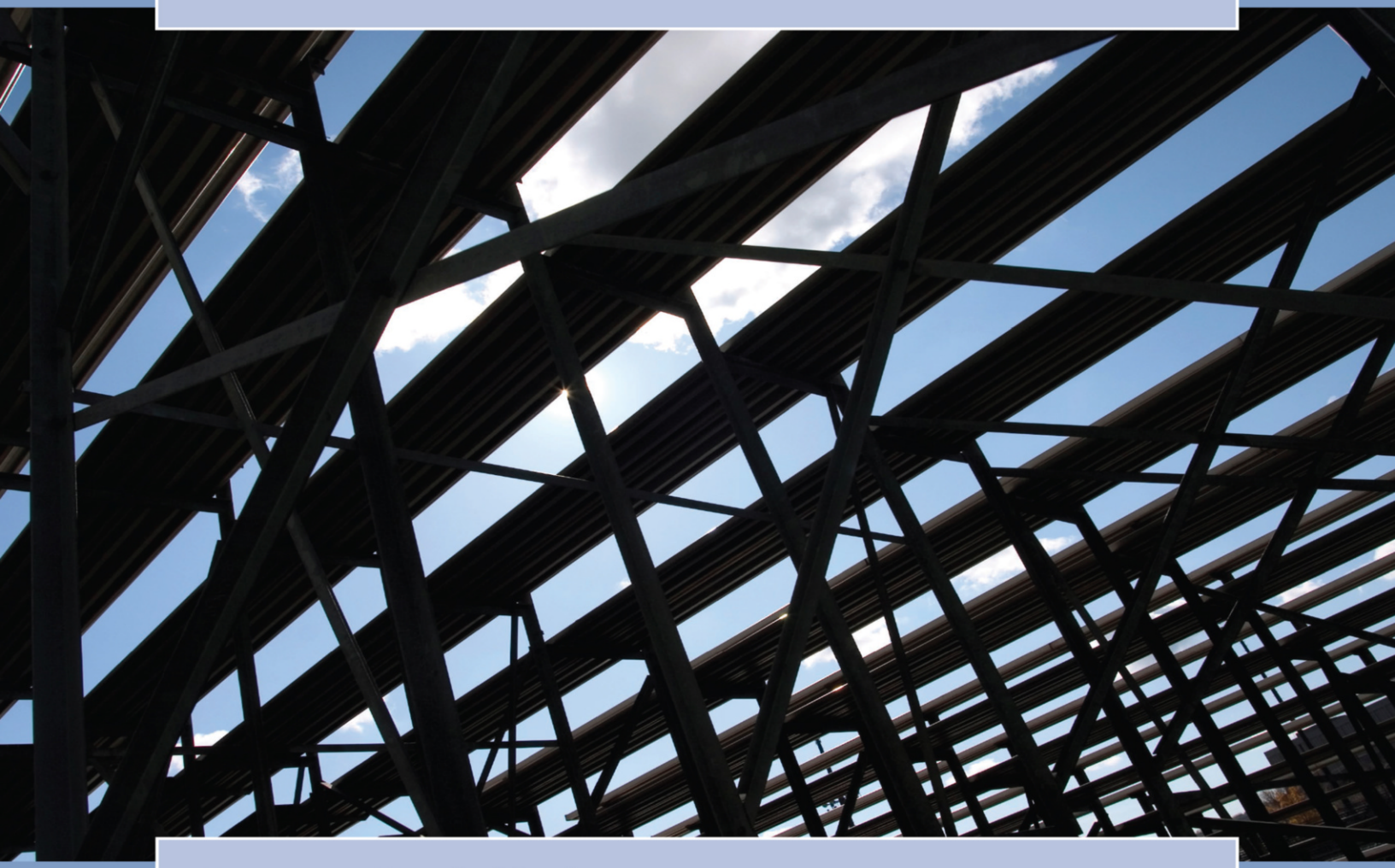
Under the Bleachers

Teachers' Reflections of What They Didn't Learn in College

Joseph R. Jones (Ed.)



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Edited by

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JOSEPH R. JONES

PREFACE

*"Wow, He Has a Nice A**" and Other Stories from My First Years of Teaching High School English*

I had just graduated from college with a teaching degree and a state certification. I was an idealist. I was a "world-changer." I was unaware of what I did not know. It was my very first day in my new classroom. I had spent a large amount of time during the summer months preparing the place where learning would transform young high school minds.

The first day arrived, and my first period class sat and listened carefully to my words. I was prepared. I had spent the entire semester prior in an eleventh grade English classroom where the cooperating teacher allowed me to teach the entire semester. She wanted to prepare me for the real world of teaching. I left my student teaching experience with a notebook full of ideas and letters of recommendations discussing what an amazing teacher I was. I had also been accepted into a graduate teaching program. I was ready.

I walked around the room discussing the information on the board. I was informally accessing the students' ability to comprehend the topic. After asking if there were any questions, I walked to the dry erase board and began removing all of the information. I was triumphant in my first lesson of my first full-time teaching job. Then, I heard these words: "Wow, he has a nice ass." I froze. I heard giggles and other noises that affirmed my belief that others had heard this student's words. I had to make an on-the-spot decision that would impact my classroom management for the rest of the academic year and possibly my career at the school.

As I reflect on this story and my years of teaching (both at the collegiate and secondary levels), I wonder what more I should be adding to my curriculum. In the chaos of my reflections, I realized that there were so many things that my own teacher preparation program did not teach me. It is important to note that I believe that my undergraduate and graduate programs were AMAZING, but there are still things that I was not prepared for in my schooling. I was not prepared for the "nice ass" comment, nor was I prepared for the irate parent who entered my classroom uninvited and interrupted my discussion of Camelot.

There were several other moments throughout my career as a novice teacher that still haunt my mind. For example, a few weeks after the "Wow, he has a nice ass" comment, my class was engaged in a cooperative learning assignment, and the door

flew open. Within seconds, two large teenage boys were engaged in a fist fight and "rolled" into my room. There was blood, spit, and lots of screams from my students. I am not a hyperbolist. I will admit that it was a frightening moment for me and my students.

One final personal moment occurred in the teachers' lounge. During lunch, I walked into the lounge to grab a soda. One of the assistant principals was degrading a student with a group of teachers by discussing the student's perceived sexual orientation. Before I could leave, I heard the question, "Joseph, he is in your class. What do you think?" The conversation had nothing to do with his academics. I quickly responded, "Talk to you guys later, I have a meeting. Sorry." I was abrupt and ran out as quickly as possible, but what does one do in such a position? In my true avoidance nature, I did not return to the teachers' lounge for the rest of the year.

In reflecting, I wonder why I was not more prepared to address some of the challenges that I faced as a new teacher. I recognize that, as members of teacher preparation programs, we cannot address all of the challenges that our students will face, but I feel as though something more needs to be done. In other professions, students receive a great deal more "real life preparation" for their jobs. Medical doctors engage in residencies that can be quite time consuming. In order to be a licensed therapist, most states require a two-year (or longer) "apprenticeship." Nursing programs require a mass of "clinicals."

In my undergraduate program, I was required to observe a classroom for a few hours each semester (only the upper level education courses). In most cases, the "real teacher" did not want me involved; thus, I sat in the back of the room, taking a few notes on what I saw. With that being said, my student teaching experience was dynamic only because I was there for the entire semester. I started on the first day of the semester and, by week three, I was teaching all of the courses. My cooperative teacher was absolutely wonderful. I was immersed in the lives of those students and the teaching profession, yet I believe that not all student teaching experiences are equal. Some of my former students (at previous institutions) complained about not being allowed to "take over the classes." Their cooperating teachers wanted to remain in control of the class, and student teachers were only "required to fully teach the courses for two consecutive weeks."

Thus, as I reflect, I believe that one of the reasons for which I continued in the profession is because I was a "little better prepared" for the reality of teaching, yet so many new teachers are not. They enter into classrooms and become overwhelmed with the chaos that teaching presents. They spend more time meandering the political establishments than is necessary. They spend more time with classroom management than with actual instruction. They are inundated with unnecessary battles.

Thus, I wonder what I should add to my curriculum. What "realties" can I add that will help this next group of young minds pass the "five year marker?" I believe that we as faculty members in teacher preparation programs should all be asking the same questions. I have always postulated that theory is important and that theoretical camps guide one's teaching practices. Every teacher must know about Dewey,

Vygotsky, and other educational philosophers. But what more? What more can I do in my classroom to help teachers survive and love teaching? What more can I do to help prepare them to address the "Wow, he has a nice ass" moments?

In compiling the chapters in this book, I hope to provide practicing teachers and pre-service teachers with another tool to help engender a successful teaching career. I hope to provide information to help teachers address the "I didn't learn that in college" moments. In doing so, the chapters are written by teachers who have a different backgrounds, different educational levels, and different disciplines. Nevertheless, they were all teachers who encountered some "interesting" moments in their teaching career and wished that they had received that "special knowledge" to help them deal with those moments.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID

With the assistance of persons immersed within the field of Education, Dr. Joseph Jones has created an insightful read. Those interested in pursuing a career in the field of education as well as those already deep within the trenches will not want to put this book down until the last pages are read, phrases are highlighted, or post it notes are in place. The reader will experience enlightenment due to the heartfelt and powerful stories held inside this book. This is a teaching tool.

—Sherry Blanco
Veteran High School Teacher
Art, New York State

Jones presents in this significant compilation a wide array of circumstances that new teachers found themselves confronting, as each author details his or her unexpected classroom experiences. From stories of handling inappropriate language choices to tales of battling uncompromising administrations, *Under the Bleachers* excellently depicts authentic, common happenings that pre-service educators may need to prepare to confront in their own future classrooms. Each author's unique voice aptly chronicles the terms of these difficult situations, composing an informative, cerebral collection vital to those planning to start their careers in education.

—Taelor Jackson Rye
First Year High School Teacher
English, Georgia

The field of education can be a rewarding but ever challenging career. This book is an essential read for new teachers and veteran teachers alike. The insightful stories that Dr. Joseph Jones has masterfully chosen as part of the book will inspire a new sense of resolve and hope for those who are feeling the weight of seemingly impossible demands placed on teachers. These compelling excerpts will assist the reader through the maze of uncertainty that many new teachers face.

—Wendi West
Veteran Teacher
Elementary, Virginia

Dr. Jones has presented this text in a manner that is insightful to all educators, veterans and novices. After being in the field professionally for four years, I was enlightened to see that many had the same opinions, struggles, and

experiences as I have had. Prior to reading the text, I experienced many times where I felt alone in a situation that was out of my own hands, but as I read the stories offered through these educators, I realized that many of us often deal with similar situations. This text is a must read for individuals with an interest in the teaching field as well as those who are currently teaching.

—Evan Moss
New Teacher
Elementary, Virginia

ADAM CROWNOVER

1. BECOMING A GOOD TEACHER – WHO CARES?

> There is in the act of preparing, the moment you start caring.
>
> —Winston Churchill

> Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have.
>
> —Margaret Mead

> Because the soul has such deep roots in personal and social life and its values run so contrary to modern concerns, caring for the soul may well turn out to be a radical act, a challenge to accepted norms.
>
> —Sir Thomas More

I was naïve to think that teaching was predominately an academic affair. I became a teacher because I loved school: intellectually, socially, athletically, and completely. I felt confident that, because I had been a good at school in those capacities and because I was a smart person, I would naturally be a good teacher. I operated under the false assumption that, since I was good at learning and knowing things, the final step of transmitting the knowledge to students would be a given. I incorrectly thought that the core challenge of teaching was the learning and knowing of things (content knowledge, instructional strategies, protocol and procedures and best practices) when, in fact, this is the easiest and least important part. Teaching is an often gritty and intimate human endeavor. Foremost, it is about building positive relationships with students and, through those relationships, working to help students grow into their best selves.

Fortunately, despite these misconceptions, my first year student-teaching went well. I seemed to have avoided some of the horror scenarios that members of my cohort shared during our graduate classes, and I counted myself "lucky" to have had good students. As the years passed, my "luck" continued, and even when I had students whose notorious reputations preceded them, they didn't present the dispositions I had been warned about. I also realized along the way that, although I had been attracted to the classroom because I enjoyed learning and the academic content, I remained because I loved the students.

After five years in a secondary classroom, I had the opportunity to return to the university to study and work in the College of Education. While supervising teacher-students, I found myself immersed in the process of teacher education and having to evaluate my experiences through a new lens. Listening to observations of my undergraduates from their visits to classrooms around the county, I was forced to consider many questions: What really matters in education? What do beginning

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teachers need to know? What makes a good teacher? What challenges do beginning teachers face? Suddenly, I was tasked with finding ways to help other teachers enjoy the same kind of "luck" that I had experienced.

It was through this reflection that I was able to identify that building positive relationships with students had been at the heart of what made teaching such wonderful experience for me. Not only had it contributed to my personal fulfillment and the richness of the profession, but it also helped me with differentiating instruction and managing the classroom and was at the heart of everything I did as a teacher. Beyond that, it was something that had gone virtually unaddressed in any of my formal teacher preparation. So to any teacher, particularly beginning teachers, I would say this: prioritize building relationships with your students. Because both students and teachers are wonderfully diverse, the process by which relationships in the classroom are developed should be specific to the teacher and to each student. However, I hope to discuss my approach in general terms in hopes that the discussion might bear fruit for others. At minimum, an awareness of the importance of devoting time to relationships and a desire to do so is a crucial first step.

Caring

If you don't care about students, you've chosen the wrong profession. This might sound obvious or harsh, but one needn't search very hard to find teachers in classrooms across the nation who demonstrate dispositions toward their students that range from toleration to loathing, and those classrooms are rarely pleasant for the students or the teacher. However, I think that, if polled, most teachers would answer in the affirmative with regards to caring for their students. Most teachers enter the profession with a desire to be a positive force in the lives of young people. Caring is the necessary condition that underlies the entire process of relationship building and maintenance.

Nel Noddings, in her book *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternate Approach to Education*, makes an important distinction between individuals who care and those who are able to creating caring relations. It is not enough for a teacher to care generally about young people or the future of the nation; teachers must care specifically for individual students in a manner such that the student being cared for is aware of and benefits from that care. We should care for students not only because establishing caring relationships assists in achieving the other goals of education but also because we want students to be carers themselves, so we should seek to model an ethic of caring (Noddings, 2005).

Knowing

Once you've committed to prioritizing relationships in your classroom, you have to take steps to build those relationships and to get to know your students. This is a two-way street, and it also involves letting your students know you. Demonstration

of your humanity, fallibility, and personality is important. For me, this process starts as soon as the students arrive in the classroom on the first day. I typically have the students create and decorate nametags and ask them to put an adjective that describes them on the placard. The first time I call roll, we have an exchange where they tell me those words along with giving me their preferred name and allowing me to make sure that I am pronouncing the name correctly. The learning and proper pronunciation and future use of student names is an important part relationship construction. I will often ask students to elaborate on why they picked certain adjectives. For example, if a student picks *athletic*, I will follow up by asking about which sports she participates in, which teams she follows, etc., or if the student selects *artistic*, I might follow up asking about which mediums he prefers to work in and later follow up by asking him to share some work. I think that this initial exchange and friendly banter as well as allowing students their moment in the sun helps open the door.

After the initial roll, I inform the students that we will absolutely not do anything academic on the first day. I will not hand out a syllabus; I will not discuss rules; I explicitly state that I want to spend the first day getting to know one another because that is most important to me. I also take the opportunity to share that I love teaching and working with students and that I am excited about the year. In teaching, I don't know that it's necessary to explain every decision to the class, but I prefer to do so when able. I think that giving the students a window into my rationale in this instance lets them understand how I operate, and demonstrating that I am a thoughtful, rational individual who is interested in them will be important in future exchanges with the students. Students, just like adults, appreciate knowing "why" more often than not. In this instance, they are also relieved to know that no "work" will occur that day.

After taking roll, I introduce myself – I have a silly PowerPoint with pictures of places I have lived and gone to school and of myself as a younger person with dated haircuts and outfits. The presentation has slides for favorite foods and sports teams and movies, and though it might be a bit self-indulgent, I try to keep it short. The students respond favorably and have a laugh at my expense, and humor helps students relax and feel more comfortable sharing about themselves later. Though it should be your mission to come to know your students, they also have a genuine curiosity about you, and giving them a glimpse of your humanity and letting them come to know you as an individual are important parts of relationship construction.

While I show the PowerPoint, I have the students complete a general questionnaire on which I ask things like:

- On a scale of 1–10, how much do you enjoy school?
- What are you most looking forward to this year?
- What sort of extracurricular activities do you participate in? How many hours a week do you spend in these activities? (sports, fine arts, job, religious organization, etc.)
- On a scale of 1–10, how much do you already know about (insert course subject)?

- What type of classroom activities do you prefer: group work, projects, independent work, etc.?
- Do you have Internet access at home?
- On a scale of 1–10, if I were to assign a project that required obtaining materials from a store (ex. poster board), how difficult would this be to accomplish?
- Is there anything that I should know about you as a student to help you be more successful?
- (I also ask for parent/guardian contact information on this handout.)

These questions are to give me some small insight into variables which might impact the "student" part of the human beings in my room, but this exchange and, consequently, the information provided are the least-emphasized portion of the first class period.

Beyond this, I typically use a people bingo game wherein students have to seek initials from other students on different squares of their bingo boards. The squares feature characteristics such as "someone who has seen the Pacific Ocean" or "someone who likes horror movies," and the students move around the room and interact with one another to fill their boards. I usually have a candy reward for the first couple of students who finish and then go over each square and ask the class to raise their hand if they could have signed off on that particular square. I usually follow up with questions to squares such as "this person was born in another state" or "this person plays an instrument" and allow for general conversation in which the students seem inclined to discuss. Again, all of this is just to give little insights into the students in my room and a chance for students to share and become more comfortable with one another. I also use an icebreaker, which is essentially a candy giveaway where each type of candy corresponds with a different question: "if you could have any superpower, what would it be?" or "if you could have any food delivered for lunch today, what would it be?" The students answer questions based on the candy that they've selected. All of this is to help create a dialogue, a positive first impression, and to help students feel comfortable with me and with one another and in the classroom, generally.

Altogether, the first day for me is about setting a tone. I've often heard beginning teachers advised to "start off strict" or "don't smile until Christmas," but I think that this drill sergeant/authoritarian recommendation is a cop-out from having to do the more complicated work of earning respect and building trust. I want my first day to be about making students feel welcome in my class and optimistic about me and the year. The first day is an important start to the process of getting to know one another. Between the questionnaire and the adjectives and the bingo, I have a baseline of information on which I can start to develop an understanding of each student. Furthermore, glimpses of their personalities can be seen through the different activities.

Students arrive in your classroom with a range of predispositions about school and teachers and perhaps even about you once you've had a cycle of students and begin to have a reputation in the building. Some students may have a negative opinion of school or negative history of interaction with adults or authority figures or men or women or whatever may be the case. For me, the first few days are an opportunity to disarm those students and to give them reasons for being "open" to me and my classroom.

It's not uncommon for a teacher's course introduction or displayed rules to include something about mutual respect. I've even heard a teacher say, "You must respect me," and I cringed. For me, on the second day of class, as we address some very general classroom guidelines, I tell my students that I believe that respect should be earned and that I hope that they will give me an opportunity to earn their respect. I also explain to them how I intend to do so. I inform them that my plan is to first show them respect, to work hard and be friendly and fair, to try to make class enjoyable, and to do anything that I can to help them get to wherever they want to go in life (we also do a goal-setting activity on the second day). In the meantime, I ask that they will give time to prove myself. Beyond that, I tell students that, while I intend to earn respect as an individual, there are some things that they should respect about the position, that any teacher is responsible for grading and discipline. We also discuss that they should, by default, respect each other and any stranger they cross paths with. Last, we address having respect for our collective mission in school.

There is a line between fear and respect, and while a using a fear of consequence or conflict might keep most students in line, it is a method that some students will readily oppose, and even those students who are pacified in a fearful classroom climate are not likely to be developing positive feelings about themselves, the subject, school in general, or learning a model for developing healthy relationships. For that reason, I do not often employ methods of management built around using fear of outcomes or conflict.

It is not enough to have a person-oriented first day and to assume that the necessary knowledge of the students has been obtained. In the past, I've also used four-colored personality surveys, a *Harry Potter* house sorting quiz, and a Gardner's Multiple Intelligence survey as a way to continue to learn about my students. If the level of the students is appropriate, discussing Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983) is a good way to acknowledge that many students will have strengths not necessarily reflected in the traditional classroom and to segue into a discussion about individualized goals for the term. As the year continues, creating opportunities to continue to learn about students can occur in the form of casual conversations, class discussions, providing students the opportunities to write or journal, observations of behavior and conversations with parents, counselors or other teachers of the student. The "picture" of each student is being ever-clarified and can also change dramatically as the student grows and evolves.

MAINTENANCE

All relationships are a work in progress. They require continued effort and ongoing dialogue and opportunities for genuine interaction. There are a number of ways to create these opportunities throughout the school year, and the essential point is that you, as the teacher, make the effort to create or to recognize and capitalize on these opportunities.

No offense to Stephenie Meyer, author of the *Twilight* series, but I would never have read her series, were I not a high school teacher. The same could be said about a number of young adult cultural phenomena that I have participated in or familiarized myself with simply because they were relevant to so many of my students, and they provided me with social capital that helps with building and maintaining relationships. Take the time to be aware of what is culturally relevant to your students; the time invested in doing so will pay dividends!

When possible, you should meet students where their interests lie. For instance, if a student comes into the classroom wearing a shirt of a favorite band or a jersey from a favorite sports team, take the time to ask about the band if it is one you are unfamiliar with, and get a song recommendation and have a listen, or – even if the jersey is a sport in which you have no interest – take the time to check out a score or follow up with that student to ask how the team performing. It is certainly easier to build relationships in the event of an overlapping of interests, but if you desire to build relationships with all students, then you'll need to take the extra step. Students will also respond to your interests if they are aware of them. In my classroom, I have posters of movies, comic heroes, sports figures and a number of things that typically generate student comments and conversations.

Beyond identifying student interests, supporting healthy student pursuits contributes to the students' perception that you care. Attending an art show, a band or chorus concert, a play, or a sporting event not only demonstrates that you are a part of the school community but also provides an opportunity to see the students "in their element" and to connect with students regarding an activity or environment with which they have a positive association. Sponsoring clubs or coaching is a good way to demonstrate a greater investment in the school and students' interests. Students know that you are not required to do these things and are generally appreciative of your extra effort. As a basketball and soccer coach, I was able to build positive relationships with students in those environments, which then translated to the classroom when my athletes or their peers would appear on my class rosters.

Regarding classroom instruction, I prefer cooperative learning activities because the students typically enjoy the chance to mix class work and still be able to interact with their peers. By not doing whole class instruction, I am also able to move about the room and have more personalized interactions with my students. This instructional style supports my relational objectives.

Additionally, small things such as standing in the hallway, acknowledging passersby, finding reasons to occasionally visit the cafeteria during lunch time, and

informally chatting with students outside of the classroom itself are chances to be visible and friendly and to create opportunities for quality exchanges with students in a setting where you are not directly responsible for them and have no behavioral or academic agenda coloring the exchange. From experience, I find that these exchanges will even result in students who are not in your class viewing you in a positive light as they observe your friendly interactions with their peers.

Relationship Challenges

Were our only job to be familiar with and friendly toward students, the task would be simplified somewhat, though still not an easy one. Yet, we also have to help students make progress toward academic objectives, which they may not always be interested in, and to assist in the development of social behaviors that will allow them to be successful in other contexts. For the student who has been less successful in a traditional class setting or who has received less instruction about socially appropriate behaviors, the road is challenging, and tensions can arise from the trying circumstances that occur. However, these moments can also be opportunities to build and reinforce the relationship.

When dealing with off-task behavior, productivity issues or socially inappropriate behaviors, one must remember that, just as these students are attempting to learn academic content, they are also learning how to be successful human beings. It is a process, and you as the teacher have the capacity (and, I would argue, the responsibility) to help facilitate this process. Whether you agree with this sentiment or would rather narrowly confine your responsibilities to influencing academic variables, the fact is that these are growing and developing persons. Even as a high school teacher, I find myself often training individuals how to be students. It seems unrealistic to expect students to learn content and be successful in the classroom when they have never really learned how to do these things. In these instances, my general classroom goals of being present and prepared, taking the task seriously, working hard, and having a good attitude need to be communicated and positively reinforced often. Some of the young people in your classroom, regardless of age, may first need to be taught, or reminded, how to be students.

A student who is conditioned to exhibit unproductive habits or rude behaviors has the capacity to change, but such change will not happen immediately. Like losing weight or stopping smoking, the process of major change for conditioned negative behaviors is complicated and wrought with obstacles and setbacks. Students need consistent positive support when attempting to adjust deeply ingrained behaviors, and the process is more likely to be successful if the student is a willing participant and sees the need for an adjustment. For an example in how difficult such change can be, I encourage you to change the log-in code for your smart phone or your PIN for an ATM/debit card and to take note of how many failed attempts you accrue as you try to defeat your conditioning and change.

In addition to being patient with students, corrections from the teacher need to be made with care. There are very few instances in which a teacher behind a lectern chastising a student by name across the room at full volume is the best manner to address an undesirable behavior. Embarrassing students runs contrary to the message of care and damages the relationship that you are trying to build. Furthermore, you put the student in a position wherein they may feel forced to respond in a contrary manner to "save face" in the eyes of their peers.

As a general guide, corrections should always come from a caring place. If a class is working on an assignment and you notice an off-task student, I would recommend moving over to the student and asking questions such as "How's it going?" or "Need any help with anything?" – questions that are non-accusatory and delivered as a genuine status inquiry. Anytime you can use humor to soften an exchange or positively acknowledge students to encourage certain behaviors, you should! You can also provide a rationale for why the student should adjust his or her behavior: "I'm afraid you guys won't finish and this will become homework." So much of this seems unnecessary to say, but I believe that one of the reasons that so many teachers struggle with classroom management is because they fail to take into account things such as tone, body language and positioning, and specific phrasing, so situations often devolve into places they need never have gone. Certainly as a teacher, you must "pick your battles" but, when possible, avoid "battling" the students! Ideally, you construct a scenario where you are on the students' side battling against whatever other obstacles to success might exist. Perhaps the one exception to this is when a student becomes his own obstacle. Just remember, as a relational teacher, these interactions are to encourage progress, not to establish control.

Sometimes these encounters escalate because teachers are humans, too, and subject to the emotional moment. It's important to try to model appropriate behavior and caring, especially in trying moments. Often, I think that teachers become offended or upset because a student's negative behavior may seem targeted toward the teacher. Generally, a student doesn't wake up with the intention to ruin a certain teacher's day, and a classroom episode is normally a culmination of other factors. As a teacher – especially if you are caring and supportive and work to help and not to embarrass a student – the negative behavior is probably not inspired by, nor directed toward, you. Remembering this and understanding that it's probably not personal should help you get to a place where you can diagnose what the real issue is. If, in fact, a happy student comes to your room and begins to exhibit negative behavior and it is targeted, then you're doing something wrong.

I've mentioned that I like to rationalize decisions to students when I am able, and I often allow students to choose their own groups or their own seats. I do this because initially assigning seats is arbitrary and because you're not guaranteed to avoid volatile combinations by doing so. It also helps students have a positive first perception of your class on that first day. I truly want students to enjoy my classroom socially, and I want to help them find a balance between their academic

responsibilities and other distractions. I explain the freedom of choice being given, acknowledging the importance and the fun of the social aspects of high school while giving the warning that, if they are not able to find a productive balance, I now know their preferred seating, so any seating that I may of necessity have to assign will be very different. Letting students choose seats also gives a negotiating tool in the event of future off-task behavior. The ability to say, "I don't think this arrangement is working out for us, we aren't really accomplishing what we need to," has proven to be an effective carrot at times. Furthermore, if the day comes when you must assign seats, you have a rationale as to why they are needed and history of evidence to support the decision.

Similarly, I have a relaxed policy on food and drink at the beginning of the year. As a graduate student myself, I can sympathize with the need for caffeine or hydration or the inability to focus on anything else besides being hungry for my next meal. Providing freedom here is also an opportunity to talk about being responsible, picking up after oneself, and trying to promote those responsible behaviors. In a recent article, Chhuon and Wallace (2012) describe a category of teacher behaviors as exhibiting a "benefit of the doubt" mentality. In their study, students identified a range of teacher behaviors that increased their sense of belonging in the school. This mentality is a combination of patience and optimism that students can meet (with support) high expectations and undergo real change. With classroom policy and in potential negative exchanges, I try to maintain a "benefit of the doubt" mentality.

What about Academics?

As a beginning teacher, I think that you need to be able to answer some underlying philosophical questions regarding teaching in general: What is my purpose as an educator/why did I become a teacher? How can I best help these students be ready for future endeavors? What essential knowledge should I prioritize for transmission to my students? What is the best possible outcome for each student? For me, the goal that I articulate to my high school students is that I want to help them develop into happy and productive people and that, at the end of the term, I am less interested in whether or not they remember how many Supreme Court justices there are but am more concerned with whether or not they demonstrate the qualities that allow for people to be successful and happy in life beyond my classroom. These include being present, being prepared, having a positive attitude, being kind, self-advocating, working hard, making good decisions, and generally being invested in their own future.

In this age of accountability, we are often caught up on the tested minutiae of our content areas. Despite my being a secondary social studies teacher, my answers to those philosophical questions have very little overlap with the national/state/district-proscribed learning objectives such as "analyze political rivalries as underlying causes for war." I admit to my students early on that I love learning and love the

content but that I'm a realist about the universal utility of certain knowledge. So, while conceding that all knowledge is valuable and that passing my specific course and graduating from high school are important objectives that will keep doors open for students as they move forward, the course content is but a tiny part of the big picture, one objective of the mission.

The point here is this: don't sacrifice the students for the content or think that the most valuable thing that you can teach a student is a series of factoids or that the greatest service you can do for your students is to prepare them for a test. I've been fortunate to teach Advanced Placement students and to have rewarding academic experiences, exploring topics in depth and celebrating students' success on the exam, but this did not happen outside of my relational philosophy of teaching.

There is ample research demonstrating a positive correlation between teacher-student relationships and student perceptions of school, student performance, classroom behavior, attendance, student perceptions of themselves, and student connectedness to the school environment, so the pursuit of relational objectives is not at the expense of academic objectives. The existence of positive relationships enhances the ability to pursue academic goals.

Final Thoughts

Relationships matter. Because they matter, teachers and schools should create opportunities and enact strategies to consciously foster the development of positive teacher-student relationships. Relationships matter not only because of the potential impact on student academic achievement but also because they are the medium through which the hidden curriculum – i.e. the human development and character education – is best conveyed. In this age of accountability and numbers, we've lost sight of some of this. Building relationships with students of such tremendous personal diversity across age, gender, ethnic and cultural boundaries is the central challenge for a teacher.

One cause for optimism is that we can greatly increase in our capacity as relationship-builders. First, being aware of the importance and prioritizing relationships are a tremendous step in the right direction. Over time and with practice, you will get better at reading students and designing classroom instruction that allows for you to see and celebrate their personalities. With effort, we can become better communicators and manage our half of these relationships better. Caring for students and being empathetic help provide more patience for process of change and the different speeds at which students grow. Even if your school does not specifically emphasize relationship construction, it is a classroom level variable almost exclusively influenced by you, the teacher. If your teacher education training underemphasized this aspect of teaching, there is a wealth of literature about relationships available, but ultimately the methods and manner should be specific to you, and it is more about a personal philosophy and process than a set of theories or strategies to be implemented.

A second reason to be hopeful about succeeding in the task of building relationships is that students, for the most part, are desirous of or at least open to the idea. I recently gave an attitudinal survey regarding teacher-student relationships to students in both advanced and standard classes of ninth graders. One of the measures asked, "How important is a positive teacher-student relationship to your performance in a given class?" My assumption was that students in the standard class would rate the relationship with the teacher much higher and that the students in the advanced class would be conditioned to perform and be successful even in the absence of a great relationship with the teacher. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being "very important," the students from the standard sections rated the importance at a 7.9 while the students in the advanced class rated it as a 7.7. I was surprised to see such high ratings in general and also surprised that the advanced sections valued the relationship nearly to the degree that the standard sections did. Other items on the survey were illuminating, however, as the students in different sections seemed to value different teacher behaviors in those relationships.

Beyond the survey results, many students demonstrate behaviors that indicate their desire to know and be known by their teachers. At my school, we have an open campus during lunch, and students can eat where they choose. Students regularly choose to take lunch in their teachers' classrooms. Any teacher can relate to the students who come to visit for no particular reason other than that they enjoy the company or the conversation. I myself recently returned to the classroom of my favorite teacher, 11 years removed. I reflect almost daily to my own experiences as a student, and I was fortunate to have a number of good teachers with well-organized classes who challenged me academically, but the one whom I think about most often and who made the most difference in my life was the one who I knew cared about me.

As teachers, a great knowledge and love of our academic content will certainly assist in achieving some of our classroom objectives. However, after teaching a certain unit for the third or 30th time, the material may not remain as interesting as it once was. Even for a lifelong learner and an evolving teacher and even in this age of ever-changing curriculum standards, the academic content is not the dynamic variable in our classrooms. The students are. The opportunity to get to meet, learn and know new students each year is what makes that first day of each term so exciting.

This relational approach and interest in the overall development of the student allows for a broader definition of success. To know that, regardless of test results, you've made school a more welcoming and enjoyable place, that you've been a positive influence or helped a student through a complicated time, that you've helped students come to know and appreciate themselves beyond their capacity to be successful on traditional academic measures – all of these are victories. Reflecting on the rewarding moments of my teaching career so far, sometimes I feel like the best thing that I've done was to be kind to a kid when he or she really needed it or to sit and listen as students relate their interests or anxieties or to be a regular source of

humor or positivity in the lives of students. So whether you are a pre-service teacher or a seasoned veteran, I would hope that you don't lose sight of the fact that, despite the conversations about scores and strategies, it really is the people at the core of this rich and rewarding profession who matter most.

