

student taught last year and, when he had time, he would spend a few minutes in my room catching up with what was going on in their lives. This interest in maintaining connection relates to the remaining area in which he rated himself “excellent”--understanding and finding strength in diverse learners. He has the recognition of and passion for diversity. His take:

*This honestly is the best job in the world, if for no other reason, than the students we get to deal with on a daily basis are so different and so all over the place. Where else do you get to deal with the best and the brightest and also have such an influence to help potential lemons realize they can make lemonad?. Each student brings something to me, so I feel I need to do the same for them.*

He had not given himself any “less than average,” and I did not think that he would. The four categories in which he marked “average” were content area knowledge; day to day planning; listening and responding to parents, students, colleagues, and supervisors; self-evaluating work and deciding how to improve. His comment about content area knowledge was that he is comfortable with the material, but since he had not taught it, he knew he had much to learn. I also concurred with his self-assessment of the other areas since parental conversations, planning entirely on one’s own, and deciding how to most effectively improve teaching practices in isolation take time to feel comfortable about. His rating of

“good” in the other seven categories--professional ethics, readiness to begin teaching, discipline, designing units, assessment, and playing a leadership role--were reasonable determinations, and indicated he believed in himself as much as we had believed in him when my principal offered him the job.

Returning to the “broken windows” idea, I suggested that he could curtail some potential problems with students who were late by using our computerized student schedules. If he pulled up information about the students’ location the period prior to his, he would know who was loitering in the hall, and who truly did have to move from one end of the building to another in a passing period that often made punctuality nearly impossible. I proposed that he let the entire class know he had the information and expected all to be on time, while acknowledging that he may have to look at individual cases of late students. Stretching the lateness envelope in this way goes against every rule of consistency, but when circumstances are beyond the students’ control, we have to find middle ground.

The unscheduled rhythm of the end-of-the-day conversations became our main form of interaction. We had no mutually open periods during the day, and a District initiative to require fifty hours of meetings after school--not necessarily the same meeting at the same time for everyone--as well as additional job related and personal responsibilities made other interaction difficult. As Drew said earlier, however, the proximity factor made this mentor/mentee relationship quite

effective. The day would end, and if we did not have a meeting or practice to run off to, we talked...and talked...and talked.

### **Let the Dialogue Begin**

Drew questioned the validity of exercises in the vocabulary book; he saw them as busy work. Sentences, synonyms, antonyms – so many students mindlessly filling in so many blanks. I reminded him that he is a teacher; he has a brain, creativity, and a responsibility. A text is only a starting point; the validity of any assignment has to come from the teacher and the presentation. I asked if he had shown students obvious and not-so-obvious relationships, used mnemonics, introduced relevant roots, prefixes, and suffixes, and made foreign language connections. It is the teacher's job to show them that even filling in lines on a page can be an important lesson in making these connections and predicting the relationships. Sometimes the mundane has to be conquered in order to move into the extraordinary.

And sometimes the mundane is extraordinary as the following after-school anecdote indicates.

*Another teacher rounded up those still in our rooms to give our opinion of the T-shirts a colleague had designed for the fall sport they both coach. Drew immediately saw a double entendre that the designer had not intended and had not noticed, nor had anyone*

*else who had looked at it. We laughed at the unexpected observation, recounted other humorous events of our day, and eventually returned to our rooms. Such a “nothing” incident, yet a colleague had sought out and trusted our opinion, and we had laughed about a day in which much had not been funny. This “nothing” is indicative of the small ways we seek each other out and support each other. I reminded Drew that the camaraderie factor had to be carried by the novices as well as by the experienced segment of our school, but that characteristic seems to be already ingrained in these professionals.*

Within a few days I requested tutoring time. I sat in front of my computer, struggling to enter my grades with little success, wanting to finish the task so I could get home. I also feared that a push of the wrong button was going to send my existing work into cyberspace. I might have wasted several more minutes had Drew not been at his desk a few feet away and analyzed the problem as an error in the way I had entered the dates for the various marking periods. What was amusing in the midst of my frustration was his observation that he is not nearly so patient with his mother when she asks for help (Is he making an age comparison here?), yet he does not experience the same frustration within the school setting. I imagine that he also has to feel good that I see the “new kid on the block” as the “go-to-kid” when I need technological help.

As we talked about his technological savvy, he expressed his enthusiasm for expanding his horizons by gaining proficiency with Apple computers when our District moves its Apple laptops-for-all-teachers initiative to the high school. Thanks to the easy availability of the young teachers to answer questions, I am quite comfortable expanding my horizons on my PC, but if I have learned anything about technology in this District, it is “Don’t get comfortable” because I can guarantee what you are just getting used to will be replaced by something else. As I spoke those words, I realized that I had also given him a metaphor for teaching – if you get too comfortable, you will stagnate; however, when kids and their ideas combine with a teacher’s energy and creativity, a powerful force impacts their lives and propels a teacher through a thirty-five year career.

That same “go-to-kid” showed his inexperience with the real world of some of our kids as we sat after school one day while he read student journals, and I typed a test. An eighteen year old, who was a junior, responded to a journal prompt by talking about the difficulties she faces as the mother of two children. A single guy who is still enjoying his bachelorhood, Drew calculated that when the student is his age, she will be the mother of a nine year old, a situation that he saw as unfathomable. He was astounded by the upheaval in her life and yet the structure that she tried to adhere to in order to make it work. I reminded him of the answer given to me by one of the new female teachers when I asked her how life as a permanent sub had aided her once she had her own classroom. She did

not miss a beat when she responded with “Don’t try to be their friend.” I am not sure that Drew intends to be their friend, but I did wonder where he would draw a line. On the other hand, I thought back to relationships I had had with particular students early in my career that, by no means, crossed a line, but were certainly different from what I have now. Different realities are created by age differences, similar experiences, and likes and dislikes, but a teacher can never be too careful.

One of our second year teachers then appeared at the door to relate an incident that had occurred in her classroom. Drew related her story to an incident in *Beowulf*, a work they are both teaching, and World War II. That led to a conversation about the usefulness of a solid base in history when teaching literature. Drew was beginning the legend of King Arthur but was dismayed when the background blurb in the text that he had hoped to be supplemental material ended up being his students’ only information on the subject. He was frustrated that they lacked basic historical information that would allow the literature to make more sense. The moral of the story? I told him he cannot take anything for granted, and if he feels the historical piece is vital, he has to address that himself. All too often the idea of a connection is something that teachers take for granted; just as with the vocabulary, Drew was expecting the students to make a leap that many students were not prepared to make. When I correct student writing, I often make the comment that they have not created appropriate transitions for the reader --teachers can be guilty of the same omission. People, places, events, music, and

art come together to enrich everything in a literature rich classroom--the whole is certainly greater than the sum of its parts. I suggested that if Drew believes this, he must foster this approach, not simply give it up in frustration. We have little control over what anyone else teaches, yet the autonomy we have in our building to teach within broad parameters is one of our strengths. If something is important enough, take it on. As we continued this discussion, Drew pointed out that his willingness to step outside of the English box to illuminate relevant connections might be a life lesson for his students as well. My only caution to him was that he be sure this “something else” did not end up driving the program.

At this point, Drew gave me a compliment that he repeated now and then throughout the semester and that is his awareness of the clear passion I still feel for my subject matter and my students; this passion is a spark that I see in him as well. I laughingly have my students repeat my classroom motto of “English is fun, teachers bring joy, and words create magic.” Drew and I have talked about the value of this overt zest for what we do. If a teacher feels this passion, he needs to let his students know why it is a passion. Touch the torch’s flame; it will not be lit by osmosis.

Speaking of flame, if anyone ever brought one near the profusion of newspaper and magazine articles organized in binder after binder in my room, the building could quickly go up in smoke. When Drew asked about how I keep lessons and myself fresh after so many years of teaching the same material, I

pointed to the binders. They are full of articles about real-life people who have faced situations that mirror everything my students read. No matter what an English teacher teaches, the lesson is relevant to today, and when we can present students with current and real parallels, they are often more open to and accepting of the concepts.

A few days later I sat in on Drew's basic English class for a few minutes as he used the movie *Anchorman* to introduce the five parts of a plot line. All but two students in the class had seen the movie, so he had tapped into a base of prior knowledge that produced an animated discussion of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution, which could have been tedious. Moving into student analysis of those terms within the short stories they were studying became a fairly easy transition. What may not have been so easy for Drew was one student's comment that Drew was "too old to know about *Anchorman*." I guess for students there is no such thing as a "young" teacher. Drew eventually had his own retort – for Halloween, when both students and staff are allowed to dress up, his plaid jacket and brushed-to-the-side haircut left no doubt that Drew was ready to take a seat behind the news desk. I love teachers who are determined to laugh, especially when they can laugh about themselves.

During a later observation, Drew started class by giving his students the day's journal prompt, and I realized that I had not had any recent conversations with him about journals. All sorts of questions popped into my head. Is there a



group follow-up with journal topics? What are you seeing in and learning from the journals? How are they responding? What do you think they are getting from the exercise? Are you able to stay on top of reading them regularly? Can you make a value judgment about the time spent reading these if that leaves you short of time to work on planning? I jotted these down to have them ready for our next conversation.

As students completed their writing, they smoothly moved one by one into the vocabulary work that Drew had written on the board, a system with which they were now familiar. He is not exactly a fan of routine, but he has learned that it sometimes has its place. A student asked the meaning of the word “belabor.” When we spoke later, he acknowledged his frustration that a junior college prep student did not know that word, but Drew had not shown signs of this frustration when he responded to the student. Instead of throwing out the answer, he asked the student to break the word into familiar parts, and “be” and “labor” were the obvious results. Though no one knew how to throw in the meaning of “be” in this context, they did know “labor,” and Drew used this as the stepping stone for more of the frequently mentioned “connections.”

I later applauded him for helping the class see how often they have the pieces of the puzzle floating in their heads; they just have to pull them out to play with now and then, and a complete picture will eventually emerge. He also went on a bit of a tangent to talk to them about the value of a foreign language when

\* working with English vocabulary, giving them specific examples from French such as “verdant” from “verd” meaning “green” and “vendor” from “vendre” meaning “to sell.” I interjected my kudos, letting the class know how lucky they were to have a teacher who encouraged thought and not just rote spewing.

