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Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Their Novice Year of Teaching

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BEGINNING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR

NOVICE YEAR OF TEACHING

by

Rebecca Bingham Rees

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Their Novice Year of Teaching

by

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Utah State University, 2015

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This qualitative study was an investigation of first-year teachers who completed

their teacher preparation program at a large, land-grant university in the west (*n=16*). It

explored teachers' perceptions of their first teaching year centered around the questions

of challenges and successes they had encountered, whether they felt prepared for their

first year by their teacher preparation program, in what areas would they have liked more

instruction during their teacher preparation program, and if they felt able to implement

developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) within their classroom.

Study findings indicated three main areas remarked on by teachers: creating and

implementing instruction and assessment; experiences of teachers; and classroom

organization, management, and procedures. All of the teachers within the study had

comments within the area of creating and implementing instruction and assessment.

About 46% of the comments within this theme referred to whether teachers felt able to

implement DAP in their classrooms. Almost 77% of teachers reported that they were

able to implement DAP within their classrooms. Fourteen of the teachers had comments

coded within the theme of experience. Almost 68% of those comments fell within the subtheme of student teaching experience. Over half of the teachers expressed satisfaction with their student teaching experience. Fourteen teachers also commented within the theme of classroom organization, management, and procedures. About 73% of those comments were coded within the subtheme of classroom management. Teachers reported feeling both successful and challenged within this theme, and it was also identified as an area they would have liked more instruction in during their teacher preparation programs. Five less prominent themes were also delineated: special education, teacher intrinsic qualities, teacher characteristics, child and classroom characteristics, and parent and family issues. Study findings demonstrated, as well, that most teachers felt prepared for their first year of teaching by their teacher preparation program. The majority of teachers began their first teaching in a public school setting, and participants were teaching students ranging from pre-school to first grade. Limitations, implications, and suggestions for future research are discussed.

(110 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Their Novice Year of Teaching

Rebecca Bingham Rees

This study was conducted to understand the perceptions of beginning teachers concerning the training they received in their teacher preparation program helped them with the successes and challenges they faced during their novice year of teaching. Comprehending novice teachers' perceptions of their successes and challenges is important as a method to help beginning teachers avoid feelings of burnout.

A survey was sent to graduates of a teacher preparation program at a large, land-grant university, who were embarking on their novice year of teaching. Responses were received from 16 teachers. In the survey, teachers were asked to answer demographic questions regarding the school and class they were teaching in, as well as, information concerning their graduation date and involvement with a mentoring program. Teachers were also asked to answer essay questions regarding their feelings of success, challenges they were facing, if they felt able to implement developmentally appropriate practice, and how their teacher training program prepared them for their novice year of teaching.

Results established that the majority of teachers participating within the study felt prepared by their teacher preparation program to meet the challenges and successes they faced during their novice year of teaching. Teachers also listed areas they would have liked to receive more training in during their teacher preparation program, which could be used to adjust teacher preparation programs to better meet preservice teacher's needs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The field of early childhood education has experienced many changes with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; United States Department of Education, 2001) that have greatly affected teachers of young children. Some of these changes include the "accepting a new set of expectations informed by standardized, predetermined learning outcomes; teaching mandated curriculum content; managing an unprecedented emphasis on academic achievement; struggling with the pressure to use teacher-directed instructional materials; responding to the demand for increased accountability; and negotiating the appropriate role of play in the classroom" (Goldstein, 2008, p. 222). These changes impact beginning teachers, who have had little or no previous experience juggling the demands associated with teaching by themselves. Morey, Bezuk, and Chiero (1997) stated, "As new teachers enter their classrooms for the first time, they face unprecedented challenges related to changes in societal context, increasing ethnic diversity, and the condition of public education. As a group, they struggle with the transition from college student to classroom teacher; they encounter situations where they question whether they have the necessary knowledge or problem-solving skills to respond effectively" (p. 22).

Teacher preparation programs play a crucial role in helping prepare preservice teachers. These programs can help beginning teachers to anticipate the challenges they may face, figure out ways to handle these challenges effectively, and to focus on providing their students with appropriate and meaningful opportunities to learn (Goldstein, 2008). Teacher preparation programs should prepare preservice teachers for

the experiences they will have as they begin and continue their careers (La Maistre &

Paré, 2010). Morey and colleagues (1997) acknowledged that the field of education is

the only profession where the responsibilities of novice professionals are the same or

more difficult than those of veteran professionals. There is a conflict between beginning

teachers' expectations and the reality of teaching (La Maistre & Paré, 2010). This

conflict can, in part, be due to beginning teachers' challenge of whether to teach in the

ways they were taught in their teacher preparation programs, which are best for young

children, or to surrender to the school climate and teach in ways that contradict what they

were taught (Brashier & Norris, 2008).   This conflict can lead to a mismatch between

teachers' developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and their developmentally

appropriate beliefs (DAB). The variety of pressures mentioned, in combination with lack

of adequate resources, class size, and salary level can lead to teacher burnout and

possibly attrition (Morey et al., 1997).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to contribute to the body of knowledge

concerning the challenges and successes of first-year teachers, and the ways in which

teacher preparation programs can be adjusted to better prepare preservice teachers for the

realities they will face as they transition to their first year of teaching. This study focused

on the research questions:

1. What do first-year teachers find challenging in their first few months of teaching?

2. What do first-year teachers feel are their strengths during their first few months of

teaching?

3. How well do teachers feel their teacher education programs prepared them for

their first few months of teaching?

4. In which areas of their teacher education program would first-year teachers like to have received more instruction?

5. Do first-year teachers feel able to implement developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review begins with an overview of Bronfenbrenner's (1979)

ecological model. Through the lens of the ecological model, the possible contributing

factors of beginning teachers' challenges and successes during their first year are

examined. Next, teacher preparation programs are explored through their history by

looking at the different emphases placed on the amount and focus of teacher training.

Advancements in teacher preparation programs are then discussed by investigating ways

in which programs are striving to meet government standards as well as the needs of the

nation's student population. Then, developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is

defined and the issues facing implementation are described. The mismatch between

teachers' DAB and their DAP is examined, followed by a discussion of beginning

teachers' successes and challenges and how issues relating to teacher burnout and

mentoring affect beginning teachers. Finally, the continual changes faced in the field of

education and possible way in which to help better prepare preservice teachers for their

teaching careers are also explored in the concluding section.

Theoretical Orientation

Factors that influence teachers' challenges, successes, and feelings of

preparedness and burnout fit within Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979). It is

useful to look at a teacher's feelings of preparedness from a sociocultural context.

Things such as educational background, school climate, student

behaviors/needs/personalities, community climate, district environment, and

administration all test a teachers' preparedness during his or her first year of teaching.

Bronfenbrenner stated that each area of the overall system can directly or indirectly

influence a person and his/her development, or in relation to this study, a teacher and

his/her development.

The microsystem, which is the environment of an individual teacher, is the first

context. This context includes people who have close contact with the teacher: school,

classroom, co-workers, administration, and parents. The next context is the mesosystem.

This focuses on the connection or links between different people and relationships with

the various environments, such as district, administrators, and teachers. The exosystem

does not have as much direct effect on the teacher; it encompasses the state board of

education and educational legislation. These areas directly affect the district and school

board, who in turn develop policy that affects the teacher. The fourth context is the

macrosystem. This context includes the overall belief system and cultural influences of

the teacher. The macrosystem has an effect on a teacher and his or her practices, which

in turn influences the teacher's development and teaching. The final context is the

chronosystem. This system encompasses the first four systems as they move through

time. An example of this is the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and its

effects on the other four systems over time.

Teacher Preparation Programs

History of Teacher Preparation Programs

During the 1800s, training of elementary teachers was the responsibility of normal

schools. "Early normal schools provided a short course of study to help students master

the subjects they would teach and acquire some techniques for managing instruction" (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 213). Eventually normal schools began requiring a high school diploma to gain admission to the school and initiated a two-year course of study. The two-year course included information on core subjects such as reading, spelling, and mathematics; as well as pedagogical topics (history of education, psychology, teaching methods, observation and practice).

Beginning in the later nineteenth century, the liberal arts tradition of teacher education emerged. In this tradition, the field of teacher education viewed a liberal or classical education as the best way to prepare teachers to teach. Feiman-Nemser (1990) state:

> Although not designed with vocational goals in mind, the traditional (liberal arts) college program served both liberal and professional aims. It inducted students into a common body of cultural knowledge. It fostered intellectual habits and skills deemed necessary for continued learning. It sought to develop humane values and a sense of social responsibility. At the same time, the classical curriculum exposed students to the best available thinking about education.
> (p. 217)

Around the start of the twentieth century, the teacher education field shifted from a liberal arts focus to university schools of education. Warren (1985) stated, "By 1931, over 60% of white elementary school teachers had preparation ranging from only six weeks to two years of college work. Even fewer black elementary school teachers received this level of preparation: 22% had only four years or less of high school" (p. 10). The aim of the university schools was to incorporate teacher education into the realm of

modern research universities. The goal of this incorporation was to "dignify education as a career, lead to the development of a specialized knowledge base, and support the professional preparation of educational leaders" (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 218). The university teacher education most often took on the format of a four-year program. The first two years consisted of general education and the second two years covered the area of professional studies (Morey et al., 1997).

Advancements in Teacher Preparation Programs

In Cochran-Smith and Power's (2010) article, *New Directions for Teacher Preparation*, they point out that the field of teacher education is seeing an extraordinary emphasis on teacher preparation and teacher quality throughout the United States and many other countries. This emphasis includes a wide range of

> complex and controversial issues, including teacher recruitment, teacher qualifications, preparation programs and pathways, induction programs for new teachers, professional development, teachers' working conditions, teacher assessment and effectiveness, practices regarding hiring and compensation, and the attrition and retention of the teacher workforce. (p. 7)

Cochran-Smith and Power (2010) identified 10 trends in teacher education and teacher quality that point to the direction that teacher preparation is heading. The trends are:

1. Linking teacher preparation, teacher quality, and the economy: This encompasses the view that linking the country's success in a globalized society relies upon the preparation of its citizens to meet world-class academic standards and master complex skills.

2. Recognition of the teacher-quality gap: It is often found that schools with the highest number of poor and minority students are more likely to have inexperienced teachers, teachers teaching in areas outside their fields, or otherwise unqualified teachers. This is a call to dramatically improve university programs to ensure that teachers are highly qualified before they take full responsibility of a classroom.

3. Accountability for student learning outcomes: Teacher preparation programs and alternative licensure programs are responsible for the student learning in their graduates' classrooms. This includes evaluating the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs and alternative licensure programs to prepare graduates to create and provide learning opportunities for their students.

4. Statewide data systems linking teachers, students, and teacher preparation: Statewide longitudinal data systems that connect students' test scores with data about their teacher, which includes information on the teacher's preparation institution. Once compiled, the data system would illustrate the efficiency of teacher preparation programs on student learning.

5. More widespread performance assessments of teacher candidates: This trend incorporates moving away from the traditional teacher certification tests towards performance assessments, which include a standardized assessment rubric as part of the state teacher licensure process.

6. Proliferation of multiple routes into teaching: Alternative certification programs have become more prevalent with state and national mandates and the teacher shortage. These programs allow for an alternate route into the teaching field for individuals who do not go through a university teacher education program.

7. School district-based teacher residency programs: Programs that consist of teacher candidates working in a classroom for a full school year, alongside teacher-mentor, as part of a master's degree.

8. Practice as the center of teacher preparation: A shift from teacher education programs focusing on preservice teachers' knowledge and beliefs to focusing on clinical practice. The intent of the clinical practice would be students' learning.

9. Teachers as researchers: Helping teachers become researchers in their own classrooms. They need to be able to collect, interpret, and apply data about students' learning to continually develop their teaching practice.

10. Preparation of teachers to teach diverse learners: Within this trend, teacher preparation programs are focusing on preparing preservice teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners. (pp. 7-11)

As can be seen with these trends, more emphasis is being placed on teacher education programs to better prepare preservice teachers to meet the needs of students in an ever-changing society (culture, race, moral values).

Baumgartner, Buchanan, and Casbergue (2011) described the changes Louisiana State University made to their early childhood program to better meet the needs of the "whole" (p. 332) preservice teacher and reflect changing guidelines to teacher certification. An internship model was implemented, which requited teachers to spend time teaching in four different grades over the course of four semesters. The program's faculty also began modeling developmentally appropriate practices within their own classrooms. This consisted of students completing projects that are "developmental and progressive. They build upon one another each semester" (p. 333). The students are also

assessed based on a performance and standard based method to supervise the growth of the preservice teachers. Baumgartner and colleagues highlighted the evolution of the program as well. "Regular professional collaboration occurs among students (within and between cohorts); among faculty (between and within departments, semesters, and courses); and between students and faculty" (p. 332). Students leaving the program stated that they felt well prepared to begin their first teaching assignment within the field of early childhood education.

Utilizing data from first-year teachers' surveys concerning their feelings of preparation, as described by Beare, Marshall, Torgerson, Tracz, and Chiero (2012), is another way that teacher preparation programs can enhance their curriculum and program. Many teacher preparation programs conduct survey assessments of their graduates during their novice year of teaching. Beare and colleagues highlighted the disparity between less positive survey results and the implementation of those results within a teacher preparation program. Faculty often cited external variables, such as the size of the preservice teacher cohort, low student SES, and the number of ESL students as reasons for the results. Beare and others found that the external variables they examined had only a miniscule correlation with first-year teachers' survey responses. The authors emphasized the importance of teacher preparation programs finding ways to effectively incorporate survey results within their program structure, which would better prepare preservice teachers for their careers.

