

# Why Do They Stay? Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Job Satisfaction and Retention

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study was to identify intrinsic and extrinsic variables that influence teacher job satisfaction and retention. A survey was sent to 300 randomly selected Missouri public elementary schoolteachers in grades K–5 having 5 or more years of teaching experience. The results from 201 respondents suggest that three intrinsic motivators (personal teaching efficacy, working with students, and job satisfaction) were perceived to significantly influence satisfaction and retention, while two extrinsic motivators (low salary and role overload) did not have any effect. Using multiple linear regression and qualitative analysis, the findings show that teachers who experienced satisfaction at their school and/or satisfaction with the profession of teaching were more likely to remain. No relationship was found between satisfaction with the job of teaching, suggesting that retention was determined by teacher satisfaction with the profession and not with work-related duties.*

One of the core challenges facing primary and secondary education is retaining qualified teachers. Twenty to thirty percent of beginning teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years (American Federation of Teachers, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2003). According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), teacher attrition problems cost the nation in excess of \$7 billion annually for recruitment, administrative processing and hiring, and professional development and training of replacement teachers (NCTAF, 2007).

The problem of teacher attrition forms a vast body of literature. A significant thrust of this research appears to be based on the hypothesis that a relationship exists between teacher attrition and the conditions of teaching (Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991), while research focused on "why teachers remain in the profession" is relatively scant.

Recent reform initiatives like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) created a national effort to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers in every classroom, but that goal remains elusive. Turnover among the nation's teachers rank significantly higher than other professions, emphasized further by the alarming number of teachers leaving the profession during their first few years of teaching (Ingersoll, 2001).

The ability of schools to keep their classrooms staffed with quality teachers will be supported more effectively if the debilitating rate of teacher attrition is addressed and reversed (NCTAF, 2002). The NCTAF Partners' apt observation that the "visible side of the coin, whose underside is high attrition rates" (NCTAF, p. 3) emphasizes that researchers tend to focus on the symptom without addressing the underlying sources of the problem. Instead of asking how to find and prepare more teachers, researchers need to ask, "How do we get the good teachers we have recruited, trained, and hired to stay in their jobs?" (NCTAF, p. 3).

This study proposes to shift the focus from teacher attrition to teacher retention by examining how professional experiences and influences shape teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom. Investigation focuses on examining the relationship between job satisfaction and intrinsic variables (e.g., personal teaching efficacy, working with students, job satisfaction) and extrinsic variables (e.g., low salary, role overload). The findings from this investigation may provide deeper insight into

teachers' perspectives regarding job satisfaction and retention and present school districts, boards, and administrators, with key information to form meaningful decisions and policies.

### *Job Satisfaction*

Job satisfaction has been the subject of seminal and significant research in the social sciences (Arnold, Cooper, & Robertson, 1998). A key finding notes that employee satisfaction has been found to be a reliable predictor of retention (Bobbitt, Faupel, & Burns, 1991; Meek, 1998). Arnold et al. found that personal satisfaction, along with professional responsibility, is an important indicator of a person's psychological well-being, as well as a predictor of work performance and commitment.

Extant literature has also shown that satisfaction is influenced directly by the characteristics of the job and the extent to which motivational characteristics (e.g., task significance, autonomy, feedback, personal work ethic) match what people value and is expected of them on the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Steers & Rhodes, 1987).

### *Teacher Job Satisfaction*

Research on job satisfaction in the field of education has explored both the consequences (outcomes) and antecedents (influences) of teacher satisfaction. Research has examined at least three possible outcomes (retention, attrition, and absenteeism) and at least three major influences (demographic variables, job role-related characteristics, and work experiences). This area of research has repeatedly demonstrated that job satisfaction results in higher levels of teacher retention, as well as an increase in teachers attaining tenure (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Cockburn, 2000; Cohn, 1992; McLaughlin, Pfeifer, Swanson-Owens, & Yee, 1986; Meek, 1998). Conversely, as satisfaction decreased, teacher attrition and absenteeism were shown to increase—creating an inverse relationship between satisfaction and turnover (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Hargreaves, 1994; Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin et al., 1986). Among beginning teachers, most research suggests that one-third to one-half leave within their first 5 years (Ingersoll, 2001; Murnane et al., 1991) due to the increase in responsibilities and demands placed upon them (Billingsley & Cross, 1992), as well as a lack of support financially (Murnane et al., 1991) and morally (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Cohn, 1992).