When the vocabulary assignment drew to a close, Drew moved on to *King Arthur* and asked his students to find a quote in the text that portrayed a sense of character. After giving them a few minutes to track down an answer, he called on students for responses, and though I was seated nearby, I had difficulty hearing some of the responses. No one asked them to speak up, including Drew. Though I am occasionally guilty of letting quiet students mumble, when on the other side of the desk, I am tuned in to the importance of encouraging students to be more outspoken. At a meeting of all first year secondary teachers, the District’s supervisor for first year teachers suggested that teachers never repeat a student’s response; teacher parroting of an answer deflects student responsibility for being an active participant. Though I usually make my quiet students speak up and repeat an answer, I had never thought about the role I had played when I automatically repeated a student answer. Once more--we always have something to learn. When I talked about this awareness with Drew, he reiterated his appreciation of my eagerness to learn more. I pointed to one of my favorite, posted quotes, a native American proverb, that is more for me than it is for my students. “One who learns from one who is learning drinks from a running

stream.” I reminded him that as long as a teacher keeps learning, a teacher’s material will be fresh, and the class will be energized.

The topic of the running stream reappeared a few days later when Drew asked me to brainstorm with him about graduate school. He had earned his Master’s degree and teacher certification at the same time, so rather than simply meeting Act 48 hours with courses for the sake of obtaining credits, he was seriously considering pursuing his doctorate. Our conversation covered a range of pertinent topics--where did he want to be five, ten, and fifteen years from now, did he want a degree in education or English, would he consider administration (a resounding “no”), could he plot course work to use a sabbatical to complete the requirements, and was he happy with local programs to meet that goal, or would he attend a school in another location and job hunt in that area since he was not yet interested in attending full time. As he pondered his options, he said that with all these decisions in front of him, he was certain of one thing. After attending high school in an affluent New England community, he preferred working in a school with the kind of diverse student profile that existed at our school. Though he thinks his job is much more challenging than what his high school teachers encountered, he also believes it is far more interesting.

One of those challenges became apparent as I watched the interaction, or lack thereof, of a particular group of students. His discussions are often lively and many students feel free to speak out, but several students on the periphery of his

seating arrangement seemed almost withdrawn. Very few teachers are permanent masters of the all-inclusive class discussion or *q and a* session; the struggle to avoid falling back on the frequently raised hand is an on-going one. His class, however, seemed to have a ring of participants that was defined by some invisible boundary based on student seat location in relation to his location.

We talked about the actual arrangement of desks as well as where particular students sat. I am frustrated by colleagues who compound the job of the “floating teacher” who wishes to move seats around or write on “their” board. Though I think that we have eliminated that mentality in my department, the problem still exists elsewhere in the building. I told Drew that he has the right to move the seats into any position he wants, and if he runs out of time to move them back, my students can do so – or not.

My focus on seating arrangements is not accidental. During my junior year in high school, students moved in teams. My history, English, and math classes were made up of the same twenty-five students, and each teacher seated us alphabetically, using the same seating arrangement. That placed me in the left rear corner of every class – and I hated it. I was by no means a shy violet, but I felt terribly removed from the core of what was going on in the class. As a result, ever since my first year of teaching, I have tried to rearrange seats every marking period: front to the back, right side to the left side, middle to anywhere else. I do not want any student to spend a year feeling disconnected. I always thought it

would be interesting to do a study on the correlation between seating arrangement and grades. In any case, when I mentioned the possibility of mixing up his current seating arrangement, Drew balked. He liked the dynamics of the class and didn't see the current arrangement as a problem. He insisted that he had never cared where he sat in a classroom; he always felt involved. I related my story to him and suggested that he at least think about the "Me's" who might need the shake-up of change.

As conversations continued over the weeks, I sensed that this talented, bright teacher could benefit from a bit of a paradigm shift. He had evidently been a bit of a teacher's dream, with full-blown participation, a strong work ethic, and an excellent memory and intelligence. I reminded him of an earlier discussion in which we had talked about the importance of his delivery of historical background that he wanted the students to have for *Beowulf and King Arthur*, and that he should not assume that they always have the prior knowledge he considers vital. He has to be willing to step into their shoes, not just to tap into the basis of their knowledge about an element, but also to sense when he must slow down or model a lesson more intently. I watched his disbelief during a vocabulary lesson regarding his students' unfamiliarity with parts of speech, which made it very difficult for them to use new words in context, and heard a student say that she could do it in her foreign language class, but not in English. His solution was to hold them responsible for sorting out the parts of speech the next day, only to face

a bit of a revolt. That is not the kind of fill-in of information that can be addressed within a day. Could these juniors sort out parts of speech in a few days? Probably, but I suggested he instruct them in the stroke he wanted them to acquire, not simply throw them into the lake saying “Swim.”

Fortunately, his response was not “OK.” We now laugh whenever someone begins or ends a statement with that expression because, during one of my early observations, he tossed it into his lecture over twenty times as he presented a lesson. As is usually the case, he was not aware of this nervous mannerism and vowed to cease and desist. I can honestly report that he had immediate success in his ability to push the verbal delete button on that habit.

His next set of questions was not so easily addressed. What do we do about students who are frequently absent? All I could give was the dreaded “That depends.” I still do not have a solution that always pleases me, because each set of circumstances needs its own resolution; however, I do try to adhere to a few “givens.” The first one is to keep myself organized. I have an absentee folder into which I put the work, with name attached, for all absentees. I have students in charge of a daily log that charts the general activities of the period, which absent students refer to when they return. I try to keep Classlines, a phone system for reporting assignments, updated. I respond to parental email ASAP. I update my parental access to individual student grades. And I do my best to stay on top of students who make minimal effort to complete missed work. Do I wish students

always did the right thing? Absolutely. The time really does come, however, when students have to assume responsibility and accept the consequences if they do not. What we can't do is make moral judgments about the likelihood of a student not completing an assignment that would keep us from doing for him what we would do for any other student.

In a bit of irony, Drew found himself on the other end of a bit of judgment or criticism from the gentleman who supervises new teachers who wanted Drew's lesson plans to be more detailed. I saw Drew shortly after the post-observation conference, and his frustration was palpable. Though he admitted that his plans lacked the elaboration that he had used for his graduate program, he felt that what he had written was adequate to make the lesson successful. He admitted to seldom writing down assignments in high school or college--he had been able to absorb instructor directions, fulfill requirements, and succeed without benefit of paper and pen. He was thrilled to be free of the perceived lesson-plan-overkill of graduate school and wanted to be free of someone looking over his shoulder, second-guessing his professional judgment. Adding to the frustration was Drew's belief that, though the lesson had gone well and the class discussion had been lively, the supervisor had not appropriately, in Drew's mind, acknowledged those positive elements. Drew did not think that hours spent putting more words on paper was an effective use of his time.

This issue was Drew's Achilles heel and would pose a dilemma for me as "the woman in the middle," for I understood both sides. I remember, as a young teacher, the liberation I felt at finally creating lesson plans that met my needs, not someone else's. On the other hand, I did have to hand those previously mentioned monthly plans to my department chair. We did have accountability for what we had in store for our students, but because the plans covered four weeks, we did not have to have much detail for the third and fourth weeks. That district believed that changes that would occur as adjustments were made in weeks one and two would possibly negate details planned for the following weeks, so an overview sufficed.

Drew and I spoke of the need for putting his objectives, methods, and materials on paper in order to have a sense of the big picture he was creating. The requirement to include standards is also a necessary element of checks and balances. We cannot be sure we are addressing the myriad requirements of the PSSA evaluation system if we have not kept track of the standards within our plans. I reminded Drew that, like it or not, he had to see some similarity between his desire to see physical evidence of a student's effort as the student works through a unit and his supervisor's wish to see more detail to Drew's lessons.

The dilemma for me became walking the line between the supervisor's desire to have me check Drew's plans and my desire to remain Drew's peer, not become his superior. My compromise was to tell Drew I would talk to him about



his plans whenever he asked. I would look over what he written whenever he asked. I would offer constructive criticism whenever he asked. I would not, however, ask to see his plans on demand. Drew often commented that he thought our mentor/mentee relationship was effective “because it was an exercise in collaboration” – and I agree.

Several days later Drew produced a lesson plan packet that he had created during a duty that allows him time to work at the computer. He had taken his next unit and rather than address a day-to-day set of assignments, he had organized the unit by standards and objectives that would be covered week by week. Connected to these paragraphs of information were appropriate page numbers and evaluative techniques that he planned to use. I could not have typed the material in the time it took him to do so, let alone create it. His supervisor was quite happy with the finished product, and Drew felt a bit vindicated. He had needed to create a system that worked for him, and I also think he had felt the need to assert his independence. Fortunately, for him, our District allows that kind of autonomy. As long as our process makes sense, we have touched the required bases, and we can justify and explain our intent, we are allowed an appropriate level of independence.

#### **A Sour Note**

I received a late night email after Drew had finished reading the latest batch of journals. Over the last few days he had been frustrated by a series of

school-based complaints students had muttered about before class officially began. He decided that the journals would be an appropriate outlet for them to discuss something they would like to change within the school and, to his surprise, their ideas and words had impressed him to such a degree that he needed to spew about them. His spontaneous articulation opened with “Holy cow; this stuff is reasonable and legit. I half expected whining, but instead I received realistic and valid reasons, sane objections and solutions to how things are done now.”

When we spoke the next day, we talked again about the value of the journals. These snippets of our students’ thought processes give insight to the individuals as well as to the school culture that each teacher needs to be aware of. The exercise also allows students an informal outlet for their ideas that can be the basis for more structured assignments later if they look at these as writer’s notebooks. Occasionally, you will even get the students, as I have had now and then, who tell you they have an attic full of journals. Some are satin ribbon-tied, some are leather-bound, and others are simply shaggy-edged spirals, but in all cases journal writing became an important part of their life’s routine. As English teachers, we acknowledged the value of writing in our lives and knew that if we did not introduce our students to the conversation-with-self via journals, most of them would not become aware of their value.

Because he was so enthusiastic about their responses, I asked if I could sit in on one of his classes when he spoke to them about what they had written. What transpired was one of those teachable moments that is not part of any standard, but is a vital part of the learning process. He talked about their role as members of a community.

*Drew to His Class*

*I've learned*

*That many of you don't like the rules*

*But you believe in the need to follow them*

*I've learned*

*That many of you need to learn*

*The way*

*To question*

*Be aware of limitations, perspectives*

*But don't limit your*

*Expectations*

*I've learned*

*From my own experience*

*That someone will listen, especially if you can back it up*

*I've learned*

*That you have no right to criticize*

*If you have chosen not to act*

*I've learned*

*That sometimes things do not change*

*But don't give up*

*I've learned*

*Giving up breeds apathy*

After making this impassioned monologue to a rapt audience, Drew decided to take the exercise a step farther and told his class the next journal topic was to write about something they wanted to change in the world. A serious voice from the rear of the room brought everyone back to earth with his sincere comment that he “can’t be a deep thinker two days in a row.” I’ve learned that kids have a way of making you laugh when you least expect it.