PHYLLIS DORN

2. WHAT THEY DID NOT TEACH ME IN SCHOOL

That Kindness Is the Most Important Thing in the World

> Three things in human life are important: the first is to be kind;
> the second is to be kind; and the third is to be kind.
>
> —Henry James

After teaching secondary school for over 20 years and college for 15 years, I have come to the conclusion that schools of education should require that teachers pass a course on kindness before they can enter the classroom to teach—yes, good "ole-fashioned" kindness. Psychotherapist Robert Furey writes that for one "to be acquainted with kindness, one must be prepared to learn new things and feel new feelings. Kindness is more than a philosophy of the mind. It is a philosophy of the spirit." Thus, both the learner's (and the teacher's) mind and spirit are touched by the smallest kindnesses in life, especially in the classroom.

I have always considered myself to be a kind person, but in retrospect, I know that I have not always been a "kind" teacher. In my first years of teaching, I was a focused teacher, a pragmatist but also a positivist who saw life as right and wrong with little room for gray. Either my students performed in language "skill and drill," or they did not; either they understood grammar and absorbed "Standard Written English," or they did not; either they turned in each assignments, or they did not. I did not give them much room for error or for effort. I did give them what I was trained to give them: pedagogy that would produce little consumers who wrote like I did, spoke like I did, and thought like I did. I did not allow for any room for excuses for not turning in homework, not passing tests, and not participating. I had come out of a life of poverty and was the first in my immediate family to go to college. I was the proverbial second child who often outdoes the first child academically. If I could make it and be a good student, my students could, too.

That kind of thinking lasted about a year although some old patterns die slowly. Furey's epithet proved true for me as the instructor—I had to be prepared to learn new things and to feel new feelings. Therefore, years passed as quickly as the names on the principal's office door, and with the passing of those years, I did begin to learn new things—such as the importance of beginning each new year (especially with middle schoolers) with a fun ice-breaker in which I allowed my new students to see my humanity. Before asking each student to show us something (that they could do in front of their grandmothers), I would show them my unique ability—I could

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literally touch my nose with my tongue. (One of my grandchildren has inherited this ability!)

By participating in this childish venture, I was allowing my students to relax and to see me as a human being. The strange thing is that I began to see them more as human beings, too. They were no longer the vessels in which I had to pour knowledge; they now became the boy who could roll his eyelids back, the girl who could fold her ears back, and the shy person who could whistle so loudly that the principal would come running. I began to learn from them as much or more than they learned from me, and before I knew it, I was having more fun teaching. I also found myself becoming kinder to my students if I sensed that there really was something wrong at home that was keeping that student from studying or working. That understanding usually translated into the student eventually performing better, even if it took the student another form of assignment to make up the grade.

Furey also writes that, the more acquainted I am with kindness, the more I must be prepared to feel new feelings. Some of those new feelings involved respecting what my students had to say, even if what they had to discuss was not in the syllabus or lesson plan for that day, and acknowledging that they could work just as well in groups as they could alone and that Dewey was right about so many ideas about education. I even got to the point that I could give a "group test" and everyone would get the same grade, but everyone had to participate authentically. Another method that I used was to give each student an oral spelling test sitting right beside me and away from other students to supplement the poor scores that he or she had already earned. Later, I would find out about different learning styles and that many of my smartest students had dyslexia or other blocks to reading and needed the accommodation of reading a test question to them.

As I implemented these methods and changed my feelings about impromptu discussions, group work, oral testing, and many other adaptations in pedagogy, I began to be less rigid in my worldview. I also began to be more comfortable in the classroom and with students from different cultures. I began to be a "kinder" teacher. I began to see that they were becoming kinder to each other and respecting each other's space, history, and behaviors, too. One of the ways that students became kinder was in listening to the writings of other students. I began to incorporate short personal writings in the classroom with more success than the longer essays, which were still required.

As students shared their personal thoughts, I believe that those words of common experiences allowed people to see the same human trials that they had experienced in life. I even began to write some from my own experiences and to share these writings with my students. To put it in a nutshell—I became more "real" as a teacher and kinder as a person with them. I had stopped using what Paulo Freire calls the "banking model" and begun to build a personal pedagogy based on kindness and consideration for each person. Did all students like these changes? No, some

complained and wanted to change classes. Did I like these changes? Yes, I did because I had found what Rousseau says is greater than other forms of wisdom: “What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?”

AMY BAGBY

3. LOST WITH LITTLE GUIDANCE IN UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY

I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher; the desire began as a young child enthralled with school and grew throughout childhood and into my young adult years. I contribute much of this aspiration to the wonderful teachers under whom I had the privilege of sitting throughout my years in school. The effect that those teachers had on my life is so profound that it is difficult to put into words. The person that I am today is a tapestry woven with many strands, and each of my teachers is a thread in that work of art. I flourished academically under their tutelage, enjoying the wonders of stories, the mysteries of science, the structure of mathematics, and the glories of the arts. I also benefited from knowing those teachers on a personal level; their character and values helped shape my way of thinking. Over the years, a few individual teachers played special roles in my life, taking an interest in the person I was becoming and providing guidance in my development. I am especially thankful for the relationships that I had with my teachers during middle school, in the midst of the awkwardness and the struggles to become my own person. Often, I did not feel emotionally safe with my peers, but I could count on my teachers for support and guidance. Knowing the impact that they had on my life, I too wanted to have that effect on the lives of others, to leave a lasting impression and to encourage growth in student's lives.

I am a white female who grew up in a mid-sized city. My middle class family lived a simple and happy life. For me, K-12 schooling consisted of classrooms with people who looked like I did and had families very much like mine. Though it would have been easy for me to only circulate in a community of similar people and customs, my family attended an interracial church with a mission of purposeful cross-cultural worship. Initially, the congregation was small, with 50 to 100 people gathering on a Sunday to worship and hear the word of God. However, over the years, the church grew, and so did the impact and outreach to the community. This church had a significant impact on my childhood as well. In this congregation, I learned to love and respect men and women with vastly different skin colors, languages, and customs than my own. I felt very comfortable with people from various backgrounds and enjoyed the variety that God had created among His people. This church was very concerned with the surrounding neighborhoods and sought to find ways to provide for both the obvious physical needs as well as the spiritual needs of the people in residence. Many of my summers were spent working with the church

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on a variety of service projects: cleaning and maintaining widows' homes, sorting and organizing food pantries, and building homes with Habitat for Humanity, as well as other activities. One of the most frequent summer activities was conducting backyard Bible clubs in the housing projects of our city. We walked the streets, knocking on doors to collect children for Bible stories and activities. On several occasions, I was invited into the homes of the children in order to help them dress or grab their shoes in preparation for attending the Bible club. The world that I experienced in these homes was very different than my own. I was often surprised by the poverty in which these children were being raised, and I struggled to makes sense of this disparity. I was amazed that the parents so willingly allowed their children to leave with complete strangers, and I was inspired by the eagerness with which these children entered into relationship with me, often clinging to me when our time together drew to an end. These experiences provided an education that I could not have received in a classroom.

Upon graduating from high school, I attended a liberal arts college where I experienced the wealth and breadth of coursework offered in many disciplines, as well as completing a teacher preparation program which provided me Pre-K through fifth grade state certification. As a part of this program, I was introduced to educational and developmental psychology, foundations in education, pedagogy in reading, math, science, and social studies and had ample opportunity to practice in a classroom setting. To this day, I am thankful for the teacher education program that I attended and know that they did their best to prepare me for the teaching positions that lay ahead of me. However, there were a few things that I didn't learn.

My first teaching job was finalized late in the summer of 1997, during the month of August. This was in the years before No Child Left Behind and the expectations of highly qualified teachers providing instruction within their area of certification. I have often said of this position, "They needed a teacher, and I needed a job." I was hired to teach seventh grade language arts, outside of my certified field. Having recently graduated from college and having no money, I moved back in with my parents. I was very eager to begin teaching and spent time visiting yard sales to find bookshelves, comfortable chairs, chapter books, and other items that I could add to my classroom on a meager budget. My primary goal was to make my classroom an inviting place for students, and I had dreams of afterschool conversations with individuals who wanted to hang out in my classroom looking for close connections with their teacher. However, the classroom that I was provided did not offer this inviting atmosphere. The school building was constructed into the side of a hill, and my classroom was on the bottom floor at the very end of the hallway, with one side underground. As a result, there were no windows to the outside, producing a very institutional feel. Despite my most creative attempts, the cinderblock refused to hold any type of tape or other adhesive, so most mornings, the bright maps and posters that I had hung would be on the floor. Though I was successful in relating with students during class, no one remained after school to spend time with their teachers.

At the end of my first month of teaching, I excitedly awaited my first paycheck but was confused when my school mailbox did not include a check like everyone else's. It was only then that I discovered the county held the first paycheck for new employees and that I would receive this check the following summer. Not only was this an emotional blow, withholding a symbol of my hard work that month, but it was also financially difficult to survive another month with no pay. Despite the drawbacks, I was hopeful about what my first year would bring.

Growing up in the city, most of my experience had been in urban settings, but this neighboring county was small and very rural, consisting of two elementary, one middle, and one high school. Eager to find a job, I did not thoroughly investigate the county or school in which I accepted this position. If I had done my research, I would have discovered that the current principal of this middle school was under investigation by the state for practices that amounted to teacher intimidation. As an example of her coercive tactics, she demanded that everyone in the building refer to her as Dr. Gregory (name changed for anonymity), but she absolutely refused to refer to any other faculty who had achieved such an advanced degree by the same title. Perhaps this was an outward expression of the inward struggle that she experienced as a female in a predominately male field, but it had the effect of causing most of the staff to be resentful as well as fearful. I don't know many details about the investigation, but I do know that I was definitely apprehensive and did my best not to cross her path. Fortunately, due to the placement of my classroom, I could go entire weeks without even laying eyes on her.

The seventh grade consisted of two teams; therefore, I had a counterpart teaching language arts on the same hallway. He served as my "mentor" that year although he did little more than share with me the worksheets that he planned to give to his students. I was in over my head, unfamiliar with the curriculum and instructional strategies for this age group. Between a scary principal and an incompetent mentor, I was left to figure things out for myself. Most days, I simply followed the scripted curriculum in the textbook and looked for ways to make the content more interesting. In addition, I read several books aloud to my students, mainly because I had always loved being read to by my own teachers.

Many of the students lived their entire lives in this closed community and had not encountered people from other ethnic groups. It was not uncommon to hear students refer to the "clan meetings" over the weekend or talk about the new graffiti that had appeared on the trees and roadways, which indicated that a meeting was scheduled. Racial slurs were very commonplace, voiced by both students and teachers. One such incident, which remains etched in my memory, occurred at lunchtime. A student received some coins from a vending machine from which she had just purchased a snack. She fiddled with them in her hands for a few minutes and then placed them in her mouth. Disgusted to think of the many germs she was ingesting, I said, "Don't put those in your mouth. Just think of how many places those could have been and how many hands could have touched those coins." She immediately spit them out

and then, with a look of absolute horror, she exclaimed, “Black people could have touched these coins!” Her concern was not an over-exaggeration for my benefit but a true fear on her part.

During this time, I was dating and soon to be engaged to an African American and often found myself worrying that someone from my employing county would find out, and I was fearful about what the possible ramifications might be. Since my daily commute was about half an hour each direction, I thought that it was unlikely that I would run into my students or their families, but I worried about how my fiancé would be treated upon such an encounter. Even though he had four years of teaching experience, I was hesitant to have him attend school events or come and help me in my classroom, fearing the reaction of my colleagues and students as well as being anxious over the way he would likely be treated. This limited the amount of help and advice that he could offer, so he was relegated to providing support from a distance.

At the close of the first grading period, I dutifully completed and submitted my report cards. The majority of my students scored well. However, I had three students whose cumulative scores were very low, even as low as 30%. Naïvely, I assumed that this was simply evidence of laziness and an unwillingness to put forth the effort required to earn higher grades. I don’t remember worrying too much about the situation until I was called into the principal’s office the following day and told that I was in danger of having a lawsuit filed against me for failing special education students. I was astonished; no one had bothered to inform me that I had special education students in my classroom, and I was too ignorant to have seen it for myself. I quickly assured my principal that I had not purposefully ignored their needs and was eager to find ways to supplement their studies so that they could succeed in my classroom. Her answer was to purchase these students third- and fourth-grade grammar workbooks. For the remainder of the year, they sat in my class and worked at their own pace through these books while I presented entirely different content to the majority of the class. No matter how successful or unsuccessful they were with this classwork, their grade never fell below 70%. Instead, I adjusted their grades to ensure that they passed the class.

In hindsight, I am completely embarrassed to think of the ways that I let these students down over the course of that year. Not only was I completely oblivious to their needs for the entire first quarter, but even once I was informed of their special education status, I still did not provide them with an adequate education. Some of this was due to a lack in my preparation to be a teacher. Though I took a survey course in Education for Exceptional Students, I was not taught how to assist special education students. My understanding was that special education teachers taught special education students, not that I was expected to also teach them. However, the majority of the blame falls squarely on my shoulders. I believe that all students are created in the image of God, and as such, each student is the bearer of attributes that are inherent. They are creative, active, purposeful, dominion-seeking beings geared

for learning by their very nature. These students were no exception, yet I did not treat them as such during that year. I denied them the ability to interact with the subject matter in a way that was consistent with their unique capabilities. Due to my lack of preparation and my inexperience, I failed to provide these three precious students with the dignity of a rich and engaging curriculum.

Sometime during the second semester, I began to read my class *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Frank, 1993). This opened the door to conversations about prejudice, which I was eager to have with my students, yet I ignorantly did not foresee the possible difficulties that it could present for this particular population of students. Issues of prejudice can be found throughout history, and although Nazi Germany was vastly different from American slavery, that was the closest link that these students had to the concept of prejudice. Therefore, the conversation in class frequently became about slavery in the Southern states. I found myself making the argument that slavery was indeed a bad thing while students in my class contended that slave owners were good to their slaves and that those slaves enjoyed their lives on plantations. Some of the conversations became very animated, and several students were distraught with the position that I presented.

Again, I found myself called into the principal's office. I was informed that some of the parents were angry about the discussions that we had in class. At least one parent belonged to the Sons of the Confederate and demanded that I be brought before his sergeant to answer for the comments that I had made. I was terrified. I had no idea what the Sons of the Confederate was or what it would mean to go before them. To me, this appeared to be a politically correct version of the Ku Klux Klan. Though my principal diffused the situation to some degree, she did consent to a meeting at the school. She was in attendance along with several men, one of whom showed up in a uniform resembling that of a confederate soldier. I was rather confused by the purpose of the meeting; I fully expected there to be yelling and to be made to feel as though I was leading their sons and daughter astray by my teaching. Instead, the men in attendance produced pictures of blacks in confederate uniform and told me that the slaves were so happy about their roles on the plantations that they even fought on the side of their Southern masters. I suppose that these men viewed this as an opportunity to educate me about the pleasantries of slavery. I drove home that evening in utter fear, wondering if I would arrive in my driveway to view a burning cross. Fortunately, this incident did not turn into much more, and I finished out the year in relative peace.

I did not remain at this school or in this school district the following year. I was eager to return to an elementary school and to a more urban setting. Subsequent years proved to have their own challenges; on my first day as a first grade teacher, I realized at lunch time that I had no idea where the cafeteria was located within the school building. My students had to guide me. Utterly embarrassed, I realized how important it is to have a tour of the school prior to beginning a new job. Although there are others stories that I could tell of my experiences in the classroom, nothing

compared to this first year, when I often found myself with little guidance in unfamiliar territory.

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SUSAN W. THORNTON

4. LET'S PLAY MARCO POLO

Advice for New Teachers on How to Win and Avoid Disaster

Believed to have taken its name from the great Venetian explorer, Marco Polo, the fun swimming pool game of the same title is often played and enjoyed by many young people. Supposedly, the origins of the game are said to be grounded in the travels of the late twelfth century explorer who reportedly did not always know where he was going on his explorative journeys in Asia – hence the name of the game. This children's pool party game is easy enough to play as long as the players have a basic understanding of the game's objective and rules, know the two participant roles required to play, and are willing to make adjustments along the way. The trick to knowing how to win the game lies in one's abilities to be observant, to be a good listener, to make sound decisions, and to be flexible. This is great advice for the game. Moreover, it is solid advice for many of life's encounters. Just as in the children's swimming pool game of Marco Polo, novice teachers need to be observant, to listen well, to make sound decisions, and to remain flexible. However, not all pre-service training prepares them for all aspects related to the rigorous requirements of education, sometimes leaving them to discover and to navigate on their own.

Educators new to the profession must have a basic understanding of what is expected of them in order to participate successfully. Because the rules in education are frequently ambiguous, it often becomes necessary to depend on the advice and the expertise of others. New teachers must be willing to play their role well and to be ready to navigate their own journey while not always knowing the path that they are on. They must learn to be selective in their decisions and to be flexible enough to readjust their strategies as necessary. This is particularly true as the novice teacher begins developing professional relationships with colleagues and, to a greater extent, to include working with the school's leader, the principal.

Effective educational leadership, specifically the position of the school principal, is essential for improving schools and for increasing student achievement. Historically, the school principal's main responsibility was centered on his or her ability to function as a building-level manager. However, over time, the job's responsibilities have evolved, and today the principal is considered the main change agent for the school (Rousmaniere, 2013). Beginning in the mid-1990s, as the call for school improvement and school reform increased, so too did the focus on higher levels of student achievement and accountability. Consequently, the public began

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looking toward those who were deemed most responsible for the student's success – the teachers and the school principal. Hence, the link between effective school leadership and student achievement began to be realized by both policy makers and educators as being essential (Spiro, 2013). Accordingly, Rousmaniere (2013) contends that the role of the principal was both altered and expanded to include being much more than a building-level manager. Therefore, the contemporary school principal is expected to be the school's instructional leader, curriculum leader, and discipline leader. Moreover, this position often demands that the principal be the school's motivational leader as well (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Many public schools today are facing inestimable problems and often find themselves struggling under the yoke of school reform. Because this is a book for educators, by educators, I will not target any of the precise issues facing contemporary education, as that is for another book and another chapter. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the "burning" issues in education today will eventually be replaced by new and just as dramatic concerns tomorrow, as this is the cyclical nature of education. Therefore, I will reiterate the enduring significance of an effective school principal while also posing the question, "How does the novice educator navigate the contentious waters of poor school leadership?" Accordingly, this chapter is an examination, first, of the how the school principal and the position is often presented to students in pre-service education courses and, second, of how, in turn, the novice teacher can best traverse his or her way through the chaos of poor leadership if needed. To accomplish this, I will share a story. The names of any persons in this story are pseudonyms.

First, I believe that the door to teaching is wide and varied and should be opened to all who can attend to the task effectively. For me, the journey to the classroom was not a traditional path, as I entered the profession at the age of 40, or the typical time in one's life when many are beginning to weigh their retirement options. Nonetheless, in the fall of 1994, at the age of 36, a mid-life career change was what I pursued. Hence, I attended a small, private, Southern institution that was fully accredited and well known for its education department. Wonderfully for me, it offered an evening program, which afforded me the opportunity to continue working during the day. Today, as I reflect upon that particular educational experience and the courses that prepared me for my chosen profession, I consider not only the content of the courses but also the professors who taught them and the manner in which they approached certain topics in education.

Consummate professionals and true educators to the core, these instructors addressed the subject matter head on. While their teaching styles varied and the depth of inquiry was wide-ranging, a common theme was threaded throughout. Education is serious business, and we as new teachers were to look to the "head of that business" – that is, the principal, with respect for the rank, the knowledge, the experience, and the leadership capabilities that this person possessed. In each education course, the principal was generally presented as one who was all knowing, all seeing, all wise, and all powerful. To me, this person sounded almost godlike.

Clearly, my job as a new educator was not only to teach my students effectively and efficiently; my job was also to make certain that my principal's educational expectations, policies, and mandates were followed. It was explained that failure to do so was tantamount to professional suicide and would most certainly lead to the nonrenewal of one's contract. Accordingly, I understood and valued this piece of advice from my professors, as it also led me to believe that the principal represented the pinnacle of what it meant to be a professional educator. Consequently, the thought that a person in this position could ever be inept did not cross my mind, nor would I have been prepared for what to do if I had a principal who fell into that category early in my career. Yet, in time, I discovered that there are those who struggle as leaders, who cannot make rational decisions, and who are essentially inept in understanding curriculum, instruction, or addressing discipline effectively.

For the purposes of writing this narrative, I first had to consider the following question: Were the perceptions that I developed regarding the role and the position of the principal my individual interpretation as influenced by my professors, or did other educators have similar experiences in their teacher education program? To answer this, I conducted informal interviews with 20 of my colleagues, asking them how principals and the principalship position in general had been presented to them in their teacher preparation courses. The respondents ranged in age from 23 to 41 and had attended a variety of post-secondary institutions. Of the 20 participants, 14 had earned their teaching degree from well-respected state institutions while the remaining six participants earned their initial degrees from exceptional colleges or universities outside the state. These included two participants who graduated from institutions in Tennessee, one from Florida, one from Alabama, one from Ohio, and one from North Carolina. The results were interesting, as the majority of my peers reported having experiences similar to mine in their pre-service education courses, with respect to the role of the principal. As previously stated, this was a simple and informal inquiry to help me reflect and ascertain whether my pre-service experiences, specific to grasping a clear understanding of the role of the school principal, were isolated to me and perhaps limited by my own interpretation or if others had had similar experiences during their pre-service education journey. Thus, I offer a brief summation of my peers' responses.

When advised on how to view and to interact with the principal, all of the participants reported that, as pre-service teachers, they were encouraged by their professors to have respect for the principal specifically for his or her rank, knowledge, experience, and leadership capabilities. When questioned about whether the principal had ever been presented by their education professors as being one who was nearly omnipotent, the overall results (18 of 20) supported this concept with a slight exception; only 16 of the 20 respondents reported the principal as being presented as one who was "all wise." The most common information reported by each respondent was how his or her education professors maintained a doggedness in making certain that, as new teachers, they were to follow all of the established rules and to do nothing that would be considered unprofessional or that would alienate

the principal, nor should they openly question his authority. Additionally, all of the respondents noticeably remembered and referenced that they had been thoroughly schooled on and understood the concept of "professional suicide" and how certain actions could potentially lead to the nonrenewal of one's teaching contract, a recommendation that typically originates with the school's principal. Nevertheless, with nervous trepidation and excitement, each eventually found employment and began to carefully maneuver the path of his or her early educational journey, and I was no different.

Like many new educators, I took the first job that was offered even though it was over 70 miles round-trip from where I lived. Thus, my first year teaching was at a rural alternative school that focused on educating students who, for various reasons, could not or did not function successfully in the traditional school setting. I taught classes in secondary English and civics, and fortunately, my first year teaching experiences included having a seasoned principal who was highly effective in his operation of the school and in his relationship with the faculty and students. He operated on the principle, "I will help you if you help me," meaning that, as long as the teachers in his school were professional and were doing everything that they could to help the students succeed academically, he would support them in all endeavors. This principal was hardworking, honest, and knowledgeable. He was essentially an excellent example of the type of principal about whom I learned as part of my pre-service education preparation. While I enjoyed my first year as a teacher under this principal's tutelage, I jumped at the chance to apply for a teaching position at a high school in my hometown. Hence, I left this rural school setting having gained much from my colleagues and my principal, and I began my second year teaching with many new experiences waiting.

"Oh, don't worry, principals come and principals go." This is what I was told when I entered year two of my teaching career. My new school, with over 1200 students, was much larger than the little rural alternative school that I had just left. As a teacher new to the system, I was assigned a faculty mentor to help me with the transitional process. Everything was seemingly overwhelming, as there was so much to learn regarding policies, procedures, and expectations – not to mention preparing for teaching three different subjects to six classes daily that were packed with over 30 students in each class. Trying to balance it all was daunting, and when I asked my mentor to tell me what I needed to know about my new principal, I would often receive the aforementioned response or, "I was here when he arrived, and I'll be here long after he's gone." This told me nothing other than that she did not care for him. As a result of that conversation, I decided to ask other teachers what they thought of the principal in the hopes of gaining enlightenment regarding his expectations. What I discovered was that many of the faculty members actually liked and respected this principal. Those who did not often complained that his expectations were tedious and demanding and that his tendency to micromanage the faculty was a blow to their professional autonomy. Still, as a new teacher, I wanted to know more. Certainly, I wanted to ensure my success with my students, but I also

did not want to do anything to exasperate my new boss. After all, I remembered that the principal had the power to recommend the nonrenewal of one's teaching contract resulting in unemployment, something that I neither wanted nor needed. Consequently, I decided to ask the school secretary. If anyone knows what is going on in the school, it is the school secretary.

With great professionalism, the school secretary laid out in explicit detail everything that I needed to know to be a successful teacher under this principal's leadership. Once again, the expectations and character of this principal turned out to be almost everything that my professors had said that a principal would be. Dr. Newton expected all teachers to provide exceptional bell-to-bell instruction, to use formative and summative assessments to guide instruction, to be content experts in their field, to differentiate instruction, to be creative problem solvers, to be professional at all times, to provide a pleasant classroom environment, and – most importantly – to have his vision for improving student achievement. He was highly visible to both students and teachers, as he made it a point to visit every classroom at least once per week. The reality was that his high expectations and his constant visitations made some teachers exceptionally nervous, but as it turned out, many of the teachers who were most unhappy with his leadership approach were what Von Sheppard (2013) refers to as "toxic" teachers, or those who were part of "the old guard of difficult or ineffective teachers who really did not like kids" (p. 35). As a new teacher, it was quite interesting for me to observe.

Those teachers who belonged to the disgruntled group worked diligently at resisting the principal's program of change, but he did not relent. Consequently, by the end of his second year at the school, a large exodus of faculty occurred, with approximately one-fourth of the faculty leaving the school; however, with the disappearance of the toxic teachers, the rest of us, along with the new hires, got down to the serious business of education following Dr. Newton's vision. It was during this period that great advancements occurred at the school. The graduation rate improved, student attendance rose, the numbers of students passing the required standardized exams increased, student discipline decreased, and the school even won several regional and state sport championships. Over time, people began to see that a breath of new life had been infused in the school, and it was refreshing. Not everyone always appreciated his leadership style, but everyone did recognize that a new level of professionalism was present.

Dr. Newton had obviously done something right. He stayed at our school for 10 years until he retired. He brought a level of expertise to the school that trickled down to the faculty and throughout the community. We were proud to be educators and proud of the work that we had accomplished. When Dr. Newton retired, many of us were sad to see him go and even more apprehensive about the person who was going to replace him.

Now, this is where my narrative begins to get specific to the novice teachers reading this book and will perhaps help those who are the preparers of pre-service teachers. Hopefully, the rest of this account will assist these preparers by encouraging

them to offer a more realistic or at least an alternate view of those who may serve in administrative roles.

The next principal who assumed the helm at the school was pleasant enough; however, his leadership approach placed no concrete emphasis on excellence or on professionalism. Within six months, all of the gains previously made under Dr. Newton began to crumble. This new principal was rarely visible to the students or the faculty. He kept the assistant principals busy doing most of his work in addition to the work on their schedule. The best way to describe Mr. Knott's leadership style would be to say that he was passive. He did not want to make the hard decisions that principals must sometimes make. Fearful of offending one group over the other, he instead tried to win people over by being their friend. He wanted to befriend the students, the teachers, the parents, the board members, the community stakeholders, and any others associated to the school. It did not work. People became distrustful of his words and actions, student disciple began to rise, test scores began to fall, and many teachers grew slack in their own work ethic, adopting the attitude of "Why bother? No one cares or is looking anyway." The professional commitment to the school and to the students that had been previously held by the faculty began to disintegrate rapidly. Within two years of Mr. Knott's supervision, the school's culture and academic infrastructure had begun to collapse. Additionally contributing to the downward spiral, the principal resigned at the last minute at the beginning of his third year, taking a new leadership position in another school system. After this experience, I was beginning to understand what teacher frustration with school leadership really meant, but what would happen next would prove to be far worse and ultimately would test the limits of everyone's good practice and judgment.

The following school term proved to be one of my most trying. By this time, I was no longer a novice teacher. Now, I was the "veteran." In addition to my classroom responsibilities, my duties had expanded to include being department chair and working with pre-service teachers as needed for teaching practicums or to assist with student teaching field experiences. Periodically, I would also serve in the role of being a mentor to new teachers. That particular fall, I was assigned the role of being a mentor to a new teacher. I agreed even though I had some apprehensions. After all, the previous two years had not been pleasant, and my colleagues and I were still reeling from the backward decline that our school had begun to encounter. Regardless, none of us were prepared for what was to come.

Our new principal arrived under much fanfare, as he was going to be the one to "save the day." With outstanding charisma and grand pretense, Mr. Boston interviewed for the opened principal's position and was offered the job. He came to the school after impressing an interview committee of other principals and teachers from the whole of the school system, followed by the superintendent, and ultimately the school board. Mr. Boston had a first-rate résumé that included a successful 20-year career in the corporate sector. His initial steps into the world of education began with his previously held business degree. With that and upon his retirement from the corporate world, he began teaching secondary business

education courses, which he did for two years. During that time, he also acquired his education leadership credentials, which allowed him to apply for and to be hired as a principal. Thus, Mr. Boston's experiences in education were limited to two years in the classroom and one year as a principal prior to being hired in my district. With a total of three years of experience, Mr. Boston became the principal at my school, and events at the school rapidly began to change.

Immediately, the faculty and staff noticed something odd about Mr. Boston. He was not like any principal whom we had previously encountered. While school began at 8:00 a.m., Mr. Boston rarely arrived before 9:00 a.m. Every day around 11:45, Mr. Boston would leave the school for a "business lunch" with random people from the community, dining at various local eateries, and then he would return around 2:00 p.m. When he was in the building, he would spend a majority of his day behind the closed doors of his office "working," and he was not to be disturbed. In time, teachers and parents began to grow more and more frustrated, as access to the principal was virtually nonexistent. Consequently, it was not long before people began to talk, and by October, many were agitated enough to carry this information to the system superintendent. Shortly after, Mr. Boston began to arrive to school earlier, his off-campus lunches ceased, and he began to leave his office door partially open; however, along with those changes came unspoken resentment from him toward the whole of the school. In retrospect, I find it interesting that he once stated in a faculty meeting that education was his post-retirement choice, really a simple afterthought to his corporate retirement because he believed that the world of education was far easier in scope and demand than the business world. Openly, he admitted that he only planned to stay in education the required 10-year minimum in order to accrue a second retirement. Void of a vested interest in education, combined with the restrictions of being a building-level principal, Mr. Boston soon discovered just how difficult education really was.

Already in a chaotic state, the school was falling further and further behind. Test scores dropped, student discipline rose to an all-time high, and student attendance declined significantly. Almost daily, student altercations occurred in the hallways and the classrooms. As teachers were trying to teach and facilitate learning, blatant insubordination and student disorder would occur, disrupting the instruction and the learning processes. Students would be referred to the administration for these discipline infractions, yet nothing effective was done to address the problem. The assistant principals would dole out punishment as prescribed in the school's student handbook, but Mr. Boston would quickly reduce or reverse the assigned punishment just as soon as a parent called or, in some cases, if the offending student used profanity toward him. Consequently, the teachers began to believe that the administrators were no longer concerned with their plight in the classroom or with their professional needs. Many came to the conclusion that the principal was not in their corner, as Mr. Boston openly blamed the teachers for the students' decreasing achievement, the tremendous increase in student discipline, and the rising rate of absenteeism. Needless to say, teacher and staff morale hit an all-time low.

Even in the best of circumstances, mentoring a new teacher can be difficult, as there is so much that a new teacher must know to be successful. Sadly, the school at that time was not remotely close to being the best of anything. As the department chair, I worked with my mentee to help him make the transition that he wanted and to become a highly effective educator. While I knew what it was like to work in conditions where the principal held professionalism to the highest order, with Mr. Boston, even I as a veteran teacher was uncertain on how best to impart consistent advice to my protégé.

In his attempts to understand Mr. Boston and to meet his expectations, my mentee, John, tried to sum up the situation as he saw it: "Maybe he's incompetent, or do you think he's just a jerk?" Even though I was tempted to agree with him, I said, "I think he's just not sure how to lead in this setting." He replied, "Well, Coach Smith told me that Boston chewed him out in front of a bunch of kids and teachers who were standing there. Then Emily (a science teacher) told me that he did the same thing to her. She was really embarrassed and angry. Why would a principal do that? I was always under the impression that the principal was the smartest, most professional guy in the building." "John," I said, "Let me give you some advice. First, even though some people believe and have said that Mr. Boston is incompetent, unscrupulous, lazy, or inept, we have to remember that he is still the boss. We have to recognize that, and until that changes, you have to learn to operate within the space you are given. Remember, you do not have to like or agree with his policies; you just have to get them done as long as it doesn't require you to do anything that is unprofessional or unscrupulous. I know you know this, but in every school, there are going to be people who talk. Your job as a new teacher is to be careful who you listen to and to use good judgment in all of your decisions, and if things don't work out the way you thought they would, be flexible enough to adjust and start again." John nodded in agreement. I continued to work with John, and he made tremendous strides.

Like many new classroom teachers, John was overwhelmed his first year. He had to prepare his lessons, to continuously grade student work, to complete loads of administrative paperwork, to call parents, to post grades, to serve afternoon bus duty, to attend faculty meetings and department meetings, and to engage in professional development sessions as just a few of his responsibilities. It was hard for him to juggle it all, and while he was getting everything done, he felt like nothing was being done well. He expressed his frustrations with me about the workload, and he also shared that he was concerned about his impending teacher evaluations.

Under the regulations at that time, a new hire in the district was to be evaluated a minimum of three times in a school year. The building-level principal was responsible for two of the observations while an assistant principal conducted the other. I explained to John that the observation was nothing to worry about. I reminded him that he knew his content and was well liked by his students and that, as long as he followed the standards-based classroom protocols that we had discussed, he would be fine. Nonetheless, he was seriously worried and nervous because he had no

confidence in Mr. Boston as a leader and was uncertain as to how he would evaluate him. After discussing it further, I discovered that John was totally unprepared to interact professionally with a principal whom he perceived as one who was lacking as a leader. John shared that he strongly believed that all principals were supposed to be competent leaders who had solutions and answers for the school's success and that he was totally taken aback by Mr. Boston's actions. What I also discovered and realized was that John was doing what many teachers new to the profession do, including me, which was to listen to the "coffee room chatter" or the voices of those who are discontented. As a mentor, this behavior is often difficult to overcome with new teachers. I will return to this later, but first I want to share the rest of Mr. Boston's story.