*Demographic variables.* Although relatively few studies have examined the relationship between teachers' job satisfaction and their demographic characteristics (Bogler, 2002), findings in this area have shown that job satisfaction has been positively related to age, gender, marital status, grade level taught, and educational level. Ma and MacMillan (1999) found that older and more experienced teachers expressed significantly less satisfaction with their professional role than their younger and less experienced colleagues. Female teachers tended to be more satisfied than male teachers (Bogler, 2002; Lortie, 1975; Ma & MacMillan, 1999), while married women were more satisfied than unmarried women and men (Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975). Elementary teachers were more satisfied than secondary teachers (Bogler, 2002; Perie & Baker, 1997), and teachers with higher qualifications (higher education level or degree earned, more professional development) tended to be more satisfied than those with lower qualifications (Meek, 1998).

*Job- or role-related characteristics.* Studies have suggested such aspects as role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, and stress to be predictors of job satisfaction (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994). Billingsley and Cross note that greater leadership support and lower levels of role conflict, role ambiguity, and stress were predictors of greater job satisfaction and teacher retention. Similarly, Hargreaves found an inverse relationship between job satisfaction and role overload—increased teacher-perceived levels of role overload (e.g., excessive paperwork and other nonteaching duties) resulted in significantly decreased satisfaction. In addition, Hargreaves revealed role overload to be a major variable in teacher attrition.

*Work experiences.* Positive experiences for teachers, such as opportunity to work with children and to nurture student learning (Cockburn, 2000; Cohn, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Klecker & Loadman, 1999; Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin et al., 1986) were reported by teachers as prime influences of job satisfaction. Work in this area also demonstrates that when teachers had the opportunity to collaborate with

colleagues (Cockburn, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994; Klecker & Loadman, 1999; Kushman, 1992; McLaughlin et al., 1986; Meek, 1998), receive recognition from supervisors and administrators (Ma & MacMillan, 1999; Meek, 1998; Perie & Baker, 1997), serve in a leadership role (Kushman, 1992; Perie & Baker, 1997), and improve their professional skills and abilities (Kushman, 1992; Meek, 1998) they were significantly more satisfied with their role as teacher than those who did not have these experiences.

Negative work experiences, such as lack of student and parent interest (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Cohn, 1992; Goodlad, 1984; Meek, 1998; Perie & Baker, 1997), and professional autonomy (Perie & Baker, 1997), were found to have a negative influence on teachers' perceptions of job satisfaction. Research in this area also indicates that teachers who went into teaching because of inherent professional values were more satisfied than those whose entry into the occupation was for economic reasons (Goodlad, 1984). Although recent debate about teacher salary suggests teachers might be more satisfied if their paychecks were larger (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Macdonald, 1999; Murnane et al., 1991), Perie and Baker found no significant relationship between salary or benefits and teacher satisfaction.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study posits that teachers' job satisfaction, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, their commitment and intent to remain in the profession, and demographics are directly related to teacher retention.

*Job satisfaction.* Job satisfaction is affected by a wide variety of factors. For example, Herzberg's Two Factor Theory (1966) of job satisfaction has influenced a number of studies regarding teachers' job satisfaction. In his work, Herzberg theorized that job satisfaction was influenced by "intrinsic factors" or "motivators" relating to actual job content or "what the person does" (p. 74) and by "extrinsic factors" or "hygienes" associated with the work environment or "the situation in which [the person] does" (p. 75) the work. Examples of motivator factors for teachers would be teaching and working with students (intrinsic) and working conditions such as salary levels and role overload (extrinsic). According to Herzberg, extrinsic hygiene factors, which are external to what a person does, do not contribute to job satisfaction but rather to job dissatisfaction. Alternatively, the presence of intrinsic factors or motivators lead to job satisfaction, but their absence does not lead to job dissatisfaction. Herzberg's concept of intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of job satisfaction has been widely used and has influenced studies examining K-12 teacher satisfaction (e.g., Cohn, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Lortie, 1975; Meek, 1998; Perie & Baker, 1997).

