

**MY NAME IS TEACHER:
STORIES FROM THE FIRST YEAR**

Karen Lauritsen
MUSE, UC Berkeley
May 2004

THE WHY: INTEREST IN TOPIC

PERSONAL MOTIVATION

I decided to enter the teaching profession for many reasons: I had held other professional positions that I didn't find rewarding, I wanted to enact change within a society where I saw injustice, I wanted to have a lot of autonomy, and I wanted to have chunks of time to myself to travel and learn. I didn't realize before choosing teaching, how much I would enjoy working with teenagers, or how much work would really be involved in a given day. I also never lost sight of the visceral knowledge that teaching is one of the most important positions a person can have, a job that can be so much more than a job, but also a person's life.

I was attracted to this idea at first – that a job could fill much of my need to contribute something powerful to society. I was also excited to share my enthusiasm for learning with students and to have a forum to put forth some of my own ideas about society. Certainly, one of the lures of teaching was to expose young minds to a sort of counter culture, or to at least talk openly about the assumptions and powerful forces in society that mold our perceptions. Yet, I discovered, these goals do not happen through mere proselytizing alone. These goals are best achieved through lots and lots of work. Work that stretches way beyond the bell system, well into the weekend and even into vacation time.

Within a month of starting my first year as a teacher, I was beat. I was invigorated and energized by my actual class time with the students, but exhausted and depleted for the other hours in the week. I had a thesis project to write, a documentary video project that I was excited about, and a life that I wanted to live. I resented my windowless office and stacks of papers. I was frustrated with the bureaucracy of simple tasks like taking roll or requesting a substitute. I loved my job; I hated my job.

Ultimately, I made a very difficult decision to leave the profession at mid-term, and focus my attention on other interests. It was a decision that I struggled with for many reasons. I knew I was in love with the students, but not my quality of life. How much was I willing to sacrifice to teach them? Yet it wasn't all sacrifice. I felt extremely rewarded by my interactions with students and supported by other English teachers in the department. I felt I was rising to meet one of the greatest professional challenges of my life and spending my days doing something very worthwhile and meaningful. And veteran teachers told me it got easier. That the first year is tough, but eventually the pressures ease and a rhythm is found. I believed them, but also knew that there would always be papers to grade and teenage emotions to manage.

I am undecided about whether or not I will return to teaching. I know that at this point in my life, I want time to multi task. I am excited about making a documentary that explores the same questions I ask in this paper, and I am excited about maintaining involvement in activities that have nothing to do with my professional life. I know however, that I already miss working with teenagers and building meaningful relationships with them.

Because of my struggle with the profession and my decision to leave, this paper is a personal one. It was written during and immediately after a time of difficult decision-making and emotional upheaval as I re-evaluated my professional goals. More so than with an academic eye to the classroom, this paper is with an inward eye toward myself and my peers. Yet despite its personal underpinnings, it does speak to many common questions and emotions that new teachers have.

PROFESSIONAL MOTIVATION

There is a lot of rhetoric about the first year of teaching. From the first day of the program, instructors warned us that the first year would be largely about "survival." Everyone said it would be grueling, and the main goal would be to "make it through." I began to wonder if I was entering a new profession, or being dropped into the wilderness with a water bottle and a knife to get me

through until June. But before I began, I remained positive. Surely I would still have time to make dinner, to visit friends, and maybe even get dressed up for a date. After all, I certainly didn't want to lose out on ten months of my life, only to use the summer two to lick my wounds and fatten up for the next lean stretch of personal time come fall.

I now find myself inclined to repeat the same rhetoric. To try and find the words to explain to someone who has never taught just what is involved. That it is exhausting; that being "on" in front of 90 students throughout a day takes more energy than a triathlon. Or that even when the day feels finished, a teacher has to find the energy to prepare for the next. What will the lecture material include? What worksheets will students need? Will they work in groups or in pairs? Are they ready to choose their own work groups or should I continue to select their collaborators? Did more than half of them do the homework from the night before? If not, how do I bridge that work so that they can get the work done today? Did my students get enough food and rest to be focused? Should I send a belligerent student to the office tomorrow if she tries to test me one more time? Should I have sent her today? There are thoughts about what has to be done, second-guessing and reflecting on what has already been done, and thoughts about what hasn't been done and will never get done, which sometimes seem to take up more mental space than what has been or will be accomplished.

Yet, even while learning to go to the bathroom at very precise intervals throughout the day, I loved it. I loved how students would make me laugh, and I loved it when someone's eyes got wide with a new idea. In many senses, it was a love affair for me. I would be excited to introduce a new idea, to spend time with thirty-two teenagers and to watch them interact with one another. I felt my work stories were the most interesting of any of my friends, and once I overcame the sometimes stigma of being a school teacher, I could wow anyone with adorable or inspiring or heartbreaking student stories.

Much of what will factor into my decision of whether or not to return to teaching at a later time is not so much the students and their development, but my own quality of life. I know I care about students and their development. I know I like teaching. The question is whether it will dominate my life. When I talk with my friends who teach they often say teaching has taken over. It's more difficult to find time for partners, hobbies, friends or the everyday pleasures of life. If I wouldn't sacrifice this much time for a corporate position, I wonder why it seems implicitly justifiable to make such an enormous personal sacrifice for teaching, because it is defined as a service profession.

The idea that a teacher is one who must sacrifice much of his or her own life for the good of others is one that seems largely inherent in the public understanding of the profession. I strongly resist the notion of a selfless person working on an altruistic cause without care or time for self-preservation and nourishment. Since teaching is largely still a female-dominated field, I am certain gender politics has shaped the profession and the expectations of its practitioners.

While I recognize that the first few years of teaching are especially tough ones, and that it gets somewhat easier with time, experience and an amassment of materials, no one would argue that teaching is ever easy. Since teacher retention is a major crisis in education and one that causes some of the most pressing challenges to policy at local, state and national levels, the question of teacher retention in the first formative year (and even in the few following) is one critical to address. While retention problems may be partly attributed to the growing mobility of the population and the transitory nature of careers in modern society, it may also be that teachers feel forced out of the profession by demands that don't lessen or respect that isn't granted. Regardless, attrition impacts student and school success, and is one of the factors that widens the gap between low income and high income school performance.

THE WHAT: QUESTIONS ASKED

This paper explores the experience of a small group of new English teachers, all trained in the same credential and masters program at UC Berkeley, and all living in the Bay Area. I know all of them personally, either as classmates or as good friends. I was curious as to what their experience was in the formidable first year, and what similarities and differences existed among their experiences. Ultimately, I wanted to know: Are there common themes these teachers speak about in their first year, and if so, how do they characterize the varying approaches to negotiating the first year?

The question above serves as an umbrella from under which other questions about the first year can be considered. For example, what sort of support systems do first year teachers find at their schools? How do expectations of the first year prime a teacher for her or his true experience? How does teaching impact a person's personal life? What keeps teachers teaching? How do they hope later years will differ from the first year?

By exploring teachers' first year experience, I hope that there will be implications for how support systems can be improved. I want to see my friends remain in teaching if that is where they want to be, but not at the sharp expense to their personal lives that many, but not all, have endured in this first year. I am not comfortable with assuming that experienced teachers are necessarily better, but am certain that experienced teachers may feel they have more to offer, garnered from their years of experience. I hope that this introductory glimpse into a basic question – "What is a teacher's first year like, anyway?" will offer useful information for considering the quality of teachers' lives.