I’ve also learned something about Drew. I am surprised that he has been able to continue responding to the journals with such regularity, though he now does it most days instead of every day. I did ask him if the time put into this assignment was coming at the cost of other things such as reading new material for his course or lesson planning, but he did not think that was the case. He did comment, however, that basketball season was starting soon, and he might have to reevaluate his schedule.

His decision to coach the seventh and eighth grade boys’ basketball team was not unexpected. During one of our after-school spontaneous conversations,

we had talked about what brought each of us to the teaching profession. He said that he was the oldest of three children and had taken very seriously the idea of being a role model for his siblings. In addition, when he was in high school, he had had what we hope each of our children have--teachers and coaches who had inspired him and whom he had looked to as role models. One of my few regrets about my mentor relationship with Drew was that I never made it to one of his games; a few of my “must-do’s” fell victim to my schedule this year, and that was one of them. Barring unforeseen circumstances, I will be there next year.

### **The Music of Word Play and Movement**

I love to work with mnemonics. As a student I was always on the look-out for ways I could play with words, letters, or numbers to facilitate my studying, and as a mother and teacher, I continued creating them as I helped my children and students. I have used made-up songs, rhymes, and even movement. At a conference a few years ago, the presenter gave us a solution to a situation that has long frustrated me; that is, the students who insist on spelling “a lot” as one word. He had the conference attendees move to one side of the room and repeat after him, saying “a.” We then moved to the other side of the room, saying “lot.” We did that a few times, reinforcing the idea that there was space between these two words just as there had been space between us as we repeated the words. I have used this exercise with my classes ever since, and I can’t say that I have had

100% success, but the frequency with which that error appears in their writing has decreased.

I related this anecdote to Drew, and we talked about the study habits that had brought us a degree of success as students. He expressed his frustration that so many of his students, even those in college preparatory classes, seemed to lack strong study skills. Once again, our dialogue returned to the idea of modeling, or at least addressing, issues with our students that won't appear on the curriculum map for most high school juniors. I can remember my surprise many years ago when I realized that several of my Honors eighth graders had no idea how to take notes in class. That skill was not something anyone had formally taught me; I just seemed to know. On the other hand, I know that words and visuals are what make me tick; language and associated skills do come to me through some kind of osmosis. Drew functions in much the same way.

It is in these circumstances that a teacher has to be a bit of a clairvoyant. Acquiring a sense of what our students can and cannot do allows us to play to their strengths and forces us to mix things up a bit. Drew mulled all of this for a while, said he had an idea, and asked if I would sit in on his class the next day because he was taking his students on a walk.

He started the class with some playful banter, clearly enjoying the interaction. Looking out the window in our room, which overlooks the courtyard, he remarked that, because it was such a beautiful day, the class should take a

walk. His only instructions were for the students to observe, to pay attention to what they see every day but never really see. We walked down hallways, through doorways, stomped down steps, and ended up outside. When we reached his chosen destination, he instructed them to pay attention to what they may have missed the first time and to also think about the sights they were now seeing from a different angle. We then made the trip in reverse.

Once we were back in the classroom, he placed the students in groups, asked them to brainstorm, and then gave them the freedom to write about what they had observed, using any approach they wished, as long as they included detail and transitions. The movement had clearly energized them, and they had immediate and concrete sights of their memories of the walk to aid their use of detail. Drew and I walked around the class, interacting and laughing with them as they generated ideas and wrote. Some of them approached the assignment quite literally, describing the mural in a hallway and mentioning how quiet the halls were as opposed to the hustle-bustle that exists during passing. Others told a more imaginative story of zombies in the courtyard hiding under shrubbery until the setting of the sun. What was common to each group, however, was that no one complained that he or she didn't know what to write, no one sat silently staring into space, and no one seemed isolated. The magic of movement – and a fresh approach.

When we eventually touched base with each other, I commented that when he had mentioned the word “transition,” I had had another idea. What if we took the walk again, and asked them to think about transitions. How did they get from one end of a hallway to another? How did they get from the first floor to the second floor? How did they get from the inside to the outside? I wondered if we could get them to see the hall, the stairs, and the doorway as types of transitions, ways of moving from one place to another. Because I frequently use analogies to make a point, perhaps the concrete transitions of a building could be the analogy I need to help me convey to my students the concept of transitions in their writing, something that my ninth graders still forget to do. That experience is waiting in the wings for a future assignment.

As we talked about this idea, we both expressed how much we valued, not only our ability to bounce ideas off each other and to feed off each other, but also to have a department full of colleagues who value that ability. Teaching in a personal vacuum diminishes what you can offer your students and your own growth as a teacher.

The departmental sense of community came to Drew’s rescue a few days later when I asked to look over any one of the tests he planned to give over the next few weeks. I have found that new teachers often fill a test with recall questions and do not ask questions that address higher level thinking. We were at a point in the semester when he had had already drafted a few tests of his own and



had seen sample tests from those who taught the same course. Though I had planned to meet with him after another meeting, I was delayed and unable to return to school before he had to leave. Because he wanted to give this exam in a few days and opted for immediate feedback, he instead turned to the woman with whom he had student-taught last year.

The next day Drew and I talked about her suggestions for improving the test. Her assessment was that he had produced a quality exam, but perhaps he could eliminate some of the recall questions that were multiple choice or matching and add some short answer questions that would ask for interpretation or analysis. He had included an essay question, thinking that would be a sufficient counterpoint to the recall question. I simply offered the suggestion that he allow the students a chance to move from recall to essay by inserting “warm-up” short answer questions that ask about an element of characterization, setting, or perhaps point of view. These warm-up questions will then often jog an important idea or connection that can be used in the essay.

I was glad to see his willingness to include an essay, because some English teachers think they have enough correcting to do with essays that are written out of class, let alone adding them to tests. We discussed our students’ need for more exposure to responding to a timed prompt, not just because that is a PSSA or SAT expectation, but because they need to be able to think on their feet, delivering information in an organized and coherent way. He expressed concern

that students would not complete a test that was as comprehensive as I had suggested and still complete an essay. I told him that I had dealt with the concern by spreading the test over two days, feeling that the practice of writing on demand and giving expanded thoughts warranted the extra time. I do agree, however, that sometimes we are spending so much time evaluating that we are sorely minimizing our instructional time.

One thing that he does do with his tests is something that is almost a trademark of many of the new teachers – create a test or handout that is visually interesting. I grew up in the age of mimeograph machines and accompanying purple hands; we were lucky if we had created a test free of typos, let alone insert anything clever. His tests are full of eye-catching fonts of varying shapes and sizes and of relevant downloaded pictures. On one packet King Arthur was shown in three poses--sitting astride his horse, looking longingly at Guinevere, and directing his knights as they stood at his Round Table. On additional pages, the pictures were subtle backgrounds over which questions Drew had written questions. Some students will definitely benefit from this type of reinforcement.

As long as we were on the subject of tests, I asked him to think about what his midterm was going to look like. The creation of this exam is like a long-term student assignment--too important to wait until the last minute to think about. When I changed grade levels a few years ago, one of the most useful pieces of assistance I received from a colleague who teaches the same course as I was a

copy of her midterm and final; she volunteered these copies at the beginning of the year. Looking at this exam carefully crafted by a teacher known for her intelligence, work ethic, and attention to detail not only helped me to think about the exams I would give to my students, but also to the development of the course itself. When studying Wiggins and McTighe's backward design (1998), I knew the validity of this approach from first hand experience.

In the past the District has required teachers to give their department coordinators copies of their midterms. Most teachers have given permission for coordinators to share those exams with new teachers to facilitate construction of new exams. At one time, all teachers who taught a particular course gave an almost identical midterm and final in order to maintain a semblance of course consistency. Now, the days on which the exams are administered vary so greatly that giving the same tests, unfortunately, facilitates cheating since information has so much time to pass from student to student. Instead, teachers try to address the same concepts but use different questions.

I asked to look over his ideas by early December, and I stressed that since he now had a stronger feel for conducting his own class, creating his midterm might be a significant aid to planning the rest of his semester. My only other piece of advice was that he not overload this comprehensive exam with questions about specific stories. I know that I am espousing a personal philosophy, but by midterm and finals' time I believe teachers need to move beyond questions like

“How did Romeo and Juliet die?” and ask why they died,” or “What characters could have prevented this tragedy and how?” Ask students to think about issues of figurative language and analyze their own use, applying the knowledge they have gained by studying Shakespeare’s use. Or give them material they have not studied before and ask them to determine and discuss a theme or a character’s strength. As Alice Walker has said, “Art and literature should make us better people, or what on earth are they for?” Teachers should be instructing students to help the students grow and think, not just to help them memorize or spit back.

A few days later Drew asked me to look over a page of his thoughts that would eventually be transformed into his midterm. He had approached the task in a way that intrigued me. He had come up with three headings that addressed key discussion topics that he and his students dealt with as they discussed writing units and the literature of *The Once and Future King*, *Beowulf*, and moved into *Hamlet*: the importance of plays and the use of imagination, our obsession with the future, and the combined traits of ambition, treachery, and betrayal. Under each heading he had spewed a series of thoughts and questions that he and I talked about and that he would eventually push and pull into a finished product. His thoughts and questions about these themes seemed particularly universal – relevant to the literature studied and to the lives of these emerging adults.

We make mistakes

Every single one of us

Some are accidental, some are cold and calculated

Most we regret; some we don't

Why does Man commit acts of treachery and betrayal to

Make more money, climb the ladder, look "cool"

For thousands of years we have been stabbing friends in the back

We have betrayed both loved ones and enemies

What makes us commit acts of immorality

And unquestionable depravity

And equally horrific

Why do we take pleasure in hearing of those who are downtrodden

And why are authors completely enraptured with

Writing about our inhumanity over and over and over again

Though my study ended before his students had a chance to respond to the questions that emerged from his thoughts, I eagerly awaited opportunities to share their insight.