As the year progressed, a series of events occurred and essentially sealed the fate of this principal. A student brought a modified toy gun to school in an attempt to be funny. Mr. Boston failed to report it as required and told the teacher whose room the gun appeared that he would "handle it." He also called teachers to his office for unscheduled parent conferences even though they were in the middle of teaching a class, saying that it was okay to leave the students in classroom unattended. He accused teachers of intentionally provoking students in the classroom as a means to increase the annual discipline offences, and he believed that parents were deliberately keeping their children at home to make him look bad as the school's attendance rate dropped. As a means to subsidize his student test bonus incentive, a program that was supposed to mirror the yearly bonuses found in the corporate world, he began asking local businesses and corporations for large monetary donations. However, when he did not get the response that he expected, he attempted to bully teachers into "donating" one 100 dollars each to purchase and provide 500 dollar flat-screen televisions for every student in the junior class who passed all four parts of the graduation tests.

The next and final event that shut the door on Mr. Boston's administration was the massive lunchroom brawl that took place a few weeks before the end of the school year. Unfortunately, a community event that happened between two student groups over the weekend spilled into the school's lunchroom that fateful Monday morning. While some students were quietly having breakfast, others squared off to settle a score. A fight broke out, chairs went flying, and total chaos ensued as approximately 10 to 15 students were involved in the altercation. The teachers and coaches who were on breakfast duty immediately jumped in to restore order; however, Mr. Boston was seen and unfortunately filmed on the school's security system running out of lunchroom toward the office yelling, "Help, help there's a fight! Somebody help!" In a weak attempt to defend himself to the superintendent, he blamed the incident on several teachers, claiming that they had orchestrated the fight beforehand and had encouraged the students to participate in it all with the intent to damage his character as a leader. Within days, he was escorted from the building.

FINAL THOUGHTS

To a new teacher, complexities such as inherent ideas about people or roles combined with voices of negativity can be overwhelming; so it was with John. What made matters worse was that the basis of this negativity was actually grounded in authentic concerns. Certainly, the faculty and the staff had much to be unhappy about as seemingly the school was crumbling around them. However, as a mentor, I was charged with guiding John toward being the best educator possible while hopefully teaching him how to navigate his already overwhelming circumstances of being a first year teacher, but this was coupled with the burden of having a weak and ineffective administrator. As it turned out, John's fears concerning his formal observations were ungrounded. He received marks of excellent on the one evaluation that Mr. Boston conducted, which lasted less than 10 minutes. One of the assistant principals did conduct another, but the third observation never occurred. At the end of the school year, John, who also coached golf, accepted a new position at another high school in a neighboring school system and is doing very well. Today, when John talks about the chaos of that first year, he says that he learned a great deal from those experiences – some he was prepared for and others, not so much – but we both agree that neither of us wishes to experience a Mr. Boston leadership style ever again.

Fortunately, for my school, we are once again doing well, as the principal who assumed the helm after Mr. Boston is very much like Dr. Newton. He places high emphasis on professionalism and excellence within the school. Moreover, he shares this message and expectation to the faculty, the student body, the parents, and the community. Collectively, the administrative team is exceptional, and as a result, in the last four years, our school has once again turned around. The school is making great academic gains and again achieving in sports. Teachers are expected to provide exceptional bell-to-bell instruction, to use formative and summative assessments that guide instruction, to be the content experts in their field, to differentiate instruction, and to be creative problem solvers. This is to occur while maintaining a level of professionalism at all times in an atmosphere that includes a pleasant classroom environment and, most importantly, with the vision for improving student achievement. This environment is what every teacher should experience throughout his or her career; hence, if there is any doubt, I will state it boldly: leadership does indeed matter.

Just as in the game Marco Polo, finding one's way as a new teacher is not always easy. The path is not always known, nor is the route direct. Conflicts will affect both new and veteran teachers; however, finding one's way can be established in being observant, knowing how to listen well, understanding the value of making sound decisions, and then in realizing the value of flexibility.

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ANNE M. MEIROW

5. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

I was in a year of transition: coming out of teaching a high school science classroom full-time to half-time science teacher, half-time learning consultant, working with academically at-risk general education students. My administrator and I thought that it would be a great idea to schedule those kids whom I saw for one class per day for intensive intervention into my science classroom as well so that I would have two hours of exposure to them per day.

Scheduled into both my support room and my ninth grade physical science class was a student named John. The previous spring, the middle school had characterized John as a student who had possibly the most severe case of ADHD that they had ever seen. I believe that their words were "hyper with a capital *H*." The middle school had recommended testing for John, but the parents were highly offended at the insinuation that there was anything "wrong" with their child. John was undiagnosed and unmedicated, and out of control.

In my science classroom, late in the day, John was a terror. If he could sustain his attention for longer than 90 seconds, it was a good day. He couldn't keep his hands or feet to himself, taking the possessions of other students, spinning in his chair (that didn't spin), kicking other students, touching, poking, and pulling. He wasn't afraid to voice his opinion – "This is STUPID!!" was pretty common. I felt as if I said his name 30 times per hour. I would pull him out in the hallway to have "the chat," but I never sent him to the office.

I asked for help. John's counselor came in to observe his behavior in the classroom. In just 25 minutes of observation, he had written three pages of notes. I emailed home frequently, receiving messages ranging from "he would be punished" to "it's an issue you need to figure out how to deal with… you are the teacher." John was failing miserably. Homework was not getting turned in, and his testing was abysmal. While he was in my support room each day, he refused to work. He was intent on disrupting the other students in the class who were there to receive support. While his behavior was not as aggressive as it was in the science class (it was a very small class, therefore a smaller audience), it was definitely not a productive use of his time (or mine).

I didn't know what to do to reach this kid. As the weeks passed, the climate in my science class was changing. I was spending so much time focusing on John that the rest of the class had a free pass to socialize. When they were focused, they were getting increasingly annoyed with John. I didn't have to say his name as much anymore – the students were redirecting him for me. The tone was turning hostile

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 35–39.

toward John. As frustrated as I was with him, many of these kids had been dealing with his behavior in other classes for years and had lost their patience long ago. It was getting ugly. I didn't want it to escalate to a bullying situation within my classroom.

On the occasions when I would pull him out into the hallway or when I would speak with him in the support classroom, I was trying to get to know him. The REAL John. Some days, he would let me in, and I would learn a little about his home life and his history, but other times, he was so angry (with me?) that his face would turn purple, and tears would stream down his cheeks. Overall, John was a likeable kid who seemed eager to please, but for whatever reason along the way, he decided that calling attention to himself in any way possible was that key to forming friendships. Unfortunately, if he had any friends, they were few and superficial at best. I was concerned for his future. Besides the failing grades and disciplinary issues that he was racking up with other teachers, kids with ADHD are at a higher risk for substance abuse either through the desire to self-medicate or as a mechanism for forming friendships.

We were now several weeks into the school year, and John seemed to be escalating his behavior. He was no longer doing ANY homework, and his behavior was increasingly out of control. I was frustrated that he was affecting my classroom so greatly. Our little chats were increasing in frequency, as were his tears and anger. In one of our chats, I expressed that I was concerned for him. I asked him if he wanted to make friends, and he assured me that he did. I explained that his actions weren't the way to go about it. I was concerned with how the other students were beginning to treat him and exclude him. I told him that I cared for him but that, if his behavior continued, I would be referring him to the office for disciplinary action. I was running out of ideas. I had scoured the Internet and read numerous articles and chapters in books on how to best handle students with ADHD. They all sounded great in theory but made me wonder if any of the authors had ever had a student with ADHD in their classroom. Nothing was working with John.

Of course, this wasn't a personal vendetta against me. All of John's other teachers were experiencing much of the same behavior and associated frustration. They were not giving him as many chances as I was. John was becoming a frequent visitor to the main office.

After approximately four weeks of this escalated behavior, with me practically ripping my hair out on a daily basis, it was as if a switch flipped. John was suddenly like a different kid. He was completing most assignments, he was pleasant, and his in-class behavior improved dramatically. Day after day went by of this new, improved John. I was afraid to ask questions. I was holding my breath, hoping that this pattern would hold. I sent emails home, praising John's apparent transformation. His parents had no explanation as to why he had changed but were happy to get such good news. His behavior was somewhat improved in other classes but not as drastically as in mine. I encouraged other teachers not to give up, that there was

a great kid underneath. John and I were having pleasant conversations, and I was praising his behavior and thanking him for the change. After a week or so, when I was pretty sure that all of the turbulence of the past few weeks was behind us, I dared to have the conversation with John as to what happened and how he had suddenly changed.

He was testing me. That whole time, he was testing me. He admitted it. I hadn't given up on him. I hadn't gotten mad at him. I hadn't sent him to the office. He was pulling his worst behavior, and I hadn't wavered in supporting him. He had to know that he could trust me. From that point on, he and I developed a great relationship. He became one of my favorite kids. John was a very bright boy, capable of great things. His ADHD was getting in the way, and he had a long history of people tiring of him quickly. By January of that school year, he was confirmed to indeed have ADHD and began a medication regimen, and his performance and behavior continued to improve, both for my classes and for his other teachers. The next four years were not completely incident-free for John, but he graduated, and I am so very proud of the man he became.

I am now a full-time learning consultant, and the majority of my focus is on my general education students with ADHD. It is great to be able to interact with and form strong relationships with the students on my caseload, but for their teachers, it is much harder to find the time to individually work with them. It can be incredibly frustrating to have a class of 25 to 35 students when two or three (or more) have ADHD. Among the three different subtypes of ADHD (Inattentive, Hyperactive/Impulsive, and Combined), these students may present in different ways, with different needs. It is not uncommon to hear words/phrases such as "lazy," "disobedient," and "not motivated." I find that many teachers are unfamiliar with the needs of a student with ADHD. It is common to hear complaints about missing assignments, lack of effort, "spacing out" in class, and no follow through on deadlines when these are all attributable symptoms of ADHD. Realize, as a classroom teacher, that you may see signs and symptoms of ADHD in students in your classroom who have not yet been diagnosed. You may have students in your class who have been diagnosed – but who aren't receiving medication – about whom you don't know. You may have students who are diagnosed and medicated, but the parents do not want the stigma of a "label," so they have not notified the school. Because of all of these factors, most of the strategies that you would employ to assist your students with ADHD fall under the category of "best practices" and would serve to support ALL students in your classroom.

ADHD may look different from student to student, depending on the sub-type, gender, and compensatory skills that the student may have developed to overcome any deficiencies associated with the ADHD. ADHD does not define a child; it may change the way that he or she processes thoughts and emotions, but children with ADHD have the same hopes, dreams, and goals as any other student in your class. ADHD should not be a barrier to reaching their full potential. Unfortunately, the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) messages that they hear from teachers, peers,

family members, and society in general can gradually erode their psyche to the point at which they may feel different, inferior, and destined for failure.

As a classroom teacher, my most fervent suggestion to you would be to get to know your students – well. This may be a bit easier at the elementary level, when you have the same children all day, but at the secondary level, where you may see 150+ students a day for 45 to 90 minutes at a time, it may seem more daunting. The small amount of time spent each day making personal connections with your kids will save you much more time in the long run. As exhibited in the earlier story, that relationship piece can be the key to keeping kids engaged and helping them push past their limitations, perceived or real. If they know that you sincerely believe in them, it can help them believe in themselves.

With regard to best practices in the classroom, not specifically to students with ADHD but with all students with different learning styles, it is a wise idea to vary the delivery of your instruction. Provide choices in assignments and assessments to reach everyone. Rather than focusing on grades, focus on mastery of content and standards. There should be no surprises in your classroom. Let your students know what is expected of them by the end of the class period as well as by the end of the unit. Along these lines, since you are letting them know where you expect them to be, you may want to instruct your students on how to develop and follow through with goals for themselves. Try to direct their goals away from class comparison goals, such as scoring a 75% or above on the next test. Encourage your students to develop goals specific for themselves, such as improving their next test score by 5% above their previous test or reviewing their materials for a minimum of 20 minutes each night, if there is no other homework to complete that evening. Try to identify those students in your class who have anxiety issues (anxiety is frequently associated with ADHD); work on strategies to help them reduce those episodes, and encourage them to incorporate those strategies into their goals.

When providing instruction, provide visual instruction in addition to auditory. Utilizing technology is huge. If you are not comfortable with technology or are unaware of the vast number of useful educational applications available, please do your students a favor and learn. This is where today's students live. Provide them (and their parents) with information on your website, telling them what you did today, what you are going to do tomorrow, what you are doing next week. If you provided notes or information, put that on your website. Allow your students to scan or email their homework to you – many students with ADHD have no trouble doing their homework on time, but it is the actual physical act of turning it in that can be the issue. If they can submit it to you electronically as soon as they are done with it, they can clear their brains of it and move onto the next task. Subscribe to a service that allows you to send out text alerts/reminders for upcoming tests, quizzes, and due dates to both students and parents. Communicate grade information frequently, and provide useful feedback to the students to help them improve the next time around.

Many teachers get wrapped up in "covering" the vast amount of curriculum designated by the state or district. To that end, it is tempting to jump into lessons

immediately at the start of the year and each day and to work bell-to-bell on material related to their curriculum. After all, there doesn't seem to be enough time to do anything else. As mentioned earlier, if you begin your relationship pieces immediately, you set the tone for the school year. This sends a message to your students that you are truly interested in them. Throughout the year, this may also save you time that you would spend redirecting students, correcting behaviors, and getting your kids back on track. Take the time to administer interest and learning style surveys within the first couple of days of school. Use this data to help design your lessons. Let each class have a say in the classroom "rules." Just from this little bit of interaction, you will get to know a lot of information about your students. This will allow you to target any potential issues ahead of time as well as to give you tools with which to connect with your kids, such as things you have in common. In my experience, kids appreciate teachers who take on more of a mentor role rather than an authoritarian stance. You should not be their "friend" but a partner in their education, along with their parents. I always enjoyed getting feedback from my students in the form of anonymous surveys. You could do this fairly frequently, once per marking period or per semester. It helps you keep track of the pulse of your class and helps your students feel you value their input.

Relationships in the classroom can serve you in a variety of ways as a teacher. In my opinion, it is an essential best practice. For students with ADHD, and really any other disability, knowing that you are on their side and are sincerely interested in the best for them can help soothe old wounds and calm anxieties in the classroom. There are multitudes of resources available on ADHD and best practices in the classroom. It is in the best interest of your students to seek out those resources, whether on the Internet, in a book, or even within your building. Good luck!

ELIZABETH E. WILLIAMS

6. THE UNEXPECTED

What I Didn't Know I Had to Do as a Severe and Profound Intellectual Delay Teacher

Like many new teachers, my first year teaching was an adventure that I was ready for before I was even done with my student teaching. I just knew that I was good at teaching because my professors had consistently given me great reviews during my student teaching observations. My ego was inflated going into my first year teaching because of those glowing reviews. I would not admit to anyone that I was scared to take on my mild intellectual delay classroom because it was not what I had been given extensive training in, but it was what I wanted to teach. I was so headstrong as a first year teacher; come hell or high water, I was going to teach students with intellectual delays and be good at doing it.

NEW SKILLS IN MY FIRST YEAR

The first class I had was a sweet fourth and fifth grade mild intellectual delay class. I had no clue what I was doing. That was very apparent the first day when my student with spina bifida walked in. I had no formal training in how to deal with students' physical and health impairments. I recognized that I had no knowledge of any specific disability. I was going to have to learn as much as I could and quickly! As my new students continued to file into the room, I felt that I was way in over my head.

Later that morning, the county nurse came into my classroom to meet me. I found myself fumbling through the IEPs for my students, wondering why the nurse was telling me that I had a student with nursing services. I did not recall seeing that in any of my IEPs. I felt so dumb that I missed that bit of information. During the brief meeting with the nurse, I was informed that I was going to have to learn to catheterize one of my young female students. In my mind, I was thinking, "Wait, you want me to do what?" Upon the nurse's return that afternoon, I had to watch the process of catheterizing this student. I was mortified for this girl and myself. How could she possibly be ok with her teacher watching such an intimate procedure?

At the end of the day, I sat down at my desk exhausted, still incredibly nervous that I would screw up somehow, and worried that I was going to be expected to meet the medical need of this child. My principal sent me an email to meet with her in the morning regarding this child. In the end, I was not responsible for catheterizing this

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 41–47.

particular student. I was relieved that I was not responsible for that service on the child's IEP but wondered if or when I would have such demands made of me again in my teaching career.

IT WAS LIKE BEING A NEW TEACHER AGAIN, EXCITING!

Entering into my third year teaching, I found myself in a new school, in a new special education setting, and on a new grade level. Earlier that year, I very excitedly took a position in a severe and profound intellectual delay classroom on the high school level that would start in August. After two years in elementary school, I was ready to move up to working with older students. I had this idea that I was again going to be a great teacher making miracles happen for these students every day. What I did not know, but learned quickly, was that my students were going to make gains at a snail's pace. At least, it felt that way, but I learned to celebrate the small things in a big way every time they did have those gains. If it meant that, from day to day, they were not going to perform the same skill, I could be fine with that. On the days that they did something amazing, I danced around my classroom like a crazy woman, letting my students know that I loved when they did so well.

This class challenged me in profound ways and opened my eyes to so many experiences that I never imagined I would have. If I had been asked as a student teacher whether I would do some of the things that this class required of me, I would have laughed and said no. At the start of my career, I was positive that the SID/PID setting was not for me. Never would I have thought that a group of seven students over the course of three years would change my life and solidify my passion for changing the lives of students with disabilities. This was what I wanted to do from the beginning of my career. I was in a place to make a big difference in the lives of my students. I would have never guessed that they would have made such a large impact on me.

My class started off small with four students. Two of my students were in wheelchairs. None of them were potty trained, only a couple could feed themselves, one student – Kendra – had a severe seizure disorder, that same student had to be catheterized, and one student – Dean – had Fraser syndrome and was born without eyeballs. All of my students were non-verbal, which meant that they could not always communicate their needs to me. This class was a whole new learning curve because I spent the first few weeks trying to learn body language and signals. I never had to guess before because my students in my previous jobs could communicate with me. I felt like a brand new teacher all over.

During the first week, I had to learn how to change a diaper on adult-sized individuals who would not hold still. Thanks to babysitting as a teenager, I knew how to change a diaper, but the rules changed when the person to whom the new diaper was being applied did not hold still and the diaper ended up crooked and not covering all essential parts, or heaven forbid the diaper was not on tight enough and would not stay up! Changing adults was not like changing a baby. It was much

harder and a talent that I had to learn. Then there was also learning to catheterize Kendra student. As a young 24-year-old teacher, I was still highly embarrassed to have to do something that seemed more personal than just whipping someone's rear end. I was slightly more prepared having just received an *A* in the medical procedures class during the course of my master's program in multiple and severe disabilities, but it still did not prepare me to actually perform the procedure. Nor did it help me to feel any less embarrassed Kendra. I would not let the school nurse leave my side for two weeks while in the learning process. Several times, she had to finish the procedure for me because I could not get the tube in the correct spot. There was slight relief knowing that I was, at least, familiar with the female anatomy, being a woman myself. I just prayed that I would never have a young man who required this type of care step in my room. I was learning that I was going to be in a more intimate care giving setting as a SID/PID teacher than I first thought. I was not sure I was ready, but I was sure that I was in the classroom that was meant for me.

Diapering a student was not all that I learned. I had to puree food to the correct consistency so that my student Paul would not choke. I had to make drinks such as water and juice thicker because Kendra would aspirate on liquids. It was scary knowing that my students had a higher choking risk. In fact, it happened one day during my second year in this classroom. My student had just learned to use a fork to feed herself, and Kendra stabbed too many chicken nugget pieces on her fork. Before I could think about what I was going to do, I was pulling a very low tone, floppy, and over 100-pound student out of her wheelchair and attempting the Heimlich maneuver. I am pretty sure that, to a bystander, it would have looked like I was shaking this child. She finally coughed up the chicken nuggets. I was so shaken that I collapsed on the floor, still holding the child, shaking like a leaf from the sudden rush to action adrenalin, while her pulse oximeter beeped because her oxygen level had dropped below 90. This was not the first or the last emergency that I would have to deal with in this classroom. However, it was one that made me realize that I could not panic in an emergency. I just needed to react fast enough to ensure my students' safety. During times like that, I felt inadequately prepared for what was at hand. There were many sleepless nights while working in this classroom. I would worry about the medical frailties of my students and hope that I was meeting all of their needs both physically and educationally.

Monitoring breakfast and lunch was a task that required a good hour and a half for each meal to be completed. It was a difficult task, as I felt that I needed hand upon hands to get through it. I was managing more than just table manners and behavior. With the help of my paraprofessional, we had to puree food, to thicken liquids, and to cut everything up. We both sat with the students at the table because Molly felt compelled to eat off other students' plates, Kelly liked to spit food across the table, and then we had Paul, Kendra, and Dean, who were unable to feed themselves. Sometimes it was all that I could do to sit down and put food in my mouth. My lunch was on the fly when I could fit it in between lunchtime and the end of the day.

At first, I felt like my instructional time was so minimal due to feeding and diapering. It took me a while to feel like I was maximizing the small amount of time that I could do whole group and then I would work with individual students. I was always second-guessing whether I was providing my students adequate instruction. As the year progressed, I was able to bring in general education students as partners for my students. We worked on reading, math, and social skills. My students made the greatest gains in their abilities from those partnerships.

During my second year, my class and I gained students. Mickey was semi-potty trained, and Ellen had the ability to be potty trained but preferred to use her diaper, so I had to learn how to trip train a student. I thought since I was previously an elementary special education teacher that I would have no problems trip training Ellen. I was wrong. The first day, she pooped in her diaper and proceeded to wipe it on the walls in our classroom bathroom. It felt like teacher–1, student–0. The next day, I missed every single cue for her bathroom schedule, and she peed in her diaper three times. She thought that it was funny. That day was student–1, teacher–1. Finally, the next day, I was smart; I brought out the positive reinforcement to get her to pee in the toilet like a parent would do with a little kid. Stickers on the sticker chart were the key. She loved to put one on her chart every time she peed. I was blown away at the skills that I was picking up as new students were presenting me with new challenges.

This class challenged me in ways that I never thought were possible. I was a pro at problem solving on the fly. When Kendra wiggled her way out of her chest straps on her wheelchair and leaned forward to get out of work, I rigged those straps so that she could not get them loose and had no choice but to sit up in proper positioning. Another time, I had a wheelchair wheel break as we were going out to the bus. I pull the wheel off and duct-taped the spoke back together and put in a call to the repairman. The child safely rode home on the bus, and the repairman was in my classroom the next day with a spare wheel. I had extra clothes on hand at all times just in case one of my students needed a change. At any given time, I looked like a pack animal because I always wanted to make sure that I was prepared for any number of issues to occur. It took me a year to get to that point, but as issues arose, I would just add to my preparedness kit. When we went out on community-based instruction, I figured out a way for my student with Fraser syndrome to carry the bulletins that we picked up at a local church. Never in my previous years teaching did I have to employ such ingenuity to make things work for my students.

Halfway through that second year, I picked up a fifth student. Don was the most difficult student I had ever dealt with. He was a paraplegic due to a car accident but was born with an intellectual delay. He remembered what his life was like to walk and, as a result, grew up as a very frustrated young man with no communication skills. Upon his arrival, I learned that he was catheterized, and the fear of catheterizing a male student set in. Watching the nurse insert the catheter was even more mortifying than having to perform it on Kendra. Don was 20 at the time, and I had just turned

25. I had a hard time fathoming the fact that he was a man and I was a young woman. The age should not have mattered, but to me, it did. I expressed my concern about catheterizing a male student to my principal and was read state law, which said that the clean intermittent catheterization was not a medical procedure and could be performed by a layperson. I was just going to have to deal with the uncomfortable feeling and do it. I was not sure where I was going to find the inner strength to that procedure, but I did. I made it through my first week and my second and my third before the nurse dubbed me trained.

The next year, I added two more students, which put me up to seven. That year, I was expected to learn how to feed John using a tube-feeding pump that circulated for two hours. It was by far the easiest skill for me to learn, except for the first day I was left to my own trained devices, and I accidentally did the worst thing that I could have done to this student. I accidentally hit the tube as it was hanging from the pump, and I pulled out the student's mickey button, the button where the tube is connected that creates a direct line to the student's stomach. I ended up with formula and stomach fluid all over the front of me. I never wanted my students to feel that I was ever grossed out by anything I had to do to care for them. I always did my best to hide it, but this time I could not help it. I started to gag as stomach fluid came out. It was like a sudden eruption of Old Faithful at Yellowstone; as soon as it happened, it stopped. The student's mother came and took my student to the doctor to have the button replaced, and the balloon at the end reinflated. She assured me that what I had done, she had done several times since the feeding tube was put into place.

Those students really showed me what I was made of as a teacher. I learned how much stress I could handle and how much love I had to give, which was an endless amount. I always talked with my colleagues about how great my students were and about getting them prepared for wherever they would go after high school. I was always looking to the future of their growth while enjoying the time that I had them in my class. I knew that my students were medically fragile and that sometimes their lives hung in the balance. They were sick more often than regular students, and as a result, I developed a very strong immune system. I never realized how low their immune systems were until Dean got sick my third year working with him. That year, I learned the hardest lesson I would ever learn in that classroom.

DEALING WITH HEARTBREAK

My third year in my classroom, I felt the most at ease. I gained students mid-year, but I felt like I was prepared for all manner of possibilities that teaching SID/PID could entail. I was getting into a grove of feeding, changing, and teaching. I could get through that cycle twice in a day, and I was proud of that personal accomplishment. I could tell when I would need to change or reposition my students in wheelchairs. I knew when my students were happy or sad. I also found ways to communicate with them that made it easier for me to know when they needed something. I had

behavior under control for the most part, with the occasional outburst every now and then. However, I never thought that I would have to deal with the deterioration that students with medical issues go through in their lives.

Within the first two weeks of school, Dean – who had Fraser syndrome – ended up in the hospital with pneumonia. He was out for a few weeks, and upon his return, we celebrated and welcomed him back. We had a party complete with cake and ice cream because that student loved his desserts. All was wonderful for a few more weeks after his return. He was the same incredibly smart and sweet child before he ended up in the hospital with one major difference; he was no longer comfortable in his wheelchair. He spent several days in pain no matter where I positioned him. I could not get the child to eat or drink. Both his mother and I were very concerned about what was going on with him. The doctor prescribed the student some pretty tough painkillers to make him comfortable, and it worked. I was relieved because I no longer felt helpless. This student was able to learn and attend to lessons just like he has before. However, I did not realize that this was not the end of his struggles that year.

In early October, this student was rushed into my classroom off the bus, and he was blue. It was very clear to me that he was in some major distress and that he needed to get to the emergency room quickly. Typically, there are protocols in a school building before dialling 911, but I skipped that. I did not care at that point if I would get my wrists slapped. I needed to get this child to the hospital. When I was off the phone and knew the ambulance was on its way, I notified my administration. They all came running, and I was barking orders at everyone to clear the rest of my students out of the room and to give Dean, who was in massive distress, space. I called his mother at the school where she worked and could not manage niceties on the phone with the school secretary. I simply said I needed Pam, Dean's mother, and it is an emergency. Pam answered the phone and my response was, "Your son is not OK, and we are heading to the children's hospital in Atlanta."

Those were the worst words to ever come out of my mouth. Never would I have thought as a teacher that I would have to deliver such a blow to a parent. There was nothing that I could do to comfort Dean or his mother. As I climbed in the back of the ambulance with Dean, I choked back tears, knowing that crying would do nothing to help and that the paramedics needed me to provide as much medical information for him as possible. That was not the last time that this situation would happen. In the course of the year, I made one more ambulance trip to the hospital with this student. It was several months later.

I spent much of my time trying to make Dean comfortable and happy as I watched him start to deteriorate physically. I still remember the last day I held him. We sat on the couch in my room, and I read him a book by his favorite author. For the first time in months, he was still, calm, and comfortable. Three days later, on the first day of spring break at 5:30 in the morning, his sister called me to tell me that he had died in his sleep. I was not able to process this information right away. It hit me an hour later that my student was gone. I had no clue what motions to go through when it

came to informing administration at the school. I called the only assistant principal who I knew was in town. I could not fight back the tears as I spoke with him. Word spread quickly to my colleagues, and I spent most of the day on the phone answering a number of questions.

I had spring break to deal with the grief that I felt, and then it was back on Monday to a seemingly empty classroom. I had to figure out what to tell my other students. I was not sure that they would understand what happened. I had one student that had delayed echolalia, and I had to tell her something that would not hurt my heart, as she was bound to repeat it multiple times a day for the rest of the year. I left the school the same year Dean died.

I had served my time in that classroom and felt comfortable making the decision to leave for a new classroom. I knew that my life and the way that I viewed teaching had changed. I was more open, kind, and loving. I learned that I never knew what my students would throw at me in the course of the day, but I also learned that I was strong enough to handle anything.

While my heart still breaks for the loss of such a young life, I know that my other students are doing well. I have touched base with parents, and this year, I can proudly say that my students whom I taught all three years are graduating in May of this school year. Their lives are still fragile, and they still get sick often, but they will live full lives because I worked to help them do that. I loved the challenge and would gladly do it again if the opportunity arose, but this time I would go in much wiser and smarter. I would utilize the people I work with in a more efficient way to help manage the physical needs of the students. I know how to communicate with non-verbal students better because I learned that they have their own mode of communication. I am proud to say that I am a better teacher and person for having had the amazing opportunity to work with that class.

JOSEPH R. JONES AND SYBIL A. KEESBURY

7. "WHAT YOU CALLED ME WAS JUST NOT OKAY"

Why New Teachers Must Address the R Word

> "I remember as a teenager, walking through a department store and someone behind me yelled 'Look at that retard!'" said Potter. "It was hurtful. I remember turning around and saying, 'That's just not ok! What you called me was just not ok.'"
>
> —Abilitypath.org

Recently, we were in an upscale restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia, when we heard a couple at the table next to us use the *R* word. Because we were shocked that such language was being used in an establishment by individuals whom we believed would never use such language (yes, we acknowledge our incorrect belief in the connection of social norms and social status), we listened more closely to decipher their connotations and use of the word. These adults were using the language in the same manner as students in K-12 and collegiate environments. After this experience, we conducted an informal interview in which we asked participants the following question: "Is it ever okay to use the *R* word?" The respondents' comments ranged from "the word should never be used" to "one can retard the timing of the engine." All of the participants were educators, and two have earned Ph.Ds. in Special Education from a comprehensive research university and were both practicing special educators. However, a young woman with a master's degree in education posited that the *R* word is acceptable if it is not used negatively toward another person.

As educators, we have witnessed the pain that the *R* word has caused so many of our students. The word is overwhelmingly used negatively toward students with special needs. We are adamantly opposed to the word being used in any context; however, we question how we as educators can combat the institutional history and hegemony of the word. Unlike other hate language (such as the *N* word or the *F* word [referring to gay and lesbian students]), the *R* word is rooted within a clinical context. We postulate that it is more difficult to change the landscape of hate language when the language has been institutionalized within accepted parameters.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.), the *R* word (adjective) is defined as, "held back or in check; hindered, impeded; delayed, deferred." Further, as an adjective, the word is "characterized by deceleration or reduction of velocity." In 1895, the word was used as, "diagnosed with or characterized by learning

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difficulties or an intellectual disability; spec. having an IQ below 70; designating a person regarded as mentation deficient; slow, dim, feeble-minded." In physics, the word means, "designating a potential or other parameter of an electromagnetic field in which an allowance is made for the infinite propagation speed of the radiation, the potential due to a distant source being expressed in terms of the state of the source at some time in the past." As a noun, the word means, "the fact of being slowed down or delayed with respect to action, progress, or development; lateness, slowness; a delay or slowing down," and can be traced back to 1781. Moreover, as a verb, the *R* word is defined as, "to hold back, delay, or slow (a person or thing) with respect to action, progress, etc.," and can be traced back to 1490. Further, as a transitive verb, the word means, "to put off to a later time; to defer, postpone, delay." In 1909, the word became more prominently used within education and psychology as a noun meaning, "a person displaying or characterized by developmental delay or learning difficulties, and a child whose educational progress or level of attainment has fallen behind that expected for his or her age."

In modern society, the word is still being used with two major academic disciplines, music and science. Although it is sometimes spelled *ritard* in music (but pronounced the same), the word is a musical notation that signifies a slowing of tempo that will most likely return to its original tempo at any given point in the piece. For example, one may say, "I see the retard on the page," or, "Why don't we try retarding there?" The use of the word in these instances has no connection to intellectual abilities. Conversely, the word is slowly disappearing within the science community; the word *retardation* is slowly being replaced with "electrophoretic mobility shift assay" and "mobility shift electrophoresis." However, the replacement is quite slow; in fact, the change has been occurring since the 1990s.

Although the above discussion of the word revolves around academic discourse, the reality of the usage is quite troubling. Recently, we were walking across campus and documented hearing the word seven times in a ten-minute walk. Within broader society, the word is also quite prevalent. In 2014, professional basketball player LeBron James, used the term (common knowledge). In another instance, a CEO used the word in reference to how much individuals with special needs should be paid (Huffington Post, 2014). These are only two examples. From a quick Google search, there are numerous other examples discussing someone using the word in public, predominantly in a negative manner.

Having said that, an academic colleague made the following statement: "It's not just the word that is so disturbing; it is the cultural hegemony around children and adults with intellectual disability – as too different to be schooled with other children, as not belonging to our schools and communities, as having no cultural value or worth. I have recently had a series of long conversations with a mother of a 6 year old child with Down syndrome about why inclusion is still so damn hard. Eradicating the word may be easier than eradicating the devastating and long-standing cultural landscape" (Elizabeth Altieri, personal communication, 2014).

Dr. Altieri offers an interesting point. Addressing the *R* word is quite different than addressing other forms of hate language because the *R* word is rooted within a socially constructed hierarchy, one in which individuals with special needs rests at the bottom. Because the *R* word was once a clinically accepted term, as such, the word contains great power within in society and schools; this power helps to reinforce how schools define normal students. In this capacity, the *R* word is the scarlet stamp that solidifies the separation of "those students" from the "normal students." In essence, the *R* word becomes an identity marker, a label from which one is unable to escape. In this manner, the marker engenders bullying behaviors.

