings and relationships I built over the course of the student teaching year are indescribable and something I do not want to turn my back on. I grew as an educator and truly believe I have a calling to become a great teacher in a school much like the school I first began.

KATIE LOWDER

4. FEARS

Bissonet Plaza Elementary School

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines fear as an unpleasant, often strong emotion caused by anticipation. Fear is inevitable and has preceded change with every significant event in my life thus far including: applying for college, applying for grad school, interviewing for jobs, getting engaged, house hunting, and of course student teaching.

I tend to reflect on life experiences and analyze how each has shaped me. Recognizing my inability to express my deepest fears to others brought me back to an occurrence in fifth grade—I was tainted by the “gifted test.” It was my dream to be in the gifted program because all of my friends were in gifted. The woman who was administering the test asked how I was feeling about the test. Being honest, which I thought was the “best policy” (I still do), I answered that I was nervous. She sent me back to class and told my teacher that gifted was not for me due to my lack of confidence. Even now, I struggle sharing my fears because of the fear of feeling like I will not measure up.

When discussing our writing topics for our individual chapters, my peers were surprised that I would choose to write about fear. My approach in this chapter is to show the journey of dealing with my fears through student teaching. What I learned in my peers' feedback is that I apparently come across as carefree and peaceful most of the time, but that is my problem – I hide and dwell on my fears. I pretend like they do not exist when I am around others. They sometimes control me. They make me sick. They burden me. They destroy my confidence, but...

PRIOR TO THE START OF SCHOOL

August 7, 2012

I was anxiously awaiting the email all day, actually all summer, for the contact information of the mentor teacher with whom I would spend the next year. Finally around 7 pm I got an email from Kenny, my professor, with the email address and permission to contact my mentor teacher, Ms. Anna Claire Bowers, a second grade teacher at the New Ridge Academy, for the first time. Before I received her e-mail address, I drafted and asked peers to review a charming message introducing myself and stating my enthusiasm about school year. I intentionally hid my

K. LOWDER

nervous anticipation about what was to come. Within minutes of hitting the send button she responded with excitement and told me that I could come in the very next day to meet her. *Sigh of relief*. We planned on meeting at 7:30 am at the school for the first day of teacher workshops.

I did not sleep much that night probably because of all of the questions running through my head and fearing what the year might bring. My dreams were bombarded with questions:

Will I actually be able to teach the kids?

Will I be able to control/manage a classroom?

Will my mentor teacher and I get along?

Will I be welcomed in the school?

Will I feel like a part of my classroom?

Will I actually get to teach?

Will I be judged constantly?

Will I revert back to the traditional ways that I was taught throughout primary and secondary school?

Will I have a life outside of teaching?

Will I be patient with the students?

Will I get sued?

Will I be involved in drama?

Will I have support?

August 8, 2012

At 6 am I was sitting in the school's parking lot. *Nervous*. I sat there, in my car, for an hour and a half before my mentor teacher would arrive. First, I prayed. I prayed that my mentor teacher and I would have a healthy and communicative relationship. I prayed that she would support me and give me advice on how to be an effective teacher. I prayed that she would allow me to be creative and implement strategies that I learned over several years of education courses. I prayed that she would talk to me and treat me like a teacher and make me feel welcomed in her classroom. I prayed that I would actually be able to teach well—that the students would gain knowledge. There were probably 500 other things that I asked God for that morning. Next, I proceeded to draft out a list of some of the questions that I had for my mentor teacher. I would ask her:

What time does school start?

8:23 am

What time do you get to school in the morning?

Between 6:30 and 7 am

What time do you leave?

3:30pm, right when the bell rings

What is the teacher dress code?

Uniforms—black pants and different color polo for each day. Friday is free dress.

What is the classroom schedule like?

ELA in the morning, lunch, recess, math, P.E., science/social studies, and finally computer lab

Do you need help with anything?

Nope

What does she expect of me?

I am not sure. I will have to read the handbook for your program.

Is it alright if I come to some of the teacher workshops this week with you?

Yes.

I ended up staying all day and attending the next few days of teacher workshops in preparation for the new school year. I learned a lot about teacher evaluation programs, state standardized testing, homeless students, bully prevention, school policy, technology, etc. It was a lot of information! I was petrified with all of the talk about teacher evaluations and standardized testing. I know I thought for at least a second that I had gotten into the wrong profession, but that fear was quickly clouded over by a plethora of other information. I just took notes and breathed it all in, eyes wide, but determined to learn everything that I could in order to prepare me for what I was about to experience for the first time.

The students were to arrive Friday. Many teachers were scrambling to get their rooms in order; however, Ms. Bowers had it totally together. Everything had its place. Every inch of wall space was filled with educational posters, expectations, vocabulary and word walls, calendars, pictures, and more. I wanted to help with *something*, but there was absolutely nothing I could do. If I were to judge a book by its cover everything seemed great. *Fears: Am I useless to her? Will the entire year be like this?* I would not know until I found a place in the class. *Would I have*

K. LOWDER

a place in the classroom? Was this going to be real awkward for the next 9 months?

THE FIRST FULL WEEK

August 10, 2012

The first day of school with the students was a pleasant blur. I wish I could tell you more, but you will understand what I mean when you experience it for yourself. What I do remember is that the students were on their best behavior, probably a little nervous and uncomfortable with the newness. The morning started off with an assembly to cover school rules and procedures, as well as introductions of faculty and staff. Then, as a new class, we made our way down the pristine hallway to our home for the year. The day was a scramble, which consisted of reviewing the student handbook *in depth* and turning in/organizing school supplies. I was there, but I did not feel needed.

I loved meeting the students, though it was hard for me to remember 25 new names on the first day— for some reason, in my mind, many of the students resembled one another. I loved the beautiful school building. I loved the seemingly relaxed atmosphere. I loved the joy and enthusiasm of the teachers. I really only had positive things to say about the first day of school. I was excited and felt a little relaxed finally. This is not going to be so bad...

After experiencing the first week of school, my initial excitement and joys faded as the week progressed—fear flooded back to me. I quickly discovered that the plan for classroom management meant a lot of yelling. I got so upset with the constant chastisement toward the students. All week I heard, “*move your clip!*” (the clips were part of a visual management system) and “*move your clip two times!*” Students were constantly moving their clips for not raising a hand, for not sitting in their seat properly, for talking to the person next to them, for not keeping their eyes on the teacher, for not following along in their book, for shouting out answers. At the end of the day the students whose clips were on C, D, or F would cry in fear of being “whooped” when they got home for having a poor conduct grade. Each offense meant moving their conduct clip down a letter grade. I reflected on the fact that there was no room for improvement with this behavioral management system. Students were stuck looking like the “bad” kid, all day on display. During the first week most students were on the “C” or “D” for conduct everyday. This was shocking to me because for the past 4 years I had envisioned my classroom being happy and uplifting. No one ever yelled at me. I worried that my mentor teacher would want me to use the same methods that she used to discipline the students and to control the class. It put me in an awkward position of feeling like I was not pleasing my mentor teacher by not being on the same page with her, but I also did not want to betray my beliefs of behavioral management. That first week I vowed that I would not make students move their clips and that I

would not yell at a student. There is a fine difference between yelling and being firm, which is definitely necessary at times.

We also had 3 write-ups in the first week. *Wasn't this second grade?* Two boys were sent to the principal for not keeping their hands to themselves and one girl for crying hysterically and disrupting the class for, wait for it... *having to move her clip twice!* The clip chart became the bane of my existence. I was shocked that week with how many times the principal had to visit the classroom and how many times kids had to visit the principal's office. I did not think our students were bad, or even had behavior problems that needed to be dealt with by the principal, but that was the established management plan of the classroom. I have heard that when you send a kid out of the classroom, you lose power as a teacher. I was given the advice that it is only necessary to send a kid to the principal if he/she is a danger to him/herself or others. I stuck with that advice and focused on establishing rapport and open communication between students and myself as part of my plan of management. I would work to establish a trusting and respectful relationship with each student individually.

As the week drug on, I contemplated once again if this was the right profession for me. After four years of undergrad and working so hard to get into grad school for a career that I thought I was so passionate about I honestly feared that I had wasted four years of my life with something I was just not cut out for. Though I struggled with not agreeing with the behavioral management techniques pre-established in the classroom, I pushed past the things that I did not like about how the classroom operated and shifted my focus to enjoying the students, being there to love and care for them, supporting them, encouraging them, assisting them, teaching them how to handle confrontation, and pulling knowledge from their brilliant minds. I still had that lingering fear that I would offend my mentor teacher because our teaching styles clashed in the area of behavioral management, but also with instructional planning and delivery, assessment strategies, and even our personalities seemed to be vastly different. A simple example would be that I like collaborative learning, but the thought of the students working together seemed to make her nervous. Another example is that I liked doing diverse, hands-on learning activities and she seemed to gravitate toward worksheets. I do not like drama, but it always seemed to surround our classroom. Initially it all made me feel very frustrated, but I decided to stay focused on my purpose and beliefs and just keep trucking along. Instituting and maintaining positivity may have been the thing that got me through a lot of the bumps of the experience.

Among many burdening thoughts of the first week, I discovered that every experience, whether good or bad, is a learning experience. I had the privilege of jumping right into participating, assisting, and even teaching in the very first week! I was a little nervous teaching my first lesson in the classroom, even though it was just an art activity connecting with a writing activity that the students had done earlier, I just did not want to let my mentor teacher or my students down. I was so relieved when Ms. Bowers gave me the opportunity to teach. I also started the

K. LOWDER

routine of checking the students' homework daily and offering feedback, I assisted with math each day—I walked around scaffolding individual students by asking them questions as opposed to just telling them the answers, I read books at the end of the day to the entire class, and I even took over a reading lesson while my teacher had a long conversation with the principal in the back of the room. I administered math pre-assessments to individual students, which would be administered again at the end of the year to note progress made. I also gathered running records for each student. Since we learned how to administer running records in one of my reading practicum courses in undergrad, it was really exciting to have the opportunity to put into practice what I had learned. I was eager and excited to get that much experience in the first week. Everything that I had learned thus far had transferred into reality. I got acquainted with the routine of the classroom by simply jumping into it immediately. These events allowed me to feel like an integral part of the classroom community. The fear of feeling like I would not find a place in the classroom faded quickly.

And right when I get past a fear, another arises. Throughout elementary school I remember doing an awful lot of worksheets, but after years of being taught more progressive theories of education and how much worksheets *suck*, I told myself before school started that I would stay away from assigning worksheets. During that first week I graded and checked more classwork and homework worksheets than I could eat cookies, which speaks volumes, and then copied a *few* more. I worried that my mentor would not accept my teaching philosophy when I actually had the opportunity to teach the class regularly.

After what seemed like the longest week of my life, I got a call from my mom that Friday asking how things were going at school. All I could say was, "I don't know!" I was confused. Everything was so much, so new, a big change. *Another fear... change*. They say that change is good, right? I think change is scary. How am I going to be a teacher if I hate change so much? I have learned that teaching is one of the most dynamic professions possible. Teachers must be flexible; standards are always changing, kids are always changing, schedules are always changing, classes are always changing, staff is always changing, and each day is unpredictable. What have I gotten myself into? But mama taught me never to be a quitter, so I guess I will give it more than a week...

On one hand I did not agree with the classroom management techniques in our classroom, but on the other hand I was having a wonderful experience interacting with students, learning their strengths and areas for improvement, and getting to know each of them personally. That is what matters! I had an important realization at the end of the week—I can implement the management plan that works best for my students and me in the future and I can lead the class the way I feel is best; until then, I will just have to roll with the management plan and method of instruction that is established in my classroom, while still remaining true to myself. I decided that I will respect that my mentor teacher chose to use the clip chart and the "principal scare," but I will simply not participate in those techniques and I will

work hard to develop lessons that are engaging, fresh, and meet the needs of my students.

THE NEXT FEW WEEKS

The dramatic retributions for students' minor misbehavior started to settle down as the weeks progressed. I do not know if my mentor finally realized that I absolutely refused to make a student move his or her clip, but she gradually cut her use of the method, and rarely used it anymore. I really did not notice a drastic difference in behavior, but I was relieved that things were actually mellowing out. I had seen this trend of dictatorship to relaxed atmosphere several times throughout my schooling. It is a method of classroom management that some choose to use in attempts to get the class running smoothly, but I believe in a different and more peaceable approach.

There will always be behavioral mishaps and off-task behavior at some point during a lesson, but simple eye contact most often does the trick just fine and *magically* reduces the amount of lesson interruptions and humiliated students. I progressively felt more comfortable with behavior management and my fear of not being able to control the class began to subside with this group of students, but I think that fear will be new each year with each incoming group of students. It takes learning the students individually and the class as a whole to discover what works for the present classroom community. I learned that developing deeper, respectful relationships with the students individually also has helped me with management. I sat by different students at lunch each day and just talked to them and asked questions about their lives.

Positive rapport with students served as an excellent management technique as they trusted me, we respected each other, they were eager to share knowledge and love with one another, and they did not want to disappoint. During our education courses in college, we were harped on incessantly regarding the establishment of routines and rituals in a classroom. After several weeks of organization and disciplinary issues within our classroom, I quickly realized how applicable and relevant those "routines and rituals" rants really were. We lacked that in our classroom, and things were hectic. After a month we finally started to see routines originate. There was a routine for turning in homework, for getting water, for going to the bathroom, for walking in the halls, etc. I felt as if my mentor teacher was learning what worked best as she went, even after 15 years of experience. It was encouraging to see how my mentor would reflect and manipulate a situation to make it work. I picked up on that *very* important lesson for any teacher: reflect and fix or reflect and rejoice! It may have been easier and more convenient to have those in place at the beginning of the year in hopes that there would be less confusion and chaos, but that is how it played out and it was corrected to work with our class.

K. LOWDER

My mentor teacher finally allowed me to start teaching formal lessons independently. She relinquished social studies and science to me entirely and asked me to lead two, thirty-minute small group sessions for English/language arts each day. My workload started to increase drastically on top of personal life priorities like: my job (after school tutoring), leading a bible study, LSU assignments, wedding planning, spending time with the people I love, eating (because I actually had to make time for eating), painting (which is another source of income), and meetings. I wish I could say exercise, but at that point I had to sacrifice something. All of the work became stressful. I feared that I would not be able to get everything done. I feared that I was going to get sick and my worrying was not helping. I feared that my relationship with my fiancé would suffer. How in the world am I going to juggle all of this? Thankfully, a little voice in my head from Kenny reminded me to take everything *a day at a time*. This was actually really soothing and sound advice that has gotten me through patches of the experience that seemed almost unbearable. If you do not have at least one of those moments—I do not believe you are doing your job right.

September 10, 2012

After about four weeks in my placement, taking baby steps in order to get acclimated to life as a student teacher, I started to feel more comfortable with my mentor teacher, the students, and the surrounding faculty and staff. I still had an itching fear that I would not be able to teach my students well and that they would not learn anything from me. With a lot of brainstorming and failed attempts at how to best record my personal reflections of the experience and assessments of my students, I formulated assessment documents for each student. I carry a clipboard with me everywhere. I had an assessment sheet for each day. On the assessment sheet was a table with every student and every subject. For each student I recorded his/her progress or struggles in each subject area. I also recorded misbehavior, funny things that they said, and honorable things that they did in each individual's row of the table. On the back of the assessment sheet I typically wrote self-reflections or events of the day, which is how I was able to recall much of the experience. I also had a binder in which every student had a tab where I transferred the information from the daily assessment sheet to each student's tab in greater detail. I did this so that I could have an overview of each child's week. This allowed me to assess student behavior and academic performance, and thus drive future instruction.

During my first day of using this assessment system I discovered the most common instance where students were off-task during a lesson, which was during whole group direct instruction. The assessment data also clearly identified students who were struggling with certain concepts, which allowed me to pull them during ancillary time or assist them during a lesson for remedial purposes. The knowledge that I gained from collecting data all year was very helpful in planning instruction

Daily clipboard assessment

	ELA	Math	Science	Social Studies
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				

Date:.....

Student Name:..... Week of:.....

ELA				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Math				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Science				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Social Studies				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Other				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

Figure 1. Examples of my assessment documentation templates.

K. LOWDER

and designing activities that met the needs of the diverse learners within our classroom. My mentor teacher was encouraged by this system—she found it very beneficial in parent-teacher conferences and she was thankful that I knew exactly what needed remediation before testing occurred. She told me that she was going to implement a similar system next year for herself. It was rewarding to think that I was impacting my teacher.

September 12, 2012

I mentioned earlier that whether you are having a good experience or a bad experience student teaching, it is a learning experience. Often I felt like I did not agree with the practices that I was witnessing in the classroom, but I learned what I did not want to do in my future classroom. I commend my mentor teacher for doing a fantastic job of helping students transfer their learning to all subject areas. She constantly reviewed past topics, even from the first weeks of school, to ensure that the material stuck in the students' long-term memory. You have to accept the 'bad' in order to be engaged with the 'good.'

September 14, 2012

As student teachers we did not spend many Fridays in the field teaching because of our LSU courses that met most Fridays. However, we had the opportunity to get a few full weeks in the field in order to be comfortable with and prepared for the full week experience of teaching. This Friday happened to be the very first Friday that we spent at our field placement. I was aware that our class took their weekly tests on Fridays, but never having seen it before, I was shocked when I walked into the classroom that morning to find the classroom completely rearranged, books and tubs blocking every possible "peaking view." We literally tested and graded papers all day. In my daily reflection I wrote, "Whole day of testing super hard for the kids, no recess and the kids are tired..." *Shoot, I was tired!*

This was also the day that the Office of Field Experience at LSU called me in the middle of class demanding some paper work from my teacher, which I had no idea about. I may have gotten a little short on the phone with them because I was frustrated with the lack of communication and organization of the program thus far. This incident was really just one of many instances where I felt like the student teaching program through LSU was a little unorganized, which is just another of the millions of ways that I have discovered how flexible teachers have to be. In situations where I felt that the program did not have it all together, I just continually told myself to be patient and to trust that my advisors would not let anything slip through the cracks.

September 18, 2012

It was my first thirteen-hour day at the school. I spent the usual allotted time at school, teaching, assisting, and grading papers. Then proceeded to stay after school until open house. A bunch of the teachers went out for drinks after school at a nearby Mexican restaurant before open house. I figured it may not be a wise decision to mix pleasure and work, so I just stayed at school and planned lessons. When open house began I got to meet a lot of the parents for the first time. They knew a little bit about me since I sent an introductory letter home, but it was great to have some personal positive contact with the parents regarding their child. I talked to at least 9 parents and showered them with positive and encouraging things about their child. Tara's mom particularly liked to hear that her daughter actually behaved in class. She even sighed with relief when I told her that we had not had a single behavior problem with her daughter. At that instant, I realized how valuable positive contact with parents can be.

My mentor teacher and I were the last ones out of the building that night at a little past 8 due to our large number of students. This is when the fear of having no social life hit me. I literally did school for 13 hours that day, which is not a typical day at school, but I realized that I did school for what felt like 24 hours a day. I tutor after school, I come home and prepare lessons and tests, I worry about my students' grades, I worry about my students' home lives, I plan the next week's lessons on the weekend, and when it is time to go to bed I have dreams about my class.

Then, the question of whether this career was fit for me enveloped me again. I will say, for as many times as I have wondered that, it has been reinforced a million times more that I am right where I need to be. I see the smile on Marvin's face and I cannot help but hug him. I listen to the jokes that Ryan tells me and I cannot help but laugh. I hear the brilliant knowledge deluging from Dallas and I am inspired. I feel the eagerness to learn and be successful from Molly and desire to support her. I read a sweet letter from Isadora and know that I am making a difference.

September 19, 2012

What an interesting day...

Right when I got to school that morning my mentor teacher was speedily racing around the room. She always walks very fast, in her 5-inch stilettos, which she always wears (I am seriously impressed). On this particular day, I could tell she was upset. She approached me and said, "Did you realize that we were the *ONLY* people left in the building last night?" I assumed so considering there were no cars in the parking lot when we left at 8 pm last night. She started to cry. She was having anxiety about the thoughts of what could have happened to us being there

K. LOWDER

that late at night, alone. *I was shocked. I was concerned.* My stability and support system was breaking down right in front of me.

Then, during recess, Sharice took her belt off and proceeded to choke a fellow classmate. We brought her to the office right away, where she was suspended for 3 days. This was her fourth time to be written up. Once she cried and cried and would not stop crying loud bellowing cries that interrupted the class, so she had to be removed from the class by the principal himself. There was another incident, where she acted like she was shooting other students. Her behavior had been very unpredictable.

And finally, during the math lesson my mentor teacher had the students measuring each other's waist. I could tell you all the things wrong about this situation, but the thing that made me most upset was that the smallest student in the room was paired with the largest student in the room.

I felt completely disheveled after that day. *Why was teaching so crazy? Was my job going to be like this for the rest of my life?* Sometimes you will just have days like this...

September 20, 2012

September 20th was the day that exhaustion seriously set in. I wrote in reflection:

I am worn out. I don't feel like writing an entire lesson plan, but I know that it will prepare me to teach the kids well if I have my lesson and activities written and planned out. It will help me to know exactly what to say, so that I don't get nervous and start rambling.

I guess on the bright side, I was optimistically exhausted. Sometimes you will have days like this...

September 25, 2012

My mentor teacher had her first teacher evaluation observation of the year. She asked that I leave the room while she was being observed due to nerves. I respected her wishes and went to hangout in the art room for an hour. This sparked a fear in me that I had not realized until that moment, I was going to be judged for the *rest of my life*. With all of the teacher evaluation programs in place and jobs at stake, I saw that a tremendous amount of pressure is placed on teachers.

September 26, 2012

As we were collecting paper work from home as part of the morning routine Kayla brings a letter to my mentor from her mother. I watched her read the letter and she looked perturbed. She hastily made her way over to me and griped, "Read this!" I read the letter of Kayla's mom's concern of the homework load that is sent home

every night. I was thinking the same thing because I had to check it and it sometimes took me an hour and a half to check. That simple letter *enraged* my mentor teacher. For the rest of the day there was a lot of anger taken out on Kayla. Ms. Bowers told me not to assist her if her parents did not care enough about her homework to help her. I refused to heed that demand. Kayla needed help. She struggled in math and needed extra attention. Kayla just so happened to get a poor conduct grade that day. And my mentor teacher wrote a “friendly” (aka sassy) email home to Kayla’s mother exclaiming that Kayla did not *have* to do her homework any more, that it was *only* to *help* the students. I was exhausted from the drama, from the treatment, from feeling like this was about to get ugly.

September 27, 2012

This was the start of a war. Kayla’s mother marched into the school to have a conference with the principal and my mentor teacher. All I heard was that there was a lot of yelling. I was the furthest thing away from drama and I somehow was clouded by it. This was one of the most distressing times of my experience. Parents, students, principals, teachers, the superintendent...they all got involved. I was very discouraged and fearful of the outcome. What if somehow I got drug into or blamed for this...*stress*.

SETTLING IN

October 10, 2012

I wrote, “*today Ms. Bowers referred to our students as her ‘little soldiers’ and that her classroom is like a military school and that she demands discipline.*” That frightened me.

October 24, 2012

I wrote:

Struggling with feeling like I have a place in this classroom lately. I feel like I don’t have the opportunity to teach math at all the way that I would like to. Only when I am assisting and working one-on-one with students do I get to use manipulatives and peer-tutoring to enhance a lesson. Today I felt so happy when my mentor teacher was at a TAP meeting and I got to be in charge while the librarians conducted individual appointments with students in the back of the class. I get really excited when I think about having my own class so that I can be free to teach the way that I envision.

I very well knew I had a place. I was just struggling with the lack of freedom. Every student teacher will go through experiences where they feel like they do not

K. LOWDER

have any control in the classroom. How I dealt with it? I just continued to implement my own strategies in small groups; finally my mentor decided that she would relinquish the entire subject to me. You will find yourself in many situations that you just cannot control because you are, in a sense, a guest in the classroom. You do not necessarily have to feel like that always, but you have to respect your mentor teacher's ways. I was always sure to respect her authority, but I quietly tried things that I wanted to implement when given the opportunity to work with students. Test things out. I learned not to be afraid to communicate with my mentor about ideas that I wanted to try with the class.

November 7, 2012

On this day I wrote: *"Battle—I like a warm buzz in the classroom, but Ms. Bowers likes silence. She yells at the students when I am teaching, even after I have given them the permission to talk quietly or call out answers—it makes me sad."* Not only sad, but it made me feel powerless. My authority was compromised. I just kept on teaching the way in which I believe.

November 8, 2012

The accident report I had to fill out on this day:

Date: November 8, 2012

Location: Playground

Time: After lunch during recess around 11:30 am

On duty: Ms. Bowers, Ms. Snyder, and Ms. Katie

Morris Adams walked out from under the playground equipment and came to me and told me that his arm hurt. I saw that his arm was visibly swollen. He was not crying and was very calm. I inquired about what happened and he told me initially "I fell." I walked him to the nurse right away where they took over from there calling his mother immediately.

