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Striving and surviving: The phenomenology of the first-year teaching experience

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Striving and Surviving:

The Phenomenology of the First-Year Teaching Experience

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

This document is humbly dedicated to the loved ones that helped me get to the finish line.

I couldn't have made it without my family who pushed me to realize my potential and

encouraged me to chase my dreams…the mentors who provided guidance and

wisdom…the friends who provided support and welcome distractions…and my loving

wife who has watched the good, bad, and ugly of the process and continues to hold my

hand.

To my mom, Wilma R. Smith, I don't know where to start and, if I did, I wouldn't know

where to end… I can't thank you enough for your love, generosity, and support. My eyes

are still on the prize…

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

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Michael D. Smith

ABSTRACT

Despite the enduring relative popularity of teaching as a career, the research literature on teacher preparation suggests that there is growing concern about the state of the field. With each passing year, the demographic realities within k-12 classrooms bring new challenges for the teacher preparation enterprise. Shortages in high need communities and increasing numbers of provisionally certified (or uncertified) teachers represent two areas of concern. Notwithstanding the extraordinarily increasing cultural and linguistic diversity now found among the student population, the teacher population has failed to diversify in kind. The number of new teachers who are ill-prepared to respond to this "demographic imperative" is a glaring cause for concern.

This study represents the author's attempt to contribute to this important discourse by studying a cohort of individuals who recently completed a teacher preparation program and started to apply what they learned in their first professional teaching position. The purpose of this research study is twofold. First, the researcher uses phenomenological research methods to investigate the first-year teaching experience. Through a series of interviews, he explores the participants' expectations, experiences, and reflections in order to distill the essence of the phenomenon. Second, the researcher examines the connections between the culturally responsive pedagogical competencies developed during teacher preparation and their attempts to implement the practices in their new classrooms.

Analysis of the data showed that the essence of the first-year teaching experience featured the influence of the following: relationships with students, lessons learned through experience, importance of support and mentorship, and the negotiation of challenges. Analysis of their attempts to apply culturally responsive pedagogy revealed their intentions to implement programs and principles; however these were often compromised while managing other realities of the first year experience. The study concludes with a discussion of implications for practice and possibilities for future research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Teachers in the United States, private and public school alike, face a daily task replete with rewards and nuisances. For years, educators have been caught in the public's undulating wave of faith in the capacity for education to ameliorate societal problems. The ever-shifting role from panacea to scapegoat has made schools a ready and easy target for praise and derision. "Educational prescriptions to social or economic ills" have resulted in many teachers being placed in the untenable position of being responsible for not only academic content knowledge but also substance abuse education, sex education, vocational education, and moral training (Tyack & Cuban, 1997, p. 2). Lortie's seminal anthropological study of teaching calls the paradoxical status that teachers have historically held in America as "special but shadowed" (p. 10) (1975). As a profession, teaching is widely seen as greater-than-average work, while struggling mightily for the respect accorded other professions. Overworked and underpaid, it is just short of amazing that there is still a queue of individuals who would deign to take on the task of educating tomorrow's populace.

Despite the enduring relative popularity of education as a career, the research literature on teacher preparation suggests that the field is growing increasingly concerned about the pipeline supplying new teachers. While the literature includes good news about promising practices in classrooms, the overall field may be moving toward a precarious position relative to the changing contexts in U.S. public school classrooms. Specifically, the timbre of the literature indicates that educators and researchers are increasingly

1

concerned abut the shifting demographic realities that are changing classroom contexts (Gay, 1995; Gomez, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Obiakor, 2004).

With each passing year, the demographic realities within the classroom bring new challenges for teacher preparation. One might even argue that Institutes of Higher Education might have to reconsider current preparation practices, given the dynamic demographic trends of both teachers and students. Consequently, the teaching force seems vulnerable to future changes if it continues to leave present concerns unaddressed. The 22nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2002) states, rather ominously, that the U.S. teacher corps is at a "demographic crossroads" (p. I-1). We are in the midst of an interesting time in U.S. educational history. There are larger numbers of uncertified (or provisionally certified) teachers in classrooms nationally. According to the 22nd Annual Report (2002), impending teacher retirements and increasing student enrollment are creating new challenges. These challenges affect the quantity (as evidenced by increased vacancies) and the quality (as evidenced by certification status) of the persons entrusted to lead the classroom.

There is another demographic challenge facing teacher educators. For years, research reports have been projecting that increased immigration and minority population growth would reshuffle the cultural composition of public schools (Banks, 1991; Gay, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Despite the extraordinarily increasing cultural and linguistic diversity now found among the student population, the teacher population has failed to diversify in kind. The literature states that teachers are from "overwhelmingly"

monolingual, White, female, and middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds (Gomez, 1993; Sleeter, 2001).

The teacher education enterprise, writ large, has answered this call to action by encouraging teacher preparation programs to recruit and retain candidates from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and increasing coverage of cultural and linguistic diversity issues in the preparation curricula. Steps have also been made by teacher education accrediting bodies (i.e., National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) to ensure that issues of cultural and linguistic diversity are addressed during the preparation process. In spite of the current relative inclusion of diversity issues in teacher education programs, further research is needed to better understand the impact of cultural competence training and teacher education courses on practitioners' comfort with (and attitudes toward) culturally and linguistically diverse students, and the degree to which these attitudes result in culturally competent classroom practices. Research, such as the present study, contributes to the teacher preparation discourse while also seeking to elucidate these processes.

Epistemological Framework

This inquiry was grounded in phenomenological epistemology and the accompanying assumptions. A full discussion of the phenomenological interview methodology (Giorgi, 1985; Pollio, et al, 1997; Seidman, 1998) follows in Chapter 3. For present purposes, the researcher briefly introduces some of the central principles of this epistemological tradition and the perceived benefits for assuming this perspective.

The nature of human experience. There are numerous ways to attempt to access human experience through inquiry. Where one situates himself relative to the

phenomenon of interest ultimately determines the assumptions that set the parameters for the study, questions that may be asked of the data, and implications that can be extrapolated from the findings. A phenomenological orientation means that the researcher assumes the nature of human experience might be best accessed through the complexity of the first-person narrative.

Phenomenology is a form of inquiry that explores the enormous complexity of human experience through an examination of the relationships between the person and his or her world (Pollio et al, 1997). The result of this inquiry is a rigorous description of a person's experience that attempts to capture the urgency, agency, and ambiguity that resides therein. This research explored the perspectives of beginning inservice teachers to understand better the urgency, agency, and ambiguity of their initial career experience. Specifically, the teachers' narratives should provide an understanding of the relationships between the beginning teachers and their students, colleagues, parents, and the evolving sense of self that occurs during the first year. In addition, given their previous concentrated exposure to cultural competence training, the investigator is interested in how this training comes to bear in professional practice.

Pollio et al's *Phenomenology of Everyday Life* (1997) provides valuable insight into the history of phenomenology and its influences on psychological inquiry. According to the authors, something important changes from viewing experience and the body from the first-person perspective. This change from experience-as-observed to experience-as-lived is central to this theory. The phenomenological perspective might be better understood by examining the specific assumptions about the nature of human experience.

First, phenomenological philosophy assumes that human experience and thought is *intentional*. Husserl first introduced this notion to modern phenomenology stating that, at its essence, human experience is co-constituted within a person's context. That is, our experiences are partially filtered through, and a function of, our relationship to the context. This is not "intentional" in the sense of being planful, instead, "intentionality" in this paradigm relates to the degree to which one's actions and thoughts are directed toward something. Pollio et al expand, "What seems to be the case is that we learn and relearn who we are on the basis of our encounters with objects, ideas, and people…what we are aware of in a situation reveals something important about who we are" (p. 8).

This intentional "looking glass self", acquiring information about who we are based on the things that are reflected back, has direct implications for the teacher socialization process (Tatum, 2003). Beginning teachers have expectations of their first year based on preparation and self-efficacy beliefs (among other things). That is, they *experience* themselves as a teacher. This study is concerned with understanding the additional information and expectations communicated in the initial professional context.

Pollio et al. further illustrate the differences between the third-person description and the first-person perspectives that come from phenomenology through a sports example. Third-party descriptions of the act of hitting a baseball, for instance, may be very detailed and informative but lack the immediacy of a first-person account. A third-party description about the concentration needed to hit the ball takes it out of the body, whereas the first-person perspective shows it as a single, unified event that is experienced as an integrated performance of body, will, and outcome. The task of hitting the ball is not experienced as discrete disparate activities, "it is not determined by first looking over

the situation, next deciding what to do, and then doing it, but that it all occurs in a more immediate, unreflected way" (p. 9). In this way, a phenomenological investigation offers a particular kind of nuanced account of the experience.

The assumption of intentionality also suggests that experiences can never be separated from the culture and language. That is our actions are understood within a sociolinguistic framework. Examining the teacher socialization process, also contributes something important concerning the language and experiences of the first year process. Very valuable information can be ascertained by observing the language they use to describe their experience and the metaphors they use to give meaning to their experiences.

Second, phenomenology assumes that there is a figure/ground relationship between the things that are directly experienced and the surrounding context. That is, "all objects of experience are experienced only in relation to some less clear part of the total situation serving to situate the focal object" (p. 13). Using this as an interpretive lens, one finds it epistemologically unsound to try to parse an event or experience from its contextual circumstance. Instead, the figure/ground (experience/context) must be viewed in concert.

Figure/ground relationships are not always simple. Under most circumstances, there are contextual circumstances that constitute the immediate (i.e., fringe of experience) and distant (i.e., horizon of experience) ground setting the parameters of the figure. This clarifies experience inasmuch as it clearly articulates that all experience is situated in some ground. Pollio et al. expand, "The situatedness of human experiences, however, requires us to emphasize not only that there is a situation but that the situation

is significant only in the unique way it is experienced by the person." (p. 15). The first-person perspective challenges one to attend to the aspects of the situation that are critical to the participant instead of the aspects that are salient to the researcher. The multiple grounds that surround it as an object and the multiple grounds surrounding the person (including his experience of the situation, the language, and the culture in which he or she lives) thus ground a focal event.

Third, phenomenological epistemology assumes human experiencing, perceiving, and knowing are distinguished by states of continuity and change. William James describes the stream of human consciousness in five characteristics (1890): a.) Every event experienced is always experienced by some specific person, b.) Within each person, consciousness is constantly changing, c.) Within each person, consciousness is sensibly continuous, d.) Within each person, consciousness always deals with objects, and e.) Within each person, consciousness selects among its objects and events. Consequently, the *person* must be taken into account in any description of thoughts or consciousness about an event and involves multiple points to capture our attention.

The initial professional teaching experience is a complex process that has been studied and conceptualized from many different perspectives, and this researcher sees value in attempting to distill the essence of this experience through the first-person participant narratives. The primacy of first-person experience is a value that is evident throughout the study and informs the research questions asked, interview methodology chosen, and means of interpretation. Further discussion of the phenomenological method and phenomenological interviewing follows in Chapter 3.

This inquiry also draws heavily from the research literature on multicultural education, teacher education, and teacher socialization. A comprehensive literature review suggests that, while cultural competence may be desirable for beginning teachers, it may be unrealistic to expect that the two years of field experience and coursework typically found in most teacher preparation programs is enough either to produce these skills or create these attitudes (Lortie, 1975; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981; Haberman, 1991; Haberman & Post, 1998).

Despite the compelling nature of the research regarding the difficulty of producing these competencies during teacher preparation, the author believes that this research represents a worthy pursuit. While it may be difficult to expect dramatic changes in attitudes or dispositions during a two-year preparation program, exploring the nature of beginning inservice teacher attitudes regarding diversity and factors that influence these attitudes may still yield important results. Insight into the nature of inservice teacher attitudes immediately after their preparation program might offer an entry into a better understanding of what is needed to prepare them to meet the demands of increasingly diverse classrooms.

Purpose

In response to the demographic imperative currently facing teacher education, further research is needed to investigate the efficacy and capacity of teacher preparation programs to impart culturally competent values to preservice teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1999). This research study represents the author's attempt to contribute to this important discourse. The purpose of this research study is twofold. First, the researcher uses phenomenological research methods to investigate the first-year teaching experience.

Through a series of interviews, he explores the participants' expectations, experiences, and reflections in order to distill the essence of the phenomenon. Second, the researcher examines the connections between the culturally responsive pedagogical competencies developed during teacher preparation and their attempts to implement the practices in their new classrooms.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions: What is the essence of the first-year teaching experience and how does this experience influence the implementation of culturally competent pedagogy? Phenomenological qualitative exploration of this subject affords the researcher the opportunity to explore the nature of first-year teaching, as a phenomenon, with greater depth. The researcher used Seidman's (1998) phenomenological interview methodology to guide the construction of interview questions, probes, and format. Through the use of Seidman's semi-structured interview format, the research explored the contextual issues that preceded entry into the profession, the details of their first-year teaching experience, and a reflection on the experience after the first year was completed. A complete discussion of the Seidman phenomenological interview method can be found in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

Cultural diversity in some form is now included as a component of most teacher preparation programs and integrated into the many accreditation standards. Both the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education include standards and guidelines for the inclusion of multicultural education components in teacher education programs (Martin &

Koppelman, 1991). However, multicultural education and cultural competence training are implemented very differently based on the philosophies of individual departments. In some instances, there may be heavy emphasis on diversity that is self-evident throughout the selected curricula and field experiences. This is not usually the case though. Artiles and colleagues (2000) found that many teacher preparation programs, however, use one social foundations course on multicultural issues in education to fulfill the requirement instead of infusing it throughout the curriculum. While one course on multicultural educational issues is better than none at all, these researchers believe that the courses tended toward general aspects of culture instead of a more sophisticated examination of the influence of sociocultural variables on learning.

The research on culturally competent teacher training is varied and far from consensus. Among other things, more research is needed to understand the processes involved in cultural competence development, the barriers and facilitators to cultural competence development, and the subsequent implementation of these competencies in inservice classroom contexts. Teacher educators interested in this area cannot afford to assume that these competencies were *learned* just because they were *taught*. Neither can they assume that these practices will be *implemented* in their future classrooms just because they were *learned* in their university classrooms. Teacher education research may benefit greatly from extending its focus to include the experiences of individuals who recently completed preparation programs.

Delimitations and Limitations

Campbell and Stanley's (1963) influential work proposes twelve extraneous conditions that can compromise the internal validity of experimental and quasi-

experimental research. Using this as a guiding framework, the researcher acknowledged the relevant limitations in this study and how theses limitations were addressed.

History effects apply to studies that last over an extended period of time. Research designed to last over an extended period introduce the possibility that factors other than the targeted phenomena might be responsible for the subsequent changes in behavior and attitude. For instance, contextual factors in individual settings experienced at a local level for the entire year may be said to eventually explain more of the phenomenon than a teacher's socialization process. One could argue that this choice might compromise the data and the implications that may be drawn from it.

The researcher, however, attempted to reconcile this by purposely picking teachers from very different teaching contexts, grade levels, and settings for this study. The researcher also sees opportunities for subsequent research that focuses on the particular beginning teacher issues for specific grade levels, as well as the need to replicate the research in schools that have different geographic/demographic characteristics. Understanding that numerous events might occur over the course of the school year that may play a role in their experience, the researcher built into the research design, several opportunities to talk to the participants over the course of the school year. Multiple contacts throughout the course of the year might capture these formative events as they happen and contribute to the researcher's ability to contextualize these experiences and better understand the phenomenon.

Similar to history effects, Stanley and Campbell (1963) state that research studies that continue over an extended period are exposed to *maturation effects* in the participants. Maturation effects refer to the psychological changes that are likely to

happen to participants over the course of a study. Campbell and Stanley state that these may be natural developmental changes that occur in participants in the context of certain research designs that influence the dependent variable. To protect against this threat to internal validity, a control group is sometimes suggested. For the present study, the maturation effect may actually be a part of the development that naturally occurs as a part of the first-year teaching experience. It may be reasonable to expect that some issues are experienced differently in the beginning than at the end of the study.

For instance, talking to teachers at the beginning of the year about their expectations, one might find anxieties or a lack of confidence concerning particular aspects of teaching. Subsequent conversations later in the year might reveal teachers that are in a very different place with respect to their self-efficacy beliefs. One might argue that such changes are more a part of the natural maturity that occurs as one gets more comfortable in a new job than a function of the phenomenon of interest. The researcher, however, assumes that maturation effects are a part of the first-year teaching experience. The researcher expected that there would be a degree of growth and comfort that occurred over the duration of the project. This maturation effect, if it occurred, would be evident over the course of the interviews.

The researcher will have to be careful about the implications that can be drawn from this study because of the characteristics of the sampled participants. The participants selected in this study have not had a typical teacher preparation program because of their exposure to supplemental culturally responsive pedagogy training as members of a teacher preparation grant. This supplemental preparation experience included exposure to guest lectures by urban educators, facilitated group discussions

concerning teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, and opportunities to attend relevant national conferences. As such, their exposure to the culturally responsive pedagogy may be greater than typical preservice teacher populations. Consequently, the researcher understands that results may not be able to be directly applicable to the entire preservice teacher population, but significant information might be gathered from accessing these experiences. If individuals who have had significantly more exposure to culturally responsive training and learning opportunities experience difficulty implementing culturally responsive teaching practices in their initial professional settings, one might wonder about preservice teachers who only had the benefit of a single course.

Also, familiarity between the participants and the researcher should be acknowledged at the outset. While it is not uncommon to become familiar with participants over the course of a series of interviews, familiarity with two participants prior to the interviews exists in this study. The researcher served as the Instructor for two participants in a course that addressed issues of diversity and the accompanying educational implications. It is possible that the participants felt compelled to provide responses that affirmed interviewer expectations given the familiarity from the earlier context. For example, having taken a class about diversity issues with the researcher, participants may have wanted to demonstrate that they learned what was taught and answered accordingly. As professional teachers removed from the teacher-student power dynamic and assurances that responses in the interview hold no professional or academic consequences, the researcher made every attempt to manage any perceived participant anxiety.

Further, discussions of beliefs and attitudes regarding race sometimes create dissonance in participants. The researcher's demographic characteristics might also influence the interview in unforeseen ways. It is difficult to anticipate the degree to which the researcher's age, race, and gender influenced the conversation. Respondents may try to give answers that indicate that they are more comfortable with culturally and linguistically diverse students than they actually are as not to offend their interviewer. However, in addition to the researcher's previous experience facilitating conversations about issues of race, culture, and education, he also has training and experience conducting interviews. Consequently, every attempt was made to create an atmosphere for a comfortable dialogue with participants. A more comprehensive discussion of the interview method can be found in Chapter 3.

The study only included students who successfully completed the teacher preparation program and were beginning their professional teaching careers. Because this study was an examination of the first-year teaching experience, the sample needed to be focused in this regard. Further discussion of participant characteristics follows in Chapter 3.

This study featured three configurations of interviewer/interviewee relationships. Of the twelve interviews, two were conducted by Dr. Patricia Alvarez McHatton, eight were conducted by the author, and two were conducted collaboratively. This mixed configuration of interview interactions can be alternately viewed as a limitation, benefit, or complicating feature in this study. As a benefit, collaborative interviews create an opportunity to increase the depth of the inquiry by using your partner to help develop questions, provide alternate perspectives, and counterbalance researcher bias. A co-

investigator can raise critical issues that might be missed in an independent interview. Further, collaborative interviews also create an opportunity to debrief afterward to compare notes on the experience and verify interpretations of narratives.

Conversely, the manner in which the second interviewer was used in this study opens the possibility for criticism about its limiting impact and the degree to which it complicates the analysis and interpretations. Using the language of positivist inquiry, one might say that the researcher failed to "hold factors constant" across participant conditions. That is, one might argue that the failure to do individual or collaborative interviews consistently in *all* situations created a possibility that the changing configurations of the interviews might have altered the nature of what was reported. It is difficult to know *exactly* what effect these configurations had on the participants and the narratives that they disclosed. However, Chapter 5 discusses some possible implications for this research.

Finally, the lack of member checking is an important limitation. Member checking is regarded as one of the best qualitative research verification procedures because it ensures the researcher—and by extension, the reader—that the researcher's description and interpretations have been corroborated by the original source. For multiple reasons, the researcher in this study was unable to conduct the member checking that was originally planned. However, the researcher acknowledges that this would have significantly contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of the document. A fuller discussion of the credibility and trustworthiness measures present in the study can be found in Chapter 5.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

A review of relevant literature is included in Chapter 2 of this document. This literature review discusses multicultural education's foundational principles. This includes a full discussion of the misconceptions that have emerged since multicultural education moved from academia into popular discourse. Multicultural education is often discussed as a singular concept, but research has shown that it can be constructed in numerous ways (Jenks et al., 2001). The literature review also includes an examination of higher education's attempts to impart cultural competence values to preservice teachers. The evidence found in this area further underscores the need for the present research. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the relevant literature on teacher socialization. Chapter 3 of this document explains the research methods that were used in this inquiry. This chapter provides a more comprehensive discussion of the participant characteristics, sampling procedures, and population. The chapter concludes with appendices, figures, and illustrated conceptual frameworks. Chapter 4 features an analysis of data. The researcher presents case studies of each participant including the relevant themes gleaned from their experiences. The chapter concludes with a description of the essence of the first-year teaching experience according to the data. In Chapter 5, the researcher discusses the results and shares reflections on the process. The chapter concludes with a discussion about implications for future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

    For the better part of the last 50 years, researchers and demographers who attend to trends in population growth have been portending a major shift in the composition of American society. What seemed like a projection of a distant future in the 1970s and 1980s, no longer feels so far away. These prognosticators have been writing about a time in the near future when the term "minority" will no longer be an appropriate descriptive classification for culturally and linguistically diverse individuals living in the U.S. that are of non-European ancestry. This shift in population demographics has potential implications for multiple sectors of our society, however, one stratum appears particularly vulnerable to these population shifts: the American educational system. This epoch of immigration and minority population growth is distinguished by an important feature: a significant portion of this group is comprised of young people (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Consequently, public schools are projected to consist of increasing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

    While our national values toward some things vacillate, the value of education remains relatively stable. From the first, education has been linked to developing a responsible, civilized citizenry and schools were entrusted with the responsibility of both educating the masses and imparting these values. In times of philosophical turmoil, schools have been the place where Americans have looked to help solve broader problems. Lyndon Johnson chose to work toward the "Great Society" *and* fight the "War on Poverty" via the schoolhouse (Tyack & Cuban, 1997). Schools were also viewed as

one of the earliest socializing contexts whereby the first wave of 1800s immigrants would come to understand "what it means to be an American." The mandate in present-day schools to "Americanize the immigrant" is not as explicit. On the contrary, some might point to contemporary methods that attempt to manage these transitions better. English-as-a-second-language courses represent a pedagogical means to bridge new curricular information and English language acquisition by using the child's native language. Multicultural education is another pedagogical method that attempts to capitalize on the rich cultural differences that exist between (and within) groups and use them to make education relevant.

Some researchers interested in teacher education suggest multicultural education or cultural competence training as a possible response to the changing classroom composition. A central assumption of this movement is that there is an interaction between a student's cultural context and subsequent classroom learning. These researchers work from the assumption that a student's cultural background contributes to differences in classroom behavior, learning style, meaning interpretation, language usage, academic motivation and, ultimately, educational achievement. They believe that teachers who have the capacity to competently use this interaction to facilitate learning for their students can make dramatic differences in the educational attainment.

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the literature in educational psychology, multicultural education, and teacher education and understand the interaction between culture, teaching, and learning. A full review of all articles and theories related to culture, teaching, and learning is beyond the scope of this chapter, however, I attempt to discuss a sample of the major theoretical frameworks that have been identified in previous research

in multicultural education. I look toward the multicultural education literature for guidance as it is a trusted source for information regarding the interaction between culture and education. This chapter begins with a discussion of the discourse's commonly held assumptions. This is important because these assumptions frame the ways in which inquiry and analysis are undertaken. This is followed by a discussion of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. This seminal theory offers an explanation for the exchange between cultural contexts and individual traits. This is followed by a discussion of the cultural discontinuity theory. Unlike Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, this hypothesis considers the effects that occur when there is incongruity between the cultural mores of the learner and the features of the learning context. The discussion of culture's influence is followed by an investigation of the interaction between culture and teaching. Finally, the chapter concludes by reviewing multiple constructions of multicultural education and a framework for culturally competent teaching.

Assumptions about the Effects of Culture on Human Experience

Discussions of the effect of culture on human experience have been framed in numerous ways. Meacham (1996) believes that the two most prevalent explanatory frames have created two sets of dichotomies—biology vs. culture and society vs. individual—that are not only false, but misleading. In the first dichotomy, biological endowments are constructed as an opposite continuum pole from the constructive influence of contextual factors. Arguments for the predominance of a single factor contributing more significantly to human development entirely misunderstand and/or misrepresent the primary function of biology and culture.

According to Meacham (1996), survival is the primary function of both culture and biology. From a scientific perspective, genetic evolution is distinguished by the ability of organisms to not only adapt to new circumstances, but also fundamentally incorporate these changes. Thus, a genetic modification presumably increases the survival chances for the adapting organism. Likewise, the evolution and survival of societies are tied to the capacity of individuals to pass on their beliefs, practices, and values to subsequent generations. The preservation of societies is also contingent upon the degree to which individuals are able to make modifications, where appropriate, to respond to the evolving cultural zeitgeist.

The second dichotomy sets the collective in opposition to the individual. This represents the delicate societal balancing act that contributes to cultural evolution. Societies maintain a taut balance between maintaining core values that distinguish their collective experience and promoting the individuals' prerogative to explore, create, and change. Furth (1990) uses babies' simultaneous pull toward family and push toward individuality as an example of this construction. Babies (and young children) begin with strong drives for attachment with the world around them; first, with those who are familiar and later, with the world beyond them. Simultaneously, there is a drive to understand, existentially, one's own place and the role to be played in the broader contexts. These understandings later become the identities to which we explore and, later, commit during adolescence and adulthood. Concurrently, this individual meaning-making endeavor exists within a broader context of a familial, communal, and societal culture. Within this broader context, individuals are inculcated with values, behaviors, and beliefs that are consistent with the culture, thus preserving the culture.

While these are useful heuristic frameworks to begin a conversation on the interaction between culture and cognition, they may be woefully inadequate for serious analysis. A more sophisticated analysis of the influence of culture on the human experience acknowledges that these two frameworks—biology vs. culture, and society vs. individual—are probably more accurately conceived as interdependent systems within their particular sphere. Stated differently, the discourse does not necessarily benefit from trying to separate the people from their contexts while attempting to understand how they make meaning. Theories that consider the interplay between the environment and the individual, or the cultural context and innate traits seem to be more comprehensive and useful.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is useful because it acknowledges this interdependence in the learning process. According to the sociocultural theory, learning is facilitated through interpersonal interaction, internalizing social activities, and using more knowledgeable others to aid comprehension of novel ideas. He succinctly explains this theory but stating that "the functions of a child's mind originate as interpersonal relations between individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). One of the hallmarks of Vygotsky's legacy is the notion of the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development describes the figurative area that is just beyond the sole grasp of the novice learner but within his or her realm of understanding with the help of a more knowledgeable other (i.e., teacher, parent, or more advanced peer). Learning in this context demonstrates the interconnectivity of the person to individuals outside of himself or herself. Also, academic knowledge is not the only type of knowledge that can be communicated in this way. Cultural values, behaviors, and beliefs might also be

imparted this manner. There are rich opportunities for incidental learning as teachers demonstrate, through their choices of actions, symbols, and language, what is valuable.

While the sociocultural theory provides a rudimentary framework for structuring the ways in which culture and influence cognition and constructs meaning, it also assumes a natural congruence between the individual and the learning context. It does not necessarily allow for instances where these two systems are incongruous. There are frameworks that offer clarity on this issue relative to education. Among others, Ogbu (1982) has significantly contributed to this discourse with the cultural discontinuity hypothesis for education.

Cultural discontinuity hypothesis. The cultural discontinuity hypothesis began in the early part of the twentieth century with criticism of U.S. public schools' failure to account for the diverse backgrounds of that generation's wave of immigrants. Hewitt (1905) was among the first to recognize that the American public school culture not only differed from the minorities who had access, but was disrespectful of their cultures. As researchers began to look at culture and learning more deeply in the 1960s, the prevailing framework found a triarchic interaction between the home environment, school environment, and genetic traits (Bloom et al., 1965; Coleman, 1966; Jensen, 1969). These evaluations contributed to a *cultural deprivation hypothesis* that explained poor educational outcomes as resulting from deficiencies in the home or school contexts of minority learners, or their innate genetic deficiencies.

Later researchers tried to resituate the dialogue on culturally and linguistically diverse learners by proposing a *cultural difference hypothesis*. This framework attempts to reframe the negative values placed on the individuals and communities labeled as

"defective" by reconceptualizing them in terms of "difference". These researchers believe that the home and cultural contexts of underperforming minorities have fundamental differences that impact learning under normal circumstances. Instead, they suggest prescriptive strength-based pedagogy as a means of circumventing existing cultural discontinuities (Boykin, 1980; Allen & Boykin, 1992). But what are cultural discontinuities?

Ogbu's research (1982) has identified multiple cultural discontinuities that influence learning. These types of cultural discontinuities can be separated into three categories: universal discontinuities, primary discontinuities, and secondary discontinuities. Universal discontinuities are attributed to aspects of the schooling experience that are believed to be inherently incongruous to everyone, regardless of their cultural or linguistic background. Learning within the school context has numerous characteristics that set it apart from learning within the more familiar home context.

These universal discontinuities that impact all learners typically relate to the processes of language usage and meaning-making. In schools, there is a higher premium placed on, and level of accountability for, the skillful and proficient use of language. The purposes and uses for language differ *qualitatively* from home to school. School language is a means to acquire and exchange information, and proficiency is *required* "to describe behaviors, tasks, objects, and events more accurately and to classify, to operate on and to solve problems" (Ogbu, 1982 p. 292).

Schools also explicitly teach student *how* to learn. This skill is an invaluable tool for students to learn subsequent information and it is almost assuredly different from the ways in which they have been learning at home. It is likely that metacognitive strategies

are not being taught, accessed, nor assessed in comparable ways at home as in school. Finally, Cook and Gumperz (1979) identified the literate culture of schools as a discontinuity that all students encounter. At home, the culture of communication is primarily oral, but this changes at school. Oral communication is still very important, but a student must also be comfortable and proficient with both reading and writing in order to fully participate in classroom-based learning. These are only a few of the ways in which the school context may present standard challenges for all children.

Primary cultural discontinuities are defined by Ogbu (1982) as "differences [that] result from developments before members of a given population come in contact with American or Western white middle-class culture or enter American public schools or Western-type schools" (Ogbu, 1982, p. 293). These discontinuities primarily affect the learning experiences of those who immigrate and are newly introduced to Western-type schools. This represents a serious challenge because these students not only contend with the universal discontinuities that come with adapting to school experiences and expectations, but they also have to manage possible difficulties that arise when their cache of cultural frames of reference differ from presumed common frames used in school. Consequently, it is very likely that, not only the *primary communication style* will be different, but also, the *primary language* will likely be different too. This has significant implications for the degree to which a student can transfer the knowledge across settings (i.e., school to home or community) and, the degree of skill reinforcement that can happen formally (i.e., help with homework) and informally (i.e., using congruent dialect, grammar, or pronunciation).

Secondary cultural discontinuities, by contrast, are defined as "discontinuities [that] develop *after* members of two populations have been in contact or *after* members of a given population have begun to participate in an institution, such as the school system, controlled by another group" (Ogbu, 1982, p. 298). In Ogbu's analysis, the discontinuities experienced on this level are experienced more by non-immigrant minorities than immigrant minorities. He situates these challenges within the sociocultural and structural consequences that stem from the legacy of oppression and domination that is present in U.S. institutions. In his estimation, these cultural discontinuities are "less specific, [and] more diffuse and stylistic" yet very significant to the schooling situation. The *experience* of being a member of an oppressed group has consequences for one's orientation toward the institutions and individuals that are associated with causing said oppression. Consequently, often to their detriment, members of these groups may eschew the mores of the dominant culture, despite the overriding presence of these mores as the standard ways to achieve success in school (Ogbu, 1982). It has even been suggested elsewhere that these secondary cultural discontinuities eventually "turn off" many Black students from their previous enthusiasm for school (Boykin, 1980).

Conceptual Frameworks for Integrating Culture and Teaching

In the years since "multicultural education" has found its way into academic and popular parlance, its original conceptions have been lost in the common usage. Broad constructions of the "multicultural education" label have resulted in the proliferation of myths and misconceptions about its intended usage, intended population, intended effects, and the inherent possibility for collateral damage. As such, multicultural

25

education theorists and their critics often assume that they are debating one another from the same ground, but they may be defending (or criticizing) wildly different constructions of multicultural education. Individuals often take for granted that multicultural education is a singularly unified concept because it is so often discussed, however, researchers have theorized it in multiple ways.

The collected works of James Banks are widely recognized as the preeminent scholarly voice advocating the use of multicultural education's pedagogical principles. As the leading voice of multicultural education, Banks has also been the target of critics' derision. In an effort to "reveal the truth about multicultural education," Banks (1993) addressed the growing misconceptions and reasserted his conceptual framework. One of the most pervasive criticisms of the multicultural education is that it is primarily for individuals of color (p. 22). Banks calls this misconception the "most precious and damaging" because of its enduring presence and practical implications. Despite the immense literature to the contrary, many continue to believe that multicultural education is a curricular movement *for* culturally and linguistically diverse students. This enduring belief, especially among teachers and administrators in predominately White school districts, results in the failure to consider cultural and ethnic diversity issues important for their students.