Although there appear to be different meanings and uses for the word, a majority of the American population uses the word in a hateful manner toward individuals with special needs. The word causes anguish. It is problematic when the word is still used in a clinical manner with students. In fact, we recently had a conversation with a veteran special education teacher who used the *R* word in our discussions when referencing a clinical diagnosis. This teacher has been teaching for 30 years. When she used the word, we were troubled but did not address her language choice. If she had used the *N* word or the *F* word, we would have immediately opposed her language choices. If we, as academic researchers and teacher educators, felt apprehensive about addressing the language, how can we expect new teachers to address the word when functioning within the agency of schooling?

Because of this, it is imperative for educators to conceptualize the reality of the impact that bullying has on the lives of students with special needs. According to AbilityPath.org (2011), "Tyler Long's diagnosis with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) caused unique personality traits that made him unpopular in school. His mother, Tina Long, says being different made him a target of bullying. Classmates took his things, spat in his food and called Tyler names. On October 17, 2009, 17-year-old Tyler's battle with the bullies led to a tragic end. Depressed, he hanged himself before school and committed suicide. It devastated his family and engulfed a community to seek answers."

Students with special needs are two to three times more likely to be bullied than the general population of the school building. Specifically, 47% of parents reported that their children had been hit by peers or siblings, and 50% of parents reported that their child was scared of their peers. Moreover, 9% of the students with special needs were attacked by a group of students and hurt in their "private parts." In terms of social interactions, 12% indicated that their child had never been invited to a birthday party, 6% were almost always picked last for teams, and 3% ate alone at lunch every day (Abilitypath.org). Further, most students with special needs were told not to tattle on others who had bullied them nearly twice as often as their non-special education counterparts.

These are extremely heart-breaking statistics, and they paint a dismal picture of the culture of schools in regards to bullying and how it impacts students with special needs. Bullying individuals with special needs is a tremendous problem in

our schools, which becomes more acceptable in the school community because of the use of the *R* word. The acceptance of the *R* word opens up the possibility for greater intolerance toward individuals with special needs.

Therefore, educators must address the use of the *R* word because allowing the use of the word creates an atmosphere where bullying students with special needs is acceptable. For students with special needs, the *R* word has the power to disenfranchise them and opens the door for physical acts of violence. A school culture that allows the use of hate language toward a population of students is more likely to allow physical violence against the same marginalized population.

As a first year teacher, many educators are not prepared to address hate language in their classrooms. Most new teachers were not offered a course or class assignment that depicted how to create tolerant classrooms, nor did their district offer professional development addressing this challenge. Therefore, we argue that it is imperative that first year teachers realize the problematic nature of the *R* word and how the word impacts the learning environment. First year teachers must also address every use of the word within their classrooms and schools. We wish that there was a prescriptive method that we could offer to first year teachers. First, do this. Second, do this; and so forth. Because bullying behaviors are constructed through a community's beliefs about difference, a prescriptive plan will not work in every classroom. In one classroom, a teacher may simply say, "Choose a better word," and the student would ideally never say the *R* word again. Another class may require a lengthy discussion about the *R* word and why it is not acceptable, whereas another class may need to engage in ongoing dialogue about tolerance and how the *R* word creates intolerant spaces. In all of these cases, the teacher must immediately address the use of hate language through appropriate methods.

Thus, we postulate that practicing teachers must begin attempting to eradicate this word from schools through realizing the detrimental aspects that the *R* word has on students with special needs. The word continues to be a way to inflict emotional pain on a particular population within our classrooms. Students with special needs are bullied, and the *R* word is the hate language hurled at students during those bullying behaviors. In order to address this problem, teachers at all levels must realize how the *R* word becomes a conduit for reinforcing what it means to be normal in schools. In this capacity, the *R* word continues to dehumanize a population of individuals in our community, which causes society to remove any social value from those individuals. Again, teachers have the power to control the language in their classrooms.

We challenge all new teachers not only to embrace the reality of their power in controlling language within their classrooms but also to begin to conceptualize their ability to destroy the hegemony that exists with the use of the *R* word. Language reinforces the hegemonic structures that are prevalent within our society. As such, when individuals remove specific condemning language from the social atmosphere, the hegemonic structures weaken. We posit that teachers can weaken the structures to the point of full collapse. The collapse will create a safe and affirming learning environment and society for individuals with special needs.

As educators, we believe that it is imperative to eradicate the *R* word from all uses within our society. Our students deserve to learn and live in a safe environment, which is free from all hate language. In this capacity, we must begin contemplating how we are preparing our teacher candidates to combat the language choice in a manner that dismantles the institutionalized acceptance of the *R* word. Further, as advocates for individuals with special needs, we must begin a grassroots effort to change the way other disciplines use this word. We can no longer accept the use of hate language based on a contextual meaning. Because the word is used in music and maintains a different meaning, it still destroys a marginalized population within the broader society. Therefore, we must unravel the institutionalized acceptance of the *R* word.

We are aware that we are asking for an incredible feat. However, it must be done. All students deserve to attend school and not be disenfranchised and harassed because of difference. Our students deserve a place where they can achieve greatness. The language used in schools and classrooms creates an atmosphere that can promote or hinder greatness. We can control that language.

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MISTY S. SALTER

8. TEACHING WITH THE HEART

Teaching Students with Special Needs

I can remember the very moment that I knew that I wanted to become a special educator. I had spent several years visiting a special education classroom in our elementary school. I had been working with a young boy named Gunner on learning to tie his shoes. One day, while volunteering at our local Special Olympics, Gunner walked up to me with the "biggest smile that I have ever seen" and said, "Watch this." He bent down and tied his shoe, all by himself, right there in front of me! To say that I felt a sense of overwhelming joy in that moment would be an understatement. I was just as excited that he could tie his own shoe as he was. I knew in that very instant, even though I was only in middle school at the time, that I wanted to become a special education teacher.

SPECIAL EDUCATION WAS/IS MY CALLING

I've got this all figured out… or do I?

When the time came to graduate high school and to move on to college, my career aspirations of becoming a teacher of students with special needs had not changed. After writing countless essays for scholarships, I was afforded the ability to attend Georgia Southern University. Over the course of two years, I completed my core studies and was then accepted into the Teacher College, where I studied Special Education. I began working at an elementary school as a long-term sub the day after my graduation from college. I really thought that I had it all figured out. I could handle teaching in my own classroom in the upcoming year. I had all the tools – or so I thought I did, anyway.

When I began my first official year as a teacher, I was assigned to a self-contained classroom that housed a range of disabilities and ages. There were students with cerebral palsy, autism, and fragile X syndrome. This one classroom housed all of the students in the school with significant disabilities, so the ages of the students varied from five to 13. Of course, I entered the classroom with big plans and aspirations of all the milestones that the students would achieve while I was their teacher, but no one prepared me for the emotional and physical toil that the job would take on my personal wellbeing. I can remember countless times of

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 55–58.

joy and excitement in that particular classroom when a student would achieve a task or say a new word, but I can also remember many tears and "What should I do next?" moments as well.

A moment that changed my perspective….

One moment that I will not soon forget happened my first year as a teacher, in the above-mentioned self-contained classroom, 11 years ago. There was a student in the class, Jason, who was non-verbal and had been diagnosed with autism. He would have moments of rage in which he would become physically aggressive. It is still my belief today that the aggression that he displayed was purely from his own frustration of not being able to communicate his wants and needs in a manner that others could understand. When he would get overly stimulated, he would also bite his own forearm, causing bruising and scaring.

One particular day of teaching, Jason stands out in my mind as a turning point in my understanding, or lack thereof, of the emotional turmoil that some of the students are under. As a class, the students and I were attempting to complete our daily group calendar time. Jason became extremely frustrated during the group activity and began to bite his arm and rock backward and forward in his chair while making loud moaning noises. I allowed Jason to remove himself from the group in hopes that being able to move around would calm him down. Even though he was moving freely around the room and was no longer required to sit at the table, he still seemed to be very distraught, and his behaviors were intensifying. In an effort to help Jason, I thought that I would try to talk to him. Little did I know that my voice was apparently the last thing that he wanted to hear. Almost immediately after I began talking to him, he reached over, scratched my face, and then bit my arm. It all happened so quickly that I was unable to avoid the encounter. I was in shock at the moment. It took me what felt like several minutes to release my arm from his grip. Once I had freed my arm from his tight grip, Jason turned away from me and then began to go after other students in the classroom. At this point, I had to physically restrain him on the floor. He was absolutely beside himself. He was crying, screaming, and continuously trying to bite himself and me anywhere he could. I tried to release him slowly after about a minute, but he immediately lashed out toward my paraprofessional, attempting to bite her. I again had to restrain him. This went on for about 30 minutes.

I was both physically and emotionally drained by the time I was able to calm Jason down enough to let him go. I felt as if I had failed this child. He was frustrated beyond my understanding, and there was nothing that I could do about it. We were both bruised up and completely exhausted. I had to go to the hospital to receive a tetanus shot because the bites had broken the skin. No one prepared me for any of that. I had no idea when I graduated college that there would come a day when I would be bitten and bruised and have to restrain a young child. It was a devastating

experience. More than anything, my heart ached for Jason. I had many restless nights praying of ways that I could help him.

Why did I not know how much my heart would hurt??

I wholeheartedly believe that the teacher education program through which I received my training was a good one. I learned many important skills on how to teach students with a multitude of disabilities. However, no one ever taught me how to teach my heart to handle the heartache. There was no class on teacher self-preservation. No one told me that my heart would hurt so bad for these children that I would not know what to do with all the built up emotion, and there was definitely no one who told me that I would have to take a trip to the emergency room (on multiple occasions) to receive a vaccination after being bitten or to have a nose put back in place. Yes, my nose was dislocated one time by a five-year-old little boy. While that was extremely painful, more painful still were the feelings that I had of failure. I wanted to understand these students, to help them, to take away their pain.

I believe that most educators whom I know are extremely optimistic. We all have an image in our minds of standing in front of the classroom, teaching little boys and girls (or young men and women, depending on "the level that you teach"), and empowering them to become active learners. We want to be "the best that we can be", and we expect the same of our students. That is why, when an educator has moments of "failure," it tears them him or her down, or it did me, anyway. No one taught me how to deal with the realization that there are some instances that may occur that I will have no control over. Maybe there is a fear in teacher education programs that teaching the "nitty gritty" might scare potential educators away. I am not sure, but I do think that it would have proved beneficial for me, had someone told me that the job was hard on the heart.

Or, quite possibly, maybe someone did tell me that my heart would break almost daily for my students. Maybe I just did not listen, or maybe, as my students say, I used my "selective hearing" when the topic came up. Whatever the case may be, I was not prepared for that part of the job. I was not prepared for the raw emotions that I would feel when I hear another student teasing a student in my class. Or when I hear another educator coldly discussing how "that kid" will never make it or "that kid" will never be able to do anything. Eleven years later, I still struggle with the emotional aspect of being a teacher of students with special needs. I have many years to work with the same group of students and to develop a relationship, a bond, with both them and their families. I take them in as my own and do everything that I can to ensure their success while they are under my guidance in school. I work to make sure that they have options after high school and goals to work toward.

To me as a special educator, it is hard to understand how everyone does not feel the same compassion toward my students that I do. Yes, the student mentioned earlier, Jason, attacked me on numerous occasions. Yes, he lashed out at others in

the room multiple times. Yes, he would yell so loudly that other teachers would come in and check on us. But at the end of the day, he was a child. Jason was a child who needed help and was not able to express his feelings or his needs. All that he wanted was for someone, anyone, to understand what he was thinking/feeling but did not have the words to say. As his teacher, I am supposed to know what he needs. I am supposed to be the one with the skills to help him. I am supposed to be the one who can figure out what is going on when no one else can, but there were times when I could not, and those are the times that resulted in the fits of rage and physically aggressive behaviors. Those were the sleepless nights, tossing and turning, trying to figure out what I could do better the next day. How could I help Jason? What does he need from me?

As educators, we are our toughest critics…

I continued to work with the students in that self-contained classroom for three years before moving to another school district. While I truly believe that I learned more in that classroom than I could have learned from a professor, I continue to posit that I would have benefited greatly from some sort of preservation class. It is my belief that the majority of educators are critical theorists. We begin our career with a notion that we will be the ones to change the world, to teach the kids what others could not – that, with us as their teachers, they will achieve all things. We know with every fiber of our beings that we can be the ones to make that difference, so when we are faced with a situation like the one I have discussed, our hearts are torn. We blame ourselves. We punish ourselves, and we cannot rest until we figure out our next move to ensure success for all the students in our classroom.

I do realize that many educators may never be faced with a situation in which they are physically attacked by a student. As a matter of fact, I pray that most are never put in that situation. While I know that many educators will not face the same situation, I assert that, somewhere along the way, they will blame themselves for a student whom they cannot reach. They will spend countless hours pondering, pacing the halls, wondering what they could have done differently, better. Whether we want it to be or not, the heart is involved in what we do all day, every day. It would be a disservice to our students if it were not. I am not suggesting that we harden our hearts and just teach with no emotion; however, I do posit that someone needs to tell future educators that their hearts may hurt from time to time, but they should never give up!

SYBIL A. KEESBURY

9. KEES KREW LEARNS THE TANGO

A Journal Entry for New Teachers

I moved to the South the first week of January 1998. I put in teaching applications in every school within an hour's drive of my new apartment. I didn't get any calls until about January 25, when I was asked to come interview for a possible position.

Before I can even begin to discuss the first day or even the year of teaching, I must talk about the interview. I was new to the state and felt truly lucky to be called for an interview in January for a full-time teaching position. I dressed in my very best suit and set out for the one-hour drive to get to the central office. As this was the time before GPS technology, I had a map and explicit directions from the principal and director of special education for the county. I followed the directions perfectly, gave myself an extra forty-five minutes to get there – and, well, an hour and forty-five minutes later, I was still driving. I called the number given to me, told them where I was, and got further instructions on how to find my way. They were gracious and forgiving of the new girl trying to navigate the unfamiliar country roads. Three and a half hours after my departure from home, I arrived. I walked in, found the group of people waiting to interview me, took a deep breath, and was ready for the first question. That question was, "Will you accept the position?" Say what? I just drove all this way only to find that they had no questions for me other than will I accept? I asked about the position, accepted with the school and classroom sight unseen, signed the paperwork, and drove back home. I couldn't wait to start with one week to prepare myself.

THE FIRST DAY

On my first day ever of teaching, I was so excited! I was up early and drove the forty minutes to the school in record time, and this time I did not get lost. I had interviewed in a central office building, a beautiful new central office building, with fresh paint and new furniture

I made it to the school. The building was old and run down, and had cop cars parked all around it. I asked the officer where I should park, he pointed to the gate near the back. The gate was part of a chain link fence topped with barbed wire. The security guard at the gate asked my name, wrote down my car information, looked at my driver's license (which was still a NY state license), and said, "Welcome, honey." I was a little thrown off by the fact that I was parking in a guarded, gated, and barbed

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wire lot, but I was still optimistic for this grand adventure. I just knew that it was going to be a phenomenal day and that the students would love me! I walked into the school, met the principal, and was escorted to my room. Upon entering my room, I found only six desks, a few broken chairs, and two long tables. On one of the tables were three computers, but they were not even plugged in. There were two teacher desks and one teacher chair as well as a partition to the back, where the students hung their backpacks. The paint was light blue, peeling from the walls, and no books were anywhere in sight. Wow, not at all what I was trained to teach in.

The only job available in January was teaching children with emotional and behavioral disorders in a self-contained classroom, Kindergarten – Fifth Grade, 10 boys, and inner city. I was, a 22 year-old, from New York and Minnesota who moved to the Deep South, to teach ten inner-city boys with emotional and behavioral disorders. Seriously, what was I thinking?

THE AMBULANCE

Two assistants came into the room, a male and female: Mr. C and Mrs. L. They greet me, and we have some laughs about how I'm brand new and ready to conquer whatever comes my way. I am still upbeat (though a tad bit concerned about the state of the room). Kids start trickling in; this will be easy! Then, one boy comes in, leans against the wall, says, "I don't feel so good," and promptly passes out. What? Really? I squat down and shake him, thinking, "Wow, this is a great performance," only to find out… he really has passed out. We call the office, they call for an ambulance, the paramedics come, and out he goes… My first half hour in the school, and the paramedics have already been called. This doesn't bode well. As it turns out, J had a rough morning, and his uncle decided that it would be best to give him a double dose of his medication since there was going to be a new teacher.

WHITE BITCH

As this was happening, another teacher was nice enough to hold my other six children in her room until the commotion had stopped. Those six walked in nicely and greet me pleasantly; they hung up their bags and chatted with the assistants in the room. Once all the chaos had seemingly ended, in walked student number seven, K. He looked straight at me and stated, "Yo, yo, yo, white bitch!" I was floored. I looked at him and said, in my calmest teacher voice, "Hello, I am Ms. Keesbury, what is your name?" After all, I was trained to ignore the bad behavior and redirect. He laughed, said, "Cracker, my name's K." Well, "Hello, K, this may be a very long year for me," is what went through my mind. Mr. C told K to put his stuff away and to take a seat. K danced his way through the room, right on by me, with a little huff and another "white bitch" declaration, and the day was starting.

So, hour one: an ambulance, a swearing child, and five kids in the room. All desks are full, and I am waiting on three more students to come in. Where will they sit?

What I am supposed to do with these students? Mrs. L is already at the chalkboard writing out some math problems, I am looking at the roster trying to put faces to names, and Mr. C has taken a spot next to K, which seems to be his normal place. So far I have in class J – fourth grade who was currently at the hospital, K – fourth grade who likes to swear, TR – fifth grade who is almost as tall as I am, N – fifth grade, quiet and really not much to notice about him, E – fourth grade who is wearing a hooded sweatshirt and seems to have a permanent frown, B – third grade who hasn't stopped giggling since entering the room, and T – third grade who is wearing two different shoes that seem to be different sizes as well. I am not trained at all for this; I don't know what to do, and I still have three more to come in, and it's only February. Wow!

M AND HIS MOM

M is student number eight; he is a big boy. Mr. C stands to greet him, and I walk over to say good morning. His mom is standing behind him and asks to speak to me. I gladly accept. I introduce myself and start to ask her name when she cuts me off and says, "Well, M is six, in kindergarten and if you have any problems with him, I live the across the street, but here "she hands me tree branch, which I quickly learn is called a switch", use this if he acts up." I smile politely and say, "No, thank you." She sets it down on the table and says, "He will need a beating today, so I will leave this here for you."

Now, I am truly shocked, and I don't know what to do, think, or say. I smile and say, "Have a nice day," and she leaves. What am I supposed to do with this stick? Mrs. L informs me that, every day, M is told to pick his switch on the way to school and that his mom will come and hit him with it if he gets out of line. Well, that is a great way to be introduced to M: M – kindergarten who gets beaten with a tree branch every day. As I am processing this newest development, in walks R.

THE OLDEST AND FINAL ENTRANCES

R – who is, I am told before school, 13 years old and in the fifth grade. I am informed that he will drop out at 16 and that I shouldn't worry much about him. He was tall, skinny, handsome, and very polite and sat right down. I couldn't believe that I had a 13-year-old and a six-year-old in the same class. I spoke to R, gave him a piece of paper, and asked him to copy what Mrs. L had put on the board. He smiled politely and somewhat coyly and said, "No, ma'am, I don't do school work." I was speechless again.

In comes A – fourth grade. A comes straight to my desk, tells me, "I don't belong in here," puts his bag away, sits down with a notebook, copies the work off the board, and seemingly gets straight to work. I honestly thought to myself, "Maybe you don't…" I now have nine students present: three fifth-graders, three fourth-graders, two third-graders, and a kindergartener.

The rest of the day is uneventful. I followed the "schedule" that the students had in place: 8:00 – 8:40 arrival (this actually started at 8, and A entered at 9:04), then we had math, reading, writing, lunch, recess, and specials, then the day was over. I didn't know what else to do but to follow what they had known at least for the first few days as I figured everything out. I was ill equipped to teach all of these subjects to such a variety of age groups. I didn't even have any books for the students, let alone work sheets or anything else for that matter. Along with the lack of supplies and knowledge of how to inclusively teach K-5, I didn't know what the kids could and could not do. That first day, I watched what Mrs. L and Mr. C did; I worked on some math and read a book that I borrowed from the teacher next door.

LUNCH AND RECESS

Lunch was an interesting experience. That first day, I didn't know the routine, so I just followed the lead of the two assistants who had been in there for two years. It turns out that my students had been banned from the cafeteria. Due to the nature of their disabilities, emotional and behavior disorders, I was informed that the class had to eat in the classroom. At our designated lunchtime, the secretary brought the lunches to the room; the students weren't given a choice of what they wanted or even real trays. They were too "wild" to eat in the lunchroom with other students and caused too much of a disruption. Being the young newbie that I was, I decided that this was not "fair" and that we needed to rectify this situation. I spoke with my principal after school that first day and told her that I thought that it wasn't right. How could I work on their behavior if they weren't allowed to be around their "typically" developing peers? She politely informed me that no teacher had lasted more than a month with this class and that, if after a couple of weeks I felt the same way, I should come back and talk to her.

Recess was immediately after lunch. There was a playground in the gated area of the school, near the parking lot, and also a basketball court. I again was informed that the class had been banned from the playground. We could use the basketball court, but we weren't allowed access to the equipment from the PE teacher due to the risk of my students damaging or stealing it. So we went to the basketball court, and Mr. C had them run laps and do some games all while I sat dumbfounded that this class was dealing with so much exclusion.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM DAY ONE

It was only day one; I didn't leave until I was told to leave (by the custodian) at 5:15 because it wasn't safe for me to be at the school any longer.

Lesson One: there was a group of 10 boys, all from the inner city, who had been diagnosed with emotional and behavior disorders at some point. I had no idea when because there were no IEPs to be found, or cumulative folders, or any other

information other than word of mouth. Though these boys were a bit rowdy, I was ready to teach them.

Lesson Two: I was way out of my element. I was trained to deal with the behaviors and to teach students but not for the environment I was in. I had never seen such terrible conditions. I had never felt such outright discrimination due to children's disabilities. They had no access to books because there was too much risk of them destroying them. No access to the lunchroom or the playground. I was disappointed and upset at such an outright display of bigotry, but mostly I was determined. I was determined to make a difference, to teach these students. I was determined to gain back privileges and not to be another person who gave up on them.

I went home, called everyone I could think of who would have resources to send to me (this was before the age of Google), and I made an appointment at the education school at the local university to see what I could possibly glean from them. Day one was tough, eye-opening, and scary.

Time started to fly by once I acclimated to the setting. I got shipments of books, workbooks, data sheets, testing supplies, and donations to buy school supplies, and I spent a lot of time at the library preparing lessons for all of the students. I bought some fun posters, classroom decorations, paper, and pencils, got one of the computers to work, got a couple of fun programs for the students to use, and felt that I was really on my way to teaching these kids. In the meantime, I also got donations for jump ropes, a basketball, and some sidewalk chalk. I made the students earn the use of the equipment, and they had to sign a contract to take it outside. This seemed to work well, and with the help of Mr. C and Mrs. L, we made recess a time the students looked forward to.

Shortly after beginning my job, I was informed of testing that the students inthird to fifth grades would need to participate in. They would be tested on reading and math near the end of the school year. The End of Grade Testing (EOG) was nothing I should worry about, though, since the students in my class had never passed either the field tests or previous year assessments. I decided that I would do what I could to get the students to pass this test. Since all of the students but one would be taking it, I made it the priority in the classroom. We spent a lot of time on reading every day and worked our way from kindergarten review math to their grade level math.

IEP AND DISABILITIES

You may be wondering, how did these kids do behaviorally?

Well, after a week of asking, begging, and downright pleading, I was given the IEPs for these students. They were nondescript, with few goals that even related to anything academic, let alone behavioral. The county sent me a representative from the special education department to help, and she explained that these were the lost kids who were placed here because no one else could handle them. The IEPs were in place because they were legally bound to have them but weren't necessarily based

on individual needs. I spent a lot of time reworking goals, just for myself, with the help of the county representative, to track student progress.

Daily, we had outbursts. Mr. C dealt well with restraining the students if needed, and we kept most behaviors in house, making the students responsible for their own behavior rather than calling in the principal or assistant principal every time a student had a meltdown or outburst. The county representative also helped me come up with some good in-class rules; we worked contracts with each of the students to ensure that they knew what I expected of them. This seemed to work for the most part, our days became routine, and we had some fun.

At the start of my second week, I had held a class meeting. I spoke to the students about respect. I told them that I was there for the rest of the year and that I respected each and every one of them. I told them that, with the respect that I gave them, they had to return the favor. I told them that I was working to make recess more fun, that I was trying to get back to going to the lunchroom, and that I wanted to get them some books and other materials. I explained that all of this was based on them, their behavior. I couldn't do it alone, and we had to become a group, a team, to work toward the goal. R, N, and TR, the oldest of the boys, decided that we needed to name our room. From that point on, we were known as Kees Krew. We decided that, as a class, we would write a weekly newsletter highlighting all of the great things that they did in class each week. Each student got a section and a topic, and we distributed this to people in the building. They called our paper Kees Krews News. This was especially exciting to them, as they would get to talk about good things, not just dwell on negative behaviors. They asked me a lot of questions and told me that no one had ever stuck around, so "why be nice to someone if they were just going to leave?" We discussed this in depth, and I explained that, no matter what, I wasn't going to leave – not until the year was over. Shortly thereafter, I doubted this myself.

THE AFFAIR

As things went along, I made friends with Mrs. L and Mr. C. We talked for hours at night and on weekends about life, school, activities, the students, and what we could do to make things better for our Krew. I started to notice that things were off with Mr. C. He wasn't as attentive to the boys, he was late coming in some days, and he just wasn't the same guy I had started working with just a month earlier. I spoke to him, asked all the right questions, and even threw in some mild threats about his behavior, but nothing changed. The bombshell came from a late night call. It was after midnight when the phone rang. I answered it, and in my sleepy haze heard, "Sybil, I am leaving my husband." I sat up tried to figure out who was calling and what was happening, all while pretending I knew… On went the conversation: "We have fallen in love. I know we are not supposed to and that it has affected our work. We wanted to tell you sooner but were ashamed. I will be at work tomorrow, Mr. C will not, as he is finding us a place to live." Boom, there it was; Mrs. L and Mr. C were having an affair. I yawned and tried to be sympathetic but thought, "This can't

be real." How did I miss this? Isn't this against school policy? It turns out that it was not against school policy, and Mr. C didn't come to work that next day. A week later, they informed me that it was over and that everything would be fine. I don't know if they really ended it or not, but life went back to normal, and Mrs. L stayed with her husband.

LUNCH

Starting in month two, the students had lunch and recess privileges, probationary, given back to them. The principal had listened to my pleas and informed me that we could use the equipment and the lunchroom, provided that there were no outbursts. We started with the lunchroom, and the Krew did great. They were seemingly on their best behavior every day. I decided that they behaved how we expected them to and that, given the chance, they could do really well. We had a few days where some of them had to stay back with Mr. C and eat in the room as a consequence for morning behavior, but overall, lunch became a success in the lunchroom.

Recess also became a success. I never took away recess as a consequence; the boys needed time outside to run and play and be kids. They taught me how to play basketball. I challenged them to pick up games, and we never had an issue with equipment or outburst while outside until the day with E.

E AND THE BULLETIN BOARD

By now, I have lost track of time. I don't know how long I have been at the school but long enough that some of the behaviors that the boys exhibit are getting worse. They are no longer on their best behavior for me. E stomped in this morning, clearly unhappy about something. He was mumbling under his breath. I sat next to him, trying to figure out what was going on, when he looked at me and said, "Get away from me before I hit you." I calmly stood my ground. Mr. C moved in as he sensed that something was about to happen (as he told me later) and told E that he was not going to hit me or threaten me and that it was completely unacceptable here at school. In a flash, he stood, grabbed me, and had me in a headlock. Mr. C quickly had a hold of E, E had a hold of me, and my head was being pushed toward a window. All I can remember thinking is, "I need to close my eyes, and this is going to hurt!" Mr. C stopped E before he could hurt me. E was crying and apologizing as Mr. C held him in a restraint to make sure that we were all safe. My head was spinning, and I did my best to remain calm. E calmed, we went back to work, and K just kept saying, "Yo, man, he tried to kill Ms. K." The day continued on, and we had order in the room.

We went to lunch, and E started pouting and mumbling again. Mr. C moved closer to him as a precaution, given the events of the morning. He seemed to control himself, and we headed back to the room to get ready for computer time and recess. As we headed down the hall, E screamed and started running. Mrs. L took the rest of the class, and Mr. C and I started running after him. As E turned a corner, so did

I. He had grabbed the bottom of a wooden bulletin board and pulled the wood off the wall, nails and all. As he held this like a baseball bat, ready to swing, Mr. C and I stood immobile, wondering how we were going to handle this. E swung, missed, and started swearing. By now, we were trying to calm E down and to get him to put down the weapon. E backed away, got close to an exit door of the building, dropped the wood, and ran. He escaped. Now what? Well, the good thing was that three fourths of the building was fenced in like the parking lot with barbed wire at the top, and he went out the door leading to the bus lot, which was indeed fenced in, so he didn't get far. Mr. C and I went looking; the principal called E's mom, and we found him underneath a bus, crying. What led to this outburst, we don't know. We suspended him for a day. When he returned, I never had another issue with him. Maybe he was testing me, or maybe he was just having an off day.

K AND THE TANGO

I tried to convince K (who affectionately wanted to call me white bitch) that this was not a term of endearment and that he needed to call me Ms. Keesbury. He wasn't totally convinced but did agree to call me Ms. WK for "White Kees," as he said. I accepted it. Pick your battles, right?

K, as you remember, danced through the room on my first day of teaching and informed me that he wanted to be a professional dancer and that he could waltz, and twist and sort of polka but that all that he wanted to learn to do was tango. We as a class danced a lot, listening to classical music, pop, rock,' 50s and' 60s, and some kids' music. They loved dancing, and it was always a good way to change a mood when things seemed to be spiraling downward. I made K a deal: if he passed the EOG, I would teach him to tango. He told me, "Never mind, I don't want to know anyway." We talked about expectations and that, if he thought that he couldn't do it, he never would. I reminded him that I never went back on a promise and that I knew that he could pass. He agreed to continue to work hard, to study at home, and to practice the tests that I had given in class. So we put it in writing and both signed the contract that, if he passed his EOG test, I would teach him to tango.

R

One day, R (remember, he is 13 and in the fifth grade) was late to school, arriving at close to 11. The principal called and told me that he was in the office and that I needed to come down to get him. He had no excuse, and the principal wanted to send him home. I was against that idea, as he needed to be in school. He had been doing well in his schoolwork, was reading now on a fourth grade level, was excelling in math, and had a great artistic side. He was in a foul mood, and I tried to talk to him about what was happening that he was late and so unhappy. He told me that his dad took the last of his stash. Stash? What kind of stash? This is a 13 year old boy, and I figured that it was money that he was holding. I told him that I was sure his

dad didn't mean to and that he would replace it soon. R informed me that, no, he wouldn't because it would be gone, and how was R to continue to make money? I decided that I didn't want to know anymore. I wanted R to be the innocent kid that he should be.

I later found out that R had been selling pot for his parents in order to make money and help feed his family. I am certain that, had I pushed R, he would have told me, and then I would have been obligated to tell someone. Looking back, I probably should have told someone anyway, but I wanted to keep him sheltered and safe and was truly scared of what would happen to him, had I told some one. I don't know if he was smoking pot at that time, but I would guess that he did. This is part of the sad reality that was the culture surrounding the school.

THE INCIDENT

On a Friday, as we were preparing for our big test coming up, we were taking practice tests, as all but M would be taking the test. On this day, M was sitting in front of my desk, with J sitting next to him. We were taking a practice math test while M was working math problems at his desk. All was quiet in the room when J, seemingly out of nowhere, got up to get his book bag, and he told me that he needed something. I didn't think twice about it. J went on to his bag and back to his seat. Nothing at all seemed amiss. Suddenly, J raised his arm, yelled at M, grabbed something from his pocket, and sprayed it. I was out of my chair and around my desk in record time. It turns out that J had just pepper sprayed M. The room erupted. I had a hold of J, Mrs. L had M, who luckily was not actually hit with the pepper spray, and Mr. C was ordering the rest of the class to sit. I had no clue what had just happened, but I knew that this was serious. J was a small boy but strong. Mr. C and I escorted J out of the room, toward the assistant principal's (AP) office. The entire time, he was squirming, trying to get out of our grip, but not saying a word. We got into the AP's office and sat J in a chair. Mrs. L had already called and informed her what was happening, so she was expecting us. I sat in the chair next to J, didn't look at him at all, trying not to give unnecessary attention for this terrible act. I was speaking with the AP; Mr. C was standing off the side behind J. We were discussing calling J's uncle when, out of the corner of my eye, I see J raise his hand and try to punch me in the face; I was just fast enough to grab his hand as Mr. C grabbed his body to keep him from actually making contact, whew! I was still not giving any attention to J. The AP and I called his uncle, but no one answered, so we called every number that we had but could not reach anyone. Our school had a police officer who spent some time at the school every day, so our AP called him. He said that he would send a patrol car to school while he checked in on J's family. Meanwhile, Mr. C and I escorted J down to the main office, where we could sit in the nurse's room while waiting for someone. I made the decision to stay with J during this waiting period and sent Mr. C back to the room.

As J and I sat in the room with a window into the front office, so we were not completely alone – he on the nurse's cot and I in a chair – I asked him what he was thinking. I was trying to get answers out of him as to what started this when all that he would tell me is that he wanted to hurt M. I told him how disappointed I was and that he could have really hurt M or someone else and that this was unacceptable. He wouldn't say another word but didn't move either. I was sitting sideways next to him, he was on my left side, and there was a small table with a drawer in it in between us. Somehow, J got this drawer open without me noticing and the next thing I know is that I have been stabbed in the left arm with a pair of scissors. J is standing there, with a look on his face I have never seen before, and I momentarily froze. I was bleeding, and J was holding the scissors. I quickly grabbed his arm, the scissors dropped, the secretary was at the door directing a police officer into the room, and the next thing I know, J is in handcuffs, and the officer is asking me if I am alright while the AP and principal are ordering the office staff around.