Continuing education, at a graduate level, is another way that universities are able to better prepare teachers for the realities of teaching. Nelson and Smith (2004) assessed how teachers' perceptions of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)

implementation and beliefs changed from the beginning to end of early childhood master's program course work. The sample consisted of 30 master's students. The data were collected through a survey given at the beginning of the course work and at the completion of the students course work. The researchers found that, after the students completed their course work, they understood and were more aware of DAP and ways to incorporate it into their instruction and procedures. Nelson and Smith (2004) did point out that early childhood educators and professional development facilitators need to remember that there may sometimes be substantial environmental, cultural, and administrative constraints that do not allow early childhood educators to implement what they believe.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Developmentally appropriate practice was first explained by Bredekamp in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, which was published in 1987 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The National Association for Education of Young Children describes the foundations of DAP as:

1. learning should be guided by the child's level of cognitive and social development;

2. teachers should adapt instruction to the individual learning abilities and needs of each child; and

3. instruction should be responsive to the demands of the social and cultural context in which it takes place.

Often teachers' beliefs center around the principles of DAP, but many issues arise with the implementation of DAP. With the culture of school, there are many stresses that teachers face to make sure their students are academically ready to face the challenges of the next grade. Pressure comes from school districts, school climate, parents, and upper grade teachers to use more teacher-directed instruction, and to ensure that all children will meet their grade level requirements, no matter their individual development. The NCLB act has played a role in the increase of these pressures. NCLB focuses on using standardized testing to assess students' learning. The act's purpose is to ensure the majority of children are meeting grade level requirements each year, as well as to ensure that schools and teachers are being held accountable for student learning and guaranteeing quality education (Jeynes, 2006). NCLB also describes a highly qualified teacher as "one who has full state certification, a bachelor's degree, and solid content knowledge of the subjects being taught" (Marxen, Ofstedal, & Danbom, 2008, p. 81), but fails to include the importance of teacher knowledge concerning child development and DAP. With these pressures, many teachers align their instruction and practices with teacher-directed activities and learning.

Another factor that plays into DAP implementation in the schools is teacher quality. Han and Neuharth-Pritchett (2010) noted the differences between DAP and developmentally inappropriate practices (DIP) interpretation between teachers with college degree(s) and para-professional teaching aides. Teachers with college degrees felt stronger about DAP and were able to identify DIP better than the para-professional teaching aides within their study. Davis (2003) has pointed out that not everyone can teach. "Knowledge of content, child development, classroom management, diversity,

assessment, and a number of other skills are necessary for effective teaching. These

skills alone, however, are still not sufficient for high-quality teaching" (p. 100). Colker

(2008) discussed characteristics that teachers of young children need to be effective in

their classrooms. She surveyed 43 early childhood educators and identified 12 innate

characteristics that indicate effective early childhood teachers. These include the

following characteristics: passion, perseverance, willingness to take risks, pragmatism,

patience, flexibility, respect, creativity, authenticity, love of learning, high energy, and

sense of humor. Colker (2008) noted, "New teachers….would benefit if they could

confirm that the interpersonal and intrapersonal beliefs they possess are those demanded

by the field" (p. 68). Implementing DAP in the classroom takes a lot of time and effort

for the teacher. Often this time and effort to implement DAP may not be seen as

worthwhile by teachers, which can lead to a mismatch between teachers'

developmentally appropriate beliefs and their actual practices.

Mismatch Between Teachers' Developmentally Appropriate Beliefs and Their Developmentally Appropriate Practices

There is a disparity between teachers' developmentally appropriate beliefs and

their actual implementation or lack of implementation of DAP in their classrooms

(Charlesworth et al., 1993). This is an area many beginning teachers may struggle with

as they try to align their teacher education ideals with the realities they meet within their

classroom. Leung (2012) stated, "Because the teacher is crucial in implementation of the

developmentally appropriate approach, teachers' attitudes and beliefs about classroom

practices are important" (p. 39). Other contributing factors may be how a teacher

interprets DAP, the role of culture in DAP, ways in which further education deepens the understanding of DAP, and ways teachers have successfully found to align their instruction with DAP. All of these issues contribute to the mismatch between a teachers developmentally appropriate beliefs (DAB) and their implementation of DAP.

A study conducted by Wien (1996) looked at what areas and factors made it difficult for early childhood teachers to implement DAP in their classrooms. She found that time and its organization affected the implementation of DAP in the participants' classrooms. Two of the participants in Wien's study adopted the rigid time schedule of the child care settings they worked in. These two participants struggled with finding time and ways to implement DAP into their classrooms. The third teacher had found ways to reconstruct her schedule and instruction that allowed her classroom to align with DAP. This schedule allowed learning to be based on the children's interests that the teacher observed in her interactions with the children. The teacher also had more time to have individual interactions with children and planning time with other teachers. This particular teacher commented, "Her own lively interest in children's learning and investment in life is more sustained by her new approach, which depends not on the preset conceptual planning, carried out in a set time frame, but on planning that is responsive to children's engagement, and a socially constructed or emergent curriculum" (p. 394). Wien (1996) concluded that, if centers and teachers would reflect and reorganize their programs to focus and meet children's interests and needs, DAP would be implemented more in classrooms.

As with many needed improvements in the field of education, funding is oft times one of the main obstacles. The reorganization of time in a classroom, as summarized by

Wien (1996), can be a cost effective way to implement more DAP in classrooms. Of course, this reorganization of time depends on the classroom autonomy the teacher has. In some cases, teachers are not permitted to implement their own time schedule, but must adhere to the school or center's schedule.

Goldstein (1997) conducted a qualitative study of one elementary teacher's experiences of incorporating DAP in her classroom. She spent three months in an ungraded classroom (kindergarten, first, and second grades) observing and participating in the learning. Goldstein (1997) identified three areas that the observed teacher struggled with concerning the implementation of DAP. These areas were "problems with personal interpretation, partial adoption, and inconsistency in implementation of developmentally appropriate practices" (p. 3) by the teacher. The school environment and culture was not considered a factor due to the fact that it was in a state that supported DAP and a school that was explicitly child-centered and employed experiential education.

Goldstein (1997) stated, "Developmentally appropriate practice, then, is simply out of step with the mechanistic, efficiency-oriented rhythm that has been the heartbeat of elementary education for a century" (p. 25), which implies elementary education focuses on group, basic-skills learning instead of child-centered learning. Another issue is brought up by Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006). They found that teachers who describe themselves as using child-centered curriculum or DAP, often feel pressure from teachers in higher grades to ensure their students meet academic standards based on their grade level. The need for their students to be able to work with teacher-directed instruction is also stressed. These areas are viewed by upper grade teachers as ways to

help students be prepared for teacher-directed/skill-based instruction as they advance through their educational experience.

Stipek and Byler (1997) studied the relationships between teachers' beliefs of how children learn; their views on policies related to school entry, testing, and retention; their beliefs on the goals of early childhood education; their satisfaction with their present practices and pressures for change; and the teachers actual classroom practices in 60 preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade classrooms. They broke teachers' beliefs, views, and practices into the sub-groups of child-centered, referring to teachers who act as a facilitator of learning by embedding basic-skills into meaningful, everyday activities, and basic-skills-oriented, in which teachers focus their instruction on skills, such as writing, coloring, counting, in the form of repetition, practice, and review.

From the data gathered, Stipek and Byler (1997) found that teachers with more child-centered views and beliefs had more child-centered learning and instruction in their classrooms. Teachers with basic-skills beliefs had classrooms that focus more on academic learning and teacher-directed instruction. Pressure from parents for academics was one of the factors that affected the teachers' teaching practices.

Schmidt, Burts, Durham, Charlesworth, and Hart (2007) conducted a study comparing the social behavior of kindergarten children in a DAP classroom and a DIP classroom. Teachers' guidance strategies, whether positive or negative, were also observed. The study points to the fact that children who experience DAP, including positive guidance strategies, have more positive psychosocial development than those who experience DIP. Children are better prepared to interact with peers and adults successfully, as well as to manage conflict. Another study done by Burts, Hart,

Charlesworth, Fleege, Mosley, and Thomasson (1992) found that children in DAP kindergarten classrooms experienced less stress, as compared to children in DIP classrooms. Transition times, wait times, and workbook/worksheet activities were particularly more stressful to the children in DIP classrooms. Legislators often show more concern for academic skills than social-competency skills such as with the NCLB act. This can result in children failing to learn how to resolve and handle conflicts appropriately or to build positive relationships with their peers. The results of the Schmidt and colleagues' (2007) and Burts and associates' (1992) studies demonstrate how important it is for young children to experience DAP classrooms.

From Stipek and Byler's (1997) study, it can be seen that about half of the teachers had child-centered classrooms, but they felt there was still too much pressure for a basic-skills approach, either from parents or administration or a combination of the two. These are some of the pressures that beginning teachers will face as they launch their careers. There is often a disparity between what a teacher believes, what they are taught in their teacher preparation program, and what they are actually able to implement in their classrooms because of factors such as administration, parents, and government policy. Stipek and Byler (1997) have suggested that teachers need to know and understand the beliefs and cultural values of the populations they are working with. In turn, teachers also need to build and gain a language for explaining the benefits of child-centered/DAP programs to parents and administrators, which can help reduce the pressures teachers feel to have a basic-skills classroom.

As mentioned previously, culture affects the implementation of DAP. A study conducted in Mumbai, India by Hedge and Cassidy (2009) looked at teachers' beliefs

regarding DAP, and how it must adjust to meet cultural parameters and children's needs in that region. The authors detailed the educational system in Mumbai and the specifics of a typical classroom. Hedge and Cassidy (2009) found that teachers in Mumbai had strong beliefs aligning with DAP, but felt unable to implement their beliefs due to the lack of sufficient play materials and lack of funds to buy those materials. The materials in some classrooms were not age appropriate, developmentally appropriate, or even safe. Other areas that were mentioned, which discourage DAP, and coincide with findings from the United States, were the large class sizes and the lack of parental support/parent understanding of child-centered education.

Hedge and Cassidy's (2009) study highlighted some important considerations when transferring DAP standards to other countries and cultures. It is imperative to look at the students' individual culture, race, age, any special needs, gender, and socioeconomic status. When looking at the findings of this study many of the issues mentioned transfer to the United States and its growing diversity in cultures, beliefs, and races. Due to these differences, DAP may vary from state to state, city to city, and culture to culture. This is important to consider when teachers move to a new area, or when a new student moves into a school. It is important for teachers to know about their students' culture and beliefs to better meet their needs and plan effective instruction. One activity that could help teachers learn more about their students' cultures and beliefs is conducting a home visit with each student and their family at the beginning of the school year. "A home visit is a wonderful way to decrease 'beginning-of-school jitters.' It is a powerful tool for building positive relationships between teachers and parents and children" (Johnston & Mermin, 1994, p. 63). During this home visit, a teacher is able to

meet the child and family members in a setting where the family feels comfortable, which allows teachers to get a glimpse into what their students' home life and cultural values may be. This information can then be used by the teacher when planning instruction and interacting with students.

Overall, the implementation of DAP with teachers and in classrooms across the nation, and the world, over 20 years since its first introduction, is still controversial. This opposition may come from the focus in our country to have all children performing at grade level, no matter their individual development and if they are mentally and developmentally ready to understand and grasp the information they are "supposed" to know.

Successes and Challenges for First-Year Teachers

Romano and Gibson (2006) stated that having beginning teachers reflect on their success and strengths in their teaching indicate areas that teacher training programs and school districts can improve teachers' experiences during their first year of teaching. Employing a case study analysis design, these investigators focused on one teacher's struggles and successes during her first year of teaching. Using descriptive data and inductive analysis, the study examined the demands placed on the teacher by teacher responsibilities, school climate, students in the classroom, students' parents, and the pressure from personal goals and setbacks. The information was collected by monthly open-ended interviews and a questionnaire that was completed three times during the school year. These questionnaires and interviews focused on the successes and struggles

that the teacher was having, and the types of knowledge, expertise, and resources that were available or that were needed for effective teaching.

Romano and Gibson (2006) detailed three different issues relating to university training that their subject identified as an area with which she struggled. These three issues were more or improved university training concerning students with special needs, more teaching experience, and more training in writing. Using teacher preparation programs to introduce preservice teachers to the actual challenges and successes of teaching is one way that Romano and Gibson identified to adjust teacher preparation programs.

Beck, Kosnik, and Rowsell (2007) conducted a study that focused on 22 first-year teachers' views of their needs during their initial year of teaching. The teachers' comments highlighted areas in their teacher preparation programs that they wished would have been covered in more depth. These areas included a deeper understanding of theoretical frameworks, procedures for the first few weeks of school, practical knowledge and skill, capacity for comprehensive program planning, understanding of skill in assessment and evaluation, and ability to implement effective group work. Beck and others (2007) concluded that, to better prepare teachers, teacher educators should find ways to connect theories with practice. This would allow for preservice teachers to gain a better understanding of how to implement theoretical knowledge into their planning, teaching and assessments.

Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout is a condition that affects many beginning teachers. Grayson and Alvarez (2008) looked at different variables that play a role in teacher burnout. In rural Ohio, they conducted a study in 17 schools that focused on school climate components and how/if they related to teacher burnout. Some of these components included parent relations, community relations, student behavior values, and administration. Teacher burnout was categorized in three different ways: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low personal accomplishment. This study also took into account demographic factors (gender, age, and years of experience), teacher satisfaction, and teacher-rated school climate. A study done by Morey and others (1997), 10 years prior to Grayson and Alvarez's (2008) study, found that "as many as half of all teachers leave teaching within 5 years…. Reasons why include: conditions of work, salary level, class size, and lack of adequate resources" (p. 22). Results from these studies link a variety of school climate items to the three different types of burnout.

Gavish and Friedman (2010) examined first-year teachers' experiences, including whether novice teachers had feelings of burnout during that year. They surveyed a group of first-year teachers at the beginning and end of the school year and found that many first-year teachers reported feeling burnout on both of the surveys. Gavish and Friedman (2010) highlighted that teachers who felt burnt-out during the first survey, most likely began their year with those feeling, which may indicate that they had feelings of burnout during their teacher training program.