The second major misconception, according to Banks, is the belief that multicultural education stands in opposition to the West and Western traditions. Because proponents of multicultural education often take a social justice stance that attempts to give voice to previously silenced narratives and empower historically disenfranchised groups, many conflate this stance with an anti-Western sentiment. Critics of multicultural

education suggest that this movement needlessly moves students away from traditional studies of Western civilization and toward a "revisionist history" (Schlesinger, 1991, 1998). Schlesinger very pointedly stated that this move toward "empowerment" attempts to change history and provide therapy to females and culturally and linguistically diverse students; two aims for which schools are not responsible. Despite this frequent claim the accepted canon in many academic disciplines remain dominated by Western thought. Further, the preponderance of authors on high school required reading lists remain European and male (Graff, 1992).

One of the most troublesome criticisms of multicultural education is that it is a source of divisiveness. The fundamental assumption that drives this line of criticism perhaps overestimates the existing state of unity in the U.S. and underemphasizes the full spectrum of multicultural education's aims. Banks clarifies, "Multicultural education is designed to help unify a deeply divided nation rather than to divide a highly cohesive one." Interestingly, both multiculturalists and their critics take umbrage with each other's view of the *unum* in *e pluribus unum*. Schlesinger believes that multiculturalist ideology "belittles unum and glorifies pluribus" by eschewing ideals of assimilation and integration to focus, instead, on the specific narratives of particular ethnic, cultural, and gender experiences (Schlesinger, 1998 p. 21). This attention on the local narrative, consequently, takes one's attention away from the unifying "American" experiences that he sees as ultimately more useful. Banks, on the other hand, also sees virtue in *e pluribus unum*, but the *unum* is less fixed. In accordance with the postmodern perspective, he views it as open for negotiation and discussion, as well as, seeing the need to make sure

that the very real plurality of experience that make up the nation has relative representational space, particularly in academic discourse.

These misconceptions of multicultural education often obscure its true aims. Further, oversimplified constructions have great implications during conversations between interested parties. Banks' (1993b) model of multicultural education has five dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure.

The content integration principle involves the degree to which teachers use students' cultural backgrounds to inform classroom discussions, provide examples, and illustrate concepts. In many instances, this is the lone dimension of multicultural education recognized by most teachers. Consequently, it appears to many as though multicultural education is more accessible and useful for social studies and language arts teachers than their math and science counterparts. The knowledge construction principle includes the examination of how sociocultural factors influence the ways in which knowledge is developed. Teachers, employing this principle, would help students unpack the role that their gender, culture, language, and class factors into their assumptions, perspectives, and frames of reference. Next, the prejudice reduction dimension suggests that teachers who teach in a multiculturally competent way should also work with students to develop positive attitudes toward individuals who are ethnically and culturally different than themselves. The equity pedagogy dimension states that teachers should use pedagogical techniques that are responsive to the ethnic and social classes present in the classroom. Finally, multicultural education, according to Banks' model, should empower the school culture and social structure. This dimension involves changes in the culture of

schools such that children who are culturally and linguistically diverse will find school empowering. Banks envisions this as a change in attitudes and expectations among faculty and staff, use of culturally-appropriate assessment practices, and elimination of tracking practices that funnel disproportionately high numbers of ethnically and diverse students into special education or vocational programs.

Even though Banks is most often associated with multicultural education and cited widely in this literature, there are numerous ways to frame the role of culture in education and the responsibilities of schools to effect change for these students. Jenks et. al. (2001) have identified three philosophical frameworks that characterize previous scholarly approaches to issues of teaching, education, and culture: liberal multiculturalism, conservative multiculturalism, and critical multiculturalism.

Banks' model would be considered a *liberal multiculturalism* framework. Liberal multiculturalism features a humanistic approach to curriculum that believes "equity and excellence are achieved through acceptance, tolerance, and understanding" (Banks, 1994). This approach is criticized for being a "feel-good" approach that naively relies on an idealized curriculum to bring about change in schools. This approach also, perhaps, overestimates the ability and willingness of faculty, staff, and administrators to bring about this change.

The *conservative multiculturalism* framework takes a very different stance. Instead of advocating the use of additions to pedagogical methods and school modifications, conservative multiculturalists believe that the means to achievement for ethnically and linguistically students are already present within the current system. A conservative multiculturalist might advocate a cultural homogeneity curriculum that

focuses on "melting pot" narratives as exemplars promoting assimilation as a means of gaining access to American avenues to success instead of a curriculum that attempts the same ends through cultural empowerment and awareness.

Finally, *critical multiculturalists* hope to increase educational outcomes by focusing on issues of equity and excellence, as well as, the influence of sociocultural variables. This form of multicultural education views knowledge as situated with students' historic, linguistic, and ethnic contexts. As such, they view the use of the students' contextual realities as integral to any meaningful learning experience that has the chance to achieve the dual goals of equity and excellence.

What do we learn from examining these constructions of multicultural education? First, we learn that "multicultural education" is not monolithic. That is, multicultural education is not one particular concept that can be rigidly defined. Even in this brief comparison of the three frameworks suggested in the Jenks et. al. (2001), one might assume significant differences in the foundational ideas that influence the research perspectives. Whether encouraging assimilation, pursuing empowerment, or challenging existing assumptions, each framework uses a different means to arrive at a common end: excellence and equity for all children.

Second, an understanding of the ways that individuals theorize multicultural education suggests different implications for practice depending on one's perspective. Depending on the philosophical and epistemological frames of the researcher, the theories recommended, inquiry pursued, and implications suggested may differ widely. A scholar with conservative multiculturalist beliefs may believe that teacher education already has the programmatic pieces in place to adequately teach culturally and

linguistically diverse students appropriately, if minor modifications were made. However, a researcher from a critical multiculturalist standpoint might, instead, believe that teacher education needs to change their practices radically to better train preservice teachers to interrogate their own expectations and assumptions about culturally and linguistically diverse students, access culturally relevant examples and illustrations, and incorporate pedagogical principles and learning strategies that are synchronous to the diversity of their future students. Again, differences in multicultural education constructions may have serious implications for research and practice.

Third, despite the differences in the particulars of the perspectives, there are some similarities that unite the perspectives. Multiculturalists of all stripes operate from the assumption that culture and context influence learning. There is an overarching belief that accessing the concepts, frameworks, and ways of knowing that are congruent with students' local contexts will improve their learning experience and, by extension, their life chances. Despite the specific inroads taken, most multiculturalists have as their goal equity, access, and excellence. Whether advocating for a radical critical curriculum or cultural contributions integration, multiculturalists want to see schools represent a fair opportunity to access the "American dream" (Howe, 1997).

The Role of Teacher Education

With each passing year, the demographic realities within the classroom bring new challenges for teacher preparation. One might even argue that Institutes of Higher Education might have to reconsider current preparation practices given the changing demographics of both teachers and students. Consequently, the teaching force seems vulnerable to future changes if it continues to leave present concerns unaddressed. The

22nd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2002) states, rather ominously, that the American teacher corps is at a "demographic crossroads." For years, research reports have been projecting that increased immigration and minority population growth would reshuffle the cultural composition of public schools (Banks, 1991; Gay, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Despite the extraordinarily increasing cultural and linguistic diversity now found among the student population, the teacher population has failed to diversify in kind. Teachers are overwhelmingly monolingual, White, female and from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds (Gomez, 1993).

The current demographic imperative appears grave and the historic examination of minority access to education offers little comfort. Ladson-Billings (1999) suggests that teacher preparation has been woefully unresponsive to cultural diversity and other sociocultural factors over the last 60 years or so. Teacher preparation, from its normal school roots, was primarily concerned with subject matter proficiency. During the first wave of immigration, however, teachers were doing their best with these new students without the benefit of any specific training. A great opportunity to reform teacher education was missed during the landmark Supreme Court Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954. The Brown case was important because it established that separate schools were not, in fact, equal. However, teacher preparation did not change accordingly to explore how classrooms would be changed by integration and the implications for practice. Instead, the same pedagogical techniques continued to be used in teacher preparation programs and student diversity was not a part of the preparation program (Spring, 1989).

The 1960s were marked by an increased sense of cultural and spiritual enlightenment. Previously disenfranchised persons were experiencing an increased sense of pride and awareness. During this time, the language of cultural deprivation also began to permeate the educational literature relative to outcomes for minority and low-socioeconomic status students. Much of this push to improve outcomes for "culturally deprived" students resulted in positive legislation. Head Start was one of the important compensatory education programs that came out of this mindset. Unfortunately, teacher education programs were less focused on changing than it was on identifying culturally deprived students for the appropriate compensatory education program.

The 1980s had multiple extremely influential national reports that had major implications for education. The Commission of Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk, Holmes Group, and Carnegie Task Force reports were especially significant. These reports had important implications for teacher preparation because they saw the need for increased professionalization in teaching, increased standards, and increased recruitment efforts to improve teacher quality. Despite the reports acknowledging the need for more minority teachers, these reports failed to discuss specific ways teachers might be better prepared to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body. This marked yet another opportunity whereby attending to sociocultural factors in teaching and learning could have influenced the field but the changes were negligible.

In defense of the field, cultural diversity is now, at least, included as a component of most teacher preparation programs. In addition, cultural diversity is now integrated into the standards for accreditation. Among the institutions that attempt to fulfill the diversity requirement, trends can be found. Research has shown that many teacher

preparation programs use one social foundations course on multicultural issues in education to fulfill the requirement, instead of infusing it throughout the course curriculum (Artiles and Trent, 2000; Webb-Johnson, et. al., 1998). While a course in multicultural issues in education is better than nothing, these researchers believed that the courses tended toward general aspects of culture instead of a more sophisticated examination of cultural variables.

Despite the inclusion of diversity and multicultural education principles in most teacher preparation programs, not everyone is convinced that these programs can significantly influence preservice teachers' attitudes toward culturally and linguistically diverse learners. There is a compelling body of literature that suggests that teacher education programs are not a sufficiently powerful intervention to overcome the years of socialization that teachers have experienced before they begin their preparation program (Haberman, 1991; Haberman & Post, 1998; Lortie, 1975; Zeichner, 1981).

There are a few hypotheses for the relative difficulty in changing value beliefs of preservice teachers. First, Haberman's research (1991, 1998) suggests that preservice teacher dispositional characteristics are the most salient factor in determining the future compatibility, comfort, and proficiency with culturally diverse learners. His research suggests that resources are better allocated selecting future teachers with compatible dispositions rather than trying to change values and beliefs toward cultural diversity once students enter the program.

Also supporting Haberman's view of the salience of preexisting characteristics is the Lortie's seminal work, *Schoolteacher* (1975). In his book, Lortie (1975) states that the "apprenticeship of observation" is a more powerful teacher socializing agent than

university programs. That is, the years spent unconsciously observing teaching during one's twelve years (or more years) as a student strongly influences the expectations and schema for what a teacher should be. This finding informs the maxim: teachers teach in the way that they are taught. Further, the persistence of didactic means of teaching reinforces the power of early school socialization (Feiman-Nemser et al, 1999).

Zeichner's research implies that the socializing effects of the world beyond the higher education doors are far stronger than the socializing press inside the program, such that the latter is "washed out" by the former. To support this claim, he cites national and international data that report that undergraduate student attitudes tend to become increasing liberal during their university time, but later assume more traditional conservative values when they encounter the "real world." Extending these findings, one might surmise that teachers, once encountering the sobering realities of a typical public school classroom, might abandon some of the liberal notions of their program (i.e., multicultural education principles) and gravitate toward a more conservative pedagogy. Given this scenario, one might see some credence in both Lortie's and Haberman's stance. Those students, for whom issues of cultural and linguistic diversity are important, will continue to apply them regardless of the pressures of the context. Whereas, students who did not have this orientation (and did not fully integrate these values and proficiencies in their training) more easily view these principles as supplemental and nonessential to the everyday task of teaching.

Despite the literature that questions the relative power of teacher programs to influence student beliefs about diversity, there are realities that necessitate continued research in this area. Haberman and Post (1998) make a very simple claim: "Selection is

more important than training… [and] [t]raining is useful only for those with appropriate predispositions" (p.101). While Haberman and Post's profile of "the best and brightest for culturally diverse children" might provide useful information, there is still a responsibility for teacher preparation programs to attempt to develop cultural competence in each student who desires to stand before a class and teach. There are multiple pragmatic realities that might preclude departments from turning away a number of students who fail to fit the criteria including demographic location of the university, demographic characteristics of the typical students interested in the program, or even the need for student FTE in the department. Thus, the charge to prepare all teachers to understand the power of culture on learning and the need to equip them with the necessary tools to achieve these ends remains.

Undaunted by the aforementioned grave findings about the capacity of teacher education programs to influence student values, beliefs, and proficiencies relative to diversity, many researchers continue to forge ahead and study ways in which cultural competence might be cultivated in preservice teachers. Mason (1999) reviewed the findings of two studies that investigated the effect of field-based experiences on preservice teachers' attitudes toward urban schools and students. This research grew out of a response to the Haberman and Post (1992) research that suggests that preservice teachers tend to have "selective perception" during field experiences in urban settings. That is, if they entered the setting expecting the worst (i.e., unruly behavior, dilapidated resources, etc.), then they were likely to find evidence of that. Conversely, if preservice teachers expected to see something uplifting (i.e., students eager to learn despite the circumstances, cooperative and enthusiastic faculty and staff, etc.), then they were likely

to find evidence of this as well. Mason's research about the effects of the field-experience showed that selective perception need not be accepted as a given. In his own research, and related research with a different methodology (Olmedo, 1997), Mason showed that these perceptions were malleable. Their work indicates that positive outcomes can result from field experiences in urban settings if structured activities accompany the experiences. Experiences like guided reflection, community-based learning activities, and specific debriefing all help preservice teachers develop informed, complete impressions of what they just saw and experienced. Ultimately, evidence suggests that field-based experiences can be helpful in creating culturally competent practitioners.

New Teacher Experiences: The Induction Process and Programs

Assuming the inherent significance of early professional teaching contexts, teacher socialization also merits discussion. Feiman-Nemser, et al (1999) reviewed the literature on new teacher induction programs for the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching. This comprehensive literature review examined early teaching experiences and the teacher induction process from a conceptual interpretive lens, looking variously at the ways in which induction has been conceptualized in previous research.

In this review the induction phenomenon is revealed to be dynamic and complex while also being variously constructed as a: a.) phase in learning to teach; b.) process of enculturation; c.) formal support program; and d.) assessment mechanism for beginning teachers. The researchers also use the Janus figure as a metaphor for the liminal figuratively existential space of the induction period. The Janus' dual focus, thus, looks simultaneously backward toward preservice and forward to inservice.

Induction as a "phase". Induction as a "phase" relies on a couple significant assumptions. First, the conceptualization of induction as a phase assumes that inservice teaching is the beginning teachers' first experience with "real teaching". If this is the first exposure to real teaching, by definition and necessarily, other preservice experiences are minimized as something altogether inauthentic. Second, induction as a phase implies that there is a transitional figurative space between the preservice teacher self and the experienced professional teacher self. This can also be seen in Fuller's developmental model of teaching (1969). According to this classic theory, teachers develop confidence in themselves in phases. This develops, first concerning personal adequacy, next with teaching performance, and later with student learning. Research comparing expert and novice teachers also suggests that there are qualitative differences between the two in thinking and performance. Results from these studies suggest that competence, expertise, and proficiency take time to develop.

Induction as a "continuum" in teacher development. If induction represents a place along the continuum from inexperienced teacher to experienced teacher, this space is an important developmental threshold. The literature review refers to the potential to use this as "seamless bridge" to link the text of preparation to the context of the professional classroom. Also, if viewed as a portion of a continuum, it reframes the understanding of continuous improvement involved in highly qualified teachers. Thus, teacher development and expert teachers are not viewed as mere destinations but also as part of the lifelong process of learning that accompanies the job of teacher.

Induction as a "socialization process". This takes the view that induction is the explicit process of initiating teachers into their new role. Induction, from this perspective,

might be said to be a means of internalizing occupational norms and expectations whereby "social control" becomes "self control". In this way, internalizing involves absorbing "what works" and "doing it" like one's mentor. Thus, induction creates an operational/behavioral orientation toward teaching instead of an intellectual connection to the job.

Further research is needed to understand better the ways in which new teachers experience induction and how the process influences the competencies developed in the preparation programs. Induction programs have clear implications though with respect to teacher retention and job satisfaction. Renard (2003) suggests managing expectations of and workloads for beginning teachers. She points specifically to the challenges of expecting "brand-new, just-out-of-the-wrapper teachers to assume the same responsibilities and duties as our most seasoned professionals" (p. 62). Given the challenges of the new context, she states that it is little wonder that beginning teachers end up feeling overwhelmed, overworked, and dispirited. Renard's suggestions for nurturing new teachers include: Keeping first-year teachers in the same grade or class for two or three years to allow for seasoning before changing their assignment, do not assign them to a school duty period, instead, allow for additional planning time, do not pair new teachers in inclusion teams (especially with other new teachers), ensure mentors and new teachers have the same planning period. Crucial to this is holding these teachers accountable for using any freed time for planning.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Ideally, an understanding of culture's influence on learning would lead teachers to use the pedagogical principles that reflected this knowledge. This pedagogical method is

known in the literature alternately as culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally sensitive pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally competent pedagogy). Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive pedagogy as the use of "cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits of teaching them more effectively" (p.106). Culturally responsive pedagogy, as Gay conceptualizes it, shares many assumptions about the interconnections between the learner's local understandings and new knowledge. Gay specifically states that culturally responsive teaching assumes that students' lived experiences inform the development of subsequent knowledge and skills, and the use of these experiences makes learning more meaningful, interesting, and efficient (Gay, 2000).

What would one expect from teachers who are proficient in culturally responsive teaching practices? According to Gay (2002), a culturally responsive teacher should: a.) develop a cultural diversity knowledge base, b.) design culturally relevant curricula, c.) demonstrate cultural caring and build community, d.) communicate cross culturally, and e.) attain cultural congruity in classroom instruction. This comprehensive view of teacher cultural competence begins with the notion that teachers must develop a personal working knowledge of the relevant groups' "cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns" (p. 107). This working knowledge is important because teachers will not, and cannot, teach what they do not know. A working knowledge, in this way, makes these concepts an easily accessed part of their teaching repertoire.

This foundational knowledge also informs the curriculum design. Gay believes that a culturally responsive educator should be able to recall these understandings of their

population, review the formal curriculum, and make sound decisions about how to modify it to capitalize on his or her students' strengths. A culturally competent teacher is also able to aptly manage the symbolic curriculum in the classroom (Gay, 1995a). That is, the teacher is cognizant of the messages that the symbols, images, and signs displayed in the classroom communicate to the students regarding what (and who) is valued, respected, and appreciated. This symbolic curriculum might also extend to the types of books selected for common reading, images of heroes, and social statements.

An ethic of care and community is also an important component of culturally responsive teaching. The teacher's actions and communicated expectations are as important as the explicit curriculum and pedagogical methods. Gay distinguishes typical constructions of care from "culturally responsive care". Care, in this context, is defined as: "…an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence" (Gay, 2000, p. 52).

Finally, the Gay model of culturally competent teaching emphasizes "multiculturalizing" one's teaching in order to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. "Multiculturalized" instruction is found in classrooms where teachers have purposefully aligned their teaching practices with the learning styles of their students. While this label may sound peculiar, it is actually a description of what good teaching would look like in a classroom where the teachers know their students well and steer the instruction into their strengths. Opportunities to multiculturalize instruction include, but are not limited to, providing relevant descriptive examples and vignettes,

creating valued incentives for learning, encouraging and demonstrating competent cross-cultural communication, and selecting culturally relevant content (where possible).

Conclusion and Implications

In this chapter, I have attempted to elucidate some of the issues pertinent to an understanding of the ways in which culture interacts with teaching and learning. There is still a lot to learn about the influence of culture on student outcomes and the best way to prepare teachers to implement these methods. Multicultural education has many researchers and scholars on multiple sides of the debate concerning its worth. These arguments range from those who believe that it represents de facto, subliminal racism and weaken the established canon (Hirsch, 1987; Schlesinger, 1991, 1998) to those who believe that multicultural education contains benefits for both the educators who teach using those methods and the students who learn by using those methods (Banks, 1993; Cochran-Smith, 1995).

Despite the differences of opinion, a couple of things seem certain. First, there is no shortage of areas to explore to understand the interaction of culture, teaching, and learning better. Researchers who are interested in this area should also become versed in the foundational research on culture and learning (i.e., the works of Vygotsky, Bruner, Bronfenbrenner, Ogbu and etc.), as well as, revisit the seminal works to test them against current contexts.

Also, it might be argued that the need and magnitude of this discourse will increase with the rate of diversification in schools. The rapidly changing demographic classroom realities cannot be dismissed as "sky-is-falling" rhetoric. The so-called "demographic imperative" is a present reality with present consequences. Higher

education cannot continue to be complicit in the certification of new teachers without casting a critical eye toward the classrooms that await them and the requisite training needed to prepare them for success in the field.

The research literature has not reached a consensus regarding the influence of culture on teaching and learning, which, in itself, has implications for those who choose to pursue this line of inquiry. Despite the considerable body of work on the differences between groups, lots of researchers fail to address the substantial differences that exist within a group. While there may be certain experiences that are common among Latinos, for example, creating broad generalizations about the Latino experience may be specious. The Latino experience can vary widely within the group too depending on dialectical differences in language, country of origin, socioeconomic and education level, or generation in America (among other things).

There is also a need for more research studies that span a wider range. Longitudinal studies and studies that include an indicator of teaching behavior in their subsequent professional contexts are critical. A large proportion of the literature simply examines at preservice teacher attitude change while they are in the undergraduate program. Failure to extend this research to the following context makes an important, but potentially costly, assumption. Teacher educators cannot assume that just because these competencies were *taught* that they were *learned*, nor can it be assumed that they will be *implemented* just because they were *learned*. Finally, longitudinal studies of students who experienced culturally competent teaching would also provide useful information. Currently, these narratives are not as present in the literature as the voices of

academicians and teacher. Perhaps hearing from the ultimate recipient of the lessons

learned in teacher preparation would be instructive for future directions in the discourse.

Chapter 3: Method

Participants

The participants in this research were originally recruited to participate in a larger study under the direction of Dr. Patricia Alvarez McHatton. In this larger research context, we conducted interviews and focus groups with first-year teachers in an effort to understand their initial experiences and their transition from preservice training to professional practice. This study reflects the lived experience captured by a series of interviews with four of those participants. Participants selected for this study were recent graduates of an undergraduate special education teacher preparation program. As members of the same undergraduate cohort, participants shared many preparation experiences. Specifically, participants completed an identical program of study, engaged in similar field experiences, and were exposed to the same departmental values. Their undergraduate program is dedicated to preparing teacher candidates who can work effectively with students that have a range of mild to moderate disabilities. Upon completion of the program, teacher candidates are certified teachers, according to Florida state standards, for "varying exceptionalities" (with an ESOL endorsement) and can teach school classes from kindergarten to high school.

In addition to the standard curriculum and field experiences, participants were also involved in a supplemental urban education, teacher preparation grant. The urban education program (UEP) was created to recruit teacher candidates who had an interest and commitment in teaching students in urban settings, as well as, developing the specific knowledge and skills that would serve them in that context. The UEP provided students

with tuition remuneration, book scholarships, travel expenses for an annual research convention, and faculty mentoring supports. Participants in the UEP were also required to attend an additional course each semester related to issues and trends in urban education. This course provided a space, outside of their standard coursework curriculum, where students could intimately explore issues relevant to urban populations and communities. While in this course, participants also engaged in community-based experiential learning events, attended expert guest lectures, and participated in self-reflection activities.

While the participants share many aspects of the preparation background, there are also important differences in the sample that may be important in the study. The researcher was unable to vary the sample according to gender; however, the women sampled for this study are from different ethnic backgrounds. The sample is comprised of one Black, one White, and two Latina participants. The sample for this study represents a range of initial professional teaching contexts. Teachers in this study have different daily teaching contexts (teaching independently versus team teaching), different grade levels (elementary and middle), geographic location (rural, suburban, and urban), and differences in ethnic representation of students served (predominately Black in one school versus predominately White in another school). The variation in initial professional teaching contexts creates an interesting departure point to compare their first-year teaching experience, especially given their nearly identical preservice teacher preparation.

Sampling

Two common forms of participant sampling schemes commonly employed in educational research are probability and nonprobability sampling (Merriam, 1998).

46

Researchers typically use a probability sample (more commonly referred to as "simple random sampling") when they are concerned with generalizing results from the sample to a population of interest. Nonprobability sampling, according to Merriam (1998), tends to be the sampling method of choice for qualitative researchers because statistical generalization to a population is not a necessary (or justifiable) goal for most qualitative research.

Within the typology of nonprobability sampling schemes, the most relevant to this study is the purposeful or purposive sampling strategy (Kuzel, 1992; Morse, 1989; Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling strategies assume that the researcher has an informed understanding of the phenomenon that he or she wants to explore and thus needs to select a specific sample that represents these experiences. At the core of the purposeful sampling strategy is the necessity for the researcher to select "information-rich cases". Information-rich cases are particularly important in a phenomenological study because of the importance of only including participants that have had specific, direct experiences with the phenomenon.

In his discussion of "purposeful sampling strategy", Creswell (1998) acknowledges the limited range of available sampling strategies for phenomenological research studies. Instead, he offers that the essential feature of sampling for phenomenological studies is that all participants have experience with the intended phenomenon. Thus, "criterion sampling" is often a preferred way to frame participant selection. Criterion sampling ensures that inclusion in the study is based on the satisfaction of predetermined standards and, thus, provides a measure of quality assurance (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

According to Merriam (1998) it is not only important that researchers explicitly delineate the criteria that frame their sample selection, but also explicitly detail why these criteria are important to realize the purpose of the study. Three criteria were used in the selection of participants for this study. First, the researcher was interested in selecting participants who were involved in the same teacher preparation program. Methodologically, keeping the preparation program experiences as a constant across participants reduces the possibility that variations in first-year teaching experiences are a function of the initial differences that were created from exposure to multiple programs. While it is still possible that each participant experienced the program uniquely, these individual differences might have been exacerbated if they were also exposed to different content curricula, field experiences, and department values. Finally, the researcher needed to identify willing participants who were graduating from their undergraduate program and would be starting their professional teaching the following fall. This was necessary because the research design requires three interviews with the teachers starting in the beginning of the school year.

The study sample also provides a robust opportunity to provide insights because of the variation within the group. The use of a heterogeneous sample (or maximum variation sample [Glaser & Strauss, 1967]) has been suggested for inquiries where the phenomenon is sufficiently complex that a significant shared experience may be found that transcends the disparate participant circumstances (Patton, 1990). Because of the complexity of the first-year teaching experience phenomenon, choices must be made to frame the study. One could examine the specific experiences of first-year teachers relative to their grade level, geographic setting, or teaching classroom assignment (among

other things). In this study, however, the researcher sees the potential for robust findings by using participants from various teaching contexts and looking for the essence of the phenomenon that transcends their particular teaching circumstances. As such, a sample including teachers from various grade levels, geographic settings, and teaching classroom contexts is ideal for this study. Future research might focus on the experiences of a single population (i.e., first-year teachers in urban settings).

Five participants originally agreed to participate in the study (one later chose not to participate). Looking toward the literature for guidance for an appropriate number of participants for qualitative research offers some perspective. Qualitative texts suggest designing the research study such that "the participants, sites, or activities answer the question posed at the beginning of the study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 64). The researcher recognizes that the small sample size may be viewed as a limitation to the generalizablility of findings to the population. However, the literature on qualitative research notes that "qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people nested in their context and studied in-depth—unlike quantitative researchers, who aim for larger numbers of context-stripped cases and seek statistical significance" (Miles & Huberman, 1998, p. 27). Further, the purpose of this research is not necessarily to generalize the findings to the entire teacher population; instead, this investigation is concerned with understanding the essence of this experience and the "conditions under which the construct or theory operates" (Miles & Huberman, 1998).

Qualitative Instrument

The choice of phenomenology as the primary epistemological orientation necessitates the use of a method that can help the researcher realize the purposes of the

story. Specifically, the chosen method must be able to access the varying perspectives and respondents' experiences; consequently, this research requires a phenomenological interview methodology (Pollio et. al., 1997; Seidman, 1998). Pollio et. al. (1997) describe the phenomenological interview as "an almost inevitable procedure for attaining a *rigorous* and *significant* description of the world of everyday human experience as it is based and described by specific individuals in specific circumstances" (p. 28, emphasis added).

To ensure a rigorous and significant description of participants in this study, the researcher used a well-established phenomenological interview method as a guide. Seidman (1998) presents a framework for conducting the phenomenological interview. Seidman describes his method as a combination of life-history interviewing (he refers to Bertreaux, 1981) and in-depth interviewing informed by phenomenological assumptions (he refers to Schultz, 1967). Inherent in the Seidman method is the flexibility to use it to study a wide range of topics (he notes over 30 dissertations and publications that have used the method) and structural flexibility that can accommodate the contextual realities that sometimes make it necessary to modify the framework.

The Seidman interview is distinguished by its use of the three interview series with each participant (see Figure 1). The three interview series is used, as opposed to a single in-depth interview, because it helps researchers (and participants) contextualize the phenomenon of interest. The first interview is referred to as a "Focused Life History". In the interview, the researcher explores the preexisting contexts and experiences that led the participant to the phenomenon under investigation. Within this interview, participants are asked to reconstruct and recount early experiences. Seidman uses a study of student

teachers as an example (O'Donnell et. al., 1989). In the first interview in this study, participants were asked about their "past lives" (before becoming student teachers), past experiences in school, and other teaching-related experiences that led to their participation in the teacher education program.

Figure 1: Seidman's Structure for In-depth, Phenomenological Interviewing

"Focused Life History"	**"The Details of Experience"**	**"Reflection on the Meaning"**
Establishes the context for the experience	Concentrates on the details of the experience	Asks participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience
Explores the relevant preexisting and contextual factors	Reconstructs facets of the participants' experience	Requires participants to consider contextual factors that influence present circumstances
Sample questions might include:	Sample questions might include:	Sample questions might include:
What were your experiences as a student? How did your experiences as a student influence your desire to teach?	Now that you have been teaching for a semester, how would you characterize your first semester teaching experience?	How would you finish this sentence: My first year of teaching was…?
Can you describe the moment in which you knew you wanted to become a teacher?	What would you describe as the highest point thus far? What would you consider one of the low points?	What would you describe as the defining moment of your first year?
Can you describe a teacher that stands out in your memory?	How have you seen your teaching change since the beginning of the year?	What has this first year taught you about teaching?
Interview 1	**Interview 2**	**Interview 3**

The second interview, "Details of Experience", is a focused conversation about the phenomenon. In this interview the researcher focuses specifically on the phenomenon, as such, it is necessary to try to keep the conversation focused on the experience details. In Seidman's example, participants were asked about relationships with students, colleagues and parents, as well as, about the typical day in their life from waking to sleep.

The final interview, "Reflection on the Meaning", is another opportunity for the researcher (and the participants) to place their experience in context. Questions in this interview try to access the meaning attached to the experience for participants in terms of the "intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (p. 12). The final interview requires the researcher to guide the participant in a discussion of the interaction between previous life factors and their present circumstances, and the details of their context and experience.

Qualitative Procedure

Participants were interviewed three times over the course of their first year as professional teachers. Dr. McHatton conducted two interviews, the author conducted eight interviews, and two interviews were conducted collaboratively. The researchers held the interviews in times and locations that were convenient for the participant, consequently, the setting varied according to scheduling constraints. A few interviews were held at the teachers' school (often in their classroom during a planning period), but the majority of the interviews took place in a conference room at the university. See Table 1 for a visual representation of the locations and interviewer/interviewee composition of each interview.

Table 1: Location and Composition of Interviews

	Audrey	Barbara	Cynthia	Debbie
Location: Interview 1	University	Participant Classroom	Participant Classroom	Participant Classroom
Interviewer: Interview 1	Smith and McHatton	McHatton	McHatton	Smith and McHatton
Location: Interview 2	University	University	University	Participant Classroom
Interviewer: Interview 2	Smith	Smith	Smith	Smith
Location: Interview 3	University	University	University	University
Interviewer: Interview 3	Smith	Smith	Smith	Smith

As stated in the previous section, the research features an adapted version of the Seidman phenomenological interview methodology that maintains the rigor and structure of the source material. Seidman endorses modifications to his method, "[a]s long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experience within the context of their lives, alterations to the three interview structure and duration and spacing of interviews can certainly be explored" (p. 15). He further notes that variation in spacing of interviews has occurred in previous studies with satisfactory results. The governing principle, he offers, is for researchers to "strive for a rational

process that is both repeatable and documentable" (p. 15). The researcher has made every effort to adhere to these conditions in the design of this study.

The first interview, "Focused Life History", occurred during the first semester of the school year. In this interview, participants were asked questions about past experiences in school, expectations for the new school year, and experiences in the teacher preparation program that set the foundation for their knowledge and skills. The second interview, "The Details of Experience", happened at the midpoint of the school year. At this point, the teachers had an opportunity to be involved in varying experiences of first-year teaching. It was assumed that the teachers, by this time, had good days and bad, frustrating times, and small victories. At the same time, the experience was sufficiently new enough that there were aspects of the job that they were being actively processed. The final interview, "Reflection on the Meaning", occurred at the end of their first school year. In this interview, the teachers were asked to reflect on their entire first year experience. As an interview that is supposed to focus on reflecting on the experience, it seemed appropriate to wait until the end of the school year so that the teachers could truly reflect on their experience and interpret the meaning.