In addition, asking these questions of my peers was also motivated by my desire to maintain a bond with the people I had been training with for the last year and a half. Once we had our new teaching jobs, the time we spent together dropped significantly. Therefore, these questions can be

considered a social outreach to the people I had become close with through MUSE. Simply, I wanted to know how my friends were doing since we didn't have much time to talk anymore.

THE WHERE: CONTEXT OF STUDY

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching is the practical application of ideas in a real life setting that has real life impact, and it usually warrants less attention than theoretical study in academic settings. The very nature of university life is that there isn't as much value placed on practice as there is on theory. There isn't a lot of intellectual credibility granted teachers, and certainly not the same amount of prestige and all that goes with it – funding, programmatic support and validation. How did primary and secondary school teaching become such a dismissed position in both academic and professional circles?

According to Clifford (2000), "Teaching represents the largest field for women in the Department of Labor's category of 'professional and technical occupations.'" Historically, the demand for women to enter the profession was necessitated by the goal to establish public schooling as a universal institution in America. There were simply not enough men to fill the teaching ranks, so women were ushered into the profession with the explicit understanding that the job would not interfere with their marital or maternal responsibilities. Since women did not hold equal power or rights in nineteenth-century America, school boards and trustees were able to pay them 40 to 50% of the male wage (Clifford, 2000). The strong presence of women in the teaching field is not coincidental to its lack of status in society.

The lack of recognition and status that teaching warrants is especially egregious in relationship to the demands of the job. The first year is the year of induction, and while the beginning of any new practice can be demanding as the practioner negotiates the learning curve, the extent of the demands can be detrimental to both the health of the practioner and the profession.

New teachers especially can clock as many hours as new law partners or medical interns. Yet they are not rewarded in the same ways. Teaching is infamous for consuming immense amounts of time and energy, especially in low performing schools. English teachers especially, have what often seem to be insurmountable workloads.

With this in mind, Murnane (1992) found that teacher career length varies by subject, state and whether the teacher is working in a primary or secondary school position (primary school teachers stay in the profession longer, on average). The study compared teachers in Michigan and North Carolina, and found that English teachers had a median career duration of 3.7 years in Michigan and 6.4 years in North Carolina. Considering that the first few years of teaching are ones that involve a sharp learning curve, it is noteworthy that so many leave the profession just as they are amassing more skill. Indeed, at the school where I taught there was a gap between teachers who had been teaching twenty years or more, and those who were in their first five years. From looking around department meetings, it seemed to me that the ranks of experienced, veteran teachers were diminishing. While exploring causes of attrition rates is another paper entirely, it is important to note that the same study found that salaries affect the likelihood of attrition for novice teachers (Murnane, 1992). Especially for those who had expertise in fields that could command more money outside of education, like chemistry and physics, teachers' annual salary did influence a teacher's decision to leave. As mentioned earlier however, decisions to leave may also reflect the increasing mobility of employees in all sectors, public and private. Instead of having one career, many people have several.

Beginning teachers face other problems, besides feeling like they are not being paid enough. Podsen (2002) found that top issues include problems motivating students, dealing with students' social and emotional problems, classroom management and discipline, the large number of students in the classroom and a lack of materials. Not surprisingly, teachers, on a scale of one to seven with seven indicating the highest stress level, rated their stress level at 5.52 at the junior high level and

5.03 at the high school level during their first two years of teaching (Podsen, 2002). Add to these concerns the likelihood that new teachers are often given the most difficult teaching assignments, such as teaching six different subjects rather than two or three, and teachers can be left feeling overwhelmed and exhausted.

First year teachers feel much more than just tired, however. Moir (1990) charted the feelings of first year teachers and identified five different phases. In time with the school year, new teachers begin with a feeling of anticipation, feeling committed to their profession and holding rather idealistic views of how to accomplish their goals. Teachers then quickly move into survival mode, when they feel overwhelmed by the time demands of teaching. Late in the calendar year they begin the disillusionment phase, which is largely a result of their exhaustion. In the new year, teachers begin the rejuvenation phase, largely fueled by the preceding winter break. Come spring they begin to reflect on what they have learned from the year, and how far they have come. Finally, at the end of the school year, they begin to feel anticipation for their second year of teaching, when they can apply what they have learned to a new group of students. It is significant to note that the survey and interviews for this paper took place during what Moir (1990) describes as the “survival” and “disillusionment” phases.

With the above research ruminating in my mind, I considered the experiences of first year teachers. My feminist perspective also informed my research, as well as my own experience in the classroom. Together, these factors provided me with a foundation from which to consider individual stories.

SETTING

All of the teachers featured in this paper work in San Francisco Bay Area schools. The schools range from desperately under funded to well supported by the residents in the surrounding community. The teachers who responded work in both middle and high schools. Through the interviews, teachers reveal details about their working contexts that will show the individuality of their school communities.

The teachers interviewed are all part of the UC Berkeley Multicultural Urban Secondary English (MUSE) program, as am I. The teacher's first year of work inside a classroom is the second year of study in the MUSE program. The MUSE 2004 cohort consists of twenty-eight people, eight of whom are men and the remainder of whom are women. The program is designed to prepare teachers to work in urban schools, usually low performing and low-income and with students who may have grown up speaking a language other than English. During the first year of study, teachers take theory and methods classes and have two student-teaching assignments in cities near Berkeley. Some of the teachers have credentials in both Social Studies and English; all of the teachers have credentials in English.

Like the others, I began teaching at an urban school in the Bay Area in my second year of MUSE. The school where I taught is located in the East Bay, and about 1,400 students attend. The student body is diverse, split nearly into thirds: Black, Latino and White. It grapples with what many urban schools struggle with – lack of funding, facilities that are too small or too dated, low test scores and gang activity. There are also many positive influences on the campus – teachers who care, a variety of school activities, and supported sports teams. Although I didn't remain at the school, I have fond feelings for the campus and the students and teachers who work there.

THE HOW: METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Just over four months into the 2003-2004 school year, I sent out an email to the twenty-six teachers actively enrolled in the MUSE program (two teachers did not continue with the second year of the two year program for personal reasons). It was at the winter break, when teachers had a moment to themselves, and, I hoped, a moment to respond to my written survey. I felt intrusive, so in the email I recognized their enormous time constraints and pleaded for a piece of their time. I attached the interview to the email, as well as pasted it into the body of the message (see Appendix).

I requested that teachers return the survey within two weeks from when I sent it. Seven teachers responded over the next six weeks. Six respondents are female, one is male, and all are white. Four of the teachers who responded to the written survey were also interviewed on tape. Three teachers responded by email only. See Table 1 for a breakdown of who did what:

Table 1 Overview of Teacher Respondents

Name (Pseudonym)	Middle School	High School	Written Survey (e-mailed)	In-person Interview (taped)
Alexis		X	X	X
Annabelle		X	X	X
Audrey	X		X	X
Clemma		X	X	X
Janice		X	X	
Sophie	X *		X	
Zeke	X		X	

* Sophie works at a K-8 school

After receiving teachers' survey responses by email, I called the respondents and requested a time to meet with them for an in-person interview. Since I was also making a film in conjunction with the paper, I both video taped and tape recorded the interviews. I wanted the in-person interviews to be more like casual conversations than formal interviews, so I didn't follow a strict format when meeting with teachers. Instead, I reviewed their surveys before our meeting, and asked

teachers to expand on their responses. Sometimes this led the conversation to other topics that weren't directly asked on the survey, but that were related. What I was most interested in was their experience as first year teachers, so whatever resonated the most with them was what I wanted to hear about during our time together. The shortest interview was forty minutes; the longest lasted two hours. Interviews were later transcribed in their entirety and compiled with the written survey responses.