Grayson and Alvarez (2008) identified many factors that influence teacher burnout. Some of these factors included issues from a teacher's personal life, school

culture, and district issues, which would be difficult to address in teacher preparation programs. Other factors such as classroom management, handling student behaviors, building/maintaining parent relations, and working with administration are issues that could be addressed in teacher preparation programs. Adjusting the curriculum of teacher preparation programs could help preservice teachers become aware of the factors that contribute to teacher burnout and be able to discuss ways in which they can handle those factors. This may also help better prepare preservice teachers for their careers and issues they will face and possibly reduce the number of teachers that experience burnout.

Mentoring

With beginning teacher attrition rates reported as high as 50% during the first five years in some areas of the United State (Le Maistre & Paré, 2010), it is imperative to support novice teachers as they make the transition from the student role to the teacher role. One way to support beginning teachers is with the inclusion of a school or district mentoring programs. Mentoring, as described by Barrera, Braley, and Slate (2010), is when a senior teacher (in teaching experience and possibly age) provides information, advice, and emotional support to a junior teacher in a relationship lasting over a lengthy period of time. Daniel, Auhl, and Hastings (2013) noted that, "preservice teachers enter a profession where ongoing critical reflection and learning are ideally embedded as part of everyday professional practice" (p. 159). Daniel and colleagues (2013) discussed the importance of teaching preservice teachers to collaboratively reflect and critique their own teaching, as well as their peers, in an effort to further develop and inform their

teaching practices. This critiquing process was fostered through mentoring groups consisting of teaching professionals and preservice teachers within the same cohort.

Parker, Ndoye, and Imig (2009) conducted a study concerning mentoring practices and its association with novice teacher support and retention. Parker and associates (2009) used information gathered from North Carolina's survey of Teacher Working Conditions. The sample consisted of 8,838 teachers in their first two years of teaching. Parker et al. (2009) found that 88% of beginning teachers who were matched with mentors by grade level and 60% who were matched by subject area were more likely to remain in the profession. This matching may have been so successful, in part because the matched mentor and novice teacher were experiencing some of the same issues, such as age group of students, student behavior, and curriculum. Also, other contributing factors to effective mentoring, according to Parker et al., were mentors and novice teachers meeting at least once a month during the school day to plan instruction, mentor teacher observing novice teacher and observation of the mentor teacher by the novice teacher, discussing teaching practices and experiences, having informal meetings outside of the school day which included planning the day and reflective discussion, and novice teachers receiving more support from mentors versus less support. Barrera and colleagues (2010) also found that mentor programs need to have well defined goals, well-defined roles and responsibilities of mentor and novice teacher, as well as a welcoming and accepting school environment that encourages novice teachers to seek support when they need it.

Conclusion

This review has summarized the origins and history of teacher preparation

programs in the United States and the advancements of today's teacher preparation

programs. These advancements aim to better meet the needs of a culturally diverse

population, ensure higher teacher quality, and improve teacher preparation programs.

Even with these advancements, beginning teachers are facing many challenges during

their first years due to the heightened focus on academic readiness. There is a

considerable mismatch between teachers' practices and beliefs.   The NCLB act is one

contributing factor to the emphasis on "shovedown" (Hatch, 2002, p. 457) curriculum.

This intense focus on academics often makes teachers feel less able to implement DAP in

their classrooms and they, in turn, concentrate more on teaching to the tests (Smyth,

2008).

Research has established some of the challenges and successes that beginning

teachers face during their first few years. These challenges include the responsibilities of

the teacher, school and district climate, students and their parents, as well as pressure

from personal goals and setbacks. Oftentimes these challenges can lead to teacher

burnout, which often affects teachers in their first five years of teaching. Mentoring has

been shown to help beginning teachers adapt to their responsibilities and the demands

placed upon them.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find areas in which first-year teachers,

who graduated from the elementary education and/or early childhood education program

at a large, land-grant university in the west, felt prepared or unprepared during the first

few months of school. The research questions were:

1. What do first-year teachers find challenging in their first few months of teaching?

2. What do first-year teachers feel are their strengths during their first few months of teaching?

3. How well do teachers feel their teacher education programs prepared them for their first few months of teaching?

4. In which areas of their teacher education program would first-year teachers like to have received more instruction?

5. Do first-year teachers feel able to implement developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participant Pool and Procedures

The participant pool for this study included teachers who began their first year of public school teaching in the fall of 2010. These teachers had student taught in the Child Development Laboratory as part of their teacher training at a large, land-grant university in the west, during the fall semesters of 2008 and 2009, the spring semesters of 2009 and 2010, and the summer semesters of 2009 and 2010. The eligible participants had also completed the elementary education and early childhood education programs at same university.

The teacher preparation program at USU consists of four levels. Students begin the program in Level I. During this experience, students take classes that introduce them to the field of elementary education. As part of the introduction class, students spend 15 hours observing in an elementary classroom. In Level II, students are enrolled in classes that broaden their understanding of the history and social/philosophical foundations of elementary education. Students also spend a significant amount of time observing and participating in early childhood and elementary classrooms. Level III consists of an intense, nine-week coverage of content areas. After the nine weeks, students participate in a five-week practicum where they have the opportunity to plan and teach small and large group lessons. Level IV is a semester of student teaching in two different classrooms. Students in the early childhood program also complete student teaching at the Child Development Laboratory somewhere between Level II and Level IV. The

hours spent in practicum increase with each year in the program, culminating with student teaching in the Child Development Laboratory and in a public school setting.

During the fall semesters of 2008 and 2009, the spring semesters of 2009 and 2010, and the summer semesters of 2009 and 2010, there were 89 university students who participated in a student teaching experience in the Child Development Laboratory. About 45 of these students majored in early childhood education and/or elementary education, and were likely to embark on a teaching career in early childhood education. Information about past student teachers was obtained from the Child Development Laboratory class lists, which are compiled every semester. The lists contain the students' phone numbers, addresses, and e-mail address.

An e-mail was sent out to the 45 eligible participants containing information regarding the study. It is not clear how many of the 45 potential participants were actually employed as novice teachers, nor was there verification that these were potential participants' current e-mail addresses. This information included a summary of the study and a link to the survey. The survey was available through Survey Monkey, which kept the participants' responses anonymous. The participants gave their consent to participate in the study if and when they filled out their survey. A pretest survey was sent out to teachers after their first few months of teaching. A posttest survey was sent out to the participants eight weeks following the pretest. As part of the survey, participants created a unique ID number. This ID consisted of a participants' mothers' birth month (two digits) and birth year (last two digits) and their fathers' birth month (two digits) and year (last two digits). The ID allowed researchers to match the pre- and posttest survey

responses. Two reminder e-mails were sent out to participants 5 and 10 days after the initial e-mails were sent.

Instrument

The survey consisted of two sections: demographic information and open-ended questions about teaching (see Appendix A). The demographic portion of the survey was based on the demographic information collected by the Transition Practices Survey (National Center for Early Development and Learning [NCEDL], 1996). Included were questions about school information, classroom information, and teacher information. School and classroom information included how many children in each teacher's class(es) were eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches, and the current total student enrollment in their school. Demographic data about the teachers' education, degree(s) obtained, and family circumstances were also gathered.

The second section consisted of open-ended survey questions that were based on an instrument used by Romano and Gibson (2006). The questions elicit qualitative information about the participants' successes and challenges during their first few weeks of teaching, such as what areas the participant felt particularly strong in, and in which areas they did not feel so strong.

The survey questions were reviewed by experts in the field to ensure that they were pertinent to the study. A pilot test was also conducted on the survey with a few graduate students within the field of early childhood education. The pilot test was designed to ensure that the on-line formatting of the survey was clear and that the questions were readable and comprehensible. The graduate students suggested a few

minimal changes to improve the clarity of the questions and readability of the on-line survey.

Human Subjects

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects at a large, land grant university in the west (see Appendix B). There were no identified risks to participants. All participants' responses were anonymous. Participants pre- and posttest surveys were matched using an individualized ID number created and known only to them. All data were kept in a secure, locked cabinet, accessible only to the research staff.

Participants

There were 16 teachers who responded to this study. Thirteen teachers completed pretest surveys and six teachers completed the posttest survey. Three of these teachers' pre- and posttest surveys were able to be matched, which means that there were 16 different respondents between the pre- and posttest surveys, and 19 total surveys completed. The 16 teachers who participated in this study were in their first year teaching. All participants received their bachelor's degrees (2009-2010) from Utah State University. Most of the participants were certified in multiple areas, with 81% (13 participants) certified within the areas of early childhood and primary grade education. An equal percentage of teachers (31.2% or 5 participants) taught at public schools that drew students from surrounding neighborhoods or public schools that drew students from neighborhoods that did and did not surround the school. About 43% (7) of participants

taught in public schools with total enrollment of 450 students or lower. The participants

in this study taught in grades ranging from preschool through first grade, with 56% (9

participants) teaching kindergarten. Class size ranged from 8 to 30 students with a mean

of 21 students. About 75% (12) of teachers reported having 3 or fewer students who

were on individualized education plans (IEP), with 7 participants having 3 students on

IEPs. Thirteen of the sixteen participants indicated that they received additional adult

help in their classroom at least two times per week (34% had a teaching

assistant/paraprofessional, 39% had a parent volunteer). About 81% of participants'

districts offered mentoring programs for beginning teachers, with all teachers who

reported mentoring programs taking part. Participants ranged in age from 22-29 years

with 68% being 24 years and younger.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Frequencies (n = 16)

Category	n	%
Type of school		
A public school that draws students from surrounding neighborhoods	5	31.2
A public school with students from neighborhoods that do and do not surround the school	5	31.2
A public magnet school	3	18.7
A private or parochial school	1	6.2
Other (Head Start, Home-Based Preschool)	2	12.5
Location of school		
Urban	4	25
Suburban	4	25
Small Town	4	25
Rural	4	25

Category	n	%
School enrollment		
12-39 Students	2	15.1
40-150 Students	1	6.2
151-349 Students	1	6.2
350-450 Students	3	18.7
500-530 Students	3	18.7
700-738 Students	5	31.2
Unsure	1	6.2
Grade		
Pre-School (2-5 years of age)	3	18.7
Kindergarten	9	56.2
First Grade	4	25.0
Class size		
1-9	1	6.2
10-19	3	11.5
20-29	11	68.7
30-39	1	6.2
Number of special education students in class		
0	5	31.2
1-2	2	12.5
3-4	7	43.7
5-6	2	12.5
Number of students that receive free or reduced-priced lunches		
N/A	8	50.0
Unsure	2	12.5
1-18	2	12.5
Half of student in class	1	6.2
Majority of students in class	3	18.7
Additional help in classroom (teachers many have more than one kind of help in their classroom)		
No additional help listed	3	13.0
Teaching assistant/paraprofessional	8	34.7
Co-teacher	2	8.6
Parent volunteer	9	39.1
College student	1	4.3
Outside classroom instruction with individual children		
Children on IEP's	12	75.0

Category	n	%
Outside classroom whole class instruction		
Whole class	6	37.5
Year degree was received		
Unanswered	1	6.2
Bachelor's 2009	5	31.2
Bachelor's 2010	10	62.5
Areas of specialization of certification (teachers may be certified in more than one area)		
Elementary education (K-6)	11	35.4
Early childhood/primary grades	13	41.9
Special education	1	3.2
Preschool	5	16.1
ESL	1	3.2
District or school offering mentoring program		
Yes	13	81.2
No	3	18.7
Teachers participating in mentoring program		
Yes	13	81.2
No	3	18.7
Age		
22-24	11	68.7
25-27	3	18.7
28-30	2	12.5
Marital status		
Single	6	37.5
Married	10	62.5

Data Analyses

The data gathered by the pre- and posttest surveys were analyzed using the

method described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), which outlines the development of a

qualitative coding system. First, demographic responses were examined and responses

were broken into teacher, school, and classroom characteristics. Descriptive statistics

were used to describe the participants' demographics. Next, survey responses for each question were read and general themes and categories were developed. Only comments pertaining to the research questions were used in the analysis. Each category or theme was represented using words or phrases. A coding scheme was written, describing the characteristics of the categories and themes (see Appendix C). The survey responses were then read again, and coded. Based on the research questions, it was expected that each teacher's comments would fit in more than one category. Survey responses were read once again, and the categories that appeared most often were used in the data sample. The survey responses were then coded by another individual, as well as the author. Coded responses were compared, with unmatched coded responses being reviewed, discussed, and recoded by both the coder and author. Finally, the codes were compared and inter-rater reliability was established at 90%.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

When examining teachers' comments and grouping them according to common categories and themes, it was discovered that teachers articulated an assortment of challenges about their first months of teaching school, as well as discussed many of their experiences that had gone well. After qualitatively analyzing teachers' responses, three prevalent themes emerged: creating and implementing instruction and assessment; experiences of teachers; and classroom organization, management, and procedures. Five less prominent themes were also identified: special education; teacher intrinsic qualities; characteristics of teachers; child and classroom characteristics; and parent and family issues. These themes are categorized in this chapter by pretest and posttest responses, and matched pre- and posttest responses. Many of the teacher remarks fit into multiple themes. Each part of a teacher's comment was coded into its corresponding theme. These same themes will be elaborated upon in detail in Chapter V in the context of the research questions.