Each interview lasted no longer than ninety minutes, as Seidman cautions against the inevitable diminishing returns that occur in the interview quality after the ninety minute threshold. The researcher anticipated that extenuating circumstances may influence the length of time available to do interviews; consequently, there was no specification on the minimum amount of time needed to do the interview. Each participant, however, was told that the interview would last approximately sixty minutes.

Interviews were semi-structured to provide a frame for discussions. The researcher prepared questions with accompanying probes prior to the interview to lend structure to the conversation and continuity between the interviews. The questions served as a guide and not a stringent protocol for each interview. Questions used in the interview were informed by previous interviews or the research literature on teacher education (see Appendix 1).

Qualitative Analysis

The data analysis for this study was guided by Moustakas' (1998) modification to the van Kaam method of phenomenological analysis (1959, 1966). The van Kaam method is a "detailed, specific approach to phenomenological analysis" that guides the researcher through the process of phenomenological inquiry and reduction through a rigorous systematic method. Figure 2 illustrates this data analysis process. The data analysis process begins with complete transcribed interviews for all participants. The researcher then reads each participant interview making notes and codes in the margins to indicate the presence of potentially relevant indicators of the experience. This process is known in the phenomenological literature as "horizonalization". In the process of horizonalization, each relevant expression of the experience is given equal value and is viewed as contributing something to the researcher's understanding of the meaning and nature of the phenomenon for the participant (Moustakas, 1998). In this step, the researcher noted every instance that seemed relevant to the first-year teaching experience.

Figure 2: Application of the van Kaam (1959, 1966) Method of Phenomenological Analysis
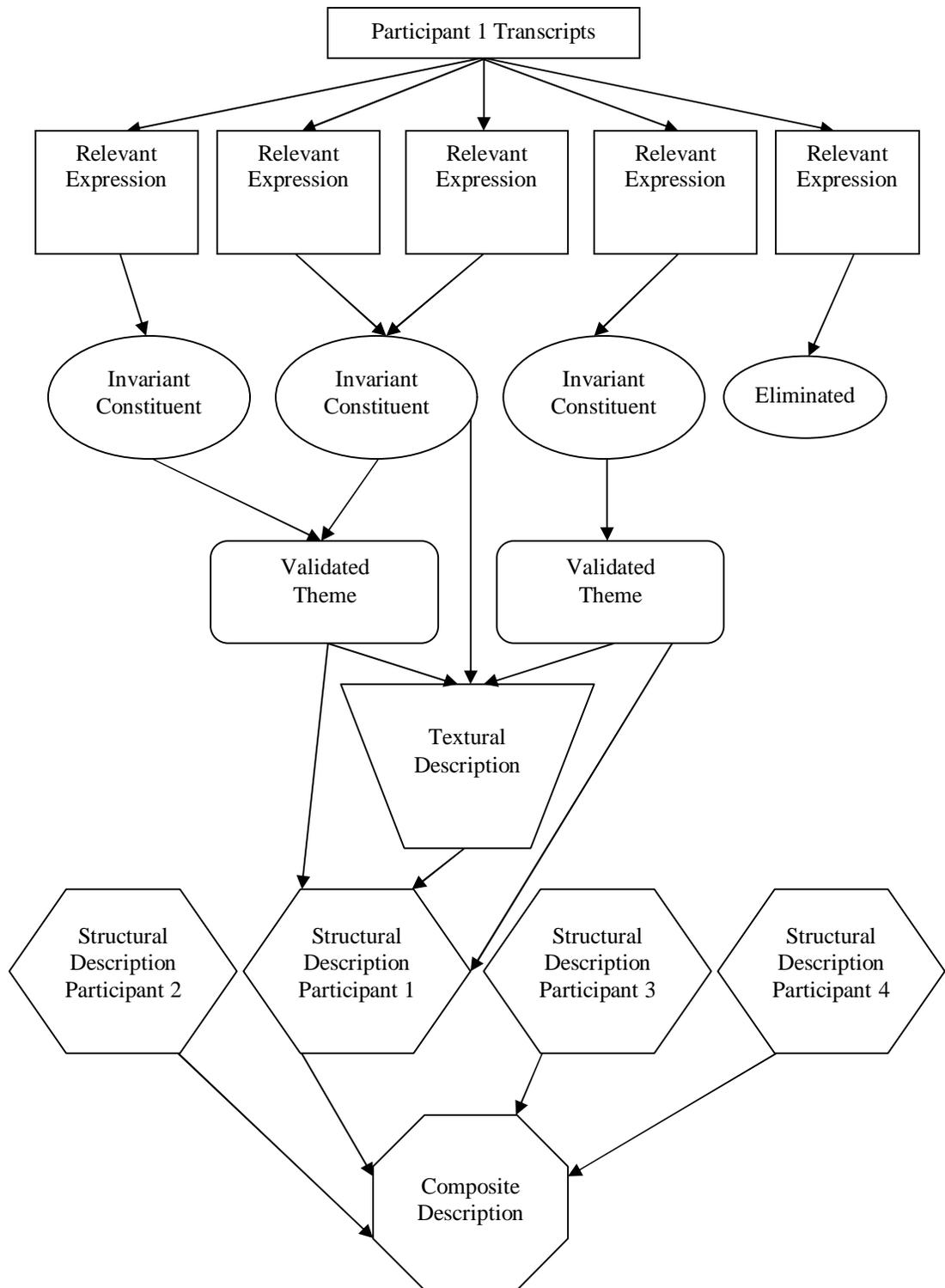
Next, the researcher attempted to reduce the list by eliminating previously noted expressions of the experience that fail to meet the requirements of "invariant constituents". According to the van Kaam method, each notation must meet two conditions in order to be considered an invariant constituent. First, the noted segment from the transcript must contain a moment of the experience that contains information that communicates something essential and necessary for understanding it. Second, the labeled experience must be able to be abstracted and labeled. If a labeled event cannot meet these two criteria, then it is eliminated from consideration. This step also eliminates "overlapping, repetitive, or vague expressions" unless they can be collapsed into another relevant descriptive horizon or qualifies for a more descriptive label. The units that are left are called the "invariant constituents of the experience" (Moustakas, 1998).

The third step in the process involves the creation of themes. The researcher creates themes by forming clusters of related invariant constituents. There are no limits on the number of themes that can be created; however, the creation of themes from the invariant constituents represents a layer of reduction in the process. The fourth step is closely related to the third. In the fourth step of the process, the researcher makes final decisions about invariant constituents and themes that were created. A process of validation informs final decisions. The validation process requires that each theme satisfy the following requirements. First, the themes and constituents must be explicitly expressed in the participant's transcript. In the event that they are not explicitly expressed, a qualifying validated theme must still be compatible with the events reported in the interviews by the participants. If a constituent or theme does not have an explicit (or compatible) link to the participant's interview, it is eliminated from consideration.

Next, the researcher makes the first attempt to use the newly validated themes and invariant structures to create a textural description of each participant's experience. The textural description is an account of the experience that describes the nature and focus of the experience as narrated by the participants. It is a description of what happened during the experience and is supplemented with verbatim examples drawn directly from participants' interview transcripts (Creswell, 1998). This description tries to capture, accurately and effectively, the stated feelings, thoughts, and challenges, as well as, the situations, relationships, and conditions. This also includes interpretations of various meanings and perspectives as reported by the participant (Creswell, 1998). At this point in the process, the researcher may attempt to make meaning of how feelings and thoughts are connected to construct the experience for the participants. The researcher is challenged to look beyond appearances and consider the essence of the phenomenon under investigation.

Finally, the researcher develops a composite description of the participants' experiences based on a comparison of the textural and structural descriptions written for the individual participants. This description of the experience represents the experience with the phenomenon for the entire group. By comparing the phenomenon across participant experiences, this description attempts to articulate the commonalities across experiences and distill the essence of the phenomenon from the participants' perspective.

Ethical Considerations

As a study using human participants, the author recognizes the importance of conducting ethically responsible research. The researcher successfully completed the "Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams" web-based training on

the ethical treatment of research participants. This two-hour training module satisfies the human subjects training requirement for the National Institutes of Health and certifies that the researcher has an understanding of the guidelines and principles that ensure that participants are treated in an ethically responsible manner. The larger study that encompasses this inquiry was submitted to the University's Institutional Review Board and approved before any data collection or participant interaction.

All informed consent forms included a statement that reiterates the voluntary nature of the research. That is, participants were free to stop any portion of the research at any time. Measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality of all participants. For example, the researcher changed identifying information during transcription and password protected data files on the computer. Confidentiality was particularly important, as findings may be used in publications or presentations.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Overview

The results of the phenomenological data analysis are presented in the form of four case studies that include thematic descriptions of the participants' experiences. Each case presentation begins with a general discussion of the participant's background and professional context. This background includes selected relevant information about their school and the local context in which they teach. The inclusion of this background information helps to situate each case within the appropriate context. Further, situating the narratives in this way helps the researcher and the reader understand the contextual factors that may have influenced the participants' experience with the phenomenon. At the conclusion of this chapter, a macronarrative of the experience is presented that serves as the master interpretive narrative of the first-year teaching experience as communicated by the participants and understood by the researcher. This narrative is based on the rich data that were provided by the participants. The researcher has made every effort to validate the claims made in this section by comparing these themes to the discussions of themes gleaned from the interviews as well as frequent comparisons to the actual source interviews. Grounding the interpretive macronarrative of the experience in the source materials and using participant quotes where relevant further reinforces the confidence in the findings.

The process began by coding transcripts from the digital audio-recordings of the participant interviews. This first round of data coding was done broadly; coding an extremely large amount of the transcript. Following this coding scheme in the beginning

of the process was necessarily fluid and dynamic. At the beginning of the process, it is difficult to know which aspects of the individual's experience are actually relevant to their overall experience of the phenomenon and worthy of noting. Consequently, each transcript seemed to be littered with possible codes in the beginning. As the process continued, patterns slowly emerged. Some codes were used repeatedly, seeming to capture perfectly the experience communicated by the participant. The code and theme-sorting grid that I used to organize the data provided visual clues to the pattern. Moving from the first interview to the final interview, some cells in the organizing grid grew more heavily populated with coded data, while others only featured few items.

According to the selected analysis process, this liberal assignment of codes requires a reduction to remove extraneous codes that did not appear to add significantly to the overall understanding of the experience. After the reduction, codes were assigned a corresponding theme that attempted to capture the essence of the codes and reflect the communicated experiences of the participants. The greatest challenge at this point was selecting a name for the theme that adequately captured and described the essence of the communicated experience. This theme also needed to parallel the experiences communicated in the interview. Deciding on a name for each code and subsequent theme was an iterative process of adjusting the name and comparing it to the transcripts to determine if it still accurately portrayed the particular aspect of the phenomenon.

For example, there were instances when the similarity between two classes of coded experiences necessitated collapsing the pair into one theme. Recognizing this similarity required a reexamination of my definitions and rationales for the original codes. For instance, in the initial pass at coding, there were separate codes that

approximated the evidence of the participant's awareness of her own first-year

experience. This code captured instances where she attributed her own relative

inexperience to what was happening to her, why she made a certain choice, or interpreted

a situation in a particular way. As I read multiple transcripts, participants seemed to

connect to a meta-awareness that there is a "first-year teaching experience" that would

change as they acquired more experience. This awareness of, and attribution to, the first-

year teaching experience seemed akin to the sports term "rookie mistake". The "rookie

mistake" is any miscue made by a player who is new to a particularly elevated level of

performance. It is assumed that after the rookie season, the player gained experience and

wisdom through playing time and will not make those mistakes in the future. The

learning curve experienced by the teachers suggested to me that a parallel experience

might be relevant for this sample. Further, participants had numerous instances where

they discussed explicit lessons learned about being a new teacher or the moment when

they realized that they were in the midst of a lesson that could be applied to help them as

they gained more experience. Each of these codes (awareness of a first-year teaching

experience, recognition of "rookie mistakes", and lessons learned), seemed to belong to a

bigger family, related as a single theme: "Reflecting on lessons learned in the first year

teaching experience". This merger into one thematic category made sense in the context

of the reported experience. In addition, the theme fit each isolated excerpt as well as the

contextual tone of the interviews.

    After the first reduction of codes into themes, the researcher made one last

attempt to condense toward the essence of the reported experience. Each case followed

the process to distill themes down to the smallest number possible that still illustrated the

essential elements of the experience reported by the participants. Ultimately, the themes presented with each case represent the components of the experience that were communicated with the greatest frequency and depth.

Participant A: "Audrey"

    Overview and participant introduction. Participant A, whom I will call Audrey, is a White woman in her early 20s. Audrey teaches at a rural elementary school on the fringe of a major city in central Florida. She is beginning her teacher career at Camelot Key Elementary School. Camelot Key serves just 600 students, approximately a third of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch. The school's student body is predominately White (82%) with a small minority population. Latino (11%), Black (4%), Asian (1%), and American Indian (<1%) students make up the remaining portion of the school's student body. Students with disabilities represent approximately 10% of the student population and less than 1% participate in the gifted and talented program.

    Dr. McHatton and I interviewed Audrey together in the first meeting and I interviewed her alone in the second and third meeting. When I sit and talk with Audrey, my first impression is that this is a young woman with a strong presence. She is warm, friendly, and easy to interview. Interviewing Audrey was particularly easy because she seems to be a very straightforward person; she was frank, direct, and seemed to say exactly what she meant. Beneath the easy-going manner, there is also a glimmer of an inner toughness. Talking with her, I envision her as a teacher who can be fun, but also one who can assume the no-nonsense visage of someone who means business. This initial impression of the fun, young teacher who can also get tough was confirmed through her rich stories about the firm but caring way in which she managed her students. Her stories

of keeping order with a stern look and saying a word that echoed throughout our interviews—"Respect"—speak volumes about the classroom culture that she tried to cultivate. As a teacher with youthful looks, she described—as have the other participants—having to pay particular attention to navigating the social space with her students. Her appearance and common sociocultural frames of reference make it easy to relate to the students in some respects, but the line must be clear. She believes that she must be an authority in the classroom. Audrey's description of her awareness of these factors, and more, made her an ideal participant for the study.

Theme 1: Caring relationships and interactions with students.

"I've embedded [this idea] in them because they all came from different schools and I try to make it like we're family, working towards a common goal…"

-Audrey

In our first interview, Audrey spoke freely about her experiences with school as a student. This illuminating conversation provided invaluable contextual information about the origins of her desire to become a teacher, formative experiences as a student, and the ways in which she connects those early experiences to her current roles and responsibilities as a teacher. This reflection on the past, as suggested by Seidman (1998), provides a context for understanding how Audrey interprets her present experience. For instance, the stories that she tells about her own journey to become comfortable with people who are culturally and linguistically diverse helps me understand some of the

motivation and means used to cultivate similar feelings among her students. Recognizing her history of advocating for the "underdogs" helps me understand what has drawn her to the "underdog" class of students in her current teaching position. Her background story provides clear evidence that situates this present desire to advocate and care so fervently for them.

According to her description of events, she has known all of her life that she wanted to be a teacher: "I've always been interested in taking care of younger children…I was always the only one who would take the reins!" She recalls an early childhood education course in high school being one of the earliest formal introductions to education. Education was definitely the right discipline, but the student population did not match the vision that she had for herself as a teacher. Working in the early childhood setting felt like babysitting and "…I decided I wanted to teach not just baby-sit—and not that you can't teach at that age—but it's not the intellectual interaction that I like."

In our first interview, Audrey tells a story from her community college experience that would be very significant in her decision to become an educator and prescient in relation to her eventual career path. Observing in a special education class for an assignment, she noticed a Latino student who she was told would be sitting with them for the day. She recalls, "They just put him in there because he didn't know the language and I said, 'Well…why?' And what little Spanish I did know I communicated with him and he was fine. He knows his numbers, his ABCs, he's in first grade—what's the problem here? 'Oh, we just can't speak to him,' [they said]. That's what intrigued me to Special Education. That's kinda how I got here." In this example, Audrey saw something in the social arrangements that seemed unfair and worthy of questioning. Questioning the

perceived social justice and advocating for those who she referred to as the "underdog" are component parts of her experience of a teacher's role and responsibility.

Audrey's description of her experience as a student also grounds later conversations about her interactions with her current students. She described herself as a good student academically but her behavior became an issue as she grew older. In fact, she wonders now if she maybe should have been labeled "emotionally handicapped". She describes this time in her life: "I had a lot of behavior interventions but never was labeled with a disability—as 'EH," emotionally handicapped—and now that I look back on it, I've talked with some former teachers, it kinda seems like I was." Having her own experience as a student who excelled academically, but experiencing difficulties managing her emotions and controlling her behavior, it seems that Audrey has a special place in her heart for students who have had similar experiences. "I look now at kids with behavior problems and I feel like I need to be an advocate for them because people are like, 'Oh, you have a behavior issue. Oh, they're a bad kid. They don't want to learn.' It's not always the case; something else might be going on..."

Reflecting on personal experiences as a student who worked through difficulties with an aspect of school seems natural and emotionally proximal. As such, she has been able to access these memories in a way that creates empathy for her students. She experiences herself as a teacher who doesn't immediately jump to the gravest conclusion about her students. Instead, she considers alternative explanations that could be influencing the experience. Among the alternate explanations to consider, Audrey wonders about the personal challenge a student might have and the consequences that reach into the classroom. "Because I have [had] my own personal issue, I reflect on that

when I see a kid acting out…So I think back on why I acted up sometimes and take it into consideration." She elaborates, "I was similar when I was their age. I was also the class clown and very goofy and talked back and I think I kind of, in a way, saw myself in some of those kids who have emotional disorders; they can't control it. So maybe teachers in the past don't take that into consideration and [the teachers] will just battle back and forth with [students] or sometimes I try not to battle and let them get over it and move on with their life."

Audrey's relationships and interactions with her students are best captured in the family ethos that she tried to create and cultivate in her classroom. She describes her classroom culture: "I think I've embedded [this idea] in them because they all came from different schools and I try to make it like we're a family, working towards a common goal…" Throughout the interviews, conversations about her students and classroom veered toward her value for a classroom culture that could be experienced by all as a family. It is clear that she wants to develop a safe comfortable learning environment where students can learn and take risks.

This belief in the classroom as an extended family is a value that Audrey brought into her teacher preparation program, but she says the program further developed it. In our first discussion about her expectations for her students, she elaborates on this value in the classroom: "I want them to just be the best at who they are. I have a big thing in my class—teachers actually comment on it. If we go out somewhere, I turn around and all I say is 'Respect', and all of them get very quiet and they are very respectful to speakers and to each other. I explained to them over and over, we're a family in here and if something happens to one of us it affects us all." As a metaphor for their collective

interdependence, Audrey's family value reminds students of the bond that connects them through this collective experience and alternately serves as a rallying cry for solidarity, admonishment against inappropriate behavior, and an encouragement to try their best.

With a student who was "kind of stand-offish", she used this family concept as an "extra encouragement" saying, "Hey, we're family in here; we do things together, and the student later started jumping in and participated." Audrey gets a sense of satisfaction seeing her students interacting in a manner consistent with this value. This is manifested in numerous examples ranging from the way conflicts are managed to general helping behavior. "They'll make a big deal [of things sometimes]. Oh well, that person stole my pencil and he's touching my desk and I'm like, 'Who's cares? You guys are brothers and sisters in this classroom—you're going to deal with it.'" She offers another example of this relationship in practice during the first interview. "The other day I couldn't believe my eyes. My one little boy who is very, very poor broke all his pencils… Finally, my one little girl leaned over and said, 'I just sharpened this one, do you need it?' It just made me feel good because I didn't have to intervene in any way, shape, or form."

When asked about the high points of her experience as a teacher, she immediately talks about the successes that her students have experienced over the course of the year. Of all of the possible experiences that could have been selected that directly relate to her, she chose instead to talk about her students. Perhaps the students' victories provide a sense of accomplishment for the job she is doing teaching them. In the second interview, she relates just this type of story. She was able to help a student learn to read who previously was at a low level. She displayed pride in what she was able to help him accomplish. "I have a student who came to me reading, he's in 3rd grade for the 2nd year.

He came to me as an early 1st grade reader and is now on grade level or well 3rd grade. Even though he should be 4th grade, he's on grade level now, and had mom break down and cry in front of me and just everything else. It's overwhelming to think…I don't want to sing my praises but I did help this child so that has to be the highest point of all—and he knows it!"

Theme 2: Influence of teacher preparation.

"My courses here at [the University] have showed me that everything's not just a worksheet… One of your observations of me, you brought a point out when I was over at Longfellow Middle School. [You said], "Audrey, you're a good teacher. You're teaching from the book, but what else are you doing to enhance this? …and now I find myself when they don't get it, I'll go and find some material or I might actually act them out. I'm always acting out..."

-Audrey

Throughout our conversations, Audrey reflected back on her experiences in the teacher education program at the University and linked her current pedagogical practices to the things that she learned along the way in the program. As such, it seems as though the University's teacher education program paid dividends for her and positively influenced her practice. Of the many things that she talked about in our conversations related to the teacher preparation program, she spoke with the greatest depth about the

69

specific skills and values that were cultivated as a result of being exposed to the faculty, curriculum, and cohort experience of the University program.

In the first interview, we asked her to compare herself to the teachers she had when she was a student. As she recalls, her teachers did not embrace differentiated instruction and did not recognize the value of trying multiple paths to helping a student learn a particular concept or skill. She reflects, "We didn't have differentiated instruction. It was almost like if you didn't get something or if you were given material and it took you a little bit longer to finish it you weren't given any leeway…If you got bored and they already had stuff to give you they'd be like, 'You need to occupy yourself' and I think that's why we got in trouble when we were younger because they didn't know [how to differentiate and adapt]… For instance, if I had someone come into my classroom right now and give my kids the books that I had when I was a kid or from some similar work they'd go nuts! They'd either be bored or frustrated. So I guess it's just a matter of learning about your students. We weren't individuals back then. Now I learn to focus on my kids as individuals."

This focus on the kids as individuals and the challenge to look beyond the curriculum to the strengths of her students is a value that she attributes to the preparation program. Audrey experienced the faculty to be pushing her and challenging her to become a better teacher. In the opening passage, Audrey recalls a previous conversation that stuck with her. Dr. McHatton saw potential in her, acknowledged her proficiency at teaching the material from the book but thought she could do more. This encouragement challenged Audrey to dig deeper to figure out other things that might help her help her students. Reflecting on her current practice, she says, "…now I find myself, when they

don't get it, I'll go and find some material or I might actually act them out; I'm always acting out." She communicated, in this example, an explicit attempt to translate preparation to practice.

Audrey specifically attributes her teaching philosophy's student-centered approach to lessons learned while she was in the teacher education program. She says that it came specifically from the "special education department" and the way that the department's program "show[ed her] that each kid does not learn the same way." Because of learning these lessons, she includes this as centerpiece of her teaching philosophy, "Take each child as an individual. Take each child and get to know them and learn where they come from; learn how they can learn…focus on individuality." As a result of a rigorous training program, she feels comfortable in her role as a new teacher and feels confident in her ability to enact her teaching philosophy. This is another virtue that she specifically attributes to her time spent in the program. She says, "I'm very comfortable now. When I first started my college career I was very iffy because my AA was in Elementary Education. When I started, it was just, 'Oh, I want to teach.' I think if you would have threw me in a classroom right then, as opposed to now, it would be much different. Because a lot of this has to do with how they educated me here at the University. I think if I wouldn't have had the materials and the professors I had, I wouldn't have gotten this..."

Audrey believes that specific components in the teacher preparation program account for the quality of her training experience. In particular, she focuses on the role of the training experiences, cohort interactions, and academic courses in her development. Audrey believes that having "hands-on experiences" observing and participating in

classrooms along the way, as opposed to simply participating in one student teaching practicum at the end, helped her tremendously. She testifies, "I can't say it enough. Going out and doing the three practicums [was beneficial]. If I would have only had an internship like I know a lot of General Ed has, it wouldn't have even been the same. My three practicums and my internship really showed me that you're going to be put in different positions all the time."

A good example of the preparation program breeding confidence in Audrey can be found in her description of her competence with running records. Reflecting on her preparation experience in our second interview, she was thankful for her experiences in the Clinical Teaching course and the degree to which it prepared her for doing running records for literacy. Her current school has a slightly different system, but the mechanics were similar enough that she did not feel the pressure to learn a completely new system. "We do running records at my school but it's not UFLI, it's very similar. I felt like I was God for a day because I was—I hate using that term but that's just what it felt like—and I was there and they said we have to do running records and I said, 'Oh, I now how to do them.' 'No, you're a first year teacher, you need to go to this course,' [they said to me] and I said, 'Sit me down with a student right now'. I was so confident and I said, 'I can do this'. And sure enough I sat down with them and it might have varied just a little bit but I was still checking off, 'Oh you didn't say this one right.' It was calculated in a percentage. They moved up a grade or a leveled book due to their progress and a couple of people were amazed. Three specialists couldn't believe I knew it…"

Finally, she discussed the apprenticeship she received in the final internship as a significant contributing factor in her development. Being able to observe her supervising

teacher's system gave her a blueprint for how she could do her own later. Apprenticing in this way was beneficial because it provided a safe structure to observe and gather knowledge and skills that could be modified later. "She had very good structure and I stole a lot of her ideas. Thank goodness, because there are interventions that, I think if I would have just seen it with the child before, I wouldn't have known how to work with him."

The cohort experience is another aspect of the preparation experience that Audrey cites as beneficial to her growth as a teacher and her comfort in her current position; "[It was] the cohort! The cohort, the nine of us that originally started out and then the closeness we had…" Matriculating through the program within the cohort system provided a continuity that she felt benefited the group. Experiencing the same classes, with the same students, at the same time helped them to develop a support system and created witnesses to their collective growth throughout the process. The cohort structure also created opportunities to experience conflict, and later learn how to resolve the conflicts among peers.

She especially expressed the presence of conflict and opportunities to resolve cohort conflict in the UEP program. Positively resolving these conflicts showed her that it is not something to fear and she could do this with her students. "When you put it all at one table a lot of tears were shed, a lot of anger came out, but I think once I learned or saw all of us as basically adults and college students doing this to each other I want this for my kids as well. So I think just the communicating that we did within a teaching atmosphere allowed me to be able to do it with my students."

The final aspect of her preparation experience that she felt was beneficial and contributed to her current experience was the UEP program. She attributes the program with helping her to learn how to use her comfort with issues related to diversity to help others develop their awareness. "UEP broadened my horizons to be more sensitive, you know… Her appraisal of the program's overall commitment to diversity was influenced by the presence of the UEP, "Prior to UEP, I had about school year here with UEP [and] I didn't see as much of it until I was in UEP… UEP showed me that they put a lot of effort into diversity here." Audrey believes that she has an advantage over many teachers who were not exposed to this training. Despite having a great deal of respect and admiration for her colleagues, she believes that those who have not had similar training have a blind spot that may influence their capacity to work fairly with students. The UEP experience created a learning context for her and her cohort members that challenged otherwise naïve beliefs about race, class, and culture. Considering her mentor's current knowledge and skill set, she says, "[My mentor's] only downfall was because he was naïve to what I've been exposed to with UEP…"

Theme 3: Experiencing diversity.

"You know we are together [as a class]. We are a group and they look out for each other. And I learned that from UEP. We're all bringing all these different things to the table…you and I don't have anything in common and you and I have everything in common…"

-Audrey

When we talked about diversity in the context of her school and teaching, Audrey approached the topic in the broadest terms. When she defines diversity in the first interview, she preferred to look at the bigger picture because she believed that a broader definition better applied to her school's context. "Diversity (pause) a lot of people think it's just race. But where I'm at it has a lot to do with poverty versus rich. [You're] definitely going to see that difference in my classroom. Diversity can go anywhere from sex, race, ethnicity, it's just a matter of each child [bringing] their own issues or their own background and it's all of us in the same classroom." The socioeconomic differences between the upper and middle class students compared to the lower income students is the difference plays the most significant role in her school, as her school is not that culturally diverse. In fact, she had very few students of color in her class. In the first interview, she only reported having one student of color.

In response to the socioeconomic differences between the students, she sometimes compensates for students who cannot afford some of the things that others can. In her interactions with students and their families, she recognizes families try their best but may not have the extra resources to contribute to holiday wish lists because "half [of her] class can't even afford clothes for themselves." As a response, she has attempted to create a "safe environment to discuss things." As such, she hopes to create a classroom where students understand that they are "brothers and sisters in this classroom", a value that is often repeated. As brothers and sisters, they are expected to care for and share with one another, regardless of their differences.

For her part, she found herself taking on a parental role and extending herself to help her students, even if it meant doing extra financially. "As for the economical

standpoint, we try obviously not to put that out there but I find myself accommodating those kids I guess in that sense. Like when we go on fieldtrips, like a lot of times I've had two or three kids that don't ever turn money in for anything so I find myself paying for that so they don't stand out." She related another touching story where her caretaking instinct with a student motivated her to take an extra step on a student's behalf. This narrative offered a glimpse into something deeper in this teacher.

"I noticed when I pass the IEP for my one little girl that tons of notes from this teacher about how she smells and she has to have her clothes changed and it's all throughout the folder. And I don't think it's necessary for that to be in her cumulative folder. She wrote the amount of days, the number of days that she sent her to the clinic for smelling bad. And what upsets me, [the student] doesn't come in with underwear all the time so I find myself…like, I bring socks in—I haven't brought underwear in—but I bring socks in or belts because her clothing is usually too big and I'm the one [saying], 'Get over here' and stapling her pants together if she has a hole. I just (pause) I don't like it to be put out there and a lot of times it seems teachers pinpoint the poor kids. And so when we were talking about the field trip two of my kids said, 'Oh, we're not going.' I said, 'No, I paid for you; you're going to attend.' So the teachers will talk about that. They'll talk about who the underdogs are."

In her experience, the teachers not showing more discretion and being down on the underdogs offended her sensibilities and her values. In this same example, she described confronting a teacher and students about making fun of this girl. "One teacher was making a comment about her smelling. Some of the kids were making fun of her and the teacher brought it up in front of [the class]. They were making fun of her because she

smells and she just cringed and I said, I looked at [the teacher] and I said, 'Do you really feel that needed to be repeated right now?' She had nothing to say to me, she just stopped. And I looked at the two kids and I was like, 'If I ever hear it you're in trouble.'" This example clearly demonstrates Audrey's role as an advocate and protector of the "underdogs". In this case, the underdog, marginalized group is represented in members of the lower socioeconomic status.

She does not experience the school as particularly welcoming to those who are outside of the mainstream; particularly her students in special education. In our second interview, we were talking about the school community and the degree to which the community as a place is open to diversity. The relative closeness of the community to diversity has created an atmosphere that she experiences as isolating and frustrating, especially related to the reception of her students. She says, "We're isolated especially with the ESE. I mean the program that we brought…we have teachers [who] put up their hands. They don't want our kids in their class. They don't want ESE children so I don't feel that welcome when it comes to my students. My students' [type of diversity] is not looked upon like Black History Month; nothing talked about it…nothing even brought up." Despite seeing this division in her school, she seems optimistic that there will be a change in the future in this regard. "I think it will [change] and as long as I'm there because I kind of put the word out there, um, of course [we] butt heads a few times… So it's more or less just teaching them; they're naïve. So, yes, I think it will get better. With [her mentor's] sternness and my openness, I think it'll get better." Again, Audrey's assertiveness in advocating for her students causes her to be optimistic. It does not appear that she is willing to wait passively for things to get better.

In her classroom, Audrey tries to cultivate the climate of openness and comfort by attempting to demystify the differences by playing them down and talking about them openly, "My motto is 'who cares' because they'll make a big deal…you guys are brothers and sisters in this classroom…". She continues, "I don't have a very ethnically diverse group right now but I only have little Black girl in my class… We were in small group and we were talking about tans and they said she's already tan. I said, 'Well, explain why is she tan, and one of my kids was trying to say it and they get all hush-hush and she said, 'She's Black' like we couldn't talk about it. So I looked at Maya and I said, 'Are you Black?' and she [said], 'I am Black!' But you got to bring it up… It's just (pause) I let them talk freely about [it] I should say because that's how it gets addressed…"

This discomfort that sometimes comes from conversations related to diversity is something that Audrey doesn't experience often. She describes her upbringing near Baltimore as instrumental to exposing her to different groups. Coupled with this diverse background is her outgoing and fearless personality. She describes her early experiences that cultivates this comfort, "I wanted to be friends with everybody…I'd go and purposefully put myself out there like that. I don't know, it just made me confident. I think once I hit high school when I moved from Baltimore to here it was very different. It was a culture shock but it again helped me. Okay, it's survival. I have to make friends with people even if they look different than me because I'm not going to sit here by myself all the time." From the conversations that we've had about diversity, it seems as though she attempts to use her comfort with talking about differences to bridge the discomfort that some of her students have and give them permission to acknowledge differences respectfully.