Later, when Ms. Bowers and I asked our class what they witnessed several students reported that Morris was, in fact, pulled off of the playground equipment by Derrick Smith. After the incident students reported that Morris continued to play for a while until he came up to me, or any of the teachers that were on duty.

Derrick admitted to pulling Morris during a game on the playground. He showed Ms. Bowers exactly what happened.

My mentor teacher was concerned with the legality issues that may arise from the accident. I was naïve to that, since I was so concerned with his health. I nearly

threw up when he approached me and his arm was in the shape of a “Z,” clearly it was broken. His father came up to the school raging and blaming it on everybody, stating that the school was going to “pay for this!” Recently I attended a conference at LSU about legality issues within the school. The speaker had me worried about all the ways in which teachers can be sued...I started thinking, what if we get sued for the playground injury?

All of this brought up another fear; I will be responsible for 20+ humans one day independently. I am responsible for their lives. This will make you grow up real fast. (Morris ended up unexpectedly transferring to a different school after that incident ... that was all that ever came of the situation. Weird. Just weird.)

November 16, 2012

After weeks of drama between Kayla’s parents and my mentor teacher, they decided that it was best that Kayla move schools. It was not a pretty departure considering the tension between my mentor and Kayla’s mother due to what the mother thought was an unfair homework load and grading system. My mentor was not budging on the amount of homework assigned nightly since it was not graded and was only to benefit the students. The parents put a lot of blame on my mentor for their child’s poor grades. I personally assisted Kayla daily and many times offered her one-on-one remediation. I do believe that Kayla could have been successful at our school with the right accommodations, but she was not classified as having a learning disability, therefore, could not receive extra time on tests or have test questions read aloud, which really did make a difference in Kayla’s performance. Unfortunately, her parents refused to have their child tested for a learning disability. Being an academy our school requires that students must have a 2.0 in order to remain at the school, it also means that our coursework is rigorous. Maybe the parents felt like it was best to remove their child before her grades removed her. Kayla’s move satisfied my teacher, now she did not have to deal with the mother or the struggling student, but Ms. Bowers was asked to adjust her grading system in case future issues would arise from other parents.

The grading system was adjusted, which was very time consuming for Ms. Bowers, but the grades remained relatively the same, which showed no evidence of an unfair grading system. I was sad about the situation because I felt like it could have been prevented somehow. I get sick at the thought of a student failing under my watch, so it almost made me feel like I failed. My mentor kept reminding me that not every student will be successful, but I have a hard time believing that is true. It is just something I may have to struggle with for a while or it may be something that I truly believe in and will fight for to never happen.

We have been preached to unremittingly about positive parent-teacher relationships. This was an example of a poorly developed relationship. The situation just gave me one more thing to worry about, parent-teacher relationships. The situation caused me to reflect on how I would have handled the situation from

K. LOWDER

start to finish. I will certainly refrain from sending mean emails in retaliation of being offended. I also learned that a face-to-face conference is safer and may be more effective when there is something really difficult to discuss.

THE BREAK AND 2ND SEMESTER

December 7, 2012

The semester ended for student teachers. I was exhausted—I really gave it all of me. I was excited—Christmas break meant a month of relaxation, kind of. I was relieved—I had survived. I was happy—I still wanted to teach in the future and I already missed my students. Those were good signs. The past four months were full of learning experiences...good, bad, funny, sad, disappointing, fulfilling, overwhelming, happy, stressful, memorable, impactful, educational, encouraging experiences that all reinforced my vocation for teaching kids. The fear had not defeated me...but I had to survive one more semester...

January 14, 2013

Last semester I taught small groups for ELA, social studies, and science. This semester my mentor handed over math entirely as well. I was a little overwhelmed when I heard the news because I already spent so much time planning, but reality was that in several months I would have my own classroom and I would be planning all subjects entirely and I had to be able to handle it. There was no time for stressing about it. I jumped right back into teaching that very Monday. Jumping in has been a reoccurring theme throughout this year.

The saddest part of my first day back was learning that three of our students were gone. One student moved, while two others were (*re*)moved due to grades. One of those just happened to be a student that brought me great joy. I felt that feeling that teachers have when their kids leave each year.

January 24, 2013

I wrote:

Last night, as well as the night before, I had a freak out on James (my fiancé). I was blasting him for my loneliness, my lack of free time, my financial burdens, my student-teaching stress, my fears of the future, and not feeling like his priority. Going to grad school full time, student-teaching full time, working part time, planning a wedding, worrying about my family, not having enough time to spend with people I love, not having time to be outside, not having enough money to buy a Valentine's present much less buy myself necessities like groceries, toilet paper, and razors is overwhelming

100%. If I calculated and stored up all the time that I spent worrying and stressed, I may actually have time to get everything done. How can I shut the worries down?

I never let my personal life flow over into my professional life. I have my bad nights, but in the morning I put on a smile, fill my heart with love, and am out the door to have an enthusiastic day with those precious kids. They are enough to make me forget about all of the stress and internal or external issues that I am battling aside from school.

January 28, 2013

Braydon, who has missed over thirty full days of school without doctors' excuses, finally came back to class after two and a half consecutive weeks absent. It took the cops visiting his home to get his mother to bring him to school. We have heard all the excuses throughout the year. It was ringworms this time. I had been worried about him, mad at his mother, and confused because I did not know what was going on. It is hard to accept that one of my precious kids is not being nurtured at home and has no way to get himself to school. It is also hard to catch a student up who has missed that much class. It was tough having to file a truancy report because they can take the child away from the home, which probably would be good in Braydon's case, or send the parent to jail, which was not the goal.

February 19, 2013

Before the break I taught a lesson that I was sure bombed, nothing seemed organized or right, but we were about to be on break for Mardi Gras. I got back to school after Mardi Gras break refreshed and with a positive attitude. I saw the principal first thing in the morning and he immediately began to praise me for my amazing lesson from before the break! *What?! Was he for real?* He noted how I had such positive rapport with my students and he complimented the engaging and diverse aspects of each center. I lit up! Though I had been encouraged and praised by my family for my hard work, I *needed* to hear that from someone who actually witnessed my teaching. It felt so good hearing that from the man in charge, too. Later that day my student-teaching supervisor came to the school to watch the lesson via video camera. I was nervous to see the pandemonium unfold... We watched, and watched, and I just smiled. *Peace*. I had never seen myself teach. I liked what I saw. Yes, there were a few mix-ups, but there were so many wonderful things about the lesson that just outshined anything that I thought had destroyed it. Watching myself teach, seeing my kids interact with each other and myself, and noticing how engaged the students were during the lesson was a beautiful sight. My confidence was restored. My university supervisor praised me and gave me some helpful advice for future lessons.

K. LOWDER

March 6, 2013

I will be in my field placement for just 22 more days. Where did the time go? We had a seminar about preparing for the job market. As I sat listening to a panel of principals talking about job interviewing, I began to panic a bit. *I am about to be finished. I need a job. I have to support my future husband and myself throughout his time in dental school.* After 5 years of college it is finally time to start life in the real world. That is a lot of pressure. Someone once told me a list of some of the most stressful situations in life, the list was as follows in no specific order: death in the family, having a baby, moving, finding a new home, graduating, finding a job, and getting married. What I am experiencing right now is 5 of those 7 major life stresses. Knock on wood I am not experiencing a death in the family, and pray that it does not happen soon, and I am definitely not expecting a child. I will, however, graduate and get married in May, I will need to find a job, and I will have to move to a new city and find a new home in the next few months. If I think about it all at once it seems impossible to handle. Does everyone feel like that? As I sat at lunch visiting with my peers, they shared with me some of the very same feelings that I was experiencing. It was crunch time for us all, but it gave me some peace to know that many of us are in the same boat.

March 7, 2013

As I realized that my time in my placement was coming to an end, I began to reflect on my experience as a whole. I discovered: Teaching is learning. Learning is growing. Growing is changing. Changing is necessary. This year I learned more than I taught. For every lesson, I had to reteach myself the material in great detail in order to be able to question students and answer questions myself. I even learned from the students when they shared in classroom discussion. Not only did I gain academic knowledge, I learned about students' lives. I took the time to build relationships with them; I listened; I recognized their cultures, interests, and needs. I also learned that I am very critical of myself, because I want the very best for others. I expect the best from me in order to give the best to the kids. I have reflected on my practices and tweaked them time and time again in order to meet the needs of my students. I know this is something I will do for the rest of my career. People are dynamic; therefore, I realized that techniques used in the classroom must be dynamic as well. Most importantly I learned that with every fear came growth.

Eight months ago I was scared to death to teach. I had a list of fears a mile long. March 7 was my last observation of the student teaching year. I swear I get nervous every single time I am observed—I am told that everyone does. After the last what I thought was a disaster observation I learned a very important thing: teaching will never be perfection, even as much as a perfectionist, like me, wants it to be, it is impossible, and that is okay. I prepared for the lesson with the same intensity and

organization as all of my other lessons and got really excited to participate with my children in our activity. As I sat at the front of the room with my children surrounding me, eager to answer questions, lighting up when they got the answer correct, actively engaged, with smiles on their faces I recognized how much I love what I do. Hearing them say, “This was a fun lesson, thank you!” assures me that I am doing what I do best. I went from a timid and fearful student teacher to a bold and daring teacher. Change is necessary. Change is good.

I know that fears will whisper in our ears and make us feel incompetent, defeated, and insecure, but we cannot let fear control us. We have to prepare ourselves as much as we can, jump in, be prepared to learn and grow, be actively involved and eager to try new things, be creative, reflect and in hindsight we will discover that we have conquered all of our fears.

DRAWING NEAR THE END

April 2, 2013

Reflecting on fears and how I always overcome them has allowed me to reduce the amount of stress in my life. But reality is real and it hit me on this day. I had been preparing my resume for months. I had asked several references to write letters of recommendation for me. I had thoughtfully written and had edited (several times) my “Philosophy of Education.” I had researched schools in the area in which I would be moving in a couple of months, just after the wedding, but I had not started the job application process yet. I felt pressure from my peers, family, coworkers, fiancé, and especially myself to get the ball rolling with job applications. I pulled up the online application of the district in which I wanted to teach—I was taken aback. There were over 20 sections to complete, which included things like: essays, background information, experience, awards/involvement, uploading supplemental documents like my resume, transcripts, and letters of recommendation, and desired positions. It took me two weeks to complete that application. I wanted to be thorough and thoughtful with every detail. This was the opportunity that I was most hopeful about, working in the largest public school system in the city.

I also filled out a couple of other job applications. I felt like it was a waiting game now. Once again I was struck with fear (*ohhh no it's back again!*). *Are they going to contact me for an interview? I need a job to sustain us while my future husband is in dental school.* I decided that I could not be in fear, but I should be proactive. I can apply to as many school systems as possible; I can prepare, research, and just be real.

K. LOWDER

April 11, 2013

My application for my desired school system was submitted. I signed up for an interview with the school system through LSU's teacher interviewing day. I thought to myself: *How do they go about interviewing a teacher for one of their 90 schools in the district? Am I supposed to mention the schools that I have researched and am particularly interested in?* I think it is important to ask yourself questions and seek answers for those questions. Some questions may just be unanswerable until they are uncovered along the path of your journey.

In preparation for my interviews, on teacher interviewing day at LSU, I looked over potential interview questions. I organized and printed several copies of my teaching showcase portfolio, which included: a cover page, philosophy of education, letters of recommendation, observations, sample lesson plan, sample student work, transcripts, etc. I bought a suit. I also looked up recent news about the school system and tried to figure out genuine questions that I could ask the school system in order to determine if I am a good match for them. I have that lingering fear of: *Will I get a job?* I will have that fear until I actually get a job.

April 17, 2013

My last day. After rereading my journey I noticed how fears transition with the seasons of experience. Most of my initial fears were faced and overcome, but there were always new fears that seeped in throughout the student-teaching process. Even at the very end of the experience I encountered new fears about a job and my future. Reflecting on the fears throughout the process has been encouraging. I have a panorama of how I have prevailed through every one of those fears and that will be one lesson that produces perseverance. I could not be more satisfied with this journey; every good and bad aspect has made me wiser. Good luck to you! The experience is what you make of it, no matter the circumstance.


April 18, 2013

I wanted to thank my mentor teacher for taking care of me this year. I have grown to love her as a friend. I know we both learned a lot from each other. I will cherish our relationship forever. I wanted to thank the sweet students who made me excited to go to work each day. The funny, brilliant, sweet, and uplifting things they said or did overshadowed any situation that I went through. Get excited about experiencing this for yourself.

JESSICA DAIGLE

5. BALANCE: IS IT OBTAINABLE?

Math, Science, and Arts Academy West



The image is a screenshot of a Google search result for the word "balance". At the top, the Google logo is on the left, followed by a search bar containing the text "define: balance" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar are navigation tabs for "Web", "Images", "Videos", "News", and "More", with "Web" selected and underlined. A settings icon is also visible. The main content area displays the word "bal·ance" in a large font, with a phonetic transcription "/ˈbæləns/" and a speaker icon. Below this, the word is categorized as a "Noun" and a "Verb". The noun definition is "An even distribution of weight enabling someone or something to remain upright and steady." The verb definition is "Keep or put (something) in a steady position so that it does not fall: 'a mug that she balanced on her knee'." A "Synonyms" section follows, listing "scales - equilibrium - equipoise - poise - scale" for the noun and "poise - weigh - equilibrate" for the verb.

Google writes that balance is “an even distribution of weight enabling someone or something to remain uptight and steady” when being used as a noun, and “to keep or put (something) in a steady position so that it does not fall” when being used as

J. DAIGLE

a verb. While Google is not a “scholarly” source, I think we can agree that this is an accurate definition for the word balance. My question to you as a reader is, “can balance be truly obtainable in a bigger sense?” Is balance obtainable at work? Is balance obtainable at home? When it comes down to it, is balance obtainable in your life?

Quite often as a dance teacher, I find myself discussing the word “balance” with my students. A dancer uses balance in everything they do – from standing in first position to doing single pirouette turns to doing fouettés. I also found myself using the word balance quite often within my teaching experiences as a student teacher. My hope is that after you read this chapter, you will have a better idea how to balance the activities or experiences in your student teaching experience, and even in a larger sense... in your life.

Step 1: Prepare

The first step to doing a turn is the preparation. While there are several different ways to prepare for a turn, it is always important to get to a place where you are steady enough to begin your turn. You must understand what steps come next, and you must be fully committed before you can begin turning. If you are not fully committed and prepared, you may fall down – and as we all know, no one wants to fall on their face!

BALANCE OF FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

As I embarked on my journey of student teaching, there was a great deal of emotion. I was unsure whether I should be excited or scared, nervous or joyous, stressed or calm. Because of this uncertainty, all of these emotions hit me at once. I went from being excited and anxious to frustrated and overwhelmed in such a short span of time. I began to think to myself, “What am I getting myself into?”

My first fear was “Is this going to be too much?” I could not help but think about the workload. I had recently bought a dance studio, and although I felt confident that I could do both dance and student teaching at the same time, I began to grow a little apprehensive. Working as a business owner, giving my all as a graduate student, and as a student teaching intern... I must be crazy, right? My thoughts exactly! However, I took a deep breath and realized that I was just going to have to take it one step at a time. For me, this was no easy task. I am infamous for taking things 100 steps at a time instead of focusing on just one step. I knew, however, that no workload was too large if I paced myself correctly.

I was nervous about the teacher because I would be in the same school, in the same classroom with her all year long. All I could think about was “Is she going to be like me?” and “Is her brain going to work the same way as mine?” This was something that I knew could make or break my experience. Although I firmly believe that every experience is a learning opportunity, I knew that I would be

miserable if the teacher I was placed with was unorganized and a mess. This was a grave concern of mine.

Though the workload and my placement overwhelmed me, I think the most crucial of my worries was “Am I good enough?” I frequently questioned whether I was a good enough teacher. I did not want to fail my students, my mentor teachers and supervisors, the school, the community, or myself. I thought I would have all the confidence in the world, and right before I started student teaching, I realized that my confidence had turned into fear. Starting the year, I knew that I would have to put my fear aside and give it my all. I was committed to my job as a student teacher, and I was committed to my students. Fear or no fear, I knew I had to buckle up for one crazy ride.

My expectations, admittedly, for the year may have been a little clouded and even emotionally driven. I knew I would have to stay at school all day with the teacher and my students. I knew I would have to teach a certain amount of lessons and earn a certain amount of hours. I also knew that I would have to work hard inside and outside of my 3rd grade classroom to give the students everything they needed. Finally, I knew my weaknesses – flexibility and time management – and I expected myself to work on them. It is what I did not know that scared me, and in the end, the unknown is what always made me question, “What am I getting myself into?”

Just like when preparing for a turn in dance, your prior schooling and college years have prepared you (to some extent) for student teaching. You must trust that it is going to be enough to get you through that time, and even if you encounter something that you have yet to learn, you should take the initiative to try to learn as much as you can. Student teaching is not a time for worry. Although I can promise their will probably be a little stress and a little fear, you must commit yourself to what you are doing, and you must always remember your purpose!

Step 2: Arms

The next thing you must think about when doing a turn is your protection. How are you going to prevent yourself from falling? Your arms are one way that you can prevent yourself from falling. While there are several different ways you can put your arms, knowing that your arms are there to help you get around in your turn is one of the keys to success. For example, if you just treat your arms as if they are not there and throw them around or put them down, the force of gravity is bound to work against you, and as a result, you will fall. If you can imagine watching an ice skater turn, their arms start out, but then they strategically pull them closer and closer in to their body. This motion helps them to turn faster- it is actually quite a simple physics lesson!

BALANCING YOUR ROLE AS A GUEST

Entering into student teaching, it is crucial to understand and remember that you are a guest in your host school. You are not there to take charge and do things “your” way. You are there to learn and absorb all of the information you can while you are there. With that being said, it is often hard to balance your role as a guest with your role as a teacher.

With the first few weeks of school, I found myself struggling with role balance. Because I am the type of the person that naturally wants to take control and do things my way, I really had to think and reflect about when I would jump in and when I would sit back. For two weeks, I decided to be in an “observation” phase. In this phase, I literally sat in the back of the classroom taking notes. I wanted to learn about my mentor teacher’s rules, routines, and procedures. While I wanted to be a part of her classroom environment, I felt it was my duty to let her shape that environment before I tried to weave my way into it.

This observation stage ended up being crucial for my entire experience. This was imperative with one student in particular: Jason. Jason was diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) before he even stepped foot into our classroom. I was unaware of this diagnosis until he decided he was going to “test the waters” during the first few weeks of school. My thoughts of this can be seen in my earliest reflections:

On Friday (8/17), Jason was having an off day. We had put his desk isolated from the rest of the class because he said he wanted to be by himself. Throughout the day, he became more and more frustrated. Eventually, he started writing all over his desk. I could tell he was so frustrated when Lacey asked the class a question about charts in math and he mumbled something like ‘enough already’ under his breath. He was sick of talking about that subject, and it was obvious he wanted to get his way. Lacey ignored his behavior and continued to teach the other 17 children who were waiting to learn. A few minutes later, he picked up his book-bag and slung it down in front of him. My back was turned at the time because I was helping students in the classroom library, but Lacey immediately told me that she was going for a walk with Jason. Another 3rd grade teacher came in to help me supervise while Lacey was out of the room. When the day was over, I couldn’t help but think about what would have happened if he hurt another student. Would the penalty have been worse? I also couldn’t help but wonder what I would have done in such a situation. Would I have acted as calmly as Lacey did? At the end of the day, I discussed this with her, and she told me that she was in an “observation stage” where she was watching his behaviors and what works and doesn’t work for him. She explained that he had been diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) before, and this was merely a glimpse of his anger.

This was the first time that I was unsure of what to do, and it was a scary feeling! Lucky for me, I had a mentor teacher who really knew what she was doing. I admired the way that she was able to decide when to correct Jason and when to sit back and watch. I also realized at this point that I was not the only one taking notes in the room. Lacey was also using the first few weeks to get a feel of her students. She did not automatically react; rather she used the time to figure out what was the most proactive thing to do.

It is interesting when you think about it. I am an “authority” figure in the room, but really, I decided not to have authority at all for the first few weeks. Watching Lacey and the students was actually probably the smartest thing I could do. I not only noticed that Jason was testing the waters to see how we would react, but I was able to determine all of the other students’ personalities at that point as well.

I also learned a lot about my role in those first few weeks. From the way the classroom was run to the parent teacher conferences we had, I quickly noticed that Lacey saw me as a very valuable asset to the classroom. She viewed me as more of a co-teacher than a student teacher. This was another blessing that occurred during my student teaching. I know that if I would have been placed with a teacher who was not as open and willing to let me experiment and test the waters myself, then my experience would have been completely different.

As the year progressed, I often felt an internal struggle with my “guest” self and my “teacher” self. I find that this struggle seemed to occur when I did not agree with something. I am typically a very outspoken person yet, I found myself questioning when I should speak up and when I should just keep my mouth shut. This oftentimes happened when it came to working with the other third grade team members. Luckily, Lacey and I have the same style of teaching and very similar teaching philosophies so in most cases; she spoke up without me having to speak up. In one case though, our methods seemed to haunt us for the remainder of the year.

It was science fair time, and all of the other third grade teachers decided they wanted to send their science fair projects home for the students to do. However, Lacey decided that we should do our science fair projects in class with the students. She planned out 18 different projects based on students’ personalities, and made a schedule of when each of those projects would be completed. She also made a list of materials so the parents could help purchase some of the materials needed. None of this was a problem until after all of our projects were finished.

I distinctly recall sitting in the hallway with our students and some high school helpers putting their project boards together. Suddenly, all of the other teachers had a major problem with the fact that we were doing our science fair project during class time. Now, I would understand if we actually did the projects and not the students, but that was not the case at all. I would also understand if the projects caused us to fall behind or if they were disruptive in some way. However, we were still on target with the other teachers, and I really do not think we were disruptive.

J. DAIGLE

For some reason, the other teachers starting talking about how Lacey was “not a team player.”

What does this have to do with being a guest and being a teacher? Well, I quickly realized that if I were a teacher at the school, I would have spoken up to support Lacey. She was merely trying to help the students learn the scientific method and trying to prevent the project from becoming a “parent project.” As a teacher, I would have applauded her efforts to stay on track yet go above and beyond to prepare the students for their future. However, I also realized that I was not a teacher – I was a guest in the school. Therefore, I decided not to speak up because I was there to learn from these teachers, not to cause drama or issues among them.

Now, I am not saying that student teachers should always stay quiet and never speak up. I am saying that it is wise to pick your battles. It is all about finding a balance. Sometimes, it is quite appropriate to share your thoughts and opinions about an issue. Other times, it is probably in your best interest to just watch as things unfold. In this case, I decided to watch. Because of this, I learned that I strongly believe in what Lacey is doing. I also learned that I should never rush to talk about people or their methods. I should first ask them their reasoning, and then decide if I agree or disagree. Furthermore, I should always at least attempt to be supportive of my team members. That does not mean that I always have to agree with them, but I should at least hear them out.

Looking back, I would have to say that taking the first few weeks to get to know the environment and the students was one of the smartest things I have done. While instinctively you want to jump in and start right away, it is sometimes better to take a step back and observe. This observation period not only helped me to understand my students and my mentor teacher, it also helped me to understand my role in this classroom. It is very wise to pick your battles within the school. Sometimes it is appropriate to speak up, especially if it is something you really believe in, but other times, it is your job as a guest in the school to just sit back. Oftentimes, the hardest part is going to be finding a balance between when you want to just keep doing what your team members are doing and when you want to just run your classroom as you would without them. Keep in mind that you are not there to “step on anyone’s toes.” You are there to learn and to grow. In the end, you must always remember that while you are a teacher (to some extent), you are also a guest, and you must find a balance between those roles in order to have a successful student teaching experience in the classroom.

It is imperative to find a balance of your roles within the classroom; it is also important to use your mentor teacher like your arms. She/he is there to help you keep your balance in a world that could seem to be spinning without her/him. Not taking advantage of your mentor teacher, it is like not using your arms in a turn: you may just fall.

Step 3: Passé

Once you prepare, commit, and understand where your arms are going, you can pick up your leg into a passé and turn. Although you start with two feet on the ground, you eventually have to pick one up. You have to commit and have confidence in yourself that you can do it.

Step 4: Spot

“Spotting” is one of the most crucial parts of a turn. “Spotting” is keeping your eye on one spot as long as possible in order to prevent you from getting dizzy and/or losing your balance. You have to know where you want to go to “spot” where you want to land.