### **Tackling the Research Paper**

Drew, as a teacher of juniors, faced one of the most difficult units for any teacher, let alone a new teacher, and that is the introduction to the research paper. Teachers in a variety of subjects may have introduced seventh through tenth grade on-level and college prep students to various and sundry research skills in the school library, but it is the junior year teacher who is responsible to make sure

they are able to complete all aspects of a research paper, from developing an idea for a thesis statement to completing a paper formatted using Modern Language Association requirements. The first time out, the task is daunting because the teacher is trying to juggle many pieces that require many due dates and necessitate immediate feedback from teachers so that the students can move on to the next phase of the assignment. The teacher must then carve out enormous personal time to review, reflect, and comment on these tomes. Complicating the situation is the difficulty in scheduling class time (in addition to the expectation of students' individual trips to library, not in lieu of) in our heavily used library, as well as finding simple teaching time in a junior semester that is heavily interrupted by PSSA testing, field trips, and special assemblies.

I remember all too well how difficult it was to teach this unit the first time. We do have textbook chapters and even entire paperbacks that address the teaching of the research paper but, as is the case for all texts in the hands of thinking teachers, "attention must be paid" to adapting the text material to the needs of the teacher's classroom and assignment. Knowing what was ahead of the mentees, I suggested a meeting time for an afternoon when we could both stay as long as possible to go through my files and binders and, at the same time, schedule a follow-up meeting to address the questions that might emerge after the initial introduction of what needed to be accomplished.

Unlike some teachers in other departments, Drew was quite familiar with our library and its many resources, so that component was taken care of. This expertise was the result of his prior experience in our building and his work ethic. He had developed a mini unit on research skills when he had student-taught in our building, but he had acquired additional library expertise when he worked as a permanent substitute. Normally, when permanent substitutes fill in for one of our librarians, he or she helps with paperwork and easily tackled questions. Drew, as was often the case, expressed his interest in doing as much as he could, and filled in for librarians by actually teaching classes about our resources when students came to the library. As is usually the case, teachers learn best when teachers must do. Drew probably knew the library better than anyone other than the librarians.

We then talked about the options he would offer students in terms of the direction of the paper. The more experienced teachers have accumulated a wealth of background information that has allowed them to offer a wide range of focuses; for the first year teacher, the focus has to be a bit narrower, conforming to parameters that are familiar to the teacher because both teacher and students are juggling so many other facets of the assignment.

One of the most important elements of our discussion was a lesson I had learned from my graduate courses. I had been one of those clueless teachers, years removed from writing a research paper myself, who told my students to read,

think, and come up with a thesis that was written in stone on a particular due date as had been asked of me as a college student. No, I wasn't exactly that cut and dry with the directions, but I had not allowed the ebb and flow of reading and tweaking and reading and discussing that Moravian professors had encouraged in the early and middle stages of the research process. I used to tell my students that once they had their research notes taken and organized, their paper was, in many ways, written. Now I know that the hardest part of the work is the pushing and pulling, talking, reading, and discovering that goes into the selection and wording of the thesis statement – and I am a much better teacher for it. Once again, “One who learns from one who is learning drinks from a running stream.”

Drew and I sat with my binder of assignments, and I explained my rationale for what I do, and why I have changed some of the assignments that I used to do. As with students, an explanation of the thought process may be more important than the end result. He decided, based on the literature his students were reading and the direction of his midterm, that his students would address an issue related to the tragic hero. He had a long way to go before final activities would take shape, but I had made sure that he had ample time to look through available material and continue our discussions before introducing the project to his classes.

Our discussion eventually turned once again to midterms because Drew was concerned about planning for the rest of the semester. An earlier school start



date, late August, meant earlier exams; that gave us only one week between students' return from Christmas vacation and the first exam. Drew had planned to start *Hamlet* in the next few days but knew he would not finish by midterms. He saw this stopping and starting caused by vacation and exams as an intrusive break in the rhythm of the play. He asked if starting the short story unit would be a more practical solution to the timing problem.

My response was again to offer personal experience, which is that the short story unit is a good one to save for the end of the year. Each course has core stories that are to be taught, but teachers are free to add those that appeal to them. Because the second semester is always full of unexpected interruptions, we never seem to have enough time. By saving the short story unit until the end, it is possible to teach the core stories and, if time gets tight, no crucial part of the curriculum is omitted. The short story unit is the only one that offers this freedom. He mulled over my comments, but my classes were not his classes, my schedule was not his schedule--he was a professional who could sort out what would be best for him and his students. After a few days' thought, he decided he would delve into *Hamlet*, full speed ahead.

#### **Another Sour Note**

As Drew and I talked after school, I began to sense that he was internalizing some of the unpleasant realities of our job. He was now coaching, though the schedule for practice was varied. Some days he left for the Middle

School a few minutes after school ended and, on other days, he had time to work after school, go home, and drive back for an evening practice. He was clearly enthusiastic about the chance to mix his beloved athletics with his desire to work with energetic youths, but he was quickly losing his ability to stay on top of the correcting and planning aspects of teaching to the degree that he previously had. He also had to limit the journal assignments, not only because he could no longer read and respond to them promptly, but also because this student writing was taking up too much class time, causing him concern as to his ability to address an appropriate degree of the material in the curriculum maps. I made it very clear to him that this set of circumstances in no way reflected a flaw in his teaching. It was simply a part of the ebb and flow of a teacher's own learning process about the art and science of teaching. As far as correcting papers – there is no such thing as “finished” until June when the last final exam has been graded. And Drew knows that, to this day, I struggle with unexpected interruptions and the desire to respond to teachable moments that occasionally throw my best laid plans to the winds.

I reminded Drew of earlier conversations that stressed the importance of flexibility and learning from past experiences. This concern with pacing is one of the best reasons for keeping and reevaluating clear lesson plans, for they provide the experience from which to learn. These past plans become a form of data

collection, and the notes made after the fact are as significant to how a teacher plans the following year as are the original plans.

He was also becoming frustrated that, no matter how hard he tried, apathy and lack of work ethic had greater control of some students' academic performance than did their desire to succeed. Others, who had innate ability, occasionally turned in lackluster performances because of unreasonable job commitments that take priority over schoolwork. Ah, if only I had the magic bullet for those issues. Stepping outside the mentor role and into researcher mode, I found it fascinating that he was fitting right into Moir's categories (1999) about the five stages of a novice teacher's emotional ride. Her work has indicated that a new teacher's first year experience creates a ride on an emotional wave that takes him through anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, and reflection. This awareness, however, did not solve his problem – and neither could I. I had no new mantra, no powerful words of wisdom; I had only the phrases that I had already given him: "Don't buy into a culture of low student expectations" and "Never give up." At this point, the caring, hard-working teacher has to find peace with himself. I thought that perhaps Drew could find that peace and get a needed charge of energy, if I encouraged him to do what he does so well – spew about his job. I thought that he would eventually tap into the well that would produce a geyser of self-motivation and reinforce why I had been so pleased that he had accepted our principal's job offer so many months ago.

*When you get so frustrated, what keeps bringing you back?*

It takes one student

Just one

To make you have an amazing day

And every day, every day, every day

Is a fresh start

Inevitably

The kid who made your life difficult yesterday

Is good today

It is impossible to hold grudges

This inability to hold grudges is one of my favorite traits about Drew. I have seen him sternly and loudly make it very clear to a student that he has crossed the line; I have seen his body language tense with frustration. I have seen him ask a student to stand with him outside the door as he reprimanded him privately. And I have seen him take a deep breath, resume class, and call on or converse with the reprimanded student as if he were an exemplar scholar.

*What help has been provided?*

I have had almost daily conversations with others about what makes things tick as they do. Sometimes you just need to blow off steam, and it doesn't mean you had a bad day or you don't like a class. Sometimes it's just something sets you off and you just need to talk

about it. Communication and the ability to have someone relate to what you're going through is invaluable. The funny thing is when you're in school, you have these texts and lists of things you can do not to get upset or have a bad day, but in reality, the best thing is to be around great people, whether it's the department or students who truly care about doing their work and pleasing you.

Though large schools are targets of criticism for those who feel they are too impersonal, what Drew is talking about is an asset of larger schools. With a staff as diverse as ours, there is always someone with whom the novice teacher can connect and talk.

*Earlier in our conversation, you alluded to the fact that even the most difficult day is bearable if one student responds to you. What have adults in this building done to respond to you?*

Being here last year made all the difference in the world. I know a lot of the teachers, and they have told me about the positive things they have heard their students say about my class and what we're doing. And through formal and informal observations I have a pretty good idea of what I am doing right and what I can improve upon. I can't ask for anything more.

*What is your confidence factor regarding the teaching of your courses?*

I would have been more confident teaching ninth graders as I did last year, but I made the choice to move to eleventh grade because I really enjoy the

British literature and playing with the history and language. Next year should be so much easier because, let's face it, it's tough to do anything the first time around. The more kids "get it," the more confident I am with my abilities to help them "get it." The big themes and ideas are everywhere. My job is to give them the opportunities and tools to find them on their own.

*Talk to me about lesson plans...*

Single hardest piece of my year

I am

Chaotically inventive and creative

For whom organization is often a struggle

*...and paperwork.*

Paperwork is the hardest thing in the world to finish

because it never ends

never ends

I've learned to do the essential paperwork as soon as I get it

Or I will forget it

In the totem pole of priorities

There really is no end to what has to be done

When is someone going to realize the value of

TIME

to brainstorm and create and share with colleagues

and the value of decompressing over lunch

These are moments of professional development

far more important than the District's choices

*What do you have to say about your experiences with parents?*

I have been told to be objective and positive

When talking about students and

So far

Parents have seen me as fair and understanding

The best advice I've received is

When in doubt, call home

Others have said

The results are far more positive than

They had hoped they would be

*How do you feel about the autonomy you have in your classroom?*

That is an important reason I am teaching here. I am thought of as a professional and allowed to run my classroom, but I am not hung out to dry. I am expected to know what I am doing and how to impart valuable information. The only interference is the good kind--constructive criticism, helpful hints, and questions that mostly come from almost daily chats with my mentor/department chair. Because of my personality, these informal talks are much more helpful than a

structured “OK, what did I see that was done poorly” type conversation with an administrator. I believe that is a 100% good thing for all involved.

### **Another Form of Reflection**

As the holidays and the end of my research approached, I asked Drew to once again respond to the Novice Teacher Reflection sheet that he had filled out at the beginning of the school year; his responses were accurate reflections of what I had observed over the course of the semester. The one area in which he downgraded his skill from “excellent” to “good” was in his understanding of diverse learners and his ability to find strengths in them. I was not terribly surprised by this because of his recent expressions of frustration about those who are reluctant to participate or do even minimal work, even some in the college prep program. This was not the student role he took on in high school, and likely because of the demographics of his high school, he has no recollection of his peers being apathetic about school. I wish I could assure him that he will eventually have the insight to be everything to every student. What I could tell him was that the longer he teaches, the more he will learn. His ever-expanding bag of tricks--stronger lessons, more organization, diverse assignments, school networking--will enable him to make inroads to a greater variety of students each year.