Creating and Implementing Instruction and Assessment

Collectively, each teacher (*n = 16)* in this study included some kind of remark about creating and implementing instruction and assessment in their classroom on either the pre- or posttest. These comments made up 42% (41 out of 97) of the responses in this study. These comments included ways teachers felt they were creating and implementing instruction and assessment well, and instances where teachers expressed trials within this

Table 2

Coding Themes and Corresponding Teacher Responses

Themes	Pretest Number of teachers who commented in this area	Posttest Number of teachers who commented in this area	Number of comments in theme/sub-theme
Creating and implementing instruction and assessment	13	6	47
Incorporating developmentally appropriate practices and beliefs into lessons and classroom			22
Knowledge of assessments and how they are implemented			3
Teaching methods			7
Individualizing instruction for students			10
Knowledge of subjects and curriculum and how to plan lessons in those areas			5
Experience	13	4	31
Student teaching experience (on and off campus)			21
Grant writing			1
Observation of other teachers			2
Home visits			1
Teacher training geared towards typical classrooms			4
Educational teaching support books			1
Knowledge of available resources or programs in the community, district, and school			1

(table continues)

Themes	Pretest Number of teachers who commented in this area	Posttest Number of teachers who commented in this area	Number of comments in theme/sub-theme
Classroom organization, management, and procedures	11	6	30
Organization of classroom, materials, and procedures			1
Classroom management			22
Time management			5
Transition times			1
NEAYC portfolios			1
Special education	5	2	13
Documented special education needs			1
Individualized education plans (IEPs)			2
Referring children for special education services			1
Holding children back a grade			1
Interventions for special education students			2
Special education information			6
Teacher intrinsic qualities	3	2	6
Motivation			1
Knowledge of children and their development			1
Self-reflection			2
Expectations of self			2
Confidence in teaching abilities (strengths/weaknesses)			

Themes	Pretest Number of teachers who commented in this area	Posttest Number of teachers who commented in this area	Number of comments in theme/sub-theme
Teacher characteristics	9	3	15
Flexibility			3
Efficiency (in and outside of the school day)			7
Managing files, reports, and grades			1
Support (or lack of) from supervisor (their beliefs in early childhood education)			1
Rapport with students			3
Child and classroom characteristics	5	3	12
Class size			1
Availability of additional help in classroom (aid)			3
Child behavior issues			7
Student's transition to kindergarten			1
Parent and family issues	6	2	15
Socioeconomic status (SES)			3
Lack of parental support			4
Parent communication (parent and teacher communication)			2
Teacher's relationship with parents			6

area throughout their first few months. Many teachers' comments included descriptions detailing the reasons behind their feelings. These reasons included incorporating developmentally appropriate practices and beliefs into their lessons and classrooms, knowledge of assessments and how to implement them, their teaching methods, individualizing instruction for students, and their knowledge of subjects and curriculum and how to plan lessons in those areas.

Incorporating Developmentally Appropriate
Practices and Beliefs into
Lessons and Classrooms

Of the comments within this theme, about half, 22 out of the 42 (52%), focused on either the success that educators felt in finding ways to incorporate developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and beliefs (DAB), or the frustration of not being able to do so. All of the teachers (16) within this study had at least one comment that fell within this sub-theme on either the pre- or posttest.

Pretest. One teacher, who taught at a home-based preschool, described her biggest challenge as "integrating developmentally appropriate lessons into all that I do when I am in the classroom," while another preschool teacher who taught in a private school, described one of her strengths as the ability to "pay close attention to my children in order to provide an emergent curriculum." Both of these preschool teachers had a co-teacher or college student in their classroom. Of the 13 educators who responded to the pretest, 11 (or 84%) of educators felt that they were able to implement DAP and DAB into their classrooms. Of these 11, eight teachers had at least one other adult in the classroom with them. One kindergarten teacher from an English Language Learner (ELL) magnet school stated

> My principal has a strong belief in early childhood, which really helps to have
> the support from your administration. We still have to stick to our district
> curriculum which can sometimes be hard, but for the most part I am able to stay
> with my beliefs.

Another kindergarten (full-day) teacher noted:

Our district is implementing Great Expectations. This is all about how to teach to children in a way that incorporates the learning style of each child in a positive manner. I don't think that I would be able to teach in a place where I did not have the freedom to implement practices that help children learn. There would be no point.

Two teachers asserted that they were not always able to incorporate DAP and DAB within their classrooms. These two teachers, who both graduated for USU in 2010, spoke about this topic in a similar style. One of the teachers, who taught kindergarten in a suburban, public school, stated:

Well…. That depends on the subject and time of day. I feel that there are times when things are just awesome (when they're in learning centers, when they are choosing the mode they will be learning something), and other times, I feel that it is like pulling teeth, specifically with a program we use to teach reading, writing, and spelling. It's just really hard for some of them to sit in their desks for long periods of time and I've been struggling to get it to be appropriate and still have time to do everything.

The other teacher, who taught kindergarten in a small town public school, also felt pulled in two directions concerning her DAP. She noted that she used "Love and Logic" daily and enjoyed it but she "was taking over for another teacher and am currently relying more on her strategies and practices than my own." Both of these teachers had students who were pulled out for speech instruction and either had a student referred for an individualized education plan (IEP) or had a student on an IEP.

Posttest. Three of the six teachers at the posttest felt they were able to implement DAP within their classrooms. A first grade teacher who taught in a rural, public school noted that she had, "lots of hands on activities and experiences." She also liked to keep her lessons moving and did not allow much wait time. Another first grade teacher in a suburban, public school stated "I do not believe in using a lot of worksheets. I am able to get away with only using 4 or 5 a week." This teacher had 24 students with one on an IEP. The third teacher taught morning and afternoon kindergarten to an average class size of 23.5 students in a rural, charter school. She remarked, "I believe that any child can learn, we should have high expectations for all students, this is an expectation of teachers at my school, and I have only one student out of 47 that is 'failing.'"

The other three teachers felt that they were not able to implement their beliefs all of the time. One of the teachers, who taught kindergarten in a suburban, public school stated:

> We teach Spalding phonics, and for some of the kids it's appropriate and fine, and for others it's like pulling teeth…. I have done small group instruction, but it just takes so much time that we were getting behind, and for the most part, it can be done in a large group, it's just a few kids who are struggling with it.

A first grade teacher who had 23 students remarked, "I am able to do both whole and small group instruction at times and that is something I believe in. I would also say no [to being able to implement DAP] because I don't have the resources I need to do some of the hands-on instruction I believe in." This teacher did have the help of a teaching assistant and a parent volunteer in her classroom. The third teacher, a Head Start teacher

of two-year-olds, observed that some of the rules at her school did not allow her to implement DAP fully within her classroom.

Individualizing Instruction for Students

A repeated theme for teachers' comments on both pre- and posttests was individualizing instruction for students. Nine teachers made a remark that fit within this subtheme. Half of the teachers' comments within this sub-theme fell into the area of concerns the teachers were having as they tried individualizing instruction for their students.

Pretest. A first grade teacher with 26 students noted her struggle with individualizing instruction for her student by stating, "I have some very low students this year and it is hard knowing exactly what help to give them." A kindergarten teacher in a rural, charter magnet school also listed individualizing instruction as an area she was struggling with. Two teachers who taught in a private or charter school, indicated that they felt individualizing instruction for their students was an area they felt confident in. One educator noted "…teaching students with different needs." Another teacher stated, "I feel like (my teacher preparation program) especially helped in my ability to plan for my children." Both teachers had additional adult help in their classrooms.

Posttest. A kindergarten teacher with an average of 19 students in her two classes described her challenge with implementing individualized instruction in her classroom due to the scripted curriculum she was using in her classroom. She stated, "If I had aides, I would have those kids who are struggling get pulled for more appropriate instruction."

Another teacher, who taught first grade, with three students on IEPs and a teaching assistant, noted her challenge with, "Adjusting to the needs of all learners. My class is very diverse. I have really high and very low students and I always worry about planning lessons that can reach all learners." Another teacher, who taught eight two-year-olds in a Head Start Program, specified her difficulty with "working with children with varying skill levels and adapting activities to every child's needs." The other teachers' comments were similar, in that they expressed difficulty in working with students who have a variety of skill levels and trying to find ways to plan lessons to meet all of their students' needs.

Teaching Methods

On both the pre- and posttest many of the teachers highlighted their ability to implement large and small group instruction within their classrooms. About 14% (7 of the 47) of teacher comments (from 6 out of 16 teachers) within the overall theme of creating and implementing instruction and assessment fell under the sub-theme of teaching methods.

Pretest. An educator, who taught first grade to 26 students in a rural public school, also stated "I know that the age group I teach can't sit for too long just being lectured. I have really implemented hands-on lessons across the curriculum that helps to reach all learners." A kindergarten teacher from a public school described "various teaching methods (meeting different learning styles)" as one of her strengths. Both of these teachers were certified in the areas of elementary education and early childhood education.

Posttest. One kindergarten teacher, with an average of 23.5 students between her two classes noted, "I believe children learn best from direct, explicit instruction," which were the methods used at the school she taught. A first grade teacher with 26 students remarked that she would have liked more instruction in "using district Basal lessons to plan weekly lessons." Another first grade teacher with 23 students described her ability to implement small and large group instruction within her classroom. This teacher had a teaching assistant, as well as a parent volunteer helping in her classroom.

Additional Creating and Implementing Instruction and Assessment Comments

Knowledge of subject and curriculum and how to plan lessons in those areas. Three teachers made comments that fell within this sub-theme. All three teachers had at least one student on an IEP. One teacher, who taught Head Start in a small town, mentioned her desire to have received more instruction in lesson planning during her teacher preparation program on her posttest response. A first-grade teacher with a teaching assistant noted that "reading instruction, math instruction, whole class, and small group instruction" were her strengths at this time on her posttest. She went on to say that "I feel that I'm a pretty good teacher thanks to the training and education I received while attending Utah State." The third teacher stated, "I am…finding it challenging to plan for math instruction." This teacher had three students on IEPs and taught first grade at a suburban, public school.

Knowledge of assessments and how they are implemented. Three public school teachers mentioned the issue of assessments in their responses. All three teachers had two or more students on IEPs.   One kindergarten teacher, with a teaching assistant,

responded on her pretest that she found assessments challenging. She noted, "There are several assessments that I must give and they have to be administered one-on-one. It is hard to find time to do all the assessments!" A second kindergarten teacher listed assessments as one of her strengths on her posttest, while the third teacher, who taught first grade, of the group stated on her posttest that she would have liked to receive more information on assessments during her teacher preparation program.

Experience

Teachers' experiences, whether from their teacher preparation program or outside participation within the field of teaching, was the second largest focus. Of the 16 teachers, 14 (29% of the 97 comments) included references to their experiences on their pretest or posttest. Items included within this theme include observing other teachers, conducting home visits, student teaching experience, grant writing, teacher training geared towards typical classrooms, use of educational teaching support books. The most common sub-theme in this theme was student teaching practicum (on and off campus).

Student Teaching Experience
(On or Off Campus)

Fourteen of the sixteen teachers had comments that fit within this sub-theme on either the pre- or posttest. Almost 67% (21 of 31) of teachers' comments, within the theme of experience, referenced their student teaching experience. These comments ranged from the ways in which the teachers' experiences as student teachers helped them feel prepared during their first year of teaching to other teachers expressing how their experience of student teaching did not help them face a variety of circumstances during

their first year. Almost half of the comments (9 of the 21) made by 9 of the 16 teachers in this sub-theme, expressed satisfaction with their student teaching experience.

Pretest. A home-based preschool teacher noted, "I believe my teacher education program did very well in preparing me for the teaching setting I am in now." Two kindergarten teachers, with twenty or more students in their class, mentioned that the experiences they faced in their first year of teaching were not things that were taught in their teacher preparation program. One of these teachers who taught full-day kindergarten noted, "I don't know that I would say that the education program prepared me too much for the first few months of teaching." Two other teachers had mixed feelings on the subject of their preparedness. Both teachers taught kindergarten in small town public schools. They both noted that their student teaching experience was valuable, but there are also experiences that they could not be prepared for by a teacher preparation program. Of the 14 teachers who commented within the theme of experiences, 7 teachers (7 of the 21 comments) listed areas that they would have liked to receive more instruction in during their teacher preparation program in their pretest. Their responses included topics such as: receiving more instruction in organizing their classroom, special education issues, classroom management techniques, information about different preschool forms, and more experience in schools off campus.

Posttest. One first grade teacher stated, "I think it is really hard to prepare someone for so much responsibility and they prepared me the best they could." This teacher had 26 students in her class, with three students on a IEP. Another teacher, who expressed her feelings that her student teaching experience had not helped her during her first year of teaching, described, "The real classroom experience is nothing like the lab.

You can read and talk about it but you won't know what to do with big behavior issues until you have to deal with them."   Although a first-year teacher, she graduated from USU in 2009. She taught 2-year-olds at a small town Head Start. A third teacher, who taught first grade to 23 students in a rural, public school stated, "I feel that I'm a pretty good teacher thanks to the training and education I received while attending Utah State." She did also mention that she felt "there will always be room for improvement in every program (referring to how prepared she felt from her teacher preparation program). I was lucky to have parents that are teachers….they helped me get ready, but I would have been in real trouble (without their help)."

Teacher Training Geared Towards
Typical Classrooms

Comments within the sub-theme of teacher training geared towards typical classrooms made up 12% (4 out of 31comments) of the total comments within the theme of experience and were made by four teachers on their pretest. All of the responses had similar foci.

One kindergarten teacher with five children on IEPs noted:

I learned much at college, but feel that many of my classes taught me "fluff

things" that were only for tests. Or rather, I didn't have the field experience yet to

be able to understand how to best relate the subject matter taught at college to my

classroom. Now being in my own classroom, I reflect on many college classes

and actively look for class notes I took to better my classroom.

Another kindergarten teacher with 20 students stated that "one thing I wish they wouldn't

do is teach us how to teach to the ideal classroom. I found that every teacher taught to the

ideal classroom where everything worked and went well." One full-day kindergarten educator described her first year as something that must be experienced, rather than taught. In her pretest response she stated, "My first year of teaching went very well, but most of the challenges that I ran into were not things that were covered in school." Some of the items she had difficulty with included working with parents and special education issues.