BALANCING WITHIN THE CLASSROOM

Time? Anyone have some time that I can buy? You just wish you had more time, right? More time to watch television. More time to clean the house. More time to go on vacation. Unfortunately, we do not have as much time as we would like to have in a day. Sometimes, it feels like the time flies by, and we did not get anything accomplished. Especially in a classroom, time is very minimal. We always wish we had more time to teach or more time to give assessments or more time to spend just playing outside with our students. Because we have so little time with our students, it is imperative that we prioritize and balance the many things we must do as teachers.

Often in today’s schools, teachers either teach strictly using a traditional approach or strictly using a hands-on approach. The traditional approach to teaching includes much more teacher-centered instruction with the students doing very little of the work. In a hands-on or inquiry-based approach, students are the center of instruction, and the teachers are there to guide and facilitate the students in their exploration and learning. Through student teaching, I have learned that neither model is completely successful on its own; it is imperative to find a balance between several different ways of teaching.

Throughout my college experience, I was constantly told that I should “always” teach hands-on and “never” use textbooks. Needless to say, before I started student teaching, I believed that textbooks would never work, and I should never use them. However, when I arrived at an actual school with real students, I learned this was not true. It did not take long for me to realize that such a diverse classroom cannot solely rely on a traditional teacher or a hands-on approach. Because these two types of teaching are on completely opposite ends of the spectrum, it is imperative that we find a middle ground.

Naturally, I am a very hands-on type of teacher. I always want my students to work together and explore. I never want to tell my students the answers; I want them to work through their difficulties to figure out the answers on their own. I

J. DAIGLE

also believe that it is important that students understand why we learn the things we learn. I feel like this helps students have a more meaningful experience if they can understand how it pertains to their own life.

Luckily, my mentor teacher had a very similar philosophy of education so we worked very well together. While this sometimes caused problems with our team members, who do not have the same teaching philosophy, we were able to make things work very well in our own classroom. With that being said, sometimes we had to find a balance between how we would typically do things and how they wanted us to do things.

It did not take long for me to realize that there is just not enough time in the day. Initially, I would teach lessons that were solely hands-on, and I would end up spending days letting the students figure out the material on their own. While this would be acceptable in an ideal classroom, it just does not work that way in the real world. I would end up spending too much time on a certain topic, and therefore, my third graders would end up being a week “behind” all of the other third graders.

I use the word “behind” loosely here. I firmly believe that because my students spent more time on the material and were able to get a more in-depth approach, they will not be behind the other third graders. However, according to the state-standards that were in place in Louisiana prior to the Common Core State Standards, my students would end up being “behind” the other third graders in the material. Here is the issue: try explaining that to an administrator or another teacher when you are merely a student teacher!

As a student teacher, it is not worth your time trying to fight a battle over the state standards or the amount of time you are able to spend on the material or the fact that you think the curriculum is “a mile wide and an inch deep.” It did not take long for me to realize that I just have to pick my battles within the classroom as well. Sometimes, I would end up teaching a concept really in-depth and strictly hands-on. Other times, I would use resources like the textbook or library books. I would like to point out that I think it is okay to use the textbook as long as it is used as a resource. There is not enough time in the day and you as a student teacher do not have enough power to try to justify why you are teaching one way or another.

Please do not get me wrong when I say this. I am not trying to say that as student teachers, we have no voice or no opinion. I am, however, saying that this is a time where we should find ourselves, understand what works for us and what does not, reflect on our experiences and learn from them. Student teaching is not a time to try to teach one way or the other. It is not a time to try to fight battles. It is, however, a time that you should use to experiment and explore your own philosophy. Then, as you become a teacher, you take what you learned from student teaching and use it to find a balance or a middle ground. Because we end up having a completely different group of students every year, this balance or middle ground may be shifted from year to year or even week to week. Regardless,

student teaching is a time to learn and grow. If you are not open to learning, you will not get as much out of the experience.

I also learned quite quickly that there is not enough time in the day. There is not enough time to teach the way I would teach in an ideal world. There is not enough time to analyze assessments and data like I want to analyze. There is not enough time for all the other “stuff” that comes with teaching. Therefore, teachers must find a way to balance all of the “stuff” in such a way that it is most meaningful to their students.

Assessments, Assessments, Assessments...

Assessment is a word that seems to take many forms in education. Each week of my student teaching, there seemed to be talk of another benchmark test or writing assessment or reading assessment. Now, I believe in assessment, but I do not believe in assessment as strictly a means to come up with goals for myself. I think assessments should also be used to come up with goals for our students. I also think that some teaching should actually occur between the assessments. It does students no good to have assessments all the time if we are not going to analyze the results, find out where our students deficits lie, and do something about it. It becomes just a meaningless mountain of paperwork instead of a measure to drive instruction.

With so little time, it is imperative that we take every opportunity we can as educators to evaluate and assess our students. It is also important to take the results of those assessments and use that data to inform our instruction. While this may seem like an extra step to some teachers, this should be one of the first steps in planning your lessons. It is imperative that you balance your time well enough so that you can give meaningful lessons and meaningful assessments. If there is no balance between the work and the assessment, your students will be affected in a major way.

Looking back, I think I learned a lot about balance within the classroom. First, it is important to use a variety of styles of teaching within your student teaching experience. You should be open to trying as many options as possible so that by the time you finish student teaching, you have found a good balance of what works for you. Next, it is important to have a balance between teaching and assessments. Because so many schools are so focused on assessment, they tend to lose sight of the reason for taking the assessment. It is imperative that you give meaningful lessons and meaningful assessments, and use the data you collect to drive future instruction. Finally, it is imperative to balance your time. With so much to do and so little time it imperative that you find a balance. This may seem impossible during student teaching, but this balance will come with experience.

While it may be hard to find a balance within the classroom it is important to work toward achieving. Just like “spotting” is crucial in dance, it is always crucial to keep your eye on the goals that you have for yourself and your students. With all

J. DAIGLE

of the assessments and changes that occur in education, you always have to remember where you want your kids to go and where you want yourself to go. That may mean balancing assessments with hands-on or inquiry-based activities, if you keep your eye on the target, you are more likely going to land there.

Step 5: Awareness

Although there is quite a bit of technique involved in turning, there is also the idea that you must be aware. There are a lot of outside forces like props or the stage or even the formation of other dancers that may affect your turn. It is important to be aware of and actively think about these outside forces as you are turning so that you do not lose your balance.

BALANCE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Of course student teaching has an effect on our lives within the classroom, but what about our lives outside of the classroom? Initially when I was reflecting on my hardest part of student teaching, I thought, “Well... there isn’t really one hardest part.” Each week, there seems to be a different “hardest part.” One week, I may think having students leave is the hardest part. Another week, I may think it is lesson planning. The following week, I may think graduate schoolwork is the hardest part. Another week I may think dealing with drama and gossip is the hard part. Sometimes, all the paperwork is the most difficult part. Other times, having a work life or personal life is the hardest part. While it seems that each day or week could have a different “hardest part,” after much thought and reflection, I have realized that finding a balance is most definitely the most difficult part of my student teaching. I carry so many roles inside and outside the classroom.

First, I am a student. Finding a balance between my student teaching and my university learning is sometimes a struggle. Because I am a graduate student, I am required to do certain assignments including data collection, lesson plans, sketch plans, and so on that some student teachers (and even some teachers) are not required to do. I oftentimes find myself having to pick whether I think my LSU schoolwork is more important or my student teaching schoolwork is more important. If I manage my time correctly, I can do both, and my LSU work will ultimately help my student teaching work, but sometimes, there is just not enough time in the day.

Next, I am a business owner. Because I own a dancing studio, I have a responsibility to my dancers and their parents. If I do not manage my time, I find myself overwhelmed with payments, dance costume orders, lighting paperwork, program setup, choreography, and other recital preparations. Although I am stressed because of the business aspect of it, the art of dance is something I love. It is my therapy at the end of the day, and I truly feel blessed to have a gift I can express and pass on to others. With that being said, it is something I am not willing to give up, and therefore, I must find a balance.

Finally, among other things, I am a daughter, a granddaughter, a sister, a girlfriend, a friend, and a mother of two dogs (and while they are not children, they are like my children). Family and friends are extremely important aspects of all of our lives. They are our support system and for that reason I could not do anything without them. However, because I am so busy ALL the time, I struggle with finding time to have a social life. I find myself having to pick between schoolwork and family. This ends up being a struggle over which will be a more important priority at the time.

With this many roles in addition to the important roles of student teacher, co-teacher, and 3rd grade team member comes sacrifice. Prioritizing and time management seems to be my weaknesses, and I will definitely always work at becoming better. A great deal of the time the other teachers in my host school amaze me. There are teachers who have children and husbands. There are teachers who are coaches and tutors. There are teachers who go above and beyond all the time. I oftentimes wonder how they do it all. How in the world do they possibly teach the same thing (or more) that I am able to teach and still leave with a clean classroom at the end of the day to get home to their babies? Even when I do give it my all, I feel like I am not getting as much accomplished as they are. I wish I could be a fly on their wall sometimes so I could see how they get it all done. I admire those teachers, and I can only hope that one day I will have the experience and knowledge to manage my time so wisely.

I am the type of person who wants to give 100% to everything I do. However, with so many roles in addition to my major role of student teacher, I often find myself doing a constant juggling act that seems to go on and on forever. With that being said, I know that I will have some of these roles in addition to wearing other hats when I get a real job as a teacher. Therefore, I have come to realize that balancing is just a part of the profession, and although it may be the hardest part now, having this experience will help me in the long run as I strive to be the best teacher I can be.

Just like the outside forces that may affect your turn, there are outside forces that affect your student teaching. Because we are all human, things happen in our relationships and in our lives that are out of our control. As a teacher, it is our job to find balance between work and school so that neither is affected in a negative way. We must try to be as aware as possible of our surroundings and outside forces so they do not knock us off balance.

Final Step: Land

When you are done with your turn, you land. Sometimes we land on our feet. Sometimes we land on our face. Regardless of where you land, it is up to you to think about the turn you just completed. You must reflect on that turn in order to improve the next turn.

J. DAIGLE

LOOKING BACK

Looking back on my experience, I have realized that it did not do me any good to stress before I started. My placement ended up being perfect (or at least close to it). I was with a teacher who does have a brain just like mine (thank goodness), and I was in a school that welcomed me as one of their own. Not only did I accomplish my schoolwork and student teaching, but my business is also up and running smoothly. I feel like I did a pretty good job of balancing everything. At times I was exhausted, and I still find myself getting overwhelmed, but I just have to take a step back and realize that it is usually not worth stressing over. I have to take it one day at a time. I have also come to realize that every experience is a good experience to have as a student teacher because I am more than likely going to be faced with the same obstacle at some point in my career, and I would much rather learn now how to get over it than next year when I am an actual teacher.

That brings me to my biggest fear: being good enough. I have learned that I am always going to have room to grow. I went into the experience wanting everything to be perfect all the time, and I have quickly realized that not everything can be perfect. Things do go wrong and unexpected things do happen, especially in a classroom full of 3rd graders. There is no need to stress over the little stuff. After all, teaching is a profession where you are constantly learning and growing.

ADVICE

After looking back at student teaching and reflecting on my experiences, I have two pieces of advice for other student teachers and even teachers. Each piece of my advice is preceded by a small piece of advice from the father of education himself, John Dewey.

Experiences in order to be educative must lead out into an expanding world of subject matter, a subject matter of facts or information and of ideas. This condition is satisfied only as the educator view teaching and learning as a continuous process of reconstruction of experiences. (Dewey, 1938 p. 87)

First, take every experience as a learning experience. You are there to learn and grow so there is no need to stress. If something goes wrong, you just have to learn a lesson from that experience and carry it on with you to make your future lessons even better. It is imperative that you learn from one day to improve the next. It is good that things happen to you during your student teaching so that you have a better idea of how to handle them whenever you are teaching in your own classroom. "The belief that all genuine education comes through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative" (Dewey, 1938, p. 25).

Second, reflect. Because it is a learning experience, you should reflect as often as possible. Just like you have to analyze your students' tests, you should analyze

BALANCE: IS IT OBTAINABLE?

your experiences so you know what to take from them. You will realize that not everything can be perfect. You have to admit your weaknesses and try your hardest to grow. Furthermore, if you reflect now as a student teacher, you are more likely to get in the habit of it and reflect when you have a job as a teacher. Do not forget that you always have room to improve and grow.

KATHERINE STEINHARDT

6. WEATHERING IT ALL

Lafayette Academy Charter School

OVERCAST

Sky Condition When Greater Than 9/10 of the Sky is Covered by Clouds

I arrived at Greenlake Charter, my home for the rest of the year. I had been there before tutoring for other practicums, so the shambled exterior was not a surprise. It was 7:20 am, and I was circling the school, trying to figure out how to get in. All of the doors were locked. Not a good omen! Mr. Childress, the business manager, let me in. Clearly, I looked frazzled. “Um... I’m... um... I’m the new student teacher.”

“Who are you with?” he asked simply. OMG! OMG! Wait what was her name? Great, I already look like an idiot.

“Um... she teaches math?”

“Oh, okay—Lindsay,” he says, “Let’s go find her.”

We headed up the creaky staircase. “Oh, me! It’s me!” a bodiless voice rang out. Popping out of a classroom a woman exclaimed excitedly, “Hi I’m Lindsay!” She was so bubbly! And young. But I was not very optimistic. How could I be after what had happened to me earlier that semester?

My first day at Greenlake Charter ended up being great! I met 65 amazing students, 34 fourth graders and 31 fifth graders. They welcomed me right away. I say *they* welcomed *me*, because it was not their first day of school. It was not my first day of student teaching either – It was my second first day. I had started out in a place where I could not, would not grow, physically and emotionally. For 20 days, I had endured a poor placement. Just based on that first day, Greenlake promised more than my previous school. Greater than nine-tenths of the sky might have felt overcast at the beginning of the day, but by the end, I could see the light trying to peek through the clouds.

K. STEINHARDT

PARTLY SUNNY

Used to Emphasize Daytime Sunshine

The summer before student teaching, I spent time with friends and family and worked at Plum Street Snowballs. I had done the same summer activities since I was in middle school, but this summer was different. After being stuck in Baton Rouge all summer for my first-ever summer school experience, I was back in New Orleans enjoying the short weeks of relaxation, waiting for the real world to start, and waiting to find out my teaching placement. I was definitely curious and anxious, but I was not compulsively checking my e-mail. I knew that as soon as placements were up, my GroupMe would explode with excited messages. Sure enough, I was working at Plum Street when my phone nearly vibrated off of the shelf with so many notifications.

I am not delusional, but I was still hopeful that the placement chart would read “Katie Steinhardt, University Lab School. Throughout my field experiences at LSU, I saw example after example of what not to do. I knew what not to do—it seemed like common sense, and seeing bad teaching once would have suited me just fine. In my mind being at the University Lab School would have been a way for me to see great teaching in action. I thought our placements would be less than ideal, but I had to hope that I might be the girl that got lucky with that unbelievable mentor teacher. I figured that I had enough poor teachers; surely it was due time for a good one. Hands sticky with snowball syrup, I checked my email: Woohoo! I was placed at Fairmont (a school I’d never heard of) with Laura Camp (a teacher I did not know) teaching fourth graders (oh sooooo pumped for Louisiana’s 4th grade standardized test called LEAP). I could not even remember what grade I had requested. I did not think it was fourth, but I thought “I’ll roll with it.” I was not particularly tied to a certain grade. The little ones (second grade and lower) are so cute though! Fourth graders, cute? Eh, not so much I thought. It did not matter though; I was excited to get into my classroom.

My first day at Fairmont, a Tuesday, wearing a ‘mother-approved’ casually professional outfit, I walked apprehensively into a building that had been renovated the past summer. Construction was apparently so behind schedule that none of the teachers had gained access to their classrooms until the Sunday before, and even then the air conditioning was not working. Needless to say, it was a frenetic environment. Luckily a fellow student teacher names Allison and I had carpooled together, and she was also placed in fourth grade, so we awkwardly followed the principal down to fourth and fifth grade hall, making small talk, trying to make the best first impression possible. “Camp?” the principal yelled from the hallway into the classroom that would be my home for the next year.

“Yeah?” my new mentor responded. After a brief exchange between principal and teacher about the appropriate way to respond to someone calling her name, because “Yeah” was not it, I was excited to see that my teacher was young and

looked nice. She looked like someone I would want to be friends with, but might be just a little too cool for me. It even crossed my mind that I should set her up with my older brother! It seemed as though sunny skies were ahead.

FAIR

Describes weather in which there is less than 4/10ths of opaque cloud cover, no precipitation, and there is no extreme visibility, wind or temperature conditions.

Laura Camp was friendly enough as we chatted idly, mostly about how stressed she was that her classroom was not finished. I was eager to help her finish her jungle-themed classroom, but unfortunately for her, I am decoratively-challenged. I can not cut straight lines, I do not have pretty handwriting, and I am a disaster with covering bulletin boards. I was embarrassed of my shortcomings, thinking how annoyed she must be that I could not do these menial tasks, especially after she described herself as OCD. I am the antithesis of OCD. But I was actually hoping to have a mentor teacher who would force me into forming my own organizational habits. That day I left with hot-glue burns all over my hands from trying to hang stuff on the wall, but was excited nonetheless. Even though I was wary that Ms. Camp was alternatively certified through some program I had never heard of, and that she had graduated in fashion merchandising from LSU, I was relieved that we would get along.

Ms. Camp introduced me to the class as another teacher. There was no mention of my student status. She thought that would automatically entitle me to respect from my students; I agreed. Unfortunately though, my inexperience was glaringly obvious. I did not quite understand the motions of the day, the set-up of the classroom, the school rules. I had felt this discombobulating sensation only 3 times before—starting kindergarten (because I totally remember that), the beginning of school returning after Katrina (again, I was in such total shock, I barely remember anything, except I accidentally took someone else’s backpack home the first day), and starting college (honestly, I was hungover.) This time was totally different! The kids did not know exactly what was going on either, but I was expected to know. They would ask me basic questions...“Ermmmmm...Ms. Camp?” I would defer to her.

The kids quickly learned that I was not the classroom expert I was supposed to be. Our plan was clearly flawed. Even when I got into the flow of things, it was not my classroom, so I was still wary to make decisions. Camp was in charge (kind of), and I was some really nice random teacher cutting laminated paper in the corner. The kids sort of listened to me, but there were certain rules I did not even understand, let alone know how to enforce. I do not think you could ever convince me that kids have to walk silently in a single-file line through the halls. Why do they have to tuck in their shirts? That is uncomfortable, and as a former chubby

K. STEINHARDT

girl, and currently chubby woman, I would die if someone demanded my shirt be tucked in. Kids can tell when you genuinely do not care about a rule, even though I really did try to enforce the rules because I was supposed to.

I barely remember that first day at my first placement. According to text message, the day was “fine”. According to Facebook (maybe my second status ever), “I survived my first day, and I already love my 4th graders.” I remember feeling obligated to post a super positive status after reading all of my classmates’ enthusiastic blurbs. Weirdly, this was already my version of positive: “I survived.” And I did love my kids, most of them at least. Even in my short time at Fairmont, I grew very attached.

Then again, maybe survival was all I could muster in my insane exhaustion. I know I am not alone in this. My first week, I was barely a human being. I went back to New Orleans that first weekend, pretending it was still summer vacation. I was so deliriously tired that I was CONVINCED that someone had stolen my dirty laundry out of my car while I was zoned out and filling my gas tank on my way out of Baton Rouge. I knew I had packed it, but I could not see it in my rearview mirror anymore. It had to be gone. It sounded ridiculous, but then again so did I. I was exhausted and not too optimistic. I already was saying it would be an interesting year.

In the classroom I felt most comfortable when I was collecting data that was supposed to drive instruction. I had set up a great system for myself. I walked around the classroom while the kids did worksheet after worksheet after worksheet and wrote on mailing labels what I noticed needed improvement, what was mastered, interests they had, etc. This data was never used to drive instruction, mostly because there was no instruction to be driven. I am not kidding. I was at Fairmont for 20 days and I am not convinced that I saw but 5 lessons taught. Though it was only a short time, it felt like forever. *Maybe* I could understand so few lessons if the days were spent practicing routines and rituals, but that did not happen. It was just so odd, not at all what I thought a classroom should be like, not at all what I had experienced in elementary school.

I told myself excuse after excuse. I felt so bad for Ms. Camp, at first. Because of construction, she had had ZERO time to get her classroom ready. I was willing to stay late and help her, but she did not feel like it. She was tired, and so was I. We were sinking fast. I already felt like there would be no way to catch up. We were just going through the motions. I was already so negative. But it only got worse. My frustration peaked after we began an extended day schedule. Fair weather began fading fast.

FLASH FLOOD ADVISORY

A flood that occurs within a few hours (usually less than six) of heavy or excessive rainfall, dam or levee failure or water released from an ice jam.

Because Fairmont is a “failing school,” it received a grant for an extended day schedule. Students stayed until 4:30 four days a week instead of getting out at 3:00 like most schools across the district. On Wednesdays, students got out at 12:30; the faculty had professional development (PD) until 4:30. After I got over the initial “Why me?” of being at school until 4:30 when no other student teachers at other schools had to, I started to realize that it could really benefit the students. The last hour was supposed to be intervention time, an hour carved out of the schedule specifically intended for student differentiation. But unfortunately, this time (like all other times) was not used effectively in my classroom.

Yes, I was still bitter about getting home later than everyone else, but Wednesdays, Wednesdays were horrific. The faculty crowded into the library for our weekly faculty meetings. It was so awkward in there. The teachers sat in their cliques, like that cafeteria scene in *Mean Girls*. Usually, all of the student teachers clustered together after getting those “*You can’t sit with us!?*” looks. Nearby, Ms. Camp would be sitting with her posse, the other fourth grade teachers, minus Ms. Alvarez, the teacher they all made fun of behind her back. They even made fun of her accent. We would be sitting there, and the principal, Ms. Carvin, would begin her slow, but loud drone. Glancing around, you would see at least four teachers rolling their eyes at a fellow colleague. Tough crowd. Ms. Carvin would usually complain about how she had not even had lunch yet, and Ms. Camp would whisper to a fellow teacher mocking the principal. We would sit, listening to the principal howl on for what seemed like hours until the floor was opened up for teacher announcements. Thus begun the pointless debates about carpool, passive aggressive comments directed at other teachers, and the goody-two-shoes teacher sucking up to the principal. I get grumpy feeling like my time is being wasted. Finally, the meeting would conclude and teachers would be dismissed for planning time in the building. Those Wednesdays that were meant to be productive time for the teachers became instead a flood of negativity washing through the faculty.

HIGH RISK OF POLLUTANT

Strictly too much of any substance in the wrong place or at the wrong time is a pollutant. More specifically, atmospheric pollution may be defined as the presence of substances in the atmosphere, resulting from man-made activities or from natural processes, causing adverse effects to man and the environment.

Naïvely, I was excited at first about the huge chunk of planning time Wednesday’s could afford. Ms. Camp and I would get so much done; maybe she could even catch up on all the things she was so far behind on. Maybe I could even start planning to teach. I barely taught at Fairmont. Oddly, I do not even know what Ms. Camp taught. I thought there was not a single day where we got anything done. I remember going over the vocabulary from the reading basal, and listening to Ms.

K. STEINHARDT

Camp read *Superfudge* aloud to the class. Sometimes we even listened to the story off of the basal website. I am not kidding. Ms. Camp would pull up the story and let the computer read to the kids, while she texted. This was not right, not for the kids, and not for me either.

While planning time was supposed to be an opportunity for the fourth grade teachers to plan lessons together, this was how their planning was set up: Ms. Simon planned social studies and science; Ms. Carvin planned math, Ms. Alvarez (yes, the one whose English they mocked) planned English Language Arts, and Ms. Camp “planned” intervention time and writing. Every teacher was then given these plans and expected to execute them. This does not seem like a totally flawed plan, except that this leaves NO room for differentiation among classes let alone among students. What was supposed to be their individualized intervention was prescribed. Thus Wednesdays, an amazing opportunity to collaborate, turned into a giant gripe session where they divvied up who would copy which worksheets. Allison and I would sit there silently in awe of the venomous words spouting from these frustrated teachers’ lips.