In her classroom, in addition to trying to demystify the taboos related to talking about issues related to diversity, Audrey has attempted to bring principles of culturally responsive pedagogy into her classroom. She has attempted to attend to the "hidden curriculum" in the classroom. The hidden curriculum (Delpit, 2006) refers to aspects of the implicit messages that are communicated in classrooms by representations in the curriculum of underrepresented groups. She says proudly, "I have a lot of diverse things around the room, you know, posters and things like that; not just pigs (laughs)…"

As far as the "deeper issues" related to diversity, Audrey thinks that the students are "still too young to [really] express themselves in that sense" but she has begun to introduce concepts that may serve as a foundation for this understanding. Among the more impressive things attempted with the students, Audrey is trying to get them to see the individuality that they each possess, affirm the differences between them, and celebrate the commonalities that unite the entire group. Getting her young students to internalize these ideas can be complex but she has chosen a simple project to communicate this value and reinforce it in her classroom management.

In our second interview, she described a project that she worked on during the second semester. "[This] semester we focused on 'Where I Come From/Who am I?' I did a 'Where I Come From' [project] with them and we discussed that openly and made posters and talked about it…some of them have no clue. I think they are still too young to express themselves in that sense. [Recognizing this,] I turned it a little bit and that's when I did 'Who we are as a class.' And I always let them know that when you step out of this classroom, you're representing Ms [her last name]'s class. You know, we are together. We are a group and they look out for each other. And I learned that from UEP. We're all

bringing all these different things to the table…you and I don't have anything in common and you and I have everything in common…"

Theme 4: Reflections on lessons learned in the first-year experience.

"I really question myself and, especially as a first-year teacher, I blame it all the time and maybe I shouldn't [blame it] but it was me learning and trying to figure out how to get my classroom flowing throughout the day…"

-Audrey

Over the course of our interviews, Audrey offered a look into the life space of a first-year teacher through sharing her direct experiences, but she also provided a window into the internal space where she was interpreting her experiences. Very often, she explicitly expressed an awareness of a "first-year teaching experience" happening as a subset of her greater "teaching experience". These revelations were interesting and took multiple forms. At times, her description and discussions took the form of conjecture about how one might be perceived as a first-year teacher. These portions of our discussion seemed to be her projections of what is expected of a first year teacher or the assumptions she felt others would make about her as a first year teacher. As with projections of other psychological phenomena, these projections reveal some of her inner anxieties about being a first-year teacher. Audrey clearly articulated some of the pressures and instances where she felt anxious. In our conversations, there were specific instances where she felt that being new to the profession created the tensions that resulted

in anxiety or pressure. Finally, Audrey expressed a belief that her current stage in her career was part of a larger developmental process. She believed that she was in the process of evolving as a teacher and had a sense that some of the things that were current challenges would become easier with practice and experience.

One of the more interesting findings from the transcripts came from the emergence of instances where Audrey discussed her expectations of individual reactions to her specifically "as a first-year teacher". These portions of the conversations were especially rich with possible projections. Audrey seemed to brace herself for a more tumultuous experience and seemed "relieved"—and "actually I was kinda surprised"—at her experience and how she was treated. "It just went very well and I'm very impressed with how my immediate coworkers worked with me. Some of them hadn't been teaching very long either but they were still very respectful and respected me as a first-year teacher which was nice."

This expectation of a more contentious, less respectful relationship was not limited to her colleagues. She also expected a less favorable reception from parents. She reported in the final interview "expecting a little bit more confrontation with parents maybe because most of them knew I was a first-year teacher." This expectation of a negative reaction to her being a first-year teacher made her somewhat defensive when a parent broached the topic. "The first time being asked [are you a first-year teacher], I was offended. I was greatly offended to the point where I put up a guard almost and I think I said, 'Why, can you tell?' And one parent said, 'Well, you look like you're 16.' 'Actually, I'm 24,' and I tried going down the whole road with it but after talking with some of the parents and explaining some of the things that I know and asking their

permission to trust me, that's how I handled it. Like, 'Look, let me show you first that I can do this.'" Initially offended by the query, she has become progressively less offended as she's had more opportunities to answer the question. It is interesting that the question first received such a strong initial reaction—a reaction that assumed a negative association with being a first-year teacher. "I've actually had a few parents come out and point-blank ask me, 'Are you a first-year teacher?' Of course, I panic and say, 'Does it look that bad?'"

Similarly, there is an apparent trepidation related to the discovery of her status as a beginning teacher by her students. In the second interview, she described herself as being "just fearful that these kids would know that I hadn't already been a teacher and I was understudying per se and they would run over me, but they were great!" Again, she expected a strong negative reaction and was pleasantly surprised by the generally positive, receptive response of her students.

The line between one's projections of self and the perceptions of how others see you is also on display in our conversations about what it is to be a "first-year teacher". On one hand, Audrey has braced herself for mistreatment by her students and parents. She felt that they might try to take advantage of her or not acknowledge her training and competency. In each instance, she was pleasantly surprised by their geniality and willingness to give her a fair opportunity to prove herself. With her colleagues, however, it sounds like she has felt subordinated some because of her age and inexperience. In our first interview, she believed that her colleagues perceived her as "a kid sometimes. Some of them, I feel as though they'll look at me as though I shouldn't be here. I've had parents [say], 'Oh, what are you like 19?' And I understand that I do look a lot younger than I am

anyway but the only person that I think that honestly knows I'm doing a good job is maybe my principal—which counts a lot—and my mentor who I work with closely. And they've even told me, 'Oh well, you're pretty set in your ways for a first-year teacher. But people other than the Special Education Department, they kind of perceive me as a young naïve teacher."

This persistent feeling of the needing to prove herself and wondering if she would be treated fairly were among the biggest pressures and sources of anxiety described in our interviews. There definitely seems to be an awareness of a "first year experience" that is fraught with anxiety producing feelings related to performance and perception. "I think I was so nervous at the beginning of the year that I didn't want anyone to think I wasn't capable of teaching very well but because I felt the heat of coming and having to learn the paperwork and having to learn the curriculum and what has to be taught, I wasn't focused on the kids the first few weeks." In this instance, she felt that her anxieties related to getting adjusted to the learning curve and expectations (real and imagined) prevented her from truly connecting with the kids.

Overall, Audrey describes her experience of the first year in generally positive terms once she had an opportunity to reflect on the entire year. The pressures and anxieties, especially in the beginning, will cause one to question and scrutinize each little movement, but in her experience this is a transition point along the way to a more positive experience. In our third interview, she reflects on the beginning of the year and the uncertainty that she felt, "I really question[ed] myself and, especially as a first-year teacher, I blame it all the time and maybe I shouldn't [blame it] but it was me learning and trying to figure out how to get my classroom flowing throughout the day…"

Theme 5: Contributions of mentorship and support.

> "[My mentor], he is wonderful…I mean nothing but good things to say
> because he's so (pause) I don't know…he's just so knowledgeable…He's
> very open-minded and that helps out too and he's also a very hands-on
> instructor… I couldn't ask for a better mentor."
>
> -Audrey

One of the biggest things that stand out in Audrey's first year experience is the presence and depth of her relationship with her mentor Ted. She frequently pointed to his wisdom, support, and encouragement as a reliable resource on which she could depend. According to her description, their initial meeting during her job interview previewed a relationship that would be built on similar teaching philosophies and open communication. She recalls her first interaction with Ted, "…he interviewed me and right away he said I said one sentence to him—he couldn't tell me what it was—but he knew right away that [I] think like [him]. It was something about being receptive to each individual child and he thinks the same way too. His theory is you build a bond with the student and the parents, then you can teach. And he repeats that often and it's, more or less, you know, you have to allow them to trust you." From her description, Audrey has an extremely positive relationship with her mentor. She describes the relationship as being "like a father-daughter basically" and a "friendship [with] give and take".

This immediate bond that was created through recognizing shared values and developed into a friendship as the year progressed. She believes that the honest and direct

way that Ted interacted with her created space and opportunity to speak openly about life and work. After trust was initially developed, their bond developed further. "I had to develop that trust with him and I'd say that, probably come January, there were things that we discussed that probably only my close friends and relatives know but I felt comfortable enough to tell him about it. And if things were going on with me—and things were going on—I just felt like he needed to know. Maybe I told him more than he needed to know because I felt comfortable… So it's probably, he developed that with me but I learned what to look for too because you learn who you can and cannot trust."

She expresses the comfort of knowing that, with the support of her mentor, she could take chances with her teaching and interactions with peers and parents. In our first interview, she explained her expectations for her mentor. Foremost among her expectations was that he would "watch her back" to make sure she does not "fall off". She offered an example of what falling off would look like: "If I do something wrong, not correcting me right away… For instance, I had an IEP and there was just certain things in the paperwork I hadn't done right and he looked over the IEP and he got ready to hand it back and he was like, 'No, we need to go over this together.' Like I would have looked really dumb in front of a parent if I would have read some of that stuff wrong. So basically falling off in the sense of embarrassing myself in front of parents or colleagues…um, and letting me get too frustrated. I found myself getting really nervous and he was like, 'Shake it off.' He'll actually tell me to bring in a sub half a day, no big deal. 'You need to get paperwork done. Don't stress yourself out.' He was like, 'be in the classroom but have a sub in there too.' Just not letting me get overwhelmed, reminding

me that I am a first year teacher; I am learning and that you have to take one day at a time."

Reflecting on her first year experience, she felt that it was "actually very successful". In fact, she was "relieved" that it was less stressful than she expected coming into the experience. The success of her first year and the relative stresslessness of the experience is attributed to the presence of a mentor that eased her transition into the profession. She explicitly credits him for making this process easier for her. "He played a huge, huge role in this because it was almost like he would explain things to me thoroughly and if something went wrong, he wouldn't let me take the heat by myself. He was kind of like, 'Oh, she's learning, I helped her. Let's figure it out together.'"

Audrey also expressed an awareness that she was having a positive experience with her mentor that situated her in a great position compared to some of her first year teaching peers who were at other schools. She believed that the access to the quality mentorship in her situation might be the central feature that distinguished their experiences. Again, her relationship with Ted is viewed as a valuable asset. "I think mentors have helped me because [her peer Cynthia] said she doesn't feel that comfortable with her mentor, whereas mine…I mean…I'm very upfront and point blank with him and our relationship is a lot stronger than her relationship with hers and I think I get more questions answered."

Participant B: "Barbara"

Overview and participant introduction. Participant B, whom I will refer to as "Barbara", is a Latina in her early 20s teaching at Manatee Meadow Middle School. Manatee Meadow Middle School is a magnet, middle school located on the fringe of an

urban center in central Florida. The school has a culturally diverse student body comprised of 37% White, 34% Black, 24% Latino, 1% Asian, 1% mixed race, and less that 1% Native American. A large portion (66%) of the students is qualified for free or reduced lunch. Twelve percent of the population is being served in the Special Education program while 7% participate in the Gifted and Talented program. At the time of the study, Manatee Meadow had attained a "B" grade for its performance on the state assessment.

Dr. McHatton interviewed Barbara in the first meeting and I conducted the subsequent two interviews. When I talked to Barbara for the first time in this study, I was struck by the confidence and self-assurance that she exudes. She has a warm smile and affable personality that created comfort in the conversation. She struck me as a thoughtful individual in our interviews and seemed to be a natural for teaching. She willingly reflected on her experiences and shared stories. I was particularly impressed with the passion that she displayed when she spoke about teaching. She enthusiastically talked about her students and the joy that she experienced teaching them. The fervor and detail in her stories made it easy to imagine the exchanges she had with students and the students' responses. From her descriptions of her interactions, it is easy to imagine her as a teacher for whom students would work hard.

Barbara was a fount of ideas when considering the possibilities for her classroom. The mere mention of plans for the following year launched her into a discussion of new things that she might try with the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and classroom design. Among the most interesting ideas, was her idea of bringing a bit of New York City to the design and layout of her classroom. I did not have an opportunity to observe

her teaching but really wish that I could have. The manner in which she communicated her love for the profession made me want to see her in action.

Theme 1: Reflections and lessons learned from the first year in teaching.

"[The first year was] good overall. There are some challenges, of course.
As a first-year teacher, you have to kind of at times fend for yourself…
Overall, it's been good; I can't complain. I've been blessed with the
people that I have that have been very supportive so I've been very
fortunate."

-Barbara

Conversations with Barbara revealed an individual who was well aware that she had a good situation for her first year in the profession. The awareness of this good fortune was communicated with humility, especially as she compared her experiences to her first-year teaching peers who were having unpleasant experiences. Characterizing her impressions of the first year, she acknowledged that part of the value of her experience must be attributed to the quality of the people she is surrounded with in her school. She said, "I've been blessed with the people that I have that have been very supportive, so I've been very fortunate… I think I'm fortunate, like I said, just because I know that there are some of my peers [who] aren't as fortunate where they don't have the support at all— like none—which I think is really sad to come into school as a first-year teacher and you don't have anyone backing you up." This recognition of the contribution of others to the quality of her experience was also present in her final interview when she reflected on the

school year. When we discussed the entire experience, she began by giving credit to the support that she received from her mentors and colleagues, while again acknowledging that this support may have been unusual given her peers' experiences. "I would say in comparison to other people that I know [who are] first-year teachers, I would say that I had a really, really good year and a really good experience because I had a lot of support. I had mentors that were there when I needed them. Overall, just a well-rounded year with, you know, a good support that I needed as a first-year teacher."

Barbara's positive experience during her first year of teaching turned out to be a pleasant surprise for her. Barbara began the year expecting something far different. She "actually expected it to be worse." The level of support that she received from her mentors and colleagues was one of the biggest surprises she reported in the second interview. "I expected to not have the support—and maybe that sounds bad—but just as a first-year teacher, [we] kind of are looked over and…so again, I feel fortunate because I've had the support. Initially I thought, 'Oh my gosh, I'm going into the first year. Will people click with me, will they not? What are some of the things that I'm going to be facing that I may not agree with or hate?'"

While Barbara insists that she was not nervous or intimidated in the beginning of the year, she admits that she did experience some "jitters." The experience of "jitters" was mainly connected to her desire to make a good impression on the individuals with whom she would interact. It sounds like there was some pressure to be accepted and respected as a qualified teacher, instead of being greeted with the skepticism that one might have of an untested rookie. This implied desire to be accepted was expressed in the final interview. She reported, "I wasn't nervous; I wasn't intimidated, you know. Of

course, you always get those jitters. It was my first year, you want to make sure that the parents know that—yeah I'm a first-year teacher but—I have a good background and I know what I'm doing. The ultimate goal is for me to have a good relationship with them because of the student[s]. So that was kind of my jitter but I was so ready…" Again, it is interesting to see in this excerpt that Barbara has internalized, or is at least aware, that she may be perceived as less competent because this is her first teaching position. The anxiety that might have flummoxed others was mitigated by the confidence she had in her preparation experience. She continued, "I mean, I wasn't intimidated. I felt like I was ready from the stuff from the program and I really felt like they prepared us. Of course, you know, they don't tell you every single thing, you find things out on your own but for the most part, I wasn't afraid of anything. I wasn't like, 'Oh my God, I don't know what to do…'"

Barbara was very reflective about being a teacher, carefully considering the experience and her role within the experience. There were several occasions during our series of interviews where she reflected specifically on her experiences teaching, trying to discern lessons that could be applied to the next situation. In one example from our second interview, she talked about how she spends time reflecting on her days—good days and bad days—to search for clarity. "I've had those days. I have had those days where I've gone home and I'm like, 'Well, that went really well.' Because I always do that. I just always try to reflect with myself in the car and say, 'Okay, what could I have done better? What was it about that kid that was being disruptive that I could have done something different with him? What else?'" In these moments of reflection, she

reportedly not only considered what was happening for the student but also considered her contribution to the situation and the appropriate future adjustments.

Her reflection on her experience was not limited to personal moments taken in private. Barbara also sought feedback and an appraisal of her teaching from her students. Seeking feedback from her students, an undertaking that left her vulnerable to hear *anything* from her students, created an opportunity for her to get feedback from the primary recipients of her teaching. "So what I try to do is, just in order to make myself a better teacher, I try to get feedback from my kids through writing. I'll tell them or I'll ask them verbally, like, you know, what can I do better? What do you want to learn? What can make it fun? And they'll tell me; they have no shame…" Barbara also saw this as a diagnostic assessment in her classroom. "Just last week when we were doing letter writing, that was kind of little pre-assessment. I had them write a letter to me telling me how they felt about the class. What are the things that bothered them? What are the things that are good? What are the things that I did that they just didn't agree with? Is there something I could do better? What could I do to help them? And they told me and a lot of them wrote about the other students in the class how their behavior was frustrating for them and that they couldn't learn." She saw this as an important classroom diagnostic tool that all educators could learn to use, particularly her fellow first-year teaching peers. "I carry those letters in my bag just because if teachers like (pause) I share with my peers—the ones that I graduated with—that if they had the students do that they could see because it's proof that [the students] will let you know and even if they may not say it during class because other peers are around they have a lot on their mind. I think that has helped me to change throughout the year…"

91

Being open to learn the lessons presented by her experience provided Barbara with many moments of insight during her first year. These moments of clarity helped her see the ways she needed to improve. Staying open to the process and reflecting has helped her understand how to navigate within this context; as she puts it, "you just learn the ropes after a while." Among the lessons learned while navigating this new terrain, Barbara learned to "read" her colleagues.

For Barbara, it was necessary to survey this interpersonal terrain carefully and determine who was dependable and trustworthy. "You never know who you can fully trust and who you can't so you just be careful with your words and what you discuss and just know that it's a professional thing you know and that you're keeping it on that level. You gotta have boundaries…" As a first-year teacher, she felt a particular press to negotiate these relationships. "I just try to have a good rapport with people basically and let them know that even though I'm a first-year teacher I still know what I'm doing, you know. There's just a thin line and you've got to know how to handle it but I think that was one of the challenges that's hard. And I'm sure that's in any company, any job, you know."

Theme 2: Experiences of diversity in her school and in her teaching.

"[Diversity] should be a [priority] because there's no teacher that's going to walk into the classroom and not deal with diversity…"

-Barbara

Our conversations moved easily and freely into the area of diversity and Barbara discussed the topic comfortably. Like some of the other participants, Barbara offered a broad definition of diversity. Her definition was so broad in the first interview, in fact, that I wondered if she actually was attempting to provide a socially desirable, "correct" answer. I do not question her honesty or grasp of the broad concept of diversity. Her responses to other questions bear that out. Instead, I think the reply had a measured tone that differed from other portions of our conversations. This might also be a function of the pressure of being interviewed by a former professor; an issue revisited in Chapter 5. She answered, "diversity, for me, is so many things. I just can't say that diversity is a bunch of different races or a bunch of different ethnicities because it's so much… I just think diversity is about everything. Students with disabilities are diverse. Students with different races, of course; with different religious backgrounds. It's so much…it's such a wide spectrum that it's hard to just pinpoint. I've learned so much through my college and taking courses, especially the Urban Trends course. Diversity is not just one thing. It's multiple things, so to sit here and say that diversity is just this, I can't do that."

Barbara's approach to using students' diversity to inform her expectations, teaching, and interactions reflects a complex understanding of the issues related to teaching and learning. In her opinion, recognizing a student's sociocultural characteristics requires holding two ideas at the same time. On one hand, she was adamant that she does not discriminate against any of her students because of their background. However, she also realized that students come from particular circumstances that influence who they are and how they interact with the material. For her, the recognition of differences creates a departure point from which a student can be celebrated. Speaking directly to the

question of her expectations of students she replied, "[Their cultural background] factors in, but it doesn't factor in a way that I'm going to push them aside because they're different or they have a different cultural background. If anything, I embrace it. I let the other students know why that kid is special or what it is about them that's different but also awesome. I emphasize to all of my kids that they all have a culture, whether they be Caucasian, or African-American, or Asian, or whatever it may be. Oh, that's a big thing for me; just taking in their culture. I definitely feel like we have to take in their culture."

Part of this celebration of culture was the creation of a classroom culture where everyone felt comfortable sharing a part of his or her cultural experience. This culture of sharing and celebrating each other included Barbara. Sharing her culture with the class was important to her and provided a model for her students. When it was relevant, she did not shy away from sharing her Latina experience with her students. For Barbara, this was her way of being authentic, honest, and "in the moment". "Being Latina and coming from a culture where we're close, we strive for education and I think it definitely factors in. I know what some of the students in my class may be feeling because I was there once. So it definitely factors in and I always want to share with them how it is being Latina. I've got to keep it real with them because to say it's all good and I've always had everything would be a lie and I don't want to lie to my students."

Sharing herself and her culture is a big part of what she does in her teaching as she tried to illustrate during Hispanic Heritage Month. She took the challenge to connect culture, in big and small ways, to multiple aspects of the curriculum. She used literature from the library to introduce students to Latino perspectives ("believe it or not, those kids were interested"), taught them to dance salsa ("I told them how it connects to math

94

because you have to count steps and be aware of spacing"), introduced them to Latin food, and concluded with Geography. In this regard, she made distinctions in the Puerto Rican experience and revealing more of her background to the students. "In my room they had me as proof. I wasn't born on the island [of Puerto Rico], I'm more considered Nuyorican, which is an actual title with someone who is Puerto Rican descent that was born in New York but keeps their heritage close. So just all those things, you know, so it was really interesting that they were more open you know what I mean?"

There are numerous examples of Barbara demonstrating this value directly in her teaching. She was particularly proud of her efforts in introducing her students to the "I am poem exercise" that she learned from Dr. McHatton. The "I am" poem was an exercise that was powerful for three out of the four new teachers and each of them mentioned introducing it in their classrooms. For Barbara, the poem created a way to connect with students and get to know them better. In addition, it created space and opportunity for students to reveal themselves and own the complexity of their individuality. The impressive thing for Barbara was the way students delved into the assignment, took risks to examine themselves, and found the courage to stand before their peers to share their poetry. She described the activity: "I didn't want to open it with my poem. I didn't want it because I didn't want them to take words that I used and put it into their stuff. I just told them, you know, what we're going to do today is have like a little reflection thing. I want you to think deeply about your life, who you are as a person, what are the things you agree with, what are the things you don't like. I said, 'You may be young but you have a right to disagree with things, you know.' We did it in a reading class but it was like a reading/writing journal if you want to think of it like that but I had

95

the 'I am' poem preprinted out and they just added it in their own writing. So the first was like 'I am…' and they added in 'I wonder', 'I see', 'I hear', 'I feel', 'I touch', and then they added the stuff. So after everything was done, I had a few volunteers come up and, of course, they giggle or whatever because I had some that were like, 'I am who I am,' 'I wonder when my dad will get out of jail' things like that. You know, they don't know at that age how to be appropriate as far as like, you know…how real it was just so powerful, you know, and that's kind of hard to do. So after that was all said and done, [I told them] this is about me guys and then I read it to them. 'I am Latina' you know so they really like it. I mean, most of all, I think girls (pause) because being female I understand [they] were more emotional and a lot of time they feel like it's hard to connect with the boys as much but they got up there and they volunteered to read their stuff so I was like, 'Wow'. So I was very excited on that day…I was just like I felt like I had done something that day…"

To the degree to which she could, Barbara tried to incorporate issues of diversity frequently. This emphasis and attempt at frequent inclusion was mostly dictated by her class. Rather, her belief that the students had issues related to cultural and racial differences that need to be addressed. "I drove my kids crazy! I would always just touch on [diversity] because I found that there was still a lot of bullying going on; a lot of teasing. [For example], 'Oh, you're White this and that' and I think you have to build a very, not only nurturing but safe environment for the students. So I always threw diversity in there somehow, some way while I was teaching." For Barbara, "throwing diversity" in there some way could be something as explicit as using various texts to explore the experiences of individuals to having impromptu conversations with the

96

students about particular issues that they may encounter as they get older and interact with the broader society. In the latter case, her close relationship with students helped her use examples that speak specifically to the situation that students find themselves in at home.

Barbara was emphatic about her belief in the importance of understanding diversity and an awareness of one's own issues. For her, negotiating these issues is an inevitable reality of the classroom that must be managed. Further, teachers have to interact with so many types of people; they have to be comfortable with themselves and others. In her opinion, this is a value that should be a priority for all teachers. Reflecting on it in the final interview she says, It should be the cream of the crop because there's no teacher that's going to walk into the classroom and not deal with diversity. In whatever aspect you may go into a classroom and have all White kids but some of those kids may have an Aztec background, some of those kids may have a Hispanic background, some of them may have disabilities, you know, there's just different variations of that but that all goes back to if you're going to do the whole diversity thing, if you're going to talk about it, put it out there then you have to know some of your stuff too. So I think that's the biggest thing but it's not only about a color, that's my thing. That it's so broad, I mean diversity is such a big multitude of things and people often think that it's just one thing and it's not." Overall, it sounds like she did quite a bit with diversity during the first year. Despite this, Barbara reports the desire to do even more the following year. She revealed plans to collaborate with colleagues, and develop projects that may raise awareness within her school's community.

Theme 3: Relationships with students.

"I can't see how a teacher can go to work everyday and not have an emotional connection with the students; I just can't see that…I don't know—that's just me—but I don't know how you can't be emotional[ly] connected with the kids…"

-Barbara

An important aspect of Barbara's first year experience as a teacher was the quality of her experiences with her students. Throughout our series of interviews, it was clear that Barbara's experiences during her first year were enriched by her relationship with her students. In our conversations, she described a deep satisfaction and gratification that she experienced in this relationship.

Teaching seemed to be a calling that Barbara answered and through which she received frequent positive reinforcement that she made the correct choice. For Barbara, fully connecting with her students was vital part of her role as a teacher. Teaching went beyond the communication of the curriculum, instead, it also included connecting to students emotionally. "I can't see how a teacher can go to work everyday and not have an emotional connection with the students; I just can't see that. Me, personally, I don't know but I've always been very nurturing, lovey-lovey, kiss-kissy—that type of thing. So that's what I bring into the classroom, um, and just kind of knowing the boundaries too. Who likes to be loved and kissed? Who needs that attention and stuff and then the ones that

you can give that love to but in a different way? So I don't know, [maybe] that's just me, but I don't know how you can't be emotionally connected with the kids."

Barbara described many "rewarding" experiences with her students. Among the stories that she told about feeling a connection to her students, the anecdotes that really stand out show how the students directly demonstrated the depth of their feelings for their teacher. Barbara felt gratified in her role as a teacher when, at the end of the school year, students wrote letters "thanking [her] for being their teacher". She experienced this gesture as an affirmation and the "kind of thing [that] was rewarding at the end." She similarly described another explicit expression of appreciation when a tough young man who had been challenging during the semester made her an angel out of pasta for Christmas. She felt touched by his gesture and communicated feeling a connection between his current experiences and her past experiences. She reflected on her connections, "I knew how that was because that's how I was raised—with a single mom—and you know what I mean. So I was able to connect in that way and he knew that I cared a lot about him and when he gave me that I almost wanted to cry. I was like, 'Oh my gosh, you do love me!' I didn't tell him that but you know I just really went out of my way with him and every kid is different and I really tried to and whatever I could with that individual student but he really touched me with that because I did not expect that from him, you know, so that was really rewarding…"

Barbara does not underestimate the importance of her relationship with her students. In fact, it seemed as though she experienced herself as an extension of the family or, at least, a partner in developing the child. She said plainly in the third interview, 'Without [the parents], there's nothing that I can do for their kid…like if they

don't have that support at school—which is me—and then you know if they don't have that support at home—which is parents or guardian or whoever they live with—it's really hard for me to handle the job of the parent as well…" While she recognized the partnership that must be present between home and school, she sometimes felt as though her roles and responsibilities as a teacher necessarily extended beyond the realm of curriculum communicator and into the realm of extended family member. It appeared that this was a role that Barbara gladly accepted. Stepping into the role of "authoritative surrogate parent" is something that she believed ultimately served the best interest of the students. "Usually I find myself doing that. I'm the teacher. I'm the mom. I'm the dad. I'm the grandma. I'm all those things in one and yet I'm trying too, you know. I'm hard on them but at the same time I still know that they need that attention. They need to be loved…"

Extending this sphere of intimacy with students also situated her to care about more than whether the students learn the material to considering the life lessons that they will need to learn in order to compete. For Barbara, recognizing the particular challenges that her population will encounter, she believed that pushing them harder and holding them accountable for their actions and encouraging them to find—and use—their voices will serve them most in the long run. "I really tried to teach my students that people aren't always going to cater to you. You need to have some self-advocacy skills…So I tried to implement that too so that when they do go and they are in society they need to know these things and some of them don't have that support at home so I really try to do that with them." Once again, it can be seen in this illustration that she sees a connection

between home and lessons learned in school. In the absence of getting these things at home, she happily steps in to span the void.

One of the most impressive ways in which Barbara attempted to connect with her students was also perhaps the most conventional—through the curriculum. Barbara communicated a strong desire to connect with her students at the intersection of the things they were interested in and the things that needed to know, according to the curriculum. In a number of instances, she communicated her value for considering her students' particular needs and characteristics as she developed her lessons. She believed firmly that there are more creative ways to engage students while communicating the curricular content. "I try not to give the traditional: here's a piece of paper and you know just take this home and review. I'll do a game…" She believes this switch paid dividends in the students' performance. "[Creative assignments] really did wonders for them you know so and even if there were students who didn't want to participate they were still engaged because they were watching the other ones go back and forth. So I think that my reviews I try to make them more interactive and more hands-on, more kinesthetic, where they are actually up and moving around so that they're not boring and I try to do those because I have a lot of kids who are ADHD so they can't sit and I have them for a ninety minute block…"

This seems to be a value that became integrated into her teaching philosophy. She emphatically stated numerous times, "I'm trying to do better. I'm trying to make learning fun…I think, once again, being creative, having new ideas being innovative being able to do something different where they are not getting bored. And I teach language arts and

reading so that's a subject that you have to be (pause) you have to make it creative—if not, you'll lose them."

A good example of Barbara adapting to her students and using creativity to connect to her students came from an anecdote in our second meeting about making adjustments to work. The class was doing a basic language arts assignment in which they were given sentences that contained grammatical errors and they were supposed to correct the sentences. She noticed that students were starting to get bored with the assignment and "weren't really putting any 'mmph' into it. They weren't searching for the answers and what I would do is, they would do that when they walked in and then I would go over it with them so I was finding that they were just putting answers down… So, I just tried to change it. Instead of doing that routine thing where they were getting bored, I changed it. Like this last week, as a matter of fact, there's a song out by [popular recording artist] Bow Wow and he says, '[You aint] fresh as I is,' Okay, total grammar. So I did it for bell work and I put it on the board and they were like (pause) they couldn't believe that it was on the board. I was like, 'I want you guys to translate this which is in slang—which is perfectly fine—into standard English (what you've learned in school)'. So, it's things like that that get them, you know, and catches them off-guard…". This example suggests that she was able to recognize that the students were getting complacent in the approach to the staid way of presenting the material. Recognizing this, she found a way to pull in a popular song into the curriculum to get their attention. In the process, the students learned something about their teacher and connected with her. "They were like, 'You're a teacher, what do you mean you listen to that?' I'm like, 'I'm on! I'm up-to-date on everything that goes with hip-hop culture.'" From her description,

you can almost envision the students' surprise and recognition of the humanity in their teacher.

Theme 4: The experience of feeling supported and benefits of mentorship.

"My other mentor teacher was my PPP from my final internship so if I felt overwhelmed, I felt like she was more of the shoulder to cry on. If I felt kind of overwhelmed, if there were some challenges coming you know when things happened where people were talking about my team, I went to her."

-Barbara

As discussed in Theme 1, Barbara felt "fortunate" to have had the wellspring of support available in the first year of teaching. She was very effusive in her praise of the support provided by her administrators, mentors, and colleagues. " I've been blessed with the people that I have that have been very supportive so I've been very fortunate." Beyond the overall sense of support in her setting, Barbara described feeling particularly indebted to her colleagues and mentors for introducing her to the field and easing her transition. As far as Barbara was concerned, it is imperative that first-year teachers have reliable resources that can help them to negotiate the entire range of experiences. "I think [it's] really sad to come into school as a first-year teacher and you don't have anyone backing you up. Even if you need to ask like, you know, where is the Teachers' Lounge? Where can I get copy paper? Um, where can I make a phone call to a parent? Things like

that, that to [experienced educators] may seem so petty and small but to a first-year teacher those are things that we need to know."

Barbara was supported by a team of colleagues, administrators, and two faculty mentors. With this wealth of resources providing support, it sounded as though she did not have to look far to find answers to questions. "My team pretty much does support, if I have questions I can go to them and they're a group of regular ed teachers and I'm the only ESE teacher. That's how they assign the ESE teachers. That's how they assign ESE teachers to a team and then you're the only ESE person everyone else is general ed. Um, I just think our administration is supportive here too. Um, like the principal's secretary she's been very good with me. Um, if I've had questions with no problem she's like, 'Here's the answer' or if she doesn't know it she'll find the help that I need. Um, the counselor for our grade level, she's also been there to support."

Reflecting on the surfeit of supports that have been available through the year in our final interview, Barbara again acknowledged the benefits and advantages that she experienced by having different mentors for different kinds of supports. "[There were], three different people and when I got my information on who was going to be mentoring me I was like, 'Wow.' I was glad that two of them were ones that I knew and that they knew me and that, as a first-year teacher, they weren't going to judge me and be like, 'Oh, she has tons to learn…' They even knew what kind of background I came in with—I came from a special ed program. A lot of, you know, first-year teachers—and I won't say all but—I would say a lot have come in with different degrees and then they get certified. That's just a different thing [than] coming in from a true College of Ed background." In this way, Barbara felt that she was being acknowledged for the knowledge and skills that

she was bringing to the table and not being underestimated by virtue of her beginner's status.