One area in which he felt that he had improved from “average” to “good” was content knowledge. We have heard the adage “He who does the talking, does the learning” and that learning is, hopefully, the case with teachers no matter how many years of experience they have accrued. In order to prepare for classes, Drew had talked, and in the preparation for these lectures and exchanges, Drew had gained insight, anecdotes, and factual information that made him more comfortable with what he was doing and where he was heading.

A second area of improvement from “average” to “good” was his ability to talk with students, parents, co-workers, and supervisors. I also expected this because Drew moves easily within and among groups of people and carries himself with a certain confidence. Our head principal is very clear about his appreciation of the students and staff in this building, and this attitude is of paramount importance in setting a tone of open communication from the top down. Drew has been receptive to and learned from this administrative style.

Out of fourteen items, Drew felt that his skill level as a novice teacher was “excellent” in three categories, “good” in nine, and “average” in two. He had not given himself a “less than average” in any category either in the beginning of the year reflection or at this point.

Curious as to how his reflections would compare to my perceptions, I filled out the same form prior to seeing his, and we matched in every category except one. I had indicated a skill of “good” rather than “excellent” at finding

teaching materials and resources. Though our planning room and staff are gold mines of materials, and he is technologically savvy at creating his own resources, he needs to access journals, newspapers, magazines, professional websites, and other supplementary information to a greater extent. That will come with time.

*Drew's unsolicited tangent:*

I think I am still here (yes, a whole four months) because I have the same excitement and love for being here. Check back in thirty years, but I doubt I will change much. There is always that student whom you make a difference with and impact in such a positive way...The department we have and the support we have inside the building make this job worth coming to every day – in fact, it's not really even a job at all but "School." I tell the students that this doesn't feel like a job because you can see that all the work you do has an impact and a positive influence on so many students. I haven't decided to fly the coop yet, and doubt that I'll feel like doing that in the future.

*My thoughts:*

As a mentor, one indicator of success is the ability to maintain quality personnel within a program. Both he and I know that his coop will eagerly await his return and continued growth next year.

### **The Music of the Remaining Members of the Quintet**

*In the end we are all separate; our stories, no matter how similar, come to a fork and diverge. Peace and Justice Newsletter October 2005*

My time with Drew was far different than the time I spent with the other four. As I had feared once the year unfolded, the opportunity to have large group meetings as I did with last year's group was not possible. A variety of District initiatives and personal and professional calendars negated the chance to meet with any regularity. Novice teachers from last year had jumped into regular extra-curricular participation, as had Drew. Jessikah's job with the after school academy allowed her to spend no more than fifteen minutes with us. That left Sarah who had a lengthy commute until she found new housing.

The schedules now required a new rhythm to mentoring. Sarah and I had a planning period together, but ironically, we found that to be one of the least effective arrangements for mentoring. Her determination to stay on top of planning and paperwork often put her in hibernation during that time, and that was the period that I was most likely able to meet with students because of their schedule. In addition, the period I was most often available for observations was the period she had a study hall. Jessikah did not come in until the last two periods of the day, during which I had classes, and she then taught from 2:50 to 6:30. I did observe her twice during one of the two periods at the end of the day, but that necessitated my getting coverage for one of my classes, not to mention the

problem of having to leave my class. My official day did not end until 2:40 and the after school hours were the only time I could spend extended hours in my room. Her family (and mine) were not interested in having her stay later than 6:30 to meet with me. I also observed her in the after school program, but that simply was not something I could do with any frequency. We did share a lunch period, and the conversation among the five of us who ate lunch at that time often turned to “What do you do if...”

Meeting with Maro and Rachael, teachers who were now in their second year, posed similar difficulties. Maro coached, but since we are the department early birds, we did have the chance to touch base before school started. Rachael was one of the five in our lunch bunch, but she also made frequent use of forwarding questions and concerns to me via email. I would never have anticipated that mentoring someone with whom I had no common periods but shared a room, Drew, would produce the most frequent contact.

What I did anticipate was that, as I reviewed the notes from my months with Drew, Jessikah, Maro, Rachael, and Sarah, the layers of similarities in their stories peeled away. These layers were not something I imagined; these layers were the lyrics of their words that clearly sang.

*This is the best job in the world*

**Rachael:** When I help a student or a student makes me feel better – that’s when I know I have made the right career choice. It’s much

more than what happens in the classroom; it's the moments between, too, that make it worthwhile. On a day when I'm feeling at my worst, I know that my students can put me in a good mood when it feels like no one else can.

**Jessikah:** (The master of succinctness) Seeing a student “get it – wow.”

**Sarah:** When students are receptive to lessons and they're more than willing to participate, the feeling is amazing. Also, the times when students make connections between literature and life – I can't describe it.

**Maro:** Oh, I'll tell you what makes this job great. One day a student says to me, “Miss, I don't normally like English classes, but you make it kind of nice.” Teaching is a performance. When that performance goes well, there is no feeling quite like it. When it doesn't go well, I swear I hear crickets chirping. That is what makes it great, though – the constant challenge to keep it great. When the kids latch onto a new concept or idea, and I can say to myself, “Wow, I taught them that,” I know that this is what I was meant to do.

### **Sarah's Aria**

*You are what you wear – or not*

When we were college students, our dress code required that we wear skirts to dinner, skirts to the library on Sundays, and skirts whenever we left campus; a foot of snow was no excuse for covering legs from thigh to ankle. During my second year of teaching, a colleague was sent home to change when

she dared show up for work wearing a pantsuit. My peers who attended less restrictive colleges could not fathom adherence to these restrictions or this particular culture. Times have changed and so have cultural expectations of appropriate attire in many environments. It was this issue of appropriate attire that caused the first sign of distress between Sarah and the District's novice teacher supervisor. When he spoke with me after his first observation, he was displeased that she had been wearing open-toed sandals; he indicated that he had found her choice of footwear so disconcerting that he had had to avert his eyes from her feet.

Speaking of feet – I often find myself with each of mine firmly planted on either side of a fence. I understand his concern that teachers dress professionally, but I am also aware of changes in the fashion times, and changes in what is considered appropriate in our building's environment. On any given day, several female colleagues are likely to be wearing similarly styled shoes. Sarah's appearance is always meticulous, and her clothing choices lean toward simple skirts and slacks with blouses or crewnecks. She does not wear anything flashy or in any way try to call attention to herself.

As her mentor I had a responsibility to her to intercede, at least to the extent of relaying these thoughts to the supervisor. By the time he and I finished our discussion, he was talking about "the good old days" when every male teacher wore a shirt and tie, acknowledging that no male teacher today would be criticized

for not wearing a tie in our building. I still think he would prefer that she opt for different footwear, but he seemed willing to make it a non-issue. I am sure that his delight at the quality of her classroom performance – at what was going on with her mind--certainly alleviated his concern with her feet. As the weeks passed and the supervisor made additional visits, he continually praised her creativity, classroom discipline, and student/teacher interaction.

I spoke with Sarah about my comments after she had met with the supervisor, and he had expressed his thoughts to her. She was a bit unnerved that he had addressed this issue because she was simply modeling the attire that had surrounded her and had not anticipated that it would be a problem. In the ensuing weeks, her shoe style changed only when the weather did, and no further discussion arose.

*I never thought of that*

I observed Sarah's class as she moved students into groups of four or five for a review game to prepare them for the next day's exam. She asked a series of questions ranging from simple recall to character analysis via quote identification. Students brainstormed the answers for the group, and then corrected their group paper as Sarah read and briefly discussed the correct answers. She took the point totals of each group and then asked a bonus question that was worth enough points that the lead team could be displaced by another team. Participation was enthusiastic but controlled. Though I prefer to stay away

from groups as large as five because the reluctant student can usually remove himself from participation, most students did interact.

When we met later that day, I asked if I could look at the test, and many of the questions asked in the review were phrased exactly as she had asked them in the exam. I asked her if she had any fear that a review that so directly mimicked the exam might encourage students to be lax about doing their work for class. I doubted that all of them had the innate motivation to do work for class if they knew that simply paying close attention during the review would give them correct responses. When she finally spoke, her words reaffirmed what her eyes had said immediately, which was “I never thought of that.” She was definitely caught off guard, and started to answer a few times, stopping each time as she tried to think about this possibility. As I continued to talk with her, she acknowledged that she took almost full responsibility for student success on a test. If they did well, then she was doing her job; if they did not, she was not. She had not entertained the idea that perhaps she might be fostering something less desirable than student success.

My question had clearly put her into reflective mode, and that is the way I prefer to mentor. I plant the seed and provide the water, but the novice teachers need to supply the sunshine of their own perspectives and choices.

*Her own person*



A parent contacted Sarah to schedule a conference to discuss her child's grades. At the beginning of the year, I had suggested that they be fully prepared for any conference, being sure to supply grades and an explanation of how these grades were arrived at, as well as the student's folder containing all tests and assignments. Sarah did just that only to be caught off guard by the parent's insistence that the teacher allow the parent to take home a copy of the most recent test. Sarah was, understandably, uncomfortable with the thought of one of her tests floating among the general population, and resisted. The parent persisted and said she would give the test to a tutor, but that did not ease Sarah's concern. Sarah offered to make a list of unit concepts for the mother and supply what other information she could. At this point, a principal arrived on the scene having been contacted by the parent prior to the conference. When the parent explained what she wanted, the principal supported Sarah's decision.

I was pleased that Sarah had had enough confidence in her personal academic philosophy to not acquiesce to the parent's request, yet sufficient presence of mind to offer the parent a reasonable alternative. In addition Sarah also indicated to the parent that she could have extended the common courtesy of informing Sarah that she had contacted a principal. The parent and Sarah had not had any previous relationship that would have warranted a mediator, and the appearance of a principal indicated the parent intended to avoid addressing a chain of command. I do not know that many first year teachers can reasonably

hold their ground in the face of strong parental pressure, let alone politely express dissatisfaction that important information had been withheld.

When I asked her how she had been able to have the presence of mind to handle the situation this way, she attributed it to watching her cooperating teacher speak with parents and listening to her brother-in-law talk about some of his parent conferences. I cannot let her get away with an important omission – her own personality and confidence were equally important.