All of the educators' responses within this sub-theme had similar tones. Their comments highlighted their perceptions that they did not feel they were prepared for some of the issues they faced during their first year. Those teachers also noted that these issues may be something that new teachers will need to experience during that first year of teaching.

Additional Experiences

Three teachers (two on the pretest and one on the posttest), licensed in the area of early childhood education, also mentioned experiences such as taking a grant writing class, observing other teachers, conducting home visits, and the use of educational teaching support books as some things they would have liked to have had more experience with.

Pretest. One teacher, who taught 2-year-olds in small town Head Start, felt that one of her strengths was her skill in observation, while another kindergarten teacher taking over a classroom midway through the year, noted that she would have liked her teacher preparation program to offer more opportunities to "Learn from other teachers and observe HOW they teach and discipline." She went on to state, "I also feel that I would have liked to have learned more about the programs available and being used in

our community. When teachers say things like, 'Scott Foresman Program' or 'Dibels,' I wish I had known what that was and what it meant when I came into the school."

Posttest. One kindergarten teacher with a morning and afternoon class mentioned the helpfulness of teaching support books such as *The First Days of School* (Wong & Wong, 2001). This teacher also commented that they would have liked to have read this book multiple times during their teacher preparation program. She stated, "I actually would have liked to have read all of *The First Days of School*. I've read most if it by now, but it would have been good to have read it at the beginning, middle, and end of the program." She also noted that she would have liked more instruction on how to conduct "home visits effectively."

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Classroom Organization, Management, Procedures

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Almost every teacher (14) in the study made comments (30 total) that fit under the theme of classroom organization, management, and procedures on either the pretest or posttest. Some of the teachers made multiple comments that fit within this theme. Thematic elements included classroom management, time management, organization of classroom, materials, and procedures; transition times; and National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC) portfolios. The most common sub-theme mentioned by teachers was classroom management.

Classroom Management

About 73% (22 out of 30) of the responses within the theme of classroom organization, management, and procedures fell under the sub-theme of classroom management. Fourteen of the sixteen teachers who responded made comments that fit

into this sub-theme. About 50% (11 of 22) of the comments within this sub-theme displayed teachers' confidence with their classroom management skills. Three of the eleven teachers described feeling confident about their management skills. The other eight teachers simply listed classroom management skills as a strength.

  Pretest. Three teachers who taught kindergarten in a public school described feeling confident about their management skills. The first, a full-day kindergarten teacher stated, "I feel as though my classroom management skills are very strong."   The second kindergarten educator, who taught in a small town with a teaching assistant, noted, "Management! I have found fun ways to keep my students on task and doing the things that they need to be doing to get their education." The last kindergarten teacher described her situation as, "Probably classroom management (as her strength), although it has been tough lately, but I feel that I have been handling it fairly well, all things considered." This teacher taught a morning and afternoon class with 18 and 20 students in each class respectively.

  Two of the 13 teachers (representing 2 of the 22 or 11% of the comments within the sub-theme) in the study listed classroom management as an area that they were challenged by. Both of the teachers taught in public school, with one teaching first grade and the other teaching kindergarten. The first grade educator remarked that she was dealing with difficult students, which impacted her classroom management. She observed, "I felt confident in my classroom management skills when I went into my classroom, but with so many students who have problems it is hard to meet all of their needs and keep track of them all."   The kindergarten teacher noted that she took over a classroom mid-year for another teacher and was grappling with classroom management,

due to the fact that she was trying to keep the classroom consistent by using the previous teacher's procedures and organization.

Another issue mentioned within this sub-theme concerned teachers wishing they would have received more instruction in classroom management during their teacher preparation programs. About 31%, or 4 of the 13 teachers, within the study included comments in this area. One kindergarten teacher from a charter school, observed, "Classroom management, the ones they taught in ELED (Elementary Education Program) were a joke and they weren't directed towards early childhood." A first grade teacher noted, "I would have liked more classroom management instruction as far as how to deal with problem children." This teacher had three students on IEPs that were being pulled from her classroom for multiple subjects. The other two teachers simply stated that they would have liked more instruction in classroom management.

Posttest. Three of the six teachers (50%) made comments on their posttests that fit within the theme of classroom management.   A first grade teacher remarked on her struggle with classroom management. She stated, "I have a very hard group of kids and they test my classroom management skills every day." This teacher had 23 students and one student on an IEP. She also had a teaching assistant and a parent volunteer's help in her classroom. A public school, kindergarten teacher attributed her troubles with classroom management to the season (spring) and the coming of the end of the school year. A teacher who taught 2-year-olds in a small town Head Start simply stated that she would have liked more instruction in her teacher preparation program on classroom management.

Time Management

Time management was commented on by 4 of the 16 teachers within this study on either their pretest or posttest.

Pretest. Three of the 13 teachers mentioned time management on their pretest. One teacher, who taught kindergarten in a small town, noted that time management was something she had difficulty with, stating, "Finding time to do all the things that are required of me from my district." Specifically, she indicated that finding time for "all the assessments" was something she was having a problem with. Two of the three teachers included time management as one of their strengths, with one teacher highlighting her "ability to know what is needed at a particular time." The other teacher stated her strength lay in the fact that she knew how to "plan the time appropriately." This teacher also went on to say that time management was an area she would now be interested in studying during her teacher preparation program. Both teachers had between 24 and 26 students in their classes and taught in public school settings.

One kindergarten teacher, who taught two classes, included comments about time management as it related to being able to implement practices that are consistent with her beliefs. She noted that she felt that during some times in her school day she was able to implement her beliefs more than at other times. The time she felt most able to implement DAB was when she allowed her students to participate in learning centers versus the times she had to teach a specific program.

Posttest. One of the six teachers made a comment that fit within this area. She simply listed time management as an area she would have liked to have more instruction on during her teacher preparation program.

**Additional Classroom Organization,
Management, and Procedures Comments**

Three other areas under the theme of classroom organization, management, and procedures commented on by teachers were organization of classroom, materials, and procedures; transition times; and NAEYC portfolios. Each of these three areas had one teacher's comment fall within it.

Pretest. A preschool teacher at a private school included "Getting our NAEYC portfolios ready," so the school she was working for could become accredited, as an area she was having difficulty with at that time. The second teacher, who taught first grade in a rural school, noted her organization of her classroom and procedures as well as her transition times were areas of strength for her. She noted, "I have set up good classroom rules and procedures and my class can transition well from one area of study to the next."

Posttest. The third teacher, like the second, taught first grade in a rural public school, and articulated a desire to have more information about "setting up a classroom and how to organize it," in her teacher preparation program.

Teacher Characteristics

Comments within the theme of teacher characteristics made up 14% (14 of 97) of the total comments. Nine teachers made comments that fit within this area on either the pre- or posttest.

Pretest. Five teachers noted that they felt confident with issues that fell within this theme. Two teachers highlighted their strength as flexibility. Each of the two teachers also had additional adult help within their classroom at least twice a week. One

of those teachers also mentioned patience as another strength she possessed. Two other teachers emphasized the rapport they have built with their students. Both of these teachers taught a morning and afternoon kindergarten class. One teacher mentioned, "The rapport I have built with my students is solid. They know that they can trust me and work with me and that I value them in my class." The second teacher stated, "I definitely have a lot of love and care for my students and am working very hard for them. I feel invested in each of their success and want them to be happy and successful in school." A final teacher felt she was successful in using planning time appropriately. She also noted, "I have great mentor teachers and coaches who have been a great help!"

Four of the eight teachers noted that they were able to implement their DAB in their classroom. Three of the teachers taught preschool classes, with the fourth teaching kindergarten. Three teachers highlighted the positive role supervisors played in their ability to implement their beliefs. All three teachers taught in different settings, one in public English Language Learner (ELL) magnet school, one in a private school, and the third in a home-based preschool. The public school educator stated, "My principal has a strong belief in early childhood which really helps to have the support from your administration." The home-based preschool teacher mentioned, "I feel that I can implement this in my classroom because I have a boss who allows me to experiment and implement my ideas within the framework she has set out for me." The private school teacher noted, "My boss is very encouraging of us to use emergent curriculum and is very open-minded about how we run our classroom." The fourth teacher, a Head Start teacher, noted that her ability to be flexible with the activities planned and the cues from her students contributed to her feeling of being able to implement her beliefs.

Two teachers, both kindergarten teachers with classes of at least 20 students, emphasized their struggles with finding time to fit all they need to do in to their day. One teacher simply stated she was having difficulty finding enough time to fit everything in. The second teacher was more descriptive. She discussed the challenges she faced with the management of her time.

> There's so much to do that I didn't know about, things I don't know how to do, things that just take time. I could work 24 hours a day and never be done. Good thing I'm single or this would be impossible.

This teacher also went on to mention that she would have liked to have more instruction in managing files, reports, and student grades. A kindergarten teacher who taught full-day kindergarten at a public school also commented in a similar vein. She stated, "I would have liked to know more about the clerical work, how to stay organized, etcetera.… I had no idea of the records that I would have to keep."

Posttest. Three of the six teachers had comments that fit within this area. Two teachers, who graduated in 2009, felt confident with items that fell within this area. A Head Start teacher noted that she was successful in the areas of efficiency and flexibility. She went on to state, "I get the work done." The second teacher taught first grade to 26 students in a rural, public school. She identified the areas of being, "well planned ahead and prepared," as successes. A third teacher, who taught morning and afternoon kindergarten, discussed the areas of managing files and grades as areas that she would have liked to receive more instruction in during her teacher preparation program.

Parent and Family Issues

Parent and family issues was an area that included 13%, or 13 of the 97 comments within this study. Six of the sixteen participants had comments on either the pre- or posttest that fit with this theme.

Pretest. Six of the thirteen teachers had comments that fit within this area. Four of the six teachers, all of whom have additional adult help within their classrooms, commented on their desires to have had more instruction in their teacher preparation program concerning how to communicate and work with parents and families. Two teachers simply stated they would like more instruction with working with families. One of those teachers, who taught 2-year olds in a Head Start program, went on to mention learning "How to build trust with parents…of children with behavior problems." A teacher who taught kindergarten in an English Language Learner magnet school stated, "Working with children from broken homes… and how to help them cope with anger and emotions." Another kindergarten teacher, who taught in a small town public school, highlighted learning how to work and build relationships with parents as a "key thing" she would have liked more instruction on.

Four of the six teachers whose comments fell within the theme of parent and family issues listed some issues with which they were having difficulty. Three of the teachers focused on challenges they were having with parents or families. One full-day kindergarten teacher in an urban, public school stated, "The parental involvement in our school is very low, mostly because we are in an area where both parents are working and cannot participate in their child's education." A Head Start teacher listed family issues, such as low socioeconomic status (SES), health issues, parents' lack of knowledge

concerning child development, reporting abuse, and the communication between parents and teachers. The third teacher, who taught two classes of kindergarten in an urban, public school simply stated, "Dealing with difficult parents," was a struggle. The teacher in this area, who taught preschool in a private school setting, noted that her "school appeals to high income families, so we are dealing a lot with private school applications" as something that she was grappling with.

Three of the six teachers felt that their communication and relationships with parents were areas they felt strong in. A kindergarten teacher in an English Language Learner magnet school noted her "ability to work with parents of all different personalities," while a second teacher, who taught preschool in a private school stated, "I have a good relationship with my children and their families." One teacher discussed her feeling of unpreparedness concerning some parent relationships. She mentioned her challenge of, "How to deal with parents who are not interested in their child's education." This teacher taught full-day kindergarten to 24 students in an urban area.

Posttest. Two of the six teachers had comments that fit within this area. A kindergarten teacher who taught a morning and afternoon class simply listed parent communication as an area she felt confident in. The second teacher, who taught two-year-olds in a small town Head Start stated, "working with families of low SES," as an area she would have liked more instruction in during her teacher preparation program.

Child and Classroom Characteristics

Of the comments within this study, about 12% (12 of 97) fell within the theme of child and classroom characteristics. Eight of the sixteen teachers had responses that were

coded within this theme on either the pretest or posttest. Five teachers included

comments within this theme on their pretests. The posttest responses consisted of four

teachers, one of which also included comments in this area on her pretest.

Pretest. The most common comments of four of the five teachers, were the

issues they were having difficulty with at that time. All four teachers either listed

behavior problems, emotional problems, or both as one thing they were struggling with.

All four teachers taught in different types of schools. One taught in a Head Start, another

in a private school, a third in suburban, public school, and a forth in a public ELL magnet

school. Two of the four teachers had three students in their classroom on a IEPs. One of

the four teachers, who taught kindergarten in an ELL magnet school, described, "Dealing

with children with very high behavior issues and emotional problems." The other three

teachers' comments were similar to the teacher quoted above.

One teacher felt successful in implementing her beliefs in her classroom. This

teacher taught kindergarten in a rural magnet charter school, felt she was able to

implement her beliefs within her classroom because she had a full-time aide that allowed

her to implement small group instruction each day.

Two of the five teachers mentioned that they would have liked to receive more

instruction in how to help and better manage children with behavior issues. One teacher

worked in a Head Start program with 2-year-olds and the other teacher taught two

kindergarten classes, with at least 20 students in each class. The kindergarten teacher also

highlighted that she felt her patience and attitude with difficult children was an area in

which she felt confident.