Once I had the written surveys and hours of interview tapes, I read the data looking for trends and themes. I searched for terms that more than one teacher used in her or his response, and reviewed the data with the goal of describing it in a few key words. After chunking some of the data together, I wrote an analytical memo and continued checking for trends that I thought may be emerging. I highlighted recurring ideas and made notes in the margins of the hardcopies. Sometimes I contacted the respondent to ask her or him to elaborate on a point.

For this project, I was interested in qualitative responses that reflected a teacher's individuality as well as the individuality of her or his experience as a new teacher. I organized the responses into categories or themes, so that responses are grouped together by headings, rather than by individual case studies.

THE WHO: FINDINGS FROM TEACHERS

MORALE & SUPPORT AT THE SCHOOL SITE

The survey starts with a group of what I termed "Basic" questions that seek to understand the setting and situation of the teachers. Questions were framed around school description, including information about demographics, support and morale. Support however, can be a mysterious concept to new teachers. How is it defined? What does it feel like? A shoulder to cry

on or a peer evaluator? Lesson plans readily available, or a teacher who is willing to take in students with behavior problems for a time out? Most importantly perhaps, is figuring out who is responsible for the support. Do new teachers need to seek it out, or is it something that should be there for them, gently making its presence known throughout the year? There are arguments for many variations of support, but the underlying message is that there must be something that new teachers can grab onto in their new settings. This section explores how new teachers assess their level of support, and demonstrates the different ways in which teachers do or don't feel supported.

Janice* works at a large (1,800 students) public high school in the East Bay. The majority of her students are Latino (50%) and the school was taken over by the state this year. Janice shows much of the ambiguity around the concept of support when asked if she feels supported at her school site: "Sort of. I've been offered help by a number of teachers, but I don't know what to ask for, that's part my fault I guess."

New teachers are so overwhelmed that often they don't know what to ask for and may fear that by doing so they are going to generate more work for themselves or for other teachers, who they realize are also busy. Clemma is well aware of the time constraints inherent in teaching, but is still looking for professional growth. In several conversations I've had with her outside of the interview context, she has repeatedly spoken of her need to develop as a professional and be treated as such. This is also apparent in her survey response:

I don't feel all that supported by the school. I've been observed by my principal 3 times this year and I did have a 1 on 1 meeting with him but it seemed cursory, as if he really didn't care. He had nothing but positive things to say about the observation which was nice but unrealistic in the same respect. We have new teacher meetings monthly but they're pretty lame. I think the school should try to build community between new teachers, especially across departments. It's so hard to really get to know other teachers. There's NO time!!

Clemma works at a diverse high school in South San Francisco. She is one of the few teachers who explicitly responded to my inquiry about morale among students. She writes, "For the most part,

* Not her real name.

morale is pretty good. Students are easy-going and are not very moody. There is not a strong academic culture but students get along very well - especially between races.” Since the teachers and students are working together in the same space, it is critical that morale between both groups be considered since there is a direct relationship between the two. If teachers feel supported, students are more likely to feel supported. Conversely, if students have low motivation or if the climate between different races or ethnicities on campus is tense, teachers may feel down.

Sophie, who teaches at a K-8 school in the North Bay where the student body is about half Latino and half White, is excited by the kind of support she receives, and rightly so. Her experience has been so overwhelmingly positive that she decided to study how mentoring impacts first year teachers. When I attended her paper presentation, she raved about how supported she felt by those around her, and campaigned for more mentoring, both formal and informal, at all school sites. In her written survey, she explains:

I love working with the other teachers in the middle school, who are incredibly supportive and willing to help. There are a few people at the school I consider mentors, who are available to help me out with everything from curriculum to classroom management. The administration is also very supportive- during my first week, the principal wrote me a little note saying how much she appreciated me, and gave me flowers on Back to School Night.

Annabelle, who works at an urban school of about 70% African American students in the East Bay, feels so overwhelmed she doesn't know how to describe morale at her school:

Morale? God, I have no idea. I'm so focused on my own survival, it's hard for me to have a realistic gauge on the other teachers. It's also hard for me to generalize about morale for students at [the school]. But I can talk about MY students. My 11th graders generally are disenchanted and don't really buy into school. Those who do are pretty focused, and I think they are the ones with support at home and involvement in sports. My 9th graders seem more hopeful and more upbeat.

Alexis, who works at a school on the peninsula in an affluent area, describes morale and support very differently:

Very positive! Students and teachers seem extremely happy and unified, compared to the other schools I've seen. Teachers are all very supportive and are happy to share materials and advice.

However, despite a positive environment, Alexis wanted more organized support for her first year: “I think there should be some kind of new teacher support system in place (like BTSA [Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment],) but there is no such program.” Audrey, who works at a middle school in the East Bay where 46% of students qualify for the Free/Reduced Lunch Program, describes morale among teachers and students at the school this way: “Varies w/ teachers: some are jaded and other are excited; varies w/ students: some think the school is way better than their prior school (if they came from Oakland) and other think it can be a ghetto school.”

Audrey raises the relativity of school setting and the vulnerable position of professionals new to a field. New teachers don't have other school settings to compare their current experience to besides their student teaching assignments, which sometimes don't allow a teacher to develop good sense of administrative and district support. The first year therefore, isn't only about learning how to work with students and develop curricula, but also how to navigate the school setting. This includes navigating school politics, administrative procedures and department meetings. Whether or not a teacher feels supported may be related to whether the administration communicates upcoming meetings in a timely and respectful way, whether other teachers are willing to share their lesson plans, or something as simple as whether the prep room has a functioning copier.

In Audrey's case, she finds great support from the structure of the shared class system. Because she collaborates with teachers who are close to her classroom, she feels more supported than she expected:

I feel great support from both a fellow Humanities 7th grade teacher and my partner math-science teacher (with whom I share all my students). The Humanities teacher (5 years experience) was my cooperating teacher from spring student teaching and so we have built a strong relationship and 2-3 times a month collaborate on curriculum and lesson plans. We have early release on Wednesdays and have time to meet to talk about plans. I regularly check-in with my partner teacher (2-4 years experience, 2nd year at [our school] about students issues, discipline, parent contact and paperwork. Both have provided much needed areas of support and guidance.

Later in the survey, Audrey writes explicitly, “The school has been more supportive than I expected.” Expectations certainly play into a teacher’s experience. Zeke, who teaches in the same district as Annabelle, with an 80% African American student body, describes morale as:

Very low, there are teachers who regularly miss days from school and we rarely get subs. The students know they come from the dead end and act as such. Not too much positive things happening at the school. Very low parent support, in fact, most interactions with parents are very negative.

The survey also asks for “Other information you think is important about your school.”

In response to this question, Zeke writes, “Our school is viewed as the worst middle school in Oakland.” When asked about whether or not he feels support at the school Zeke writes, “No, but I didn’t expect it.” What would he like, if he could get it? “More support and working together with teachers.” Zeke paints a dismal picture. Not much is expected of the students, which seems to result in low expectations of the school. Since there has been a lot of failure in the past, failure is expected in the future. Even Zeke, a first year teacher, seems resigned to accepting the situation as it is, and making due.