It was a moment of chaos. I truly don't know how long it all lasted. J was escorted out of the building; the principal told me that J would be suspended for the entire next week. As the fog was clearing in my head, I said, "No, J needs to be right back in here Monday morning to face me. That is a punishment worse than sitting at home." It took a lot of convincing, but she relented and said, if I wanted him back, then OK.

Monday morning came, and I made sure to wear a short-sleeved dress, showing my bandaged arm. J came in quietly and calmly. We had a private conversation about how I was not to ever see him try to hurt anyone again; I didn't offer any threats, just that he wasn't going to do it ever again. He said, "Ms. K, I am sorry" I told him that I knew he was. That was the end of it. I never brought it up again, neither did he, and for the remainder of the year, he was the best behaved of all of the class.

THE BASKETBALL TEAM FOR EOG

The school had pep rallies, gave away daily prizes, and had desserts and treats all to pump students up for this testing madness that was coming soon.

All of these activities did not include the students in my classroom although two of them were allowed to attend with another class, TR and N (as long as one of the assistants went with them, just to be safe). The others were not allowed to participate because, as the administration told me, my students weren't well behaved enough to participate. I fought the urge to be outwardly angry about this though inside I was fuming. On the special days, I brought in our own special treats to pump the students up. I tried to explain that we were special and had our own exciting activities that were better than any of the things that the school was doing. All the while, I was wondering if it was even legal not to allow our students to participate due to their disability.

The final activity was a local college basketball team coming to play for the school, and my students thought that this was the greatest news ever. I told them

that they had to earn it and that, if they did, I would fight to get them to be able to go. I had never seen the kids so excited about something. I went to the principal and AP, pleading the case for why the kids should be allowed to attend. I showed them behavior charts and explained that they had really earned this privilege and that it would do wonders for their self-esteem. I was told no – that my class as a whole was not allowed to attend, but to use my best judgment to decide who, if any of them, could go. I was furious. I didn't tell the boys, and I didn't tell Mr. C and Mrs. L. I went home that afternoon and ruminated on what was happening at this school. I called one of my previous professors and talked to him at length about how the class wasn't allowed to participate in school-wide activities based solely on their disabilities. I knew it wasn't right or fair and was immensely disturbed by it.

THE DEFIANCE AND THE WHITE GIRL IN THE SOUTH

The day came when the team arrived; I decided that, in my best judgment, all of the kids could go. After all, didn't they tell me that I should in my best judgment decide who, if any, could go? We lined up and waited to be called over the loudspeaker as all the other classes had been. We were never called, so when I realized that the last class had been called, we walked to the gymnasium; we entered and got to our seats. That's when the AP came over to me, obviously furious, and said, "Ms. Keesbury, your class is not allowed here. You need to take them and leave now." I just looked at her; she pointed to the door and repeated, "Now." The students looked at me, and we stood up and left. I have never been so scared in my life. The adrenaline in my system had never been higher. I knew that I was doing the right thing for my students, and they deserved to be included. We went back to the room; they couldn't understand why we were asked to leave, they were angry, and so was I. I couldn't explain to them something that I didn't myself understand. I took them outside; we played basketball, and they fumed while I fumed silently. Mr. C and Mrs. L asked me what really had happened; I told them the whole story. Mrs. L just laughed and told me that I was gutsy.

Shortly after we got back inside, I was called to the principal's office; I knew that I was in trouble. She and the AP were standing and informed me that I needed to sit, so I did. The AP looked and me and said, "You were insubordinate, bringing the students to the gym." I told her that it was my understanding that I was to use my best judgment and that I decided that they all deserved to go. The response was, "Young lady, you are young, white, and from the North and have no idea how things are run down here." What? This whole thing was summed up in that one sentence. I was stunned, angry, and speechless. Did she really just say that to me? How was I to respond? They dismissed me and said that we would talk about it in the morning.

The next morning, I came in to find a formal reprimand in my box. I called some teacher friends and was told to write a rebuttal letter, which I did. All of this started a flurry of meetings with the AP, the principal, and me. I stood my ground and was continually told that I couldn't understand how things were run in the South and

that being white didn't make me a savior to these kids. After a couple of meetings with the principal, she brought in a central office representative, who met with me separately, took my letter of rebuttal, met with the AP and principal, and told me that we would meet in a couple days. The next day, I was called to the office, and this time, the school system superintendent was waiting for me, and the principal was sitting behind her desk but was silent. He introduced himself and told me that he had been in conversations with both the AP and principal and that he was there to apologize for the fact that my students were not allowed to attend the rally but that I should have spoken to the principal before I took the students. He told me that it was just one big misunderstanding. Maybe it was my naiveté that gave me guts, but I was angry and told him about all the things that were said to me by the principal and AP, about how I was formally reprimanded, about the discrimination against my students based solely on their disability, all while he sat and listened to me. He asked me if he could meet with me later, to which I agreed. I left the office, and that was all that I heard – for a while anyway.

THE TESTS

Meanwhile, it came to be EOG testing time. Every morning, we had a dance party and sing-along before it was test time just to release some tension. The students each took the tests. Each student spent time telling me after the test was done how they felt about it, what they thought they did well on, and what they thought they didn't do well on. Each one of them told me, "It doesn't matter, Ms. K, we always fail." This broke my heart, and I couldn't help but think of how long they had been told that they were bad and failures.

The day came that the results of the tests were in; I think that I was more nervous than they were. I was once again called to the office; I was sure that this was the end – that they had all failed, that I was going to be fired, and that this would be the end of my teaching career. But SURPRISE! All of them passed, yes, nine out of nine, who were expected by everyone to fail, PASSED! Never before had any of them passed the EOG. They ALL passed. I started crying. I ran back to the room, where they were all sitting quietly; I walked in, tears in my eyes, and K said, "I'm sorry Ms. WK." I smiled and said, "None of you have anything to be sorry about; I have never been more proud of anything in my life. All of you passed."

THE DANCING

With this announcement, the room erupted, I started crying again, and each of the boys hugged me. I looked at K and said, "Shall we tango?" I taught the entire class how to tango. We laughed and smiled. I truly have never had a moment as proud and awe-inspiring as that day.

THE DEPARTURE

We were just a few days from the end of the year, and we were wrapping things up. I was called to the office once again; when I arrived, the superintendent was there again, this time with a couple other people, including the principal and AP. We all sat in the conference room, and he started out by once again apologizing. He then introduced me to the school board members; they all said that they had heard what was going on and wanted to apologize. By this time, I had spoken with many friends, family members, teachers, and former professors. We all had come to the realization that I shouldn't stay at this school anymore. Too much had happened. The group asked me what my plans were, and it was apparent through the discussion that they just wanted me to leave quietly. They knew that they were wrong, and I knew that they were wrong, but I didn't have any more fight left in me. I had taught the kids, and I had gotten them through the year as I had promised. I was truly young, white, and from the North and didn't want to know how things were run around there.

On the last day of school, I huddled the students and told them how proud I was of them but that I would not be back the next year. Some of them were moving on to sixth grade, M was moving, and the others were sad. They again asked lots of questions, and I answered them as honestly as possible, telling them that I had loved my time with them and that they could go on to be anything that they wanted to be.

I packed up my stuff, silently looked at the school, and thought, "WOW, all this in only four months."

DANIELLE M. HOWARD

10. REFLECTION

Draw a Line–Turn the Page

I finally decide to leave for the day and head home because bricks and weights on my shoulders are getting too heavy. I think that staying at school and working in the peace and quiet would help me release the day, but this line of thinking has not been working. I decide to put a few things in my school bag that I usually ambitiously think I might work on at home but probably won't. I climb into my car and begin the 20-minute drive home. The car is silent as I rehearse the challenges of the day. At this point, I only see challenges. I have a plan, but my expectations for each day are to get a little further. During my car ride, the radio is off, I do not have a tape playing, and there is no noise except the noise in my mind. The noise is so loud that I frequently miss the last turn to the street leading to my apartment complex. I do finally make it home, fumble around my purse for my keys, and turn the key to unlock the door. Most days, I put my school bag down by the door. Today is no different. I go to the restroom because I have not been since leaving that morning. I usually do not use the restroom while at work because I am working. I rarely take time for lunch or for restroom breaks. During my first year of teaching, I often packed my lunch – partially because it was less expensive and partially because I can eat my lunch throughout the day. While I was definitely elated to be earning a salary, it was barely enough to pay my car note and apartment rent with only a little left for groceries.

After I return from the restroom, I make a bowl of Frosted Flakes and begin broiling a hot dog. I sit down on the futon to eat my bowl of cereal and hot dog in—silence. After finishing my dinner, I wash the dishes and sit back down on the futon and stare in the space. This had become my custom at the end of each day. I was so overwhelmed and drained that I did not call friends, watch television – I just sat, stared, and thought. On this particular day, the phone rang and startled me out of my trance. On the other line was my mentor asking about my day and my current activities. I explained to him that I just need to make it to Thursday, when I go to church, and make it to, Friday. I further explained that I really was not doing anything right now but staring into space. We talked benignly for a few more minutes when he broke again into my thinking and stated that I was showing early signs of burnout. He suggested that I start leaving school earlier so that I could release the school day. He also suggested that I get a journal. I only followed his second recommendation because I was convinced that working harder was working longer. I purchased a

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 73–77.

five-subject notebook and started journaling. Quickly, my journal became like a diary where I would record my thoughts each day. After a short time, I became bored with expressing the same concerns without any solutions. One day, I remembered how I reflected during my undergraduate studies. From that time forward, I began dating the page, drawing a line, and turning the page by reflecting on my school day.

REFLECTION: CONCEPTION

I got my very first teaching assignment three days before school began. I signed a pre-contract during the teacher recruitment fair. This contract basically meant that the school district promised to offer me a job at the start of the next school year. The contract did not stipulate when I would be notified of my teaching assignment, but nevertheless, I got my first teaching assignment in 1999. There was no bonus attached, but it was a promise. The interviewers commented that what sealed the offer of the coveted pre-contract was my use of reflection. I showed them my portfolio, as many new teachers are encouraged. As I was flipping nervously through the pages, one of the panel members stopped me and inquired about multiple pages with a line down the middle. I excitedly explained that the pages were my reflections. It was my interpretation of how teacher candidates in my program were supposed to reflect during our "methods" and student teaching semesters. Most reflections were in paragraph form, but I decided to revise the format to be useful for me. I drew a line down the middle of my piece of notebook paper. On one side, I wrote "What Went Well." On the other side, I wrote "What Needs Work." My intention was to psychologically encourage myself into thinking that the whole lesson, assignment, or day couldn't have possibly been all bad! Traditionally, the act of reflecting is usually when the person admits to mistakes. I chose to acknowledge what went well. My thinking was that I always remember the incorrect answers on an assessment but that I can rarely remember the correct responses. I wanted to know what went well so that the practice could be duplicated. I continued to tell the interviewers that I can visually see my growth because the "What Went Well" column should have more comments further along in the semester and the "What Needs Work" comments should begin to decrease. The panel seemed very impressed with this interpretation on reflection until I explained the last piece. After I draw a line, I turn the page. After I commented under the different headings, I turned the page to then jot down any suggestions or next steps for going forward. Ultimately, the process of reflection for me was to draw a line and turn the page. The panel thanked me by offering me a contract to teach in that county the next fall.

REFLECTION: BENEFITS

After the phone call with my mentor, I committed to engaging in the practice of reflection. I had a plethora of situations on which to reflect, and the following is an example.

One of my students refused to follow my directions, warnings, and fruitless pleas not to tip in his chair. I mentioned the litany of consequences, the safety issues, but he continued to tip in his chair. Well, the worst happened. He fell out of his chair and hit his head on my chalk ledge. I panicked but managed to alert 911. While the student was being assessed by the EMT, I walked over to my manipulatives because my back would be toward the scene. I pretended to tidy up while tears fell from my face because this was not my first call for emergency help. Earlier in the month, the same student said that he wanted to commit suicide. Actually, this was not my first time when I needed help. I was overwhelmed, deflated, defeated, oppressed, and alone and really questioning whether teaching these students was a good choice. The student was examined, and it was reported that the student would be fine and that his stunt was probably for attention. The EMT crew recognized the young man from another situation. After the emergency team left, I dried my tears and anticipated the arrival of my assistant principal. I feared that the beginning of my teaching career was beginning to crumble, but I had to do something. When the bell rang to signal dismissal time, I could not wait to journal about the day. This day's reflection was a little different. I drew a line.

Many of you reading this can probably see many analogies associated with this phrase. I envisioned myself drawing a line in the sand to say that this practice stops here or that this practice I will not compromise on. Turning the page drew the image of turning the corner on a new habit, turning the page on a new season of life. In this case, turn the page on whatever happened and move forward. The trap is that teachers can usually identify what needs work but rarely identify intentional practices to repeat. Even rarer is actually practicing the habit of documenting suggestions. When I turn the page, it was a physical motion to trigger the habit of asking questions, making a list for further research and the best part, the most exciting part, recording my ambitious fresh ideas commonly associated with being a new teacher.

The habit of reflecting eventually pulled me out of the mire commonly experienced by new teachers. I was able to identify the good and bad in order to move forward. I would have reflected orally with my colleagues, but exposing my issues to tenured staff members was not welcomed and was very deceiving. That's another chapter. Further, I needed an avenue to express my celebrations and concerns without judgment and risk.

The most common statement heard at the end of the school year by first year teachers is "I survived!" I was no different. I was so happy when my first year ended, but I knew why I survived. It was because, at the end of every school day, I pulled out my light blue, five-subject spiral notebook, drew a line, and began writing. I would mentally go through the day and write what went well. Many days would seem like a bust to some observers. It became a life-saving habit for me to reflect every day. After a couple of days of reflecting where I quickly jotted about the day, then drew a line and turned the page, I began to feel lighter. Physiologically, I could feel the release in my body. The problem with holding the emotions from the day is that it leads to sickness. Many people warn first year teachers about sickness

mainly because of the germs from the students. I believe that the largest contributor to sickness for first year teachers is harbored stress.

As I continued to make reflecting a habit, it saved my relationships. Instead of releasing my frustrations on my family and friends, I had an avenue to liberate myself from the challenges of the day. Reflection became a tool of empowerment for me. I remember specifically rereading my reflections, just longing for the start of the next school year so that I could recalibrate my classroom. In the midst of the reflection, I became heavily motivated to have a second first day of school! Through my reflections, I was empowered to organize a second first day of school. I felt more and more motivated to address the issues right then and not to wait. I wanted to confront the challenges with some of my suggestions. I shared my ideas with my mentor, and he fully supported me in my efforts. I have worked with many teachers who just pine for next year to come so that they can start over. Consequently, I frequently suggest to first year, second year, and veteran teachers to embrace an earlier reset of the school year. The second first day of school allowed to me a second chance to start the school year. When I turned the page, my suggestions were to do my beginning of year phone calls again, announcing the second day of school, to establish a revised behavior management plan, and to distribute a new welcome with the revisions. The second first day of school is when I began to realize the importance of not just having rituals and routines but intentionally practicing them. I even pumped up the students for the second first day of school. We started school over! When the day arrived to implement my own suggestions to our classroom challenges, I knew that I would survive my first year of teaching. The only other alternative to surviving was to accept an early death to my dream career.

REFLECTION TO IMPROVE PRACTICE AND INTERPRET RELATIONSHIPS

Reflecting improved my practice as a teacher and moved me from being marginal to exemplary. Teachers were writing lesson plans using only the objective, the page number of the Teacher's Edition, and the homework. All of those components fit into a small box. Since I was teaching students with severe emotional behavior disorders, what I needed to include in a plan would not fit in one box. I began reflecting by drawing a line. It was this format of reflection that led to my adding more detail to my plans. This consistent detail impressed my evaluator, who gave a rare exemplary rating to a new teacher. Additionally, it was this reflection and suggestion that I routinely engaged in that birthed a fresh look at my behavior management plan and outlook on when to reset a school year. As a result, this work also impressed an evaluator during my second year, one who gave me another rare exemplary rating for classroom management to a new teacher.

As we further our discussion about reflection, please remember that this tool is not exclusive of the induction phase of the teaching career but through its progression. My second year of teaching was thankfully better than the first. I owe most of the progress to recognizing the impact of reflection on my professional

life. In a previous section, I alluded to feeling alone. The loneliness escalated when I realized that the staff support was an illusion, a ploy to lure me into revealing my weaknesses. Many staff members would not return friendly greetings. I enjoy brainstorming and problem solving. On many occasions, I thought that I was engaging in a professional discussion only to realize that my conversations were being interpreted as being inept. Once I became aware, I immediately experienced a feeling of betrayal and lack of trust. As a result, I retreated to my classroom. I no longer ate in the teacher's lounge. When I checked-in in the morning, I went straight to my room. When the loneliness heightened, I was thankful to have the journal. I was thankful to have experienced the power behind drawing the line and turning the page. When I witnessed inappropriate reactions to student behaviors, I drew the line. I steeled within myself that I would not engage in those behaviors toward children. When I witnessed the bullying that occurred among other staff members, I drew the line. I would not participate in unhealthy or negative support of my fellow staff members. I continued being professional and molding my teaching craft. I continued to use reflection as the tool to move me forward. The result of needing to be independent further strengthened my beliefs in educating children. Teaching is not about pleasing adults; it is about doing what is best for students. Teachers can often become distracted with unproductive staff relationships and lose sight of the true vision. When I moved on to another teaching experience, I had some many examples of how reflection saved my teaching career. As my professional and personal life has progressed, I have experienced how reflection has preserved my marriage and growing family.

I have continued to use during each new professional experience. I used reflection to help with transition from teaching upper grade students with emotional behavior disorders to teaching younger students with emotional behavior disorders. Again, reflection remained impactful when I retired from full time education of special needs to teaching typical children. Reflection came to the rescue again as I sorted out my roles and responsibilities as an instructional coach. As I embark on a new adventure in administration, I expect reflection to carry me through. When new temptations to compromise my pedagogical philosophy and my leadership beliefs, I know how to draw the line and turn the page. I encourage you to survive and thrive. I encourage you to reflect, draw a line in the sand, and do not compromise on your hunches or what you know in your knower. It is also important to turn the page. Educators cannot rest in our victories, beliefs absence of action or wallow in our disappointments or disagreements. We must turn the page, tap our innovation, summon our courage, and move forward!

VINCENT W. YOUNGBAUER

11. WILL THERE BE A THIRD YEAR? THE TRIALS (LITERALLY) AND TRIBULATIONS (FASHION POLICE AND ADDICTION) OF MY FIRST TWO YEARS OF TEACHING

It is mid-June, and it is nearly two weeks into summer break at the end of my second year of teaching. I am sitting on the witness stand of a courtroom in central Pennsylvania, there is no air conditioning (that my body is aware of), and I am sunburned and wearing a suit and tie. I am about to give testimony against a student of mine who was involved in a violent assault in the town in which I teach. I am aware of sweat beading on my forehead that is being fueled by the heat and the stress of the situation. And of course, I also feel the discomfort from the sunburn—particularly under my collar but painfully distracting under my suit in general. I scan the courtroom and make eye contact with the student's family—his parents, siblings—and supporters. I am sworn in, stating my name and position for the record, and the prosecuting attorney begins to ask me questions.

I could say that I am not sure how I got here—but that would not be accurate. I know the events leading up to it and that court appearance was only one of the many unusual and unpredictable occurrences that dot the landscape of my first two years of teaching. During my teacher education, did I ever imagine that I would be testifying against one of my students? Of course not. Did I think that there would be teaching experiences that could not have been predicted? Sure. Maybe. However, many of the experiences during my first two years go beyond anything reasonably predictable. I cannot honestly say that I had a magic formula for handling any of the experiences that I discuss here—or that I handled them well at all. I cannot be certain that any of my reactions, follow-ups, or handlings of said situations would serve as good advice for any new or experienced teacher. I do know, however, that the experiences and my reactions to them did help me become a better teacher.

I was a returning adult student when I enrolled in teacher education. That is a polite way of saying that I was a college dropout who, after re-evaluating his life choices, decided to go back to school and earn a degree. In the time between dropping out and re-enrolling, I was a successful professional musician, married, and started my own family (of course, with my wife's help). During that time, I also held numerous "day jobs," including teaching private music lessons and group martial arts classes. Those teaching experiences would be instrumental in my decision to become a teacher—I was going pro, so to speak.

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 79–84.

I had a long drought of second interviews for teaching jobs. My résumé was good enough to get first interviews—I had been to several—but just could not seem to nail down further interest. I was literally working in a friend's pizza shop when my wife called to let me know that she had just gotten off the phone with a superintendent of a local school district. "He's excited about your résumé," she said. "You must have misheard—no one is excited about my résumé," I responded. After her reassurance, I called the superintendent from the pizza shop. The rest is sort of history.

I started teaching high school in 1998, coinciding with the rise of pop music singer Britney Spears. This is an important coincidence because of Ms. Spears' specific fashion influence on the wearing of thong underwear by young girls—specifically, the wearing of thong underwear in such a way as that it shows above the waistband of pants (what is colloquially referred to as a "whale tale"). I'll get back to Ms. Spears in a minute. You see, there was a 16-year gap between when I graduated from high school and when I began teaching high school. Up to that point, the only experience that I had with young people was through being a private music instructor and a martial arts instructor. Generally speaking, these experiences were primarily with teenage boys. The only connection that I had to the things that young girls were "into" was through my daughters—none of whom were quite yet at the age of the students I was teaching.

Something happened in those 16 years, something cultural. It became commonplace for young people in general—and girls, more specifically—to talk about and exhibit behaviors that were not discussed when I was in high school. To be clear, as a man, I can account many instances of what could be called "locker room talk" that boys tend to engage in—or at least did when I was growing up. However, the willingness to discuss topics of that nature openly, in a classroom, was new to me. For example, I remember my (concealed) shock the first time that a female student (ninth grade) asked to go to the bathroom because she had just gotten her period. I am positive that this likely happened to my female classmates when I was in high school, but I never heard anyone exclaim it to the teacher—and the rest of the class. My response? "Well, then I guess you should go—remember to sign out." There was no sense of anything out of the ordinary from her or the rest of the class.

Back to Britney Spears. It is generally understood that young adults want to be viewed as *real* adults, i.e. part of growing up is the desire to be seen and understood *as adults*, *by adults*, and having all of the benefits and rights of adulthood. The easiest way to accomplish this is through appearance—boys grow whatever facial hair they can muster, and while they put considerable thought into the clothes that they wear, girls corner the market in trying to achieve adult status through fashion. That seems sexist, but as a social studies teacher, I have engaged students at length on social issues in schools as an introduction into understanding civic governance. Those discussions have included length of school days (teenagers are often willing to stay later in the day if it meant that they did not have to get up at "the crack of dawn" to start school) and school uniforms. By-and-large, my female students always outnumbered their male counterparts in being in favor of school uniforms.

They often declared how wonderful it would be to *not* have to worry about what you were wearing to school every day. While boys have their moments with actions that they engage in to be viewed as adults—I vividly remember the "diverse" smell of my classroom when Axe Body Spray became popular among the boys—the fashion world belongs to the girls, so to speak.

What I was not prepared for as a high school teacher was the time I spent—nearly every day—enforcing school dress code policies. This was a duty unwillingly shared by all faculty, male and female, and the procedure for enforcement was often a topic at beginning of year faculty meetings. Some of the topics discussed/addressed included girls' skirt lengths, whether or not bra straps were visible, and of course, the proliferation of visible thong underwear. To be clear, boys' underwear was also to remain *not* visible, but while boys' fashion did exhibit low riding, baggy pants, the bigger distraction came from the girls' fashion choices.

Of course, this led to many uncomfortable situations when forced to tell a female student that she had to go to the office because I could see her underwear or that her blouse was too revealing. Those statements were often met with "Why are you looking, Mr. Youngbauer?" to which my standard reply was something like, "I have daughters who are your age, and that implication makes me nauseous." What was worse was when it happened during the last period of the day. That meant that, if a girls' clothing was too revealing—and it was blatantly obvious—EVERY other teacher she had during the day had "chickened-out" on addressing it. This was a common occurrence, as teachers were often reluctant to spend or waste valuable instruction time on dealing with something that they did not feel they were hired to do—be fashion police. While some things such as skirt length would always be an issue, fortunately, the thong underwear phenomenon ran its course, as all things will do in fashion. After a couple of years, it became passé to have your underwear show above your pants.

Now let us take a darker turn. The school district that I taught in had a severe heroin problem. This was not something I was aware of when I was hired, and I have often wondered in hindsight how desperate the district may have been to keep that quiet when they offered me the job. It should also be mentioned that I did not live in the district I taught in and therefore was somewhat oblivious to current events in the city in which the district was located. I learned about the heroin problem initially in the faculty room as older teachers shared experiences. It seems that I was hired immediately after what could be considered the peak of the problem. The city was featured in an MSNBC documentary *America's New Heroin Epidemics: Along Comes the Horse* as having the highest per capita heroin addiction in the country. The mother of one of my students was featured in the documentary. The student would die from an overdose four years later. The timing of my hiring led to my seeing the effects of the "bad" years before and put me on the ground floor of the plan to change the course, so to speak. The "effects" were dealing with students who had been through rehab and were now being re-introduced into the school. These students were a diverse group representing all

socioeconomic levels. Many were athletes, and many were "good" kids from good families. Some had tested positive for Hepatitis C, and therefore exposure to any bodily fluids was dangerous. I can remember having to have my vaccinations updated, and while no vaccine was/is available for hepatitis C, my doctor recommended a vaccination for hepatitis B, which teachers were not required to have at the time. I remember sending such a student to the office for spitting in my wastebasket—and then the custodial staff replacing the wastebasket.

In faculty meetings, we were told what color of paper—small bits of wrapper—to look for in our waste cans. Local law enforcement would inform the district of new batches of heroin making its way from larger cities, such as Philadelphia, and how it would be wrapped in different colors than the last batch. This was a telltale sign that one of your students was using. I learned the cycles of using heroin by daily observation of known users—the "sleepy" day, the "functional" day(s), and the irritable day signaling the need for a fix. Students were not to be excused from the classroom (oncoming menstrual cycles notwithstanding), particularly to use the office phone (pre-cell phone days).

Through dedication and perseverance and policy changes, the school turned around. I remember the assistant principal (who was ex-FBI) asking me to assist him on "shake downs" of students when I was on hall duty: watching him ask students to empty their pockets asking a student if he had anything sharp such as a syringe in his pants anywhere because he was going to frisk him, keeping suspected students apart from one another in the office while they were being questioned, and ABSOLUTELY not letting them go to the bathroom before law enforcement arrived. Most of the changes came from the student body itself, with students dedicated to taking back their school—literally changing the culture of their school. The city/district still has problems like others across the nation, but I remember those days being times of promise, not of surrender.

In one of the last weeks of school at the end of my second year, I overheard a conversation among several of my students while passing back graded work near the end of the class period. This was a sophomore history class, and there was a table in one part of the room where "overflow" students sat when the desks were all full. As I was passing out papers, moving back and forth through the room, I began to piece together the conversation and realized that the students were talking about someone getting "beat-up" at a local public recreational park basketball court. Deciding that I could not just let it go, after passing out the papers, I went straight to the table and asked what they were talking about. Four of the students turned and looked at the fifth, whom I'll call Tyler. Tyler—obviously the storyteller in the overheard conversation–began to retell the story.

Tyler and another teenager—not a student of my school—were playing basketball when an altercation broke out with a third person. There was pushing and shoving, and then the third person assumed a karate stance (it just so happens that the third person was Asian). He tried to kick one of the other boys, and a fight broke out. Tyler and the other teenager started throwing punches at the Asian teen, who tripped and

fell to the ground. Once on the ground, Tyler's friend began kicking and stomping on the Asian teen's head. Tyler said it was just like what happened in the film *American History X*, where a character played by Edward Norton makes a gang member put his mouth on a sidewalk curb and stomps on the back of the gang member's head, thus killing him. The Asian teen survived, but Tyler was obviously upset by what happened, stating that his friend just started going crazy on the kid. I asked Tyler if the Asian teen was a student at our school, and he answered no.

After class, I had a plan period, so I went to talk with the assistant principal about what had happened since I could not be sure of whether this was a fabricated story, rumor, or truth. Shortly into my retelling the story, he said, "Wait a minute," and took me to the principal's office, where I told the whole story. They both told me that it was true, that the police were investigating, and that the Asian teen—in critical condition with a broken jaw—almost died. Furthermore, the teen was afraid to testify because there was some question about his immigration status. As I stated earlier, I did not live in the district, so I was lacking in any local news on such events. In this case, I had heard nothing of the incident.

So, a week or so goes by, school is dismissed for the summer, and my family embarks on the first real vacation since I started teaching. We went to Chincoteague, Virginia, where my father-in-law rented a fishing cabin months in advance. On returning home, sunburn and all, my neighbor comes to my house—I was literally unpacking the suitcases from the car—and tells me that the police have been to my house looking for me almost every day we were gone. Sure that my neighbor was exaggerating or even fabricating (he was one of *those* neighbors who really wants you to know that he was looking out for you and your family—a little nosy but friendly and well-meaning), I take the suitcases into the house and notice that my answering machine is flashing like a strobe light. Again, I should mention that this is the pre-cell phone era. I had numerous messages on my machine from the district attorney's office in the county where I worked. They had been trying to serve me a subpoena to testify against my student and the other teen accused of the attack on the Asian teen. The next morning, I called the office and set up a meeting for deposition. The day after that, I was in court.

So, I'm sitting on the witness stand, sweating and trying to do some kind of Zen master-mind-over-body thing to ignore the pain of my sunburn. I do not mean to make light of the situation—this is serious business, and a young man's future hangs in the balance. But in the process of trying to ignore my physical pain, I am also trying to ignore the gaze of my Tyler's family, which is hard to do. My student is sitting with defense council, and the other attacker is led into the courtroom in an orange jump suit and full shackles. It turns out that he was arrested for another incident after the attack and before this trial. I was told by the district attorney that the young man was going to be "sent away" regardless of what happens today, as he is 18 and it being tried as an adult.

I begin telling my story, pretty much as I described above, with what I overheard. "Objection, hearsay," says the defense council. The district attorney assures the judge

that I should be allowed to continue, as the relevance of my testimony will become obvious. I tell the whole story, and the defense counsel asks only one question in cross-examination: "Did Tyler ever say that he kicked the third teen when he was on the ground?" I answered no.

In the end, I'm not sure why I needed to testify. I only corroborated what Tyler had testified, and you would think that I was a better witness for the defense than the prosecution. The third teen was indeed "sent away," and my student got off lightly—he was a minor and, while he admitted being accountable in the start of the assault, was not an active part of the horrible actions his friend escalated to. He did nothing to stop him but was able to convince the judge that he too was afraid to act. For his involvement, he received some form of juvenile probation and community service. I cannot comment on what happened to the victim—I honestly do not know what happened other than that he recuperated from his injuries. Tyler would later tell me that he was deported after being released from the hospital—a somber chain of events led to his being a victim in more ways than one.

The following summer, I taught summer school, and Tyler was one of my students. We talked after the first class meeting, and I asked him, "Are we cool?" I was really just concerned that we could move forward so that he could be successful in summer school. He said that we were—after all, "all you did was tell them what I said." I would later have parent conferences with his father, and years later, I had his sister as a student. I was a little concerned to have future interactions with the family, but they always seemed to have their children's futures as their first concern and were pleasantly and surprisingly professional about the whole ordeal.

While writing this piece, I thought back on the reasons I left public education. There was indeed a third year. Actually, there were eight more years. Oddly, none of those reasons concerning why I eventually left have anything to with the events on which I have reflected in the preceding pages. I never second-guessed going back in those early years. Maybe I felt lucky to just have a job. Maybe I'm old enough to be part of a generation that, simply, just goes to work every day. Or, maybe, for all the things I have discussed and the many other odd things that did not make it into this writing—maybe the pros outweighed the cons. I went back every year because I loved teaching and felt a connection to the students. They needed me and people like me who diligently tried to make their world a better place, who told them to pull up their pants or to sit like a lady or whatever. Oddly enough, it was events that occurred outside of the classroom, outside of the schools—events that take place and decisions that are made in legislative bodies that are more about self-serving political aims that about children. Those things—the subject for another paper—are why there wasn't an 11th year.

RICHARD KILBURN

12. SCHOOL MAY NOT BE WHAT YOU THINK

Imagine a large corporation with many stores located in multiple locations. Each store has an on-site manager who is responsible for the daily operation of that store. As long as the manager maintains positive sales, customer satisfaction, and profit margins, the corporate office usually refrains from interfering in the operation of the store. While each store manager is responsible to someone from the corporate office, he usually resents any attempt by someone in the corporate office to dictate store policy. Personal feelings further complicate the process. A manager and his supervisor may simply not get along. In this case, the manager must ensure that every report mentioning his store reveals only the positive aspects of operations. In order to retain control of his domain, a store manager must obsess over numbers and may lose sight of how these numbers affect the real people who enter (as customers or employees) the store each day.

Of course, these situations exist in business, but this chapter is about education. Surely, educated people who have devoted their lives to the betterment of society through the education of youth do not involve themselves in petty circumstances to the point that they lose focus on the reason for the entire enterprise: *the students*. Such was my way of thinking upon entering the teaching profession. I knew enough of education to understand that students were not actively seeking every morsel of information that passed through the lips of a teacher. But I anticipated every teacher to be actively engaged in the process of improving the learning experience of students. More importantly, I thought that it was the moral obligation of every teacher to passionately advocate for the best interests of students. Only through such a discussion could a school-wide consensus be reached. Assuming that this type of dialogue was the modus operandi, I sought my first teaching position.

MY EXPERIENCE

The Interview

Principal: What about the use of technology in the classroom?

Me: Other than calculators and overhead projectors, which are not really up to date, I am not even sure what technology there is to be used. I guess I will ask those in my department and see what they are doing and try to incorporate those things.

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 85–90.

Principal: How do you handle discipline in your classroom?

Me: If a student is misbehaving, I would redirect their attention back to the lesson. If the misbehavior continues, I can call a parent after school. If the misbehavior is severe, I guess I just send them to the office. I am not really sure. I guess I will ask those in my department and see how they handle different situations.

Principal: Why do you want to teach?