One of the shining moments of Barbara's experience appears to be her relationship with her mentor(s). Throughout our conversations, Barbara spoke positively about the contributions that her mentor(s) made in her first year. Barbara spoke of having *two mentors* who were very responsive to her, which she believed to be a luxury that surpasses the reality of others in her situation. These "two mentor teachers" come from different backgrounds, "one being an ESE, [the other] one being a peer teacher on my team and she's regular ed." One of her mentors was her supervising teacher during her final internship. This familiarity came from the pre-existing relationship was a source of comfort for Barbara. Once again, this was important because she could work reassured in the knowledge that the person who would be supervising her and with whom she would be working had knowledge of her competence. In this situation, she was not in a position where she had the pressure of needing to repeatedly prove herself. "We [have known] each other since last year, which is good, so she has background knowledge on what I'm about, how I teach. She's seen me in the classroom. She knows what I'm capable of…" As a result of this established relationship, Barbara acknowledged that "some people I feel more comfortable and willing to go to than others, but I don't hesitate to go to any or all of them…I also have a good relationship with my peer teacher as well but because my two teacher mentors know me from before I think there is more, um, I'm more comfortable with them. I feel that I can express things that maybe I wouldn't express to my peer teacher because I'm no on the level with her yet…" Having multiple mentors supervising, observing, and advising her was never a challenge to negotiate. It sounds

like Barbara transitioned well and adjusted easily to the visits and evaluations of lesson plans.

Her school has a preexisting structure to support new teachers. Mentors meet with their charges "once a month," review and evaluate lesson plans, observe classroom lessons, and provide immediate feedback. Their program also included goals and benchmarks for new teachers. "There are some other things that I'm supposed to do—I still don't have my folder so I'm going by what my peer teacher says—there are just certain things I have to, certain criteria I have to meet before the year is up. They give you like a folder with everything in it and it tells you what cycle you're in. Most of the stuff is observation, um, just to see where I'm at…what I'm doing in the classroom, how I'm presenting lessons and stuff like that." The observations have not been a source of stress or intimidation. Barbara credits her preparation in the University program for preparing her in this regard. She believed that the frequent observations during the program desensitized her to the anxiety that sometimes comes with being observed.

Barbara also communicated a great deal of trust in her mentors and the ability to use their strengths to support her in different ways. It sounded as though one of her mentors served as a guide on the pragmatic daily issues related to teaching. "I saw her on a daily basis… I mean we have a great relationship…She was there if I need her. If she wasn't there, she was like come by at this time and, um, so in a way we backed each other up." This mentor was perceived as dependable and reliable, demonstrating that she had respect for Barbara, especially in her station as a first-year teacher.

Her other mentor seemed to serve a more socioemotional support function for Barbara. The closeness that she felt with her previous cooperating teacher during final

internship translated later to her feeling a sense of comfort using her as a mentor who could help her navigate the emotionally challenging aspects of teaching. "My other mentor teacher was my PPP from my final internship so if I felt overwhelmed, I felt like she was more of the shoulder to cry on. If I felt kind of overwhelmed, if there were some challenges coming you know when things happened where people were talking about my team, I went to her. So that was probably like one person, you know—maybe two people—I would be able to confide in and say, 'Hey, look this is what I'm feeling' just because I had built that rapport before so I knew who they were and they knew who I was and I knew that they wouldn't judge me or anything like that."

Barbara's expectations regarding her relationship with her mentor revealed something interesting about her expectations. While she felt comfortable knowing that she could go to her mentors whenever she needed something, she also expected her mentors to seek her out more to check in with her. This interestingly mirrored the hope and expectation of other teachers as well. There was a comfort in knowing that the person was there but also an accompanying feeling that it would have been nice if their mentor teacher sought them out too. "I expect from them to just come and check up on me even if I haven't been able to check in with them. Just check up on me to see if I need anything [or] if everything's okay, um, that type of stuff." The reality of her mentorship experience did not coincide with her expectations but she believed that it has "been good overall…I know that my teacher mentor has a lot on her plate but there is never a time where I feel like I can't go to her…and my other teacher mentor, it's the same thing. I know I can go to her and so far she's been out sick a lot. I kind of don't go to her as much just because I know she's been going through her own personal things. You know, I'm sure she

wouldn't want me to think I couldn't go to her because she was out or whatever the case may be. So I stop in from time to time and just say, 'Hi' and, you know, let her know I'm alive and I'm doing okay."

Theme 5: Influence of the preparation experience.

"I felt that I was more ready or more competent than [students from other programs]…I can say that I was ready. I could have taken on a class on my own because I felt competent enough to do that because I felt like I was prepared."

-Barbara

When the conversation turned toward Barbara's appraisal of her teacher preparation program, she was emphatic and singular in her praise of the overall quality of the experience. In the first interview, when Dr. McHatton asked for Barbara's impressions of the preparation program, she freely lavished praise. "Good, great, super! When I graduated I felt so prepared—not only when I graduated—but also in going into my internship. I got a lot out of going to all levels of practicum. I got a lot out of my final internship. I felt that overall the ESE program showed us—or gave us—a great example of what it is going to be like in the school system." This overall sense of competence and feeling prepared for the profession permeated the conversations and, I imagine, contributed to the palpable confidence that she projected. "I felt that I was more ready or more competent than [students from other programs]…I can say that I was ready. If they could have hired me during final internship, that would have been okay too. I could have

108

taken on a class on my own because I felt competent enough to do that because I felt like I was prepared."

Of all of the individual components of the teacher preparation experience, Barbara felt that the field experiences were the most beneficial. Having multiple opportunities to participate in the field provided the space in which she could try on the "teacher" identity in a safe way. The field served as a place where she could become more comfortable as a teacher while also scaffolded by the supervision of more knowledgeable, experienced mentors. This component may be the one that is most attributable to this global sense of competence and preparation that she expressed in our conversations. This excerpt from the final interview is an illustration of this perspective on her experience: " I felt like I was so ready with the program, you know. We're all in our practicums and our internship. I know our department of Special Ed pretty much has 4 internships—3, you know, practicum level ones and then the final. So I felt really comfortable…I kinda knew what to expect [when I started]…"

She also specifically mentioned the importance of the final internship experience multiple times as one of the factors that helped her feel prepared for the job. Part of the quality of this experience might be attributed to the quality of personnel at her site. Barbara received frequent specific feedback and support. She regularly received this feedback from the same individuals during her first year. "[The final internship] was a great experience. You know, I had a lot of feedback from my mentor and [cooperating] teacher, so that was good. I really liked that because a lot of times I've heard where you go in as an intern [and] you're either forgotten about or, you know, it's just kind of like you're there and sometimes they don't give you feedback, you know, and I like to know

what did I do, what could I have done better. You know, just let me know…" The depth of feedback provided by her internship supervisors—and later mentors—helped her feel that, if needed, support would be available and responsive "even though [her mentor] was busy. I mean busy, busy, busy because she was a team leader."

It also seemed clear that her experiences in the teacher education program were not only academically and professionally edifying but also helped to broaden her perspectives. This expanded perspective also influenced her personally and in her teaching philosophy. She explained, in the first interview, "..A lot [of it was] the 'Urban Trends' class and what I learned and experienced with the cohort that I was working with…just learning and thinking deep about yourself and learning who you are and what you feel. I think that had a lot of influence on me. Had I not taken two years of UEP, I don't think I would be where I am today." This influence was later reiterated when she said, "[It] opened my eyes to a lot of things that I might not have been previously open to within my 2 years at [the University]. I just want to share with teachers that might have been in [the field] longer or veterans that haven't had that experience. If I can share it with them in some way, at least I'm passing something along." Time spent in the program was perceived as valuable and the lessons learned worthy of being shared with others.

There were numerous instances where Barbara specifically traced the origins of her actions to something that she learned in the preparation program. For example, she attributes her current interactions with families and expectations for family involvement to the value placed on it in the program. In the first interview, she recalled "It was a big thing when I went to classes. It was always mentioned how parent communication is so

110

important—especially in our program with ESE. It should actually be in all programs—secondary education or whatever the case might be. It was emphasized a lot…It's one of the things I learned most."

Finally, the influence of the University preparation program on Barbara as a person, and ultimately as a teacher, was captured beautifully in a story she told about not sitting idly by while someone was being culturally insensitive. In that moment, she knew that she had to say something, and she drew the courage to speak up by reflecting on a memorable quote from Dr. McHatton "…usually I hear people say something and [if] it's not directed to where I'm involved in the conversation, I normally won't say anything. But this one particular day, I remember us being in the Teachers' Lounge and the teacher saying, 'Well, I don't understand why that student has to fast?' [The students they were referring to were Muslim.] And she's like, 'I just think that's so stupid.' And so I said I from the other table, 'Well you don't understand the culture…what do you mean they can't fast? That's a part of their culture and not allowing them to fast is demeaning to what their beliefs are.' So I said that and she was like, 'Oh' but it kind of like shut her up in a way…So in that way I think that I'm at least able to defend what I believe in or defend the student, you know, especially when the person that's talking doesn't know what they are talking about…But it's things like that I feel I'm knowledgeable enough in that background to speak up I guess and even if my voice is shaky it should be heard, umm, it makes a difference. I think that's one of Dr. McHatton's favorite sayings, 'Even if your voice is shaky, let it be heard!' You know…it's important."

Participant C: "Cynthia"

Overview and participant introduction. Participant C, a young woman whom I will call Cynthia, is a Latina in her early 20s teaching at Jefferson Middle School. Jefferson Middle School is a public middle school in central Florida. Compared to the other local schools, Jefferson has a relatively diverse student population with approximately 47% White, 33% Black, 14% Latino, 4% Multiracial, and less than 1% each of Asian and American Indian. Sixty-seven percent of the school's student body receives free or reduced lunch. Relatively small portions of the total student population have been classified for programs serving gifted or limited English proficiency (3 percent in each). Students with disabilities make up 17 percent of the total school population.

Dr. McHatton conducted the first interview and I conducted the final two interviews. Cynthia's first words in the study were "I think I've always known I wanted to teach…" This persistent interest evolved into a career decision, however, with the inspiration of a Community College professor years later. She repeatedly and enthusiastically referred to "feeling inspired" by this professor's "passion". She said in the first interview, "I fell in love with her passion for teaching and just how people were in love with her…She turned on that light [in me]. It was there, but she sparked that flame. Ever since then I said that's what I want to do, that's how I want my students to look at me and, you know, that where my passion was [too]".

Cynthia described her experience in school as positive overall. She felt liked and respected by teachers and peers, experiencing early success academically. Middle school represented a turn for her though. In the shuffle of preadolescence, school became more complicated. As a quiet student, she found it difficult to adjust to this new context's

emphasis on popularity and in-crowds. Reflecting on herself as a middle school student informs how she experiences her students now, "When I look at my students now, you know, I see that they only care about their friends. That's what they're focused on and that's how I was back then…people don't know how difficult it is being a teenager…" As I reflect on her transcripts more, it seemed that her previous experiences currently situate her to interact and advocate for students who may be experiencing school similarly. This reflection on her student experience appeared to be significant in subsequent conversations where we discuss the value of understanding students.

Of the four participants, it seems that Cynthia had one of the toughest experiences. Each time we talked, there were moments when I was astounded by the challenges she had to manage. In our meetings, I found her affable, funny, and extremely forthcoming about what seemed to me to be a difficult situation. Although I tried my best to be present and impartial in the interviews, I also found myself wanting to offer comfort and support. Beyond that, however, there were the other moments where I wondered, given the same situations, how would I have managed?

Cynthia described her first year teaching experience as a roller coaster on multiple instances; feeling like she had been put through extreme ups and downs. This wide range of emotions, however, did not prevent her from sharing her story in our space. Having known this teacher as a student, and having a good relationship prior to the study may have contributed to the ease with which she spoke about her situation. This familiarity also made it especially hard to hear the challenges while bracketing the intuitive emotional reaction.

The tenor the meetings changed and evolved over the course of the year. The first meeting was hopeful. She talked comfortably about her previous experiences with school, her motivations for becoming a teacher, and her expectations for the coming year. By the second meeting, the pressures of teaching and the particular difficulties of her situation had begun to wear through the optimistic exterior and the frustration began to leach in. She was having a rough year and was trying to hold onto her positive spirit. The final meeting was bittersweet. I felt as though I was having a conversation with a survivor. I sat across the table from an individual who had faced down a difficult circumstance and found herself intact in the end. While reflecting on the meaning of the previous year, she also looked expectantly toward the following year and how next year would be not only different but also better than this first one.

Cynthia had an interesting experience. This first year took Cynthia on an emotional and psychological rollercoaster and, by listening and creating space, the researchers served as witness. This case could have been captured by numerous descriptors but looking back at my notes, one continued to emerge. I was continuously struck by this teacher's resilience. Cynthia's context was certainly less than optimal. She was moved multiple times during the course of the year and did not have consistent mentorship or a consistent cadre of colleagues to help. Instead, she had to marshal resources to sustain her. She found informal mentors and support from her peers who were teaching in other schools, and took each negative experience as a lesson that she would apply to the next year. Her response to the situation was an object lesson in making the best of a rough situation.

Theme 1: Reflecting on lessons learned.

"I always reflect on myself. I'm like, 'What am I not doing over there?'
Like I said, it's a learning experience. I feel like come next year or even
next semester, you know, I'll know what to do at the beginning of the year
to that. When these things happen I can catch it."

-Cynthia

During the participants' preparation program, numerous courses required the
students to write reflective journals on the course content and field experiences. These
journals provided a space for students to reflect on a topic, express their thoughts, and
later, receive feedback from professors. It is possible that the practice of journaling on
one's experiences provided benefits beyond the academic gains from writing in these
journals. Perhaps this exercise helped to cultivate the reflective habits of mind that served
them later as they reflect on their professional practice. The experience communicated by
Cynthia revealed a new teacher who frequently reflected and adjusted her practice.

There are numerous examples of her reflecting on her experiences and looking for
the lessons that might be found in the good and bad times. This is especially true of her
recognition of issues related to being a first-year teacher. She had an acute awareness of
this and often considered what part of her current situation was attributable to being a
"first-year teacher". Cynthia, especially in interviews two and three, showed an eagerness
to look forward to the next year. At that point, she had experienced significant challenges

115

and demonstrated an ability to evaluate her situation and consider how it would be different the following year.

When I analyzed the interviews with Cynthia there was a definite presence of what could be described as "reflection and appraisal of the first-year experience". The heavy presence of reflection could have been partially created by the interviewers/interviewee context. I cannot necessarily attribute any intrinsic reflective qualities to Cynthia because her function in this relationship was to consider the questions and then respond in a manner that she chose. Despite this structure, she was in control of the length, breadth, and depth to which she went to fulfill her end of the social contract. In our conversations, Cynthia was very willing to "go there" as she appraised her performance as a teacher, considered her relationships with colleagues, mentors, and peers, and thought aloud about how she would handle situations differently in the future. Cynthia displayed a skill for identifying the lesson in her situation and considering possible future applications.

There were several occasions throughout our conversations where Cynthia critically reflected on her experience as a first-year teacher. In addition to considering what it meant to her to be a new teacher, she also considered what others' associated with her classification as a "first-year teacher". In a theme that finds a refrain in the participants' interviews, this awareness of meaning attributed to their first-year teaching status informed their interactions and perceptions in situations. This consciousness about being a first-year teacher manifests in different ways to different ends.

Cynthia appeared to be self-conscious about being perceived as less capable because she was new. Sometimes this reticence to ask a question for fear of sounding

naïve may compromise the ability to get the needed assistance. In the second interview, I asked her about the available resources and supports, especially if she had a challenging situation to manage. She replied, "[In this situation,] I would have gone to my AP but I didn't want to seem like I was constantly complaining… She's great, I love my AP but I didn't want to seem (pause)…She asked me is everything alright, everything okay? I was like, 'Yeah, cool,' because I didn't want to seem like I'm just this person who complains. They know it's my first year but, you know, sometimes they're like, 'So what if it's your first year.' Throw you in the deep end and you got to learn how to swim, you know what I'm saying? So I felt like that's how their thought process goes. So I just don't go to her because I know that she's busy."

There are a couple of things that stand out in that passage. First, she had a resource available that she liked and respected, but her assumptions about how the AP would view her prevented her from maximizing the possible assistance. It is certainly normal and expectable for a new teacher to have questions for an administrator, yet the fear of sounding like a "complainer" or someone who is incapable of handling the rigors of the job restricted her from reaching out. Secondly, she seemed to internalize this sense that people assume that new teachers are easily overwhelmed. She seemed to want to avoid the perceived widely held beliefs about new teachers. She refers to an ambiguous "they' who collectively devalue new teachers. Despite this ambiguity, or maybe because of it, is assumed that this is such a widely held belief that is held by all.

Another interesting view of her reflection comes when she considers the type of teacher she experiences herself as now compared to the teacher she assumed that she would be. This interesting juxtaposition of "self as one experiences it" versus "self as one

117

expected" was interesting. In our second interview, we discussed the adjustments that she noticed in her teaching since the beginning of the year. Chief among her observations is the changes in her level of focus. In the beginning, she experienced herself as "all over the place" but by the middle of the year she felt as though she was being more purposeful in her decisions. As the conversation continued, we veered into an interesting area where she began to reflect on the experience and juxtapose the teacher that she experiences herself as now with the teacher who she thought she would be. She said, "I'm not where I want to be as a teacher and I haven't been who I wanted to be as a teacher. One day the ESOL teacher was giving me ideas and they were positive things to do when a student does something really good…I haven't been doing that a lot…I was more negative." She elaborated, "I want to be more positive…I want my classroom management to be tight to the point where they respect me, you know; we respect each other. [I want to be] someone more positive, you know, more inclusive with my students…you know, being able to have fun with them and doing it and not always reminding them the things that they do wrong…I don't know how far I am from that but I know I have a lot of work to do."

Throughout our conversations, she gave very frank appraisals of how she experienced herself as a teacher. She spoke openly about the things that she found challenging, frightening, and exhilarating about teaching. One of the issues that came up numerous times was the confusion and uncertainty she felt at different times during the year. It seemed that Cynthia was confident in the training she received in her teacher education program but experienced herself "feeling her way" through the initial learning curve.

Reflecting on this bit of uncertainty and her anxiety related to the learning curve, she sometimes evoked the imagery of experimentation. On multiple occasions, she talked about feeling like the students this year was, unfortunately, like "guinea pigs". In the first interview, she talked about how she felt like she was "on track" and but still needed to figure things out along the way to find comfort. She stated, "I still need to see. Like, now, I feel like I'm on track…I'm starting to feel comfortable, but I wasn't too sure what I wanted. I know I wanted them learn about multiple intelligences, and I was gonna have them write about that and I don't know what happened. They got me off track to something else, you know. I guess I'm still [finding my way]. I'm still trying to find my way, so they are like my guinea pigs…"

In the middle of the school year, the frustration and anxiety related to being a first-year teacher seemed to take its toll. As she reflected on how she experienced one of the biggest challenges from this first year, she expressed a hope that the students would have another teacher instead of her because she felt inadequate. "I don't know, I guess cause I'm like a first year teacher…It's crazy, like I said. Constantly, the kids are my guinea pigs. It's been crazy, you know. They've been going up and down. I always pray that I'm not going to be their teacher next year, that they have really good teachers because I know that they've had a bad year before and then with me coming in all over the place hopefully they are getting something…"

Through all of the challenges that she experienced, she demonstrated a facility for finding the lessons from her experience and considering how to apply the lessons next time. There were numerous instances where she would say, in essence, I was taken advantage of as a first-year teacher in this way this year, but I will be wiser next year and

this will not happen again. On one of her more discouraged days, she questioned her career choice. Buoyed by the support from peers and an overall positive attitude, she tried to find the positive lessons from this difficult time. In our final interview she says, "It was very stressful. I mean I got to the point where I felt like I didn't belong in the teaching profession…I don't know, I think it was just a moment that I had a bad day and I was having…I didn't feel like I had a good year but like I said it was a very good learning experience, you know. So it's not overall like negative because everyday I was like, 'Okay, I was learning something new…'".

Cynthia communicated resilience to make the next year better. "They seemed to like me at school…I'm like okay and the fact that I do like teaching and I like being around the kids and I'm not a quitter, you know. I might say something but I won't do it because then I'll be (pause)…I've just never been like that. I may be struggling but I won't quit… I've made a mark—a really, really small mark at this school but I want to make a bigger mark, you know? When I leave, I want to be remembered. So that's one thing, I said, no, next year will be better and I will be stronger and I'm going to be better and the kids are going to improve…" Later in the same interview, she came back to the topic, "I'm not one to just bounce, you know. I have to make the situation better. Last year sucked but this year is going to be better and this year I'm not putting up with their crap, you know. If I gotta say something, I'm going to say it. They're not going to mess with me…" These were defiant, self-assured words from a young teacher who survived the first year.

Theme 2: Interactions and relationships with students.

"There's still work to do in that class I feel. But I do think about them every single day; sometimes I go to sleep with them in my mind. I really care about them, and I know they know it."

-Cynthia

Cynthia experiences as a student provide a window into who she is right now as a teacher. She recognized in the first interview how "tough it is to be a teenager" and questions the degree to which other adults remember this feeling. She seems to take particular pride in the degree to which she has remembered this feeling and incorporated this value for her students into her teaching philosophy and her interactions with students. Cynthia's interviews consistently reflected the value placed on the interactions with her students and the manner in which these relationships influence her teaching experience. This theme was reflected in our discussion about her teaching philosophy, role, and responsibilities.

Cynthia's attention and intention to serve her students appear to come directly from her teaching philosophy and, reportedly, from the values learned in her teacher preparation program. "I think it comes from, number one, it's from me. I think deep within, as a human being, you know, as a teacher you have that responsibility…It was my passion because I cared about humans wanting to succeed. So I know deep inside it comes from deep inside of me and just, you know, the university and college experience too kind of brought it to that surface like, 'Yeah!' You know, this is what teaching is

121

about and this is how it should be. It was my college experience; it's UEP definitely. Because I felt like in UEP I knew certain things already coming into the program—I'm like yeah, I know that—but I learned a lot more than I thought I had."

In the first interview, we talked about her teaching philosophy and the role that she has in her students' education. In her case, the question was prescient because it would preview an important value that she held that repeatedly came up throughout the conversations. Primary among the roles and responsibilities that she described was the belief that the teacher should be a caretaker. She says, "…there are so many roles. Number one is caring about them and *really caring* about them, treating them differently but treating them fairly…just really caring and having a heart, really caring about no matter where they come from. Still, looking at their heart, not their actions or behavior, that's one thing."

This focus on the students also continued in the time when she is not in school. The students stayed on her mind after hours and into her weekend. "I think about them all the time. If I don't work on the weekend, I plan things I really want to do. I want them to learn. I just don't like giving them things to do—I like them to really, really learn." This value placed on caring for students also made her a little suspicious of those whom she perceived as not being as invested. She commented in the first interview, "It's hard to find someone that I can really talk to as a teacher…the AP cares about the students, but teachers, it's really difficult to find someone that really cares about the students like I do." This sense of her own elevated sense of care, compared to her peers, may also influence her collaboration with others. In our final interview, discussing the challenges that she was experiencing with a colleague, Cynthia says, "…I like working with other

people but that can be really hard depending on where the mentality is and I'm very free-minded and I'm for the kids and there's not too many people that I see here that are like that."

Care for students can have many different facets. Care can be in gentle acts of kindness or in extending oneself beyond what is normally expected. Care can also be in challenging individuals to push themselves in order to achieve their potential. A great example of how she demonstrated care for the students was a story that she told about challenging her students' perceptions about themselves. As a special education teacher in Jefferson, she has heard the disparaging comments and witnessed the reduced expectations for students with disabilities. In one instance, she reacted strongly to what sounds like the beginnings of students' internalization of these negative associations with their placement in special education. In the first interview she recalls, "I gave them a lecture because they called the classroom 'boom-boom'. I was trying to get them to write an essay—I wasn't expecting anything [like that]...Some of them, they were paying attention, [some were] talking to each other, commotion, and it kind of got to me. So I got kind of loud with them; I tell them what I expect and how much I care about them. I said, 'If you think is a 'boom-boom' classroom then that's your problem that you feel bad about yourself, but I don't feel that way about you…This is why I have you do what you do—so you can learn. Your brain is a muscle and it needs to be worked out." This feeling of having less value than other students is an attitude that she frequently encounters. It seems important to her to address these instances so that she might offer her students a counternarrative. "You know, a lot of my students don't believe they are smart and that they're stupid. They say, 'I'm stupid,' you know, and they don't believe [in themselves]."

Her connection to the students' overall learning experience is also seen in the way she experienced the highs of teaching. It was not just all tough days. Instead, she took great joy and pride in their triumphs. Each time the interviews turned to the subject of good days, she would describe her good days as an extension of a good day for the students. This feeling was especially strong when students performed well on a task, learned a lesson, or expressed his or her love for school or learning. While it certainly feels good, as a teacher, to have students appreciate your work and by extension learning, there seemed to be more here. It seemed that her interactions and relationships with students served a deeper, more human function. This was undoubtedly a tough year for Cynthia but it seemed that the relationships with students served an affirming purpose. More than anything, it appears that she was able to sustain herself and enjoy the fruit of her relationship with the students.

An informative illustration of the beneficial and sustaining nature or her relationship comes from her description of "good days" as a teacher. Without being prompted to discuss the students, she launched into a discussion of the joy she experienced vis-à-vis her students' successes. The successes she felt for them seemed amplified given the circumstances of her experience (i.e., having a first year teacher who was repeatedly moved throughout the year). She cited the circumstances almost as a disclaimer when she talks about the students' experience. This persistent frustration may make the victories that much sweeter. "I've been having difficulties with them because there's been a lot of changes with them… [but] it was such a good day! I was just so proud of them. I was raving about them to the different teachers that day. I just felt like— I don't know—kind of high off of their success…I can even give you examples I can

remember." Hearing and seeing her brighten up brought to mind the small special moments in teaching that make the difficulties worth it.

A final story captures this sentiment: "[One] day I went home and I was like, 'This aint for me. I can't [do it anymore].' It was just one of those days. So you know I talked to [one of my peers] and I started thinking about their [test] scores and all that and just started thinking about them because throughout the year I thought they knew I cared about them but I didn't know how much they felt about me, you know what I'm saying? But at the end of the year, I thought they [would be] like, 'Please go home, I don't care' but the last day of school when I saw them and they were like wanting me to take pictures with them and they hugged me, you know, and then I was kinda feeling like you know like I really do care about you.' I was just tired and stressed out but I really care about them so then that's when I started thinking, you know, I have to come back."

Theme 3: Challenges experienced.

 "They haven't been treating me right. They just haven't…"

-Cynthia

Cynthia had one of the most challenging years of all of my informants. She certainly experienced more than her share of challenges from colleagues, students, and parents. There were a couple of times when I wondered about just how happy she was teaching and, at this rate, how long she would stay in the profession. If she chose to go, I would not have attributed it to a lack of inner strength on her part. Instead, knowing her side of the story, I would have attributed it to the tumultuous system in which she was thrust that showed little regard for protecting and nurturing new faculty.

Chief among the persistent challenges that needed to be negotiated frequently was the instability of her home classroom setting. Over the course of the year, Cynthia's classroom placement changed multiple times with repercussions on how she experienced her job and ability to perform. The lack of stability had consequences because, as described in the first interview, "the dynamics [are] different, there's so many things. It's a different classroom and they're tired of just moving around. I don't ever know how to sit them now because the desks [are] different and close together and all these things. They don't know how to act."

The insecurity also had consequences with the way in which she engaged the curriculum. Cynthia never really felt settled in because she did not know when she would be moved again. Not really feeling established, Cynthia didn't really seem to be completely comfortable to fully engage and try all of the things that she wanted to try. Discussing her desire to bring cultural diversity into her classroom, frustrations about the impact of her classroom instability came up. "I always think about how I want to bring that in the classroom (pause) [but] because I don't have my own classroom. I think about if I had my own classroom what I would have on the walls. You see what I would have on the walls because I was floating and even with them I've been floating around because I've been moved from classroom to classroom…It's crazy and, at first, I was thinking I wasn't doing much but I feel like now I'm just trying to survive this whole floating around and getting things done."

The relative discomfort of this instability also made Cynthia frequently muse about what might have been if only she had a space of her own. "So it's been not so comfortable for me because I'm more than that, you know? I said, 'If I had my own

classroom I would have (pause) what I would have on the walls.' Just the other day, I went to a Chinese restaurant and they had a poster. It had the calendar and it's cities in China and it's in my car because I want to put it up in the room so they can see all the cities in China somewhere in the classroom but I don't know (trails off)." The changes have had implications on how she's managed her classroom. Describing the move-related inconsistency she felt in classroom management and instruction, Cynthia evoked the metaphor of the roller coaster. In the second interview, "I've been having difficulties with them because there's been so many changes with them—that's my resource class—and there's been so many changes with them. So it's like at the beginning of the year, I had my classroom management set, you know, and now it's like starting over again. So with them, it's been like a roller coaster."

As we were discussing challenges related to classroom management, the focus changed to the recurrent, enduring impact of her classroom instability situation. Explaining a mid-year change in her classroom management system, she said, "It's a combination of a lot of things. Number one, when I first got these students, they come from another teacher. Not only did they come from another teacher but we were in a different classroom. So from that classroom they switched me to another classroom. *They haven't been treating me right. They just haven't*." This last statement was chilling and despairing. There seemed to be sobering realization that she was in a tough situation with her job and are in a relatively helpless situation.

As a first-year teacher, there seems to be a certain vulnerability in your station. Some people may understand this vulnerability, but can also see their own personal agency. Cynthia, however, seemed to take another approach. She chose to try to ride the

wave. Asked directly in the second interview how she's experienced all the changes, she replied, "I've just been going along with it, you know? I mean it's been crazy and frustrating but I've been going along with it." Conversations with others about her experience reveal to her just how untenable this situation was. "When I talk to other people…I sometimes am negative or I'm just like whatever they just look at me and say how it's crazy that they're changing [me] so much. So then, they make me think, 'Hmm, there's something wrong'. I don't know, I guess cause I'm like a first year teacher I don't know what to expect; that's why I'm taking it. It's crazy, like I said."

The changes were tumultuous but Cynthia gamely tried to roll with it. For example, in our second conversation, she recounted a situation where she was told on Friday that she was going to have to change her setting and students after the weekend. "Oh yeah, they told me Friday and then I got them Monday; same thing with my reading class. They told me on Friday to start on Monday, same thing with my reading class. So, I'm thinking, 'What am I going to do?' All weekend I'm like, 'I don't know the way they are.' I'm thinking, 'Okay, I'll test them.' I went in Monday still not knowing what to do. I had an idea what I wanted to do for sixth period. Oh wow, time goes by like this (snap) but seventh period. That's an extra 50, 45, 50 minutes. So I'm thinking, 'What do I need to do?'" Talking about how she experienced these changes, she reiterated the extent to which, despite her attempts to be flexible, recognized that she was bearing a bad situation. Her status as a new teacher may also have contributed to her tentative, some might say passive, response to the overall situation. "I don't know. At first, I was just taking it. You know, like they tell me (pause) okay, what am I going to do, you know? I didn't know how to take it. I thought it was part of my job…" Again, a more seasoned,

entitled, or, perhaps, assertive individual may not have experienced it in this way. A different individual may have recognized the relative injustice that is in this situation of being repeatedly moved, and felt agency enough to advocate accordingly.

Another example of her classroom management being affected by her constant transitions can be found in the following excerpt from her second interview. "There's just been so many changes…I think…umm, so many changes you know…It's a little…(longer pause). For example, like my classroom management at the beginning of the year. Like I was so confident with that because it was down pat, but now I'm just, like I said, I'm blaming myself because I'm coming in and I'm like, 'Wait, what's going on?' You know, this is crazy. You know, so I was thinking, 'What am I *not* doing, you know?' I always reflect on myself. I'm like, 'What am I not doing over there?' Like I said, it's a learning experience."

In our final interview, I asked Cynthia to tell me the first thing that came to mind when she thought about her first year as a teacher. After a short contemplative pause, she said, "first thing that comes to mind (pause) I think about chaos. But I also think, um, like you know, learning experiences." Intrigued by this answer, and somewhat surprised, I probed for further explanation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in hindsight, the specter of the classroom placement instability and the consequences that it wrought in her overall experience as a teacher emerged. Cynthia elaborated, "Well, it was chaotic because I was moved around a lot; I didn't have a single place. I felt tired a lot toward the end of the year." She reported feeling comfortable with her current number of students. She later communicated difficulties trying to incorporate five new students while also preparing

for her first encounter with FCAT only escalated the sense of chaos that she experienced. She revisits the experience of having a new class/responsibility sprung on her.

As she reflected on the lessons learned from her first year teaching, she sounded emboldened. She reframed the frustration into a "learning experience." Regarding the learning experience, she says, "It was a learning experience because now I know what I want. See, this year I think I took a lot of things because I was like, 'Oh, I'm a first year teacher and I don't want to make a scene like I can't handle that.' But I know what I can and cannot handle…They're kids [and] it's hard for even adults to go through certain changes, you know?"