Unlike Zeke, Annabelle finds some support at her school. Like Janice, when asked if she feels supported, points out that if she wants it, she must seek it out:

Generally yes, but I think it's pretty much a situation where I need to seek it out. When I do ask for help, I get it. And I'm grateful for it. There is also a "new teacher" group that's meeting every week, but I don't really feel I have the time for it all the time. When I do go, I really really appreciate the camaraderie and general sharing.

This is the double bind of support: although teachers are desperate for it, they are also desperate for time. They don’t have enough of it and already feel stretched by the demands they must meet, leaving little room for something that feels optional. It seems professional support must be a priority to a teacher in order for a teacher to find it. Or, a school must have a strong system in place that can continually offer a teacher support without making more work for her or him. The latter is certainly more optimal, as teachers already have too many demands on their time and energy.

The teachers profiled here are competent, intelligent people with high endurance. That is exactly the kind of person administrations count on to fill their teaching ranks. There is nothing wrong in seeking strong people for demanding positions, and it is often necessitated by state or federal policy decisions that funnel resources in other directions. Yet despite the fact that all of the new teachers profiled in this paper feel committed to their chosen field, much is being asked of them with too little support in return.

WELCOME TO TEACHING, NOW YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN

Morale and support at the school site can be critical to a teacher's success, especially in terms of feeling less isolated, alone or frustrated in a new profession. Just as it can be difficult to assess morale at a company with whom you are interviewing for only an hour, it can be difficult to know the climate at a particular school. In addition, so many hires are done so at the 24th hour. New teachers especially, since they don't have lay-off status within districts that annually lay-off staff for budget reasons, only to rehire them again when student enrollment demands it, are left without a for-sure job late in the summer. It isn't until the week or day before school begins that many new teachers I know secured a position. This type of timing can lead to desperation on both ends. For Alexis, one of three of the teachers I interviewed who secured her job less than a week before the school year began, it led to an experience that seems exceptional, but may be more commonplace than many realize. When I asked her to explain her introduction to teaching in our in-person interview, she described a very difficult couple of weeks:

Well, I took the first job that I got and that was at a very big urban school and it seemed okay at first and then I took the job about four days before it was going to begin and then about one day before I was going to begin I found out I'd be teaching completely different classes than I thought at first – so that was the first set back.

They told me in the interview that I would be teaching 10th grade sheltered English so it would be language learners and it would two periods of them. One period of English and one period of Test Prep – Preparation for the Exit Exam. So that was two preps and they said nothing about anything else. They asked me if I felt

comfortable teaching mainstream sometime, but I just didn't feel comfortable with [more than] just two preps this year. So that's where we left it at the interview.

Then the day before I was supposed to begin there was a staff development day and I went to that and I was informed that I would be teaching mainstream senior English. So I had one day to get ready for that and I was really shocked. I was like, "I can try."

So I did the first day and had the second interesting experience where I – this is sort of humorous - I got stuck in the elevator there with two other teachers. Right before staff development where I was late because I was stuck in the elevator and the fire department had to come and break me out. So it was a little bit of a funny first day, but it was okay.

The faculty day went okay and they told me I wouldn't have my own classroom and I would be shuffling around and I was okay with that, but then during the faculty development day they told me they had found a space – it was the old teacher's lounge from last year. So that day I spent a lot of time getting some desks in there and there was a whole bunch of crap – from like 20 years before. Industrial fan, home ec. room.

[Did it look like a classroom?]

No, not at all, there were teacher mailboxes. I mean it was basically storage space – teachers were still picking up mail. The next day I began – I had washed off all the desks, I had done my best at putting something on the walls.

It was okay, then the first two weeks I was in there at doing my best to pull together some lessons, but I didn't really feel any support from that school or that staff. It took me two weeks to get a bathroom key – I was using the student bathrooms – no one gave me a tour of the school. I couldn't find any materials. It was hard for me to – I had to sign up for the book I wanted to teach right before, I didn't have any time to plan for anything. I was starting off with a poetry unit in my senior English class.

So I had three preps and I was with those students for two weeks and my car got hit by a student in the parking lot. They were supposed to give me a parking space and I asked about twenty times, but nothing ever happened. Same with the bathroom key, room key. I didn't have a key to my own room and every morning I had to find a custodian to get them to open the room. It was pretty much disastrous.

I went out and spent \$400 on getting some materials for my classroom because there was absolutely nothing in there including paper. There was no computer for me. So there was my work space, so because there was not computer, I would come home every day and work for six hours. So I did it for two weeks and I was a miserable wreck. I couldn't do it – I was crying, I was breaking down. My family told me you gotta do something about this now. You have to quit the program – it's not worth your health.

I called in sick one day – no one had informed me on how to get a sub, no one had informed me on any paperwork. I hadn't signed a contract. The district was kind of messing me around. Telling me they couldn't until they got a definite count on the number of students back so that even though I had been there for two weeks they couldn't guarantee that I would be there.

So I didn't know how anything was going and breaking down and all that. So I finally called them and told them I wasn't going to sign the contract for this position. I called the department head. Well, originally I had called in sick and since I didn't know how to call in a sub, I called the school. So they told me they would take care of it. A few hours later, the department head called me back very angry and said, "Do you realize that there is no sub for your class and this is not professional and you can't do this?" And I said, "I apologize, I did call the school and I had no idea on how to call a sub."

The next morning I called her and told her I was not going to sign the contract for this position. She was upset – I had to get going and pick up my stuff. I donated all my stuff to a teacher who was in a similar position.

I came home and was like, I don't know what I'm going to do next, but I just can't do that for this year. At the time, it was the most difficult decision I ever had to make in my whole life. At the time, I had been with the kids for two weeks and you know, it had nothing to do with them at all. They were a great group, I loved them. I was so excited to teach them – it was impossible. So that was my first experience.

[Were you able to have a farewell day with them?]

No, I called in sick and just didn't go back. No, it was really unjust to them and I believe they get it all the time. I still feel horrible about that.

It wasn't really the first time I'd done first time teaching because last year I did six weeks full time and that was great. It was seriously the circumstances and the lack of support. Everything I wanted I had to ask twenty people to figure out how to find.

Alexis' experience is heart breaking. During the summer she searches for a job but isn't hired because her local district has a hiring freeze. Then she finds a job at the last minute that seems initially fortuitous, but is instead a grueling introduction to her new career. In this position not only is she not supported, she is abandoned. How different her story is from Sophie's, whose principal brought her flowers during Back to School night.

Differences in new teacher induction practices are an important area to investigate further. It seems that in urban schools especially, new teachers do not have a support system solidly in place

for them. It is dependent on the school, and the department. If a teacher is lucky to connect with a teacher who has more experience, perhaps that person will take the new teacher under her or his wing. If the school has an active new teacher program, then a new teacher can be plugged into that, which may be useful. However, it does require additional paperwork and may feel like an additional commitment, rather than a respite.

What is clear from Alexis' experience especially, is that the first experience can be traumatic. To enter a new profession after over a year of intensive training, only to be treated poorly and certainly less than a professional, is a symptom of a deeper illness: teachers often aren't valued. Perhaps it is the high turnover, so surrounding staff are less likely to invest and get involved. Certainly one factor is administration style; another, budget constraints. There are no doubt many reasons why induction programs vary not just by district but also by school. However, the result of meager or non-existent programs can lead to teacher burnout and turnover, and contributes to the sense that the first year is extremely difficult.