Me: Too many of our students are leaving high school believing they are prepared for college when in fact they are not. College Algebra should not be a hurdle for students with a college prep diploma.

Principal: What classes would you like to teach?

Me: I would love to teach advanced math. I want to teach calculus, but I understand that is the grail of high school mathematics. I am willing to teach any level of math as long as I am given the opportunity to move to higher levels at some point.

Principal: With your knowledge of mathematics, we would be foolish not to use you to prepare some of our students.

I was not prepared for my first interview. I was confident in my math ability, but that did not make me a teacher. Most of my answers consisted of my acknowledgement that I was unsure of what to do and would be seeking the advice of those within the department. In a time before interactive boards and iPads, I had no idea what technology could be used in my classroom. Other than sending a student to the office for infractions, I was not able to articulate my own discipline plan. Shortly into the interview, it was obvious that I lacked the training in some of the major points of teaching. After the principal, math department chair, and assistant principal who were present in the interview conferred, I was still offered a job! It was not until later that I was told my willingness to adapt to the culture of the school combined with my content knowledge is what confirmed their decision. Through this encounter, I realized that I was not expected to be an expert teacher, but I was expected to actively seek to become one.

The School Year

Starting the new school year, I worked closely with my assigned mentor teacher to develop my pedagogy. Coupling this time of apprenticeship with my previous experience teaching in post-secondary classrooms provided a great start to my career. I was given a mixture of college preparatory and vocational classes. The promises to help me develop as a teacher and allow me to fulfill my mission of helping student prepare for college were being realized.

The monumental significance of the announcement at the beginning of October was lost on me. The principal, the same man who had seen potential in me, had resigned to take a position in another system. He would be leaving at the end of the month. While many faculty members were upset, I naïvely believed that little would change. I could not have been more wrong. In the time span of two weeks after the principal's departure, everything changed while nothing did. One of the assistant principals was named interim principal. To my naïve mind, this was the natural progression. Yet, teachers stopped saying anything meaningful when they openly spoke to each other. Whispered conversations were commonly observed between faculty members. The tension running through the building was so thick that it could be sliced with a knife.

Two things about the situation bothered me. First, students began to be affected by what was occurring. Several times, my classes were interrupted by the inquisition of students trying to make sense of what was happening in their environment (which I could not explain). I, like them, was desperately trying to understand what was happening.

Second, the environment within the school turned hostile very quickly. Without an explanation or ever understanding the situation, the school environment did not improve through the rest of the school year. At the end of the academic year, the interim principal was named the permanent principal (which I did not think surprising). I left my first year of teaching believing that I had done a good job in the classroom and completely bewildered by what was occurring outside of it.

I Became a Problem

The painting by Raphael entitled *The School of Athens* depicted at the beginning of this chapter depicts a hall containing several groups of people in deep conversation. I entered the teaching profession believing that faculty meetings were conducted in this manner. Teachers would form groups to discuss pedagogical issues or recent findings in scholarship. I imagined the administration presenting topics to guide our conversations and solutions arising through a combination of knowledge gained in formal education and experience. I believed that educators were all intelligent content experts committed to providing opportunities to young people. I believed that we were *democratically* working toward a common goal.

During the first faculty meeting of my second year of teaching, the administration presented a plan to address an issue. While I cannot recall the specifics of the proposed plan or the problem it supposedly fixed, I do remember instantly finding a flaw. Continuing to work under my assumptions of education, I brought the flaw to the attention of several people around me, thinking that we would soon find a solution. My colleagues quickly stifled my enthusiasm and told me to drop it. Not being one to give so easily (or understand subtlety), I raised my hand and brought the flaw to the attention of the administration. In no uncertain terms, I was told that I would be following their instructions without question.

Talk about confused! Why would the principal treat me so curtly when I had done the very thing that was expected of me? I apologized without meaning it and left feeling like a scolded schoolboy. This type of interaction occurred several times over that school year (sometimes I can be a slow learner). Each time I was reprimanded for attempting to prevent a larger problem, my resentment toward the administration in general and the principal specifically grew.

During my third year, I *suspected* that I had fallen from grace. After being asked to move classrooms each semester of the previous year, I was instructed to move once again to begin my third year. I was given a calculus course because I was the only one qualified to teach it, but the other advanced courses were taken from me. Then, right before first semester final exams, I was told that I would have to teach four different math courses when we returned for the second semester. It was not uncommon for teachers to have multiple sections of two or sometimes three courses, but this was the first time I had seen any teacher have to prepare four different lectures each day. It was explained to me that there was no other way to schedule the classes to prevent it despite several other teachers in my department only having two different courses. I became suspicious when I solved the scheduling problem in minutes; however, this time, I had learned not to approach the administration for fear of reprimand, so I let it go. It is time-consuming to prepare four different courses every day. The job is overwhelming when you are teaching three of them for the first time! I thought that maybe I was being set up to fail. I decided to give the administration the benefit of the doubt and pressed on.

I *knew* that I was being singled out the following year. Given two new courses to teach the following year (along with the calculus course that I had taught for the first time the year before), I eagerly began the year seeking to amend whatever mistakes I had made the previous year. During the summer, I learned that all of my calculus students scored high enough on the Advanced Placement test to earn college credit at most institutions. I hoped that this would help return me to favor with the administration, but it was not to be. Again, at the change of semesters, I was given a fourth prep while others had only two. I was denied permission to do activities with my class when other math teachers had the same request granted. I was reprimanded for implanting a new homework grading policy. However, once the department chair explained that she was the originator of the idea, the policy was deemed appropriate, and the reprimand was rescinded. It was at this time that I decided to leave the situation and transferred to a different school within the system at the end of the year.

THE SITUATION

Several questions plagued me during the next few years of my career. How did I change from enthusiastic to disgruntled in four years? What happened in such a short span of time that could turn my passion for teaching to vinegar and affect me and my

students? The answer is simple: *The School of Athens* painting is a myth. The scene that is so beautifully portrayed is nothing more than a mirage.

Schools are often not institutions of learning in which the professionalism of each individual is equally respected. Schools operate more in a manner similar to corporations. Through the accountability movement and other trends in education, principals have been reduced to store managers who are forced to obsess over graduation rates, parent and student complaints, and testing data to ensure that central office personnel stay out of the day-to-day operation of the school. In an effort to protect teachers and students from more interference, principals often have to dictate policy without offering faculty the opportunity to engage in dialogue. The ideas and sometimes more efficient solutions presented by teachers are often rejected without consideration. Teachers who suggest that a principal's plan is not perfect in front of others, as I often did, are seen to be threatening the authority of the principal. These teachers are labelled troublemakers and must be dealt with. In short, as is true everywhere, politics exist in schools.

What I did not know during the first four years of my career is that politics were happening in my school. I was so focused on learning to teach during my first year that I failed to notice that the tension and whispered conversations often came about because the faculty was divided because a different assistant principal was interested in the principal position. The choice of which person to support drove a wedge in the faculty. The following year, the assistant principal who failed to get the position was gone, but the wedge remained. As such, any public critique of the principal was seen as dissent against his appointment to the position and support for the other candidate. None of these things was ever articulated, and I had no way to understand what was transpiring. So many teachers were afraid of what might happen and focused on their futures that the effect on new teachers was often ignored.

THE SOLUTION

Analyzing the situation in its entirety a decade later has allowed me to answer one question: How could I have prevented the relationship between the administration and myself from taking negative turn? The answer lies in the assumptions that I brought to the profession. Essentially, I needed to realize that I am not an equal to the administration. We are not colleagues who participate equally in operational discussion. I did not realize that faculty meetings are often more like briefings in which information is disseminated than open forums in which ideas are discussed.

I set myself up to have problems by trying to engage the administration in public dialogue. If I had only presented my ideas to the principal in private instead of challenging his ideas in faculty meetings, I may not have been so quickly dismissed. If I had only approached the principal as a boss instead of an equal, I may not have been labelled a troublemaker. If someone had explained it to me, then perhaps I would not have become so disillusioned with education.

Understanding all that transpired has allowed me to release the hostility and once again to focus on my students. The joy of teaching quickly returned once I could comprehend my surroundings. I now ensure that new teachers in my school take time to align their expectations with the reality of the school environment so that they do not end up with a situation similar to mine.

There are many frustrating aspects of education, which challenges a teacher's desire to teach. I implore you to understand my mistakes and to learn from them near the beginning of your career. Navigating the politics of education is a skill that must be mastered, as the internal struggle between advocating for students and following administrative policies is fierce within many educators.

TRACEY DUMAS CLARK

13. WHAT REALLY HAPPENS IN SCHOOLS

Did I miss something? Was there a class that I failed to sign up for? I don't recall seeing it in the course catalog, and I don't remember it being a graduation requirement. How did I miss that bus? How did I miss out on the most important class of my career? You know, the one where they teach what *really* happens in schools.

As an undergraduate, I received my fair share of courses in curriculum development, classroom management, methodology, and pedagogy. My university was known for providing a world-class education to future educators. They did not release teachers into the wild without first preparing them to maintain the reputation of good teaching for which the university was known.

Right from the start, my program began molding me into an effective educator, consistently providing the hands-on experience and the knowledge to back it. As early as the first months of my freshman year, I began spending time in schools, benefiting from the mentorship of veteran teachers and the watchful eye of my all-knowing professors. Every observation, every assignment, exam, and performance task I conquered with ease. I was born to do this! Nothing escaped my grasp, and teaching was in my blood. I prided myself on the influx of praise that I received for my impeccable classroom management, content knowledge, creativity, and student engagement. I was more than prepared to tackle the challenges of education head on… or so I thought.

In June of 2000, I walked across the graduation stage straight into a teaching position that I was offered several months prior at a teacher job fair organized by the university education department. The intent of the fair was to hone in undergrads' interview skills and to prepare them for the real deal when they began their true job hunt. Who knew that I would be one of a very select few who walked away from the practice round with a teaching contract in hand, ready to conquer the world?

Weeks prior to the start of the school year, I eagerly obtained the keys to my classroom. As the principal walked me through the building, my heart leapt with excitement. My own classroom, I can't wait to make it beautiful. He guided me down the halls as he described each room that we were passing, but my mind was on my room, thinking of all of the ways that I would create a "conducive learning environment." How large is the space? Will I have tables or desk? How many windows are there? What is the storage space like? My mind rambled on and on, just as my new principal's tour guide commentary. "This is the third grade hall. Your teammates rooms are locate right here." Third grade hall… this is it, I thought, quickly snapping out of my egocentric trance. I'm going to see my first classroom.

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 91–94.

My heart began pounding in my chest but quickly sank as we continued walking right out the door and down a cold, uncovered walkway. "Where are we going?" I inquired. "To your class," my principal responded eagerly. As we turned the corner, I was hit with a wave of disappointment. A white, single-room building sat before my very eyes. Far away from the world of civilization was my lonely little classroom, a portable. In hindsight, this physical isolation only foreshadowed the emotional isolation that I was doomed to endure for the remainder of my novice years as a teacher.

A week before school started, I met my third grade team for the very first time at a professional development meeting designed to introduce the district's approved curriculum guide. The approved curriculum guide was a ginormous blue notebook filled with pages upon pages of information, organized in what seemed to me a foreign complex numerical system. As the district coordinator zoomed through the information, my teammates chattered happily about their summer vacation with their families. I was confused, perplexed, and lost, to say the least. Embarrassed to speak aloud because everyone else appeared to know what was going on, I humbly asked my teammates, "What does this mean? How do I use it?" Almost in unison, they responded, "Oh don't worry, we'll help you. You don't need to listen to anything she is saying! We have it all planned out." They quickly went back to their conversation. I smiled nervously, turning my attention to the presenter and attempting to absorb the hoards of information being thrown at me while an entire room of veterans tuned out into their own little worlds of conversation. As my eyes glassed over with confusion, I slowly slipped a little further into the black hole of educational isolation.

"You are a new teacher, so you must complete an evaluation period to obtain your continuing contract. You have to go through ADEPT," my principal reminded me. "Ok," I thought to myself, "I remember talking about this process during college. I can handle some paperwork and a few observations. Easy peezy lemon squeezy." It wasn't long before that self-affirmation transformed into self-doubt.

I remember well the struggle to blend the approved curriculum guide, the needs of my students, and the pre-planned lessons of my teammates into one cohesive long range plan. I felt stretched in all directions. My teammates pushed me to disregard the curriculum guide and to do everything exactly like they did. The district mandated the use of the curriculum guide, which was also the expectation of my evaluation team. My principal wavered, saying that I must use the district curriculum, meet the students' needs, and "be finishing the teacher next door's sentence" if he left her room and came to visit mine immediately afterward. This made absolutely no sense to me. My heart and my college training told me that it was my responsibility to meet my students where they were and to use their individual strengths and weaknesses to get them where they needed to be. I could not envision a way to make this all possible. These contradictions drove me to seek the advice of anyone who would listen. I beckoned to my principal, my grade level chair, my instructional facilitator, my curriculum coordinator, and even my superintendent, asking them to tell me how

I could meet the needs of my students, use the curriculum guide, and become the exact duplicate of my teammates who resided far away from me on their hall in their school building, but no help was found in sight. My directness in challenging the inconsistencies of my institution only pushed me further into the abyss of loneliness, where no one dared to extend a helping hand.

Soon, it became very obvious that I was the teacher who asked too many questions, and my punishment was to be ostracized. My teammates began arranging secret grade level planning meetings without me and creating classroom sets of material for everyone's students but mine. One winter recess day, I watched my teammates discuss and grade journals that they created for third grade. When I inquired what it was that they were doing and why my students weren't provided any, I was dismissed with, "This is nothing. You don't need to worry about it." My principal assigned an academic assistant to my room to drop in and "check on" me a few times a week. She later informed me that she was sent to spy but continuously reported back that there was nothing going on in my room but good teaching. My evaluation team railroaded me during my preliminary evaluation and assigned nine out of 10 "not met" performance standards, resulting in a fail.

I was devastated! For a brief moment, I considered throwing in the towel and seeking employment as a greeter at Wal-Mart. Then I remembered that I was born for this. Teaching was my destiny, and no one could take it away from me unless I let them. So after wiping my tears, I pulled out my sword – the mighty, mighty pen – and went to work. I meticulously responded to each negative remark on my preliminary evaluation, providing names, dates, times, and exact quotes of those to whom I had appealed for assistance. In addition, I supplied documentation of the dates and times my grade level team purposely excluded me along with raving reviews from the individual sent to spy on me. I included my emails to those in charge as evidence demonstrating their lack of and/or inconsistent responses to my cries for help. I provided student work samples, data analysis, and parent communication evidence to support the instructional decisions that I made and the results of my students' success. I attached glowing observations from the principal and assistant principal that I had received prior to the moment someone decided to sabotage my career. These observations completely contradicted every negative remark made on my preliminary evaluation. By the time I put my pen down, I had a 15-page document that liberated me.

I felt freed from the shackles of confusion that ensued to entangle the gift that God had granted me to teach. In that moment, I made the decision to return to my roots and let my students drive my instruction. I decided that, if the curriculum guide or my teammates provided something that would assist me in this goal, I would gladly use it but only as resources, not mandates. I stepped into the role of the professional in my classroom and the expert of what my students did and did not need. After all, it was I who spent six hours a day engaging their minds, not my teammates nor the curriculum guide. I knew better than anyone how they academically ticked. Gone

were my days of trying to be what everyone else around me wanted of me. I was back to where I started, being what my students needed me to be – an educated, highly effective, fully capable facilitator of learning.

While I still spent the remainder of the year isolated from my administration and grade level, suddenly the loneliness didn't seem so lonely. My students filled the gaps. The time that I spent creating plans specifically designed for them was an invigorating experience. Daily, they engaged in learning experiences unlike any other they had before because I chose to put them above all the bureaucracy. They loved learning in my room, and I loved teaching them. During the last weeks of school, I decided to claim my own space inside the building. I took up an entire wall and created a display headed, "A picture is worth a thousand words!" I covered this wall in pictures of all of the fun and exciting things that my students had accomplished that year. For weeks, I noticed other students and even some teachers stopping to get a closer look at the wall. Many pointed out activities that they wished that they had done, stating, "That looks fun!" or "Why didn't we get to do that?" On occasion, one of my students would reply, "Because you weren't in Ms. Dumas' class. We learned a lot of fun stuff in the portable!" Every time I heard such a conversation, my heart beat a little faster in my chest, just as it did the very first day I obtained the keys to my class.

Surprisingly, I passed ADEPT with flying colors. Somehow, I went from being the worst teacher in the world to a stellar teacher overnight and managed to obtain 10 out of 10 "meets", a perfect performance standard score. I can even recall one of my evaluators pulling me aside after an evaluation, asking to borrow one of the lesson plans that I had created to use as she prepared for her National Board Certification.

That year, I learned so many lessons, lessons that I wish that I could have attended a college class to obtain but could only really be experienced in the battlefield. As you venture into the wonderful world of teaching, please understand that, while you may have been the best thing since sliced bread in college, the world may not be ready for you. Everyone will not embrace your excitement and desire to facilitate learning. You may enter a building where the school's vision does not align with school's practices. You may be told that students learn best through hands-on experience and at the same time have your hands-on idea crushed by a requirement to use a textbook. Trust your instincts. Great teachers cannot be cowards. They must stand up for the minds of their students. They must be willing to do what no one else will. Others will hate you for it, but your students won't. Let the ones you are trusted to guide, guide you in every decision that you make. And as you venture to fight against a system that will often fight against you, keep documentation. Your anecdotal records, assessments, emails, personal journal, classroom videos, student work samples, and candid classroom photo shoots are your friends. They will be the weapons that help you build an arsenal to fight for the right to grow your students' minds!!!

KIA JAMES

14. REMEMBER

There are several things that I have learned throughout my career that can be valuable for new teachers to know. Of all of these things, I routinely abide by a basic standard. In order to fully understand my basic principles, let me first explain how I became a teacher.

Education has long since been an important part of my family's traditions. As I was the youngest daughter of Jamaican parents and the only natural American, obtaining a good education was their hope. Both of my parents were mature (older than most) when I was born. Regardless of their age, school was a nonnegotiable. If I wanted to go to a party, I had to have good (great) grades. Before anything could be asked of them, they would ask me about my grades. My friends also had to answer the same questions each time they entered my house. One would think that this was strict or unreasonable, but to my family, it was neither strict nor unreasonable. My parents would question a teacher about his or her teaching objectives, practices ,and even if he or she was furthering his or her own education. They understood that a good teacher would serve as a guide and role model for students. Neither of my parents went to college or completed today's definition of formal education. Nevertheless, they understood the importance of education and the role that a teacher played in the lives of his or her students. To date, I have had the opportunity to live in a number of different states as well as to travel internationally. These things gave me a love of learning and a fire-burning passion to teach.

I am blessed to have fulfilled a few of my personal educational goals and the goals of my parents. While working to earn my bachelor's degree in biology, I met a man and married him. It was then that I realized I am truly my parents' child. After giving birth to my first son, I began to think about the person who helped nurture me and my love of learning. My parents played a major role in my development, but so did the school that I had attended and the teachers who taught and supported me along the way.

My children are involved in several different athletic activities. I spend a large portion of my time preparing, driving, watching, or cheering for them. I make every attempt to enjoy my life and to cherish my family and friends. As a mother, I wanted to help shape the lives of other children as so many teachers had done for me in the past. This is one of the reasons that I became a teacher. As such, self-reflection is a large part of understanding one's purpose in life, so I often journal my thoughts, rants, or notes. Here is a simple note that I wrote on the first day of school while

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 95–97.

thinking to myself about what every teacher should remember: "I remember being a new teacher. What would I say if I went back in time and had a message to tell my younger self about teaching and education? There are so many things that I can think of to tell myself. I would say get to work early, learn the school layout, ask what time is lunch and planning, and so many other things that in the large scheme of things do not really matter. The single most important thing I would say to myself and any other new teachers would be to remember the feelings on your first day and that you have the most important job on earth."

Through my teaching career, I have learned other valuable lessons. In schools, people seem to want carbon copies; independent thoughts and ideas are looked upon as crazy, impossible, or unrealistic to achieve. Time is short; once you are born, your expiration clock begins. With that in mind, why don't we guard our time better? As a high school teacher, I am well aware that I only have my students for three–four years. I have that small amount of time to teach, to develop, to motivate, and to inspire them to move on to the next level and hopefully to be successful. Knowing all that has to take place in that short amount of time while in my classroom, there are not any minutes to spare. When you think about children and their education, you have to understand that their education impacts the rest of their lives. What type of adult he or she grows into has a direct correlation to the education that he or she received.

Also, people are inherently different. There almost 70+ million possibilities of base-sequences in people's DNA and a finite number of genes (combinations of those base sequences). Why do schools and teachers think that one "common" template would work for every child?

At what point do we stop creating new problems in schools and develop solutions to the current ones? We have to think about the mistakes of the past, learn from others, and move forward as a collective group. Students are the answer, and the current teaching model and the education system are the problem.

Technology has opened the world to students in new ways. Students can access information and visit foreign places without leaving the classroom. However, even with all of these advances, students need guidance to map their future.

Further, telling children you want them to go to college means nothing if they don't possess a tangible clue linking current situations to future goals. Students have to possess the motivation and desire to complete their education. Schools fail because they lack long-term goals that relate to students success.

Education is not a preparation for life; it is life itself. Everything that you say and do directly impacts your life and learning. As a teacher, you must connect the outside learning into the classroom, show an interest in each student, and stay away from those teachers who refuse to evolve and to grow. You should treat every day as the first day of school; it will keep you stress-free and wondering. Teach, as you would like someone to teach your child, your baby, your family members. Teach as if you have the power to change minds and show a new perspective to the same old problem. Teach as if you never heard of Common Core, teacher evaluations, or

anything else outside the learning process. Teach like it is the first day of school. On the first day of school, you are excited, anxious and you really believe that you can make a difference! Too often, new teachers' hopes, inspirations and ideas are killed or undermined by veteran teachers refusing to change, to grow, or to develop a new skill. I would tell myself and any other new teacher to hold onto the knowledge that he or she would not be where he or she is without a teacher, without somebody who commented on, inspired, encouraged, or motivated him or her to learn. First year teachers make a difference. I would say to myself (then and now) and all new teachers, "Hope to never be a forgotten, always inspire, foster a love of learning in students and yourself. Teach for your own knowledge, let your students keep you young and keep you on point. **Teach as if the future depends on it because in the end it really does**…"

JOSEPH R. JONES

15. GIVING THEM HOPE

Creating a Safe Classroom for Non-Heterosexual Students

In his famous "Hope" speech, Harvey Milk (1978) made the following statement, "You have to give them hope. Hope for a better world; hope for a better tomorrow… hope that all will be alright. Without hope, not only gays, but the blacks, the seniors, the handicapped, the us'es, the us'es will give up …and you, and you, and you, you have to give people hope." During this time in American history, the dehumanization of people abounded across the nation. It was a time in history that depicted the very ugly truth of hatred toward a minority population in our country. Twenty years after his famous speech, I walked into my first teaching position in a typical middle class school district. I was an idealist seeking to change the world through my pedagogy. I wanted my students to love literature and to embrace the truths that can be gained from reading Shakespeare and Faulkner. Yet, it became a time when I saw the same ugly truth of hatred that Milk discussed 20 years earlier. It was a truth that I was not prepared to address.

I walked down the hallway during the first exchange of class periods and heard every type of hate word directed toward non-heterosexual individuals possible; at one point, I literally thought that there was a toxic level of hate in this building. I heard the *F* word repeatedly. The language choices caused me to cringe. In that moment, I actually regretted accepting this job offer. I was offered several positions while in my student teaching experience, but I had chosen this district because of its size and student population. It was in a metropolitan area; thus, I was naïve in thinking that such problems did not exist within larger cities.

After this epiphany, it was difficult to remain focused on my instructional activities. I wanted to begin discussing this hatred. I wanted to begin the revolution to combat this toxicity. Yet, I realized that I needed to reflect on the appropriate ways to address the challenge because my undergraduate program had not prepared me to do so.

As the days passed, I began collecting data on the use of hate language by notating the number of times I heard certain words. These language choices were part of the normal vocabulary of these students and, in a number of cases, the faculty members within this school building. However, it was not simply my school district. I was not working in a special district that was different from others. My friends in other districts noticed the same use of hate language in their school buildings. In that moment, I began questioning how I could change the vocabulary and eventually

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 99–103.

the social belief systems of my students. I questioned why my teacher preparation program had not prepared me to address homophobic hate language. I was not prepared for the tumultuous task that I faced. It was that moment that engendered my desire to become a scholar in creating safe schools for all students, regardless of difference.

Each day, many students attend schools that are constructed to be safe places. The buildings are constructed with state of the art fire alarm systems. Slip-resistant strips on stairways prevent students and faculty from falling. Posters presenting specific safety procedures for students to follow are hung in science labs. There are Heimlich posters in the cafeteria, should individuals choke. School buildings are built with students' safety in mind. Yet, the school culture, during my first few years of teaching, was not constructed to provide all students with a safe learning environment. Today, I argue that a majority of school cultures continue to perpetuate the hegemonic forces that create intolerant educational experiences for non-heterosexual students.

Specifically, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2013) recently reported on their National School Climate Survey statistics that discuss how gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students experience schooling:

- 71.4% of students heard *gay* used in a negative way frequently or often at school.
- 64.5% heard other homophobic remarks frequently or often.
- 51.4% of students reported hearing homophobic remarks from their teachers or other school staff.
- 74.1% were verbally harassed (e.g., called names or threatened) in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- 16.5% were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in the past year because of their sexual orientation.

These statistics prove the necessity for future teachers to begin addressing school climates. Having said that, it is difficult for teachers to address these challenges because a majority of undergraduate teacher preparation programs do not offer specific courses to confront issues surrounding tolerance and acceptance of different sexualities. Although many teacher education programs postulate they they discuss diversity across their programs, a number of these discussions do not include in depth dialogue concerning issues related to non-heterosexual identities. These discussions are necessary to begin creating more tolerant school communities toward gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning individuals.

Therefore, my advice for novice teachers as they meander the halls of their first few years of teaching is simple; all hate language must be addressed within classrooms and schools. In this capacity, I offer the following strategies to create tolerant classrooms.

First, it is important to create the appropriate culture within classrooms and schools. By this, I mean a culture that validates and affirms all students regardless of difference. This is a vital aspect that must be addressed the first day of school. In this manner, teachers should have firm conversations with students about the

importance of tolerance. Teachers must set the tone in their classrooms, one where all students will be respected. For instance, Brittany Williams (2012), an elementary school teacher has the rule, "edify or goodbye," in her classroom. On the first day of classes, she discusses with her students that the culture of her classroom is to support and uplift all students. Her classroom is truly a safe place for each student who walks into her space. In order to address hate language in a classroom, teachers must first establish a set of principles to which the students must adhere, and those principles must aid in engendering a tolerant classroom culture.

Secondly, teachers must create appropriate relationships with students. By this, I mean that students must feel comfortable sharing with teachers how they are being treated by others. For example, as a teacher, I constantly provided students with reflective writing practices that could have been catalysts for students to share with me any bullying or homophobic actions that they or their peers were encountering. In addition to reflective practices, teachers can have a "suggestion box" wherein students can drop anonymous notes concerning homophobic and other actions. Having said that, students are not willing to share those experiences if they are not certain the teacher cares about addressing the problem. Thus, teachers must construct appropriate relationships with students that express their dedication to having every student become successful.

Next, it is vitally important to address all uses of hate language in the classroom. Hate language is treated differently in a majority of school communities because it is treated differently in the broader society. Rrecently, several celebrities were publically humiliated for using the *N* word. One celebrity lost millions of dollars and endorsements. Conversely, individuals who publically used the *R* word (referring to individuals with special needs) received little condemnation, and the same transpired with the use of the *F* word (referring to gay males).

As with the broader society, the same hierarchy exists within educational settings. The *N* word is never allowed to be used in schools. In most instances, students who use the *N* word are immediately punished. I argue the most who use the *F* word do not receive the same severe reprimands as students who use other hate language. Yet, all words are hurtful to a specific population. Because of a vast difference in treatment for each word, society has structured the words within a hierarchy of hate language.

By not addressing hate language equally, we are perpetuating the belief that racist language is never acceptable and that homophobic language is acceptable. In this manner, language directed toward non-heterosexual students is "not as bad" and in some cases is acceptable to use (the cases in which we do not even attempt to reprimand the one using the language).

If a student says, the *F* word, teachers must address it immediately. If a student says "That's so gay," or another derogatory phrase/word directed to non-heterosexual individuals, teachers must address it immediately. If teachers do not address it immediately, they send a message of acceptance to the students in the classroom. In order to create safe places for all students, all hate language must be addressed in the moment so that students visualize the importance of creating a safe classroom

culture. Students need to know that teachers are serious about creating a tolerant space.

Therefore, the easiest way to address hate language is to politely ask the student to step outside. Teachers should tell the student that he or she will meet the student in the hallway in a few moments. In this process, the disruption does not create a hostile environment where the student feels that his or her reputation is in danger and that he or she must be combative. Rather, it diffuses the situation and removes it from the public arena. The teacher should engage in a discussion with the student as soon as possible. In doing this immediately, it sends a message to the entire classroom that such language is not accepted in this classroom. It reinforces the conversations about tolerance and the importance of creating a tolerant classroom that transpired on the first day of class.

Additionally, I postulate that curriculum and pedagogical instruction can be a powerful tool in creating a tolerant culture within schools. For example, if a class is reading a text that involves marginalized individuals, there may be numerous opportunities for the teacher to discuss how all marginalized individuals are treated within the broader society and within the specific school community. In this capacity, the curriculum provides amazing dialogic spaces to discuss the notions of acceptance of this marginalized population.

Finally, students need to understand the power of language. In a society where the immediacy of language trumps reflective literacy, students are making language choices without recognizing the power behind their choices. Texting has created a society that no longer reflects on the meaning of language; rather, it has caused individuals to type and send a message without fully reflecting and conceptualizing the power of the language used. This immediacy of language has impacted the way in which students verbally use language within schools and society. The immediacy of language has caused students not to reflect on how the use of a particular word my impact a student. Students need to understand that saying, "That's so gay," may create a hostile environment for the non-heterosexual students in the room. Although a student may use the phrase in a manner to mean, "That's dumb," the language still may negatively impact a non-heterosexual student in the classroom. Thus, we need to teach students the importance of reflective literacy, meaning to teach our students to reflect on the social construction of language and how that language may impact someone's life.

As a young teacher walking down the hallway of my first job, I knew that things needed to change. I knew that the toxic hate in that building needed to be dismantled. Yet, I was not prepared to destroy the toxicity, so I spent time researching and implementing strategies to help when possible. Years later as a college professor, I met Madison. Madison, a 20-year old college student, "grew up in a middle class family, one where he was expected to attend college. Although he had not come out in high school, everyone knew he was gay. They constantly harassed him, and he avoided sports because of the harassment and possible locker room assaults. He

learned how to skip school without his parents finding out. To him, high school was not about having fun, but rather it was about survival" (Jones, 2014, p. 3).

For many non-heterosexual students like Madison, schools are about survival not about hope. As teachers, we are the ones who must give these students hope. We can give them hope of a better tomorrow, a hope that they can attend college absent of the same harassment. We can give them hope in our classrooms that can expand into our school buildings and perhaps into the broader society. What we do in our classrooms today can change the lives of these marginalized students. We have to give them hope.

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DON JENRETTE

16. ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Teacher preparation programs were established to develop students to be well prepared educators as they enter the classroom. Regardless, from my experience, teacher preparation programs focus mainly on such topics as curriculum and instruction, classroom management, and child psychology. Limited or no time is spent discussing the other phenomena that will further challenge new and veteran educators alike. Academic dishonesty among students is one phenomenon that was never directly discussed in my teacher preparation programs. In fact, academic dishonesty has never been a topic of any yearly professional learning session that I have attended either. To be honest, my fellow educators seem hesitant to discuss academic dishonesty during our informal hallway chats between classes. They may respond passively with, "I'm sure it happens," or they may simply respond with, "It is what it is." Rarely do any of my colleagues openly discuss that they suspected or have even caught a student cheating in the recent week. Why is that? Why are educators metaphorically sweeping academic dishonesty under the rug as if it does not exist? I will share several of my experiences with cheating among students to highlight why this phenomenon should be discussed in teacher education programs.

While teaching in high school for nearly 10 years, I have encountered numerous experiences of academic dishonesty in my classroom. A rather recent experience with cheating occurred just last year. Students who miss a test have an opportunity to make it up after school. One student missed an AP Psychology test for some reason and came after school one day. I handed the student a test and an answer sheet. The student began answering questions, and I sat at my desk. As I sat there checking e-mails or grading assignments, I realized that I had to speak with another teacher before he or she left for the day. I told the student that I needed to step out for a moment to speak with a teacher next door. I headed out the door. Before I got to the teacher's door, I remembered that I forgot the document that I wanted to share with that teacher. I quickly turned around and headed back in the classroom. While I walked in the room, the student quickly looked up at me and gave me the "deer in the headlights" look. He began shuffling papers as I walked past his desk in order to get to my own. And there it was. Poking out from behind the answer sheet was a cheat sheet that appeared to be mile long. I stopped and stood there beside the student's desk and asked him to hand me the elaborate cheat sheet. He complied and looked at his desk with a blank stare. After asking him who gave him the information, I asked him why he needed a cheat sheet. Obviously embarrassed by his actions, he stated, "I didn't study. I didn't have time." Would this student have pulled the cheat sheet

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out if I hadn't momentarily left the classroom? Would this student have used a cheat sheet during normal class time if one were available? I can't answer these questions. However, discussing the most common academically dishonest behaviors among high school students is definitely a practice that could benefit students in teacher education programs.