### **Jessikah's Aria**

#### *A different challenge*

Jessikah had her hands full. The after-school program was initiated last year, and the English teacher was hired with emergency certification. The principal was as new as the program, and those putting this initiative together decided that the curriculum would be computer-based. Part way through the year, I received a plea to gather more traditional material for the teacher because of technological frustrations and student inattentiveness. When this year came around, the new principal had taken a job elsewhere, a veteran had taken over, and Jessikah was implementing a traditional text and novel based curriculum. Her task was complicated because the students were used to a culture from the previous year that this year's staff was having trouble altering.

This mother of five was exactly what these students needed. She expressed her frustration that they usually balked when she tried to teach a piece of literature

or required a piece of writing, but she insisted that there was “going to be validity to their diplomas.” When I did observe her in two of the four classes that she taught in the after-school program, I saw a masterful combination of sternness and nurture. I don’t know that this competence can be taught; only years of practice, years of trial and error with your own children allow you to bob and weave, have eyes in the back of your head, pat students on the back while you gently lift a head from the desk as I saw her do.

From the first minute of class she had them on task. She opened with a “daily spark,” a grammar rule or vocabulary word, which was an opening idea she had borrowed from one of her daughter’s teachers, who is now also a colleague. She walked them through a reading and discussion of a story about an abused child, a topic usually too heavy for novice teacher to tackle, but not for someone who had life experience. She tactfully guided them along this road that the students found fascinating, and all too often, could probably relate to. Her questions never lingered in the air unanswered, and the discussion was animated. Oh, and need I say that the students were certainly animated too.

When I spoke with her the next day, I broke my rule and did not ask her to initiate the dialogue between us. I told her I had been mesmerized by her efforts, and I wish I could open her room to the public whenever I hear what an easy job teaching is. I can easily give her compliments; what I can’t give her is a solution

to the burnout and exhaustion she is feeling from teaching six classes at the end of the day, while fulfilling the role of a wife and mother of five at the same time.

Compounding the circumstances is that four of those classes are with students who have been removed from a mainstream program because of excessive disciplinary and legal infractions. I have no doubt that Jessikah would last forever in a regular school program, but I doubt that she will do this for longer than one or two years. The District supervisor has made it clear that she is one of the best first year teachers he has observed, so it is likely that she will be hired to replace one of the retiring teachers, but it is my job as a mentor to advocate for her in any way I can, so I have talked to our principal about this move. In one of life's full circles, I am probably the retiring teacher whom she will replace.

In spite of all the above--or perhaps because of the above--Jessikah has internalized the same theme that seems to be running through the stories of all of these teachers as shown in the following anecdote she told us at lunch

*My husband, my son, and I were driving to my daughter's game, and as usual, I was talking a mile a minute - all the funny and not so funny stories of the day, the ideas that were churning, lunch time conversation. When I finally took a breath, my son said, "Ever since you started teaching, it's your life."*

### **Maro's Aria**

#### *Connections matter*

Maro and I had frequent conversations about discipline; not in the way of “I need help” conversations, but in the way of two concerned teachers, continually trying to refine what we are doing. Her articulate response to a question about the reality of novice teacher discipline:

I've actually thought about this a lot lately. Sometimes when I have “run-ins” with students I ask myself, “Am I being unreasonable or are the kids acting crazy?” I think I have come to some sort of conclusion about the whole thing. I've decided that I usually become frustrated with students I encounter outside of my classroom. Any sort of confrontation with a student who isn't my own is frustrating because I find myself taking “it” personally. I have a theory, though. It's frustrating because with those students that I only see once (in the hall, study halls, etc.) – there is no chance for redemption – for them or me. With a student in my classroom – I might get frustrated – but I can deal with that student, help him, follow it through – and at the end, I feel a definite sense of redemption. When I came to that realization, I felt a little less frustrated.

I also think that classroom management is one of those skills that is under constant construction. Last year I had a good plan in place,

but I struggled to follow through with some of my policies. At times I felt overwhelmed with other things I was doing, and I didn't have the time to keep track of everything I needed to. This year I have made a conscious effort to be better organized when it comes to that aspect of classroom management. I've found that your idea of having a journal prompt or some other regularly expected brief assignment on the board has been my saving grace. I have to remind kids now and then, but for the most part, they come in and start working – which is nice because it is a routine. Not every class is smooth sailing, but for the most part, I feel good about it.

I am a work in progress...

The teachers who choose to walk down a hallway, ignoring students who may be acting inappropriately, surprise me. I am not talking about a major infraction such as fighting, but the infractions that, if addressed, might help us repair the “broken windows.” We can't look the other way when students congregate at an intersection rather than move to class, use profanity, or float in the hallway without a pass or ID. Those who look the other way often do so rather than face the frustration that Maro spoke about. What has impressed me about Maro is the respectful way in which she takes charge and avoids this appearance of apathy. Though students know she means business, she ably disarms them with her humor. As a result, students are far less likely to think she is going to

look the other way when they try to push the discipline envelope, and emotions do not escalate.

### **Rachael's Aria**

*The sun does peak out from behind the clouds*

Two incidents involving Rachael are perfect examples of the need for mentors to be more than just fonts of ideas, but to also be an emotional support system, and both situations required me to respond instinctively to situations in which I had never found myself. Rachael encompasses everything a principal looks for when hiring new staff. She is bright, conscientious, and confident, and she has an exceptional work ethic, cooperative personality, strong discipline, and a sense of humor. Some situations, however, truly need the additional elements of life experience and teamwork.

The wonders of computerized scheduling had placed Rachael and three other first year teachers, none of whom really knew each other at this point, in a cafeteria study hall. Though we had talked about study hall issues, handling that large a group requires a united front on the part of the teachers, and none of these teachers were prepared to take the lead in such a demanding environment. Each teacher was in charge of a particular grade level and section of the cafeteria, but since there were no physical boundaries, it was difficult to enforce any expectations from students in a particular section if the other teachers did not adhere to the same expectations.

Though she had had no difficulties within her own classes, the wide open spaces, invisible borders, and lack of structured time of this environment created circumstances that she was not yet ready to deal with, and neither were the others assigned to the duty. And as Maro addressed earlier, the fact that Rachael had no connection of immediacy with these students, no student-and-teacher knowledge of each other like the one that develops in a classroom, made the task more difficult. I told her I would get someone to cover the first few minutes of my class, so that I could watch what was happening and offer some suggestions based on what I had seen. I also knew that I needed to talk to the other teachers in the study hall to determine their level of discontent, for what was needed was a solution that was appropriate to all.

As our discussion continued, however, she confessed that one or two boys at a particular table had made inappropriate sexual comments directed to her, and she was feeling quite vulnerable. Now it was time to pull out all the stops, and I looked on schedules for any member of my department who had a planning period during her study hall. We arrived at the cafeteria as early as we could, and we asked the other teachers if they minded if we made some suggestions regarding laying down behavioral expectations and then have extra bodies on patrol that period. They were as appreciative of the help as Rachael was, and the five additional members of our department addressed the need for creating a massive seating chart and assigning seats, knowing that time spent now would



save time and aggravation later. We also suggested that, following the cue of the seating chart, they require the students to adhere to the same expectations that would be asked of them in a classroom. In addition, the lone male teacher in our English group spent his time with the young male students at the table in question, making very clear to them the repercussions, legal and academic, they would face if the earlier references that had been directed at their teacher continued.

They did not.

Too many novice teachers are reluctant to ask for assistance, thinking that such a request is a sign of their incompetence, rather than a natural part of the learning curve that it is. A mentor has to make clear to the new teacher the same point she drives home to students, and that is that questions are not signs of incompetence; it is the failure to ask that causes concern. And if a mentor senses that a teacher is struggling, no harm is done if the mentor does the asking.

*The measure of a man – and a new teacher*

The school day had ended with news about as difficult as a school can receive. Our principal called the staff to the auditorium for an emergency meeting at which we were told a much beloved and involved teacher had died under difficult circumstances, which, the next day, would fill the newspapers with unpleasant anecdotes and our halls with grief counselors. The school and district support team did all it could for us, creating handouts, making suggestions about how to handle grieving students and colleagues, and informing us where

additional grief counselors would be located. Our planning room would be a base for one of the counselors, so we needed to make sure that the room was as friendly an environment as we could make it under the circumstances. Since my teaching day did not start until period two, I arrived early to check the coffee supply and to roam the halls in case I could be of use to anyone else. During homeroom each teacher had been asked to read a prepared statement that informed students of the death of the teacher and the opportunities for counseling during the day. I approached Rachael's room just as the bell indicating the beginning of the first period was about to ring, and she was standing at her passing post, which was outside her classroom door. As I stopped to see if I could do anything for her, she broke down. As we talked, I learned that she had reached the ripe old age of twenty-three having had no personal experience with death and was now expected to enter a classroom to help twenty-five teenagers deal with it. I had no magic words of wisdom, but I did have experience, so I told her I would talk with her class, and we would take it one period at a time.

Ironically, my classes had just started Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, and literature and life were about to intertwine. One of the essential questions that I use with the unit is "What is the measure of a man? Is he defined by the body of his life or by one incident?" That question was among the comments I used to talk with her class, and it was an appropriate lead-in for celebrating the life of someone who had garnered much respect during his years at the high school.

Rachael had listened intently as a dialogue quietly developed, and when the period was about to end, she assured me that she could follow my lead for the rest of the day. This was not the way I had expected to begin my day, but that was of little importance. My job in that building is to draw on every bit of experience I have, whether it is personal or academic, to sustain the quality of the life and energy within its walls.

### **My Serenade**

What are the needs of a novice teacher? Just about anything. How does a mentor meet these needs? By rolling up her sleeves to work, by listening, by asking questions, and by realizing she too has much to learn.

The most effective teacher is one who chooses to be on a journey that continually introduces her to all that is new to her, professionally and personally. It is this quest that ultimately energizes and stimulates the teacher and her classroom. We teach because we want to know more, and we want our students on that journey with us; hopefully, we realize that these students are not just the enthusiastic or apathetic young people in front of us – they are also those who yearn for a successful career in the classroom, those who will spread their arms wide, pick up our song, and reach for the moonbeam.

### **Methods of Analysis**

When the events or expectations of the day start to overwhelm me, I resort to a mantra of a favorite adage delivered by a colleague – “Learn to catch the glass balls and let the rubber ones bounce.” Over the years I have become quite adept at effective juggling of glass balls and appreciative of the power of the high bounce of the rubber ones that frequently surround me. Collecting and analyzing the data for my research, however, often negated this appreciation because each piece of the process seemed to be a glass ball that I could not afford to let slip from my grasp.