WHAT TEACHING IS REALLY LIKE

Defining survival in the teaching context is difficult. It has a tone of desperation about it, and indeed the first year of teaching can be filled with desperation. But it is also filled with accomplishment. Teachers do more than show up every day, although that in itself is a success. But the idea of survival seems to be the escape hatch from harsh judgment, either a teacher's own judgment or perceived judgment of outsiders. It is a familiar refrain in the new teacher's classroom – "I can't do it all. I'm just trying to survive." She or he may say this to her or himself or to others.

The teachers profiled in this paper knew that the first year would be a tough one. They realized they would have to make sacrifices. The next set of questions I asked related to the first year experience in general. It asked about how things were going, what was most difficult and most rewarding about being a teacher, and how the job impacted their personal lives. In their excerpts

they describe what the first year feels like so far, revealing the demands that kick teachers into survival mode, as well as the rewards that sustain them. Their words show that the trials of the first year are extensive. Annabelle captured the conflicting emotions of the first few months:

Trying, traumatic, humiliating, stressful, sleepless. Also exciting, nerve-wracking, and wonderful in small moments that I try to cherish. I think the best part of the year so far is developing relationships with my students and really connecting with them. The worst part is just plain not knowing what I'm doing, and not knowing what's best for my students.

Annabelle's words pack a lot of punch, especially the word "humiliating." It's a word that reveals the toll teaching can have on a person's core self. Indeed, teaching is a very vulnerable job that leaves a person open to hurtful words and situations, as well as painful self judgment. Annabelle is tried by her students, many of whom may feel they don't have a lot of reason to apply themselves in the classroom. Many of them have disheartening stories to tell, which can also overwhelm a teacher on top of everything else. Annabelle wants to do the best for her students, but still isn't sure what that is, although her caring is significant enough in many ways. She is frustrated by wanting to serve them well, but not yet having the tools and experience to know what it is that they need. Clemma also explains the phenomena well: "There is definitely pressure to perform immediately - All of those students that depend on my ability to teach. I sometimes feel badly for them!" Teachers see so much need that it's difficult not to be able to meet it all.

Like Annabelle, the other teachers surveyed have high expectations for themselves and want to serve their students well. Although they are just getting their bearings, the first year isn't just one of painful learning, but also of celebrated gains (sometimes that are a result of painful learning).

Alexis, in her survey, writes about the first couple months this way:

So far, I have learned an incredible amount about myself and have gained confidence. I am endlessly overwhelmed, especially considering that I technically teach part time for very little money!

Alexis works part time, but it feels like more than a full-time job. She writes of not only learning about how to do her job better, but about personal transformation. She has discovered things about

her self through her profession, including new confidence. Janice, who writes about her first year with a very positive voice, explains:

It's been pretty great. I have some really rad students, and am still in a Masters class that meets every other week, and seeing them really helps me to deal and feel not alone. My department is pretty unorganized, I didn't know what I had to teach, or what the students already knew, and there wasn't a clear way to get that information. I just sort of make it up and take educated guesses some times.

I think I've had a better time than others, and part of that is due to the great mentoring I had student teaching last year. I was pretty prepared, mentally. I was terrified, but I had some really strong people behind me encouraging me.

Janice speaks to the need for appropriate and substantial teacher preparation. Since the MUSE program more often than not placed student teachers in difficult, urban school settings, many of the teachers felt that they were ready for tough situations. Clemma explains the difference between the schools she trained in and the school she now works in:

My school is a really good fit for me. It's not as "hardcore" as my student teaching experience was. It's very diverse but the students aren't quite as needy. It's a better fit because I don't feel like it's me vs. the students quite as much. For the most part, they know I'm on their side.

The idea that students consider teachers "on their side" is critical to the sense of success in a teacher's first year and perhaps throughout their time in the profession. Teaching in a classroom where many of the students consider the teacher their enemy, or at the very least, an incompetent, can be extremely demoralizing.

Finally, Sophie's positive experience can serve as a model for new teacher induction in that she team teaches the majority of classes:

So far, it has been fun and challenging. I only teach one class on my own, though, so my workload is not as daunting as that of other first-year teachers. My class is also high-achieving and motivated. Despite these positives, I also often feel overwhelmed. I don't think I'm a very good teacher. I often feel like I don't know what I'm doing, and my curriculum is sadly lacking. Most days I fly by the seat of the pants, or at least it sure feels that way.

Reading the responses reveals some common themes. One is that teachers feel both overwhelmed and rewarded. The first year is much more than suffering. It's also about creating

connections with students and finding one's feet in the classroom. For the first time teachers have freedom to run their classrooms the way they want, after a year of being observed and critiqued. This feels both exciting and scary. Suddenly they are the ones in charge of all the students and it's hard to know what to do or how to do it right. Despite being a novice teacher, there doesn't feel like a lot of room to make mistakes or learn the ropes. There is an audience for nearly every moment, an audience that can be both forgiving and ruthless.

In addition to the external audience, new teachers still have fresh memories of being observed by their student teaching placement supervisors and cooperating teachers. Despite the lack of supervisory outside eyes in their own classrooms, new teachers learn to internalize the critical gaze. They may second-guess their decisions or feel like their uncertainty would be okay if so many students weren't depending on them. However, many teachers are aware of their novice status, and willing to give themselves a break, as are teachers and students.

IS A PERSON PREDISPOSED TO BE A TEACHER?

As I was struggling with the decision of whether or not to stay in teaching, I began to wonder if I was missing a key element in my personality in order to be successful at teaching. I was fairly certain it wasn't something as simple as stamina, since I have endured challenges in the past and made it to the other side. I knew that I had much that made me a great teacher – a love of the students and a love for their learning. So I posed this question to the teachers I interviewed: “Do you think there are certain qualities a person must have in order to be a good teacher?”

Alexis touched on the qualities that I had considered: “I think a good teacher needs stamina, self-confidence, perseverance, and organization. Yes, I feel like I have these qualities, but they are definitely being tested this year. I am burning out.” Audrey named some of the same traits: “Patience. Energy. Enthusiasm. Resourcefulness. Organization. A little bit crazy. An interest in

working with youth.” Clemma didn’t name as many adjectives, but instead focused on the need to love kids:

I feel that a good teacher must above all love kids. If you love kids then you will enjoy the job and if you don’t enjoy the job (for the most part) then it is too hard and it’s not worth it. I also think a good teacher sets boundaries and has high expectations of students. I do think that I have what it takes to eventually be a good teacher. It probably won’t happen for a while, but I know that it will!

Indeed, there doesn’t seem to be a magic formula for creating enduring teachers. Of course, there are terrible teachers who are missing some essential qualities. But, there are also many qualified people with all the right qualities who don’t enter the profession or don’t stay in it because of the demands the job places on their personal lives or the lack of professional respect both in larger society and at their school site.

Janice also offered thoughtful response to the question. Her response didn’t focus on intrinsic values that a teacher may or may not hold, but more on an attitude that serves a teacher well:

I think there are [qualities], but I think they really vary by person. There may be two different people who are both great teachers, and have nothing in common.

I do think you have to be honest no matter what, honest with yourself and honest with your students. I also think you need to be able to recognize when you are doing a good job and take pride in it. There may always be something that you can do better, but if you try your best, and really care, then you are being the best teacher you can be. I don’t think a lot of people feel that way about their jobs, no matter what they do.