Posttest. One out of the six teachers listed an item she was struggling with in this area. This teacher taught first grade in a suburban, public school and listed her "large class size, with no additional help," as what she was grappling with. Two other teachers felt that they were not able to implement their beliefs within their classroom because of the lack of aides or help from other adults. Both teachers did have a parent volunteer helping in their classroom at least two days a week. One first grade teacher mentioned she was not able to do hands-on activities or smaller group instruction due to the lack of extra help in her classroom. The second teacher, who taught morning and afternoon kindergarten stated, "If I had aides, I would have those kids who are struggling get pulled for more appropriate instruction." A Head Start teacher said she felt that her teacher preparation program did not help her prepare for her first classroom experience. She stated, "You can read and talk about it but you won't know what to do with big behavior issues until you have to deal with them."

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Special Education

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The theme of special education made up 10% of the 97 (for a total of 10) participant comments on either the pretest or posttest. Seven of the 16 participants had comments that fell in this area, with five teachers responding in the pretest and two responding on the posttest.

Pretest. Four of the five teachers who made comments within the theme of special education on their pretest, noted that they would have liked to receive more instruction concerning special education issues. All four teachers had at least one student in their classroom on an IEP, with two teachers having three students on IEPs. A

kindergarten teacher at a public charter school similarly noted, "More prep for teachers regarding their students with special education needs (especially autism)." A third public school teacher who taught first grade declared:

> I would have enjoyed more special education classes. I was only required to take one course and it was very broad and didn't inform me very well on the whole process. I have had to do lots of study on my own time.

This teacher had two students on an IEP in her classroom. The other two teachers that made mention of wanting more instruction in this area, simply listed special education.

Two of the five teachers included special education as an area they did not feel they were prepared for during their first year of teaching. One teacher, who taught an all-day kindergarten class, included items such as, "how to fill out an IEP (and) what to consider when retaining a child" when describing ways in which her teacher preparation program did not prepare her for her first year of teaching. The other teacher, who was certified in the area of Special Education and taught kindergarten in a charter, public school likewise stated:

> I did not feel like the early childhood or elementary education programs prepared me AT ALL for the first few months of teaching. The only reason I didn't completely fail was because of the training in classroom management and diversification of teaching different skill levels that I received though my special education degree.

Two participants described special education as either an area of success or an area they were having difficulty in respectively. The kindergarten teacher who was challenged with special education issues stated, "Special education (with which she

struggled), I wish I knew more about strategies and methods for helping students with disabilities." This teacher was certified in the areas of Elementary Education and Early Childhood Education. The second teacher, who had a certification in special education, mentioned "Working with students with autism and other special education needs," as an area in which she felt confident.

Posttest. Two of the six teachers had comments that fit in this area. Both teachers noted that they would have liked more education in the area of special education. One first grade teacher stated, "Instruction in how to refer a student for services would be helpful. (Also) what to look for and what you need to do to get them (students) referred (for special education services)." This teacher taught in a rural public school and had one student on an IEP.

Teacher Intrinsic Qualities

Comments within the theme of teacher intrinsic qualities consisted of around 6% of the 97 (6 total) responses on this survey, with five teachers' comments falling within this theme, three on the pretest and two on the posttest. The majority of responses within this theme (five of the six comments) were within areas in which teachers felt confident.

Pretest. All of the teachers' comments in this area related to the areas they felt confident in. Teachers listed items such as their expectations of themselves, working through issues that arise, and being patient. A teacher in a home-based preschool noted, "I feel that I have a strong foundational knowledge of child development and, therefore, understand what my students need at their varying ages." Another teacher mentioned her knowledge of children as one of her strengths. This teacher taught kindergarten in an

ELL magnet school. "I am able to self-reflect and find things that I want to change," was another area that a first grade teacher in a suburban, public school felt confident in after the first few months of her teaching experience.

 Posttest. A lone teacher who taught kindergarten in a rural charter school did note that she was having difficulty with her motivation at that time. She included the possible reason for her difficulty in this area as it was coming to the end of the school year and spring weather was beginning to appear. This teacher also listed the expectations she placed on herself as an area she felt confident in. Another kindergarten teacher stated, "Being patient and working through problems as they come," as an area she felt successful in.

Pre- and Posttest Matched Comparisons

 Three subjects' pre- and posttest responses were able to be matched. Each teacher taught a different age group with one in first grade, one in kindergarten, and the third teaching two-year-olds. All three teachers had a teaching assistant or a parent volunteer in their classroom.

 The Head Start teacher's response was the same or similar between the pre- and posttest for three questions. She felt her strengths were efficiency, flexibility, management skills, and lesson planning. This teacher also did not feel that her teacher preparation program prepared her for her first year of teaching. She would have liked to have more instruction on lesson planning, classroom management (especially with difficult children) and working with families. Her responses did vary concerning her challenges at that time and if she felt she was able to implement DAP in her classroom.

She listed behavior issues of children, family issues, parent and teacher communication as concerns on her pretest and working with and adapting activities for children with different skill level as struggles on her posttest. On her pretest she felt that she was able to implement DAP in her classroom but did not feel she was always able to do this on her posttest. She listed "Head Start's Rules" as the reason she was not able to implement DAP.

A kindergarten teacher who taught a morning and afternoon class with an average of 19 students was the second participant that had matched pre- and posttest results. On her pretest, this teacher listed time management (after school hours) as an area she was struggling with. She felt there were not enough hours in the day to get all the things done that she needed to. On her posttest, she listed classroom management as a struggle, due to the fact that her students were restless because of the season. Classroom management was an area this teacher listed as a success on her pretest as well as her relationship with students. This teacher felt she was successful with working thought problems, being patient, parent communication, and assessments on her posttest. Her response for how prepared she felt from her teacher preparation program was the same. She responded that overall she felt she was prepared, and elaborated on the pretest saying, "I don't know how anything can prepare you for this. Each situation is so different, So, I guess it was the best I could get. I'm very grateful for the preparation that I did have." Her response to the fourth question on the survey was also similar. She stated that she would have liked to have more information about managing files and grades, how to write grants, and to read more educational support books before leaving her preparation program. This teacher's responses concerning if she felt able to implement DAP in her classroom was

also similar. She noted that it depended on the subject and time of day. Her school used a scripted curriculum for some of its subjects and she highlighted the fact that she felt it was not DAP for all of her students.

The third teacher taught first grade to 26 students in a rural, public school. All but one of her pre- and posttest responses were comparable. This teacher felt that her biggest struggle was individualizing instruction for all of her students. She noted that she had a very diverse group of students, some preforming above grade level and some preforming below. Being prepared and planning ahead, transition time, and classroom management were areas that she felt confident in on both her pre- and posttest. She felt that her teacher preparation program had prepared her well and included that she believed that it would be difficult to fully prepare someone for so much responsibility. The teacher felt she was able to implement DAP into her classroom. She noted that her students could not sit for long periods of time, so she incorporated movement and hands-on activities for them. The one area where her responses differed was that she would have liked to have had more instruction during her teacher preparation program. On her pretest she stated that she would have liked to have more special education training. Her posttest response included learning how to use district mandated scripted programs to plan lessons, time management, and assessments.

Summary

Study findings indicated three main areas remarked on by teachers: creating and implementing instruction and assessment; experiences of teachers; and classroom organization, management, and procedures. All of the teachers within the study had

comments within the area of creating and implementing instruction and assessment. About 46% of the comments within this theme referred to whether teachers felt able to implement DAP in their classrooms. Almost 77% of teachers reported that they were able to implement DAP within their classrooms. Fourteen of the teachers had comments coded within the theme of experience. Almost 68% of those comments fell within the subtheme of student teaching experience. Fourteen teachers also commented within the theme of classroom organization, management, and procedures. About 73% of those comments were coded within the subtheme of classroom management. Five less prominent themes were also delineated: special education; teacher intrinsic qualities; teacher characteristics; child and classroom characteristics; and parent and family issues.

All of the teachers within this study articulated challenges they faced during their first year of teaching. Reported challenges encompassed issues such as classroom management, individualizing instruction, parent and family issues, time management, subject instruction and assessment, motivation, incorporating DAP lessons, transition to kindergarten, and special education issues. About 46% of the reported challenges for teachers fell in the areas of classroom management and individualizing instruction.

Participants also enumerated the successes they were having during their first year. Successes included classroom management; teacher characteristics; instruction areas/methods and assessments; parent and family issues; knowledge of child development; and individualizing instruction. About 68% of teachers reported successes within the areas of teacher characteristics and classroom management.

Furthermore, the majority of teachers indicated they felt prepared for their first year of teaching by their teacher preparation program. Fewer teachers noted that they did

not feel prepared and described why, while two teachers denoted that they felt both prepared and unprepared for the situations they faced during their first year of teaching.

All but one participant described areas they would have liked to have received more instruction in during their teacher preparation program. Their responses included teacher characteristics; special education; classroom management; lesson planning, individualizing instruction, and assessment; working with parents/families; and DAP or educational methods. Only one participant stated "none" when asked in which areas of her teacher preparation program she would have liked to have received more instruction.

Finally, teachers noted their ability or inability to implement DAP within their classrooms. The majority of teachers (13) indicated that they were able to implement DAP within their classrooms, with some describing the ways they were able to do so. Some of the ways included supportive administrators; incorporating hands-on activities and curriculum; flexibility with activities and observing children's cues; and providing an open classroom where children can interact and play. Four teachers (one matched participant, responding on only her posttest) stated that they were not always able to implement DAP. These reasons included district-mandated curriculum, taking over a classroom halfway through the year, and school policies.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine beginning teachers' perceptions during their first year of teaching. Data were gathered from 16 first-year teachers' voluntary survey responses. Thirteen teachers responded to the pretest and six teachers responded to the posttest. Pre- and posttest responses were matched for three of the participants. Responses were qualitatively coded and analyzed. Three prevalent themes and five less prominent themes emerged from the teachers' comments and were explored to answer the research questions:

1. What do first-year teachers find challenging in their first few months of teaching?

2. What do first-year teachers feel are their strengths during their first few months of teaching?

3. How well do teachers feel their teacher education programs prepared them for their first few months of teaching?

4. In which areas of their teacher education program would first-year teachers like to have received more instruction?

5. Do first-year teachers feel able to implement developmentally appropriate practices in their classrooms?

In this discussion, findings are organized by research question. Implications and limitations of this study are also examined, as well as suggestions given for future research.

What Do First-Year Teachers Find Challenging in Their

First Few Months of Teaching?

All of the teachers (*n = 16)* listed at least one area they considered to be
challenging on their pre- or posttest. The majority of comments (six) referenced
classroom management and appeared on both the pre- and posttest. The next most
frequently mentioned challenge (five) was individualizing instruction, followed by parent
involvement/family issues, and time management, which were challenges for three
teachers in each area. Interestingly, comments in these two areas appeared only on the
pretest. The areas of assessment and planning for a specific subject instruction were
listed as challenges by two teachers on their pretests, and the areas of special education
issues, incorporating developmentally appropriate practice, large class size with no
additional help, transition to kindergarten, and motivation were each listed by one
teacher.

The most common issue teachers were struggling with was classroom
management/dealing with difficult children. Six teachers commented on this topic, four
on the pretest and two on the posttest. These results are consistent with findings from a
study conducted by Romano and Gibson (2006) that followed one teacher through her
first year of teaching. They examined areas where she felt more and less successful. One
of the major categories they identified was classroom management, in fact classroom
management was the second highest category commented on within their study. Like
Romano and Gibson's (2006) work, participants in this study included classroom
management as both areas in which they felt successful and in which they struggled.

However, unlike Romano and Gibson's (2006) study, the theme of classroom

management as a challenge was the most common in the present study.

Individualizing instruction was the second most common challenge brought up by

study participants. This theme was noted by five teachers, four on the pretest and two on

the posttest (with one matched teacher commenting on both). This finding is similar to

participants' responses in Beck and colleagues (2007) study. Their study looked at

beginning elementary teachers and what their needs were during their first year, as well

as how they felt their teacher preparation programs helped them to meet their needs.   A

large portion of teachers within their study highlighted the reality of dealing with the

various skill levels of students in their classrooms. Beck and colleagues (2007)

acknowledged that diversity among students was discussed in their college preparation,

but how to individualize instruction for some of those students was not covered. While it

is not clear this is true for the participants in the current study, it is notable that almost a

third mentioned individualizing instruction as a challenge.

A theme listed in three participants' pretest responses was addressing parent and

family issues. Romano and Gibson (2006) also categorized "parents" as an area that the

lone teacher within their study both struggled as well as felt successful with. Teachers

within this study equally listed parent and family issues as both an area that was

challenging and one in which they felt successful. All three teachers' comments within

this area included dealing with parents who were not involved in their child's education

due to both parents work status and family issues relating to family SES. Posttest

responses did not include any teachers listing challenges with parent involvement or

family issues, which could indicate that, as the year progressed, teachers were able to address or resolve challenges they were having with parents or families.

Time management was another area that three participants listed as a challenge, but only at the pretest. Beck and others (2007) also mentioned the "knowledge of the 'realities' of teaching"; participants within their study acknowledged their need to have more information on the "hard realities" (p. 60) of teaching. One of those realities included the time constraints that teachers faced in the classroom. Beck and associates (2007) also commented on the fact that new teachers were often surprised at the time constraints they faced. One of their participants stated "time management [is my main difficulty], trying to get them on task and producing something quickly; you've only got so much time" (p. 63).

Assessment and planning for specific subject instruction were areas mentioned by two teachers on their pretest. These areas are also discussed by Beck and others (2007). The participants in their study stated their desires to have a deeper understanding and knowledge of assessment. One participant in their study highlighted his desire to have his teacher preparation program teach him what to assess, what he should look for when giving assessments and how to use assessment tools. With regard to planning, Beck and colleagues (2007) also had participants state their desires to receive more instruction on how to plan comprehensive subject lessons as well as whole-year plans. Since only two teachers mentioned this in the current study and on the pretest, it was not an area of high concern. However, interestingly, one of the teachers who mentioned time management as a challenge, also noted her struggle with assessments. It could well be that the burden of assessment was a factor in the challenges she was having with time management.