Where she was quiet and relatively passive about her situation this year, possibly because of her reticence to be draw unfavorable attention as a first-year teacher, she believed that she would respond differently next time. If the situation were to arise again, she speculated that she would take a more assertive stance on behalf of herself and her students. "I think that (slight pause) I know I would be more likely to hold on. I would have more to say than last year." She tried to speak up this year but felt that it lacked real authority and assertiveness. "I kind of approach[ed] the AP and I said, 'Look, just let me know if you're going to change us so I can get them ready before you do.' It wasn't too much like, 'Don't change me!' It was more like, 'Let me know.' But this time [meaning the next time it happens] I'm going to be like, 'Wait a minute, you're not going to change me because my kids are going to be stable and they weren't stable last year. They weren't the year before and now you're changing us again?! It was just crazy and I didn't know how to handle all of those changes. I was just taking the changes but I really didn't know how to handle those changes…For me, there's these changes like that just didn't help

me." She already didn't feel very organized, but the tumult of the situation also negatively influenced her organization. Once she felt like she knew what she was doing and was settled with an organization scheme, it was time to change.

Asked directly about how she anticipated dealing with possible changes next year, in addition to taking a more assertive stance, she also looks to this challenging experience and lessons to be learned in planning and anticipating the possibility of unplanned transitions taking place during the year. In her first year, the last minute changes that began the year may have been a harbinger of the changes to come. During the pre-planning period before the school year began, Cynthia received unexpected news. As she explained, her first indication that this year might be turbulent or that she would need to stay alert to possible changes came early. She could not know at the time what was ahead of her; in hindsight, she might have seen the signs. She might have seen the last minute planning stage change as prophetic.

In the final interview, she recounts the preplanning period prior to the beginning of the school year: "I was told that I was going to work with two teachers and then right before school started—when we had already been meeting, you know, the preplanning days—I was switched to another person. [Instead], you'll be working with him. And that was the hardest part; I didn't know what they had planned. I didn't know anything…I was working with other teachers and coming in as a new teacher to someone else's room." Not having a desk, feeling out of the planning, and feeling unsteady as a new teacher contributed to her discomfort. I noticed that she was beginning to make a shift from a reactive position to a more proactive position regarding her job. Asking her about my reaction/assumption about this, she agreed. "I'm very passive and I'm very patient

and I'll take things and they, you know, the third time then I'm like, 'Wait a minute!' They were changing us and changing us and I was taking it and taking it. Then the last time they changed me I went to the office and I said, 'Y'all need to let me know when you're going to change us because it's not fair to them, y'know, and it's not fair to me.' I feel like going through these experiences last year made me really tired and the kids saw it in me and I started letting things slide."

During our final interview, I thought it would be interesting to ask the participants to share an experience from their first year that they find themselves frequently discussing. The changes that occurred with her and the students were so salient for her that it was the definitive aspect of her first year. When she reflects on the first year experience, the instability is the first experience—the most significant experience—that she revisits. "I haven't really talked about [the first year] this summer. But, umm, I usually just talk about the changes. The changes that I went through, you know, I mean not like mental, just the changes the kids went through---that's really all I talk about and I think that's what really bothered me this past year. This past year really bothered me and not having not even a desk in the classroom. Like [I had] a really small desk that wouldn't fit anything in there and then I had a big classroom but it wasn't really my classroom. I have to say we don't own the classroom. As teachers, the classrooms belong to the school but I'm saying the stuff that was [in that room] was another teacher's so I was told I could really… I didn't know to touch them or what to do. It was a mess, you know and I didn't like the change…there were too may changes. The worst thing was like my kids had gone through those changes the year before, you know and so they (pause) they're in the ESE program—the lowest functioning—the lowest kids and they're getting

the least help. So a lot of them didn't get good grades at the end of the year and I just told them just remember you guys changed things a lot…you need to keep that in mind… So, when I talk about or think about school really, I just think about changes that I went through and that the kids went through. There was no stability for them or myself."

A second narrative thread that emerged as I analyzed her transcripts related to challenges pertaining to the personal frustrations, descriptions, and tensions that she experienced. Cynthia's personal sensitivity, while a great trait that allows her to be empathetic and nurturing in her relationship with students, also made her vulnerable to numerous bumps during the year. Among the instances of feeling frustrated, disappointed, or otherwise personally challenged in the first year, Cynthia related stories involving "frustrations and disappointments in myself, my students [and], my colleagues".

The co-teaching situation was tense for her in the beginning of the year. The students' struggles and her own conflicts with the co-teach partner made it particularly uncomfortable. Asking about what I would see in her room [if I were a fly on the wall] prompted her to respond about the discomfort in this working relationship and environment. She described the class as a "little intense. The co-teach, language arts class, they are struggling with a lot of them, and I think partly it is my fault. I guess there is so much to do. The other teacher is trying to fit all these things that we need to do." The relationship with the co-teacher is strained resulting in questions about her own self-efficacy. Asked about her comfort meeting the needs of her students in the final interview, she responded with doubt because she hadn't experienced real success in the classroom with her co-teacher. She replied, "Maybe, honestly, I've been feeling like, um,

with my co-teaching man in charge I feel like a failure." Having ceded control to the "main teacher", she felt as though she needed to advocate more for her students (and herself) and infuse more accountability into the curriculum and their classroom practice.

Cynthia described the feeling of invalidation when her role as a teacher was undermined by a colleague or unacknowledged by students. Already feeling some discomfort in her professional role, having been moved around from place to place, I can see how this could be experienced as just another layer of disrespect. As an individual who is admittedly sensitive and reflective, she describes herself in multiple instances as one who is likely to blame herself first for a problem and later reconsider what others may have done to contribute to the situation. These moments of disrespect may have cut particularly deep.

She describes a situation where she was in a co-teaching context and her regular education partner was out for a couple of days leaving her to manage the students alone. In the absence of the regular education teacher, the students behaved in a way that suggests that they believed that they could get away with more because the "real teacher" was not there. In some ways she felt that situation was set up by the way teacher regards her.

In this example, from the second interview, she describes the frustration she felt when the students regarded her as less than the "real teacher." "I've had problems with one of the FUSE teachers [and] the kids not seeing me as a 'teacher'. So one day [when she was absent] they were just out of hand. No matter what I said, you know, there was a lot of talking going on. I couldn't even instruct, so I was frustrated…I was teary-eyed like at the end of the day, so I just let it out and I started crying. So I was talking to one of the

teachers just to let it out and the next day was no joke. I came in; I just set down, just laid it out. I said, 'I'm a teacher! Some of you think I'm an aid, but I'm not. Just like I can tell you, hello, good morning, and give you rewards, smile, and tell you congratulations, good job I can also write you a referral. I can also give you after-school. I said, 'Don't play with me. Don't get it twisted, I'm not an aide. I'm not a substitute… You know, they just all looked at me and then after that they were like, 'Whoa'. And I had had conversations with them but I have never did that direct with them. You know, I had to go down to their level so after that day, they didn't mess with me in that sense…"

That these things occurred in this particular teacher's class is not as surprising after hearing about the way in which she worked with Cynthia. According to Cynthia's recollection of the working relationship with her colleague, it sounds like she was treated as a teacher's aide instead of a partner in instruction. Perhaps, because of this value-diminished position, Cynthia deferred to her colleague because she was more experienced and more comfortable in her teaching. She did not realize that ceding control like this would put the power dynamics so far off-kilter. In short, she found out the full extent of the power differential. Her partner was not a frequent collaborator with lesson planning leaving Cynthia to make extemporaneous modifications for her students.

There were other instances where she prepared for the day's lessons to find that her partner later changed the plan without including her in the decision-making process. The persistent frustration working in this atmosphere reached a tipping point when she felt like her co-teaching partner crossed a professional boundary and spoke disrespectfully to her in front of the students. "[It] was really frustrating to me. I approached her one time because I got upset, cutting me off in front of the

135

students…umm, no respect, talking down to me like I was a student and it was partly my fault because I let it happen instead of saying something but when I did approach her about cutting me off she was looking at me like this is the rules of the classroom whether you like it or you don't… Basically those weren't her exact words but you know if you don't like [it] then we'll have to see who we can talk to so we can get changed."

The hardest part about talking to Cynthia about her challenges struggles was also hearing how unhappy she sounded in teaching. It seemed as though she was having a rough time despite her attempts to be strong and, otherwise, positive. She offered a glimpse into the painful side of the first year teaching experience. There were moments when she communicated not feeling supported by colleagues or administrators, and thought peers in similar situations are thriving by comparison. "[My peers] seem to have a really good year…They didn't go through changes like I did you know and, I don't know because we're different people so they might (pause)… If they were to go through the changes like they would have gone through they might have taken it differently, you know. Barbara is more straightforward from the top so, you know, maybe, I don't know…it would have been different for her. Maybe she wouldn't have seen it like I did."

Ultimately, she believed that a person's success depends on the person and the context, but even as she was saying this, it seemed as though she was seeing that there was something about her context that was somewhat toxic. She spoke about recognizing that it takes a team and the importance of being a team member when she trails off and changes course. Sounding frustrated, she finally says in the final interview, that she recognizes that she doesn't have many good things to say about her experience compared to peers. "I don't feel like I have anything good to say whereas they always have

constantly good things to say; it seems like they really had a good year." Interestingly, I wonder if the others had an experience that was that appreciably better than Cynthia or if she was simply more transparent. At its worst, she sounded despondent, as though she was considering walking away. "It was very stressful. I mean it got to the point where I felt like I didn't belong in the teaching profession." In times like this, she was able to lean on her peers for support.

Cynthia had lots of support from her peers (friends/cohort members from her university preservice teacher program) and from university faculty, but did not feel particularly supported in her school. In the first interview she commented, "Like I said earlier, it's hard to find someone that I can really relate to. Um, there are like advisors I talk to a lot, but I guess I want a teacher because we're both in the classroom with the students… I felt [alone or isolated in the school] a lot of times. Yes, I do. You know, I walk around with a smile all the time; they think nothing's wrong. I feel alone a lot of the times. I don't stress it and, you know, I worry about the kids especially. What can I say? I feel alone a lot."

Theme 4: Resources.

"I felt like she did not really have my back…Well, I didn't feel like I had any support, whatsoever…"

-Cynthia

The available resources for the first-year teachers seemed an important aspect of their teaching experience. It is not uncommon for new teachers to participate in some

form of mentorship relationship. In fact, in the beginning, the expectation among the participants placed some faith in their relationships with their mentor teachers. In reality, the relationship between mentor/supervisor and mentee varied greatly. From participant to participant, there were differences in the formality of the relationship, frequency of meetings, and sense of trust that was placed in the other individual. In Cynthia's case, her overall sense of dissatisfaction with her relationship with her mentor was evident early and permeated the entire series of interviews.

Cynthia had a conflict involving her mentor that was so personally significant that it was mentioned in multiple interviews. In this instance, her supervisor and mentor "revealed themselves" to be unsympathetic" and "unhelpful" to her when she needed guidance and direction. Feeling disappointed in them, the lesson for her was more about finding better ways to manage situations on her own instead of recognizing how she might continue to collaborate with these two individuals.

The crux of this situation, described in the second interview, involved the need for clarification on her role within the co-teaching context in her classroom. She attended a training seminar on the teaching model before the school year started and attempted to implement it alongside her peer teacher. Unfortunately, her colleague was unable to go to the same training. Consequently, when Cynthia attempted to perform the tasks as she had been instructed in the training, her colleague thought that she was overstepping her bounds and snapped at her in front of the students. Speaking with this colleague after class about the coarse response, the other teacher replied, "Well, then, if you have a problem with it then we need to look and see who we need to talk to so you can go to another classroom." Confused, Cynthia sought clarification from the ESE Specialist but

found the answer unhelpful and unsatisfactory, "[The ESE specialist] seemed bothered by it, she said, 'I can't believe she would say that. Well, I am going to talk to her,' and they talked. But when she came back, I felt like she did not really have my back… Well, I didn't feel like I had any support whatsoever. Instead of telling her, well, you two have to play a role, [Cynthia] went to the FUSE training and in the training this is what goes on, she just came back to me and said, 'Well, she is a content teacher…' So now the kids are now seeing me not as a main teacher in the class."

After this incident, she sought further clarity on the situation. She attempted to confide in her mentor but she didn't want her to tell the ESE teacher that she was talking about the experience. This ultimately was a bad experience too, "I can't remember how she said it, but the point is she told the person I told her not to tell and that person, instead of coming to me, went and told the teacher I had a problem with her." In a situation where she expected her mentor teacher to be a confidante and source of wisdom and support, instead she found her to be untrustworthy.

The description she offered of the relationship with her mentor is instructive. When asked, she didn't actually feel like she had a positive supportive relationship with a mentor. Consequently, there was no one in a position to offer wisdom and support her during the difficult times during the semester. In our second interview, I asked specifically about the relationship with her mentor. Her pointed reply spoke volumes about the way she felt, "There's no, like, relationship. I just know she's my mentor… So, it's not so much that I have a relationship with her, it's more that I respect her." She describes the frequency of their meetings as "sporadic" and mainly helpful for IEPs. From her description, it doesn't sound like the relationship with her mentor is particularly

satisfying, "So sometimes [our interactions are] just like walking by, we'll talk about something real quick and it's like, okay, so it's not often. It just, you know, it just takes me to go and have a conversation and we'll talk about school stuff then she'll mark it as time."

It seemed that her greatest support came from peers who were also beginning their careers as teachers. The cohort experience that created a community of learners in the teacher preparation program extended beyond the university environment and into the professional sphere. In the absence of dependable building-level mentorship and edifying collegial relationships, Cynthia found that she could relied on the resources that she had during her teacher preparation program for support, sympathy, or advice. In our third interview, I asked her specifically about where she turns for support and answers to questions. She answered, "I talked to [one of her professors]. I [also] talked to my [friends who are also teaching] so that they can look at the situation…They'll help me and they'll give me advice, you know what I'm saying?" Her peers were especially helpful in the hardest days when frustrations of the job took their toll and she was reconsidering the profession.

Perhaps the resource that served Cynthia best was the training that she had prior to starting the year. Reflecting on her beliefs about responsibility and teaching, she credits her teacher preparation program for developing her skills and cultivating her value for helping people. "It was my passion because I cared about humans wanting to succeed to I know deep inside it comes from deep inside of me and just, you know, university and college experience too kind of brought it to that surface like yeah! You know this is what teaching is about and this is how it should be. It was my college experience it's UEP

definitely. Because, um, I felt like in UEP I knew certain things already coming into the program. I'm like yeah I know that but I learned a lot more than I thought I had…" She describes the program as "enlightening" and being just "what [she] was looking for and more."

Theme 5: Culture in the class.

"…I do want more and I do think about [it]…I always think about how I want to bring [culture] in the classroom…"

-Cynthia

In this section, I discuss how the theme of diversity was represented in our conversations. In the interviews, Cynthia discussed the overall climate of race relations in her school, how she tried to implement culturally responsive pedagogy in her classroom, and some of the barriers she encountered as she attempted to translate her personal value for cultural difference into a pedagogical reality.

To understand Cynthia's experiences of diversity in her school and in her classrooms, it is first helpful to understand the climate of her school. Cynthia describes her school as diverse. However, the relationships between racial and ethnic groups sounded somewhat contentious. In the first interview she said, "I see a lot of negativity. There's a lot of Latino kids and [it's] Mexican against Cubans, and Cubans and Puerto Ricans against Mexicans, things like that. And then, you know, I don't see anyone doing anything about it, and I think the teachers [feel] the same way. You know where you going to the meetings [and] you see the groups, the cliques…I have heard, you know,

what other teachers, comments that other teachers have made, and, um, just different things like, just no love." This feeling of concern for her fellow teachers' level of cultural competence was echoed later in our third interview. She expressed some concern that the students appeared to be more culturally aware and tolerant than the teachers. When I asked her the degree to which diversity influenced learning, she interjected, "I think it really matters and I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off because when you asked me (pause) it really matters. [In] my school, the kids are really diverse, you know, and they integrate more than the teachers do because the teachers don't…[and] the kids can tell you know."

For her part, it sounds as though she has tried to embrace opportunities to bring cultural competence and an appreciation for diversity to her classroom. Whether this came as a direct result of her preparation or her personal values is hard to parse. She provided instances where she tried to communicate these values to her students. Examples of her attempt to demonstrate cultural competence in her teaching can be seen in both her formal teaching methods and the way she tried to capitalize on the teachable moments with her students.

In our third interview, she related a story of addressing students who were making fun of others' cultural differences. Instead of simply ignoring the comments or talking about being nice and not making fun of others, she took an opportunity to bring to their awareness cultural differences and the importance of respect." In this example, she shares, "I had to stop one child one time when I mentioned something about Africa and then they started talking in a supposed African language, you know, one of the kids was Latino—he was Mexican. I said, 'Do you like it when people go around saying (makes a

bunch of noises) like they're talking Spanish? Do you like it?' He was like, 'No.' I said, 'You don't do that; that's not the way they speak in Africa. So if you don't like it, you don't do it.' Of course, they're ignorant. They are young and they just hear the negativity that is around them… They start saying things about Latinos and then you go and do it to another culture." She believed that taking advantage of these opportunities was critical to the students' cultural competence development—a worthy goal even though it falls outside of the parameters of the curriculum. "They really need those experiences, you know. They really need them, I think. It's just how do you take them (pause) how do you take them through that…I'm just trying to see how I can take my kids to that extreme."

She also described multiple attempts to integrate conversations of diversity and cultural differences in her teaching. In the first interview, she reported attempts to "talk about culture in the beginning" of the year. In addition to conversations about culture, she also tried to integrate it into creative writing. This was a great attempt to implement culturally responsive pedagogy but, as she describes it, not without challenges. "I wanted to do [infuse diversity into] creative writing. That's where I really got stuck because, you know, with FCAT coming and the FCAT Writes and all the writing that we have to do, I was trying to do creative writing. Through creative writing, [I bring] culture into the classroom and do poetry. I started off with poetry and the 'I am…" poems and it brought a lot of that out. But like I said, I got stuck and I wasn't sure where to take them, what to do because I really wanted to do a lot of creative writing." To facilitate conversations about diversity and create a climate of cultural understanding…to help students get to know one another, she created an activity to serve this purpose. "I did a culture share where they like had to share their culture." In addition to attempts to integrate it into the

143

creative writing, she also tried to do things for Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month.

She also expressed frustration at some perceived barriers to doing as much as she wanted with diversity in her first year. One of the biggest barriers to implementing culturally responsive pedagogy, according to Cynthia, is the lack of time. She had a challenging year with moves and the machinations of the new teacher role. Finding ways to do the "extras" like special projects incorporated in diversity required time that she didn't feel like she had. In addition, she also had to work within a co-teach context with partners who did not sound amenable to her ideas of expanding the curriculum to include diversity. In one example from the first interview, she recounts having an idea to which her co-teacher responded, "…we really don't have time. It would be good because we need it but we didn't do it because we're not going to have any time. There's no time with some of the things that were going on…"

Another barrier that she feels impeded her ability to function as she wanted was the relative instability that she experienced because of the persistent moves. Cynthia expressed a feeling of never really being settled in a classroom. She could not make a space her own in a genuine way. And ideas that she had about decorations and making her space comfortable, inviting, and inclusive went unrealized. This unfulfilled wish was expressed powerfully in the first interview. She said, "There's not a day that I would think about how the class started and what I wanted it to be like where I brought in that spirituality of, you know, diversity and culture and, um, just culture in the sense of, not just where you're from but, um, or what you eat, but in the sense of who you are and what you know, music and everything. I wanted to bring that into the classroom." Not

having the opportunity to personalize the classroom has been a disappointment, especially because it was a value that was important. In fact, she said, "It's not there, so yeah, it bothers me because I'm still like trying to find that, you know?" Despite not having the space and opportunity to do this work, she remains persistently desirous of finding ways to realize this vision, in spite of the frustrating circumstance that blocked her progress.

Finally, Cynthia describes the pressures surrounding the FCAT as a barrier to doing all that she wanted with culture and diversity in her teaching. Pressures expressed related to teaching toward the test and feeling constrained by the stakes of standardized state tests is not new. However, it is important to see how this is communicated in the experience of a new teacher. Cynthia expressed in her interviews the pressures she's felt to stay on track and move through the prescribed curriculum without substantive detours to include other topics or material. The pressures to perform well on FCAT compromised not only what she was able to do, but Cynthia believed that it has had an effect on the degree to which the school has seen it as a viable, worthwhile thing to do. The efforts that were made school-wide were cursory inclusions and viewed as "better than nothing at all." In our second interview, we discussed the school's cultural environment when she gave me a sense of how FCAT has influenced the climate of the school. Cynthia reported, "I haven't done as many projects as I wanted to do with them. Number one, with FCAT, we haven't really celebrated [in] school period except for the media specialist with the morning announcements celebrating people and differences things like that. We haven't done much."

Participant D: "Debbie"

Overview and participant introduction. The final participant in the study is a young woman whom I will call Debbie. Debbie is an African-American woman in her early-to-mid 20s who is teaching at an urban elementary charter school. Dubois Charter Elementary School is located in a densely populated urban center in central Florida. This small Title I school serves K-5 grade students many of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch. Dubois Elementary Charter School's student population is primarily African-American (94%) with only a small proportion of students from Latino (3%) or White (2%) backgrounds. At the time of the study, the school was experiencing a transition of administrative leadership and challenges with their performance on the state-wide assessment. As is common in many schools in the era of No Child Left Behind, difficulty producing satisfactory scores on the state-wide assessment produces ramifications that ripple through the school. This chain reaction reverberates from upper level administration, through the teachers, and, finally, influencing the educational experiences of the students. In this instance, the change in school leadership was the first major event to occur for Debbie.

Dr. McHatton and I conducted the first interview with Debbie together and I conducted the final two independently. As a young Black woman who was raised in a similar community, Debbie expressed an affinity for this population. The relationship with this community is especially deep because, as she expressed, she was "one of them". She saw herself reflected in the kids who walked through her door. Stretching beyond the sole role of educator, Debbie sees her calling and responsibility with her students as

something more. It seemed that Debbie took the role of teacher as fictive kin. She thinks of herself as, not only teacher, but "Auntie".

This self-designation of Auntie might be particularly illuminating. Newman and Grauerholz (2002), in the *Sociology of Families*, describe fictive kin as "people other than legal or biological relatives [who] play the family's role in providing for the emotional and other needs of its members" (p. 12). These community members are often respected and valued for their willingness to provide "companionship, emotional support, and practical assistance" (p. 12). Historically, the Black community has embraced a rich tradition of cultivating fictive kin relationships. Carol Stack's (1974) seminal piece, All Our Kin, provided a rich ethnographic examination of the range of family relationships. The kinship ties, formal and otherwise, united a community around values of social obligation, collective responsibility, and group loyalty. This functional family configuration transcends "legal definitions" of family to penetrate to the hear of what relationships mean within a very particular cultural context.

. The "auntie" holds the privileged position of being not only an authority but also a beloved figure. In the course of the interviews, Debbie seemed to perceive herself embodying this role with her students. Her goals for her students included, not only the academic skills that are necessary parts of the curriculum, but a personal focus on character, emotional, and affective development. In fact, there were times when it appeared that the personal and affective aspects of teaching held more salience for her than the academic aspects.

Theme 1: Relationships with students.

"Every time they come in, they have to give me a hug and, just, I guess they just love my company.. [I] just know that they do care and I think that they're glad that I'm their teacher."

-Debbie

One of the biggest themes to emerge from the interviews with Debbie was the importance of her relationship with her students. Her relationship with her students seemed to provide personal and professional affirmation. Describing her personal investment in her teaching, she reported spending a great deal of time at the school and committing her personal resources to the job. She took on extra responsibilities helping her colleagues prepare for the State Standardized Test because, as she put it in the second interview, "I'm here always until 6 pm; I don't have anything else to do. I stay here every day until about 6 o'clock because if I go home, I'm bored." "Going the extra mile" for her students and colleagues seemed to be a value that she brought to the job that made it gratifying for her. In addition to her regular teaching load, she also described helping with test preparation, an honor roll celebration, coaching a step team, and assisting with a graduation ceremony. For the most part, each of these sounded like tasks that she willingly took on without feeling pressured to participate, as long as it created a positive experience for the students.

In her classroom, the relationships with students also seemed to serve a validating function. As a kindergarten teacher, she describes having an affection and affinity for

younger children. This attraction comes from what she perceives as the "lovable," cooperative nature of "little kids". She explained, "I don't know, I just like the little kids. They don't really give that much attitude. [They're] lovable and, I mean, they do listen—some of them might not—most all my kids listen. I never had really any problems… Like if I give out gifts or if I give out anything, they appreciate it. Like with the older kids, it's hard to. I mean the older kids appreciate stuff because it's like you [are] paying for it and some them [will] just be like, 'Well, I don't want this.' Little kids, you can buy them a little bit and [they appreciate it]."

Because of her willingness to go the "extra mile" and "buy gifts" for her students, she expressed being hurt when one of her young students failed to respond happily to a gift. Her overall response to this situation suggests that she experienced his behavior as a personal slight. In this situation communicate in the second interview, one of her little boys looked sad and she was trying to figure out the reason while also cheering him up. After probing multiple times, she became frustrated that he couldn't see how good he had it with her as his teacher. She recounted the story, "I was like, 'Did you miss me while I was gone" and he said, 'No'… I said, 'Were you happy you went to the treasure box' and he said, 'No, I was sad.' He was supposed to go to another school and I said, 'You know, if you go to another school your teacher may not be like that, you know what I'm saying. All this stuff that I do is for you, not me.' I say, 'The stuff that I buy is for you' and I told him, 'If you feel like you don't want to be here, please let your parents know and please don't get upset if the kids that want to learn and want to be here get attention from me and you don't. Because my thing is, I'm dishing out all this stuff to you and you don't care about me and you don't care that…you know you still have this sad image then why

should I be going out of my way?" Feeling unappreciated in this way and then feeling so personally slighted suggested that, in this moment, the feeling of care was not being reciprocated.

This sense of teacher personal involvement was communicated by the way she figuratively positioned herself as an unofficial family member. In the interviews, Debbie referred to herself as being like an "auntie" or "parent" figure as well as their teacher. Asking how she experiences herself as a teacher, she replied, "I don't have any kids or anything like that but just having the responsibility of (pause) when every kid has to be accounted for and being that parent [figure]." In addition to the academic aspect of teaching, the affective relationship with the students seemed especially meaningful. She told the following story during the first interview. "I have a lot of boys in my class and they're not at that sensitive stage and I'm like, 'Give me a hug' and they're like, 'No!' I'm just making sure I'm there for them asking how their day is going, what do they like to do, or they love to tell me. [I'm] just giving them that feedback and positive reinforcement that they can do because in the long run it helps their self-esteem."

Although she expressed the importance and benefits of her emphasis on affective and emotional development with her students, it also seemed that this relationship served a personal purpose for her. In the second interview she reported, "Every time they come in, they have to give me a hug and, just, I guess they just love my company. One little boy, he'll sit next [to me], he'll stand right there for about ten minutes in the morning time and then he'll give me a hug and I'm like, 'Okay, go back to your seat' and he'll be like, 'No.' I'm like, 'Okay'. So just knowing that they do care and I think that they're glad that I'm their teacher." Feeling like the students like her, care for her, and appreciate

her was a strong defining experience of her first-year teaching experience. It is not simply a matter of the students being glad. There also seemed to be a need to feel that they were glad as well. This intersection powerfully illustrated the value placed on the relationship.

Theme 2: Experiences of diversity in school and classroom.

"My background is the same background as some of the kids. If they mama don't play, I'm not gonna play and they give me the same respect as their parent."

-Debbie

The role of diversity in her first-year teaching experience was very interesting for a number of reasons. Debbie was a member of the UEP and had exposure to critical conversations concerning racial and cultural differences, yet her understanding of the influence of these factors in teaching and learning manifested in inconsistent ways. An example of this came in our conversation about the definition of diversity in our first meeting. As a means of shifting the conversation to the inclusion of diversity in her teaching, she was asked about her personal definition of diversity. Maybe the question was too broad and confused her with the wide range of possible answers, nonetheless, her reply was interesting, if not puzzling. She replied, "Hmm, just using different angles. It's like…(long pause). Definition of diversity…umm…a variety of things…it could be different items, different food, it could be not just with color or sexual preference…so, I mean it's just like having a variety of things. That depends on what diversity you're talking about. If you're talking about a diversity of food, then it would be the different

kinds of food or the different colors. If you're talking about diversity of activities, inside, outside…so diversity is very, very, very broad."

The extremely broad personal construction of diversity continued into her initial description of how one might see diversity at work in her classroom. "I make sure kids use different colors to express…like one time we were talking about feelings—our last thing was on colors. So I asked, 'What color comes to mind when you're feeling sad? What color comes to your mind when you're feeling happy?' So they know that most of the time, a lot of people use the color yellow or somewhat blue or bright color. Right now, we're just focusing on the colors. Right now, also it's with the music because it's different kinds of music and sometimes I use some of the disco that I have or the little slow song or I have on the TV, different kinds of genres. So that's somewhat a different kind of diversity to their age because they know you have country, rock n roll, rap and they get use to it." It was initially difficult to tell if she was misunderstanding the type of question being asked or if, in her way of thinking, the only types of diversity relevant for her kindergarten students were in the pragmatics of understanding "variety" (i.e., varieties of music genres, colors, etc.).

In our later conversations regarding diversity, she demonstrated a more conventional understanding. She described reading books to her students that featured individuals from diverse backgrounds. "When I read books it talks about different kinds of diversity. Some books are books about the Black family and we started today talking about 'We are Family.' So we'll talk about Spanish names for family and mommy and just doing different things like that…" Among her practices that could be more conventionally associated with culturally responsive pedagogy, Debbie's class

152

participated in her school's International Day Celebration. For International Day, each class chose a different country and integrated lessons about their selected country into the curriculum. In the third interview, she described multiple ways of bringing her country, Honduras, into the curriculum. "Our country was Honduras so we incorporated that. I had books. I had brought some plants in…I had certain students talk about the Spanish they speak, some of the stuff that they eat like corn and plantains. I had my kids draw flags or paint flags and we put them along over the wall. And then when [the other students] came in, we [played] a Honduras CD with a bunch of songs on it…" This was a part of a school-wide initiative to widen students' understandings of cultures outside of the immediate US context. Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, and Jamaica were described among the countries studied for this project that culminated in a multi-class "tour" of various countries.

From her description of the event, it sounded like the value for cultural diversity was part of the school culture and supported by the administrators and other teachers. For her, culture is "everywhere" in her school. "The art teacher loves putting up different themes, especially African-American themes… During Halloween, she had some art that, I guess, the older kids did like an African quilt. She displays that and not like where it's just like one month. Doing the Japanese, we seen it's a dragon right here on the wall. It's a dragon that the third graders did. So she loves putting up different themes."

While Debbie seemed inconsistent in her articulation of culturally responsive pedagogy in her classroom, she was particularly attuned to the children's cultural background and how it may influence their educational experiences. In our first interview, she considered the ways in which her cultural characteristics may intersect

with her students' cultural experiences. Recognizing the similarities that she believed that she shares with the students, she believed that she was uniquely situated to respond to their needs. "I feel that I'm not [exactly] like their parent, but I know what their mom expects from them and don't… My background is the same background as some of the kids. If they mama don't play, I'm not gonna play and they give me the same respect as their parent." She describes her students as "mainly all Black" with one Latino student and one biracial girl. As kindergarteners who are just being socialized to the routine and norms of school, she feels that part of her charge is to help in this socialization process. Part of this responsibility is helping them to understand the norms and mediate the sometimes inappropriate things that they say especially as it relates to repeating music lyrics, "Sometimes they tend to [listen to] whatever music is playing nowadays to say it in class. I have to tell them, 'We don't use that kind of language in class.'"

This connection to her students' cultural background extends to her interactions with parents and their trust in her to discipline their children. "The parents are fine and we communicate and it's funny because they were like, 'If my child gets out of hand, you can whoop them.' And I was like, 'I can't do that,' (laughing) 'I'll call you and you can come up here if you want to. I'll inform you.' It's so funny because a lot of them was like, 'My child knows better so they're going to give you the same respect that they give me and nothing less and, if [not], you can call me or you can hit 'em. I was like, 'I'll call you.'"

Despite feeling a cultural connection to her students, she said that there were also moments when she was surprised by her students' life circumstances. She recalled in the second interview, "It was a culture shock for me within my own culture dealing within

my own culture [and] seeing what my kids had to go through. I guess I've never gone through the things that they've been through, so just knowing that you can't always be hard on a kid because they've been going through some home issues…" She expressed awe at the students' resilience given their circumstances and things that they're exposed to daily. Some of her students have been a part of some pretty harrowing situations that influenced their educational experiences. In these situations, Debbie had to mature fast as a beginning teacher. She explained how she, in a short time, learned more about each of her students' background and now made different decisions because of her knowledge of their situations. While this "culture shock" caught her by surprise, she felt that her decisions led her to adjust her expectations toward a more empathetic place. She felt that making adjustments such as these were consistent with the values that she was taught through her experiences in UEP.

Theme 3: Experiences of supports, mentorship, and resources.

"The mentors I do have [are] more of an indirect mentor..."

-Debbie

Another important aspect of Debbie's first-year teaching experience was her experience of supports, mentorship, and resources at her school. Debbie described the new teacher induction program as an informal structure that provided support as needed. She experienced this as a system that could be tapped for a wide range of purposes. In her first year, she sought support from her school's network of mentors (including colleagues

and administrators) to advise her on issues topics as varied as "help with guided reading" to calming her down when she had "first day jitters".