Zeke took a similar attitude in his response. He focused more on behavior choices than on personality traits as being a key to success in teaching:

The key to teaching is having an outlet. You have to have something that takes your stress and pain away. Be it exercise, art, music, whatever. Without an outlet, you won’t last long. You cannot be a workaholic. If you work too hard, you will not last long. [Fifty] or 55 hours a week, tops. People need their own time and space. People need patience, compassion, understanding, a good memory of how they were in school and a realization that people take a long time to change.

Rather than identifying some ingredient that must be present in the genetic recipe for a teacher, Zeke identified a lifestyle that teachers must adopt to survive. Perhaps he witnessed this in his mother, who is also a teacher. His response does highlight a vital need for teachers to prioritize themselves, at least some of the time. Otherwise the burnout that Alexis felt so early will continue to deplete teachers and cause them to either leave their jobs, or lead one-dimensional lives that may leave them unhappy.

At one point in time the majority of teachers were women. Now the numbers, especially in secondary education, are more balanced between the sexes. However, the dominance of women in the field at one time has had a role in the way teaching has been shaped as a profession. If men had dominated the teaching ranks more recently, how would the profession look different? Would teachers be expected to make the same sort of self-sacrifice they are today, for the sake of their students? Patriarchal society has not encouraged women to prioritize themselves, which is reflected in the structure of the teaching profession.

Of the seven teachers who are involved with this paper, six of them are women. I was very interested to know if the teachers, including Zeke, considered the influence of sexual politics on their chosen career to be significant. When asked if she thought the dominance of females in the profession had impacted the profession's parameters, Audrey responded:

Yes, I think it would be different and that has shaped the profession. The male-dominated society has been affecting education from the outside for years with the emphasis on testing, standard-based accountability and a lack of care and money into the real issues that drive and make education successful. It would be very different if more men were on the inside, for both society's view and value of education and also for the students themselves. I also think that if teaching were more of a male-dominated field, teachers would be paid higher salaries and it would be more of a professional field, rather than what it is now.

Audrey notes that the system would appear different if there were less male influence on how education is designed and evaluated, not just in what teaching positions look like. She notes that there would likely be higher pay, and more professional recognition. Clemma didn't provide a

lengthy response to the question, but also cited lack of compensation as an outcome of teaching being a female career for so long, as did Janice and Zeke. Janice also commented:

Teachers are so often looked at as moms, babysitters, and nurturers. I think that you need to be caring and nurturing and understanding, but for me, in high school, I'm not a babysitter. They're kids, they're still fragile and growing and need guidance, but I think you can give that guidance through your honesty with them and your integrity and your obvious good will and clear discussion with your students, and your frankness about what you expect of them, what you do for them, and why you want to do that.

Being a mom figure and being a strict but caring teacher are often seen as opposites, but kids need structure, they need to be held accountable, and they need to have responsibility be expected of them, so that they begin to expect it in themselves.

Janice's comments touch on what some teachers consider to be a down side of teaching – classroom management - sometimes referred to as babysitting. Although the need for this type of supervision varies greatly from school to school, it is a need regardless of where one teaches. Students everywhere will need the guidance and nurturing that Janice writes of in her response. Historically, this type of work isn't recognized monetarily, leaving teachers overworked and underpaid.

A TEACHER'S REWARD: THE STUDENTS

As is apparent from the responses above, teachers are excited about working with students and mention it as one of the greatest rewards of the profession. Students are the people who make the job worthwhile. It is clear that the teachers who responded to my survey are in the profession because they want to see students succeed and make a positive difference in their lives. Janice is especially poignant in her response:

The kids, their faces, their thanks when they learn something new, their appreciation when they feel they can talk to me, and the amazing opportunity I have to hang out with them, listen to them, be a part of their lives, and give them something that will help them to be better people. I am totally lucky to get to hang out with 90 kids everyday, to learn from them, and laugh with them, and create friendships with them.

Janice isn't alone in her appreciation for the relationships that she shares with students. Teachers seem to get a lot from interacting with their students, and sharing the day with them, not just teaching them a new skill. Annabelle describes the rewards this way:

Building relationships with students. Seeing my students make connections that I helped them with. Seeing them grow as people, developing and using knowledge from class.

In my in-person interview with Annabelle, she elaborated on her feelings for students:

...I really do care for my students, not all of them, but 95% of my students. I really truly care for them. Some I'm like you don't show me the love, I'm not going to show you the love. I guess I'm just starting to understand more and more what it means to be a teacher – as I get to know my students more.

Here, it is apparent that Annabelle is fully aware that being a teacher doesn't mean loving all the students. It's inevitable that some will not earn a place in a teacher's heart, and that a teacher will not earn a place in the student's heart. It also reflects a sort of romanticism lost. Some teachers may idealize the experience to think that she or he can reach everyone in the classroom. However, it may be more beneficial to both the students and the teacher, if the teacher accepts that some students are not reachable at that moment in time.

Obviously, the rewards come not just from spending time with students and developing relationships, but also the satisfaction of feeling that students are learning. Perhaps because teachers care so much for students, they want to know that they are imparting useful information and skills for their lives. Sophie, when asked what she likes best about teaching, says: "The students! I love interacting with them. I also love the autonomy, planning lessons, and the excitement that comes from planning a good lesson or having a good class."

It's clear that the teachers who responded to the survey and who I interviewed enjoy working with adolescents and teenagers. Because all the teachers spoke passionately about their students, it seems to be the motivating factor for why teachers entered the profession and why they

remain. Students are an ongoing source of joy. This is true regardless of school location or demographics, or even of classroom management challenges.

THE DOWNSIDE ON THE OUTSIDE: PERSONAL LIVES STYMIED

Although teachers have an on-going love affair with students, they can't take the students home with them, nor would they necessarily want to do so. However, in many senses teachers are accompanied by their students all the time. They often bring their grading home with them, think of students who are facing problems in the classroom or at home, or consider how they could handle classroom management in a different way. Then again, their thoughts may focus on how to improve students' writing and reading skills, the sub plan they have to prepare in order to take a day off, or the parent phone calls they really want to make. Certainly, a teacher's work substantially creeps into his or her personal life.

When I asked teachers on the survey how their lives have been impacted by their first year of teaching, there was a clear answer – teaching dominates. For example, Annabelle scoffed at my question:

Personal life? Ha. I don't have nearly as many social engagements. I'm too exhausted usually, or have too much work to do. Or, I'm tired of talking to people and just want to veg out. If I didn't live with my partner, I'd never see her. I do tend to be more careful about how I carve out time for myself.

When I asked her again about the impact of teaching on her personal life during our in-person interview, she began crying. It is clear that this side effect of teaching is one of the most difficult for her. Alexis also mentions breaking down during the first two weeks of teaching, and I remember coming home and crying many nights after teaching. Crying not because something had gone terribly wrong, but because I felt so exhausted. That exhaustion was a large factor in my decision to leave teaching mid-year.

The other teachers responded similarly with frustration and perhaps, depression. Alexis succinctly writes, when asked how teaching has impacted her personal life: “I no longer have a personal life and the biggest loss to me is my lack of time for important personal things such as exercise.” Zeke, also using few words, answers the question this way: “More stress, dealing with negativity, too much work, not enough time to pursue other hobbies and things that need to be taken care of in life.” Clemma writes:

Teaching definitely has impacted my personal life. I have so much less time for my life than I did before! I know it’s temporary but I feel like I could work incessantly and still just make a dent in what needs to get done. It’s out of control. There is so little time for planning. It’s depressing.