Special education was mentioned by one teacher on her pretest as an area that she found challenging. This is consistent with one important teacher preparation trend discussed by Cochran-Smith and Power (2010). They stated that teacher preparation programs are trending to focus on preparing teachers to teach and meet the needs of diverse learners. The single participant in the Romano and Gibson (2006) study stated that she wished she knew more about strategies and methods to help her special education students. Romano and Gibson's (2006) participant noted her difficulty with inclusion and special needs students and finding ways to integrate them in the lessons and activities.

In her pretest, one teacher listed incorporating developmentally appropriate lessons as an area that she found difficult. This could be due to a lack of support for DAP within her school setting and/or similar to an issue that was highlighted in Beck and colleagues' (2007) investigation. Participants noted their desire to dig deeper in the logistics of integrating subjects and activities in their classrooms within their teacher preparation programs. This is closely related to the participant in the current study articulated difficulty with the incorporation of developmentally appropriate lessons in her classroom.

Another challenge mentioned by a teacher on her posttest was large class size and the fact that she didn't have any additional help. This is similar to the findings in Hedge and Cassidy (2009) research, which looked at teachers' beliefs concerning DAP, and how DAP implementation varied as teachers sought to meet cultural parameters and children's needs in Mumbai, India. Hedge and Cassidy (2009) listed large class sizes, as a main deterrent to DAP integration within classrooms is consistent with the current findings.

Two other issues emerged as challenges by just one teacher. They were transition to kindergarten and motivation, and neither has appeared as a challenge in previous literature.

What Do First-Year Teachers Feel Are Their Strengths During Their First Few Months of Teaching?

All of the teachers ($n = 16)$ listed at least one area they felt was a strength on the pre- or posttest. The greatest number of comments (12) fell within the area of classroom management and appeared on both the pre- and posttest. The next most frequently mentioned strengths (10) were items that fit within the theme of teacher characteristics and intrinsic qualities, followed by the theme of instruction methods/subjects and assessments, which were mentioned by four teachers. The areas of parent communication and working with families were listed as strengths by three teachers on both the pre- and posttest. Two teachers listed individuating instruction as a strength on their pretests.

Classroom management was an area that 11 teachers listed as a strength. One teacher included it on both her pre- and posttest, with seven other teachers mentioning it on their pretests and three on their posttests. These results correspond with the research conducted by Romano and Gibson (2006). Classroom management was an area where the participant in their study listed the highest number of successes, with an equal number of successes throughout her school year. Some of these successes included setting up classroom procedures and rules at the beginning of the year, as well as addressing student issues as they arose throughout the year. Interestingly, the 22 participants in Beck and

others (2007) study listed classroom management as an area that they learned a great deal about in their teacher preparation programs. The fact that 11 teachers mentioned this as a strength, may indicate the current first-year teachers also felt comfortable with their training in this area.

Items included within the themes of teacher characteristics and teacher intrinsic qualities were areas where 11 teachers also felt successful. These items encompassed comments such as teachers' strengths in efficiency, flexibility, their expectation of themselves, planning lessons ahead of time, being prepared, patience with students and situations, teachers relationship with students, and teachers' knowledge of child development and how that impacts their lessons. Six teachers included comments in these areas on the pretest and three teachers on their posttest, with one teacher including comments on both her pre- and posttest. These findings are consistent with some of the characteristics highlighted by Colker (2008) in her qualitative study of 43 early childhood practitioners. She identified 12 characteristics that make early childhood teachers effective in their classrooms. The characteristics of flexibility, patience, and love of learning coincide with teachers' responses within the current study.

Four teachers mentioned their strengths in the theme of instructional methods/subjects and assessments. Two teachers highlighted these areas on their pretest and two on their posttest. Beck and colleagues (2007) stated that most of the participants in their investigation felt they were exposed to many teaching styles and methods within their programs and valued those learning opportunities. This is consistent with teachers' reported strengths in the current study. Teaching methods and subjects were areas that teachers within the current study were exposed to in multiple classes during their teacher

preparation program. Beck and associates (2007) also discussed their participants' thoughts on their preparedness concerning assessments. Similar to the teachers in the present study, Beck and others noted that several of their participants felt adequately prepared and successful in the area of assessments.

Parent communication and working with families were strengths for three teachers. Two teachers mentioned this on their pretest and one on her posttest. Romano and Gibson (2006) also highlighted the category of 'parents' as an area the participant in their study felt successful with. The authors noted that the participant within their study made an effort within the first few weeks of school to begin to build relationships with parents. This coincides with the teachers' responses within the current study of feeling successful in building relationships and working with parents. As discussed previously, three teachers within the current study also included parent involvement/family issues as areas they felt challenged by. One teacher that mentioned her struggle with parent involvement/family issues on her pretest noted her strength in the same area on her posttest.

Two teachers listed individualizing instruction as a strength on their pretests. Beck and others (2007) described their participant as noting her desires to have had more instruction on helping her connect her lesson with her students' minds and make them meaningful for them. Unlike Beck and colleagues (2007), these two teachers felt successful in planning lessons to meet individual students' abilities and interests within their classrooms. However, five teachers within the current study also listed individualizing instruction as an area they felt challenged by.

How Well Do Teachers Feel Their Teacher Education Programs

Prepared Them for Their First Few Months of Teaching?

Teachers' responses to whether they felt prepared by their teacher education programs varied. The majority of teachers (12) stated that they did feel prepared. However, two teachers stated that they did not feel prepared for their first year of teaching.

Twelve of the sixteen teachers within this study felt that their teacher education program did prepare them for their first few months of teaching, with nine teachers commenting on the pretest, five teachers on the posttest, and two on matched pre- and posttests. Six of the teachers simply answered "yes" when asked if they felt their teacher education program prepared them for their first few months of school, while the other six teachers elaborated on their feelings. Some of those comments included statements such as: she felt prepared as best she could for so much responsibility, wishing she had more experience [with teaching], and feeling more prepared because of the time she spent in a classroom setting. Baumgartner and colleagues (2011) noted similar teacher sentiment within their article describing the changes Louisiana State University made to their early childhood program to meet the needs of the "whole" (p. 332) preservice teacher and reflect the changing guidelines of teacher certification. Participants within their study noted that they felt well prepared to begin their first teaching assignment. As noted within the Beck and others (2007) work, even when teachers felt prepared for their first teaching experience, they often highlighted areas they would like further instruction on in the midst of their first year of teaching. This is consistent with the teachers' remarks within the current study. Teachers who stated they felt prepared for their first year, also

noted areas they would have liked to have received more instruction on during their teacher preparation programs, which will be discussed.

Two teachers, one at the pretest and one commenting on both her pre- and posttest, stated that they did not feel their teacher preparation program prepared them for their first year of teaching. The remarks included topics such as, "not knowing how to deal with behavior problems until you face them" and "the only reason I didn't completely fail was because of my training…. I received through my special education degree (which included classroom management techniques and diversification of teaching to children with different skill levels)." Le Maistre and Paré (2010) emphasized the "clash between expectations and reality" (p. 560) that beginning teachers face, which can lead to attrition among beginning teachers. This coincides with the response of the two teachers within this area. These teachers may possibly be struggling with the realities they are facing during their first year of teaching and felt unprepared for them by their teacher preparation program.

Two teachers indicated that they felt both prepared and unprepared for situations they faced during their first year of teaching on their pretests. Their comments included that they did feel prepared by their teacher education program, but were not prepared to handle some situations they faced in their first year. These teachers cited areas such as experiencing situations that were not covered in their training and not having enough field experience during preparation program to apply the information they learned in their college classes. These sentiments were similar to ones noted by Beck and colleagues (2007) within their study. One of their participants explained that she felt her teacher preparation program was sometimes based on the ideal classroom and assignments were

based off of those ideal situations. She stated her desires for her instruction and
assignments would have relied more on an actual realistic teacher's classroom and
experiences.

In Which Areas of Their Teacher Education Program Would First-Year Teachers Like to Have Received More Instruction?

All but one of the teachers included comments relating to areas they would have
liked to have more instruction in during their teacher preparation program. Many
teachers listed multiple areas or subjects in their responses. The majority of comments
(nine) reference issues that fit within the theme of teacher characteristics. The areas of
special education/interventions/referrals and classroom management were each
mentioned by six teachers, followed by the area of lesson planning, individualizing
instruction, and assessments, which consisted of six of the comments within this
question. Working with parents and families was listed as an area for further instruction
by four teachers. Three teachers expressed their desires to have more instruction in
educational methods and DAP. One teacher simply stated "none" when asked what areas
she would have liked more instruction in. This teacher also felt prepared by her teacher
preparation program and listed a large class size as a challenge at the time she completed
the posttest.

Six teachers within the study identified items within the theme of teacher
characteristics as areas they would have liked to have more instruction in during their
teacher preparation programs. All six teachers had comments within this area on their
pretest, with one teacher having a matching pre- and posttest. The items highlighted by

these six teachers included learning how to manage files and student grades, organize a classroom, effectively observe other teachers, conduct home visits, and getting more experience outside of the campus elementary school. Romano and Gibson (2006) also noted their participants' frustration with the learning curve and amount of time it took to keep track of students' grades and manage the progress reports she was required to write. This coincides with two of the teacher responses within the current study. Beck et al. (2007) noted the further preparation that beginning teachers need on the setup and organization of their classrooms and content. This reflects the feelings of one teacher within this study who stated she would have liked more instruction on how to organize her classroom before the school year started.

Special education was an area that six teachers highlighted that they would have liked to receive more training in. Four teachers noted this on their pretest and two teachers on their posttest. The Romano and Gibson (2006) work highlighted their participant's struggle with incorporating special education and inclusion of special education students within her classroom. Consistent with this finding, the teacher within the current study noted her desire to have received more training on things to look for when a student needs to be referred for special education services and how to do that, filling out IEPs, and offering more special education classes for preservice teachers.

Six teachers also noted their desire for more instruction in classroom management. One teacher mentioned this topic on her pre- and posttest. Four other teachers' responses came from the pretest and one response from a teacher's posttest. Three of these teachers listed classroom management as an area they found challenging, while three also listed it as an area where they felt successful. A few of the teachers

described what areas of classroom management they would have liked to receive more instruction in dealing with problem children, more experience with student motivation and management, and management techniques geared towards early childhood settings. Participants in the Beck et al. (2007) investigation noted their need for greater clarity and depth of theory. Teachers' comments within the current study may relate to this finding. Spending more time explaining and exploring the theories of classroom management in teacher preparation programs may be what the teachers within this study are seeking.

Lesson planning, individualizing instruction, and assessments were areas that five teachers expressed the desire for more instruction during their teacher preparation programs. One teacher noted her desire for more instruction regarding lesson planning on her pre- and posttest. Individualizing instruction was mentioned by three teachers, on both the pre- and posttest. One teacher stated her desire for more instruction on assessments on her posttest. Individualizing instruction and assessments were areas mentioned as both a strength and challenge for teachers. Three teachers included these areas as struggles, while one teacher highlighted it as a strength. Romano and Gibson (2006) noted their participant's successes and struggles within the areas of content and pedagogy. These areas include a teacher's knowledge of content and how to teach a specific group of students. The participants within Beck and colleagues' (2007) research discussed their desire for a deeper understanding of assessments before beginning their first year of teaching. This is consistent with one teacher's posttest response in the current study.

Working with parents and families was mentioned by four teachers, three on the pretest, and one on both her pre- and posttest. This may suggest that as the school year

progressed, teachers' desires for more instruction within this area declined. This theme is also present in teachers' remarks on their strengths and challenges, with one teacher including it as either a strength and one as a challenge. The Colker (2008) study included participants' responses of the need for early childhood educators to have the characteristics of patience and respect when working with students and their families. Building positive relationships with parents will rely on a teacher's respect for her student and their family and require patience as well as diligence.

Two teachers mentioned their desire for more training in the areas of incorporating developmentally appropriate practices into lesson plans and knowing more about other educational methods. Both teachers' responses were included on the pretest, with one teacher also listing developmentally appropriate lessons as an area with which she struggled. Leung (2012) noted the importance of teachers in the "implementation of high-quality curriculum and assessment systems in early childhood programs. They are decision-makers in the classrooms and their role is critical in supporting children's development and learning" (p. 39). Beck and colleagues' (2007) work noted many of their participants' desires to learn more about programs in the school system during their teacher preparation programs. This is consistent with findings in the current study.

Do First-Year Teachers Feel Able to Implement Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Their Classrooms?

All sixteen teachers within the current study felt able to implement DAP at least part of the time in their classrooms at some point in the year. Interestingly, one teacher stated on her pretest that she was able to implement DAP, but later indicated on her

posttest that she did not feel she was always able to do so. Three other teachers joined

her as not always being able to implement DAP in their classrooms.

Fourteen teachers commented on their pretests that they felt able to implement

DAP within their classrooms. Two other teachers indicated the same feelings on the

posttest, with one teacher including it on both her pre-and posttest. All the teachers

included comments on ways they were able to incorporate their developmentally

appropriate beliefs and practices into their classrooms and lessons. Many of the teachers'

comments centered around the areas of supportive administrators, hands-on learning and

small group activities, flexibility with activities and observing children's interest levels,

employing an open classroom where children can interact and play, encouraging

children's independence, using only a few worksheets each week, and using explicit

instruction. Stipek and Byler's (1997) research included 60 preschool, kindergarten, and

first grade classrooms. They examined the relationship between teachers' beliefs of how

children learn, their views on policies related to school entry, testing, and retention; their

beliefs on the goals of early childhood education; their satisfaction with their present

practices; and pressures for change and the teachers actual classroom practices. The

authors found that teachers with more child-centered views and beliefs had more child-

centered learning and instruction in their classrooms. These findings may correlate with

teachers' statements in the current study as they expressed ways they were able to

implement their beliefs on developmentally appropriate learning in their classrooms.