Most shocking of all was this: progress reports were about to go out and none of them had a single grade to report. The executive decision was just to give all the kids B’s. *What?!* There are so many things wrong with that decision. I even recorded one of these “planning sessions.” This particular one was so unbelievable; it had to be documented. Not that I was going to share it with anyone, but just for my own knowledge. Maybe this was part of my issue; I was rapt in their words. Rapt because I was so dismayed, but enthralled nonetheless. *The principal is psycho. She’s bipolar. How are we supposed to do X when we have to deal with Y? Ugh! This week’s story is so boring.*

If it’s so boring, change it! I screamed in my head. If adults can not even feign interest, we cannot expect students to see any value there either. My environment and the environment of the children was definitely polluted from the negative attitudes of the teachers in the building. In hindsight, there were things I could have done to counteract this negativity. In fact, I eventually even ended up with this outline:

What I should have done during faculty meetings:

1. Mentally prepare
 - a. I know this is gonna suck but I can do this
 - b. Listen to Jack Johnson and/or Hall and Oates on Wednesdays
 - c. Meditate (a.k.a completely space out)
2. Physically prepare
 - a. Bring a snack
 - b. Bring a crossword puzzle to sneakily do
 - c. Pretend I was listening

- d. Nod every once in a while
- e. Smile to get through it

What I should have done during planning time:

1. Ignored the teachers COMPLETELY and forget participating in “planning”
2. Separated with Allison
 - a. Made ourselves busy
 - b. Planned incredible lessons together
 - c. Modeled true collaboration

HEAT LIGHTNING

Lightning That Can Be Seen, But Is Too Far Away for the Thunder to Be Heard

I am a Southerner and I understand the importance of tact. That being said, I can usually express my opinions. Trying to make light of the despair I was already feeling, I half-heartedly told my supervisor, Linda, things like, “Yeah, wow, this is definitely interesting. Definitely not what I expected. I really thought I would like this more. Allison and I are kind of frustrated.” Yes, I was speaking for both of us, because Allison is a much better Southerner than I will ever be. I am also the youngest of four: squeaky wheel gets the oil. Something had to change.

Finally, I said the most honest thing I would ever say to Linda. “I just don’t think I want to be a teacher anymore.” I had not said that out loud yet. It was scary to say that. Had I wasted all of my college years working towards this goal that had become completely trivial now? I had always known, in my heart of hearts, that I wanted to be a teacher. I went through a pseudo-rebellious stage where I claimed I was not going to be a teacher, mainly because everyone told me I would be, and I did not want to admit I am exactly like my mother. So I told her. She LAUGHED. “Yeah, that happens,” she chortled. Allison and I were in a separate cohort meeting from the others. Frances was also being moved to Fairmont so she was there as well. Laughing Linda, Frustrated but Southern Allison, Shell-shocked Frances, and I were sitting in the library. I lost it. Tears started streaming down my face. “But it shouldn’t!! It shouldn’t happen!!!” I said a little too loudly. I felt all eyes on me, including the librarian, I felt my face get red, my blood boil. Linda had no idea how I really felt until that moment. How could she? She did not know me; I had not been very honest with myself, let alone her. I think I scared her a little. “Ummm....” Linda hesitated, “Let’s see if Kenny and Hillary are still here.” Poor Frances- she went to track down Kenny. Welcome to Fairmont!

It is dead quiet while waiting for Kenny and Hillary. I was still bawling. I had cried night after night, for at least two weeks. No one knew this. I was ashamed that I could not grin and bear it. But I was also furious. The thunderstorm had finally arrived.

K. STEINHARDT

ACID RAIN

Cloud or Rain Droplets Containing Pollutants

Why was I so angry? I felt like I was paying a ton of money to get my master's degree, and I was actually becoming a worse educator. I truly felt that I would have been a better teacher if I had left after our summer classes and just entered my own classroom. This is probably not true, but at least back then I had had enthusiasm. After spending just a few short weeks at Fairmont, I was spent. I did not believe all kids could learn, and I did not believe I could teach any of them. I did not see any point to any of it. I could never make a difference. Everything I had learned in my classes was a waste. Sounds all fine and dandy in theory, but this is reality. My first day, Ms. Camp even said, "Forget everything you've learned in school; this is real-life." She was right. Kenny lives in la-la-land. Forget this program. This is not what I signed up for. I was supposed to have two different school placements, high and low SES, I was supposed to have a partner in the classroom, I was supposed to actually use my concentration for something. I was not supposed to be in this sucky school, with this sucky mentor, with this crazy principal, with this overwhelming apathy. Maybe my anger was misguided. But I was confused. If Fairmont was what it is like to be a teacher, I could not do it.

The school felt like a prison. The teachers did not want to be there, the kids certainly did not want to be there either. Why would they? Kids were not allowed to be kids. Silent lunch? I could not even do that!! Of course there were behavior problems. We were stopping kids from interacting with each other. I felt like I was paying to be a babysitter for 20 really bad kids. That is what the kids were, BAD. Why? Because I could not figure out why they would not sit in their seats quietly and do their worksheets. Good children would be able to do that. White kids would be able to do that.

Now before you judge me, I have never, ever, thought myself to be racist in any way. But I was not myself in those 21 days. Not even close. I had no perspective. I could not understand why. I blamed the parents for not being involved; I blamed the principal; I blamed my mentor. It is only in retrospect I can say that NO kids would be able to sit quietly all day and do worksheet after worksheet. Now I blame myself for not realizing it sooner. I could have been these kids' saving grace. I did not understand that an environment that supports learning and growth could come from me. I was too busy seeing this school as toxic. I was too busy making excuses about why my mentor would fail, why the school would fail, why my kids would fail, why I would fail.

Kenny and Hillary walked in. I was still seething. I have no idea what I said. I know I was not nice. I know I was not tactful. I know I looked like a sniveling idiot. I was ready to quit. This teaching thing was obviously not for me. I was not looking for a solution; I was looking for a new career path. My mind was made up. I was leaving this school. And if they did not change my placement, I was leaving

the program. So simple, right? I was going to see the best of the best or I was gone. I blubbered through all the reasons the program had failed me. At that point, they sent Frances and Allison elsewhere. I am sure they did not want me to start a mutiny! This was Allison's battle too. My only cogent memory: I had stopped mid-sob to catch my breath and try to form some kind of coherent sentence. Kenny started telling me all of these things he had perceived me to be. Some I agreed with, some I didn't. But I interrupted him, I was finally ready to say my oh-so-elloquent thought.

"No, I..."

Kenny stopped me, *"Wait, let me finish,"* he said.

"BUT YOU NEVER LET ME FINISH!!!" I hissed.

He retreated, *"Ok, go on."*

I was just so rude. *What was that coherent thought I had?* I had nothing; I attested that I had been duped. This was not what I thought I was getting into. How unfair it was. The librarian was definitely staring now. Wait- she is coming over here; wait- she is saying something; wait- kids are about to come in. "But you can use my office."

So Linda, Kenny, Hillary and I filed into this tiny room covered in books. Blah, blah, blah, I do not remember. Then Kenny said what I had been hoping and waiting for since I crossed the threshold of Fairmont, "I think we need to find you a new placement." Waves of relief turned into more storms of anger and more blubbering, "But my kids! I can't leave them! Just one more person to give up on them! I can't! What about Tia, Luke, Cory?" *Okay so I am officially crazy.* This is what I wanted from the beginning but now that it was happening—instant buyer's remorse. "No, I'm not leaving!" I declared. "What do you mean I don't really have a choice? It's not that bad. I can do it. I'm just having a bad day." I don't think they were buying it.

Yea, I should probably go home for now— Wait, my stuff's in my classroom.— Do I say bye to the kids?—No, I don't think I handle that right now. I sniffle through the entire school, headed to the parking lot with Linda. Ugh, I did not drive today. So now Linda has to drive me all the way home. Great. I stand awkwardly outside of the school sobbing my eyes out while Linda goes to tell them she is taking me home. What do you mean the principal wants to see me? Now? I can not throw Ms. Camp under the bus. What am I gonna say? The truth? What is the truth? A) I hate this place, B) I hate you, C) I hate this program, D) I hate myself, E) I am weak F) All of the above. I wish I could tell you what I said to Ms. Carvin that day, but I just wanted to get out of there. MOST. AWKWARD. CAR RIDE. EVER. I'm pretty sure Linda was talking about childbirth? Like I vaguely remember the term birth canal? Finally, I am home.

K. STEINHARDT

HAZE

Fine Dust or Salt Particles in the Air that Reduce Visibility

Shaking, I called my mom. No answer. I called her again. No answer. I called her again. No answer. Finally, I called Leah, one of my dearest friends. No answer. UGH. I called my mom again, no answer.

Leah called me back.

Leah: *Hey... Everything okay?*

Me: *blubber, blubber, Nooooo, blubber, I left.*

Leah: *Yeah, okay, figured something was up since it's the middle of the day.*

Me: *blubber, I failed, I left, blubber. I think I'm being moved.*

Leah: *Wait, that's good right?*

Me: *No! What about my kids! What if the next place is even worse? Blah, blah.*

Leah: *Supportive silence*

Me: *I need to talk to my mom.*

By the way, my mom is a teacher too. I called her school's secretary. Trying my hardest to hold it together.

Me: *Hey, Ms. Anne, is my mom around?*

Ms. Anne: *Katie?? Um she's in a meeting...*

Me: *Oh (voice crack). Okay.*

Ms. Anne: *Do you need me to get her?*

Me: *Yes, please.*

My mom was full of supportive words about this being the right thing: *You can't really help these kids in the state you're in... Sometimes you have to be selfish...* I did not believe her. I still was not going to leave Fairmont. I was not giving up on these kids. All kinds of motherly advice that was totally true but I could not listen to her. "Mom, I gotta go. I just have to clear my mind."

After talking with my mother, I realized how important it was for me talk with my friend, Leah, an art school graduate, a.k.a. has nothing to do with education, and has always been my go-to-girl for all things negative. Poor thing, every night I would call her and just unload all of my feelings and all the terrible things I had to say. I am lucky she has been my best friend since first grade, otherwise there is probably no way she would have listened to me. I called her because my mom, being a teacher, was full of well-intentioned advice that honestly just made me

madder. I just needed to vent. I did not need anyone's opinion, I didn't need anyone's help. I just wanted someone to listen to me and be sympathetic. I think all student teachers in training need to find that person who will just listen.

After the phone call with my mom, I shut my brain off the best I could. I did not want to cry anymore. Kenny told me to call him once I could talk more about it. That was not right now. So I was surprised when I received a phone call from him. He wanted to meet tonight, along with another program supervisor, to figure out a plan. "Let's go get dinner."

During our heated discussion at Fairmont, Kenny had said there was a second grade placement for me at Bradford. *Is it a good teacher?* That is all I wanted to know – I do not care what grade, I just need to see good teaching! "She's not great, but she's not bad..." *That's what's wrong with this program; why would you knowingly put a student teacher with someone she should not be learning from.* I was livid and suddenly scared that the new placement would be even worse. At least I got along with Ms. Camp. Although I now see that I was in no condition to make good decisions for myself about my placement at Fairmont, I could not see that through the haze of my own overwhelmed emotions.

OVERCAST

Sky Condition When Greater Than 9/10 of the Sky is Covered by Clouds

I called Frances, truly to ask how she dealt with leaving her kids. This was super counter-productive. We got each other super worked up. We were irate. *Why were we being put in these placements that were far from ideal?* We were going give Kenny a piece of our minds. Headed to dinner, I was fired up. But as I was sitting in the parking lot waiting for Kenny and Dr. Willis, I crashed again and began hysterically crying. This was so awkward. First of all, I was going to dinner with two of my professors. Second of all, I was planning to raise a commotion. Lastly, I could not stop crying. Sniffles are not so menacing. I'm all talk. I was not up to taking a stand for all Holmes' students past and present; I could barely stand at all. Self-preservation. I knew I could only speak for myself.

"What do you mean she's not great, but not bad?" I questioned between bites of quesadilla. "Am I going to see actual teaching?" Have you ever been in the middle of a conversation where people were purposely speaking in code so you did not understand? "Well I don't know that B is the right fit..." *that meant Bradford!*

"What about GC?" *What? Greenlake Charter? But there's not anyone at that school, is there? And that's a charter school? Is that allowed?*

Dr. Willis groaned, "You know how I feel about charter schools!" *Wait, it has to be Greenlake Charter.*

"Let's just make a phone call." They called the principal at GCS. My new placement would be fourth and fifth grade math. *Ermm...math? I suck at math.*

K. STEINHARDT

“Okay great! She’ll be there tomorrow, Thanks!” *Tomorrow?!?* At the time, I could barely see the sunlight ahead.

CLEAR

Sky Condition of Less Than 1/10 Cloud Coverage

Program staff tried to figure out the root of the problem – was it unrealistic expectations? Was it the lack of resources? Was my teacher rude to me? Could I not relate to my kids? Was it because they were Black? Kenny actually asked me that. I was beyond offended. I loved those kids. No, I just wanted to see and learn great practices. End of story. I did not want to be surrounded by this overwhelming apathy. It was contagious, cancerous. I was not strong enough to thrive in this situation. This was very hard to admit. I have never considered myself weak, but I know myself.

One of my strengths is also one of my greatest weaknesses. I am a very social person. I can talk to a wall, I empathize, I relate. This enables those around to have a profound effect on me. Though I have never been susceptible to peer pressure as far as taking drugs or excessively drinking, other people can and do affect my moods. I cry anytime I see someone else cry. When someone struggles, I struggle. I know the type of people I need in my life: positive, supportive people around whom I thrive. That is what was lacking for me at Fairmont. They were not enthusiastic. I am not Susie Sunshine all the time, but they did not believe anything they were doing was of any value. What is the point? They certainly were not supportive. There was not a single faculty member who cared about me. The principal flat out told me that she did not have time to learn our names. *Cool.*

That being said, some people, stronger women than I, have been able to flourish at Fairmont. I am not scared to admit this anymore. I know myself, and all student teachers, need to be able to do this—know their limits. Be self-aware. When slipping into a funk, be proactive. Do all you can to resuscitate yourself. I knew Fairmont was not the place for me. I could not be successful there. I had to leave. There was no other way. I am positive that if I had stayed, I would have been done by December. Done, as in never stepping foot in a classroom again. New career path. DONE. Leaving was my only solution. So as difficult as it was for me to leave those kiddos and admit I failed there, I know myself well enough to be comfortable with this decision. I can clearly see that now. At the same time, I was petrified the next situation would be just as terrible and I would discover that teaching is not my path. While the sun was shining again, I could not help but feel the possibility of clouds gathering and looming.

AURORA BOREALIS

Also known as the northern lights – The luminous, radiant emission from the upper atmosphere over middle and high latitudes, and centered around the earth's magnetic poles. These silent fireworks are often seen on clear winter nights in a variety of shapes and colors.

I arrived at Greenlake Charter, my home for the rest of the year. I had been there before tutoring for other practicums, so the shambled exterior was not a surprise. It was 7:20 am, and I circled the school, trying to figure out how to get in. All of the doors were locked. Not a good omen! Mr. Childress, the business manager, let me in. Clearly, I looked frazzled. “Um... I’m... um... I’m the new student teacher.”

“Who are you with?” he asked simply. *OMG! OMG! Wait what was her name?* Great, I already look like an idiot. “Um...she teaches math?”

“Oh, okay—Lindsay,” he says, “Let’s go find her.”

We headed up the creaky staircase. “Oh, me! It’s me!” a bodiless voice rang out. Popping out of a classroom a woman exclaimed excitedly, “Hi I’m Lindsay!” Now that student teaching is over and the year progressed successfully and my fears on that day were dispelled, I can look back on that moment in time as one full of only color and light.

NICOLE CHELLINO

7. AN ALTERNATE PATH

Primrose School of League City of Victory Lakes

INTRODUCTION

All of the chapters in this book document the experiences of individuals who were seeking or who obtained employment as an elementary teacher, except this one. It was my choice to enter and complete a Master of Arts in Teaching, and at the time I wrote this it was my decision to choose an alternative path. I did not apply with school districts to begin teaching the fall after I graduated. I was not even sure where I would be living. In the following pages, I hope to share my thoughts, my experiences, and essentially, my life; to shed some light on what brought me to this decision. More importantly, in what certainly does not feel like my final goodbye to education, I would like to express how I have come to terms with my choice.

THE *FIRST* FIRST DAY

August rolled around and I was assigned to student teach in a fourth grade class at what had been labeled a failing school across town. The mentor teacher I was assigned to was Nationally Board Certified. Through my conversations with my supervisor and my mentor teacher's colleagues, I learned a multitude of perspectives about my mentor teacher that ranged from "she's a very good teacher" to "she's the best with our kids." The children I was to teach were labeled as being on the "bubble," meaning that they had barely passed the iLEAP test (one of Louisiana's standardized test) the previous year and were deemed "at risk" of failing the LEAP (another Louisiana standardized test) this year.

If there was anything my mentor teacher gave my students, it was a heaping pile of frustration. These kids were smart. They just did not know it. For whatever reason, the experiences my students had before they got to our class taught them that they "just weren't smart, Ms. Chellino" or they could not do it "even if I wanted to, Ms. Chellino." I will never forget a single student from that class.

BARRY

As usual, one boy – Barry – was the unofficial, ordained leader. When he got into trouble, everyone else followed his charms like lemmings. When he laughed, they

N. CHELLINO

laughed. When he listened, they all listened. He had a quick wit and would ask all the tough questions that were on everyone's mind. This boy had stronger leadership qualities than the principal at the school.

Once, I created science inquiry teams to give the rambunctious boys in our class a role they could own. Barry led everyone that day. We only had enough chairs at our round table for half the class to sit. Barry decided that the leaders should stand because "that's what we see Ms. Chellino doing." When the science leaders had to gather resources, Barry was the most responsible and concerned and shared with the class, "We need to take extra special care of our things." Barry saw another boy in his group struggling to focus and to understand the lesson. He walked up to him, put his arm around his shoulders with a "hey buddy, let me help you understand this thing called reflection."

Barry was called out by my mentor teacher more than all of our other students. He did not have the personality to put up with injustice – if the mentor teacher promised something, he would hold her to it. When he held her to it, she would lash out, "You're just a child. You have nothing. I am an adult with a college degree and I am way above you." She would motion with one hand hovering low around her hips and one quivering high above her head. "You are down there and I am way up here. When you are an adult and you have a college degree, then you can ask me questions."

Our classroom had one little hideaway tucked by the door; a closet and the bathrooms jutted out in such a way as to create a three foot hallway where our students stored their bags. My mentor's anger and lashing out became so bad, that I often hid in this corner to shed a few tears. From this area, you could not see the teacher at the white board in front of the room, and thankfully, she could not see you. The only student in the room who could see around the closet was Barry.

One day, early into my placement, Barry watched me walk back into my corner and saw the frustration on my face. I have no idea how he avoided a punishment, but he quickly left his desk, walked to me, put his arm around my shoulder and asked, "Ms. Chellino, why do you need a break?" I told him frankly, "Barry, I need you to understand that I am not angry at you, and I am not angry with any of the students. But I do need to hide over here for a minute." He nodded at me and we waited for a minute before we both walked back.

BECOMING A BUFFER

Within my first days at that placement, I became a buffer between my students and our mentor teacher. Many times during my undergraduate program I was told "even in a bad experience, you'll learn something." In the months I spent with my mentor teacher, that was the answer I was always given. Even looking back at how alarming my mentor's behavior became, there were always excuses ready to explain her actions:

How will you do things differently when you get your own classroom? Don't think about what she's doing; use it as a model of what not to do. Stay professional. Even when you're working with someone who is doing something wrong, you need to stay professional and get your work done. We used this mentor because she has been a mentor in the past. She has so many stressors going on at home, but she still gets her students to pass the LEAP so she's got to be effective!

The bottom line was I was stuck. I had to be friendly enough with this woman to figure out how to manage her anger and protect my kids. Barry knew what I was doing. They all did. There were instances where they even stood behind me as if to shield themselves from her.

Walking through our room was like walking through a field of landmines. The problem was neither my students nor I knew what would set off an explosion. On the first day of school, there were no class rules, no procedures, no outline of consequences, and no talk about what the school year would look like. This haphazard system of teacher control would have possibly worked for a few weeks had my mentor been a kind woman. But when the person leading the class is very quick to anger and becomes irritated with all infractions large and small, it becomes an explosive environment.

Additionally, most of my mentor teacher's lessons were thrown together at the last minute from a worksheet printed off of a random website. She never charted the intellectual progress of the students, so instruction was never tailored to the individual needs of the learners. Even worse, I would document data from their verbal answers in class or written responses to assignments to show my mentor what was going on so we could make more informed decisions, and she would still use her own plans as if the students would change to meet her needs. The majority of our students could not subtract multi-digit problems, yet when she taught division for a week, she simply could not understand why they were failing the quizzes. I sat in the back of the room watching her lessons fall on confused, deaf ears and took data on the student work yet she still could not understand why they could not divide. When they all failed their final test on division, I asked her if we would reteach, and her response was, "Oh well. I taught it and they just don't understand it. It's their own fault they don't get the material and we need to move on."

BECOMING DISCOURAGED

It really did not take long for me to become completely discouraged. I would show up at school early and sneak in through the side door. My mentor teacher never trusted me with a key. During those thirty or forty minutes, I would turn on some music and prep everything for the day. That chunk of time in the morning was the only time I felt peaceful the entire time I was placed at my first school. The

N. CHELLINO

moment my mentor walked in, the room was icy and pressured and stayed that way the entire day. My mentor would circulate around the room, pointing out all of the things my students were not doing,

You didn't do your homework; you're going to end up in jail one day. You're talking! Why would you ever speak in my class? What are you doing? Why would you get a pencil from that table? Lunch time is time to leave me alone; so please, do not talk to me. You will never understand math, because you can't focus on anything. You will never be able to complete any of your work.

For the sake of taking accurate data, I used to document every time my teacher had an outburst and changed the aura of the room; but her episodes became so frequent and my count became too high, I stopped writing them down. My students and I became a team, but not to learn and grow as individuals. We spent all of our time monitoring our environment and my mentor's mood to keep her as calm as possible to make it to the end of the day. My teacher would yell and scream and fuss so much throughout the day, she would wear herself out. Twenty minutes before dismissal she would stand in front of the class, "Boys and girls, I just can't take any more noise. I am going to sit behind my desk and work on my plans, while you sit in your desks quietly. No talking, no noise."

When I first worked with my mentor teacher, I would try to reach out to her – ask her about her life, her kids, what she missed about her family back home – but she was very unresponsive. She did not want to know about me. She did not want to plan with me. She did not want to teach me how to become a good educator. The glassy look on her face let me know that she never truly listened to anything I had to say. My aunt always said, "You can't keep kicking a dog and expect it to still come back home." I resigned myself to a table at the opposite end of the room and tried my best to work in the oppressive environment, but the environment was one of failure and defeat. My discouragement quickly morphed into depression.

I started losing sleep. I had nightmares about her screaming at me, screaming at our kids, and throwing pencils across the room. I was so exhausted from teaching all day and only sleeping three or four hours a night that my body would shut down as soon as I got home from school. Granted, adjusting to the teacher's demanding schedule does take some getting used to, but my morale had dropped so low that it was exhausting me. I would bawl myself to sleep and the bawling caused nasty headaches that turned into migraines. I could not stomach food and I stopped eating. I started throwing up before school in the morning.

If I was feeling this way, what did my kids feel like when they got home after school? No wonder they never did their homework; they saw no point in attempting it. My students were already openly deemed "at-risk" throughout the school, so there was a great urgency in showing them how learning could be achieved and actually enjoyed. My kids were still open to learning and open to me because of our relationship, but time was running out. If they did not understand

how to love learning, how would they survive? How would they develop their trust to get the resources and help that they needed? They had the ability to succeed and the only dialogue they heard all day long was a big, loud, angry, “YOU ARE A FAILURE AND YOU WILL NEVER BE ANYTHING MORE THAN THAT.”

They were so wrong about those kids, that whole school. My kids were leaders. Some were strong writers. Some were artists. I had three who were solid mathematicians. They were beautiful singers and rhythmic dancers. When they weren't being watched they had clear, ringing laughs, bright smiles. They wanted to care; they wanted to enjoy life. My blood still boils thinking about all my kids deserved and what my old mentor saw fit to offer them instead.

THE *FIRST* LAST DAY

At the beginning of November, my university supervisor finally offered me the option of switching to a new school. Honestly, the only reason I had stayed as long in my first placement was because I was very close to my students. If I left, who would protect them from their teacher? Who would love them and listen to what they had to say? Who would teach them? How would they learn how to trust adults and feel safe at school? I thought about it and weighed out all of my options and I sadly chose to accept the switch. I needed to gain and refine my skills as a teacher, and I was not learning effective practices. I was also so discouraged, I was going to swear off teaching forever. My original plan was to talk to my teacher after school and get her input on the option, would she feel more comfortable without the added pressure of an intern? Could we come up with a plan to slowly make the transition so my students would not be damaged any more than they already were?

But that talk never happened. One little girl in our class had been suspended for fighting on the bus, and her first day back was a nightmare. I will never forget her breakdown, “I HATE you! Shoooo! I oughta knock you out.” This was followed by one long, high pitched scream. All of these emotions stemmed from a math lesson she was expected to know even though she had been out of school for six days. In one huge outburst, that girl summed up all of the things we were feeling. Hate. Frustration. Hopelessness. An urgency to find some kind of relief.