Teaching is clearly a profession that demands a lot of time from teachers. However, there is an expectation and hope that teaching will demand less time as a teacher acquires more experience. Once a teacher builds up a substantial file cabinet of lesson plans and materials, the job should take less time. Audrey alludes to this hope for the future:

I feel I have been able to maintain somewhat of a social life and have made time for that; however, teaching prep and grading takes up huge amounts of my free time making it mostly overwhelming all the time. The most stressful part is that I have not been able to make time for my personal time, like exercising and doing what I enjoy for myself. I am hoping this changes.

Audrey also mentions that she has maintained a social life of sorts. Indeed, teachers also learn how to make the most of their time and to make choices about what absolutely needs to get done, and what can be left undone without painful repercussions. Some teachers make personal time a priority. Although it isn’t easy, some teachers seem to have created more balance than others. For example, Janice set personal time for herself as a goal for the year:

I’m tired, a lot. I do have lots of personal time, however, mostly because that was one of the goals I set for myself, no work at home, or at least, very little. I work through my prep and lunch, which is hard, but it’s worth it to me to get home and not have to think about school. My family has been really supportive and understanding, particularly when I fall asleep on the phone or forget things. And I have a boyfriend in Law School, so we’re both busy all the time.

Sophie seems to be in a similar situation:

On one hand, I feel like I'm never really NOT thinking about school. On the other hand, however, I make time for myself and my boyfriend. When I'm at home I'm generally interacting with him, watching TV, going to the gym, making dinner, and so forth. I work with a teacher who works twice as many hours as I do; she's always at school. But I simply couldn't do that. I need personal time to sustain my teaching life.

The impact of teaching on a teacher's social life is one of the topics I'm most interested in as I consider new teachers' experiences. It is the one that I think about the most when I contemplate my professional future. The teachers I spoke with are all active, social people whose lives I was either somewhat or significantly familiar with before the first year of teaching began. All of them have had the same partner since starting the program, so must maintain a relationship with someone else while negotiating their time. All of them have outside interests and hobbies, and all of them have felt the impact of their job on their lives. What is clear though, is that these teachers are resilient. As I'm writing this, the teachers are about two months away from completing their first year. They have survived, and, significantly, all of them plan on returning to the classroom next year.

A TEACHER'S SUGGESTION: HOW THE FIRST YEAR COULD BE BETTER

After a survey and interview that focused mostly on the challenges of teaching, I realized it was important to hear what teachers had to say about making it better. Who better than to tell legislators and administrators what they need than the people who aren't being served? It is my hope that their voices are heard.

I asked Annabelle during our interview, "How do you feel or what could change so that your first year was better? ... if you could imagine your first year being the best it could be – what would it look like or how would things be different? What would you need to make you feel like your life wasn't consumed by teaching and you felt like a more balanced person?" To my overwhelming question, she replied with a sigh:

First of all I would be working in a school where I had a mentor who worked here and we met regularly, maybe once a week or something. The school was supported by the community around it, meaning a number of things. I feel like a big thing is - the parents at the school would be very involved. I would have open house and every single parent would show up – anyone who is involved in that student's life would show up and would be almost hyperactive about what they expect out of their sons and daughters and what they expect out of me as a teacher. Basically involved parents, who want to help in whatever way they can and want to be part of helping their child succeed. Responsive parents, when I call they call back. I almost think it would be good to have required parent teacher conferences like on a semester basis.

So on top of all that I would have fewer students – I'd have 20 or less students in my classes. I would have time therefore to be more, maybe even have a tutor in the class all the time so that I could pull students out of the class and work with them individually with them or my assistant could lead them in other things.

I would have all the technological support that I need and students would have access to the Internet . . .

My school would be clean and not have rodents. Lot more support, tutors, teaching assistants, parents, technological support, support more from veteran teachers. More counselors for the students so that they don't feel like they are getting lost in the system and so that they have someone who is following them and making sure that they are taking what they need to go to college.

And yet, even with all of that I still feel it would be a challenge within this community. So if I'm really going for it – more jobs, affordable housing, welfare to work programs and I don't know – eradicate racism. Because I feel that's what it's all about – that's why this school is the way it is – because it's a Black school.

Much of what Annabelle describes isn't just about improving the experience for her, but improving it for the students at the school. This underscores her commitment and love for the students, and is representative of the other teachers I spoke with for this paper. It's difficult for teachers to think only of themselves. Their purpose is to be there for others, and thinking only about their state of being, even when asked, is difficult. Perhaps this is because many of the students have realities that are more trying than those of the teachers. Despite feeling overworked, teachers may also feel lucky. I asked most of the teachers I had in-person interviews with about the high schools they attended as teenagers. Indeed, most of the teachers were educated in schools very different from the schools they are currently teaching in, both demographically and economically.

Additionally, none of the teachers interviewed are people of color – a weakness of this paper and of the profession as a whole – and they seem aware of their white privilege. I know when I began my student teaching assignments in low-performing high schools in San Francisco, I spent a lot of time and energy adjusting to the differences between the schools I was now working at, compared to the school I attended in an affluent East Bay suburb, about 45 minutes from San Francisco. Therefore, although teachers may feel overworked and underpaid, they are motivated by the gross disparities they see in society based on race, class and gender. Teaching is hard work, but not as hard as growing up in a forgotten neighborhood.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I enjoyed talking with my peers about their experiences. They are all thoughtful, intelligent and talented people who have chosen to be educators for reasons that are meaningful to them. They care about students and I care about them.

I undertook this paper expecting to find that teachers were having a very difficult first year, and that is what I found. Yet I make no claims about the universality of the stories told here, or their applicability to school culture and teacher induction in a wide range of contexts. More focused research would have to be done in order to get at the meat of what teachers are saying. Just what exactly is it new teachers need to be successful, who is getting it and who wants more of it? The research would also need to reach a wider audience, and could benefit from including the perspective of veteran teachers.

Many questions remain. If teachers are uncomfortable with the altruistic expectations of the profession, what can be done to change the expectation that teachers are willing to sacrifice so much? It is a classic question that confronts society. Does one work within the system for change,

set up an alternate system, or perhaps learn to clearly define personal expectations within the system that exists? Where do society's assumptions about feminized professions such as nursing and teaching intersect with its ideas about appropriate roles for women? How can expectations be redefined in what is currently considered a "post-feminist" climate that largely embraces biological explanations for gender differences, rather than recognizing the patriarchal structure that defines much of what we experience in our lives? There is a very big picture in which to consider the experience of the few teachers profiled in this paper.

As a teacher, there is always something to be done, improved, added or streamlined. That is not something that can be changed by better administration or more funding. Teachers must, as professionals must in any career, set boundaries for themselves and decide what is acceptable to them. People spend 16-hour days in offices, just as teachers do in classrooms. Long hours and heavy work loads are not unique to teachers alone, although their paltry pay and lack of recognition may be more significant than for those in other positions. Ultimately however, teachers are responsible for defining their own parameters. This, in conjunction with supportive induction programs, may make the first few years less difficult.

Here it is important to point out the disparity of programs between districts. Those schools that serve affluent areas seem to offer more support than those that serve traditionally under funded or forgotten areas. School morale and teacher support are inextricably linked to the school as a whole, and whether it has the funding and services it needs. If the majority of the student population is not white, the school is usually left with far less than it needs to meet the demands of the students and the faculty. This disparity is an atrocious and shameful systemic problem in America's educational system.