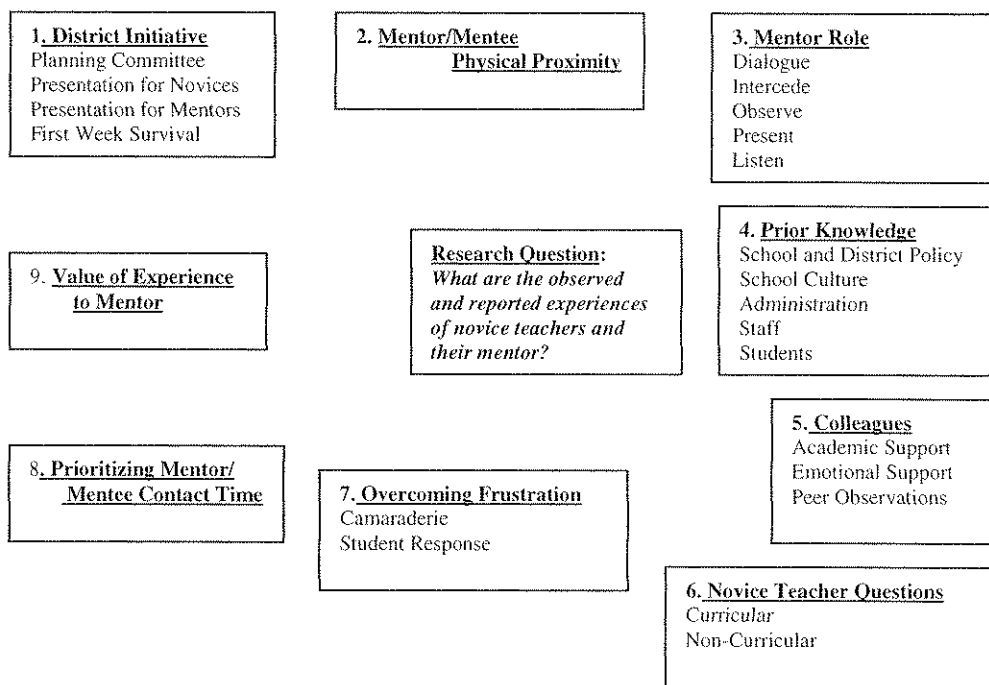
In an effort to manage the task in front of me, I became the small woman with the enormous notebook. On a weekly basis I reviewed the daily data in my log, as well as any surveys or reflective responses to questions I may have asked the teachers that week. I wrote marginal comments that struck me as I reread the week’s results. I often found myself making comments about my comments, as something that had recently occurred impacted my perception of previous events. I also became the keeper of the list. As I read what I had seen or discussed, a new series of questions or connections would jump out at me, and I would write them down, placing them in a small notebook that would easily travel with me from day to day and person to person. These questions and connections became vital elements in my efforts to code and eventually produce theme statements.

In the margins, squeezed in around the layers of comments, I inserted the codes, a process defined by Ely, et al. (1997) as identifying a “meaning unit (p. 162). I assigned codes to the data in an effort “to find patterns, and meaning in data collected through the use of surveys, interviews, and questionnaires”(Mills, 2003, p. 104). I was a bit concerned that I was finding only codes that I had anticipated such as classroom management, lesson planning, and school culture. Was I trying to force something to fit my preconceived ideas gleaned from reading the research or my prior experience as a mentor? Mills’s statement (2003) that “action research is a very personal business, so it makes sense to personalize our interpretations” (p. 114) reassured me that I was heading in the right direction. After rereading and triangulating or conducting member checks with my mentees (Hubbard and Power, 2003), they too agreed that what I seemed to be noticing were factors that they were addressing and about which they were concerned, though more time with the log allowed me to see additional nuances. As time went on, I became aware that I could more efficiently organize, analyze, and code my field log if I sorted the information by teacher rather than by a chronological system, so I had to make changes in page number and adjust all factors accordingly. This also allowed me to have easier access to information that was pertinent to a particular teacher and to then individualize the content of our conversations and materials that I would track down for them.

As directed, I analyzed the codes in order to create bins, or an “initial rough sort” (Ely, et al., 1997, p. 162), and the bins led to a graphic organizer (Mills, 2003, p. 108) that helped me discern connections. (See Figure 1 on page 138.) The ability to look at this visual representation of the big picture was invaluable in helping me sense the direction of my study, and it facilitated the process of structuring my theme statements.

Though I accumulated endless pages of notes from surveys, questionnaires, and interviews, probably the most useful bits of information resulted from conversations for which the new teachers would hunt me down and ask, “What do you do if...” In order to respond, I needed to reflect on my own practice and, at the same time, encourage them to do so as well. According to Mills (2003), the reflective stance allows critical examination “of one’s teaching to improve or enhance it” (p. 10). What emerged had to combine the experience of my years and the individual teacher’s personality. I supplemented this reflection with reflective memos that evolved after reading Delpit (2002), Dewey (1938), Freire (1970), and Vygotsky (1978). These were fortunate additions to my thought process, for as Henry Ward Beecher said, “All words are pegs to hang ideas on.”

Figure 1. Bins and Theme Statements



**Theme Statements**

1. District initiatives and induction programs directed toward helping the secondary teachers start the school year do not provide sufficient time for mentees to prepare the classroom and discuss with mentors detailed lesson planning for the first few weeks of school.
2. The proximity of mentor's room to the novice teacher's room is crucial in facilitating contact.
3. A mentor who is a supportive guide rather than an evaluator allows for productive and comfortable exchanges of ideas and concerns that flows both ways.
4. Having the opportunity to student teach and work as a permanent substitute in a building in which novices are ultimately hired creates an informal internship that gives these novices an invaluable headstart.
5. No matter how effective a mentor may be, colleagues, especially those within a mentee's department are an essential element to the success of a novice teacher.
6. The questions that novices asked were more likely to be related to non-curricular issues than curricular ones.
7. The positive human connections involved in teaching were more powerful than the frustrations.
8. A teacher's concern of "never enough time" applies to most mentoring arrangements as well.
9. Mentoring became the learning experience I had hoped it would be.

## FINDINGS

*The district did not provide sufficient time for mentees to prepare the classroom and discuss with mentors detailed lesson planning for the first few weeks of school.* Teachers know that working during personal time is a reality of a teacher's life, but administrators need to convey the idea that planning is a priority, not something that is addressed when everything else has been accomplished. Though issues such as technology, benefits, and school policy are vital, when a district schedules meetings with mentors as the last item on a two day induction agenda and, if the schedule is tight, the time with mentors is reduced, the wrong message is being conveyed. Harry Wong (2001), in his book *The First Days of School*, quoted Douglas Brooks's two important discoveries: 1) "very few teachers receive any instruction on what to do the first day of school and 2) very few teachers get any experience during student teaching on what to do the first day of school" (p. 3). Moir and Gless (2001) iterate the need for school districts and other educational organizations to make teacher learning a priority" (p. 111). In the time allotted us, I was able to cover only a fraction of the information a secondary teacher needs to know in order to address the many details of the first week of school, and I handled the planning issue by asking them to call or email me with specific questions about lesson plans. Earlier in the summer each of them had been given curriculum maps and units developed by



colleagues, but this official skimming of planning time is not the most productive or reassuring way to send a novice into the classroom for the maiden voyage.

*The proximity of my room to the novice teacher's room was crucial in facilitating contact.* Even though I had segments of time during the school day that sometimes coordinated with that of the new teachers, the one constant in my conversation with these teachers was regular dialogue with the one who shared a room with me. The period of time after students have left for the day is the only down-time in a teacher's day. It is also at the end of the day that we tend to be most reflective. We've taught the same lesson for a few periods, saw where we improved, realized where we were weak, thought about what we could do differently. Having the ability to immediately evaluate and vent provided the opportunity for the most insightful dialogues, and reaffirms Shanks's concern (2005) for the value of common work spaces and time.

On paper, Drew's schedule and mine seemed to be the least likely pairing for effective mentoring since we had no common planning time. In reality this was not nearly as important as immediate proximity during the only totally unscheduled part of our day.

*My decision to be a mentor who is a supportive guide rather than an evaluator allowed for productive and comfortable exchanges of ideas and concerns that flowed in both directions.* As the year progressed, the introductory comment to conversations, "This may sound like a stupid question, but..."

disappeared, and the teachers asked me about everything from how I create the groups for group work to how to put together a research paper; and from how I arrange seats during a test to how I handle an incident of cheating. My role as a sounding board who offers suggestions provided the concept of a safety zone that was as productive for teachers as it is for my students (Eldar, et al., 2003).

*Having the opportunity to student teach and work as a permanent substitute in the same building in which these novices were ultimately hired created an informal internship, giving these novices an invaluable head start.* In conversations and interviews, the new teachers frequently addressed the importance of starting their teaching career in an environment in which they were already familiar with many of their students, colleagues, administrators, and school culture. Eldar, et al. (2003) indicated that teachers are more likely to thrive when involved in a “supportive school culture in which members share values, such as trust, cooperation, openness, intimacy, and teamwork” (p. 43). These relationships had already been established in our building during their student teaching and permanent substituting semesters. When they walked into their own classrooms for the first time, their attention could truly be centered on preparing lessons and mastering the nuances of teaching; they were already proficient in the day-to-day non-curricular issues. Though studies show that classroom management is often an issue with new teachers, these teachers felt that the time they spent as permanent substitutes helped them avoid many of the pitfalls. They

had already developed not just working relationships, but also friendships. They knew the routines and rhythm of the building, as well as the traditions and the quirks--and they had the immediate respect of the colleagues for whom they had filled in the previous year.

*No matter how effective I may have been as a mentor, colleagues, especially those within our department, were an essential element to the success of the novice teachers.* Keenly aware that no one can be all things to all people, I am always quite awed by and appreciative of the degree to which our department values teamwork rather than isolationism. Creating this “network of collegiality,” according to McCann, et al. in *Educational Leadership* (2005), is a key action that school leaders can take in supporting the retention of beginning teachers (p.33). Johnson and Kardos (2005) concur, going so far as to say that a strong professional culture can be even more important than the mentoring experience. Though our department assistance is not formally organized, our teamwork is similar to Sullivan’s suggestion (2004) about mentoring teams, which allow for the skills and expertise of many to aid the new teacher. Our novice teachers consistently reported that any request for materials or advice was promptly addressed, and the sharing of materials was often unsolicited. At no time did any colleague take the attitude of “that’s not my job” when approached by a new teacher. The value of this atmosphere of acceptance and cooperation, this absence of isolation, cannot be overrated.