My mentor teacher left the room to get someone to physically remove the student. She was so nervous herself, she meekly asked me to step in and finish teaching math and the lessons for the remainder of the day. When she was gone, the students were scared and baffled by what had happened. I really do not know what came over me, but I knew after this I was going to leave and I would have no better opportunity to say goodbye to my kids.

“Guys, we only have a few minutes, but we really need to talk. I have to leave. It has nothing to do with you; you know I love you all very much, every single one of you. I don't want to go, but I just can't stay any more. I'm just not sure what's going to happen yet, but I need you all to know that no matter what anyone tells

N. CHELLINO

you, I did not leave because you guys are bad kids. Remember that you are smart and you have a lot to offer. You all will be successful.”

After the teacher had come back and the girl was removed, the teacher let us have carpet time and I read a story to my kids. They never breathed a word about what I said while the teacher was gone, but there was sadness in their faces for the rest of the day. They all stayed very close to me until the end of the day. My kids gave me hugs, sat with their arms around my shoulders, or rested their heads against my arms. I never got to formally say goodbye to my students. We snuck all of our goodbyes under the watchful eyes of my mentor teacher.

THE *SECOND* FIRST DAY

There was never a clear outline as to what was supposed to happen at my first day at my new school. In fact, they were not even told what day I was coming until I showed up. I went straight to the principal's office, where she welcomed me for fifteen or twenty minutes. Not only did I have the relief of stepping out of my old, oppressive environment, but from the moment I walked in the door, this new school was warm and loving. My principal knew that one of my friends was interning there, so she walked me to her room first. I spent the majority of the morning touring the school with a friend from LSU. As we walked down the hall, students from all grades approached me and wrapped their arms around my legs or waist, whatever was in reach. One little boy in first grade even looked up at me and said, “I just love you. What's your name? Where did you come from?”

With as much love as the teachers had for the students and the students had for their teachers, there was a joint effort to reach higher knowledge. Effective instruction permeated the building at all levels; decisions were made in the interest of the students. The children had responsibility and choice. They were trusted and respected. I thought the atmosphere was my own perception. My old placement was so starved of love, so empty of learning that surely I was imagining that this new school was so wonderful. I was wrong.

The first day I worked with my new mentor teacher was the most encouraging and informative day I had in the five months of my student teaching year. My second mentor and I clicked instantly. She was kind, welcoming and very real with me like she was with the students. She talked to me. She listened to what I had to say. She was invested in my success as a teacher. We became friends and very quickly and smoothly fell into a great teaching arrangement.

Now, our partnership was not perfect and there were times when we did not get along, but because we built a relationship with each other, we were able to work together and work through any differences we had.

THE RIGHT BALANCE

My mentor and I used the same approach when working with our students. She spent a lot of time building and maintaining friendships with our students, as well as other members of the staff and the students' parents. She took the time to understand their personalities, their quirks, preferences, abilities, moods and home lives. In a small school that revolves around love, my mentor teacher was the flagship example of what love truly means. As many times as I heard her say "you need to be the right balance of warm and firm," she lived it out in her practice as a teacher. If a student forgot a rule or procedure, she reminded them, "How do you ask me a question? What should you do when we are walking down the halls?" The rules and procedures were consistent; my mentor's reactions when those rules are broken were consistent. "What you are doing right now is not okay. It's not okay that you decided to [break this rule]. Tell me what you should do to fix it. Tell me what you should be doing instead." She did not yell or nag, but gently prompted the students to remember what was already inside their heads. We knew what my mentor expected out of us and she kept us on track. We were safe in her consistency; we could depend on her.

My mentor was very strategic in following up with students that broke a rule. After an ample amount of time had gone by, my mentor would check-in with a student. The check-in was never a huge ordeal and could be easily missed. She patted the student on the shoulder as she passed by their desk. It could be that she used them as an example during a lesson. She even openly joked with the students and they slowly crack a smile because if my mentor was joking with you, she clearly was not mad at you. She never dwelled on what you did wrong. She let you know that she had let it go and you should too.

This cycle of firmness and warmth permeated my experience at the second school and really gave me a whole new perspective of teaching, and life in general for that matter. Loving someone is not about giving hugs and listening when someone needs to talk. Establishing authority in a classroom is not about yelling and making sure your word is followed at every turn. Building relationships is the balanced cycle between being firm and making sure that the people around you know that you care about them.

TEACHING AS ART

A woman came to our class as a guest speaker and part of her lesson was highlighting our talents. She asked my mentor, "What are you good at?" and my mentor replied with a witty, "Being awesome." Turning the answer into a joke, that we still laugh about constantly, accurately summed up my mentor.

Pedagogically, my mentor transcended teaching as a profession and made it an art form. My mentor was trained as a middle school teacher, and every activity she planned for our fourth graders was rigorous, meaningful, and challenging. During

N. CHELLINO

the summer, she spent the majority of her time meticulously planning the curriculum for the school year. She spent hours at her computer searching for the best resources from all over the country; vocabulary units from an institute in Florida, writing prompts from the U.K., common core practice books from Illinois, and reading passages from New York.

My mentor collected data from every single activity and graded it that night to see where instruction needed to go the following day. A warm-up at the beginning of class, a reading exit ticket, a writing prompt, a social studies passage with questions, work from centers, sticky-notes from guided reading groups all went into a green bag and was toted home for the night to be entered as some sort of grade. Completion grades kept the students accountable for their work and made what we did in class more meaningful. The bag returned the next day with notes all over the pages, and comments along the lines of “The students really seem to be getting Cause and Effect!” or “The kids really didn’t do so well on the social studies lesson yesterday.” All of the notes ended with “What I think we should do next is...”

All activities and lessons were reflected on to assess what worked for the kids, what should be modified, and what should be thrown out. The students were taught whole group, small group, one on one, in pairs, and at tables. They were assigned groups for long-term projects. My mentor set them up for all sorts of learning experiences and set them up to learn content for the long haul. She also sought out and attended professional development seminars and constantly searched for the most current information. She knew who to listen to, who to ask for advice, and how to get answers. She communicated with our principal frequently and asked for help when she needed it.

In class, my mentor worked hard to teach me everything she knew about teaching. We keep a dialogue journal, which was actually a requirement of LSU’s Holmes Project participants, but my mentor treated it as if she was writing the Holy Book. As soon as I stood up to teach, she had that binder on her lap and she was carefully scanning and documenting what she observed, including what needed to improve, what could change, and what was effective. It also helped that we taught a class of fourth graders in the morning, and repeated the content for a new class in the afternoon. Throughout the day, she put bugs in my ears. “The students are acting out because they are testing you. They want to know that you mean what you say.” “Try cutting down the time, this reading is taking way too long.” “This lesson is good, but we can make it better if we pull readings from this website.” “Check that student at table three, they aren’t paying attention.” Everything she told me was valuable and I drank it up constantly.

Most importantly, she taught me how to care about our kids. When I left my kids from my first placement, I was heartbroken. I never got to officially say goodbye other than our few moments on my last day, and I thought about them constantly. I still wonder how much they could have achieved if I had brought them with me to my new school. An impossible thought, but it was one that came

to my mind quite frequently. I see them sitting at the lunch table, talking to my new students and forming meaningful relationships. I could see them relaxed and growing and learning. I am not sure why, but I always thought about them at lunch. Probably because this was the one rule I broke at my old school, I talked to my old students while they ate. At my new school, the students were allowed to talk through the entire lunch and as I spoke to them, I was reminded of the freedoms they had that my old kids did not. I often wondered if there is a way I could contact my old parents and suggest that they enroll their kids in my new school. I could know that my kids were getting everything they deserved.

It was not that I resented my new set of kids, but they did not need me quite like my old ones did. The first group of students and I bonded not only because we liked each other, but because we had to in order to survive the chaos of our class. My new students were not only loved by one teacher, but three teachers (one ELA, one Science, and one Math), as well as the principal, other teachers from other grade levels, and the staff. They did not need me. I was just an intern.

DOUBT RETURNS

After a while, I fell back into an old rut. I felt out of place, like a parasite latching on to my hosts' classroom and draining them of their time and resources. I began to pull back from the students and my mentor, which was not a quiet affair.

My mentor, who had invested in me and cared about my success, saw the change and was quite concerned. She requested a meeting with our principal and my supervisor. The details were quite long and emotional, yet one thing my mentor said stuck with me and taught me how to view any experience a teaching intern is hoping to have in their placement, "We make all of our decisions for the kids because they deserve it. You may not feel attached to them now, but they deserve your love. They love to be loved on and they will drink it up. We always need to do what's best for them." My mentor and principal reached out to me, and gave me the support that I needed. "Don't isolate yourself from the other teachers in the school. If you make yourself an island, you will be lonely. It takes courage to reach out and ask for help; when you are teaching your first year, you need to have that strength to get the help to keep going." My principal taught me the importance of reaching out and putting your full commitment into everything.

Giving my best to my new students meant becoming close to them and loving them like I loved my old students. As soon as I began investing in them, I could let go of all of the other things that make teaching hard – the long hours, the long work, the exhaustion – and really began to train myself to be a teacher. Loving my students gives a purpose to all of the other work that entails teaching; you do everything for the kids and when all of your professional choices are in their best interest, it becomes a no-brainer.

My students, mentor and I all became very close. I ended my placement, and five-year long education, on a happy note. I was sad to leave, but I knew that I

N. CHELLINO

grew so much from working in my class. It was never perfect, and some days were very challenging, but I felt it was a time of great success. One interaction I had with a student sums up the feelings I leave behind. On one of my final days in the classroom, we were all walking to lunch, and one of my boys looked up at me and said, “Ms. Chellino! Ms. Chellino! I’m dying!” Jabbing right back, I replied, “Oh no! Whatever can I do to save you?” He let out a sneaky and playful giggle, “The only way I’ll live is if you give me a hug!”

AN ALTERNATE PATH

The thing is: I love teaching. I love my students. I love the processes of learning. I love everything that goes into a school year. I love how much I am challenged by this work day in and day out.

You need to know that teaching is not a career; it is a lifestyle. I do not think that is something you can completely comprehend until you have lived it. My second mentor and I spent many Saturdays and Sundays working together to plan our instructional week. We texted and called each other after school most days to talk about things that happened during the day and to discuss things that needed to happen in the future.

Parts of your personal life – exercising, romantic relationships, friendships – are pushed aside because you have deadlines that come up, emergencies that need to be addressed. Teaching requires a certain amount of selflessness because your students become your kids and family always comes first. I remember a piece of advice a mentor gave me during my undergraduate program, very early on in my teaching experience. She was a second grade teacher with four children of her own and she cautioned me of how work will consume my life if I let it. I believe that this is a concept that can be applied to all jobs, yet in teaching, the nature of the work pressures you to give more than you can even when you cannot seem to give anymore. What she said still stays with me, “At the end of the day, you have to decide what is important to you. It is important to me to watch my children grow up and experience their lives. I need to go home and love my husband. Work will always be waiting for me when I come back to school the next day.”

I think of teaching as a marriage. You will be married to this profession, and you need to assess, have I accomplished all I need to do before I tie the knot? Before you can give your life to another person or profession, you need to be comfortable in yourself and take the time to experience all that you need to before you settle in one place. For me, I feel there are a few things I need to do before I marry education. I want to become a yoga instructor. I would like to serve overseas in the Peace Corps. I want to train for another marathon. Technically, I could do these things while I am employed as a teacher, but considering how consuming the lifestyle can be, I feel that I need to do these things before I can completely commit to being a teacher.

Yes, you can still get married or gain extra training while you work, but for me, I feel that this phase in my life opens the door to new possibilities. I view the world differently from my experiences, and before I can effectively teach children how to experience life, I feel I need to first experience some of this, great, life on my own terms.

I do not consider my time in my program as a waste or a failure. I feel very passionately about teaching and even after ending my year on a positive note, I still feel pulled to try other fields. And that is okay. It is okay that I am trained as a teacher. While it is a huge part of my life, an equally important part is my role as a learner. If that means I go back to law school, then I will do that. If that means that I open my own yoga studio or flower shop, then I will choose that. There is no shame in gaining a degree that you do not “use” right out of the gate. You will use your skills as a teacher no matter what path you follow.

I hope that you will keep all of your options open in life. There is no path that should not deserve your consideration. It is not a sin to consider that you have skills and desires that would point you down another line of work. Here are some things to consider if you are questioning your place in this line of work (teaching):

IF YOU HAVE A DIFFICULT MENTOR TEACHER

There are many people who have been living the lifestyle of teaching and are burnt out. This term has been used in your undergraduate programs, but you really cannot appreciate it until you see it or have lived it. It is very possible that your mentor teacher has some life stressors, needs a break or should even consider making a career change. It is very easy to judge what your mentor should or should not be doing, so instead, consider how you address your students. Always remember that the only person you are completely in control of is yourself. Teachers will adopt a certain teaching and discipline style that sticks with them and they are super hard to break. There are times when everyone gets snappy, but how frequent is it? If you are concerned that your mentor teacher is too harsh, start paying closer attention and document the instances when she is too rough on the students. What happened with my first mentor was unethical in many different and repeating instances. I spoke to my supervisor and addressed it with the head of my department. After my teacher made no effort to change her mannerisms, it was the best decision to pull me out of her room.

Give it some time. I stayed with my first mentor from the beginning of August until the middle of November. Yes, it was tiring and yes, it became awful and ridiculous, but everyone involved in my situation can say that we tried everything we could to fix what was wrong. Old habits die hard and you cannot teach an old dog new tricks, so make sure that you are setting yourself up for success in the long run.

N. CHELLINO

IF YOU DOUBT YOUR CAREER CHOICE

Whatever you do, do not ignore the emotions that you are experiencing. It is normal at the end of a horrible day at school to become frustrated and say, “Ugh, I do NOT want to teach and I cannot bear the thought of going back to school again tomorrow.” Everyone goes through it, take it as it comes. In the grand scheme of things, one day should not break your morale. If you are having more and more days when you are miserable because of school, then it may not be the lifestyle for you.

Try this instead. Start by giving yourself a break. Do something that makes you truly happy; for me it is yoga. I always feel better after practicing on the mat. If you take care of your body and release some of those endorphins, you will feel happier. If you are not exercising semi-regularly or at all, shame on you. Our bodies are designed to be worked physically. If exercise does not make you happy try reading a book. Log on to Pinterest and throw together a craft that is not for your classroom. If you are religious, pray. Take your dog to the park. Buy yourself a coffee. Go to the store and get a new pair of shoes. Find whatever it is that gives you a fulfilling mental break that has NOTHING to do with your students. Whatever you do for your break, finish it with a full night sleep. You should not make any major decisions running on an empty tank.

Next, ask yourself, am I feeling like this today or have I been feeling like this for a long time? If you are daydreaming in class about all of the other careers you want to try and you are feeling cooped up, then you need to take some time to really think about it. How long have you been considering it – a week? A month? For me, I have been toying with alternate careers since high school. I have seriously considered botany, floral arranging, law school, researching and analyzing British literature, yoga instruction, space aeronautics, motherhood, physical therapy, counseling, writing children’s books, and I can really keep going because I love everything. That is part of my personality, and I have had to come to terms with it. I am a very inquisitive person and I feel my interest and abilities span a wide range of suitable job choices.

Why are you feeling this way? You took a break and you have gotten a full night’s sleep, so those simple issues are not plaguing you. Do you have a romantic relationship that is causing you stress and heartache? Are you close to your parents and siblings and are they all in good health? Did you just move into a new house or apartment? Do you have a cold? Are you working another job besides your internship in order to pay your bills? If you have other stressors in your life, be sure that you are not translating those feelings into “I hate teaching.” It could be something as simple as “I really just hate my roommate.” Be honest with your emotions and why you are feeling negative about your work.

Bottom line: do not force yourself into this career just because you have spent four or five years training to become a teacher. A few more years of school or job

training are small compared to a lifetime in a career that is a horrible fit for you. If you think you are miserable now, take a second to imagine yourself teaching completely on your own. Take the time to understand why you are feeling this way. Is it a feeling of the moment or a feeling you should have heeded years ago?

IF YOU FEEL EXHAUSTED

Welcome to education. You will get used to the hours and physically, I really hope you are in decent shape because it does help. My mother always says to give your body two full weeks to adjust to a new schedule. Take your first two weeks in school as slow as you can in your off time because work time will be overwhelming and overfilled.

Your feet hurt? Seriously, buy some sneakers. Do not wear your fancy heels because you will regret it. As a runner, I know how important it is to take care of your feet and I know what it means to have aching feet. If you have a pair of cute, professional sneakers, you can efficiently move around your room and keep up with your kids. You also do not want to turn down games at recess because you decided to wear your adorable high-heeled camel colored boots. If you take a break and play with your kids, you can bond with them and give your own brain a break. Also any pain that starts in your feet will travel up your shins to your knees to your lower back to your upper back to your neck. You will be infinitely more tired if you clunk around in a pair of heels all day long.

Avoid drinking caffeine after four or five o'clock in the afternoon. Many teachers are sipping a constantly stream of energy drinks and coffee to keep up with the day, but you do not realize how much you are taking in unless you pay close attention. There is nothing wrong with a cup of coffee in the morning (as long as you do not overload it with sugar) and there are actually health benefits to having it but when you are drinking it all day long, it will make your body feel odd. Avoid the excess sugar in energy drinks because you will crash.

Sip on water instead. You will be drained if your body is dehydrated, and there are a lot of teachers who will not drink water because you have very little time to use the restroom at school. Get over it, get around it. I started bringing a Nalgene® bottle to school that has the liters marked on the side so I know just how much I am taking in. Simple fixes to the afternoon sleepiness.

If you are tired after lunch, you either consumed too many calories, too much sugar, or too little food and you are crashing. To keep from crashing plan your lunches with healthy options like salads or tuna. Avoid frozen meals that boast of only 230 calories. Bring an apple for an energy and hydration boost. Whatever you choose, pay attention to the fuel you put in your body because whatever you put in is what you are going to get out of it.

Get a full night sleep. You really should not make any decisions when you are tired and overworked. Put down your work, take a hot shower, and crawl into your

N. CHELLINO

bed. Cuddle your puppy, cuddle a pillow, cuddle your boyfriend, cuddle something, love yourself and give your brain the sleep it needs.

IF YOU HAVE OTHER INTERESTS

Do all that you can to explore your options. Take classes, go to seminars, and ask questions. Look into alternatives to your “typical” teaching job. You can teach part-time or team-teach. Take what little time you have left over after your work is done and explore the things that make you happy:

If you are interested in law, go to the local courthouse and listen to a sentencing hearing. Or watch television courtroom dramas.

If you love plants, get a few cacti or air plants. If you kill the cacti, then you definitely should stay away from a plant based career.

If you love yoga there are tons of wonderful studios in your town.

If you love to paint, go to the Art department and make some money as a nude model. It fed me through my undergraduate program and it is an eye-opening and life-changing job.

If you love languages, buy Rosetta Stone®. Audit a French class. Date a Spaniard. All of these things are quite fulfilling.

I believe that every interest is worth exploring. No, you really cannot make a career out of dating a Spanish man (unless he owns a castle and you are into living off someone else’s millions), but you can learn a lot from opening your eyes to new possibilities. Just because you show an interest in something does not mean you should drop what you are doing and chase down the new fad. Trust me; if I did that, I would have about 30 different careers by now.

Take the time to really weigh out your options—what are you good at doing? What makes you happy? What tires you out in a way that when your head hits the pillow at night, you are still dreaming about what you did that day? What leaves you feeling fulfilled? What does all of these things and still puts food on your table?

As of right now, I have not accrued many student loans, and I am lucky. If you have a heavy financial burden, but you feel like a job that pays you \$6 an hour will fulfill you, you still need to calculate how you are going to make ends meet. Analyze your interests for what they are – interests or hints that you should be looking into something else for your life.

IF YOUR PERSONAL LIFE IS FAILING

You are only going to have so much time for a personal life. The sooner you come to terms with it, the easier it is going to go for you. This is true regardless of what

full-time job you have. When forty hours (minimum) of your week are devoted to your job, and you have a certain amount of hours that you have to devote to sleeping and random chores and errands, you really do not have that much time left over.

Understand that there are three types of people in a teacher's personal life: friends who also happen to be teachers, people who understand how consuming teaching can be, and people who will never understand the work you do. Your friends who are also teachers are going to get that you are strapped for time. Be grateful for them. They will also give you a different perspective on those tough classroom situations when you are running out of ideas on your own.

The people who do not understand what you do, but still respect your work are a godsend. Keep them close because they will keep you in touch with the real world so you do not drown in teacher talk. This last type of person is tricky to deal with and how you handle them is your prerogative. You love them. They love you. But all of a sudden in between you is this huge gap that you just cannot seem to bridge. You love to talk about your students and school because this is 97% of your life right now, but no matter how much you try to explain what is going on, this person just does not get it. It may not be that they do not want to, some people have trouble seeing through other peoples' perspectives, but whatever the reason, you cannot be open about your life because they do not want to hear it. The tricky part is deciding how much you can bear. Can you tolerate the lack of conversation about your work? Great. You will be fine. If you are patient enough, that person may be a little more understanding about your work as time goes by. If the relationship was not important before you became a full-time teacher, you may need to cut your losses now. I have seen so many women go into teaching when their boyfriend "just doesn't seem to understand me or listen to me." Deal with your man (love life) however you choose, but know that a relationship is built on sharing experiences. If you cannot talk about the experiences you are having at work, what else are you going to build on?

IN THE END

In the end it all boils down to this...What matters are the things that matter to you. Invest your time into the relationships and career that truly mean something to you, and be open to the multiple pathways your life and career may take.

KASEY BALL

8. THE POWER OF QUESTIONS

West Baton Rouge Parish

As a new student teacher, finding your role in the classroom can be a challenge. When I first started in my placement, I was an observer. Although some peers jumped right in and began teaching the first day, observing gave me the opportunity to get to know the students in the class and see how my mentor teacher related and handled the curriculum and the classroom management. As I moved into the role of a teacher, there were many struggles as students tested me. The students knew I was also a student and many doubts and questions often ran through my head.

My student teaching experience was at a charter school named Greenlake Charter where 99% of the students participate in the federal free and reduced lunch program. My mentor teacher, Mrs. Smith, had been teaching for 5 years and initially started teaching through the Teach for America program. The other adult in the room was the paraprofessional, Mrs. Olson.

In this chapter I share some of the stories and situations I found myself in where I did not always have a clear path, a right answer, or a great direction to take. Most of these situations prompted questions, and these questions prompted significant reflection. I share some of the questions so that you may ponder your own answers so that as situations arise in your student teaching experience, you will have already thought through some possible responses. Every class, teacher, and experience is different, yet I hope my story can serve as a guide to understand the power a student teacher can have to influence and help students.

PROFESSIONAL DIFFERENCES

The weather was warmer than usual just before winter break, but the school had already turned on the heat. It was hot in the building, but there was nothing anyone could do except to open classroom doors. Our classroom was next to an outside door, and in the middle of the day, a wasp flew in. As expected, several students became frightened and there was a collective screech from the class. One student was genuinely petrified, and he sprinted for a table and ducked underneath. For the rest of the day Travis refused to come out. I visited him under the table to see if I could convince him to come out or at least comfort him. Travis was curled in a ball as he shed huge tears. I told him he would be safe under the table and gave him the

K. BALL

work the class was doing to help distract him. Travis came out only a few times when we were doing a read-aloud on the rug and when we left the class for lunch and P.E.

At 3:00 it was time to get packed up and go home. Travis took medicine for ADHD. At the end of the day when it was wearing off he could act aggressively, irrationally, and throw tantrums. He was coming off a severe stimulant and I quickly began to realize that a certain tolerance for behavior was necessary; not everyone realized this, however, including our paraprofessional. In the afternoon, I was content with Travis who was mostly still in line talking quietly with his friends. Mrs. Olson required him to “sit criss-cross with his voice off.” I knew that Travis could generally do what is asked of him, but he had already had a rough day. Mrs. Olson thought that Travis should be corrected so she told him, “Travis, if you don’t start acting right I’m gonna get a wasp to teach you to behave.” Travis started crying again. On her way out, Mrs. Olson said in a questioning manner, “We’re friends, Ms. Ball?” as if she was asking me not to repeat what happened. It seemed that she knew her threat to Travis was unprofessional. I was stumped by the whole exchange. She left and I stayed to calm Travis down.

As a student teacher it is difficult to be in situations where you just want to fix everything and you realize that you cannot. All I thought I could do was talk to Travis about what she said. I told him there was no way Mrs. Olson was going to get a wasp – I would not going to let her hurt him. I left the conversation feeling that there was so much more to say but Travis had had a long day, so I just gave him a hug and sat with the first grade carpoolers until they all left. While I certainly told my mentor teacher what happened, a number of questions about the situation came to my mind at the time. Who would threaten a six year old with a wasp? What was I supposed to do? Should I say something and get her in trouble? She would know it was me. I was just a student teacher. I should keep my mouth shut. What will I do when I am a teacher? Can I correct a colleague for acting inappropriately towards a student? I should be able to? What are my obligations to protect my children? Would that be professional to do in front of students?