When it comes to the first year, there are common themes that teachers talk about: the idea of surviving the initiation phase, of being in a better place for the following year, and of needing to find a way to make time for a personal life. Teachers negotiate the first year in ways that make it

more than bearable, but that also highlight the rewards of teaching. Although there is a lot to complain about, teachers also have a lot to celebrate. They are making connections with students, which is one of the main reasons they are there, and they are aware of their professional learning curve and the improvements they are making in their practice.

However, just as I felt for my students, I feel that I want more for teachers. I am left wondering if there is a way to ease the transition from student teacher to teacher, or if it is bound to be traumatic. I suppose I see truth in both sides. While teaching is inherently demanding, it could be made easier by well-defined support programs that don't ask teachers to give more, but give more to teachers. Teachers need more time to plan and grade, which could be achieved through smaller class sizes and team teaching. Teachers need more initiation into their environments, rather than a kamikaze orientation the day before instruction begins. Teachers need emotional support to know that they are doing the best they can, and they need professional support to know that they are developing in their chosen career. We do a grave disservice by expecting so much from individuals. Schools need to be communities in order for the teachers and therefore, the students, to thrive.

Yet despite seeing the complexity of the case, clouded by current education policy and economic realities, I am angry. I am angry that teachers are often not treated as professionals by the people closest to them at school sites. Teaching assignments are changed mid-stream, meetings are announced last-minute and teachers are often only told what they need to improve rather than what they're doing well. I am angry that my friends, who have endured a difficult and exhausting year, have now been met with pink slips and bizarre job justification protocols in order to hope for their jobs again in the fall. I know that administrators do not purposefully maltreat teachers. With that in mind, how can the system be better organized and structured to alleviate the bureaucracy that often frustrates and demoralizes teachers?

With more professional treatment and support from school personnel and policy makers perhaps the teacher attrition rate wouldn't be so high. It is understandable that teachers, especially

those who may have other professional experience outside of teaching, would opt to leave an environment where they don't feel respected by their students or their administrators. While working with students is immensely rewarding and the camaraderie with other teachers can be supportive and fulfilling, it should not serve as justification for poor a professional environment. Schools seem to count on teachers loving their students and their instruction time so much that it overshadows the loss of weekends and evenings to grading papers and planning lessons. This attitude suggests that teachers should feel wrong for not being totally fulfilled by their job, because they have an impact on students' lives. It's as though teachers can't ask more of their employers, because the job should be inherently rewarding. In this way, relationships with students are bartered for poor working conditions.

That is not to say that teaching is not recognized as a demanding career. It is. Teachers are often eligible for discounts on everything from books to gym memberships. There are also grateful students and families, and appreciative school personnel. Many principals and school districts work diligently to advocate for their faculty and staff. Yet while there is plenty of glowing speak to go around, there isn't always substance to back the hype. Even in institutions of higher learning, where in graduate departments of education scholars evaluate and usually condemn our public school system, teacher training remains a peripheral undertaking. It doesn't receive the funding, support or academic prestige that other studies in the field of education warrant, and is often a money maker for the department through combined credential and masters programs.

I am worried about the future of public education. I am worried for the students enrolled in the system, especially those outside of affluent areas, and I am worried for the teachers. While teaching does offer one of the most meaningful opportunities to form bonds with people, it is not a volunteer position. It should not demand altruism, as teachers have an essential role in society and impact they way in which the future unfolds. While society recognizes this role with platitudes and coffee cups decorated with rosy apples, policy makers need to put their money where their mouths

are and overhaul education by enacting affirming legislation and support rather than punitive measures. It's not just for students' sake, but also for the health of teachers. Teachers are people too, and they deserve professional recognition and personal space to be whole, rather than martyrs of a dying public school system.

I am truly inspired by the teachers and students I know. They see injustice and they work to change it. Teaching is a great job for idealists, even those who may hide it with cynicism. So while my paper is limited by the small size and demographics of its sample, the commitment and perseverance of the teachers profiled here can serve as inspiration to many. Despite set backs, these teachers identify strongly as agents of positive change and students are fortunate to have them in the classroom.

APPENDIX

WRITTEN RESPONSE & FILMED DISCUSSION TEACHER INTERVIEW

Name:

Date:

Thank you for taking the time to consider the following questions. Please type your responses directly onto this form, in a different colored font.

BASICS

1. Briefly describe the school where you are a teacher.
 - a) Where is the school located?
 - b) How many students attend the school and what are the demographics?
 - c) How many teachers are in the English department?
 - d) How would you describe morale among teachers and students at the school?
 - e) Other information you think is important about your school:
2. Do you feel supported as a new teacher at your school?
 - a) If yes, please describe.
 - b) If no, what would you change so that you feel more support?

EXPERIENCE

3. Describe your experience so far as a first year English teacher:
4. How does being a teacher impact your personal life?
5. What do you consider most rewarding about teaching?
6. What do you consider most difficult about teaching?
7. How do race/ethnicity/sex/religion and/or sexuality affect your role as a teacher?

EXPECTATIONS

8. Why did you choose teaching as your profession?
9. What do you hope to accomplish as a teacher?
10. What were/are your expectations for your first year as a teacher?
 - a) How are those expectations affecting your experience?
11. Do you plan to teach next year?
12. Do you think you will be teaching in five years?
 - a) If yes, why and in what kind of school?
 - b) If no, why not and what might you do instead?

PROFESSION

13. Do you think there are certain qualities a person must have in order to be a good teacher? If so, what are they? Do you feel you have these qualities?
14. Teaching is traditionally a female career. Do you feel that has shaped profession? Do you believe teaching would be different if it were a male-dominated field?
15. Teachers are often considered “experts” in the classroom. How does that influence your perception of yourself as a first year teacher?
16. How do you feel about being a “novice” teacher? Do you feel there is space for you to learn, or do you feel pressure to perform immediately?

OTHER

What other comments would you like to make about teaching, if any? What would you most like to discuss and explore in a filmed conversation with other first year English teachers? What would you want to know from new teachers about the first year if you were back in time, considering a teaching career?

Thank you very much for your time, energy and thoughts. I know how demanding this time is in our lives, and appreciate your efforts both on this survey and in the classroom.

REFERENCES

- Biklen, S.K. (1995). *School Work: Gender and the Cultural Construction of Teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Carter, P. (2002). *"Everybody's Paid But the Teacher": The Teaching Profession and the Women's Movement*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Casey, K. (1993). *I Answer With My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers Working for Social Change*. New York: Routledge.
- Clifford, G.J. (2000). 'Daughters into Teachers': Educational and Demographic Influences on the Transformation of Teaching into 'Women's Work' in America. In M.C. Clement, (Ed.), *Building the Best Faculty: Strategies for Hiring and Supporting New Teachers* (pp. 115-132). Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Hoffman, N. (2003). *Woman's "True" Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.
- Moir, E. (1990). Phases of First-Year Teaching. *California Department of Education*. Retrieved February 25, 2004, from <http://www.newteachercenter.org/article3.html>
- Murnane, R.J. (1991). *Who Will Teach?: Policies that Matter*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Perlmann, J., & Margo, R. (2001). *Women's Work? American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Podsen, I.J. (2002). *Teacher Retention: What is Your Weakest Link?* Larchmont: Eye on Education.
- Tabb, E.D. (1991). *Characteristics of Stayers, Movers, and Leavers: Results from the Teacher Followup Survey, 1988-89*. National Center for Educational Statistics, p.14-16.