When asked about the available supports, she expressed a generalized comfort going to her colleagues for assistance without the fear of judgment or "a nasty response". Part of this comfort and readiness to help might be the result of their recent development of "learning communities" in the school. The "learning communities" model was the school's attempt to cultivate collaboration among the teachers. When in doubt, she believed that she could "continue to ask [questions] or have them give suggestions." Because the learning community and the increased emphasis on collaboration coincided with her arrival, Debbie described the support network as "semi-established," though she is still required her to "feel things out" to know exactly who to go to for certain things. After a change of leadership on her team—the previous leader "made everybody feel uncomfortable because she never asked anybody anything and she seemed a little bit too busy [to make time for questions]"—the team has functioned better within a "more open atmosphere". The new leader was described as a resource who is "more accessible" and who "wouldn't have a problem if you asked her a question at any time." Being able to count on colleagues for support was described as one of the most "valuable resources" that she had accessed during the first year.

She described the administration at her school as supportive and providing guidance, support, and direction. Debbie described her assistant principal as particularly supportive. He was credited with creating more of a "family type" of atmosphere among the teachers and has an "open door policy". Consequently, she felt comfortable "going to him about anything". During the year, she sought his support for lesson plans, feeling

156

free to call multiple times during the day and even into the evening. One of the best examples of her reaching out to her administrators for guidance and support came in a story from the beginning of the school year. The anxiety related to beginning her teaching career was particularly high and she needed a calming, reassuring voice. She stated that her administrators can be called, "[if] I have a situation going on or if I'm nervous because I called him at 10 o'clock on my first night and he was laughing at me" but brought provided her with the needed support. Getting through that situation helped her trust that they would be there to support her throughout the year.

Though she felt comfortable accessing the wisdom and support of her peers and administrators, there were resources that she believed to be missing. Discussing resources and mentorship in the early interviews, Debbie felt that she had everything that she needed. This changed in later discussions. In a subsequent interview, she mentioned a lack of physical resources. During the year, Debbie said that she bought numerous things for her students. Among the purchases, she bought books, gifts, and supplies for her room. While this seemed significant to Debbie, purchases such as these may not be that uncommon for teachers. For multiple reasons, teachers often end up spending their own money for their classrooms.

The biggest support that she believed to be missing from her experience related to the presence of opportunities for further training. Debbie stated that she could use more "information about more teacher trainings." When she compared her experiences to peers who taught in other places, it seemed that others had more access to professional development. She credited her friend who taught elsewhere for keeping her abreast of resources that she missed. Recognizing there is still much to learn about teaching, she

was open to continued professional development. "These things are always helpful. [I'm up for] anything that's going to better me [and] help me with my kids…" She mentioned a particular interest in professional development related to "behavior [management], motivation, and reading strategies."

Theme 4: Experiences of stress and anxiety.

"At the beginning—the very beginning—I was so nervous! I called my Assistant Principal at 11 o'clock that night the day before school started. I was like, I don't know what I'm going to do because I had nothing planned for the first day of school."

-Debbie

Debbie experienced many of the frustrations, stresses, and anxieties that one might expect from any individual beginning a new career. Debbie described moments of frustration as she tried to work with new colleagues on projects and the challenges that come with from learning a new job in a new place. Despite having a very positive attitude and emphasizing the importance of being "flexible", Debbie's experience of managing the stresses and anxieties marked her first-year teaching experience. Through the series of interviews, she described multiple instances where this value for being flexible was put to the test.

One of the best examples of Debbie managing stress and anxiety came from her description of the "beginning teacher jitters" she felt prepared for the first day on the job. Reflecting on the entire experience in the final interview, she recalled, "At the

beginning—the very beginning—I was so nervous! I called my Assistant Principal at 11 o'clock that night the day before school started. I was like, I don't know what I'm going to do because I had nothing planned for the first day of school. The day before I got there I was trying to put stuff on the walls, make my centers, stuff like that. And then when I was going to print out everything for the parents, the ink ran out and I was like, 'Uh-oh.' I was nervous. I was like, I cannot believe this. I was like, 'I aint had nothing planned for the first day of school.'" She ultimately had to scramble and get ideas from one of "those books that dealt with the first day of school."

Overall, Debbie said that she took an "expect the unexpected" approach to the first year, bracing herself for anything. This might have helped her as shortly after the year began she found herself having to adapt to unexpected changes. "When I first was there, I was in a small—I had two little rooms—a room where the library was and then the art room. I was in those two rooms because in the beginning they said I was going to have nine students then I had more than that. Then—what was it like two weeks—two weeks within school I had [another room]." Beginning the year, she was under the impression that she would have nine students in her class; ultimately she ended up with "19 or 18" students. Adapting to the changes in students and classroom circumstances foreshadowed greater changes that would occur in the school.

The biggest adjustment came when there was a significant change in administrative leadership. In our second interview, Debbie described the impact of this change. "We've gone through a lot of changes. We switched principals. Our principal was let go and our assistant principal became our principal; so there has been a lot of changes [since] the beginning of the year. It was really comfortable at the beginning. I

don't think it was too (pause). I was stressed at the beginning—the very, very beginning but after awhile I got used to it… Now we're always getting looked upon. You have to continue to keep up with things and stay on task [with] so many changes." The change in leadership reportedly occurred because of continued poor performance on standardized tests and the need for a new direction in the school.

Part of this new direction is the presence of district officials having a more looming presence in the school. Classroom observations are a part of most teachers' experiences, but classroom observations by District personnel may add a different level of pressure. Debbie fluctuated on how much stress she actually experienced as we talked about it. A few minutes before, she described stress related to changes and being observed. Later, she said that it was not stressful, but being observed added a layer of things to consider while teaching. "It wasn't stressful but now we're just getting looked upon because I guess the principal wasn't doing everything he was supposed to do. So now we have a lot of our District people coming in and observing and the principal—the old principal—he would come in but I guess he wouldn't really write anything or he would just look and see and then leave my assistant principal, he would do like observations or checklists—just a general one—but now they have a format that they have to go by and he's in a classroom more looking at what we're supposed to be doing and staying on target. [He was] basically making sure that we have everything in our class that we're supposed to have like a Word Wall because some people had it up there but they wasn't using it. So we had to make sure [because] we had a lady coming down from district and she went up and see how you was doing and then a lady [came to] see

how the program is going in the classroom and making sure your classroom is effective and stuff like that."

District pressure to improve performance in the classroom also manifested in pressure to perform better on the state standardized test. As a kindergarten teacher, she did not experience the pressure directly but, as part of a larger community, she gladly pitched in to support the school-wide effort to improve the scores. In January, she and some of the other teachers were asked to do extra work with the other grades to prepare for testing. Some of the other teachers declined "because it's like there's really no money" in it or they already had after-school commitments. Although happy to help, she experienced many frustrations related to colleagues who were organized and the lack of required resources; a theme that permeated her experience in the school.

Theme 5: Experiencing the first year and various lessons learned.

"…a lot time people get stressed out their first year but this is fun to me. Me, being the person that I am where I'm very flexible, open-minded, and very helpful…"

-Debbie

This was one of the hardest sections to write because Debbie was somewhat inconsistent in her discussion of this aspect of her experience. Although coding her transcripts showed evidence of her talking about the first-year experience, she did not delve into this reflection as directly as the other informants. Despite this difficulty, there are fractured elements from our conversation that offer insight into her expectations for

161

the first year, the evolution that she experienced as a new teacher, and the future directions she hoped to pursue in the following year.

Debbie stated that she managed expectations in the beginning of the year. In fact, it almost sounds like she set the proverbial bar low so that she would not be blindsided by the challenges when, not if, they arrived. In our second interview, her response provided an important window into how she mentally prepared herself for the year. In our mid-year interview, Debbie said, "I think I just still feel the same way about things [as before]. I had that mindset coming in that it's going to be hard. I guess if I say, 'It's going to be hard and it's not [I won't be disappointed if it's easier],' you know what I'm saying? Then if I say, 'This is going to going to be a wonderful year, I'm [not] going to have any problems,' that's not going to work at all… [I was] just setting myself up for the unexpected." With this as her guiding expectation for the year, it should have been unsurprising to hear her basically answer subsequent questions concerning the congruence between her expectations and experience as being "the same."

In our second interview, I was interested in the evolution that she experienced in her teaching since the beginning of the year. Again, her response to the question, while indirect, offered another glimpse into who she is as a teacher and how this particular character contributes to how she experiences teaching. In response to the question of her evolution she replied, "Um, more organized, um, again flexible and just mainly, like having fun. Like a lot time people get stressed out their first year but this is fun to me. Me, being the person that I am where I'm very flexible, open-minded, and very helpful…" While not directly answering the question, it seemed that her experience of herself as "flexible, open-minded, and very helpful" situates her such that she simply

adapts to new situations to the degree that she does not explicitly experience herself evolving.

After probing for further clarity, she mentioned recognizing the need to become more organized "after losing papers." "I would have my aide run off some copies of some worksheets and then I would lose like a whole bunch of them. I was like, 'Ugh!' I bought some racks, like little things I can put on the desk so I could make it organized because, like, she had made like 20 copies of each for like 4 days and I lost all of them and I couldn't tell you where they was. I was like, 'Okay, I need to get organized' and then I was getting ideas from other teachers and then just using them in my own little way." Overall, it took a few months to get comfortable with her organization system. "It took like about maybe actually 3 months: August, September, October to finally get everything in order and then making it where I'm not getting stressed out and doing too much and having my aide just not chilling or anything but just me doing all the work." In this section, talking about getting organized, she also reveals learning how to best utilize her aide so that "she won't be stressed out and looking like I'm going around here with my head chopped off." This also led to a discussion of her having to learn how to establish a dependable routine so that she could manage her time better "because even during my final internship I had problems with that."

In our final interview, I asked her to reflect on the entire experience and tell me what she might change if she had it all to do over again. This question, like so many others, gave me a look at the things that she experienced as either going well or needing work. Debbie recognized that there were things that she can do in her classroom to provide an overall better learning experience for her students. Among the changes, she

believed that she could be better at assessment. During the year, she found "a checklist of what kindergarteners should know" and believes that she could do better with her students if she were to assess more frequently.

Concluding Impressions

Each case study featured in chapter four highlighted characteristics of the first-year teaching experience according to teachers' descriptions and my analysis of our interviews. Despite individual differences in their specific experiences, data analysis offers the opportunity to distill the "invariant constituents"—or "essence"—of the phenomenon consistent with this research method. Table 2 provides the reader with an overview of the shared themes gleaned from the participants' narratives. Reviewing the results in this manner provides readers with a snapshot of the common experiences that seem to transcend the particulars of their individual experience. The table provides a heuristic to help orient the reader to primary and secondary themes communicated by each participant. In the table, a capital "X" denotes a theme that was frequently communicated in the participants' narratives. These themes will be considered to be a primary emphasis of the participant's experience. A lowercase "x" denotes a theme that was present in the narrative—albeit not communicated as intensely as those labeled a primary emphasis. These will be labeled secondary emphases. It should be noted that each of these themes was expressed by every participant but in different ways.

Table 2: Table of Themes from Participants' Experiences

	Participant 1: Audrey	Participant 2: Barbara	Participant 3: Cynthia	Participant 4: Debbie
Theme 1: Importance of Relationships with Students	X	X	X	X
Theme 2: Influence of Mentorship and Support	X	X	X	X
Theme 3: Value of Lessons Learned during the Experience	X	X	X	X
Theme 4: Influence of the Preparation Experience	X	X	x	x
Theme 5: Experiences of Stress and Anxiety	x	x	X	X
Theme 6: Experiences of Diversity in School and Classroom	X	X	X	X

Key

Primary Emphasis = X
Secondary Emphasis = x

Looking across their experiences, there were four first-year teaching related themes that were primarily experienced by all participants: importance of relationships with students, influence of mentorship and support, the value of lessons learned through experience, and experiences of diversity in school and classroom. First, each participant discussed the importance of their relationships with students. This may actually be the least surprising finding. It should be little surprise to see that the teachers place high value on their interactions with students. The participants collectively reported experiencing a great sense of personal and professional satisfaction from their relationships with their students. The relationships with students pushed them to clarify their roles, philosophies, and constructions of "self-as-teacher". In the latter case, in particular, the new teachers were challenged by their students to negotiate the "friend/teacher" dynamic and find the authentic, authoritative voice that is typically associated with this professional role.

The new teachers also, unsurprisingly, found great personal affirmation from the relationships with their students. At times, the students were a source of frustration; at other times, the students became a focal point that made the frustrations worth it. For these participants, students were a sustaining and nourishing force in their experience. This nourishment was expressed through affection (i.e., a hug or a kind word) or a positive appraisal of their teaching (i.e., having a sense that students appreciated their efforts and were "happy to have [them] as their teacher"). In all of its various manifestations, it seems that the relationships with students were a valued part of the first-year experience.

Next, each of the participants discussed the relative value of mentorship and support. The actual *experiences* of support and mentorship differed across participants, but it was still experienced as significant in its presence or absence. The formality of the mentorship structure varied along a continuum from very formal, school-coordinated, first-year teacher mentorship programs, to informal, loosely-structured relationships. In the former, there were regular meetings and opportunities to ease the transition into the field. Participants who had steady, predictable relationships with supportive mentors expressed a more positive, satisfying experience. They were able to adjust to the job knowing that there was a support structure that could assist when needed.

Participants who experienced an absence of this support structure expressed more frustration and dissatisfaction with their first year. Simply knowing that "someone was there for them if they needed it" was not experienced as the support that was most needed. One participant expressed feeling as though "no one had her back". In this case, she experienced little trust or faith in the designated mentor's ability or desire to help. For the participants in this study, individuals who could have benefited from greater structured support seemed to get the least. Overall, one might infer that first-year teachers who experience their school's mentorship and support structure as helpful tend to have more positive experiences.

In addition, it appears that the first year of teaching offers many opportunities for "lessons learned" if individuals are open to reflecting on their experiences. It should be acknowledged that the context of the research study presented the participants with opportunities to reflect on the experience in ways that may not have occurred naturally. However, participants talked about other instances where they reflected deeply on the

167

job, relationships with students, and their new professional role. Whether discussing challenges with peers or reflecting on the day during the drive home, participants described teaching as a job that "followed [them] home" at the end of the work day. Performing the job well challenged them to commit a great deal of psychological, emotional, and personal resources. The actual lessons learned depended on the context, learning environment, and amount of reflection.

Finally, participants in this study reported various incidents related to their experiences of diversity in their schools and classrooms. First, the conversation about their personal definitions of diversity produced interesting results. Each participant communicated a broad personal working definition of "diversity" with multiple participants emphasizing that "it's not all about race and ethnicity." This brief response provides critical information about their view of the construct. From this establishing question—and similar foundational questions, such as, "If I was a fly on the wall, how might I see diversity at work in your classroom?"—one can better contextualize subsequent comments about culturally responsive pedagogy. For example, Audrey's definition was grounded in the experiential realities of her school. Consequently, I was better able to understand why she chose to de-emphasize issues of racial and ethnic diversity and, instead, communicated a particular sensitivity to the ways in which disability and socioeconomic status influenced her students' educational experiences. This negotiation of personal, philosophical, and pedagogical ideals with the contextual circumstances is important. An individual may have a philosophical or pedagogical position, but the actualization of their beliefs can only be realized within a given context. The participants articulated their beliefs, but they were enacted differently according to

the realities of the setting and the degree to which the setting facilitated, encouraged, or inhibited the implementation of the philosophical ideal. The study showed how four new teachers, from different settings, made attempts to reconcile their beliefs with practice.

Attempts to implement diversity were fairly consistent with what one might expect from new teachers who recently completed a teacher education program. Each participant described attempts to implement culturally responsive pedagogy in their classroom. These efforts included attempts to diversify the physical environment, participate in school-wide diversity celebrations (i.e. Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month), and modify the curriculum to include diverse subjects. The implementation was not always easy, however, as they communicated several obstacles that were encountered. Specifically, the informants reported experiencing challenges in finding: a) the time to "do the extras" associated with culturally responsive pedagogy, b) collaborators who would work with them on projects, and c) ways to reconcile their personal values for diversity with the pressures to adhere to the curriculum that prepared students for the State test at the end of the year.

All things considered, I might offer the following as the essence of the first-year teaching experience: The first-year teaching experience holds a mixture of triumphs and challenges for individuals who make this career choice. A teacher preparation program can benefit in numerous ways, but there are aspects of the experience that will be unforeseen and context-specific—and these additional lessons are learned through experience. School-specific contextual factors that affect the quality of a new teacher's experience may include the climate concerning issues of diversity, stability of the school leadership, consistency in teaching assignment, availability of resources and support, and

presence of support structure. The mere *presence* of a designated mentor does not always translate into the actual *experience* of feeling supported. The active involvement of supportive others may help new teachers negotiate this new professional learning curve. In addition, the school's climate may encourage or inhibit the realization of new teachers' philosophic and pedagogical ideals—especially as it relates to issues of diversity.

Despite the trials and challenges inherent in the job, the interactions with the students can be a source of personal and professional edification. While students have the propensity to also be the source of frustration for the new teacher, at their best, the relationships with students provide teachers with validation, affirmation, and a reminder about their purpose for joining the profession. If they are willing to be patient with themselves and reflect on the long-term development of their new professional role, it is possible for them to keep the wide range of emotions and experiences in perspective.

Chapter 5: Reflections and Implications…

Introduction

This study explored the first-year teaching experiences of a cohort of new teachers. The participants—Audrey, Barbara, Cindy, and Debbie—were recent graduates of the same teacher preparation program. During their time in the program, they all experienced similar academic coursework, experiential requirements, and other teacher preparation components needed to prepare them to work in schools. The participants allowed access to their induction into the profession through a series of in-depth interviews at multiple points throughout their first year. Through this process, I was able to capture their: a.) expectations and initial impressions in the beginning of the year, b.) experiences with the job after a couple months, and c.) reflections on the entire experience.

The participants provided diverse perspectives as their individual experiences represented a spectrum that included different grade levels, school settings, degrees of support, overall job satisfaction, etc. The diversity within the group showed how different and similar the first year can be across persons, settings, and circumstances; a strength that can be further developed by adding more first-year narratives to subsequent studies. Conducting this study clearly illustrated one of the fundamental tenets of phenomenological inquiry. Phenomenology is concerned with understanding the shared conscious experience of a given phenomenon. Individuals are sure to have a personal, unique experience of a phenomenon, but the phenomenologist assumes that there is also an "invariant structure" (or essence) to the experience that will be shared by most—if not

all (Creswell, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Despite differences in their circumstances and settings, the data from this study suggest that there may be a common "first-year teaching experience" experienced by those entering the profession. Among other things, the data indicate a first year experience that may be characterized by the experience of support, relationships with students, cumulative/dynamic lessons that are learned through experience, and the negotiation of personal and professional challenges.

The purpose of this research was to explore this important stage of the teaching experience. As a member of a teacher education faculty, I see this study contributing to the ubiquitous "research-to-practice" discourse in educational research. Lessons learned from this study and similar studies might have implications for how members of teacher education programs prepare students for the myriad realities awaiting them in their first position. Studies that include "voices from the field" help to span the perceived disconnect between the "conjecturing of researchers" and the "realities of practitioners". Further, and perhaps more importantly, a better understanding of the first-year teaching experience may help schools recruit and retain the highly-qualified teachers that are so coveted in our present educational climate.

The remainder of this chapter includes reflections on the research process, findings, and challenges experienced along the way. As my initial foray into phenomenological inquiry, the process taught me a great deal about conducting qualitative research broadly and phenomenological research specifically. Some of these reflections were chronicled through the use of a researcher journal during the process, while others are represented by revelations that continue to emerge through the analysis phase. Constant reflection on the process during the process was an important step that

also had its share of benefits and challenges. The chapter concludes with consideration of the implications for teacher education and further research. Again, as my initial study of this phenomenon, I recognize there are numerous alternate approaches that would increase the depth and breadth of our collective knowledge of how new teachers experience and interpret their beginning experiences. Also, as a qualitative study with a relatively small number of participants, I recognize that there are limitations that compromise the degree to which I can generalize the results and discuss implications.

Reflections on the Research Process

   An introduction.

   "The people who come to see us bring us their stories. They hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives. They hope we know how to interpret their stories correctly. We have to remember that what we hear is *their story*" (Coles, 1989, p. 7).

   In "The Call of Stories", Robert Coles, a celebrated psychiatrist, educator, and author looks back on his long career and contemplates the transformative role that stories have played. The first chapter of the book finds Coles reflecting on the graduate training experiences that first brought about this "call of stories." During his graduate psychiatric training program, he encountered a professor that challenged him to shift the way he was experiencing and interpreting the narratives expressed by the patients. Instead of hearing their tales of depression and schizophrenia in a cold, clinical way, this supervisor challenged him to consider the stories that the patients were offering from a different

perspective. In his role as a psychiatrist, he had a responsibility to respect, hold, honor

their stories, and think critically about the content and complexity involved in this task.

The enterprise of communicating one's experience through narrative is more complex

than the mere telling originally suggests. His supervisor pushed him to consider the

negative space in the narrative (Smith & Fowler, 2009). That is, he was encouraged to not

only consider the stories that were told, but also the "truth" in the details that may have

been untold.

Smith and Fowler (2009) discussed the duality present in the expressed narrative

in qualitative research. Within the constellation of possible narratives and details

available to informants, they make certain choices about what they tell and how they tell

it. The details and information that were edited out may also contain important

information. Connoisseurs and custodians of stories must recognize and appreciate these

complexities. Coles' supervisor calls his attention to the same thing happening in their

therapeutic sessions: "[my supervisor] wanted me to worry about messages omitted,

yarns gone untold, details brushed aside altogether, in the rush to come to a

conclusion…you might stop and wonder what else he's now going through—and you

might begin to wonder about what he *isn't* telling you, now that he's telling you about his

identity crisis" (Coles, 1989, p. 21).

I open this reflection section thinking back to the Coles text because I can relate

to the paradigm-shifting moment in my training when I first felt the "call of stories."

Since that moment, I have not been able to experience narratives in the same way. Coles'

book was required reading for a course in "Narrative Inquiry" but the book and its

lessons about our responsibilities as custodians of others' stories stuck with me as I took

other courses on qualitative research. Within this text, Coles tells his story of becoming a more empathetic psychiatrist and educator as a result of a newfound appreciation and respect for his patients' stories, but I also experienced it as instructive for qualitative researchers. As I have strived to embody his teachings in my work, I now believe that there is something powerful about a research process that asks an individual to trust you with their experience…their story.

As a qualitative researcher, I now believe that it is an honor to participate in the process with our informants. This requires us to respect the responsibility to ethically draw out as much information as possible in the short time that we have to talk, faithfully record and transcribe the conversation, and earnestly interpret their story turned data. While analyzing the data in Chapter 4, and even now reflecting on the process, the Coles text felt close, even intimate. It was like a message from a kindred spirit reminding me who I should be as a qualitative researcher. "Their story, yours, mine—it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them" (Coles, 1989, p. 30).

On negotiating self-as-instrument.

"If our job was to help our patients understand what they had experienced by getting them to tell their stories, our job was also to realize that as active listeners we give shape to what we hear, make over their stories into something of our own" (Coles, 1989, p. 19).

"Remember, what you are hearing [from the patient] is to some considerable extent a function of you, hearing" (Coles, 1989, p. 15). In this passage, Coles calls attention to the dynamic subjectivity that occurs in qualitative research. As the primary instrument in qualitative research, the researcher's reactions and interpretations influence the overall quality of the data. As an independent unit of data, the participant's responses exist in an "objective" sense. This objectivity though is fleeting and, maybe even, illusory. Choices must be made by researchers about how they will ultimately deconstruct and reconstruct the data during the analysis phase. As a unique filter of the participants' experiences, my (un)conscious choices, beliefs, and biases are realities that must be acknowledged. As Coles states, it is not just *that* we are hearing their stories, but who we are in our fullness as a listener is a key part of the equation. Ultimately, we view this work as the dynamic interaction between the persons (listener and speaker), text (content of the communication), and context (setting and circumstances of the discourse) interacting dynamically.

Investigating a research problem from a qualitative perspective requires the researcher to negotiate certain assumptions about the nature of knowledge and one's relationship to it. Qualitative researchers assume that human behavior is "more situational and context-bound than generalizable," and, consequently, focus on the more "fluid and dynamic dimensions of behavior" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 32). One might reasonably assume that individuals may change their beliefs, behaviors, or opinions as a result of finding themselves in particular circumstances. In qualitative inquiry, researchers are interested in understanding the nuances of behavior influenced by these factors. Despite knowing my participants—on one level—I assume that who they are in

this new teacher identity, what captures their attention as relevant, and how they respond to their situations are influenced by their context and dynamic.

One of the biggest components of the qualitative research process present in my study was the challenge associated with simultaneously functioning as a researcher and the primary data collections instrument (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). In the Johnson and Christensen (2004) educational research textbook, the authors help readers understand the sometimes competing assumptions that govern quantitative and qualitative research. In their presentation of these research paradigms, the authors state that qualitative researchers share quantitative researchers' appreciation for data collection that attempts to be "value-free" and "objective". However, in many qualitative research circumstances, achieving distance may be unrealistic. In fact, qualitative researchers often need or want to "get close to their objects of study" as a secondary function of their presence as "the instrument of data collection" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 31, 33). Unlike the detachment of a survey instrument, the quality of the data depends on the skill of the researchers and their ability to "collect the data, ask the questions, and make interpretations about what is observed" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 31). Qualitative research seems fraught with (un)intentional factors that may influence the process.

Considering the unintentional ways in which interviewers communicate to interviewees, Coles suggests that interviewer action informs further action by the respondent. His discussion illuminates the subtle, yet meaningful ways that the interaction might be shaped. He observes, "…we would-be analysts are not beyond perking up here, appearing uninterested there, and, of course, asking questions that set the compass for a given conversation" (Coles, 1989, p. 23). Coles believes that, despite our

177

best intentions and training, there are (un)conscious ways in which interviewers influence the informant's response.

Rereading this passage in the Coles text was a revelation in its simple wisdom. This revelation was particularly significant as I reflected on how I performed as the "instrument" in this study. I do not question *if* I, Dr. McHattan, or both of us, influenced the interview; instead, I wondered *how* the responses were influenced in these subtle ways that Coles alluded. As a qualitative researcher, I am certainly cognizant of the ways that I explicitly determine the direction of the conversation. There are numerous ways in which the power dynamic in the interviewer-respondent dyad favors the interviewer. As the interviewer, I predetermined some of the questions that I asked. I determine when I have heard enough of a particular topic and want to move on to something else. More powerful, perhaps, according to Coles are the "subtle, yet meaningful ways" that we indicate to our participants our interest, approval, commiseration, or displeasure. In instances that were, in fact, subtle or unconscious, it very well may be the case that I was indicating something to my participants that shaped their responses and did not know it.

As I tried to make sense of this negotiation of power and roles in qualitative research and the interviewers/interviewee relationship, I thought about the heuristic utility of the concept of "back leading" in partner dancing. "Back leading" happens when the person who is supposed to be the follower in the lead-follower dyad violates the prescribed role and, in this action, dictates portions of the dance. Sometimes followers back lead their partners on purpose. If the leader is off-pace, sometimes the follower will back lead to force a pace adjustment. Dance teachers often back lead to teach the leaders how to execute a move. There may be other times when this is less clear and a person

178

may not be aware that they are dictating when they should be following. A leader may not be able to turn a partner who has already decided to turn in the opposite direction.

At its best, the relationship between interviewer and informant seems to be very similar to the careful choreography of a pair of dancers. As the interviewer, I have to know when to lead, follow, and get out of the way to let my partner's gift (i.e., their narrative) "take center stage". Despite being versed in literature on interviewing techniques and qualitative methodologies, reflection after the study caused me to wonder about the process and my role. Specifically, I wonder about the degree to which I led, followed, or led when I thought I was following.

This idea intensified as I reflected on Coles' contention that our unconscious responses influence our informants. Was I a good partner in this dyad? Was I a constructive member in the triad? I feel confident that I conducted due diligence in knowing the literature, preparing thoughtful questions, and listening attentively. I wonder though, if I actually then "stepped out of the way to let my partner dance". In what ways did I unconsciously indicate my own "interest, approval, commiseration, or displeasure" even as I tried to be aware of my reactions?

To be honest, I do not have a good answer to that question, but it gives me something useful to consider for future studies—and this awareness seems to be a good first step to becoming a better qualitative researcher. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) caution qualitative researchers about becoming too preoccupied with the inevitable subjectivities of their work. Instead, they advise us to "[a]cknowledge that no matter how much you try, you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor

desirable. The goal is to become more reflective and conscious of how who you are may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 38).

As an instrument in the study, I understand that participating in the study may have changed their experience (i.e., the typical first-year teaching experience) by creating the space and opportunity to talk. This is probably an artificial aspect of the typical experience first-year teacher's experience. I think one might consider the interview situation as a secondary support that would not ordinarily be a part of a typical first-year teachers' experience. Without explicitly intending to create an artificial space, having a support structure to talk (even though it was only three times during the year), provided a place to reflect, process, and vent about their experiences along the way. Reflecting on the possibilities now, I cannot know how that positively or negatively influenced their experiences. I have also wondered about the degree to which participants made different decisions after our conversations or prior to the conversation because they knew that they would be interviewed again at some point. I hope that they experienced the setting as a place to be understood, affirmed, and not judged. I hope that they experienced me as an interviewer who was open and willing to listen. I cannot be certain, but I hope they felt comfortable with the confidentiality, empathy, and compassion that I tried to imbue in the context. The candor in many of the conversations suggests that the interviews were a useful space for the participants, but I cannot be certain.

On interpretive challenges and socially desirable responses.

"He pointed out to me that our patients all too often come to us with preconceived notions of what matters, what doesn't matter, what should be stressed, what should be overlooked, just as we come with our own lines of inquiry. He pointed out that patients shape their accounts accordingly, even as we shape what we have heard into our own version of someone's troubles, the 'presenting history'...that is what we're trained to do" (Coles, 1989, p. 14).

Considering the multiple demographic characteristics, group memberships, and preexisting relationships with (some) participants, I often asked myself about the possibility of socially desirable answers influencing the data. At different points in the interview and analyses processes, I paused to wonder if participants were searching for the "right answer". The research literature refers to this as a "social desirability bias" (Goodwin, 1995; Johnson & Christensen, 2007). It describes the tendency for participants to answer questions "in a way that reflects not how they truly feel or what they truly believe, but how they think they should respond" (Goodwin, 1995, p. 346). Given a question that may elicit cognitive dissonance, the discomfort might be alleviated by accentuating perceived desirable behaviors and deemphasizing less desirable behaviors (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002, p. 82).

In moments of reflection, I tried to consider their perspectives. What contextual or interpersonal factors might have influenced their responses? Some of the participants

were former students of the researchers while they were in the teacher preparation program. Even though the formal relationship ended at the completion of the course and the program, I wonder if the researchers' continued relationship to the teacher preparation program was a factor in some of their responses—especially related to topics taught by the researchers. While I can never know for certain, I think it is certainly reasonable to consider the degree to which this played a role in our discussion about their preparation experience. In the beginning of the study, participants were informed about the commitment to protecting their anonymity and assurance was provided that there would be no personal or professional consequences for their responses. Despite these assurances, I wonder if the researchers' affiliation with the university created pressure to accentuate the positive aspects of the program and minimize the negative.

More than anything else, however, I wonder how my race may have changed the conversation particularly as it related to discussing issues of diversity and race in their first-year experiences. Despite our culture's present penchant for espousing color-blind values and the will to claim the United States as a post-race nation, race continues to endure as a powerful organizing schema in interpersonal relations. However, fulfilling this putative post-race moment requires us to reconcile two competing ideas about the social reality of race in the United States. First, individuals must understand the socially constructed nature of race and the value that has been given to the *idea of race* (Howard, 2006; Johnson, 2005). Recent discourse presents race as a "made up" concept that has been given a particular social valence in the US. Through time and circumstance, this characteristic (skin color) has been ascribed other values of sometimes dubious

distinction. In a very objective, philosophical and biological sense, "race" has little "real" value.

The second idea almost turns the first on its head. It might be argued that, despite the contention that race is not objectively or biologically real, there are subjective and social realities concomitant with its presence. Simply put, the biological fallacy of race does not negate the social reality (and consequences) of race. Race remains a powerful schema that informs our behaviors, beliefs, and values in (un)conscious ways.

The dictates of polite society encourage us to adopt a more color-blind stance with all things race in our public persona. It is not unusual, as an instructor of a multicultural education course, to hear students emphatically exclaim that "they don't see race." The veracity and possibility of this seems questionable, strictly speaking. Maybe what they are trying to communicate is that they do not consciously consider race in their social interactions. There seems to be a collective cognitive dissonance between the acknowledgment of the social reality of race and the assumption that race *must* have a negative valence. As a person of color, my lived experience tells me that my race has a value in my social interactions. In social interactions, physical characteristics are among the first things individuals notice and evaluate.

I discuss race specifically here because I wonder about the degree to which it might have influenced the interactions during the interview. Is it possible that race played a factor in their responses? Could there have been an additional pressure to answer questions about diversity in a particular way as a function of having a young Black man asking the questions? What about when a Black man and a Cuban woman begin asking these questions? For instance, was there a comfort for Barbara to talk about her

"Latinaness" and how she incorporated it her presentation of self as she spoke to a fellow Latina in her first interview? How might this dynamic have changed if I was there or I was alone in the interview? Ultimately, it is hard to know. There are few realistic ways to fully circumvent the (un)conscious reactions to race and the relative (dis)comfort an individual may have sharing this discursive space. The possible presence of socially desirable responses may be true despite preexisting relationships and best efforts to make individuals feel comfortable. As such, I make room for the possibility that the conversations about issues of diversity and their impressions of the teacher preparation program may have been compromised as a function of the social locations of the researchers and their relational meanings to the participants. Tatum (2003) describes the pervasive presence of racism (in all its forms) as smog in the air. Despite acknowledging the "dirty air", people have difficulty acknowledging that they may, in fact, be "smog breathers"—an inevitability given the atmosphere in which they live.