BREAKING UP FIGHTS

I watched the students at recess running around one day, screaming their heads off, and generally having a good time. I overheard a heated argument, so I walked over to Alan and Keith, both students in my class, and Alan’s brother, Adon. I tried talking to Alan and Keith because it seemed as if they were the ones having a problem over Adon. Between the tears and anger it appeared that Alan was upset with Keith for bothering his little brother.

Thinking the situation had been resolved, I let them get back to playing. Five minutes later I turned around and saw Alan and Keith shoving and punching each other. I ran over and did my best to break them up. Alan kept trying to punch Keith, and I needed someone else to help me. I kept looking for the other people on

duty but they were sitting at a picnic table looking at their phones and unable to see what was going on. I was so frustrated; I was the student teacher and this was not my responsibility.

After recess, I told my mentor teacher that I had to break up a fight, because three teachers on duty were not paying attention. A few days later, a school-wide email was sent about cell phone usage at school. Did the teachers on the playground with me know that it was me who alerted administration about the phone usage at recess? As I look back on the incident, I wonder if I made the best decision. I know that I had to do my best to break up the fight for students' safety, but I wonder what would have happened if someone had gotten hurt? Would my student teaching experience have been in jeopardy? Would I have been liable even though I was not an employee? How do you foster a community where the adults remain responsible for the children at all times?

PROVIDING INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

Jazmyne loved to color and to play with those around her. When it came to reading and math, however, Jazmyne was significantly behind her peers. Jazmyne had an IEP for a developmental delay that centered on language acquisition and articulation. In addition to her academic struggles, she often wore her heart on her sleeve, and her maturity level was not as developed as her peers. I often saw her struggling to complete an activity independently, and when I tried to assist her, she became upset and said she did not need my help. I worried that if the environment did not change and she continued to struggle, it would lead to her hating school.

While working with Jazmyne was at times difficult, like with any student there were moments of hope. During math one week, for example, we worked on addition with three addends and the teacher used word problems and had the objects displayed. The objects not only interested Jazmyne but also helped her with the math and Jazmyne was a leader of the lesson. Another time we went on a field trip to see the Ugly Duckling, a field trip that Jazmyne was very excited about. In the middle of the play, the Ugly Duckling was separated from his duck family and had to save them from the evil cat. I asked Jazmyne what was going to happen next and she predicted exactly what was going to happen, drawing both on prior knowledge and the story structure. Jazmyne articulated and expressed herself during these moments very well. It was moments like these which made me know that she was smart and capable of cognitive thought on the level of her peers.

Jazmyne greatly improved throughout the year, but she still did not perform on a first grade level. One morning late in the year, Mrs. Powers, Jazmyne's mom, came in while the students were at breakfast. She asked how her daughter was doing and I said that she was improving. Her handwriting was better, and she was getting the first sounds correct on her spelling tests, which was a goal in her IEP. She still failed spelling tests, and her grades did not reflect her growth, but there **was** growth for Jazmyne to be proud of.

K. BALL

Mrs. Smith told Jazmyne's mom that she might be retained in first grade. Mrs. Powers appeared shocked, surprised, and disappointed. Mrs. Smith explained Jazmyne had failed the mid-semester math benchmark and retention was a real possibility. Mrs. Powers left. I felt that I had confused Mrs. Powers because I said Jazmyne was doing well, but despite this growth, her grades had not improved enough to move on in school. All that day, I thought about what happened and Mrs. Perkins's shocked face. I knew that there was a good chance that Jazmyne might be held back, but I also thought it was important for her mother to know she was growing. Mrs. Perkins wanted her daughter to succeed, but I think she was unsure how best to support her with the academics. We were also unsure about how to best move Jazmyne forward in a way that helped her meet the standards.

Teaching Jazmyne allowed me learn about the difficulties of having an inclusive and least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. It is not only difficult to create lesson plans and include them in guided practice and whole group activities, but also to make sure that their needs are being met academically. I wanted Jazmyne to learn as much as she could and for it to be something she enjoyed and could feel success.

As a future teacher I do not want my students' parents to leave a conversation with me feeling hopeless and I wondered "how can I help parents be partners without alienating them?" I also struggled to find the balance of instruction with students wanting to ensure that I engage all students. If I have 20 minutes for an instructional segment do I teach the whole class for 20 minutes, run centers and teach a focused group of 5 students while the others work independently, or do I invest that time for 1:1 teaching with a student like Jazmyne? As a teacher our time is very limited and we want to make the biggest difference for all of the students. This is a dilemma even my mentor teacher felt, but, realistically, what could be done? You have your students for a year and after 180 days they move on to the next teacher and so I wondered what our duties are to maximize the 180 days we have each year?

HANDLING MATTERS AT HOME

So much of what a teacher deals with is influenced by factors one cannot possibly control. Ariel and Jamal are two students whose outside lives appeared to contribute to challenges in school. As a student teacher, I began to realize that there are limits to what I could control or address, but that those difficult things played a role in my teaching.

Ariel was on serious medications and often appeared distant and withdrawn. Only once did I see Ariel engaged with learning throughout my whole student teaching time. Most often she wanted to sit with her head down and very rarely spoke unless spoken to. At some point in the year Ariel missed two weeks of school, and after many failed attempts to reach Ariel's family the teacher made a house visit and discovered that her family had moved.

Ariel soon returned to school but continued to be withdrawn. When I asked her if anything was wrong, she just looked at me and did not say anything. I wanted nothing more than to help her and find ways to engage her, but neither myself, my mentor teacher, or the paraprofessional could break through. With repeated failed attempts to breakthrough with the family we sought social work support – things never improved.

Jamal was another student for whom I felt concerned. He came to school every day smelling terrible. When I first started teaching his small group, it was hard to get used to the smell. I talked to my mentor teacher several times. She called the mother many times and explained that he was teased and tried to work on a solution, yet nothing improved. Many times, the other students in my reading group would sit there and hold their noses and made fun of him. At some point we stopped calling his mother about it and did our best to stop the teasing, but we were really at a loss. Our school did not have a bathtub or a shower, and we lacked resources, short of calling family services, to do anything to help Jamal.

With both Ariel and Jamal, I was watching student suffering and in many ways felt powerless to do anything to help them. What happens after you report suspected abuse or in these two cases what we thought was neglect? A social worker comes, asks several awkward questions, and then leaves. Would Ariel or Jamal be sent to foster care? Likely not. Would that even a good thing? For Jamal what more could we do to make sure that his hygiene needs were taken care of? Again involving social services was a limited option. I wished that I had considered, prior to student teaching, the larger range of issues that affect students and the proactive ways that I could respond. What could I control was show them love, affection, and attention, though I know it was not enough? Although it seems small now, I do believe I made a difference, but I also know there was much more that needed to be done.

BULLYING

One day during student teaching, I taught all day because my mentor teacher was absent for the day. During the day, several students got into altercations. The first altercation was in math when Frankie was accused of calling Thandeka stupid. Several students corroborated the story. As I told them both to apologize but Frankie got even more upset and threw his pencil and then his pencil box. I could tell he was furious. I told him, “I can tell you are upset,” and asked him to take some time out. Frankie came back rather quickly but I welcomed him back. The rest of math went well for the most part, and we went to the bathroom on the way to lunch. As I was telling the students to go in one at a time I saw that Frankie had his hand around Taylor’s neck. I approached Frankie. He let go, and I sent him straight to the office. I led the rest of the class to lunch and went back to the office to talk to Frankie. He calmed down and we decided to let him come back to class.

K. BALL

As the class was waiting to return to the room after lunch, I saw Frankie hit Brad in the stomach. I grabbed his arm to restrain him; he became furious, and I was scared. There were many other incidents like this not just for Frankie, but for many of the children. Whenever these incidents occurred, I felt like a failure. Why were the kids so mean to each other sometimes? What had we failed to build in our classroom environment to help our students value each other and use words to negotiate problems instead of fists?

To attempt dealing with the bullying Mrs. Smith taught a lesson during our recess time where students colored a picture of themselves and crumpled the papers to act as a visual for when others said or did something mean. She explained that even after the papers were unwrinkled, they were still crinkled and bent just like when someone was mean. Her point was that a person can apologize for actions, but the effect of their words still hurt the individual. This exercise helped decrease the bullying, and students were more aware of how their actions affected those around them. Many of my students were still learning how to deal with their strong emotions, which was normal for their age and development.

I learned that students possess a lot of power over other each other. I wondered if their need to have power over each other was a response to feeling powerless at other times, be it school or home. I wondered what we could have done as teachers to help empower students to enact their voices and not their fists? What approaches would have helped the students to understand the consequences of their actions and the value of the community of learners they are a part of at our school? Of all the lessons, figuring out how to empower students to be leaders and not bullies was the most important consideration that I wish I would have spent more time preparing for before student teaching.

In this short chapter I have shared several stories to try and help illustrate some of the very real situations I have faced. I have also left you with questions, but not answers intentionally. I hope that as you ponder these questions and begin to experience your own student teaching that you will be able to develop answers and approaches that work for the students you teach and in the context in which you work. The important thing is to spend time prior to student teaching thinking about the big questions that all teachers face and rarely have ready made answers for.

KATHERINE GOLEMI

9. IF I CAN GET THROUGH THIS, I CAN GET THROUGH ANYTHING

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

This chapter is organized as a series of short excerpts from my personal journal highlighting important things I hope you consider when entering student teaching.

PUT ON A BRAVE FACE

More than anything, I think I was afraid. I was afraid of my school. From preschool all the way through 12th grade, I received all of my education at a small, private school dominated by other upper-middle class students who looked like me. I was placed at Brookside Elementary for my yearlong student teaching experience, the polar opposite to my own elementary school experience. Brookside Elementary is old, really old. It has the worst curb appeal of any school I have ever seen. So, when I found out that I was placed there, I tried to put on a good face. When my friends asked, I told them how I had heard the principal was doing great things, which granted I *had heard*, and that I was excited to be there for a year. The last part was simply untrue. I always thought I wanted to work in urban education, but when reality hit and I faced spending a year in a school that looked like a condemned prison from the 1950s, what else can I do but put on a brave face?

And, to top it all off I was placed in fourth grade. When I told my friends and colleagues that I was placed in fourth grade, I received a lot of sympathy. “Oh... the LEAP year,” people would say with pity. LEAP is a high-stakes test given to Louisiana students. Some of my undergraduate experiences were in fourth grade classes, and honestly, that was my favorite of any grade in which I had worked. I was content with being placed in fourth grade again, until I was extended all of the sympathy. Would it really be as hard as everyone was making it out to be? My mind was filled with images of a dark, cold classroom with a looming spring testing date hanging over the children’s heads, a perfect complement to what I already knew parts of Brookside looked like.

Like most new student teachers with whom I had talked, all of these worries paled in comparison to my fear of meeting my mentor teacher. In my undergraduate, I had both good and bad experiences with my assigned teachers, but being in someone’s classroom for a few hours a few times a week is nothing

K. GOLEMI

compared to an entire year, day in and day out. What if she did not like me? What if she was mean? What if she yelled at the kids? What if she yelled at me? I had so many different images in my head of what she could look like or be like. She could be the old motherly teacher, sweet and gentle with her students and me. She could be the teacher who was burned out and lost interest and who looked at me as an intrusion on what she hoped were her last days in the classroom. I really had no idea. The teachers I had already encountered at Brookside left only one impression on me. They looked tired, very tired.

I already had low expectations of my upcoming experience, just because that is my nature. I was afraid of a school I knew was in serious disrepair and also was becoming afraid of a grade that I had previously enjoyed teaching in. I was worried my mentor teacher would not like me and that I would be critical of my role in her classroom. The stress of graduate school and a graduate program known to be rigorous and challenging was just the icing on the cake of my expectations for the year. I never thought “I cannot do this,” nor did I believe that I was not capable of finishing out the year. But what kind of person was going to come out on the other side? Who would I be when I finally got to wear the graduation regalia in May? These questions were probably what scared me the most.

AND IT GOES LIKE THIS

The first week of my student teaching went by in a blur of school supplies and aching feet. Like any student teacher, I was incredibly nervous to meet my mentor teacher and my students. I was worried that my mentor would consider me a burden, but I felt very blessed when I read the first email from her and she spoke of how she hoped to learn from me as well. I felt welcome in her classroom, a classroom that was soon to become our classroom.

What most surprised me was how fast the days went by. Getting to the school in the morning, I felt like the day would last forever. Then I would blink, and it was lunchtime. I would blink again, and it was time for the students to go home.

I also remember how much my feet hurt, really hurt! I went home every day for the first week with horribly aching feet. I immediately realized I needed to buy shoes that could hold up to those eight hours standing at the front of the room, walking around the class, and trotting to and from other places in the building. I knew that teaching would be draining on me emotionally, and I knew I would probably be tired. But who thinks of their feet? Quickly, I did.

Something else I did not anticipate in my first week of teaching was handling school supplies. Being in an urban school with a very transient population, my teacher knew the importance of documenting every supply each student brought. When a student would withdraw later on in the year, sometimes parents would expect their son or daughter’s school supplies be returned. So each student had a checklist with their name on it and a record of all the supplies they had contributed to the classroom. The worst part about all of this was not the bit of extra

IF I CAN GET THROUGH THIS, I CAN GET THROUGH ANYTHING

paperwork, but the meager supply of supplies we actually received. I was immediately concerned about how quickly our classroom would run out of basic supplies like tissues or band aids.

Though the first days of school were nothing like I expected, they still represented a huge milestone for me. I had finally arrived. For the past year, I had been really worried if I had made the right decision. I thought that my undergraduate field experiences had been lacking, and I was not prepared for what teaching would really be like. Would I actually enjoy it? Would it be something I wanted to do for the rest of my life? Despite the shortage of school supplies and aching feet, I did receive the validation I was hoping for. I loved being in my classroom and at my school. Despite my original fears, I immediately felt at home. At the end of a day during that first week of school, I sent a picture to my parents of my classroom with the caption “Just another day in paradise.” Being in my classroom felt like a dream finally come true, and I could not have been more thrilled.

IT IS OK TO WORRY

Hopefully, all teachers care about the well-being of their students and wonder what their students do after school, where they do their homework, or how much sleep they get at night. As a teacher to disenfranchised children, those worries were magnified. I received advice from friends and family about leaving the worries at school and not to stress about things I could not control. But by October, a full month into the school year, I found myself thinking about my students, constantly.

10/3/2013

Jeremiah came to school filthy again today. It is the third time this week that he's wearing the same uniform shirt with the same stains. His fingernails have dirt caked under them every day, and the smell is almost unbearable. It's now 10 pm, my new teacher bedtime, and as I lie in bed, I can't stop my mind from going to Jeremiah. Did someone feed him dinner tonight? Did someone finally wash his clothes or get him to take a bath? He's an only child with two parents, so I just can't imagine why no one is taking care of him. I just wish more than anything I could take him home with me, wash his clothes, and make sure he ate a good meal. I really wish that for all my students. I just wish I could take them home.

I have many journal entries from the first few months that read this way. I spent many nights lying in bed thinking about the welfare of my students. I had students come to school sharing stories of how the power had gone out or how there had been no food left for themselves or a younger sibling. My heart ached for them. My heart still aches for them. As a student teacher, it is important to realize your limitations. There is only so much you can do. I watched my mentor teacher feed

K. GOLEMI

breakfast to students who had missed the school-provided breakfast or offer hygiene tips to students like Jeremiah. I learned a lot from watching these interactions. Worrying about your students *is* okay, and I think the good teachers always will. It is just important to be honest with yourself about what you can do and remember there is only so much you can give. One thing I had to learn is that there was a whole team of adults charged with the well-being and safety of students, and in a case like Jeremiah it is important to connect with those who can help. In the end you give yourself to your students in instruction all day long. And while you worry about the students outside of school it is equally important to replenish yourself. Doing things for yourself resets you so that when you go to school the next day, you have that “something” to give your students.

MAKE TIME FOR LAUGHTER

This entry makes me smile every time I read it, and it brings up a couple of different ideas that I think would be worth sharing with future student teachers. First, I learned that my students were *always* watching me. It is important to think about even the smallest facial expressions or comments before you make them because at least one student is watching and listening.

I learned that teachers must see the value in laughter. Children love to laugh. My placement was sometimes a stifling place – laughter was neither allowed nor welcomed. Our students should make us smile every day! Who could spend eight hours every day with 10-year olds and not find something to laugh about? As a student teacher I learned to look for those things that made me smile and I hope to continue this practice as a full time teacher. If we find ourselves unable to laugh and feel enjoyment with our students, it might be time to reevaluate why we are teaching in the first place.

TAKE TIME TO LISTEN

1/17/13

At Brookside, we teachers have the pleasure of eating lunch alongside of our students. At the beginning of the year, the students would fight to sit next to me, asking when they first walked in the door in the morning if they could sit by me at lunch. By December, the bickering was getting out of control, so I decided to make a schedule. Students are always excited when it's “their day” to sit by me, and I usually enjoy the time to get to speak candidly with students, in spite of school regulations for “quiet lunch.” I'm such a rebel, I know, to actually want to converse with my students during one of the few downtimes any of us get during the day. Anyway, today the conversation was typical and extraordinary in the way conversations only with 4th grade students can be. Today the students decided to talk about their different

IF I CAN GET THROUGH THIS, I CAN GET THROUGH ANYTHING

family members who have spent time in jail. One student's dad had been multiple times; another's cousin was currently in for life. Questions about the difference between battery and assault arose...questions 10 year olds should never have to ask, especially in reference to their own family members. The part I found most extraordinary was how little I was fazed. My tone of voice didn't change from discussing spaghetti to discussing armed robbery. These are normal, common happenings in the lives of my children, and I am surprised to find they have become normal in my life as well.

Reflecting on lunchtime as a student teacher, there were both struggles and joys. One of my field experience assignments was in a school where lunch was completely silent. If students slipped up and got chatty, they were forced to take their lunch tray and try to eat standing against a wall. It was heartbreaking to watch. At Brookside, the supposedly "silent" lunch was more just a recommendation to keep it to a dull roar. The talking for me during lunch was never the issue. Mrs. Heath had a tendency to disappear for a lot of our twenty-minute time in the cafeteria. I understand it was a good time for her to "use it" as my kids say (as in "use the bathroom"), as well as run copies or check her mailbox. But because of this, lunchtime for me became one of the many times where I felt like I was on my own. By engaging with my students like this not only was I able to connect with my students, but I was also able to become a part of the fabric of the children's school life.

HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

1/18/13

This was the first week back after winter break, and to be honest, it was awful. It is incredible how much the atmosphere of a school changed over the Christmas break. I returned one week after the students did, and the teachers were already in full-on panic mode. The long and short of it was the teachers were panicked about a complete overhaul of the pacing schedule of the curriculum and the addition of yet ANOTHER required test named the "mini-leap." Now the students would be taking a bi-weekly test because the mid-year LEAP scores were so low. It astounded me how the district's solution to poor test scores was, in fact, more testing. I also found out that there are now no more centers. Our small group time, which once consisted of exciting activities and creative ways to meet weekly learning targets, now consisted of me trying desperately to hold their attention while we trudged through state-provided practice books. It's awful, simply awful. I could not get the attention of Gladys, a girl who never wants to do schoolwork but whom I usually can get to work for me. She would not do a single thing. I got to the point where I told her she would not be in my small group anymore! I will not be kicking her out of my small group come Monday, but I will be racking my brain this

K. GOLEMI

weekend, trying to think of a way to improve this drudgery that small group time has become. I have to for my own sanity. The negative overall school environment has finally affected the classroom environment. Mrs. Heath flat out apologized to me for being so angry at the kids lately and being a poor role model for me. I tried to tell her I understood, but I knew she was completely on point. She said she was determined to start over and make that day better. Going into everyday with that mindset is important for any teacher though, even (or maybe especially!) seasoned teachers.

Besides being inside a dilapidated building, as most schools in my district are, I worked in a very hostile environment. A lack of a clear chain of command left both teachers and students without the support that they needed. That coupled with change after change coming down from the central district office made for a challenge. The staff was under a lot of pressure to improve student performance. Nothing in my program prepared me for the realities of the school that have a significant influence on the student teaching experience. I learned that it is crucial to start every day with a positive attitude so that I could work to be the catalyst in my classroom and school that promoted change and ultimately benefited my students.

WHEN YOU LOSE CONTROL

1/24/13

I came in this morning relatively happy because yesterday was a better day. But this morning was my worst morning thus far of student teaching. An incident occurred before the bell between some of my students and a student in another class. Mrs. Heath went with them to the office to speak with one of the administrators. During that period of time, I completely lost control of the class. There was nothing I could do or say, no number of conduct marks, no reasoning with them or explaining how I don't like to yell. They just would not give me their attention. At one point, I went to take a student outside, because I could no longer handle him. Mrs. Heath and another teacher were talking; there were no more students, no more administrators. To me it just looked like they were chatting, while I was in the classroom dying. I felt so abandoned. When Mrs. Heath finally came back in, she said I looked upset, and I nodded with tears in my eyes. She asked me if I needed to go outside for a moment, and I did, so I went. I quickly walked out of the classroom and cried in the breezeway. I cried from loss of control. I cried in failure. There were no rules or procedures that could prepare me for children who flat out would not do what I asked of them, and I had about five children like that in my class. It was truly awful. All of this, plus I have heard nothing from my university supervisor. I felt truly sick. My experience, which I had considered

IF I CAN GET THROUGH THIS, I CAN GET THROUGH ANYTHING

good despite the early on behavior problems, was beginning to crumble around me.

During student teaching there were times that I felt totally out of control. My classroom management techniques were in their infancy, a reality I had to both come to accept and to understand could only change and grow with time. What I learned from these experiences is to step away from the situation. There were times I could not physically step outside of the classroom, but I would have to step away from the situation mentally. There are a hundred different reasons a student might display a particularly inappropriate behavior. The people we work with are children, and I learned that they needed a calm and empathetic adult at all times. So at all times, you must try to strive to convey that in your classroom. In those times when you feel like you have lost control, remember to look at your students as the children they are and try your hardest to be the adult you know they need.

A GOOD MORNING

2/4/13

A good morning means... not having to break up a fight. A good morning means... teaching an entire lesson without losing my temper. I still had unruly children who tested my patience. I still gave a ton of conduct marks to students who were off task or disruptive. I still had to correct the same students over and over. But the fact that I did not want to quit teaching or run to my car by the time lunchtime arrived... it was a good morning.

Looking back on this day, it amazes me how much student teaching taught me to find the positive in any day, as I did on February 4th. Every day is going to have its challenges, no matter how effective or experienced you are. I learned to try to always, always, ALWAYS find something positive at the end of the day. "I didn't have to break up a fight before lunch?" Great! "I didn't have to give a conduct mark/turn a card/pull a stick on a student before lunch?" Awesome! "Johnny finished his quiz in the time he was given for the first time?" Hooray! Every day has something positive.

I WILL MAKE IT

2/19

Yesterday was Monday, and it was a rough day back for the kids and me. I will admit that I had a poor attitude going in to the day, so I was determined to make today better. I came into school with a smile on my face. I spoke warmly and gently to all my students as they came in the classroom. I corrected many of them but kept my cool, until one student chased another in

K. GOLEMI

the front of the classroom; then I had to raise my voice. The students were too loud. The teacher next door came in and yelled at them. When Mrs. Heath came in and I told her there was nothing I could say that would keep them quiet, she suggested just standing at the board and writing names. When she had to leave the classroom yet again, I tried this. It did not work. Once the student's name was on the board, they continued to threaten each other and ignore me. By the time Mrs. Heath came back in, I had to write up two behavior reports, one because a girl told another student, "I'm about to stab you with this pencil." The other was for an incident that had happened yesterday, when Mrs. Heath had corrected a student, and he replied something to the effect of "I'm going to put you six feet under." I felt bad writing this up today because the student had said he was going to try and have a good day, but I had to follow Mrs. Heath's instructions. I still have a strange feeling of calm. I still have to teach my lessons. I will make it through this day.

I will make it through this day. This was my mantra in undergrad. Ha! Little did I know what I was in for during my year as a student teacher. Incredibly long days, and when the teaching ended, the endless paperwork began. Long days are a given in teaching, and I always made it through them. I taught my lessons, grew as a teacher, and experienced success in the classroom. Just as teachers give students "I can..." statements to help them solidify their learning, I had to give myself daily "I can..." and "I will..." statements.

ESTABLISH AUTHORITY

2/21

I had a formal observation this morning. I should really write about what happened, but I'm so mad right now I can't even get the words out without losing it. I will try to write later....