*The questions that the novice teacher asked were more likely to be related to non-curricular issues than curricular ones.* Fawcett (1997) has reminded us of Knowles's work with adult learning which indicates that adults tend to be problem-centered rather than subject-centered. This may be atypical of mentor/novice relationships, but it was clearly the case here. Though these teachers were confident, competent, creative, and well prepared by their respective certification programs, I believe that the minimal number of questions in this area were the result of the level of curricular support they received from colleagues. Their expertise as students had made them comfortable with using the material of others as a guideline or basis for their own material, but they were not as experienced at handling the many nuances of being leaders in their own classroom and making the hundreds of instant decisions required of a teacher in the course of a day.

*The positive human connections involved in teaching were more powerful than the frustrations.* We never have enough time. Technology works against us as well as for us. Students don't do their work. We are losing too much class time for testing, scheduling, and field trips. And the litany of exasperated comments continued. In spite of this, the novice teachers enthusiastically endorse their career choice and the role of colleagues and students in sustaining them. Graziano (2005) noted a similar response in her article "School's Out" when she wrote that "teachers balance frustrations with the job's many upsides, and

expressed the unmatched satisfaction of seeing a student comprehend a difficult concept and the special joy of connecting with a child who has pulled away from most adults” (p. 43). In addition, Eldar, et al. (2003) suggest that when “reinforcing support factors stem from the pupils themselves, it can be assumed that the teacher has overcome the transitions crisis and is beginning to exhibit signs of success” (p. 42).

*The concern about “never enough time” applied to the mentoring relationship as well.* I would have liked to arrange more periods in which the novices could have observed other teachers, as well as each other, but coverage concerns limit the frequency with which that can be done. Giving up planning periods to observe creates an even tighter time crunch that may address one issue but presents another. McCann, et al. (2005) in their book *Supporting Beginning English Teachers* echoed this concern with their assertion that when “the time required to participate in the program represents an additional burden on the beginning teacher, the activities become counterproductive” (p. 43). I would have liked to talk with them about general lesson plans at least a month in advance which might have helped them address some of the issues related to pacing. I would have liked to have been a better resource person for them in terms of developing assessments. As one of the second year teachers said a few weeks ago: “At the end of my first year of teaching, I really didn’t realize how much more I needed to know about teaching and how much time it takes to do the job right. As

I move along during the second year, I see how much more I am doing than I did before, and, I think I am doing a better job of it.” Quite unintentionally, this British literature teacher has channeled Dickens’s “It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done.” Hopefully, with continued mentoring from all corners of our department, each of them will continue their development in and enjoyment of a career in teaching.

*Mentoring became the learning experience with tangible rewards that I had hoped it would be.* Coppenhaver and Schaper (1999) have stated that “teachers have often been successful learners in earlier settings, which usually make them open to learning” (p. 63). I fit that mold, as did the beginning teachers. I can’t imagine starting a morning with the idea that I had nothing new to learn that day, and the opportunity to mentor averted any fear of such a day occurring. I collected piles of articles, books, and research that I may never be able to finish reading. I sat in front of a computer while the novices patiently walked me through my latest frustration. I observed classes that gave me insight to new approaches and techniques. In discussing ideas with the novices, I was forced to reflect on and explain why I engaged in some of my own practices. Lopez-Real and Kwan (2005) found that it is not unusual for effective mentors “to feel compelled to account for and explain the reasons for their methods” (p. 19), and that mentors also talked about learning fresh teaching strategies from the novices. Most importantly, I met and played a small role in the lives of the next generation

of educators. I can contentedly say that their educational anthem will please their audience.

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**APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Principal Consent Letter

August 15, 2005

Dear (Principal's Name),

One who learns from one who is learning drinks from a running stream.

Native American Proverb

In its mission statement the (Name) District promotes the concept of life-long learning for its students and, as a (School Name) teacher, I need to promote this concept, not simply through my actions in the classroom, but outside of the classroom as well.

During the 2005-2006 school year I will be taking courses toward a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses allow me to stay current with the most effective teaching methods in order to provide the best learning experience for my students. A requirement of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practice. As department coordinator, my definition of "student" has been expanded to include the new teachers in my department, for whom I am a mentor.

Because a successful first year of teaching is vital to maintaining quality people in our profession, and because our department has been especially hard hit by recent retirements, the focus of my study is effective strategies in the support and development of novice teachers. The District has developed a strong overview for an induction program for new teachers, but I am hoping that my study can give us additional information that is more detailed and directly applicable to what goes on in the English classroom. Though my study will cover general areas such as building a sense of community, working with parents, and classroom management, I am also hoping that I can affirm strategies that will strengthen lesson planning, working with standards, and developing meaningful assessment.

The study will involve the three English teachers that have been hired for the 2005-2006 school year. All information will be kept confidential; no student, faculty member, or school name will appear in any written report or publication of the study or its findings. Minor details may be altered to ensure this confidentiality. All research material will be secured in my home.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 861-1842 or email at [jshosh@moravian.edu](mailto:jshosh@moravian.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about my project, please feel free to contact me at school or email at [evansc@eastonsd.org](mailto:evansc@eastonsd.org). If not, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Elliott Evans

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I attest that I am the principal of the teacher participating in the research study, and that I have read, understood, and received a copy of this consent form.

Principal's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Teacher Consent Letter

August 15, 2005

Dear (Teacher Name),

One who learns from one who is learning drinks from a running stream.

Native American Proverb

In its mission statement the (Name) District promotes the concept of life-long learning for its students and, as a (School name) teacher, I need to promote this concept, not simply through my actions in the classroom, but outside of the classroom as well.

During the 2005-2006 school year I will be taking courses toward a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. These courses allow me to stay current with the most effective teaching methods in order to provide the best learning experience for my students. A requirement of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practice. As department coordinator, my definition of "student" has been expanded to include the new teachers in my department, for whom I am a mentor.

Because a successful first year of teaching is vital to maintaining quality people in our profession, and because our department has been especially hard hit by recent retirements, the focus of my study is effective strategies in the support and development of novice teachers. The District has developed a strong overview for an induction program for new teachers, but I am hoping that my study can give us additional information that is more detailed and directly applicable to what goes on in the English classroom. Though my study will cover general areas such as building a sense of community, working with parents, and classroom management, I am also hoping that I can affirm strategies that will strengthen lesson planning, working with standards, and developing meaningful assessment.

The study will involve the three English teachers that the District has hired for the 2005-2006 school year and two who were hired in 2004-2005. All information will be kept confidential; no student, faculty member, or school name will appear in any written report or publication of the study or its findings. Minor details may be altered to ensure this confidentiality. All research material will be secured in my home.

My faculty sponsor is Dr. Joseph Shosh. He can be contacted at Moravian College by phone at (610) 861-1842 or email at [jshosh@moravian.edu](mailto:jshosh@moravian.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about my project, please feel free to contact me at school or email at [evansc@eastonsd.org](mailto:evansc@eastonsd.org). If not, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Elliott Evans

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I attest that I am aware that Mrs. Evans will be observing my classes and collecting data from these observations as part of her research on mentoring. Data will also be gleaned from formal and informal interviews, surveys, and my reflective writing. I have read, understood, and received a copy of this consent form in which I am giving Mrs. Evans permission to include me as a participant in her study.

Teacher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



### Appendix C

#### Novice Teacher Reflection

*How would you rate your skills as a teacher right now?*

- |                                                                                                      |           |      |         |                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------|---------|-------------------|
| 1. Ready to begin teaching overall                                                                   | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 2. Your content area knowledge                                                                       | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 3. Using technology in your job                                                                      | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 4. Managing classroom behavior                                                                       | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 5. Planning day to day lessons                                                                       | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 6. Designing teaching units                                                                          | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 7. Assessing the learning of your students (your teaching effectiveness)                             | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 8. Understanding diverse learners and finding the strengths in each student                          | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 9. Asking questions tactfully to get information from students, parents, co-workers, and supervisors | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 10. Listening and responding professionally to parents, students, co-workers, and supervisors        | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 11. Self-evaluating your work and deciding how to improve                                            | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 12. Understanding and complying with professional ethics and educational laws                        | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 13. Evaluating and finding good teaching materials and resources                                     | Excellent | Good | Average | Less Than Average |
| 14. Playing a leadership role in your school or community                                            |           |      |         |                   |

Excellent      Good      Average      Less Than Average  
*Comments (use other side, if necessary)*

Survey adapted from the John H. Lounsbury School of Education, GC&SU

**Appendix D: Reflection Dialogue Entry**

From the Handbook for Qualities of Effective Teachers

Dilemma/ Success

What did I perceive?

What were the alternative viewpoints?

What did I choose to do?

What else could I have done?

What additional actions should I take as a follow-up?

### **Appendix E: Planbook Information**

Objective and PA standard	<b>O</b>	
		Identify and Evaluate the Causes of the Civil War
		PA standard 11.5
Activity and Assessment Plan	<b>A</b>	
		Direct Instruction w/ Journal Intro
		Cooperative Learning – Evaluation Question
		Closure – Written Assessment (Exit Ticket)
Text (Materials, Chapter, Page, etc.)	<b>T</b>	
		The American Culture – Ch 6, p. 321
		Transparency, Overhead Projector
Homework (Assignment, Reflection)	<b>H</b>	
		Questions 3 and 5, p. 340
		Reflection – Cooperative Learning Question

## Appendix F: First Day Agenda

It Takes a Village...but Much of It Will Start in Your Hut

Teacher Induction August 2005

Welcome

Introductions

Week One

Management/Personality (feel free to use an additional 10-15 sheets of paper)

Learning to Live with - and Love- your roommate(s), Colleagues, Coordinator, Administrators, - and most importantly - Custodians and Secretaries

Help - as in " I need yours"

Suggestions/Requests for First Week Activities

Gradebook/Lesson Plans

Sub Kit to me - mandatory

Supplies/Texts

Fill in the Blanks - Forms (fill out samples or you will never remember)

Friday Food and Attire

The Wonders of Technology - including the copy machine

AFG

Suggestions for Extra Duties - hall (and covering other classes),  
library, study hall, bus

Available Materials Tour (classrooms, planning room cabinets,  
bookroom)

Remember - Do not fall into the culture of low expectations

Your turn...finally

What did I forget - that you need in order to survive your first week

### Quotes to Hang Onto

Learn to catch the glass balls and let the rubber ones bounce.

Art and literature should make us better people or what on earth are they for...

A student's attitude when he enters the classroom determines his success; your attitude can determine yours.

You reap what you sow (or as the kids prefer, when you plant corn, you grow corn).

Don't let them "smell blood." Remember - you are the adult and the professional.

Take care of the small things and the big things will fall into place.

(Broken windows syndrome)