"In the cautionary words of Dr. Ludwig, spoken at the end of a session that had my teeth chattering: 'The patients are often quite sensitive to what we want of them, and when they use our favorite phrases, they are tying to show us how hard they are listening, how eager they are to please'" (Coles, 1989, p. 21). This quote from Coles aptly captures the nature of socially desirable responses and possible good will behind the participants' intentions. It may be possible that the participants' choice of a more socially desirable response may not be because of some inherently duplicitous motive or desire to necessarily hide their inner world from the interviewer. I wonder if Coles is suggesting, in this case, the presence of "demand characteristics" that sometimes occur in the relationship between the researchers and participants. In the research literature, demand

characteristics refer to a situation where "participants attempt to pick up subtle cues in the researcher's behavior, the task, or the settings to use as guidance for their behavior" (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002, p. 292). This anticipation of the researchers' wants, needs, and/or perceptions can ultimately compromise the validity in the study. Instead of learning about the participants' actual experiences, we are offered an edited version that is presented to fulfill a perceived need.

One of the tough things about reflecting on socially desirable responses and demand characteristics in the research is the uneasiness that accompanies second-guessing the veracity of what I "know" as a result of the inquiry. In phenomenological research, researchers depend—for better or worse—on the testimony of their participants for data; there is no observation used to corroborate their stories. Considering the possibilities of socially desirable responses and demand characteristics causes me to question the data and the process.

Hoyle, Harris, and Judd (2002) offer multiple lessons for researchers to take away from their reflection on the realities demand characteristics exert in their studies. First, research participants often actively search for meaning while participating in studies. This is especially evident in studies where the researchers do not make the meanings and purposes explicit to participants. In this vacuum, the participants make their own meaning and react to their interpretations. The second lesson is an extension of the first. Responding to the demands of the context, participants come up with interpretations—but these perceptions are not random. Often, participants respond, interpret, and, ultimately, react to particular demand characteristics in similar ways. In this study, it may be possible that the demand characteristics related to race and position in the program influenced

their responses to questions about diversity and their experience in the preparation program. The final lesson about demand characteristics may be the most important, particularly for qualitative researchers. They suggest that demand characteristics may be an inevitable reality in research. "Because demand characteristics represent the totality of cues that participants use to guess the hypothesis of the study, researchers need to accept the reality that demand characteristics can never be eliminated. Unless participants go through the study completely unaware, incurious, and unquestioning, they will be reacting to something in the experimental setting and they will be using that something to guide their behavior" (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002, p. 293).

Intersecting diversity and the first-year teaching experience. Reflecting on the data related to issues of diversity and the first year teaching experience, there is a clear need to do follow-up studies that consider this interaction more closely. As for this study, I continue to wonder how to make sense of the data I received about diversity given the above-mentioned factors? I started this research process being interested in the first-year teaching process, broadly, and the inclusion of diversity in the first-year, most specifically. As I came to the end and tried to make sense of the data, it seemed to me that I knew much more about the first-year experience than do about how they integrate diversity into their classroom teaching.

"Front-stage" and "back-stage" behavior phenomenon complicates this too (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), researchers who engage in qualitative research often find themselves in a quandary trying to capture the "truth" of the phenomenon. They illustrate this through the double bind that confronts individuals who attempt to use observations as part of their data collection.

186

They refer to the persona that individuals allow us to see as "front-stage behavior". This is the way people behave when showing us their preferred presentation of themselves. "Back-stage" behavior, by contrast, refers to the ways in which individuals conduct themselves when they are not concerned with being observed. Johnson and Christensen describe this as the behavior that people engage in when they are among people who they feel most comfortable and are not consciously "acting". That is, people may not do what they say they will do in a given situation and they may not do what they would normally do if they were being observed.

The bind in this study is a little different. I have to make room for the possibility that what I heard from my participants may be their "front-stage" behavior. I simply did not include a second form of data collection to triangulate the phenomenon. As such, I'm not quite sure about what happened for them backstage. "The social psychology literature has a long history of research showing that the attitudes people express do not always correlate with their behavior. Thus, the results of research have to be interpreted with response bias in mind and conclusions can be strengthened to the extent that other research provides converging results" (Goodwin, 1995, p. 346.). Despite numerous questions that tried to access the implementation and experience of diversity in their teaching, I still feel that I "know" very little. Further, the things that I "know" may be complicated by only having access to what they said and not what they did. The frontstage/backstage dilemma, as a complication, might also be an inescapable, yet wholly manageable, reality of the research. Future studies might require multiple observations, more interviews, and, perhaps, different questions to learn more about how first-year teachers respond to issues of diversity in their teaching.

187

On bracketing (or practicing the epoche) in phenomenological research. As I prepared to use phenomenology as a research method, I repeatedly came across the term "bracketing" or "epoche". With respect to the data analysis, Creswell (1998) instructs the phenomenologist to "set aside all prejudgments, bracketing (see epoche) his or her experience (a return to 'natural science') and relying on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience" (p. 52). While this text was very useful for other aspects of phenomenological inquiry, he only mentions the bracketing process on two other occasions in the entire book. Both instances were cursory and far from instructive in *how* one goes about doing this. Each of these instances proved to be frustratingly short tips urging the researcher to "bracket" preconceptions so as not to inject hypotheses, questions, or personal experiences into the study. The first was a methodological description of the concept that also served as a warning. The second mention is more philosophical. Creswell (1998) believes that phenomenologists must understand the philosophical tenets that ground phenomenology. These foundational beliefs include: the practice of phenomenology as a return to the search for wisdom, the intentionality of our conscious experience, the contextualized meaning of experience, and the epoche. Regarding the epoche, Creswell (1998) believes that this is supposed to be a "philosophy without suppositions" that "suspend(s) all judgments about what is real—the 'natural attitude'—until they are founded on a more certain basis" through inquiry (p. 52). If this is such a fundamental part of phenomenology, I wondered, why such a brief discussion in the text? Was I making something simple into something far more complicated by questioning the *process* behind the *concept*? In retrospect, I do not think

so. I do not think that it is necessarily self-evident how one can *realistically* "suspend all judgments"—or if that is even possible and if it is, indeed, possible how one can do it.

Clark Moustakas' (1994) book, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, offers more direction by dedicating a quarter of a chapter to the epoche process. In this influential chapter, Moustakas provides a more thorough explanation of the concept and its philosophical roots. Derived from the Greek work meaning "stay away" or "abstain", Husserl described this abstention as an active process of attempting to free oneself from the everyday biases that may compromise our ability to perceive the phenomenon. The suspension of biases should allow the phenomenon to be seen more clearly. That is, unencumbered by our preconceived notion of the phenomenon, we can experience it as the unobstructed reality presented by the participants. Moustakas is more informative about the nuances of the epoche, but, once again, stops short of helping me see *exactly how* to do it. He describes the epoche as a "preparation for deriving new knowledge," "a way of looking and being," and " an original vantage point, a clearing of mind, space, and time, a holding in abeyance of whatever colors the experience or directs us, anything whatever that has been put into our minds by science or society, or government, or other people, especially one's parents, teachers, and authorities, but also one's friends and enemies" (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 85-86).

Reflecting on the role of bracketing is particularly important now because I see just how difficult it is to do thoroughly and consistently throughout the duration of the study. Also, now that I have completed a phenomenological study and tried to "bracket" along the way, I see why it may be difficult for the authors to articulate how one does this specifically. Bracketing seems especially difficult when the analysis is done

189

independently instead of collaboratively. In the absence of specific direction about how one brackets during phenomenological studies, I selected a method that helped me achieve the goals stated by Moustakas and Creswell. During the study, I kept a "researcher journal" to help me organize my preconceived ideas, process my assumptions, and honor the ideals communicated in the aforementioned texts. It felt appropriate to the ideals espoused in the phenomenological literature to force myself to articulate these assumptions. After all, how can I bracket what I cannot articulate? How can I be aware of the influences of my assumptions if I have not explored my assumptions?

Engaging in the process of journaling provided unforeseen benefits. First, I considered how I might answer the very questions that I asked my participants. The process of journaling my answers helped me get in touch with the vulnerability that the participants may experience as they answer the interview questions. As I wrote my answers, I wondered what they might experience. What would it be like to answer the questions, have them recorded and, later, scrutinized? Would someone judge me for the answers I gave if I were to publish *my* responses? In my journal, at least, I had the opportunity to think about what I said, thoughtfully write a response, and then edit it if I did not like the result—a luxury unavailable to the respondents during an interview. When I reflect on the things that informants might negotiate, I have a different empathy for people who "sound nervous" or may have difficulty articulating their experiences. I also feel a different sort of responsibility and accountability as a custodian of their communicated experiences. Ultimately, this process may have changed the emotional distance I feel toward the "data".

The second benefit of the journal was the venue to explore beliefs that may compromise my ability to recognize the phenomenal first-year teaching experience that my informants were communicating. Having the journal to work this out in was instrumental in helping me sort out my beliefs, assumptions, and expectations. In retrospect, I wonder how my approach would have changed without journaling. I am unsure, but I believe that the time journaling was time well spent. After all, I assumed that an awareness of my biases necessitated time spent reflecting and articulating these biases. Ultimately, I believe, to a large degree, that using the journal to "bracket" my assumptions helped me to be more present in the interview and work with the experiences that they shared instead of the experience I expected.

Increasing empathy for participants and awareness of my biases are laudable outcomes for the participation in the bracketing process, but there was one unforeseen result. In retrospect, I may have been so focused on not contaminating the data with my expectations of what should be found in the first-year teaching experience that I may have underestimated other ways in which my interpretive lens shaped what I saw in the data and constructed my narrative of their experience. I was focused so heavily on bracketing my assumptions on the phenomenon (i.e., the first year teaching experience) that I missed the ways in which my "stuff" (i.e., my regard for and relationship with some the participants) was coming through in my interpretations of events. I think there were times when the aforementioned lack of emotional distance comes through in the writing in some of the cases. I had to work hard not to be defensive on their behalf in instances they were communicating feeling mistreated. There were definitely times when I had strong reactions to their stories while they told me; feelings that resurfaced as I reread the

transcripts, deconstructed the narratives, and reconstructed them to interpret their experiences. These are not mere "participants" giving me "data"; they felt closer than that. I feel like I was a witness to their first year and they shared important details of a challenging part of their lives. Therefore, it was hard to take on the dispassionate position of the quintessentially objective researcher. The emphasis on bracketing prior assumptions left me less conscious of how emotionally connected I feel to the narratives that were shared. In future phenomenological studies, I will also have this lesson to consider; particularly if there is a prolonged engagement with participants.

On credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research.

Qualitative researchers strive for "understanding", that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with informants, spending extensive time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings. During or after a study, qualitative researchers ask, "Did we get it right…?" (Stake, 1995, p. 107).

Creswell (2007) believes that the standards of verification are still evolving as qualitative researchers reconcile one of their chief criticisms from positivists and other skeptics. Specifically, some individuals question the degree to which a reader can have confidence that a researcher's account of events and interpretations accurately represent the thoughts and experiences of participants. Opinions in the qualitative research literature vary widely on the subject. There are some who believe that the foundational assumptions and aims of qualitative and quantitative research are fundamentally

incompatible (Ely et al, 1991; Smith, 1984). As such, qualitative researchers are mistaken in their attempts to apply positivist concerns such as reliability, validity, and generalizability to qualitative inquiry.

Johnson and Christensen (2008), by contrast, believe that when *most* qualitative researchers discuss what may be broadly termed "validity", they are actually referring to the degree to which qualitative research "is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore *defensible*" (p. 275, emphasis added). Eisner (1991) recommends "structural corroboration", a term used to define the researchers' use of "multiple types of data to support or contradict the interpretation…We seek a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions (p. 110). From Eisner's perspective, a researcher may be guided by the accumulation of disparate evidence that informs the "compelling whole".

Creswell (2007) is perhaps the most instructive in matters of establishing credibility in qualitative research. He cited eight verification procedures that are commonly discussed in the research literature:

- *Prolonged engagement and persistent observation* occurs when a researcher has "spent a sufficient amount of time studying research participants and their setting so that you can have confidence that the patterns of relationships you believe are operating are stable and so that you can understand why these relationships occur" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 253).

- *Triangulation* refers to the use of different sources, methods, researchers, and theories to strengthen data and corroborate interpretations.

- *Peer review and debriefing* may be used if the researcher has an external reviewer who is willing to bring a fresh perspective to the process. This researcher may be asked to play the role of "devil's advocate" or the provocateur who challenges the researcher to (re)consider and justify interpretations and methodological choices.

- *Negative case analysis* is used when the researcher seeks disconfirming evidence of the phenomenon under investigation. The pursuit of these negative cases challenges researchers to reconcile the presence of such cases with their previously held interpretations.

- *Clarification of biases* can also contribute to the readers' sense of the study's credibility. Researchers can take steps to address personal biases through the process of "reflexivity". That is, the researcher "engages in critical self-reflection about his or her potential biases and predispositions" that may influence the interpretations and reporting of the data (Johnson and Christensen, 2008, p. 275).

- *Member checking* is also used as a verification procedure in which the researcher presents interpretations of the participants' experiences to the original informants. Participants are then encouraged to provide feedback about the veracity of the researcher's account.

- *Rich, thick descriptions* support verification of qualitative data by providing readers with enough contextual detail to allow them to situate the information and make determinations about its transferability to other settings or individuals who have shared characteristics.

- *External audits* are typically conducted by an individual (or panel of individuals) with no direct stake in the research. The auditors assess the degree to which the research process was methodologically sound and the product is grounded in the data.

Johnson and Christensen (2008) offer an additional method of verification for qualitative research. *Low-inference descriptors* can be used by researchers to present evidence in a manner that requires the least amount of inference for the researcher (and the reader). Direct quotes from participants are thought to be the "lowest inference descriptor" because a reader can see exactly what the participant said without the filter of the researchers' inferences. Low-inference descriptors not only present the participants' interpretations and descriptions for their experiences, but often do so robustly when researchers use direct quotes that offer the readers an opportunity to make their own judgments based on the informants' language and dialect.

At the conceptualization of this study, it was anticipated that member checking would be used as the primary method of ensuring the credibility of the research. Multiple factors (geographic relocation, closed email account, and elapsed time—three years from the initial planning to present), however, created difficulty following through with the initial research plan. In lieu of the originally planned member checking, the researcher made numerous alternate efforts to ensure that the participants' experiences were captured, represented, and interpreted with integrity. Creswell (2007) recommends that "qualitative researchers engage in at least two [verification procedures] in any given study" (p. 209). Of the aforementioned nine verification procedures, six were used

throughout the planning, implementation, and data analysis of this study. The author used 1.) a researcher journal to clarify researcher biases, 2.) prolonged engagement with informants, 3.) theory triangulation for face validity, 4.) rich, thick description of participants and contexts, 5.) low-inference descriptors of participants' perceptions, and 6.) an external audit by dissertation committee members.

At various points, the researcher examined potential biases and reflected on them through journaling. While it is true that biases are a potential limitation in research, it is also important to recognize that biases are a natural part of investigating any phenomena. Assessing biases with candor, however, can help to present interpretations and findings that are close to the data (i.e., the participant's perspective and meaning).

The research design for the study allowed for prolonged engagement with the participants. Over the course of a year, the researcher had numerous conversations with the participants about their experiences as first-year teachers. The three-interview format (Seidman, 1998) provided the researcher opportunity to "build trust with the participants, learn the culture, and check for misinformation" (Creswell, 2007, p. 207). Phenomenology does not provide for "persistent observation", but the present methodology included the "prolonged engagement" suggested in the literature.

Triangulation of the findings might be found in the corroboration of selected recent research on the first-year teaching experience. A 2008 report from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda surveyed 641 new teachers (a general sample that was representative of all first-year teachers in the continental U.S. public schools) and contained findings similar to the present study about the nature of the first-year experience. In particular, researchers reported the need for

"proper placement and sound support for new teachers" as they become acclimated into the profession (p. 17). According to their data, 1 in 10 new teachers are placed in "at least one class outside of their area of expertise" and assigned to the "hardest-to-reach" students. Further, the research found that "teaching in diverse classrooms and teaching students with special needs in regular classrooms are prime targets for reexamination" (p. 17). New teachers had mixed feelings about their preparation and capacity to meet the needs of these groups once they actually taught on a full-time basis in their new classrooms.

Kosnik and Rowsell (2007) interviewed 22 first-year teachers to try to understand their level of satisfaction with their preparation experience and their perceived needs for the first year of teaching. Similar to participants in this study, Kosnik and Rowsell's informants expressed overall *general* satisfaction with their preparation program, however, they acknowledged that there were some realities that must be learned in the field. Some of the "hard realities" mentioned by their participants included "time constraints, ability-range within classes, problems with parents…juggling all the parts of teaching, all the politics…the fights and behavior among the students" (Kosnik & Rowsell, 2007, p. 60). These "hard realities" were also mentioned among the "challenges" and "lessons learned" expressed by the participants in the present study.

Finally, McCann and Johannssen (2004), in an article entitled "Why Do New Teachers Cry?" investigated the challenges that consistently frustrate new teachers into leaving the field and the supports and resources that influence other new teachers to stay. The work of McCann and Johannssen, as well as follow-up research by Duck (2007), underscores the importance of administrative support and quality mentorship. In the

present study, in part, one of the key differences between individuals who had a relatively positive experience and the others involved the presence of quality school-level support. McCann and Johannssen found that first-year teachers' major concerns (i.e. relationships with students' families and colleagues, time management, subject matter expertise, evaluating student work, and autonomy) weighed heavily on new teachers. These concerns might be assuaged by contextual factors, like support, in the new setting. Similarly, their research emphasizes that the *presence* of a mentor is less important than the *quality* of the mentor. They state emphatically, "the *quality* of the mentorship makes all the difference" (p. 144).

The researcher attempted to fully represent the participants in as nuanced a way possible by providing full descriptions of the individuals and their teaching contexts. When available, the participants' language was used to describe those aspects of the school and context that were unknown to the researcher. For example, participants were asked to describe perceptions of their school climates relative to issues of diversity, possibilities of collaborating with colleagues on a diversity initiative, and implementation of diversity in their classrooms. Based on these rich descriptions, the researcher could better interpret both the challenges and efforts made by Audrey in her rural, mostly White, context or Cynthia in her ethnically diverse school. Therefore, while the researcher did not have direct knowledge about the cultural contexts of the schools, the participants' descriptions made it possible to understand their perceptions of the climate in which they were working. Additionally, where possible, the investigator presented interpretations and discussed themes in the words of the participant and grounded interpretations in the data. Using this data analysis method allowed the researcher to

present each case with as many low-inference descriptors as possible so that the reader has a sense of each participant; a vicarious experience of being a silent member in the interview.

Finally, the dissertation supervisory committee reviewing this research serves as the ultimate external audit. The committee is charged with the responsibility to examine the process and products of the work to evaluate its integrity. The researcher engaged in extensive dialogue with one of the committee chairs throughout the process of conceptualization, analysis, and interpretation. Feedback from this correspondence is reflected in this document and feedback from the entire committee will be present in the final draft.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

My pre-doctoral academic trainings and intellectual passion took root in psychology and educational psychology. As an undergraduate, I became fascinated with the many ways psychologists created theories to attempt to explain human behavior and interaction. In the psychology major, I was introduced to social psychology, biological bases of behavior, and developmental psychology (among others) ways to understand the world. These foundational lenses were further developed in my Master's program when my interest turned to educational psychology and curiosity about how psychology might be used to explain the variance in students' learning experience—especially students who experienced the greatest difficulties. Now that I'm at the end of my doctoral process, reflecting on implications of my dissertation and future directions for inquiry, I find myself reflecting on some of the seminal psychological theories and how they might contribute to our understanding of the first-year teaching experience.

Having conversations with the participants, I was struck by their process of making sense of their experiences and circumstances. These conversations led me to consider how future research might investigate first-year teachers' attributions. In the absence of certainty behind the individuals' behavior, research suggests that individuals make a supposition—or attribution—for the observed behavior (Kalat, 1993; Meyers, 1993). At other times, when individuals are asked to explain their personal behavior, their explanation may reveal something about how they attribute their circumstances.

Like most great ideas in the psychological literature, Fritz Heider's (1958) attribution theory articulates a commonsense, intuitive theory to explain human behavior. According to Heider's theory, people tend to attribute their own (and other's) behavior to two causes: internal and external. Internal attributions tend to be associated with characteristics that are assumed to be *internal* to the object. Internal attributions tend to be related to assumptions made about individuals' dispositions or personalities. External attributions are associated with factors that are *external* to the individual. External attributions of behavior reflect more on the situation or the context and not necessarily something about the individuals. For instance, a child may be observed sleeping in class. There might be multiple explanations—or attributions—for the observed behavior. A person might be inclined to make an internal attribution for the observed behavior. That is, the individual might conclude that the student is lazy or disinterested in learning. The assumption would be that the behavior is caused because of the student's personal characteristics. A person making external attributions might consider contextual factors that caused the behavior like a poor night's sleep.

Future research on the first-year teaching experience might benefit from exploring the attributions for behavior made by individuals who are novices to the profession. Listening to—and later analyzing—the interviews, it was interesting to hear their attributions for various situations during their first year. I wonder if there are differences in the attributions between the new teachers and more experienced teachers. Further, I wonder if there might be ways to help first-year teachers manage their expectations by having a sense of what is reasonable to expect—of themselves and others—as they acclimate to their new professional role. I found it interesting to hear the attributions made by the participants' for various individuals within their sphere of influence and their responses to others based on their assumptions. These reactions and subsequent attributions varied but it might be something worth exploring further.

Future studies might also investigate the interactions between first-year teachers and their support systems—specifically their mentors. The interviews with participants in this study offered some insight into the complexities in this relationship and presented a foundation on which to build future inquiry. This might be particularly important considering the significance of the critical period when an individual first begins their career. At this point, they are not only negotiating the pragmatics of a new career, but also integrating a new professional identity—an identity that many have been participating in through the "apprenticeship of observation" for many years (Lortie, 1975). In conversations with participants, many reported the desire to teach having roots that ran back to childhood. This is a career choice and identity that they have been apprenticing for, in some ways, most of their academic lives. The challenge though, comes when the realities of the job are discordant from the childhood fantasies or the

training received in their preparation programs. In these moments, a strong support system including quality mentorship can help first-year teachers realistically manage their expectations and evaluate situations.

This study made me want to explore this relationship further. I would guess that a strong support system and quality mentorship would be protective factors that would keep teachers in the field in the beginnings of their careers. As I analyzed the interviews in this study, I began to wonder about the nuances of this important relationship. I wonder if the dynamics governing this relationship are individual and personal, or something that we can recognize in predictable ways? I wonder if we can isolate something critical and essential in this relationship that may inform first year mentorship support programs in local schools. With extreme case sampling, we may be able to learn something particularly illuminating by considering the essential features of the relationships/support systems that were experienced by the participants to be particularly useful and those who are characterized as being categorically/relatively unhelpful.

Future research might consider the nature of mentorship and the circumstances that are needed for an individual to feel supported. There may be a disconnect between the *availability* of support from the mentor's perspective and *experience* of support from the new teacher's perspective. In multiple instances, the participants communicated that their mentors told them to seek them out if they had questions or concerns and they would make themselves available. From the mentors' perspective, perhaps, they satisfied their responsibility by making themselves available for support as needed. The first-year teachers in this study, however, often wished that the mentors would have sought them out more. Sometimes the fear of being perceived as an incompetent, or otherwise needy,

first-year teacher may have also curtailed their help-seeking attempts—even when help appeared to be needed. Instead, some of them quietly wished for someone to "check in" with them more to make sure everything was okay. It may be interesting to explore what actually is experienced and counts as support for these teachers and how both parties can communicate more effectively.

Future research might also investigate how power dynamics influence the experience of support within experienced mentor teacher/first-year mentee dyads. Power influences relationships in interesting ways. Research has shown that the circumstances related to power in relationship exerts social influence in interactions, specifically influencing group behavior, persuading beliefs, and influencing conformity (Meyers, 1993). It may be interesting to look at the ways in which power differentials influence the overall quality and satisfaction within these mentoring relationships. The relationships between the first-year teachers and their support teachers made me think of the differences that are sometimes found in the dynamics of horizontal and vertical interpersonal relationships. Horizontal relationships describe the interactions among individuals who have relatively equal social power. This might describe the interactions between friends or, in the case of first-year teachers, being mentored by a fellow teacher or team member. Vertical relationships, by contrast, describe the interactions between individuals who have relatively unequal social power. In this interaction one individual would function as socially dominant and the other as socially subordinate. Power discrepancies change the way individuals communicate and relate. In the mentoring relationships that combine first-year teachers with their direct supervisors or team leaders, the nature of the relationship seems to be qualitatively different. In instances

where a first-year teacher experiences concerns about the team leader, they may experience less options for seeking support because of the dynamics of this relationship.

Finally, this research presents an opportunity to advocate for first-year teachers. Future inquiry in this area must also consider the ways in which school-based contextual factors contribute to the overall quality of beginning teachers' experiences. Unfortunately, the discourse concerning the achievement gap often devolves into territorialism and finger pointing by factions seeking to attribute blame to the negligent other and minimizing personal responsibility. Therefore, vested interest groups point to the inadequacy of higher education, failures of teachers, apathy of students, and pathology of historically disenfranchised groups. To be clear, this is not an attempt to add another voice into the blame cacophony. Instead, I am suggesting the need for a more nuanced look at the ecology of schooling and the dynamic interaction between stakeholders and contexts.

To fully understand the challenges first-year teachers have—and why others prematurely leave the field—research needs to focus on the braided factors that are a part of the totality of this experience. The current research, albeit an initial foray into this area, indicates that school-level contextual factors influence the first-year experience in numerous ways including the climate concerning issues of diversity, stability of the school leadership, consistency in first-year teaching assignment, availability of resources, and presence of support structure. Future research in this area is paramount because advocacy for beginning teachers, by extension, serves the needs of the underserved communities that receive many of the least experienced, least prepared new teachers. Research in this area shines a light on the need for these settings—and others—to think

critically about this transitional time and supports needed to ensure that their highly

qualified teachers remain in their schools and remain in the job long enough to realize

their potential as master teachers. The results of this study cry out for future research that

can advocate for this group—and ultimately the children that they serve.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample Interview Questions

Interview 1

Impetus to Teach (Personal Experiences)
At what point did you know that you wanted to be a teacher? How did that happen?

What were your experiences as a student? How did your k-12 experiences influence your desire to teach?

Did you experience any teachers, in particular, that stand out for you? Good teachers? Bad teachers? An influential teacher? What makes them stand out?

How do you compare the way you teach to the ways that you were taught?

Teaching Philosophy
Definition of Diversity? If I were a fly on the wall in your classroom, how might I see diversity at work in your classroom?

What is your teaching philosophy? How did you develop your teaching philosophy?

How do you communicate that to your students? Parents? Colleagues?

How do you demonstrate it in practice? Examples…?

How comfortable or confident do you feel to respond to the needs of your student population? Needs relative to particular disability? Emotional needs? Cognitive needs?

What were your expectations of diversity as you entered the teaching profession?

Expectations
Issues with Students
What are your expectations for your students? How did you arrive at them?

What informs your expectations? Prior experience? Conversations with other teachers? Prior readings?

How do you communicate your expectations to you students regarding classroom behavior? Academic performance? Life goals? Realizing potential?

What do you see as you role in guiding them toward realizing their potential and meeting those goals? How much of the responsibility do you bear in this regard (i.e., if they fall short of your expectations for behavior, academics, etc, how much of that do you "own"?)? Where does that belief come from?

How does the student's cultural background factor into your expectations for the students? How does your own cultural background factor into your expectations for the students?

Issues with Parents
What are your expectations for the development of relationships with your students' parents?

How involved do you expect them to be with the students' academics?

What informs your expectations? Prior experience? Conversations with other teachers? Prior readings?

Are you planning to reach out to parents? How are you planning to develop a relationship with the parents?

Do you expect to discuss your role, expectations, and goals for the student's with the parents? How do envision that conversation going OR how did that conversation go…?

Issues with Peers:
How willing do you think your peers will be to the use of culture in the classroom? Do you expect to find many colleagues who would be willing to work on projects relative to cultural competence or realizing a social justice agenda? Why?

Have you met a specific person that you would consider working with on a social justice project? Describe?

What is your impression of your school's openness to issues of diversity? Provide examples. Have you experienced evidence that might suggest that your school is moving toward a culturally competent pedagogy? Examples…?

What are your expectations for working with COLLEAGUES?

Do you have a mentor teacher? What are your expectations for working with him or her?

Preparation (Confidence, Fears)
Describe your preparation program…

What part or parts of your preparation program are the most memorable? Why?

Thinking back about the entire program, what were your impressions of the program's commitment to diversity? Was it evident in all of your classes? Was it only in one? Only in TRUST?

Appendix 1: (Continued)

Interview 2

Thoughts about the first year up to this point…?
 Now that you have been teaching for a semester, how would you characterize your first semester teaching experience?

How do you think it compares to the first-year teaching experience of your peers?

How does it compare to your expectations of your first year thus far?

What is a good day of teaching? What happens on a day when you leave and say to yourself, "That was a good one…"

Challenges
Let's think about the highlights of your first year…what would you describe as the highest point thus far? What would you consider one of the low points?

What's been the biggest challenge for you thus far? How have you addressed this challenge?

Supports
What kinds of supports are available to you? What supports have you found helpful? How did you know to look there? What kinds of supports do you feel that you need that are currently unavailable?

What has your relationship been like with your mentor teacher?

How would you characterize your interactions with your mentor teacher? Formal and scheduled? Informal and Casual? Personal? Businesslike?

How often do you get to meet with him or her? What is a typical conversation like…? What would be a typical topic for a meeting?

If you could structure your own first year experience, what would it include? If you could customize your relationship with your mentor teacher (in an ideal world), what would that relationship be like…?

How does your relationship with your mentor teacher match your expectations?

How integrated do you feel into the school culture?

How would you describe your overall workload? Including time doing paperwork, extracurricular clubs, committees, etc.?

Evolution as Teacher
How have you seen your teaching change from the beginning of the year?

How have you seen *yourself* change since the beginning of the school year?

Do you experience yourself differently as a teacher…?

First-year Experiences at your School
Are there other first year teachers at your school?

If yes, do you have a sense of their first-year experiences?

How do you account for differences between their experiences and yours?

Lessons Learned and Applied
Are there any particular lessons from the preparation program that stand out to you?

How would you compare your experiences as a professional teacher to your preservice classroom experiences?

If you could say anything to the department about the preparation needs, what would you say?

Culture in the Classroom
Have you been able to implement any of the knowledge or skills that you learned in the UEP?

How open have your colleagues been to issues of diversity?

How does culture work in your school?

How does culture work in your classroom?

Interview 3

Reflections on the Year
How would you characterize your first-year teaching experience?

How did your experience compare to your expectations at the beginning of the school year?

What would you describe as one of the defining experiences of your first year?

If you had to think back on the highlights of the first year, could you describe one of the best times? Could you describe one of the more challenging moments?

If you had to do the first year over again, what would you do differently?

If you were asked to speak to a group of graduates who were getting to begin their first year, what advice would you give them? Things to look out for…? Things to ask for…? Things to check on…?

If you had to think about your successes and challenges during the first year, what do you think contributed to your successes? What would you describe as you biggest challenges? Can you describe these facilitators and barriers?

How would you describe your relationship with your mentor teacher this year? If you had to do it over, what would you change about your relationship with him/her? Is there anything you would ask for that you did not receive?

Thinking about what you did this year in your class in terms of culture and diversity, how much were you able to do compared to what you thought you would do in the beginning of the year? What are some of things you did? Did you do all that you thought you would? What will you do differently next year?

Appendix 2: Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams Certification

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Human Participant Protections Education for Research Team

Completion Certificate

This is to certify that

Michael Smith

has completed the **Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams** online course, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on 08/16/2005.

This course included the following:

- key historical events and current issues that impact guidelines and legislation on human participant protection in research.
- ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical issues inherent in the conduct of research with human participants.
- the use of key ethical principles and federal regulations to protect human participants at various stages in the research process.
- a description of guidelines for the protection of special populations in research.
- a definition of informed consent and components necessary for a valid consent.
- a description of the role of the IRB in the research process.
- the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of federal agencies, institutions, and researchers in conducting research with human participants.

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About the Author

Michael D. Smith was born and raised in Petersburg, VA. He is especially proud of his close-knit family that has supported him so passionately throughout his life. As a man and scholar, he stands on the shoulders of giants—both widely recognized and deeply personal. Michael received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Elon College, and a Masters in Education in Educational Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Following his graduate education, he began his career as a Research Associate at the American Institutes for Research in Washington, DC. Michael is currently a faculty member at the State University of New York—New Paltz. He teaches courses on educational research and diversity in US education. His intellectual passions and research interests focus on teacher preparation for diversity, issues of power and privilege in education, and the influence of race on identity and pedagogy.