So I worked for hours the night before the observation, planning an awesome lesson. I wanted to make it "portfolio worthy" with amazing student work, assessment, and groupings. My lesson face-planted the moment that camera turned on...well, really the moment the morning began. It started off with some usual violence. I had to break up a fight that landed two of my students in the principal's office. The students were sent back to my classroom with stern warnings and I began to teach. The students were just not having it. There was so much anger and frustration in the room. The kids were mad at each other and completely disinterested in learning.

I tried everything. I stopped and just stood there...over and over and over again. I tried rewarding positive behavior. I tried redirecting negative behavior. I tried to get them talking with each other. I tried just stopping and

saying we all needed a moment to calm down. I don't know if it was a combination of the presence of my university supervisor in the room or just the downright refusal to acknowledge me as an authority figure. I had one student who just sat there and flopped his textbook up and down on the table. I asked him to stop and he said "What? I'm in my own little world trying to stay out of trouble." I know this child. He was trying to get the attention of the whole class off of me and on to him. I told Mrs. Heath it might be time for a teacher time out... aka I wanted him out of the room so I could teach. We had discussed this before, in reference to her formal observation by the principal the following week. If he was going to be a problem, we would just remove him from the classroom temporarily. But she wouldn't do it. She took him to the back and talked to him. It did nothing. Nothing. Other children looked at him and that set him off. I was just so angry that she wouldn't remove him when he was obviously actively trying to sabotage my lesson. After the fact, she agreed that we should have removed him. But what good was it then? The student argued with me later about his conduct sheet and marks that I had given him during my lesson. I told him that I had the whole lesson on DVD and when I received the disc I wanted to sit down with him and watch his behavior. Mrs. Heath and I are both at our wits end. Our classroom has been nicknamed by the principal as "The Fire Pit" because so many of our students have terrible tempers. That it is...a fire pit.

As I think about that day, I am reminded of one of the fathers of education, John Dewey. Dewey subscribed to the theory of continuity of experience, which means every experience a person has is altered by previous experiences which then affects future experiences. I try to remember this as I look back on days like this in "The Fire Pit." There are reasons that the student I mentioned acted the way he did, so defiant to my authority. I had failed in the beginning of the year in many ways with this particular student. I had followed the lead of my mentor teacher and treated him differently than other students. He was particularly rambunctious from the very beginning, and my mentor teacher was more lenient with him than the other students. He was allowed to get away with things that other students would have been punished for in an effort to simply "keep the peace" in the classroom. Those experiences affected the experience he had during my lesson that day. He knew he could get away with more, and he took full advantage of this. As a teacher, especially a student teacher, establishing authority from the very beginning was very important. Try your very best to hold students to high expectations. Looking back, I think having higher standards would have changed this student's experience in the classroom as well as my experience teaching him leading to more successful classroom management.

COMMIT TO TEACHING

3/6

My time in the fire pit is swiftly coming to a close. My feelings are mixed at best. It is my biggest endeavor every morning to try to walk in with a positive attitude. It is my biggest endeavor every afternoon to try to not look with dread on returning the next morning. It may seem now that I don't enjoy teaching, but that is the farthest thing from the truth. I enjoy almost every aspect of teaching. I enjoy the heck out of my students every day. I enjoy planning exciting and engaging lessons for them. I enjoy being in a classroom all day, despite of the lack of bathroom and lunch breaks. Despite all I enjoy about teaching, it still is a struggle every single day.

I was accustomed to receiving a variety of responses when I told people that I was choosing teaching as my career. I experienced reactions ranging from pity to amusement to disgust. The harshest critics of my chosen career path have not been my parents, family, or friends. They have been the very teachers under whom I have worked. I cannot tell you how many times a teacher who I am supposed to be observing or learning from has asked me if I am sure this is what I really want to do. Usually after something goes wrong in a classroom or a student is disrespectful, the veteran teacher will look at me with a smirk and ask if I am sure I still want to be a teacher. Have I thought this through? Do I really want to do this every day? Am I sure? These questions remind me of things you might ask someone who is about to get married, not someone about to graduate from college and start their career.

There is also a lot of rhetoric among teachers about leaving the field. I think I heard about five different versions of the same statistic by the time I was a senior. This percent of teachers are leave teaching within the first three years is significant. In the school where I completed my student teaching, I was told of a teacher who allegedly had great classroom management but was losing her drive to teach. I was told I should observe this teacher and could learn from the rapport she had with her students in the classroom. I had planned to complete my observations over winter break, but by that time I was no longer able to observe this teacher. I was told by the teacher's intern that her heart was no longer in teaching. "*My heart just isn't in it anymore.*" This is a phrase you hear often from teachers who are leaving the field. I am reminded once again of marriage. A phrase that is used as a reason to leave teaching could just as easily be used as a reason to leave a marriage. Is becoming a teacher like getting married? As teachers, am I married to teaching? In many ways, I now believe that to be a successful teacher I will be married to teaching at least for the eight-plus hours a day I am engaged in the work. Students need your whole heart and soul during the school day. I learned that to be effective you must be prepared to make this commitment.

IF I CAN GET THROUGH THIS, I CAN GET THROUGH ANYTHING

The experience of being a student teacher can sometimes feel like a dream come true, like mine did in the first days. The experience can sometimes feel like a fire pit, like in my classroom, but if you can get through:

- being on your feet for eight plus hours, five days a week
- having chairs thrown at you
- dealing with being the second string of authority in a classroom
- being the only person in your group of friends who is exhausted at 8 pm
- feeling inexperienced and frustrated as a student teacher

If you can get through all of these things, you can get through student teaching. And you will come out as a well-rounded and prepared teacher. You will still be a sane person. You can get through anything. I did. And, I know you can.

MARGARET BATES

10. GAINING A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

PAVE Academy Charter School

There are generalized stigmas attached to public schools in South Louisiana and more specific stigmas in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. A typical conversation about public schools generates a narrative reflecting the stereotypical perceptions of a lack of parental involvement, low test scores, teachers who are unsupportive, and an administration with flaws. Public schools in South Louisiana are often reflective of this stereotype, and where there are concerns, particularly around test scores, the reality is complex. Without nuanced understandings, there is a general mood of negativity when speaking about public schools in South Louisiana. Knowing I would be placed in one of these schools for my student teaching made me wary. I assumed my mentor teacher would not be ‘the best’ teacher. I imagined that she would struggle with classroom management, and she probably would not use the most current approaches to engage students. I thought the good practices I learned at Louisiana State University would be well beyond what she learned in her pre-service teacher program. I thought I would have to try and make this classroom work, and fix the teacher’s ‘bad teaching’ all year. I believed that my urban school settings would be underperforming, and the students would be completely out of hand with significant behavior problems, such as fighting and being disruptive. These negative preconceived notions going into the classroom caused me to believe that I needed to critique my mentor teacher’s every move, beginning with the moment I walked into her classroom. What I needed to learn in my student teaching experience was not to use critique but instead a critical lens to drive my own instruction, and to implement practices I knew would benefit the students. A focus on students should remain at the heart of the student teaching experience and throughout a teacher’s career.

8/8/2012

I just arrived at Wilson Elementary. I got here about 35 minutes early, which is good, but waiting is hard now. I was very nervous last night. Most of the other girls in the program seemed really excited and confident, but I am just very anxious. There are only two cars here in the parking lot. I’m not sure how many teachers work here or the size of the school. The parking lot seems fairly small. The school is across from a metal-framed building with tractors

M. BATES

and huge crop fields. It took me about 23 minutes to get here...it is much farther than I thought. I'm going to wait until about 7:45 to go into the school. More teachers are arriving as I'm sitting here. I'm getting more nervous. Some questions I should ask today: What is the size of the school? What is the arrival and leave time for me? What will the daily schedule look like? What are some important dates I should know? What are the names of the students in my class?

Recounting the anticipation in my first day's journal entry, it is impossible to ignore the nervousness I felt at the prospect of entering this "foreign" experience. In retrospect, I am surprised that I was not more excited; I just recall being very unsure about what to expect of the experience. My worries definitely affected the joy that I wanted to feel upon finally stepping into a classroom. In fact, it reminded me taking a sex-education class in high school. After taking that class, the world seemed like a scary and disease-filled place to be. In the years leading up to student teaching, the process of becoming a teacher seemed just the same: scary and dangerous.

In choosing elementary education as my field of study, I imagined that the process would be easy. I had been through thirteen years of schooling, so how hard could it be to teach children on the elementary level? I was very familiar with the idea of being a teacher as my mom, family friends, and many other close acquaintances had worked in schools. Certainly I could do it as well, right? My yet untried notions of school were influenced by childhood joys such as fieldtrips, art projects, and recess. As I went through my classes at LSU, I realized the nature of teaching was far more dynamic than these quaint recollections allowed.

As an undergraduate student, it seemed that all the preparation for student teaching focused on the overwhelming amount of work that would be expected of me. On the last day of my classroom management class, we were unpleasantly surprised to find that the day's plan consisted of more than simply turning in our projects. Instead, a panel of LSU students who were finishing up their student teaching presented to us, and we listened as they related their experiences.

5/4/2012

I just left classroom management. She kept us the full three hours. The student teachers that came to talk to us were helpful, but seemed completely overwhelmed. The mood of the conversation was clouded with negativity, of things we should expect. The message was clear: our whole lives would be consumed by stress, but it would all be okay because the sweetness of the students themselves would make it worth our efforts. Now, I'm suddenly feeling anxiety about what I'm getting myself into. Why had I spent the past three years of college working toward something that will make me miserable? I am having a lot of anxiety about my future. After today, this

experience has made me seriously reconsider whether I have chosen the best major for myself.

My anxiety was not about which grade level or school I would be assigned to for student teaching. Those sorts of things were out of my control. My anxiety stemmed from the impossibly tall-seeming wall of work I was about to experience. I thought the coming year would be overwhelming because of the stories I had heard. I dreaded the constant stress the impending workload would cause and the consequent lack of freedom as articulated by those student teachers. I worried that my priorities would have to change, and I would have to sacrifice the things in my life that were important to me in order to complete student teaching and be successful. Above all, I was fearful about the nature of the work that would be required of me throughout the year.

Even with all of the horror stories I heard before going into student teaching and the anxiety that seemed to overwhelm me at times, the good outweighed the potential bad in my mind. I still found an excitement in the anticipation of meeting the students and the wonders of the classroom. What would they be like? Which students would surpass the limits of my patience? Which students would try to be the teacher's favorites? Would my mentor teacher and I get along, and would she possibly be a great support to me throughout my years of teaching? What would the students be interested in, and how could I foster their interests to help them grow? All of these exciting questions led me to believe that no matter how scared and stressed I may be at some points within the process, I needed to dive in. Would I be the one great teacher they remembered? I would be involved in these children's lives for a full year, and I wanted to have a positive effect on their lives in any way possible.

8/10/12

Today was the first day of school with students. It felt as though my mentor teacher did not come very prepared. She was very nonchalant and did not explain things very well. We have been taught at LSU that the first 3 weeks of schools should be spent building the community and teaching routines and rituals. Today, my mentor teacher taught procedures at random when a problem came up or when a student asked about it. She did not explain the procedures and did not practice them. We did one activity to start building the community, but the students were very reluctant to participate, so she ended the activity. My mentor teacher was very adamant about the desk being "hers," and the kids were absolutely not allowed to come near that area. I think that this separates the teacher from the students and sets up a negative power relationship in the classroom. These were just a few things I noticed on my first day of teaching that were contradictory to things I was taught at LSU as good practice in the classroom.

M. BATES

I now see that my reflection about the first day was resoundingly negative. I believe a lot of this negativity stemmed from my desire to learn and my fears of failure. I critiqued each and every thing my mentor teacher said. I was surprised that I did not see that at least some of the things I learned at LSU being applied in my new classroom. This first day was nothing like what I thought it would be. Since I had never seen a first day of school before, everything she said and did was very important to me. I wanted to see what worked, what did not work, and what techniques I could borrow. This thinking helped begin the process of turning my perspective into a critical lens. I thought that I should take each thing that I heard and saw and decide whether I wanted to remember it as something I would use or something that I would leave at this school, knowing that I had to bring it all to bear on and against all that I have learned.

As a student teacher, I learned that a critical perspective is necessary to learn. To make ourselves better teachers, we must critique. Student teaching is the one opportunity student teachers have before moving into our own classrooms and it is the last time to have a mentor the whole time; understanding the mentors' practices and having a critical perspective become a primary vehicles for understanding.

I found it very strange that my mentor teacher did not take the time to get to know her students. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938) stated that the teacher, "...must survey the capacities and needs of the particular set of individuals with whom [s]he is dealing" (p. 58). My mentor did not spend any time assessing her students' needs at the beginning of the year. She spent no time developing a community like I learned was good practice. After the very first day of class, I knew my placement would be interesting, and I also I began to worry about what the rest of the year would bring.

8/13/12

Today seemed like a pointless day. Mrs. Charles seems to be kind of lollygagging around and not actually teaching anything seriously. This morning she began telling the kids to turn in papers. She said it very quickly, didn't repeat it, and expected students to know exactly what to do. She found throughout the day many of the students hadn't turned in their papers. I believe this could have been solved by teaching the students explicitly. I found myself correcting students more today. I want to show my authority in the classroom, but I'm not sure how the students are responding to my discipline. I'm not sure how to change this because Mrs. Charles is not setting too many boundaries. Today there was some group discussion that I liked. The classroom makes me feel very comfortable, and I am not that nervous to teach when I will have to. I feel comfortable with the students themselves, the age of the students, and the material. Hopefully tomorrow will be a more instructionally focused day.

8/14/12

Today was a more “normal” school day. There were a few lessons and it wasn’t filled with sorting school supplies. I find that Mrs. Charles’ instruction is mostly rigid and limiting. She has an idea of exactly what she wants them to do and scolds the students if they are doing something else, even if they are doing something in a different way relating to the same topic. The students do a lot of workbook pages, and it seems they do this just to keep them occupied. I think this is why our behavior issues have increased recently.

8/16/12

Today I had the opportunity to teach a quick lesson because Mrs. Charles needed to go sit in on interviews for the new 3rd grade teacher we are getting. She left me with textbook activities to do with the students. After we finished with the textbook page I went through the answers so the students could get feedback on whether they understood the material. Most of the time, Mrs. Charles doesn’t go over the work with the students after they complete it, so the students don’t know if they are doing it correctly. It all just seems like busy work.

Within those first few days of school, I picked apart everything my mentor teacher did. The trick is not to allow these judgments to have an effect on relationships with you are trying to build. And, I quickly realized that I needed to balance positive critiquing and negative critiquing in order to improve my own teaching. I tried to recognize what I saw as ‘flaws’ and work to change my practices for the collective betterment of our students. Student teachers are like sponges in that we must soak up the information that we need and find useful yet also be prepared to wring out that which is not as useful. Although in my mind my mentor teacher made some wrong decisions in the way she ran her classroom, I could not change her. That was her way of teaching. What I could do was to try to implement best practices for the students wherever I could and maintain open dialogue to the extent possible.

10/8/2012

We had parent-teacher conferences this week. That was an interesting experience. My teacher has been at this school for 15 years, so she had taught a lot of our current students’ siblings. So much of the conferences were a little catching up on family situations. I think it is nice that my mentor teacher has this relationship with the parents, but much of it seemed like wasted time. There was an incident with one parent who was not happy with her son’s performance and certain grades he had gotten on assignments. She told us she had been sending notes with her son, but we had not received any of them. She also told us she almost pulled him out of school when he

M. BATES

received an F on a project that was completed in the second week of school. After this experience, I realized how important it is to emphasize open communication between the parents and teachers. The parent said she didn't want to bother my mentor with her concerns. I also realized the importance of keeping notes on individual students' grades, especially on a rubric-type assessment with a project. When we were discussing the project the student got an F on, my teacher pulled out the rubric from the project. She had the amount of points the students earned on each section, but no notes on why he got points deducted. At that point, she could not remember why she took off certain points or even what the project looked liked.

I was a little disappointed and confused as to why my mentor teacher had not taken notes on why she took off points on this student's project. The parent teacher conferences taught me the importance of effective communication with parents. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) stressed the importance of authentic communication in her book *The Essential Conversation*. Lawrence-Lightfoot shares ideas about how to build the community with parents and students in order to have effective parent teacher conferences. She offers ideas such as sending a letter to students before the year starts, having student led conferences, and keeping a portfolio of the students' work to use as a conversation starter in the parent teacher conferences. Finally Lawrence-Lightfoot provides insight into how a parent teacher conference should be lead as opposed to the parent teacher conferences I saw during my student teaching experience.

As the year progressed, I made myself more comfortable in the classroom each day. I taught lessons here and there, and slowly began asking my mentor teacher if I could take over science, social studies, and spelling each day. I taught just parts of the day so I could gradually push myself into the process of teaching full days. Little did I know, I wouldn't be able to prepare for my first full day of teaching.

10/10/12

This week, I had my first full day of teaching. On Sunday night at about ten o'clock, Mrs. Charles emailed and let me know that she would not be at school on Monday. Her son possibly had broken his arm and needed to be taken to the emergency room in the morning. She also emailed me all of her lesson plans for the week and a few directions for the substitute who would be in the classroom. My first reaction was simply to be glad I would be there to help out the substitute, but then I started thinking that I could use this opportunity to my advantage. I eventually needed 180 hours of teaching credit and had a few teaching hours already, but mostly from teaching one subject or helping out a small group. Mrs. Charles told me that the substitute would be Susan, the daughter of woman who worked at the school, and with whom I had bonded when I broke the laminating machine...Oops! I felt confident that I could ask for control of the classroom and that she would be

agreeable to it. I decided that because of the time constraint, I would just follow Mrs. Charles' lessons exactly without trying to edit (even if it was workbook activities) to reduce the stress on my first full day of teaching. I got to school really early and immediately went to Mrs. Charles' room to start gathering papers the students would need for reading, spelling, and English. Overall, the day went very smoothly. We had no exceptional behavior problems or meltdowns, and covered everything for each subject on Monday's lesson plans. Susan happily sat in the back of the room at Mrs. Charles' desk the whole day. I even quickly developed a formative assessment for math while the students were at recess so that Mrs. Charles could group the students the next day if she wanted to (which she did not), since I was to be at a training the next day. I did not see any negative repercussions from my teaching on Monday so I felt really accomplished! It was not at all as scary as I had feared, and I was definitely not as nervous as I thought I would be for my first full day of teaching. Maybe Mrs. Charles' absence dissolved the pressure to perform, but I am happy I had that experience.

After I taught a full day, I began to feel some confidence. My first full day went well, and I was sure that I could take on a full week of teaching myself.

10/19/2012

I asked my teacher if I could teach all next week. It is intimidating, but I know one day I will be doing it all day every day, so I am excited about the practice. Planning is overwhelming. I am in the process of planning now, and it is very difficult to think of fun activities and actually create the activities. I am excited to be doing it, but it seems like a lot of work for one hour of a lesson that I can never use again (other than now having the template on my computer). Lots of cutting and gluing!! I am really trying to focus on making fun, interactive things for this upcoming week so that I can get feedback on activities other than workbook pages. I am anxious to see what this week will bring! My anxiety stems from the insecurity of failing, or being underprepared. To my surprise, although I told my mentor teacher I would be planning all the lessons, she planned other lessons on top of mine, which consisted of workbook pages and textbook work. I am not sure why she did this. Maybe it was for the other third grade teachers or perhaps she was worried about what I had planned, but at least we had options for other things to do in case my timing was off.

When I started planning my lessons the process was very intimidating. I had never done this before and it was something that I soon would be responsible for every day. I really tried to make each and every lesson interactive, creative and fun for the students. I wanted to incorporate everything I had learned in my previous four years of college. Right away I wanted to implement all the great ideas that my

M. BATES

college professors had taught me, but I needed to take one thing at a time. I did not have to use everything learned in college all in one lesson. I needed to realize that I had the time to try different things throughout the whole year, and so I slowed down. After all of my planning, no matter how hard it was, I felt really prepared for my first week of teaching. I was a little anxious about getting tired and worn out, but since I would be doing the planning by myself when I had my own classroom I knew I needed the practice. I worked hard to try and make engaging lessons that were very different from Mrs. Charles' lessons. I had observed and noted what I saw as mistakes that I thought Mrs. Charles made in the beginning of the year—I was determined to not make the same mistakes.

10/26/2012

This week I taught four full days. After Monday, I was exhausted. I have taught a full day before, but it was not as stressful as Monday was. My math lesson seemed hectic, but overall it went well. The students were up and moving and learning from each other so although hectic, I think it was effective. My mentor teacher had to leave in the middle of my math lesson due a family issue, so I was alone for the rest of the day. During social studies after lunch and recess, the students seemed almost dead, completely non-stimulated. Then during English after social studies, I was so excited about a video I had prepared to play called "Mr. Morton" from School House Rock which informed about subjects and predicates. After I played it for the students they told me that they hated it. They all said it was boring. They still seemed dead, so I asked if they would maybe want to hear it again, but they could stand up and move around to the song and they were all in agreement, but after this I seemed to lose control. No one seemed to be listening, and I had to repeat directions what felt like 100 times. Even with an exact description of the list of steps to do on the board, they would not follow instruction. I could feel myself getting physically frustrated with the students and it was very hard for me to keep calm. I was getting impatient and the whole lesson felt like a blur. I didn't feel motivated to teach anything. I had no one's attention, the students were not retaining information, and I felt myself reacting negatively to them, which I hated. I have always wanted to be the calm, supportive one for the kids and even in the face of chaos remain composed, but today I felt like a huge mess. At that moment I felt myself wanting to go back to the way Mrs. Charles teaches with the textbook and workbooks because I seemed to lose control when I tried activities. Maybe I didn't explain things fully and completely for correct implementation. I always feel a huge struggle being able to explain myself effectively when discussing a topic. I think I let the students loose too quickly without giving full explanations and that is why I received so many questions during a lesson. This is something I will continue to try and work on. After Monday,

my confidence was very low but I tried to pick it back up for the rest of the week.

Tuesday went well. Mrs. Charles was back and the teaching day went very smoothly for me. Then came Wednesday...Mrs. Charles was gone again on a field trip with her daughter and I knew who the sub was going to be and that she would sit in the back the whole time so I would have the floor. When Mrs. Charles is not there I see a difference in the students' behavior. The children seem to act out more. I cannot tell if this is a classroom management issue on my part or simply the fact the Mrs. Charles isn't present. If it is a classroom management issue, I need to reflect on my own practices and see where I can improve. I feel my hands are tied by the school's discipline system, but I struggle with consistency and also the actual words I say to the children when I am correcting them for disruptive behavior. We learned at LSU not to yell at students (obviously), but Wednesday I found myself getting so frustrated that I was yelling, telling students to move down their clips, lecturing students on good behavior in the classroom, and constantly telling them to stop talking. When I got home I could not believe my own lapse in judgment. I could have and should have been able to handle the situation, but trying to improve the situation was fruitless. Was I not engaging students enough in the activities I planned? Was I not giving explicit directions? Was I being too negative? In the moment and even after, I had no idea what I could have done to make things better. Then I thought it might be because Mrs. Charles wasn't there. It made me feel a little bit inadequate. The students know I am a student teacher and Mrs. Charles is their main teacher, but had I not established myself well enough in the classroom for the students to respect me? Today left me feeling completely confused about my ability to teach effectively, and I know I am learning but I feel like I'm getting pulled into bad practice. I know there will always be these kinds of days at school, but I felt that I should have been able to handle today and my inability left me feeling inadequate.

After my first week, I understood why and how some teachers become hardened. In theory, teaching seems easy but I found that though I had critiqued my mentor teacher harshly early on, the reality is that I too struggled when it was my opportunity to teach. Looking back, only in the first full week was I ready to revert back to my mentor teacher's ways of workbook activities, ways that I regarded as lazy teaching. I realized this might have been a result of intensification or the continuous of increasing demands with less than ideal allocation of resources to support the demands placed on teachers. Apple wrote that intensification is more often found in schools "dominated by behaviorally prespecified curricula, repeated testing, and strict and reductive accountability systems." (p. 205). This description fit the environment of my student teaching school and was the environment in which my mentor had taught for the majority of her career. Seeing the effects of

M. BATES

intensification on my mentor makes me wonder how I handle the increased pressure for accountability without time or resource when it is just me and I am the teacher. Will I become burned out like so many others, or will I be able to rise above the pressure?

This experience made me feel like I was losing control. I questioned my classroom management and my teaching. I think my criticism of myself at this point was very important and positive in the long run. Green (2009) spoke to the idea that, “in order for a person to take action they have to go against their own previous perceptions and with that awareness a person can move forward and engage with the world to make it meaningful” (p. 161). I related to this quote because as a learner, I needed to feel the struggle and reflect and move past things my mentor teacher was doing, because in the end, I believed that I knew what was best for the children. I knew regardless of the rough day I was having, I needed to leave behind the ideas of the traditional classroom (Dewey, 1938). I had to push to do what I knew was best for the students even if I was struggling through the experience.