One common experience with academic dishonesty comes almost every year. Turning in other students' homework as their own is fairly common among some of my students. Almost daily, I assign vocabulary homework for my AP Psychology students. My students are very familiar with this routine by the end of the first week of the school year. After assigning my students a set of 10 to 15 vocabulary terms to be defined, I often walk around with my clipboard and roster to check each student's definitions. From time to time, a student will try to present definitions written by a student from a previous class. Every year, I tend to have a handful of students with horrendous handwriting. Other students have seemingly microscopic handwriting. Over time, I start recognizing the handwriting of my students. And each year, I come across two or three students who try to pass off another student's homework as their own. It is quite obvious for those students who have distinct handwriting. Handwriting doesn't change overnight. A similar cheating practice is for students to pass off a previous assignment as the most recent homework. Yes, it is the student's work but not the correct assignment. I tend to identify three or four students each year who attempt this behavior. When I recognize that the homework is obviously an old assignment, I give the student a chance to produce the correct assignment. Sure, it could have been an honest mistake that the student showed me the wrong set of definitions. However, the majority of the time, overwhelmed with obvious shame, these students tend to respond awkwardly with, "No, I didn't do the homework," or, "I guess I must have forgot to do the homework." Most students sit uncomfortably in their seat after I recognize what is going down. After discovering the truth, I try to make a point for students to be upfront with teachers about academics. Are these behaviors common among many students? Have I missed some students who show another student's work as their own? I don't know, most likely. Nonetheless, providing information about various forms of academic dishonesty could give pre-service educators the awareness that can encourage academic integrity in the classroom.

Still, another typical experience with cheating centers on students looking on another student's assessment. To most, this is a classic form of cheating. To deter this practice in recent years, I have told each of my classes that a student should not give me any reason to believe that he or she is looking on another student's answer sheet during an exam. Also, each student will be held accountable for allowing other students to look at their answers. I try to repeat these statements before each exam. Nevertheless, I still deal with this problem. About three years ago, during a graded daily quiz, I suspected a student of looking at her neighbor's answers. While answering the questions, this student appeared to quickly look at her classmate's paper. I understand that some students glance over at other students to gauge if they

are finished or not. Despite this, the student looked repeatedly at her classmate's paper. This is when I considered those behaviors to be cheating. After taking up the quiz, I spoke to the student in the hallway. I asked her, "Do you know why I asked you to step in the hallway?" She slowly said, "I was looking at my notes that I had out on the floor." I was astonished at this point. I suspected this student of looking at another student's answers. And to my surprise, the student was looking at her notes which were not allowed to be used for this assessment. Without missing a beat, I simply said, "Ok." Again, discussing the various forms of academic dishonesty in a teacher education program could prepare future educators for cheating in the classroom.

Just this year, I have identified four students involved in cheating during an assessment. The first incident occurred during a chapter test. I saw one student taking multiple glances at her neighbor's answer sheet. I continued to watch that student during the test. She continued to look at her neighbor's answer sheet. After collecting the test, I spoke to the student who was looking on her classmate's answers as well as the student who was supplying the answers. Both students denied that they were cheating. I mentioned that students should not give me any reason to suspect that they are cheating. After mentioning what I saw, the students got awfully quiet. Due to an apparent change in the school's cheating policy, the teacher needs to contact parents on the first cheating offense and allow the student(s) to retake the assessment or similar assessment, so I contacted the parents. The parent of each student whom I contacted was in disbelief that their gifted or high-achieving student would cheat.

The second incident this year occurred during a quiz. Similar to the previous incident, one student continued to look at her neighbor's answers. As before, I spoke to the students involved and mentioned what I observed. They, like the other students, denied that cheating occurred. When I contacted parents, one parent was very supportive of my conclusion that there was reason for me to suspect that academically dishonest behavior occurred. However, the parent of the student who was looking on her classmate's paper was not pleased with the accusation. This parent did not believe that his child cheated. He even sent a letter that rambled on about his own academic experience and accomplishments, his older children's academic accomplishments, and the fact that his children do not need to cheat. Beyond these statements, nothing but his faith in his daughter's denial of cheating was presented as evidence. Are parents aware that their children can make poor choices regardless of their abilities? Do parents realize that their children can lie to them? I mentioned this specific cheating incident to a fellow teacher. The teacher openly stated, "One would lie if they want to avoid a punishment." Simply offering pre-service teacher some practices that may encourage parent support for academic integrity could prevent many hazards in the future.

A student passing on academic information to the next class is yet another academically dishonest behavior that I handle from year to year. The most recent incident involving this behavior occurred early this school year. In preparation for the AP Psychology exam each May, I provide my students with several free response

questions. Covering material from three chapters, these free response questions can be very challenging for most students. Any information that can be gained about the upcoming free response question is something that is highly sought after. From my experience, it appears that students will ask students from previous classes for the specific terms that will be on the free response question. Receiving specific information on an upcoming assessment is, by definition, academic dishonesty because the student is obtaining an unfair advantage. This year's incident was unique. Before each free response question, I give the students five to 10 minutes to review the three vocabulary-filled chapters. During this time, most students are frantically turning pages in their textbooks and notebooks. On the contrary, I saw two students staring down a single sheet of paper during this time. They had laser-like focus on this single document. I monitored these students for most of the review time. As I walked around the room to monitor other students, I came to those students who were quiet and focused on that single sheet of paper. I then noticed that they were studying the very document that held the information that would be assessed on the free response question. Quietly, I whispered to the two students, "Who told?" They both looked up at me and then looked at each other as if they were waiting for the other to speak. Again, I said, "Who told?" They mentioned the name of the student who had passed on the information. I spoke to all three students involved and told them that this behavior is considered cheating and that they would be held accountable. I contacted the parents of each student, and two parents were quite supportive. Nevertheless, one parent did not believe that passing on specific information from a test to another student is academic dishonesty. The parent asserted, "I did that when I was in high school." She added that other parents whom she spoke with did not consider that behavior as cheating. Later that day, the parent called the school and spoke with the Assistant Principal for Instruction (API). The API supported my claims and inquired how I figured out that these students received the information. This experience clearly supports the need for teacher education programs to discuss what constitutes academic dishonesty. Providing pre-service educators with sound definitions will allow these individuals to educate their students and the students' parents on what is and isn't cheating.

Another encounter with cheating came unexpectedly during my sixth year of teaching. Academic dishonesty and student projects are potentially haphazard. That year, I enthusiastically assigned my AP Psychology students a project that asked the students to produce a "Farcebook" page, a fabricated page resembling a *Facebook* page, for a set of influential psychologists whom we will cover throughout the year. After giving the students two months to complete this assignment, the students turned in their work. I was pleased to see the results of my students' efforts. However, while grading each project and systematically checking the grading rubric, I noticed that some projects had terribly similar information as other projects. I started placing individual pages side by side. And there it was. I discovered that 12 students had

used or shared the same information. These students plagiarized information on their project. It was a cut-and-paste extravaganza. Sure, the students may have changed the font size and color. They may have used several different images. But ultimately, these students cheated on this assignment.

After discovering the overwhelming amount of academic dishonesty on this assignment, I asked myself, "What do I do now?" Having no formal instruction for academic dishonesty at my school at that time, I ultimately decided to have students write a letter to their parents about their cheating behavior. After the parents had signed the letters, the students could turn in a new project that was created independently for half credit. I had one parent who claimed that her two sons did not cheat on this assignment. The parent confessed, "They were working on the project at the same time, but they were working independently at the same table." At that point, after filling in the API about the situation, I passed that parent on to school administration. After much discussion, the API and I decided that there wasn't enough evidence to say that the two brothers were copying one another's work. Despite this, the API really liked the project and applauded my efforts to encourage academic integrity in my classroom.

After a few days, the news that many of my students were caught cheating got out. The students who were identified as cheating became very open to the class about their behavior. I believe that their ultimate reason for this openness about their academic dishonesty was to encourage other students who had cheated but were not identified to "turn themselves in." Some students were terribly upset that other students weren't caught and didn't come forward. Then it started. One student came to me after school. She walked in my classroom and said, "I need to tell you something." I didn't say a word. She continued, "I copied someone's project and turned it in as my work." I was floored. Despite this, I tried to keep my poker face and discuss where we go from here. Within the next week, two more students came forward with the same confession. I was proud of those students who came forward and received the same penalties as the students whom I identified as cheating. Regardless, our discussions as pre-service teachers in a teacher education program never alluded to this level of academic dishonesty.

I could share more experiences with academic dishonesty, yet I will leave with this message. Providing a strong foundation of academic integrity can greatly influence a teacher's experience in the classroom. Which practices are most effective for limiting academic dishonesty, which school policies create an environment that encourages academic integrity, and what motivates students to cheat are just some of the topics that need to be found in teacher education programs. In a time when teachers and administrators have been identified as altering student answers on standardized tests, teacher education departments should develop teachers and administrators who have the knowledge to identify, address, and ultimately discourage academic dishonesty in their schools.

H. ANNE HATHAWAY

17. PREPARATION—OR NOT

Let me begin by stating that I graduated in June 1971 and began teaching in August 1971. My alma mater was established in 1892 as a female college that became the first normal school for teacher preparation in the state. During the time I was in college, a baccalaureate degree in elementary education with certification in grades four through nine did not require a course in special education, and there were few if any field experiences prior to student teaching. Moreover, 1971 was the first year of full integration in the school system in which I taught. My preparation included no specific courses on diversity or human relations other that what might be learned in an educational psychology course or in a human development course.

The following discussion provides different scenarios that occurred during my teaching and that required me to make decisions and choices based on my best decision-making that, more often than not, did not have a foundation from my teacher preparation program.

I began teaching seventh grade mathematics and science in a junior high school in a county school system in the piedmont of North Carolina. This school brought together students from multiple elementary schools, some in the county and some in the city. The school district included children of workers in a textile mill who lived in a section of the county that the city annexed but whom the city school system did not want in its schools. Therefore, I was teaching a group of children who were more diverse than just by race. Again, little if any specific preparation regarding diversity in the classroom had been given to me during my education. This is not to belittle my institution of higher education; it is simply to explain the times and the awareness that might have or have not existed.

The school in which I taught was built for about 900 students, but it housed approximately 1400. Rooms were repurposed, and classrooms were carved out under the football stadium seats. Still, there were not enough classrooms; a number of teachers were "roving teachers" who taught in classrooms vacated during planning periods of other teachers. One of my most thankful moments was being told that I had my own classroom and did not have to use others' rooms. Of course, part of that arrangement was that I was given all the repeaters in seventh grade mathematics. Prepared for that – I do not think so!

I was prepared and certified to teach grades four through nine and had a concentration in mathematics. This "Intermediate" certificate was the precursor to the future "Middle Grades" certificate. I did my student teaching in grade four – all subjects except reading. After that experience, which was excellent, I decided that

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I did not like teaching all subjects, so I applied to teach at the junior high/middle school level on all of the applications thst I completed. I was offered and took a job teaching seventh grade mathematics and science. While science was not my concentration, I had five lab science courses in undergraduate school, which today would be 20 credit hours. At that time, a three-hour lecture and a one-hour lab course received only three hours credit; thus, I did not have the 18 credit hours for the science concentration. However, I did meet SA CS standards with 15 credit hours. Thus, I was assigned to teach mathematics and life science.

Life science was a required course at seventh grade that had a delineated curriculum that no one bothered to give me that first year. Life science is a combination of animals (zoology) and plants (botany), and both are to be taught. However, because I did not have a curriculum in hand and no one mentored me about this, I took advantage of the situation to teach animals primarily since I preferred them to plants. My students dissected earthworms and were engaged in multiple types of activities for learning life science. At the end of the year, during a discussion with my "mentor," I said something about spending most of the year on animals. Of course, this raised great concern since I had not spent much time facilitating the learning of plants. I was then given a copy of the curriculum and told emphatically to give equal time to each. Later the second year, we had a vertical articulation meeting with the biology teachers at the high school. During that meeting, we were informed that we had to increase our emphasis on animals because students were coming to the high school with much less knowledge than they should. Needless to say, I felt vindicated. As it turned out, the other teachers were emphasizing plants over animals because of their gardening passions. Now, this has nothing to do with my preparation for teaching. I had a full year of biology in undergraduate. It does speak to the preparation for decision-making and appropriate collaboration with colleagues. Quite frankly, I believe that I made the appropriate decision!

The issues with life science continue as I increased my emphasis on plants. Technology, at that time, consisted of the overhead projector, filmstrips, 16mm films, and cassette tapes. I used a lot of films and filmstrips with my students. During my preparation, I was instructed in the use of the audio-visual materials available at that time and had to be checked off as knowing and being able to use them appropriately. However, I did not follow through with something that I am not even sure was made evident: to preview a film before showing it. I ordered a film from the system office. This film dealt with blooming flora, which in this case included pussy willow. Remember, I am teaching seventh grade students. The film is moving along at a nice pace, providing great information to my students, when suddenly, the narrator stops using the word "willow" when talking about pussy willow. All of a sudden, there is snickering, and students are turned looking at me. Even though my classroom is an inside room with no windows, the students can see me because I am standing next to the projector, where there is some light. Split-minute decision-making: do not laugh, do not make a face, do not look at your students. I kept looking at the film, the moment passed, and I never said a word about it to the students. They never

asked me anything, either. My preparation did not provide me with situations or case studies to analyze and on which to reflect to provide me with some sense of what to do in such a situation. Certainly, I learned never again to show a film or use any piece of audio-visual without previewing. I also learned that I understood my students and could make the right decision in the heat of the moment.

Differentiation was never at the forefront the way it is today. Of course, meeting the needs of all students was discussed, but discussions and activities specific to strategies for differentiation were not taught. Earlier, I stated that, in my first year, I received all of the repeaters in the seventh grade mathematics. This was in addition to the heterogeneous groups of students whom I had each class period. We had a special education teacher for seventh grade, but a number of my students just barely missed meeting the criteria for special education, or their parents would not agree to their being in the special education class. Also, there was no separate program for gifted students. Thus, in some classes, I had students whose IQs ranged from special education level or just above to as high as 140. Differentiation was definitely called for.

A need for differentiation became more evident when I decided to graph the nine-week mathematics grades of my different classes. This representation of students' grades revealed an inverted bell curve in each of my classes. There was a nice distribution of As and Bs, almost no Cs, and approximately the same number of Ds as Fs. This visual of my students' grades hit me like a thunderbolt. Unlike today's teacher preparation, mine did not include analysis of impact on student learning. There were no courses, other than educational psychology, that remotely addressed the kind of information that I was seeing. Certainly, no opportunities for case study analysis and for discussion of appropriate strategies were provided. I completed these graphs for two consecutive grading periods. Afterwards, I decided to review the cumulative folders of my students. In doing so, I found a couple of patterns. One related to the socioeconomic realm. The majority of students earning As and Bs came from families of college professors or large farm owners. Those students earning Ds and Fs predominantly came from textile mill families. The second pattern related to the first. The parents of the majority of students earning Ds and Fs had not more than an eighth grade education. The majority earning As and Bs had parents who had high school diplomas and college diplomas. This was my first direct encounter with two of the major factors related to student success in school. Quite frankly, I had the belief that all children could learn, and I expected all students to meet the "standards." However, it was evident that I had to modify my planning and facilitating of learning. My preparation did not provide the specific means for my doing this. I do think, however, that it provided me the opportunities to develop my critical reasoning such that I could make the decisions that were needed to amend the situation. Yet, it was a "stomach punching" situation to see the graphs of my students' grades when I thought that I was being very effective.

Differentiation also related to a teaching situation with a particular student in mathematics. This student barely missed meeting the criteria for being placed in

the special education course. Like several others whom I taught, this student took longer to understand, learn, and apply the mathematics being taught. A particular area of difficulty was changing decimals to percents and percents to decimals. While other students were working, I would work one-on-one with this student every day for a large part of the class period. Each day was the same; the student would have forgotten what he learned the previous day, and we would start over. Each day, the student became more exasperated and would say, "Miss Hathaway, I'm just stupid. I can't every learn this." My response each time was, "No, you are not stupid. It just takes you longer, and you are capable of learning this. You can do this. It's going to be all right."

Occasionally, I would put my arm around his shoulders and give him a slight hug. After about three weeks of working with this student daily and not seeing any progress, I now was getting exasperated because I was at a loss of additional strategies to use. So the day came when the student and I were working together, and, exasperated, I said, "I don't know what else to do. I have tried everything, and nothing seems to work." The student put his arm around my shoulder and said, "It's going to be all right, Miss Hathaway. I'll just work a little harder." Well, I have never been more taken aback – yet pleased. From the point of view of differentiation, I had exhausted my limited approaches and strategies since this was not part of my teacher preparation. However, and again not part of my teacher preparation, I had developed a covenant relationship where this student felt comfortable enough to comfort me even as I was trying to comfort him. It was a major breakthrough that resulted in academic progress that would not have happened otherwise. Yet, was I prepared for all of this? I think not.

Classroom management was a major area of lack of preparation. Remember, this was the very early 1970s. There was no specific course, and I was expected to glean understanding during the educational psychology course. One benefit that I had was having worked at a camp for two previous summers, where I was a cabin counselor for 10-and 11-year old girls. However, the strategy at the camp was "to talk with and reason with" the girls. This was great experience, but it did not prepare me to walk into a school where paddling was expected and was designated in the student handbook for certain offenses. For example, if caught chewing gum, the student was to receive three licks with the paddle. I had never touched a child in this way. Moreover, I did not know how to administer the required punishment. In my classroom were three paddles, so I had a choice of which paddle to use. I had to ask other experienced teachers how to administer the consequence with as little physical harm to the child as possible.

The school system in which I worked was the system from which the corporal punishment case *Baker v. Owen* arose. During my first year, the school system had a process in place if one paddled a child. There had to be a witness, and it had to occur out of sight from other students. There was a form that had to be completed and submitted to the school office. After the court case, the actual paddling had to occur out of sight and hearing of other students. The paperwork became slightly

more substantive. However, paddling was expected, and parents accepted that consequence unless specifically requesting otherwise.

Thus, I had to determine what rules were most important in my classroom and a process of consequences that would place paddling as a last resort. I also had to engage in metacognitive reflection. I am a very patient person; that is an advantage and a disadvantage. The disadvantage is that I would allow a behavior to continue until I became irritated with it. The length of time varied for each student; as a result, there existed inconsistency in the management of my classroom. I had to monitor my own behavior as I was monitoring and managing my students. In addition to consistency, I had to address the issue of fairness. This very much was demonstrated when a school rule was broken toward the end of the school year. A female student, very bright and always with appropriate behavior, walked into my class chewing gum and continued to chew during the lesson. I walked up to her, told her to spit out her gum, and stated that I would have to paddle her at the end of class. This student knew that she had broken the rule, started crying, and begged me not to paddle her. However, as much as it hurt me (and it did), I had to paddle her. I had to be fair with the consequences. While I did not like the rule, I was required by school rules to paddle. I could not paddle some students who broke the rule and not paddle others who broke the same rule. My background did not prepare me to deal with paddling or with the personal emotional outcomes of carrying through with this requirement.

It is interesting, though. As an aside, I broke a paddle one day while paddling. The next day, I was brought three new paddles by the students. One of those three looked like the exact center of a baseball bat and was not too thin or too thick. I took it to the industrial arts teacher and had him cut off the long handle to fit my hand. I have no idea how I knew what a "good" paddle looked like, but I knew when I saw it. I still have never understood the logic that students would bring new paddles to a teacher, except I guess that the students decided that, if they had to be paddled, they would rather determine the instrument that would be used. Again, I was not prepared for that behavior.

One other scenario related to classroom management is one time when my class and I returned to the classroom from lunch. Students went directly to their seats and started working while I put my purse away and started to sit down at my desk. Before sitting down, I happened to look at my chair and saw several tacks that had been strategically place head down, spike up. I picked up the tacks, held up a couple for the class to see, and said something to the effect of, "Oh, heavens. Look at these tacks. Someone put tacks in my seat. I wonder who could have done that. I can't imagine who would put tacks in my seat." I put the tacks down on my desk and never said another word. When I did not do anything else and did not try to find out who did it, a buzz started around the room. It was easy to distinguish who did it based on facial expressions and guilty looks. However, I never said anything else. Also, I never had tacks in my seat again. I was not taught how to handle that situation. Maybe my previous work at camp helped. Maybe more so was observing and hearing the teacher next door who shared some of my students. She would react

immediately and scream and yell. Not only was this behavior ineffective, but it was a waste of class time. I believe that I learned what not to do from her; certainly, it was not because of my teacher preparation.

Diversity was not a topic of major emphasis in my teacher preparation even as we were moving toward full integration in the public schools during the time I was in undergraduate school. We had had freedom of choice for Black children since I have been a junior in high school, and there had been a Black student in my class. However, teacher preparation did little to address the racial diversity in the schools. My student teaching experience provided some "on-the-job" experience since I was placed with a Black teacher and had a Black child in the class. (Teachers were integrated at least a year before children.) Additionally, to complicate my situation somewhat, I had a Tidewater Virginia dialect, which is different from that in the piedmont area of North Carolina. I grew up pronouncing *Linda* as *Linder* and *supper* as *suppa*. When teaching certain concepts such as factors and divisors in mathematics, my dialect led students to ask me if I were from a foreign country. I replied, "No, unless the coast of North Carolina is a foreign country." My dialect typically had never been a major problem. However, one day, a Black student had been exhibiting a particular inappropriate behavior more than once in class. I had warned him several times. The last time, I walked over to his desk and told him, "If you do not stop, I am going to call your motha." This student raised his fist at me and said, "Don't you ever call my mama no motha." I stood there completely perplexed until it dawned on me what he thought I was saying about his mother. The environment in which I was raised did not include that type of language, but I was not ignorant about it. However, it was not on "my radar," so to speak. I was simply speaking normally. Because of lack of knowledge of different cultural groups, etc., I innocently offended a child who thought that I was deliberately insulting his mother. It took me a few seconds, but I recovered and tried to explain to this student that I was not insulting his mother, that I was simply speaking and that it was my dialect. I smoothed over the situation. However, it was a very poignant education in a short amount of time on the need to be aware of and attend to the diversities in the classroom.

Sexual awareness of middle school students was not a topic of study in my teacher preparation program either. Strategies for dealing with this were not offered. The human development touched on sexual development, but it in no way addressed ways to deal with it in the classroom. My students had sex education during their physical education/health class at the same time every year. I would know to expect the students to come to my class carrying their diagrams and giggling – the girls in one corner of the classroom, the boys in another. This I could deal with. However, when an individual student fell hopelessly "in love," it became an academic matter that no program of study had prepared me to handle. I had a male student (call him Joey), somewhat chubby, round face, and blond hair, who became totally enraptured with a female student. This female, at 12 years old, already was well developed and knew it. She tended to wear tight sweaters that displayed well her assets. I do not believe that I have ever seen a child follow another like a little puppy with eyes

popped out of their sockets the way this child did. I always stood at the door as students entered the classroom so that I could speak to each child. When Joey started walking in directly behind the female with his eyes bugged out, I had to immediately address the issue. I have always talked to my students about tending to learning when in the classroom and leaving other things alone until later. I took this tactic with Joey. I told Joey to put his eyes back in head and to get ready for mathematics. Joey blushed, smiled, and went to his desk. It seemed that, every five to 10 minutes, Joey stopped working and was sitting and just looking at the female student. I had to remind Joey to attend to his math and, with hand signals, to put his eyes back in his head. He again would blush and get back to work until the next time it happened. This went on for several days until the female student gave Joey the brush off. Then I had to deal with a moping male student who experienced his first heartbreak. Now, I was nowhere near being prepared to deal with this emotional and social drama in the classroom. Common sense and instinct were my tools of use. No course ever provided me strategies for handling these types of situations.

Another related scenario involved this same 12-year-old female student. She asked me one day how old I was. When I replied that I was 26 , she said that could not be. I told her it was true. She again said that I could not be that old because that was the age of her mother. A couple of male students were listening to his conversation. One of them, I could see, was doing math calculations in his head. Eventually, he said, "Oh, my gosh, Miss Hathaway, her mother was 14 when she had her!" He was absolutely floored. I simply looked in his eyes and stated that he was correct. Other than that, I did not know what to say. It was one of those times when one student arrives at a major realization at the expense of another student. I could not get upset with the student who made the calculation, and I could not indicate anything negative to the female student. However, no teacher preparation program could have presented me such a scenario – at least mine did not.

During the semester of student teaching, I was to have methods for the first eight weeks and then to student teach the second eight weeks. Apparently, this was an experiment for the school of education. However, though not told why, courses were ended after six weeks, and my peers and I were put into the schools two weeks early. This had implications for facilitating learning, as specific strategies for teaching particular topics might not have been presented before student teaching began. For my concentration in mathematics, this was coupled with the lack of research about teaching problem-solving at that time. Another complication was that New Math was the basis of the curriculum. Three teaching situations occurred that remain significant to my first years of teaching.

The first teaching situation occurred at the beginning of the school year. Following the textbook, as I had been told, I started with the first chapter in the book. A little background is needed here. New Math became part of the mathematics curriculum in my state after I graduated from high school. For example, in secondary school, I had an entire year of plane geometry. Later, plane and solid were combined due to New Math and became unified geometry or just geometry. I have no recollection

of any discussion about New Math during my preparation to teach mathematics in grades four through nine. Thus, I was somewhat taken aback when I opened the textbook and saw that the first chapter dealt with teaching/learning various number systems: 2, 5, 7, 11, 25, etc. Now, I had the knowledge base for teaching it; what I did not have were strategies for facilitating learning. It appeared that students were to better understand the base 10 (decimal) system by studying other number bases. However, it became obvious that, as much as these students had studied the base 10 number system, there was sufficient lack of understanding that students could not make connections to prior knowledge. As a result, I had to first review the decimal system, teach the other bases, and then come back to the decimal system to make connections.

Extending from this teaching scenario was another understanding that I gained from reflection and not from what I was taught. It became obvious to me over several years that the same pattern was occurring with the base 10 system and place value. Place value is a topic that is taught typically at the beginning of each school year. What does not happen is the systematic return to the topic over the school year in a manner that is obvious to students and that assists retention of what was learned at the beginning of the school year. What does happen is that the topic is taught but then is not practiced and reviewed on a regular basis. Teaching for learning was emphasized. Teaching for retention was not. This has remained with me for over 40 years and is an emphasis that I have in my methods courses today.

The second situation was teaching long division. Not an easy process for many students to learn, it created a major learning episode for me. I had planned a very precise, clear way of teaching the process and had implemented this with success, I thought. During the guided practice activity following the explanation and demonstration, I realized that I was getting the same questions from multiple students. I had given them the directions: divide, multiply, subtract, and bring down. It seemed very clear to me, especially with the multiple examples that I showed my students. However, I began to realize that simply giving a series of steps was not sufficient for many of my students. First, I realized that I knew how to do long division with no questions and with great ease. I also realized that I understood the process both holistically and with regard to the parts of the process. Third, I realized that I understood this process from a much greater analytical point of view. Therefore, I realized that I had to find a way to break down the process so that my students understood the parts of the process as well as how and why the parts fit together. This was many years before more specific manipulatives had been designed to assist students in learning. Thus, I had to find ways to help students be successful. Somehow, I persevered and enabled my students to learn.

A third scenario deals with the teaching of problem-solving. I love problem-solving and will spend hours solving problems. I guess I thought that everyone did. How not true that is. I was teaching word problems in my mathematics classes. The problems were appropriate for seventh grade students and for the abilities of my students. A student raised his hand and said, “Miss Hathaway, I don’t know what this

problem means." I said, "Read it again." Five minutes later, the same student raised his hand and said, "Miss Hathaway, I still don't know what this problem means." I stated, "Read it one more time." Another five minutes passed, and the student again said that he did not understand the problem. I replied, "Read it again more slowly." As one who enjoyed solving problems and because I had not been taught how to teach it, I assumed that everyone did what I did. I would read through the problem quickly to get an overview of the problem and then re-read it more slowly to understand to specifics of the problem. I would pull out pertinent information and rewrite it on paper. I would draw pictures and diagrams to help me understand the relationships described in the proble`m. I would underline the question or the sentence that indicated what needed to be found. What I realized very quickly while standing in my classroom trying to help this student is that I knew nothing about problem solving. That realization was very humbling and led me to learn as much as I could about the teaching of problem solving over the next 35 to 40 years. However, in the meantime, I had to find strategies to use. I realized, too, that, if I expect students to used techniques and steps in problem-solving, I have to teach it explicitly to them. Thus, I began to develop a list of the techniques and strategies that I used to solve problems and then began to teach them systematically to my students. The teaching of problem-solving remains a favorite.

The various scenarios are some of the ones that stand out in my mind after all those years ago when I was a beginning teacher. I graduated from one of the most prestigious teacher education institutions in my state. Its school of education was a leader in teacher education and experimented in many ways to improve teacher preparation. However, I also graduated at a time of much change in the country, in education, and in the curriculum. Integration of schools, New Math, open classrooms, and other new ideas in education were happening. Much of the research providing the foundation for today's courses in pedagogy, human development, and educational psychology has occurred since I attended college. Many of the manipulatives and other teaching materials have come to exist as a result of this research.

I believe that my ability to walk the path as a teacher was initiated in my teacher preparation program with the course work that I had and the expected critical thinking. However, it was combined with the common sense and innate abilities that I brought to the job. My passion for the subjects that I was teaching, my love for middle school students, my belief that I could facilitate learning, and my use of experienced teachers helped me to overcome many of the inadequacies that I brought initially to the teaching experience.

SHARON MURPHY AUGUSTINE

18. GRIEF AND TEACHING

The Unnatural Order of Things

> Though nothing can bring back the hour
> Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
> We will grieve not, rather find
> Strength in what remains behind;
> In the primal sympathy
> Which having been must ever be;
> In the soothing thoughts that spring
> Out of human suffering;
> In the faith that looks through death,
> In years that bring the philosophic mind.
> —William Wordsworth, Stanza X, "Ode to Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"

These lines from Wordsworth's poem commemorated the lives of a young woman and man who were high school students at the school where I taught and sponsored the literary magazine. Both students were murdered in separate unrelated and violent incidences. Both shot and killed before they ever reached a graduation ceremony or high school class reunion, their last school pictures show them frozen in time and youth. In the spring issue of the magazine, students wrote poetry about each student who was gone too soon and too finally. Though I had many good experiences in my pre-service teacher preparation program, I do not remember one class or professor ever mentioning how a teacher is supposed to deal with the death of students. Dealing with the death of students in the prime of their lives and supporting students grieving over the loss of their peers brings the unnatural order of things into stark view. As a teacher, knowledge failed me; therefore, the discussion of death and grief was territory left off the map of the curriculum. My experiences in my first teaching position taught me about how teachers, students, and administrators could negotiate the difficult and emotional terrain that death brings to a secular and institutional public high school.

I recently visited the high school where I first taught English. No thoughts of death were on my mind as I drove into the town; instead, I was caught in the chain reaction of memory that familiar places sometimes fold time across. I noticed how the landscape has changed. Ten years ago, the only restaurants in Grover's Corners were Hardee's, Tastee Freez, and Ollie's Family Style Eats. Hardee's has been

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converted into Popeye's Chicken, and the Tastee Freez has been demolished, leaving a lot of prime real estate between the new Krystal and Brighton's Funeral Home. Other signs of progress abound. The Bank of Grover's Corners's old branch by the railroad tracks now houses a coffee and Internet café; surely that means progress even more than the new Waffle House. The dilapidated Grover's Corners Motel with its one-story, drive-up-to-your-motel-room-door layout that stretches a block now has some competition with the Days Inn's two-story building and new pool. The Bank of Grover's Corners now has three other banks competing for your home mortgage, college savings accounts, and checking accounts. Seven new subdivisions are currently being developed in the county. Progress is alive and well in Webb County, but its small town atmosphere is still intact.

As I neared the high school, I still remembered the first time that I saw the complex. I marveled at the six lighted tennis courts, two baseball and softball fields, track, football stadium, and cow-filled barn. Coming from a large metro-Atlanta school district with multiple high schools that shared facilities, I was astonished to see the sprawling high school and the recent addition of a three million dollar fine arts center.

My cavalcade of memory took a more somber turn as I parked in front of the school and noticed over a dozen trees of various heights planted there. Many of these trees aren't big yet because they've only been planted too recently—not all at the same time but too close for comfort. In the last two decades, 17 students have died while attending the high school or in their first two years after graduation, and a tree has been planted in memory of each student. Two of these students were murdered, one by a former student who now sits on death row. Two students had degenerative illnesses that claimed their lives. Another student died of cancer. One student ended his life in a "game" of Russian roulette. All of the other students' lives were ended abruptly in car accidents. The trees are testaments to those whom we lost with small plaques commemorating each short, mourned life. Just as I wasn't prepared for the death of my students, I wasn't prepared for the swell of emotion and loss that seeing these trees prompted in me. The unfairness and acute loss seemed unbearable as I thought about the growth and promise of each life that was cut short.

I remember how the institution of school tried to address these unfathomable losses in its usual manner—a committee was formed. Even though death and grief are bigger than committee work, the intention of the grief committee was a good one—to make sure that, in death, each student's life is valued and treated with equal respect while helping faculty and students mourn. As members of the grief committee, we developed procedures that administrators and teachers would follow in the event of a student's death. We replaced the form letter in each teacher's box announcing the death with a phone tree that notified teachers before they arrived at school. Long rectangular pieces of bulletin board paper were taped to a wall on the English hall with a "Rest in Peace" notation and the student's name to create a memorial wall for the student. We later moved these memorial walls to the lunchroom commons area because it gave more students time to write tributes to the deceased

student and to read the messages, tributes, and remembrances that their peers had written. Our thinking as a committee was that the memorial wall was a tangible way to externalize grief and to see that you were not alone in loss. The school would also send representatives to the funeral. After the funeral, the committee would take down the memorial paper, roll it up, and present it to the student's family at the same time that the student's locker and other personal items were returned.

While a culture of mourning developed at Webb County High School, I remember worrying that I would do the wrong thing in my classes. I would either err on the side of downplaying students' grief or on the side of wallowing in grief. I thought that there was a way to get grief just right, like a lesson differentiating tone from mood in Edgar Allan Poe's short stories. Instead, I learned that, in an institutional setting such as school, a genuine human reaction with my students could be the most revolutionary action that I as teacher that I could take. Not hiding grief but instead recognizing school as a place where students *and* teachers experience, loss, joy, and the full range of human emotions is a revolutionary and important act. Many people find talk about the death of anyone difficult, especially a young person. And in some ways, it is unrealistic to expect the school setting to rise above cultural norms. However, school is the place where I like to think that there is the potential to practice being our better selves and moving closer to the promise of a place where the best parts of humanity are modeled for our youth.