Four of the teachers commented on their pretest that they were able implement DAP in

their classrooms, but they also listed classroom management or incorporating DAP lesson

as areas with which they struggled. Each teacher taught a different age group with two in

elementary school settings and two in preschool settings. Charlesworth et al. (1993) have noted that beginning teachers may struggle aligning their DAP and education ideas with the realities they meet within their classrooms. This may be an indication of why some of the teachers in the current study listed developmentally appropriate lessons and classroom management as a challenge.

Four teachers also commented on their inability to always implement their DAP within their classrooms. One teacher commented on this on both her pre- and posttest, with two teachers commenting on either their pre- or posttest. A fourth teacher included comments indicating that she felt unable to implement DAP on her posttest, but had stated she was able to implement DAP on her pretest. All four of these teachers included classroom management as a challenge for them on either their pre- or posttest. Two teachers noted that, for part of their school day, they were able to implement DAP within their classrooms, but experienced times they were unable to due to the required use of scripted lesson plans or not having the resources or additional adult help. The other two teachers expressed their inability to implement DAP within their classrooms was due to the rules set up by either the school at which they were teaching or by the previous teacher. Similarly Stipek and Byler's (1997) investigation found that there is sometimes a disparity between a teacher's DAB and practices that they are actually able to implement in their classrooms due to the policies of the school, administrators, parents, or governments. All of the four teachers' comments within the current study reflect these same constraints as reasons they felt unable to implement DAP within their classrooms. Another factor brought up by Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) in their study was that teachers who describe themselves as using DAP often feel pressure from teachers in

higher grades to make sure their students are meeting the academic standards for their grade level. Although this was not mentioned by teachers in the current study, some of them may be experiencing this pressure, which may impact their ability to implement DAP within their classrooms.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the nature of this study was self-report, with teachers giving their views of their challenges, strengths, how prepared they felt by their teacher preparation program, areas they would have liked to have received more instruction on during their teacher preparation program, and if they were able to implement DAP within their classrooms. This exhibits a possible bias in the results, as no observations were made by the researcher, and the sample was self-selected through volunteering to participate, and only 18% of the possible pool actually participated. Teachers were contacted through an email currently on record, which was obtained while they completed their student teaching in the Child Development Laboratory. Some of the email addresses may no longer have been used by potential participants when the survey was sent out. In addition, only teachers employed as first-year teachers were asked to fill out the survey. Because of this, the total number of teachers who completed the full survey was small. Furthermore, only three teachers' pre- and posttest surveys were able to be matched. This impacted the researcher's ability to compare and contrast teachers' responses between pretests and posttests. The small sample size, inability to match all pre- and posttests, and all teachers receiving their training through one university also eliminates the possibility of the generalizability of this study.

Implications

The implications of this research are varied. First, all teachers within the study

mentioned areas they were challenged by <u>and</u> felt successful in during their first year.

Some teachers reported items, such as classroom management and individualizing

instruction, as both a strength and challenge. This may indicate that teachers completing

the teacher preparation program at a large, land-grant university in the west were

equipped with skills to help them be successful overall in their first year as well as

articulate and reflect on areas in which they were struggling.

Furthermore, teachers expressed their perceptions about whether they were

prepared or not by their teacher education program, as well as the areas in which they

would have liked to have had more instruction. The majority of teachers stated that they

did feel prepared by their preparation program. This indicated the effectiveness of the

teacher preparation programs at a large, land-grant university in the west in preparing

teachers for their first teaching experiences. However, all but one teacher indicated areas

they would have liked to have had more instruction in during their teacher preparation

program. This information could be used to possibly explore and expand on training in

these topics, such as including more special education information during teacher

training, learning how to work with parents and families, ways to individualize

instruction for the students, and a wide variety of classroom management systems and

techniques.

Finally, the majority of teachers felt they were able to implement DAP within

their classrooms at least part of the time, however, some of these teachers listed

struggling with district-mandated curriculum or lack of administrative support as reasons

they were not able to fully incorporate DAP within their classrooms. Including

discussions on these topics within teacher preparation program course work could enable

beginning teachers to learn ways to address these issues as they encounter them in their

practicum, student teaching, and teaching careers.

Overall, the majority of participants within this study felt prepared for their first-

year teaching experience, which speaks to the effectiveness of the teacher training

program they completed. As with many professional training programs, areas of

improvement for the teacher training program were listed by participants. These areas

often had common themes, which reflected back onto the responses teachers' list as areas

they would have liked to receive more instruction on during their teacher training

program.

Suggestions for Future Research

The results of this study were obtained from a small sample of 16 first-year

teachers who completed their teacher preparation program through a large, land-grant

university in the west. Future research should seek to obtain a larger sample size,

whether through this same teacher training program or multiple university teacher

training programs. Students within teacher training programs could be contacted prior to

graduation about participating within a study and could be followed throughout their first

year of teaching, and thereafter. A study following teachers throughout the first few

years of their career could also further the understanding of the role teacher preparation

programs play in preparing teachers for their careers. Perhaps conducting a study

focusing on beginning teachers' DAB and DAP within their classrooms could help

researchers understand what teachers' DABs are after they complete a teacher

preparation program, and ways in which they implement DAP within their classrooms.

These findings could inform university teacher preparation programs on ways their

students are understanding the theories and best practices, as well as how these are

implemented.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to add to the existing body of research

concerning beginning teachers' perceptions of their first year of teaching. This study

explores the questions:

1. What do first-year teachers find challenging in their first few months of teaching?

2. What do first-year teachers feel are their strengths during their first few months of

teaching?

3. How well do teachers feel their teacher education programs prepared them for

their first few months of teaching?

4. In which areas of their teacher education program would first-year teachers like to

have received more instruction?

5. Do first-year teachers feel able to implement developmentally appropriate

practices in their classrooms?

This study demonstrated the many issues and successes teachers encountered

during their first year of teaching. It also indicated that most participants felt prepared by

their teacher preparation programs as they began their careers. Teacher preparation

program educators and beginning teachers must collaborate to address ways to better

prepare preservice teachers for the realities they will face in their first year of teaching. Teacher preparation programs need to continue to strive to prepare beginning teachers to face the situations they will encounter throughout their first year of teaching and subsequent career.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Survey of Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Their

First Few Months of School

Survey of
Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Their First Few Months of School

<u>Personalized ID Code</u>

_____ _____ / _____ _____

(Mothers' birth month/ Mothers' last two digits of birth year)

_____ _____ / _____ _____

(Fathers' birth month/ Fathers' last two digits of birth year)

<u>Demographic Information</u>

School Information

1. Which of the following best describes your school?
    a. A public school that draws students from the surrounding neighborhood
    b. A public school with students from neighborhoods that do and do not surround the school
    c. A public magnet school that draws student from many neighborhoods
    d. A private or parochial school
    e. Other (please describe) _____

2. Which of the following best describes the location of your school?
    a. Urban
    b. Suburban
    c. Small Town
    d. Rural

3. What is the current total student enrollment in your school?

Classroom Information

4. Indicate which grade you teach and the total number of children in your classroom(s)?
    a. ___Kindergarten: AM_____ PM_____
    b. ___First Grade: _____
    c. ___Second Grade: _____

5. How many children with special needs (children on IEP's) are enrolled in your class(es) this year?

6. How many children in your class(es) are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches?

7. Are any of the following types of people in your classroom at least 2 times per week? Check all that apply.
   a. ___Teaching Assistant/Paraprofessional
   b. ___ Co-Teacher
   c. ___ Parent Volunteer
   d. ___ Community Volunteer
   e. ___ College Student

8. How many children leave your classroom to receive instruction from other teachers at least 2 times per week? Check all that apply and note the number of children involved.
   a. ___ Children on IEP's _____
   b. ___ Whole Class_____

Teacher Information

9. List the year of degree(s) you have received:
   a. Bachelors: 19_ _/20_ _
   b. Master's: 19_ _/20_ _
   c. Doctorate: 19_ _/20_ _

10. Check the area of specialization or certification you may hold. (This pertains to state-level certification(s)). Check all that apply
    a. ___ Elementary Education (K-6)
    b. ___ Education (K-12)
    c. ___ Early Childhood/Primary Grades
    d. ___ Special Education
    e. ___ Preschool
    f. ___ Deaf Education
    g. ___ Other (describe) _____

11. Does your district/school offer a mentoring program for beginning teachers?
    a. ___ Yes
    b. ___ No

12. Are you taking part in your district/school mentoring program for beginning teachers?
    a. ___Yes
    b. ___No

13. What is your age?

14. What is your marital status?

   a. Single
   b. Married
   c. Divorced
   d. Widowed

15. Do you have any children? If so, list ages?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Survey Questions

The following are open-ended questions concerning your experiences as a first-year teacher.

16. What areas of your teaching experience do you find challenging at this time?

17. What do you feel are your teaching strengths at this time?

18. Overall, do you feel that your teacher education program prepared you for your first few months of teaching?

19. What specific areas of your teacher education program would you have liked to receive more instruction in?

20. Are you able to implement practices in your classroom that are consistent with your beliefs about how young children learn?
   a. If no, please give an example and tell why not.
   b. If yes, please give an example and tell why.

APPENDIX B:

IRB Letter of Information

UtahState University

Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development
2905 Old Main Hill
Logan UT 84322-2905
Telephone: (435) 797-1525

Letter of Information
Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Their First Few Months

Introduction/ Purpose Dr. Shelley Lindauer in the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development at Utah State University is conducting a research study to find out more about beginning teachers' perceptions of their first few months of teaching. You have been asked to take part because you student taught at the Child Development Laboratory and you are beginning your first year of teaching. There will be around 20 total participants in this study.

Procedures If you agree to be in this research study, the following will happen to you.
- You will receive an e-mail containing a link to the pretest survey.
- Click on this link.
- Create personalized ID, which will make your answers to be anonymous.
- Fill out the questions on the survey.
- Submit the survey.
- Six weeks after the initial e-mail is sent, you will receive another e-mail asking you to fill out the posttest survey.
- Click on this link.
- Enter personalized ID.
- Fill out the questions on the survey.
- Submit the survey.

New Findings During the course of this research study, you will be informed of any significant new findings (either good or bad), such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from participation in the research, or new alternatives to participation that might cause you to change your mind about continuing in the study. If new information is obtained that is relevant or useful to you, or if the procedures and/or methods change at any time throughout this study, your consent to continue participating in this study will be obtained again.

Risks Participation in this research study may involve some added risks or discomforts. These include
- The time it takes to fill out the pre- and posttest surveys

Benefits There may or may not be any direct benefit to you from these procedures. The investigator, however, may learn more about the effectiveness of the education and training you received at Utah State University and what struggles and successes you are facing in your first few months of teaching.

Explanation & offer to answer questions If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Dr. Lindauer at (435) 797-1532 or Rebecca Bingham at (435) 797-1525.

UtahState University

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2905 Old Main Hill
Logan UT 84322-2905
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Letter of Information
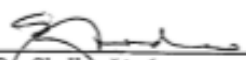### Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of Their First Few Months

Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequence Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence or loss of benefits. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation, feel free to e-mail or call the principal investigator or the student researcher.

Confidentiality Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only the investigator and student researcher will have access to the data which will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked room. Your pre and posttest surveys will be matched using an identification number created and known only to you. This ID will consist of your mothers' birth month (two digits) and birth year (last two digits) and your fathers' birth month (two digits) and year (last two digits).

IRB Approval Statement The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human participants at USU has reviewed and approved this research study. If you have any pertinent questions or concerns about your rights or think the research may have harmed you, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email irb@usu.edu. If you have a concern or complaint about the research and you would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator to obtain information or to offer input.

Investigator Statement "I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered."

Signature of PI & student or Co-PI

Dr. Shelley Lindauer
Principal Investigator
(435)-797-1532
shelley.lindauer@usu.edu

Rebecca Bingham
Student Researcher (or Co-PI)
(435)-797-1525
reb.bing@aggiemail.usu.edu

APPENDIX C:

Coding Scheme

Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of
Their First Few Months Survey—Coding Scheme

1. Special Education
- Documented Special Education Needs
- Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
- Referring Children for Special Education Services
- Holding Children Back
- Interventions for Special Education Students

2. Classroom Organization, Management, Procedures
- Organization of Classroom, Materials, and Procedures
- Classroom Management
- Time Management
- Transition Times
- NAEYC Portfolios

3. Teacher Characteristics
- Flexibility
- Efficiency (In and Outside of the School Day)
- Managing Files, Reports, and Grades
- Support (or lack of) from Supervisor (their beliefs in early childhood education)
- Rapport with Students

4. Teacher Intrinsic Qualities
- Motivation
- Knowledge of Children and their Development
- Self Reflection
- Expectations of Self
- Confidence in Teaching Abilities (Strengths/Weaknesses)

5. Child and Classroom Characteristics
- Class Size
- Availability of Additional Help in Classroom (Aid)
- Child Behavior Issues,
- Student's Transition to Kindergarten

6. Parent and Family Issues
- Low Social Economic Status (SES)
- Lack of Parental Support
- Parent Communication (Parent and Teacher Communication)
- Teacher's Relationship with Parents

7. Creating and Implementing Instruction and Assessment

- Incorporating Developmentally Appropriate Practices and Beliefs into Lessons and Classroom
- Knowledge of Assessments and How They are Implemented
- Teaching Methods,
- Individualizing Instruction for Students
- Knowledge of Subjects and Curriculum and How to Plan Lessons in Those Areas

8. Experience

- Student Teaching Experience (On or Off Campus)
- Grant Writing
- Observations of Other Teachers
- Home Visits
- Teacher Training Geared Towards Typical Classrooms
- Educational Teaching Support Books
- Knowledge of Job Requirements Before Entering Career
- Knowledge of Available Resources or Programs in the Community, District, and School