I soon moved from critiquing my mentor teacher to a more balanced critical lens when I was in the classroom teaching by myself – I felt stressed and insecure. It was easy to critique my mentor teacher and everything she was doing while she was teaching, but I came to realize that it was unfair to compare my experience to hers as I had not experienced teaching daily for years as she had; it was unfair to judge her actions but rather attempt to use a critical perspective to organize our own teaching realizing that the work of teachers is complex. As a student teacher I had the opportunity to observe through an important critical lens and I felt responsible to learn as much as possible while I was there. Every teacher is a mentor and can teach us, and we can learn from every interaction, even if the teacher’s philosophy of education does not align with ours. I learned to keep an open mind and not be afraid to make mistakes during this teaching experience.

10/31/12

On Monday I switched over to my special education placement. I was very excited for a change of scenery. After being in Mrs. Charles’ class since the beginning of the year, I was curious to know if all of the teachers at the school taught in the same way that she did. Do they all do textbook work? I will be in my special education placement for 8 weeks. I was getting a little worn out in the third grade classroom. I was getting frustrated with the process of how the team did lesson planning and frustrated with the lessons themselves being full of workbook pages. I just observed on Monday in my special education placement, First, we did Direct Instruction reading with five students in the room. Each student is working with a different adult- the special education teacher, Mrs. Davis, or a paraprofessional. Mrs. Davis takes a week with each student to get an idea of where the students are in their instructional process so she is able to collect data at least once a month

on each student. Then, we go next door to a fourth grade classroom for math inclusion instruction. Mrs. Davis has three students who receive special education services in that classroom, but the two teachers do AMAZING co-teaching. They plan together, do formative assessments to drive instruction, and feed off of each other during the lesson. I feel like I am finally seeing good teaching where textbook work is not the sole focus.

I experienced two very different classroom environments in my student teaching experiences. In my regular education placement, my mentor teacher had been teaching at Wilson Elementary for 15 years. She was still open to new ideas, but remained satisfied doing less work, following the textbook and relying only on test grades to drive instruction. In *The Aims of Education*, Noddings (2009) stated, “simply accepting the state as it is and the system as it is (merely pushing it) to perform its perceived function more vigorously is dangerous (and lazy) strategy” (p. 426). My mentor teacher complained most days about the state of education today, but did not do anything in her classroom to effect change. My special education placement mentor teacher knew the importance of data driven instruction and used it each day to create her lessons. My special education experience exemplified the best of what I learned in college, and what I attempted to implement in my regular education placement. This inclusion classroom included new strategies and student teacher involvement. Dewey (1938) wrote that in traditional schools, “teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced” (p. 18). My regular education mentor teacher was stuck in traditional schooling means and methods, whereas my special education placement clearly exemplified progressive education. I found myself neither in between these two ends nor at the same place of my mentors – I was at a place where my critical perspectives were beginning to inform the kind of teacher I am to become.

After my classroom experiences, I wonder what I will do when I have a classroom of my own. Will I become lazy and take the easy way out? Or, will I become a teacher like my special education mentor teacher? I realize that I must be more positive in my evaluations. Although things occurred in the classroom with which I did not agree. I learned instead to focus on gathering lessons and strategies that would be useful to me rather searching for the things I would not want to do, say, or implement. I set my ego aside and focused on using my critique to drive my thinking about instruction. Finding the balance between negative and positive critique, developing a critical perspective and identifying applicable critical lenses are essential to the student teaching experience. Employing a critical perspective will serve me as I become a better teacher. And as I become a better teacher, I am reminded that each and every person and situation encountered during student teaching had at least one lesson to teach; I am still learning which of the lessons that I learned will be the driving forces in my instruction.

HILLARY B. EISWORTH & KENNETH J. FASCHING-VARNER

11. CONCLUSION

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

We hope that as you read the narratives in this volume you have gained insights about the journey of student teaching. No student teacher's journey can be described as a singular experience, and these chapters are merely aspects of each author's experience. These narratives are not complete in their telling.

We who prepare teachers often wish that we could make student teachers feel better about the unknown aspects of the process. The chapter authors highlighted aspects of student teaching that are only discovered as you enter the work: who are the students you will be teaching, who your mentor teacher will be, what the school is like, how the relationships will be, etc. We struggle to comfort our candidates and help them know that student teaching is a journey we have ourselves taken, and one from which they will have the ability to grow and learn.

So we see this volume, and particularly its conclusion, as an invitation to you as the reader. Whether you are still in coursework, just starting your student teaching, in the middle of the experience, or already in the classroom, we hope that the reflective process of these authors can serve as a guide to reflective understandings of your work as an educator.

We wish to leave this volume with our own insights about the challenges of preparing teachers today, as well as highlight some of the common themes that ran throughout the volume. Finally, we end with brief updates from each of the chapter authors. We thought it was important for you to know where they have landed since their student teaching experiences. Some of the updates might surprise you while others might not.

CHALLENGES

We conclude this book by revisiting some of the challenges in preparing student teachers for their experiences. As editors, we want to be realistic about the challenges of preparing future teachers. Many of our student teachers' experiences were set against the backdrop of a complex modern educational system where much attention as of late has been given to reform.

Like most of the United States, Louisiana is riddled with calls for "teacher accountability," most often demonstrated through high stakes standardized tests for students. In this so-called accountability movement, teachers feel increased

pressure, as do teacher preparation faculty and student teachers. We wonder about the disconnects between those who are charged with executing the decisions and the ‘pedagogical others,’ such as lawmakers, governors, state boards of education, and taxpayers who speak through those whom they elect, which create the decisions.

The smoke and dust created by efforts for accountability create perceptions of a desire for a better schooling and educational system through changes in curriculum, teacher observation and evaluation, and access. Teachers increasingly think they must use prescribed teacher-proof curriculum, common standards and assessments across states, stressing test preparation as a best or effective practice. These efforts do not represent best practices; in fact they have created a paralyzing effect upon teachers who are becoming increasingly less focused on the art and science of teaching and more and more focused on the business of reform. Accountability has created smoke and dust because at the same time that these efforts are in place, the net results and outcomes for underrepresented groups has remained painfully flat. What has been created is an educational industrial complex where the crisis remains an active dialogue, and the solutions come in the form of for profit alchemy not designed to bring about real change.

Where are students, teachers, and teacher education programs left in this state of educational dismay? As teacher educators we find our students increasingly focused on meeting the “demands” of the profession, but less willing to consider the actual means that might lead to student engagement. As students, most of our candidates grew up in the No Child Left Behind era, and they often have little context beyond test preparation and high-stakes learning; it is difficult for them to imagine practices they have never seen.

Additionally we work against disconnects that our students feel as they transition from student to teacher. Our program has an explicit, unwavering, and fully engaged commitment to urban education. In 2011, the program moved to fully urban placements and many of the candidates initially expressed concern when they receive their placements. It was common to hear, “But I went to a private school” or “I really only want to teach in a private school”, and the extremes of, “I can’t believe y’all are making me go there.” Many of the authors’ sense of urban schools bleed through into their descriptions of the schools and their process of being placed. As a program we have much work to do to combat the negative stereotypes, fears, and uncertainty that go into urban education. Prior to 2011, candidates often had an urban and a suburban placement and used the suburban placement to further denigrate the experience of urban education. By having a year to build meaningful relationships with urban students and their families, now our candidates leave our program not only prepared to work in any environment, but often with a fierce protective edge when they hear others critique urban education. Since the accountability efforts of school reform often target students and teachers in urban settings, it is imperative that student teachers confront their potential biases, fears, and doubts to positively impact their settings.

CONCLUSION

A further challenge is that the very idea of teacher education is under attack. We live and work in South Louisiana, where teacher education is clearly under attack. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, significant emphasis on reconstructing schools in Louisiana's two largest cities, New Orleans and Baton Rouge, has centered on programs like Teach for America, Teach NOLA (New Orleans Louisiana), the Louisiana Resource Center for Educators' Certification Solutions. These and other programs provide teacher preparation with as little as five weeks of 'training,' prior to sending the new teachers into classrooms. The irony is that we send the least prepared teachers to work in the settings that have been identified as having the most significant needs. Programs such as Teach NOLA promote themselves by highlighting their perceived difference from teacher education. They say that they do not focus on theory like traditional programs and, instead, work to "transform talented professionals," emphasizing that smart enough people can be transformed into qualified teachers by their five-week preparation program. Louisiana, like many other states, encourages these short-term teacher preparation approaches, creating financial and structural hardship for those committing to four and five year preparation programs.

The faculty in our program model practices and experiences similar to those in which we hope our student teachers will engage their students. However, we often find that our candidates are paired with teachers who have become jaded with their accountability-era reality. Our students come back from field-placement, practicum, and student teaching visits telling us that their mentor teachers believe that we are in a "lala land," disconnected from the realities of schools. It is difficult to find mentor teachers willing to accept a student teacher for two reasons: the pressure they feel, and the disconnects between what they think will make them pedagogically successful with students, and the requirements of our Dewey-situated program, which emphasizes inquiry, dialogue, risk, and engagement. We know that many mentor teachers simply will not engage in the practices that we ask of our student teachers. Some mentor teachers will allow our students to try the practices we encourage, but, as described by many of the chapter authors, our candidates feel strong disconnects between what they see in the field and what they learn in their program's coursework and literature.

We work hard to address these disconnects and to build relationships with the schools and mentors. Our supervisors spend a significant amount of time in the schools, and our program faculty work to engage the principals and teachers. While it is difficult to convince practitioners of effective practices when they feel disempowered and deprofessionalized in their work, we push forward hoping that with repeated exposure to effective practices, and our supportive presence, we can make a difference that will impact children. We work with wonderful mentor teachers who not only give our candidates space, but also the support to engage with the practices they have been taught – and in these situations we have seen significant growth for the students in those classes as well as for the student teaching intern and his/her mentor teacher.

Finally, it should be mentioned that there is little economic support to prepare to be a teacher. Student teachers pay significant funds while their peers in alternative pathways with minimal preparation time earn money while gaining their experience. Charged with their own classrooms and the responsibility for providing reflexive mentorship to the interns, mentor teachers are paid minimal funds for their work. The mentor teachers we work with make less than \$600 a year (as little as \$18.75 a week or \$.47 an hour). We ask professionals to take on the responsibility for ensuring the preparation of the next generation of teachers, yet they are compensated at a rate that is about the same as that of many prisoners in prison jobs at Angloa prison an hour-and-a-half down the road. Compare \$600 a year with the average \$103,000 a year paid to a medical school supervising/mentor doctor. Is it any surprise that mentor teachers feel frustrated and often times disconnected from the mentoring aspects of their work? For us the answer is a resounding no! The continual deprofessionalization of teachers is significant. Couple deprofessionalization with all the challenges we have discussed in this volume, and we justifiably conclude that making real change is difficult, but necessary.

COMMON THEMES

Several common themes run throughout the nine chapters of this book. We briefly highlight these themes, as understanding them may be the key to greater success within the context of (student) teaching.

Fear of Unknown

Katie Lowder wrote explicitly about fear, however fear of the unknown was a common theme throughout the volume. Fear was not contained to the act of student teaching itself, but rather significant fear was centered on preparing for the experience, and on what the experience might do to change who the student teachers were. Chapters vividly described the first ride to school, the location of the school, and ideas before entering into the context. As a student teacher many of the decisions about the experience are out of your control and are made by others, such as program faculty, supervisors, principals, and offices of field experience. As a student teacher you need to embrace that most likely you will be able to control only your actions and decisions, and not much of the context that influences those actions and decisions.

Images of Teaching vs. Reality of Teaching

For many of the candidates having a mental picture of what they thought student teaching would be like made it difficult to understand how different the realities were. Teacher preparation should work to paint realistic pictures of education

CONCLUSION

while also emphasizing opportunities to bring about real change for children. Although none of the authors was paralyzed by the image not meeting the reality, the disconnect caused them to question their own beliefs about teaching, what they had learned in their coursework, and their ability to make connections between coursework and practice. This challenge is one that can be confronted by simply taking the experience for what it is and acknowledging that the complex reality might not match the often conjured images. Engaging in a reflective process is another way to acknowledge the tensions created by the image of teaching and its often distant reality.

Professional Differences

Almost every chapter in this volume highlighted some tension in the pedagogical and philosophical differences between student teacher and mentor teacher. As teacher educators we know that these tensions will continue as no two teachers are the same. Student teaching may be the one time when a teacher might be forced to co-inhabit the space of the classroom. The program supervisor can negotiate the dialogue about beliefs and practice for student teachers, but they must realize that teachers will always have to engage in professional dialogue and debate with colleagues and administrators throughout their career. While many of the chapter authors described a certain level of uneasiness with the disconnects, we believed it is important for novice teachers to be empowered with a strong professional voice and be able to articulate their beliefs.

KIMBERLY A. WHITE-SMITH

AFTERWORD

Chapman University

September 15

This was the first day of 6th grade and my stomach was in knots. The kids physically switch classes for English in the afternoon, so I will have double the names to learn. The kids are so proud that they can walk to another class for a different subject. It makes them feel that much closer to junior high school.

I noticed that room 432 has many more minority kids compared to ours, like almost half of the class is either Latino or Black. I wondered why that is the case? You would think that among only two 6th grade classes that the distribution would be more even. I asked my cooperating teacher, Tony, about it. She said, "Since 432 is being taught by a new teacher this year a lot of the parents requested me, because they are familiar with me, which left Rachel [the teacher of 432] with the students who were left. You know, the kids whose parents aren't active in the PTA and don't give big donations." With that she chuckled and gave me a wink then added, "You're lucky to be with me, that class is nothing but trouble."

September 16

Ronnie, a red haired freckle faced boy in my class, was being chased in between periods by a young Latina with long brown hair and dark eyes. She began to scream and throw punches at him. I pulled her away and sat down with her. I asked her what she was doing. She explained, "Ronnie used to be my boyfriend last year, but he had two girlfriends, so I broke up with him." The bell rang and she had to line up to go to her classroom (432).

September 17

Room 432 came into our class for English and I got a chance to talk to the young lady from yesterday, her name is Melissa. She told me that she was a horrible reader and writer because English is her second language. I wish I could be in Melissa's class so I could work with her. Room 432 is the class I need to be in. That's the class where I belong, not in here coddling the Booster Club Babies. This is so frustrating. This is not what I imagined teaching to be like.

AFTERWORD

October 3

Tony assigned an essay entitled, "What a New Yorker Should Know." I think that she was pressed for time and just made this assignment up out of thin air. Anyway I was looking through the essays after the kids left for the day and I came across the drafts from room 432. As I read the students' writing, tears began to well in my eyes. There is a chasm between the writing skills of the students from our class and those in 432. How is this possible? Aren't these kids in the same school?

Once I became acclimated to the truncated sentences and lack of punctuation, I became enthralled with the story and poetry the students were sharing. However, I mostly became immobilized by the pain. Melissa wrote, "If you are New Yorker then you now its danger. Especly for girls. You cant walk New York and not get raped. WATCH OUT." The images of New York that she invoked informed me of that she lived in a very different city than the kids in my room. I really want to talk with her.

September 23

Sitting here in this room with the air conditioner on full blast, I'm freezing. It starts me to thinking, I'm cold now but wait until December. I've never lived in a city where it snowed and if my financial aid doesn't come through, it will be a long

December

I don't student teach on Fridays, so I went to the employment office at 112 Main to see if Sara in the employment office can find me a job.

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She did it, Sara found me a job. I will be a security guard for the graduate dorms. I will get home from student teaching, take my classes until 10 and then start my shift from 11pm-5am. Then I will shower and head over to my student teaching placement by 7am. I am so excited, I will be able to eat. Oh crap, when will I sleep? Oh well, can't have everything.

November 7

For the next two weeks, I take over the class starting today. I am implementing a unit on poetry. We are going to read poems, write poems, and act them out. We are going to recite Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Gabriela Mistral and for the first time this year, the four children of color in my class will be exposed to writers that look and sound like them.

November 14

Today I had a breakthrough with Shekeena. She is the only Black girl in our class. When I suggest to Tony that we need to do more to include Shekeena in the life of the classroom, she just shakes her head and says, “Shekeena isolates herself. There is only so much you can do Kimberly, you can’t save everyone.” Under my breath I mumble, “I don’t want to save everyone, I just want to save her.”

Shekeena walked over to me and read her draft:

*When I wake up in the morning I feel all alone
 When I get to school I look like a fool
 Because I am all alone
 When I’m all alone I try to make myself feel at home but I still feel
 All alone
 Shekeena*

She finished and looked up at me with a smile. I fought back the tears that stirred in my chest and talked with her about her writing and the isolation she feels in our classroom. At recess she plays with her friends from room 432. As I rose from my seat, through the corner of my eye, I saw Tony wipe a tear away as she listened to me and Shekeena connect. I feel validated.

November 17

Today was the last day of my unit on poetry and for the first time, in my bones, I honestly feel like—I can do this! The end of September we welcomed a new student—a smiling eyed Jamaican boy with a beautiful lilting accent. His name is Delonn. He has had a very hard time connecting to the other kids. He rides the subway and takes two buses to get to school. When he arrives he is tired and hungry. The other kids who get dropped off by drivers or walk to school cannot relate, nor understand his frustration. Last week I caught him passing a note in class. The note read, “Here, here, here you live in a hole your mother do nasty things for a living and your father the opposite. My whole world is finish over you and you are a hoe.”

He was given two weeks detention and was suspended for a day. I volunteered to sit with him in detention. I thought it was an opportunity to help me better understand what he was going through. He explained to me that Mercy was the only kid who was nice to him and he loved her for that. However, she didn’t want to be his girlfriend and that hurts his heart. So I invited him to write about it. After several drafts he presented me with the following narrative,

AFTERWORD

I HATE LOVE

I hate love, love is not wonderful when you're 11 years old. I loved Mercy so much when I first came to this school, I took one look at Mercy and I was in love. Now I hate myself and my life. Shekeena asked Mercy out for me and she said that she'd think about it. But then I hear a roomer that Mercy liked Stephan. I blew up, my heart stopped. And worst of all on 10/5, my friends stopped me and told me to look her in the eyes and tell her how I feel. I was too scared. I am very emotional. That same day I saw Mercy and Stephan together. I cried my eyes out. Now maybe I lost my soul and spirit and maybe I am an abnormal person in this world. That's why I "hate" love and you would too if you were emotional. I'm serious, my mother says I cry for everything. I am lost somewhere and the only person who can save me from this horrible thing is Mercy.

I showed my cooperating teacher and the principal. Both were taken aback by the content and manner in which Delonn was able to express himself. The principal added Delonn to a support group run by the school psychologist. I hope in some way when I am done here I will have made some difference.

May 28, 1995

Dear Lord,

I am so disheartened today. New York City isn't hiring teachers and I probably won't be able to find a job and I am desperately broke and exhausted. For the first time in my life, I feel uncertain about myself and my future. What do I do?

October 22, 2013

Recently, my 9 year old daughter and I moved from an apartment into a house closer to her school. My office had boxes piled to the ceiling filled with stacks of papers and unmarked files. I could not sit down and draft the afterward for this book until I had cleared the clutter from my office; the words would not flow. So I began to pull boxes and made two piles, keep and discard. At first it was easy, discard old student work that was never picked up, throw away that paper I wrote eons ago as a undergrad in that anthropology class, until I came upon the box that stored my papers, journals, and pictures from my teacher education program. It made me pause. Who was I when I entered the profession? What did I hope to achieve? What were my experiences in the schools? How was my life and experiences as a student teacher different 20 years ago than the student teachers who live within the chapters of this text?

I connected on many levels with the authors' stories in this volume. I remember what my body felt like as I experienced hunger, worry, and frustration. I completely identified with Katherine Steinhardt's narrative of weathering her situation and identifying when you are in an environment that is toxic to your spirit. Like Katherine my second semester of student teaching took place in a different school and it renewed my outlook.

Twenty years ago, the context of the field was different. We did not have the environment of unyielding accountability pressures in which our current young educators have been schooled and now teach. However, there are some aspects that have not changed. In 1994, I was a starving pre-service teacher at Teachers College, Columbia University. I was unsure how I could afford to live, while I trained to be a professional educator. My peers from undergrad had moved on to graduate programs in business and law that provided internships which sustained them. When they graduated they made salaries that more than compensated for the debt they accrued, while I hoped to get a job. Like the current environment, 1994–95 was a time when the states budgets were not solvent and jobs were tight. The city of New York had a freeze on hiring and I eventually had to move to find a job. I too experienced the fear of the unknown and that “fatigue and sense of being tired that comes from teaching” so vividly described by Mackenzie Segrest.

Coming from a program that engendered a Freireian philosophy and modeled culturally relevant practice, my image of teaching in public schools was very different than what I experienced. I was left to ponder how and why inequity and indifference was so pervasive. I experienced firsthand how tracking created segregated schools within schools that left the most vulnerable populations in the hands of the least skilled. In addition, I experienced professional differences with my cooperating teacher, whom I felt perpetuated academic and social disparity in her class and in the school. However, I did not have the analytical tools to identify it nor did I feel empowered to express it.

I am amazed and astounded, at the level of critical self-reflection and thoughtfulness in which the authors of this volume were engaged as they navigated the challenges of their student teaching experiences. It is a testimony to the scaffolding and supports given them through their pre-service program. This volume is important and relevant to my work as a teacher educator. In reflecting upon my own student teaching experiences, it would have benefitted me to hear the voices of others who struggled as I did and to know that student teaching is not the end of journey, but the beginning of an adventure.

UPDATES

Kathy Le is currently a special education paraprofessional at Willow Creek Elementary in Centennial, Colorado. In this role, Kathy works closely with students on a one-to-one basis and in small group configurations to maximize the learning opportunities for students with disabilities. Thinking about her experiences in the Holmes program, writing this book, and her post-graduate work, Kathy thinks that keeping an open mind and positive outlook to everything in life is the only way to survive all the uncertainties that may arise. Kathy advises future student teachers to remain positive and take each and every experience as an opportunity from which to learn and grow.

Mackenzie Segrest is working as a third grade teacher at Children's Charter School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. As a third grade teacher, Mackenzie teaches children math, English language arts, and social studies in an urban setting. Reflecting on her experience in Holmes and writing this book, Mackenzie thinks that, regardless of the placement setting, the yearlong student teaching experience is the best preparation for future success. Mackenzie continues to be involved with Holmes' student teaching interns at her school. She believes that this helps to refine her teaching skills and gives her the chance to watch student teachers refine their skills. Mackenzie would like student teachers to build their own strategies to teach, connect with children while reflecting on what works for others, and, specifically, what works for themselves.

Katie Lowder is working as a first grade teacher at Bissonet Plaza Elementary School in Metairie, Louisiana. Katie received national attention this summer when her wedding photo, with a Tyrannosaurus Rex superimposed behind a running wedding party, went viral. Katie has learned that while your fears never go away, you must deal with them head on and hopes that future student teachers might learn to embrace their fears.

Jessica Daigle is employed at the Math, Science, and Arts Academy West teaching first grade. In her new position, Jessica feels a strong connection with her colleagues and is thankful for being on a cohesive and supportive team inside and outside of school. Although Jessica believes she has achieved some balance, she is also aware that there is always something that can throw a wrench in her plans. She believes that balance comes with experience. Her advice is that there will always be ways to learn and grow, and if being an educator is a your passion, you will always find a way to overcome the obstacles.

UPDATES

Katie Steinhardt is currently a first grade teacher at Lafayette Academy Charter School, an inner-city school in New Orleans, Louisiana. She teaches all subjects to 27 first graders. While she faces serious behavioral challenges every day, she looks to her colleagues for support, guidance, and laughter. She tells future educators to be proactive in seeking advice, and to view every inevitable struggle as a learning experience.

Nicole Chellino in a surprise twist, accepted a pre-kindergarten teaching position in Texas. While open to the alternate pathway described in her chapter, Nicole ultimately decided to pursue a teaching opportunity. Nicole remains open to future opportunities as they present themselves.

Kasey Ball is working as a substitute teacher in West Baton Rouge Parish. Kasey worked abroad this summer teaching science to fifth and six grades in Concepción, Chile. This experience exposed Kasey to the opportunities of teaching abroad and she is currently considering options to return to Chile in the spring of 2014 to teach.

Katherine Golemi studied in Chile as part of an international study abroad following graduation. Katherine decided not to pursue a teaching career until after her wedding in December 2013, as she and her fiancée will be moving. Katherine currently is working at Louisiana State University.

Margaret Bates moved to Brooklyn, New York, following graduation. Currently Margaret is co-teaching first grade at PAVE Academy Charter School in the Red Hook neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Reflecting on her experience as a part of the Holmes Program, and in writing this book, Margaret thinks that a willingness to be flexible was the greatest lesson that she learned. Margaret would like student teachers to practice building data-taking strategies to become fully aware of students' needs in the classroom.

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