Still, death was a harsh teacher in the place that I called school. The loss of students who were lights in my life and certainly in the lives of their parents, friends, and families was part of the reason that I decided to leave high school teaching. Ultimately, my experiences taught me to take chances and to explore the teaching profession through lenses other than a high school teacher. I didn't leave to escape the death of young people; I left to honor Thoreau's mantra that their deaths taught me and that I had espoused to my students but not lived: "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams, live the life you've imagined." If some of the most beautiful, humorous, and intellectually curious students could die, anyone could. When a former student of mine whom I had taught in ninth grade and coached in tennis for four years was killed in a car accident, something shifted in the way that I thought about all the readings that I assigned, the quotes that I purportedly lived by, and the trajectory of my life. Her incomprehensible exit from this world didn't make me just want to embrace changes in the dreams that I followed; her loss encouraged me to think differently about the school experiences that filled the lives of my students.

Intellectually, I might have understood that deaths could happen to my students, but facing the loss and its aftermath is always a shock. For me, the takeaway is not that there is a way to be prepared or a grief curriculum to use as an intervention or another committee to form but that the experiences that we arrange for our students in schools should have meaning for them in an immediate sense, not just as preparation for some distant future. Tragically, some of them will not have futures, so where is the meaningful engagement that helps them to live their lives more deeply in the present? As I walked among the trees in the front of the school, the names and

faces of each student I knew whose life was cut short haunted me. I wonder how the curriculum would look if we approached it not as only preparation for life but life itself. What if the future that we are preparing our students for is now?

*NAMES OF PLACES HAVE BEEN GIVEN PSEUDONYMS.

ASPASIA P. WATSON

19. FROM MY CLASSROOM TO YOURS

A Few Words to the Wise – From My Students

During the 1960s, a popular family television program called *The Linkletter Show* occasionally featured a segment entitled "Kids Say the Darndest Things." The host of the show would ask young children simple questions such as "Who's in charge at home?" or "What did you learn in school today?" The children's innocent responses were frequently humorous and occasionally quite insightful. In their guileless manner, the children often articulated very clearly their astute observations of life. When I was asked to contribute a chapter to this book for new educators, I reflected on my nearly 25 years of teaching science and carefully considered the matters that I wish that I had known about before I ever set foot in a classroom. Certification courses spend a great deal of time on topics that include theories of learning, the psychology of children, how to design and write lesson plans, and the politics of standardized testing. However, very little of the coursework, practicum, or student teaching experiences can prepare new teachers for many of the realities that they will face once they are on their own in the classroom and responsible for the education (and sometimes in an immediate sense, the very lives) of their students. For instance, no one ever talks about how to console a classroom full of students who have just learned that a classmate or a teacher has died or how to talk with students who have witnessed someone in the lunchroom who has overdosed on drugs. Once a teacher is hired in a district, orientation sessions will usually provide information and support concerning the particulars of their school and system. Fortunate novices will be assigned veteran mentors who can serve as sources of wisdom and guidance during the challenges of that first school year. I have had the good fortune to work with many superb teaching colleagues and professors at various universities through the years from whom I have learned much. Just as importantly, or perhaps even more so, my students have always been a source of inspiration for me. Much of who I am as a teacher is a result of what I have learned from my students. On consideration of this fact, I decided to ask them what advice they would offer to new teachers. Like Art Linkletter's young guests long ago, my students volunteered their unique and unvarnished perspectives on today's teaching practices. The following segments begin with a brief quote that is a compendium of ideas offered by several gifted high school students and is followed by my reflective commentary. I hope that these points for consideration will provide useful insights for teachers just beginning their careers and will contribute in some small way to the success of that first, crucial year.

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 125–133.

DON'T BE OVERLY STRICT

At the beginning of the school year, it is important to establish classroom expectations. I prefer to use the term *expectations* rather than *rules* because of the negative connotations high school students associate with *rules*. Many of them are convinced that being in high school is akin to serving a jail sentence and that most adults' lives revolve around the enforcement of the "prison rules." Regardless of this, students need to be told explicitly what behaviors are acceptable in your classroom and what are out of bounds. They also need to be told plainly the consequences for making poor choices regarding these expectations. Depending on the grade level and the recommendations of the school administration, printed copies of your guidelines can be given to the students for convenient reference throughout the school year. Streamlined versions of your guidelines can be posted in the classroom as reminders to students. Limit the expectations to a few simple and broad statements. For example, "Students are expected to act in a respectful manner at all times" covers a multitude of other ideas. Keep in mind that nit-picking every tiny infraction can lead to resentment and a feeling of being unwelcomed in your classroom. Remember that you are a role model for your students and that they are learning from your actions and attitudes as well as the content you are trying to teach. I remember a discussion that arose with several teachers and our principal over how to handle students being tardy to class. One of the teachers kept insisting that, as soon as the late bell rang, the classroom door should be closed and no one allowed to enter without an administrative pass, regardless of how close he or she was to being within the room. The principal very wisely reminded the teacher of what it feels like when they arrive just at closing time to an establishment such as a bank or restaurant and have the door closed in their face. No one, including our students, wants to be made to feel unwelcomed. This does not mean that students should be allowed to wander into class at their leisure; there should be consequences for behavior, but the goal should always be to maximize the students' time in class. As your teaching career progresses, you will be able to refine your expectations. Ask a mentor or neighbor teacher if they would be willing to share what they have. Most educators are eager to assist, and it is always much easier to edit and tailor a document to suit your needs rather than to have to create one on your own.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO PUNISH KIDS

There is an old adage that warns teachers not to smile at their students until after Christmas because smiling diminishes the respect commanded by the teacher. I do not agree with this position. Your students need to know that your classroom is a safe place for them – not just physically but emotionally as well. Laughing and smiling are among the most natural and important means by which you can make connections with your students. However, it is inevitable that there will be students who behave in an unacceptable manner and will have to be disciplined. Multitudes

of variables will play into the process that leads to a teacher's ultimate decision on how to manage a particular situation. Some of these variables may include the nature and degree of the infraction, the number of times that a behavior has occurred, and the safety of the student instigator as well as the rest of the class. One suggestion that may help defuse a situations is that, when it is safe to do so, the teacher may have the unruly student step outside into the hallway and wait for a few minutes. This usually gives the student time to compose himself and also removes him from an emboldening audience. Additionally, it provides the teacher a few moments to collect thoughts and to decide how to discuss the problem with the student. Try not to aggravate the situation by raising your voice or by making empty threats. Remain calm and, depending on the situation, ask the student to explain the situation from his or her point of view and to recall the classroom expectations discussed previously. Based on what is delineated in your guidelines, the student should know what consequences to expect. For instance, if it is the third time that Tommy has been asked to step out for a special conference, he should already have received a verbal warning, and his parents should have been notified of the problem. Tommy (and his parents) should know that the third occasion warrants an office referral or detention. It is imperative that students realize that the teacher will follow through with the consequences as outlined and that they will be applied fairly. Be certain that your discipline guidelines coincide with your school policy. It is always wise to seek approval on such issues from the administrator in charge of discipline before implementation. Most students would agree that there is a need for structure in the classroom, especially those who are there to learn. Once you have built a community of trust and mutual respect, you may be pleasantly surprised to find that your students can become your allies in maintaining a classroom atmosphere that is inviting and conducive to learning.

DON'T TREAT US LIKE LITTLE KIDS, ALLOW US TO MAKE CHOICES

High school students are on the threshold of becoming young adults and need to be allowed increasing responsibilities, within reason. In order to facilitate this growth, it is crucial that you get to know your students individually in this regard. By talking with them and, more importantly, listening to them, you will come to know who can be trusted to act in a responsible manner and who needs a little more time before being allowed certain privileges. Much of your practice in this area may be subject to administrative dictates, but even small gestures such as allowing students who finish work early to visit the media center or to listen to music without disturbing others are a few ways that permit students to make decisions that allow them to feel a sense of responsibility. My classroom is located at the end of a very long hallway. The student restrooms and water fountains are about halfway along the hall. My expectation for restroom needs is that a student can ask quietly and leave my room without a written pass as long as they do not go past the water fountain area and return promptly to the classroom. Only one student is allowed out of the room at a time. If they are

found to be wandering down the hall, in a part of the building beyond my express boundary, the privilege is revoked until such time that trust can be regained. This simple guideline proved incredibly valuable one day when a student decided to leave campus during my class. My students were conducting a lab activity, and one of the girls asked to go to the restroom. I allowed her to go and reminded her not to go past the water fountains. About 15 minutes later, another student asked but knew that she couldn't leave until the first returned. I told her to go ahead and to check to see if the other girl was alright. When the second student returned and reported that the first was not in the restroom, I became concerned and called the office. The security officer and administrators looked everywhere for the girl and discovered that her boyfriend was also missing from the school. A check of the parking lot confirmed that his vehicle had left the campus. Parents were called and came to the school. Her poor choice led to consequences that I doubt that she had anticipated. I don't recall the disciplinary action from the school, but I do remember the parents being grateful for our vigilance in keeping up with their wayward child. Because my students knew my expectations well, the administrators were able to determine fairly quickly what had happened. If the second student had not pointed out the first's length of time out of class, I may not have noticed her tardiness until later since they were all out of their seats and in the lab working. It gave our security officer and administrators time to ascertain that the students had left campus and to alert their parents. The well-being and safety of our students should always be paramount.

DON'T CHASE DOWN OUR WORK AND STAND STRONG ON YOUR DUE DATES

I have to confess that I have a difficult time with this suggestion. One of the skills that I try to help my high school students develop and refine is organization. I sometimes tease them about their book bags becoming black holes capable of swallowing all manner of assignments, but if they look carefully *one more time*, that homework paper might suddenly reappear in this universe! Sometimes the missing assignment really is there, and sometimes not. The conundrum for me is that I would rather a student turn in something for a late grade than to get a zero for an assignment. On the other hand, those who do the work promptly and submit it in a timely manner may rightly come to resent when their less industrious peers are repeatedly allowed late submissions. To facilitate students' taking ownership of their progress in class and accepting responsibility for missing assignments, provide some means by which students who have been absent from class can readily access the needed information. Some teachers will post the information for class on a website or have a plan book available for students to reference as needed. Be certain that students understand that it is their responsibility, not yours, to find out about missed work. When assignments that have a specific due date are given to the class, do not waiver from that date (unless, of course, there are valid extenuating circumstances). Again, this is a part of learning to accept responsibility by meeting deadlines. It will also make it much

easier on you, the teacher, so that you will not have students continually trying to turn in work that is past the due date. Many schools (or school systems) have policies addressing the issues of late and missing work and how to deduct points for such assignments; others will leave it to the discretion of the individual teacher. Check with your department chair or the administrator who coordinates instruction and curriculum before implementing policies on your own. They may have suggestions on how to handle such situations.

MAKE THINGS FUN, USE A MIX OF TEACHING METHODS

Students (and teachers) get bored with the same type of assignments and class routines over and over. I have found that, when possible, by offering students a choice of how to complete an assignment, they will enjoy the assignment more and (hopefully) learn more from it. For example, when I assign a project on cell organelles (according to my students, one of the most boring topics known), I allow students a menu of creative choices with guidelines that ensure that students learn the pertinent information. They might choose to write a rap or poem, they can put on a skit, or they can create a cartoon strip or video. I also allow them to come up with their own ideas for completing the project; they simply explain the idea to me, and I will either approve it or ask them for clarification or refinement of the proposed plan. Additionally, it is good practice to vary your instructional modes. Teacher preparation coursework is usually very thorough on this topic, but my students insist that all they do *all day long in every class* is copy notes. While this claim is (hopefully) highly exaggerated, I do sympathize with them on this topic. In many cases, teachers are constrained on their instructional modes by pragmatic concerns. These are usually related to the realities of the lack of instructional time and the amount of content that must be covered in order to prepare students for standardized testing. Even so, by interweaving short music and video clips into your lessons, relating the subject matter to your students' lives, or by playing games, you are helping students make essential connections for learning. Even just taking the class outside on a beautiful day to complete bookwork or for a few minutes to check on the phase of the moon or to watch storm clouds gather can do wonders to bolster attitudes and re-energize students so that they can focus on more mundane matters.

DON'T BE OVERY SARCASTIC AND DON'T PUT KIDS DOWN

Like so many of us, students do not particularly like it when teachers respond to them in a sarcastic manner. Having and using appropriate humor in the classroom is a great way to ease tension and tedium, but sarcasm is best left out of the mix. As mentioned in a previous section, high school students, while sometimes appearing to be young adults, still have a lot of growing up to do psychologically and emotionally, and they do not always understand certain nuances of language. They become offended and can get their feelings hurt if they misunderstand something

that you are joking about. I am always astonished when my students relegate tales of teachers shouting at classes out of frustration. I realize that sometimes certain students (or sometimes whole classes) can be very challenging, but losing your cool with a roomful of teenagers is a mistake; I unfortunately learned that the hard way during my student teaching days. If you can maintain a calm demeanor even when a student challenges you, it can (usually) diffuse the situation. I had a student once who decided to use especially colorful language at a volume loud enough for almost everyone to hear during a lab activity. When I quietly asked him to step into the hallway, he continued his use of inappropriate language. I gave him a minute or two to calm down and meanwhile had the rest of the class continue their work. I called the office and asked for an administrator or counselor to come to my classroom. When I joined the student in the hallway and asked him what was going on, he continued cursing but then began plaintively asking why I was not yelling back at him. It turned out that he was deliberately trying to provoke an encounter so that he would be sent home. His best friend had skipped school that same day, and they wanted to hang out together. Instead of being sent home, the administration decided to assign the student a few days of in-school suspension. So instead of escalating this encounter by raising my voice or threatening the student with punishment and by remaining calm, a resolution was more quickly reached. Many of the students whom I have had difficulties with, such as in the situation just described, had personal circumstances that were challenging, and they simply did not know the appropriate way to handle certain interactions. In these cases, part of the educator's job is to help students learn these appropriate behaviors.

DON'T ALLOW STUDENTS TO RUN YOU OVER

Unfortunately, it is very easy to get overwhelmed as a new teacher. There are so many details to attend to – lesson plans to write, parent contacts to be made, papers to correct, tests and quizzes to grade, and meetings to attend. After a while, these tasks will become more manageable as you work out a routine. Meanwhile, though, it is important not to let these details overpower you to the point that you lose the sense of what is truly important – teaching. I realize that this is much easier said than done. I was that first year teacher who spent endless hours attending to minutiae and lamentably missed so much of the fun part of being a teacher. Regrettably, I have seen teachers become so caught up in the trivia of the process of teaching that they forget about the students, and before you know it, the teacher loses control of the class. Once that happens, it is nearly impossible to regain your position of authority. You can avoid this by beginning the school year confidently, with a plan of where your students need to be at the end of the year and a reasonable idea of how you will lead them to that destination. Maintain your focus on the end goal, which is helping your students to be successful in your class and ultimately to graduate from high school. This might seem counterintuitive, but in the early years of my teaching career, I found that, the more I volunteered for extracurricular events such as selling tickets

at basketball games, helping chaperone prom, or assisting with school fundraising projects, the better I was able to connect with my students. At first glance, it seems that these activities are very time-consuming (some of them can be) and take time away from your classroom responsibilities. The benefits of seeing and interacting with your students outside of your classroom, however, are amazing. I absolutely love being able to see the creative side of many of my students by attending their art exhibitions and talent shows or the agriculture exhibitions in which the students present the cows or hogs that they have raised. The students appreciate teachers being there, too. They are always so excited and say things such as, "I saw you at the fashion show. Did you like my dress design?" or "How about that champion hog call, do you want to hear it again?" It is yet another way to demonstrate your investment in their world and to show that you care about them as a whole person, not just as someone who has to attain to a certain standardized test score. These extra efforts can translate into more effective management in the classroom because you have come to know your students in a different light.

DON'T GIVE TONS OF HOMEWORK

This topic is inevitable if you ask a high school student for a suggestion on how to teach. Of course, the amount of homework will be dictated by the level and rigor of the course being taught. Remember that yours is not the only class that your students must attend each day. I try to keep in mind that my students have seven classes each day. Even if they only had 30 minutes of homework assigned for each class, that is an additional three and a half hours of work every night. I try to plan at least five to 10 minutes at the end of class for them to start on homework assignments, and I do not necessarily always give them written work as homework. If they are having a quiz over an article that they have read or a section of a chapter, then the assignment may be to re-read or study notes on what the quiz may cover. Homework in my classes is intended to give independent practice on what has been studied or learned that day. If they can get started in class, they have an opportunity to ask me for help as needed and to clarify any misconceptions. I also offer a regular tutoring session after school once a week and try to be available either before or after school as needed by my students. To help my students develop better homework and study habits, once a year, I will invite a counselor to speak to my classes on this topic. Many of them have never really had to study before high school and need guidance. Simple suggestions such as turning off or silencing their phones so that they are not interrupted while doing homework can be significant; you cannot put in 20 minutes of good study time if you are continually interrupted by phone or text messages. The reality, too, is that many of my students are involved in numerous extracurricular activities such as sports, band, chorus, and social or academic clubs or church-related events. In my opinion, these activities are just as valid and important in the education of a well-rounded individual as what takes place in my classroom. Yes, it would be fantastic if my students all got As in the various science classes, but the

character-building, teamwork, and the leadership and social skills that are learned in the extracurricular activities are also going to serve them well throughout life.

LET YOUR STUDENTS KNOW ABOUT YOU

Occasionally, I will see my students while I'm shopping at the mall or in the grocery store. They seem genuinely surprised and ask me, "What are you doing at the mall?!" as though teachers do not have lives as people away from the classroom and school. I will usually smile and make a joke about sneaking away for a little while. I have found that, in the classroom, it can be helpful to tie in your interests and outside activities to lessons in order to make them more relevant and personal so that students begin to realize that teachers have obligations beyond the classroom doors. This is easy for me as a science teacher because I enjoy spending as much time as possible outdoors. My husband and I like to travel and explore places like Yellowstone National Park or the Florida Everglades, and we are both avid amateur astronomers. Drawing on my experiences over the years is quite natural, as I teach topics such as conservation of natural resources or when explaining why Mars appears red when you see it in the night sky. Not only does it make the content seem more "alive" and vibrant to the students when I can convey first-hand information, but it also gives them a glimpse into who I am as a person. The students can begin to see that teachers are not two-dimensional figures that assign work and grade papers all day. It is especially rewarding when you can find a common interest that you share with students. I have been amazed to find that we often have the same taste in music – I would not have guessed that some of today's teens love the Beatles as much as my generation did! It is important, though, that you maintain privacy, also. I will never forget a very late night phone call (or it may have been very early morning) several years ago. My husband groggily answered the phone. After a few seconds, he handed me the receiver and said, "I think it's for you. All I hear is giggling." Somehow, two of my students had found my home phone number and were out watching a meteor shower I had told them about. I had emphasized in class that the shower would be best viewed after midnight. When I asked them about the incident the next day in class, they said they had simply wanted to share the fun with me and had thought that I'd be out watching, too. While I appreciated their enthusiasm and dedication, I was a little uncomfortable with them having "invaded" my personal space. This type of incident fortunately is quite innocent and harmless, and I have been able to laugh about it; others have not been as fortunate. Remember to be cautious about any type of password-protected information, whether related to school materials such as grades or personal information such as your *Facebook* account. There have been instances in which a trusted student is given access to sensitive information, but then the information is either deliberately or accidentally compromised. The next day, the unsuspecting teacher is called into the principal's office in regard to a security breach on a sensitive issue. You certainly don't want that to be you!

CLOSING THOUGHTS

I have the good fortune to teach in a school system that is sought out by parents for their children's education. Families move to our district because of our schools' outstanding reputation. It is a wonderful place to teach and an excellent place to go to school. Thankfully, most of my students will never have to face the degree of violence from drug- and gang-related activities that many of their inner city contemporaries contend with daily. That does not mean, however, that there are neither challenges to surmount nor hurdles to overcome; every community will have its particular concerns. Regardless of the location of your school – rural, urban, or suburban, public, or private – making a difference in the education and the lives of your students comes down to establishing connections with them and sincerely caring about them as individuals. One of the greatest benefits of teaching for me has been to see students graduate and go on to achieve their dreams. Sometimes, the former students return to our school during open house so that they can stop by and say hello or introduce their families! Teaching is one of the finest professions to which to aspire because you have the opportunity to be a powerful and positive influence in the life of a student. I hope that these vignettes will prove useful as you begin your teaching career.

JOSEPH R. JONES

AFTERWORD

Statistics and the Unchanging World of Teaching

Years after my "Wow, he has a nice ass" experience, I entered into my first academic position teaching pre-service teachers. Most of these students were incredibly excited to enter into the professional world of schooling. To them, they were "meant" to be teachers. Most of those students wanted to change the world through one student and one classroom at a time. Over the years, I learned that some of the most beneficial moments in my collegiate pedagogical practices did not really involve me; they involved a guest teacher answering questions from my pre-service teachers. Although I could teach my students the philosophical and theoretical aspects of teaching, including pedagogical practices, there were other vitally important topics that I simply did not have the time to cover. Those visits from practicing teachers became an incredible valuable experience for my students.

As Dr. Hathaway writes about her first few years of teaching over 40 years ago, it is obvious that students and classrooms have not changed drastically over the years. There are still moments when students say inappropriate things, moments when topics of sexuality arise, and moments when administration impacts the schooling process. The challenges in teaching have remained somewhat constant, with the same challenges facing new teachers regardless of the decade.

Although there has been little change in the culture of schools, the small change that has occurred is the result of standardized testing. Standardized testing has engulfed teacher autonomy and in many cases has replaced "best teaching practices" with "teaching to the tests." This evolution has negatively impacted the teaching profession in profound ways.

However, with the problems of standardized testing and the other challenges, individuals still desire to enter into teacher education programs, to gain licensure, and to enter into their own classrooms to change the future for so many students. Yet, a number of new teachers become statistics and leave the profession within the first five years. Being an effective teacher is a difficult task. A number of pre-service teachers enter into their first classroom not fully accepting of the possibilities of chaos and the reality of managing a classroom full of different personalities, different belief systems, and different outside forces converging in one relatively small space. These can all be troublesome experiences for new teachers. This text was developed because of the need for novice teachers to truly grapple with and reflect on the realities of teaching. Those realities can range from having students

J. R. Jones (Ed.), Under the Bleachers, 135–137.

wearing inappropriate clothing, having students attacking each other with scissors or other objects, having students using hate language and bullying others, and many more real-life classroom experiences, including dealing with the death of students in our schools and classrooms.

As teacher educators, we will never be able to cover every topic with which novice teachers must grapple in their first years of teaching, but we must provide pre-service teachers with broader experiences that engender teacher reflections from which they can add possible outcomes to their teaching toolkit. It is vitally important to provide as much pre-service training as possible.

Fifteen years after entering my first high school English classroom, I decided to visit a "typical" high school building in my community. I walked into the office and declared my purpose. A student worker walked me upstairs and down a long hallway to my friend's classroom. It had been such a long time since I had been in a high school classroom as the main teacher. Yet, little change had occurred. My friend was allowing me to guest teach for the day. I spent the morning maneuvering through the bureaucratic chaos of schooling. I heard the toxicity of hate language; the *N* word and homophobic language was just as common as the days when I began my career. There was a fight between two girls over typical adolescent drama. Students discussed their weekend plans involving items that made me blush a little.

During fourth period, we were discussing *Hamlet*, and I was reviewing an assignment that my friend had given two days prior to my visit. A young girl in the back of the room raised her hand and asked, "Can you tell what you are talking about? I was not here." I responded in a nice manner, "Ask one of your classmates." She screamed, "Ask one of my classmates? You the [*F* word] teacher. I'm asking you." As if I had been spending every day in this classroom over the last 15 years, I handled the situation appropriately. My friend never stood up from her desk; in fact, she only slightly glanced in my direction. The reality is that schools and students had not changed significantly in 15 years.

Likewise, over the last 15 years, the method of preparing teachers has not drastically changed either. In all honesty, most teacher education programs prepare future teachers in the same manner in which the professors themselves were prepared. Yet, today being a teacher is far more troublesome, and more teachers become statistics and leave before the fifth year.

Thus, this book is meant to be a supplement teaching resource for teacher education programs. Its purpose is to provide another layer of instruction that can become a conduit for pre-service teacher reflection and discussion. The book is meant to increase dialogue examining the realities of the first years of teaching. We need great teachers. We need teachers who will develop appropriate relationships with students to help them succeed. We need teachers who are kind. We need teachers who understand the importance of dealing with death appropriately. Teaching is chaotic. Teaching can be muddy and difficult. But teaching can also be the most rewarding and amazing job. I am glad that I became a teacher. I am glad that I impacted students through my pedagogy. Most importantly, I am glad that I survived

and did not become a statistic. I want the same for other pre-service teachers. I want them to be more prepared than I was. I want them to have considered the classroom management outcomes of a "Wow, he has a nice ass" comment. I want them to have reflected on the role that homework plays on the lives of our students and how cheating is pervasive within schools. I want them to know that they can give the marginalized student hope for a better day. I want them to know that they do not have to be a statistic.

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Amy Bagby received her B.A. in Elementary Education from Covenant College and an M.Ed. in Administration and Supervision from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and is presently a Ph.D. Candidate in a Curriculum and Instruction program. She holds a teaching certificate in the state of Georgia, and her professional experience includes teaching seventh grade language arts as well as first grade, where she also served as mentor teacher, math trainer, discipline committee chair, first grade team leader, and a member of the interview committee. In addition to classroom teaching, Bagby worked for the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's Urban Impact grant as Mentor Coordinator, where she assisted in establishing and maintaining mentoring programs in the public schools. Currently, she holds the position of Administrative Faculty and Director of the Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education program at Covenant College, where – in addition to her administrative responsibilities – she teaches in the Early Childhood program.

Adam Crownover is a high school teacher in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction. He obtained his Bachelor's degree in history from the University of Georgia and a Master's degree in secondary social science education from the University of Tennessee. Adam is entering into his sixth year of teaching at the secondary level, having taught AP Government, world history, civics, economics, personal finance, contemporary issues, U.S. History, world geography, and Spanish to students from 9^{th}–12^{th} grade. He also spent a year working as a graduate student-teacher with pre-service teachers and teaching interns at the University of Tennessee. In terms of research, he is most interested in relational aspects of teaching, specifically how teacher education programs might best prepare participants for this fundamental part of the profession. Additionally, he has been a coach of basketball and soccer and, in his free time, can be found participating in the various adult recreational soccer leagues around Winston-Salem.

Phyllis Dorn is an adult education teacher with a passion for family, life-long learning, and literacy education. She is a doctoral candidate, a community activist, and the author of *WHAT I KNOW ABOUT GOD*, an account of her 20-year battle with Lyme disease. She has earned a B.A. in English and a B.A. in Social Work from Tift College in Forsyth, Georgia, an M.Ed. in English Education from Georgia College, and an Ed.S. in Curriculum and Instruction from Mercer University..

Tracey Dumas is an instructional specialist, a curriculum developer, and – most importantly – a mother. Based in Anderson, South Carolina, she is determined to help grow effective educators. Tracey's special interests include constructive teaching practices, rigorous and relevant curriculum design, and mathematics reform. In the words of Robert Brault, she believes that "the average teacher explains complexity; the gifted teacher reveals simplicity." She holds a B.A. in Early Childhood and Elementary Education and an M.Ed. in Divergent Learning as well as an Ed.S. in Teacher Leadership. Tracey currently works as an Instructional Specialist and is a Ph.D. Candidate in Curriculum and Instruction.

H. Anne Hathaway, Ed.D., has been an educator for 43 years in the areas of curriculum and teaching, middle grades education, and mathematics education as a public school teacher, system level mathematics supervisor, state department of public instruction mathematics consultant, and higher education professor and administrator. She is the Founding Dean of the School of Education (now Thayer School of Education) at Wingate University in Wingate, North Carolina, and the Founding Dean of The School of Education (now Tift College of Education), Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. Dr. Hathaway has made numerous national and regional presentations at NCTM, NSCM, NSTA, and AACTE, has served as a consultant to public and private schools in middle grades and mathematics education, has served as a state evaluator of teacher education programs, and has been the recipient of state and federal grants in mathematics and science education. Teaching and research interests are in problem solving in mathematics, the language of mathematics, and curriculum theory. She earned her B.A., M.L.S., and Ed.D. from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Danielle M. Howard has spent 15 years as an educator. She spent the last nine years as an instructional coach, kindergarten teacher, and elementary administrator. As an instructional coach, her primary focus has been helping teachers implement best practices as they relate to literacy instruction and other research-based instructional practices. Her educational background includes earning a B.S. in Education with a certification in Elementary and Special Education from Bowling Green State University and a M.Ed. in Leadership from Mercer University. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. Additionally, she has also been trained in cognitive coaching and has received her Reading Endorsement.

Kia James has earned several degrees; her highest degree at this point is a Ed.S. in Educational Leadership from Columbus State University. Kia is a doctoral Candidate in a Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction program. She currently holds teaching and leadership certificates in the state of Georgia and her professional experiences includes teaching high school science courses, department chairperson, teacher mentor, and a member of building-level leadership team. In addition to classroom teaching, Kia is the Gifted Coordinator and Program Director for a Gifted & High Achieving Liberal Arts Academy. She is happily married and has been blessed with two handsome sons and a beautiful daughter.

Don Jenrette has been an educator for 10 years at Houston County High School in Warner Robins, Georgia. He has taught a variety of honors-level and Advanced Placement social studies courses. At state-level conferences, the author has presented on instructional strategies using primary and secondary sources to address world history and U.S. History standards. He currently teaches AP Psychology and Honors Humanities. Don was chosen as the STAR Teacher at his high school in 2012. He received both his B.S. in Psychology and M.A.T. in the Social Sciences from Georgia College & State University in Milledgeville, Georgia. Jenrette is currently a Ph.D. student. Don's research interests focus on academic dishonesty among gifted and high-achieving high school students. His home is in Kathleen, Georgia.

Joseph R. Jones, Ph.D., is a former high school English teacher and is known widely for his research addressing bullying in educational environments. He has coined two terms in his academic community, *contextual oppositions* and *unnormalizing education*. He has been interviewed extensively by media outlets about bullying in schools. His book *Unnormalizing Education: Addressing Homophobia in Higher Education and K-12 School* was released in 2014. Most recently, he was awarded a national award from Auburn University and the Anti-Bullying Summit for his scholarship and service. He currently teaches at Mercer University.

Sybil A. Keesbury, Ed.D., has been teaching at Mercer University for four years. Her area of specialty is special education, with a focus on Autism Spectrum Disorders and Behavioral Disorders. She earned an Ed.D. in curriculum and instruction from Gardner-Webb University, an M.S. in Special Education from the University of Minnesota Mankato, and a B.A. from Gustavus Adolphus College. Prior to teaching at Mercer University, Dr. Keesbury taught special education in the public schools of North Carolina. She is certified in Preschool Handicap Birth – Age 9 as well as Emotional and Behavior Disorders K-12 and is a National Board Certified Exceptional Needs Specialist for Early Childhood through Young Adulthood.

Richard Kilburn received a B.S. in mathematics from Georgia Southern University and an M.S. in mathematics from the University of Florida. He obtained a teaching certificate in the state of Georgia through GTAPP and has spent the last ten years

teaching secondary mathematics in that state. During that time, he has added a gifted endorsement to his certificate as well as attended training and received approval from the College Board to teach both AP Calculus AB and AP Calculus BC. He is currently a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction, focusing on gifted education.

Anne M. Meirow is a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction. Her research interests include student motivation and engagement and ADHD, primarily focusing on the secondary level. Her work with general education students with disabilities inspired her to seek further education and to research in these areas to find more ways to help these students succeed academically. Meirow has been teaching at the K-12 level for over 11 years.

Misty S. Salter has taught Special Education for 11 years. She began her career as a self-contained elementary school teacher, teaching students with significant cognitive disabilities for three years. Misty then moved to the high school level, where she taught in the co-teaching, interrelated setting for one year. She then piloted the first self-contained program at her high school for students with Moderate Intellectual Disabilities. Misty worked with both students with Moderate Intellectual Disabilities and Mild Intellectual Disabilities for six years, in the self-contained setting. Salter has a B.S.Ed in Special Education from Georgia Southern University, an M.Ed. in Special Education, also from Georgia Southern University, and an Ed.S. in Curriculum and Instruction from Nova Southeastern University and is currently a Ph.D. student in Curriculum and Instruction.

Susan W. Thornton, Ph.D., holds a B.S. in Secondary Social Studies Education, an M.Ed. in Foundations of Education, an Ed.S. in Educational Leadership, and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. As a public school educator, she has been teaching for 15 years. Currently, her duties include being a high school history teacher while also serving in a half-time administrative role at her school. Additionally, Thornton is an adjunct professor of education at an area college. She and her husband are the proud parents of one son and seven adopted dachshunds.

Aspasia (Vickie) Watson is a science teacher in a public high school in southeast Georgia, mentoring new teachers in addition to her classroom duties. In her 20 years of experience, she has taught a variety of high school science courses including AP Biology, honors biology, Biology II, oceanography, and physical science as well as astronomy in a local science museum. Vickie holds an Ed.S. in Curriculum and Instruction from Mercer University, an M.Ed. in Secondary Education, and a B.S. in Biology from Armstrong State University. She additionally is certified to teach gifted and talented students and is designated as a teacher support specialist. Vickie is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction.

Elizabeth E. Williams has been a teacher of students in self-contained classes for eight years. She began her teaching career in the elementary classroom, teaching students with mild to moderate intellectual delays. Later, she taught high school and worked with students with severe and profound intellectual delays for three years. Over the last three years, she piloted a classroom of students with Moderate Intellectual Delays and Autism at the high school where she currently teaches. There, she focuses on functional, independent, and social skills training for those students. She has extensive work in behavior management of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Elizabeth E. Williams has a B.S.Ed. in early childhood and special education from Mercer University, an M.Ed. in Multiple and Severe Disabilities from Georgia State University and is currently a Ph.D. student.

Vincent W. Youngbauer, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor of Education at Mercer University. He earned his Ph.D. at Penn State University, his M.S. in Educational Development and Strategies from Wilkes University of Pennsylvania, and his B.S. in Secondary Education from Penn State University where he also earned minors in history and geography. He taught social studies for 10 years in central Pennsylvania. Dr. Youngbauer's research interests include the application of media literacy in social studies education, cultural studies, and the effect of digital media on engaged citizenship.