*The intent to remain in teaching.* The "intent" to stay in or leave one's position has been found to be a good indicator of actual turnover (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; Lee & Mowday, 1987). Previous research on teachers more generally indicates the power of affective responses, such as job satisfaction and commitment to the profession, on the intent to remain in teaching (e.g., Bobbitt et al., 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Meek, 1998; Murnane et al., 1991; NCTAF, 2002). Therefore, the influence of antecedents involving teacher demographic and profile characteristics, job satisfaction, and commitment to the profession may, in turn, have an influence on intended teacher turnover. Building upon these findings, this study is conceptualized to examine teachers' satisfaction and commitment and their intent to remain in the profession.

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to identify variables that influence the job satisfaction of Missouri public elementary schoolteachers, grades K-5; and 2) to determine the extent to which these satisfaction variables influence the teachers' intent to remain in teaching. Results of this investigation extend our knowledge and previous understanding of teacher job satisfaction by including how these teachers' perceptions influence their retention decision, as well as what issues they verbalize as influencing their intent to remain.

## Methods

### *Data Source and Procedures*

The participants in the study consisted of a random sample of public elementary schoolteachers, grades K–5, in the state of Missouri. Since no public list existed for the approximately 18,600 population members, a sample was obtained by the random selection of 30 counties, followed by the random selection of one school district from each county, and then the random selection of one elementary school from each school district. Principals from each randomly selected elementary school submitted a list of all classroom teachers grades K–5 who had taught 5 or more years. Ten teachers were randomly selected from each of the 30 lists, resulting in a final sample of 300 subjects.

After the instrument was pilot tested,<sup>1</sup> the survey was designed, distributed, and collected using the process and procedures recommended in Dillman's (2007) Tailored Design Method. Surveys were mailed to each teacher selected for the study, along with a participant cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, and a postage-paid, self-addressed envelope. All participants were advised that their participation was voluntary and that all information would be held in the strictest of confidence. Maintaining university protocol procedures to protect the rights of human subjects was paramount. A total of 201 surveys were received for a return rate of 67%.

### *Instrumentation and Variables*

The survey instrument consisted of 34 questions (Sections A–E) that examined teachers' perceptions of their job satisfaction and retention (see Appendix). The first section (A) consisted of a shortened version of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) 1993–94 and 2003–04 (U.S. Department of Education, 1993; 2003). The application of the SASS survey follows work conducted by Perie and Baker (1997) that used the 1993–94 SASS data to compare teacher satisfaction with the workplace conditions of administrative support, decision-making roles, student behavior, parental support, workload, availability of resources, staff recognition, and cooperation among staff. For section A, teachers completed 25 items regarding their job satisfaction in teaching using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 7 (strongly agreed) to 1 (strongly disagreed). The retention measure (Section B), or the intent to remain (outcome variable) questions were previously tested and constructed by Johnsrud and Rosser (1999). This section consisted of three statements: 1) I plan to remain in this position; 2) I plan to remain in this school; and 3) I plan to remain in this profession. These statements of intent were also scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

The next two sections (C and D) were developed to help further explain teachers' perceptions regarding their satisfaction and retention. Section C included questions that were specifically developed for this study and asked teachers to score their level of satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale, from 5 (very satisfied) to 1 (very dissatisfied). Three open-ended questions were added in this section to delve further into teacher perceptions regarding job satisfaction. These questions asked: 1) How satisfied are you with teaching as a profession? Why? 2) How satisfied do you feel with your job this current school year? Why? and 3) If you indicated that you were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" [with your job], what is the number one reason you attribute to this satisfaction? Why?

In terms of retention (Section D), the following questions were asked on a scale from 5 (certainly would) to 1 (certainly would not): 1) If the opportunity arose, would you leave the teaching profession for another occupation? Why? 2) Given that you have been a teacher for over 5 years, what is your number one reason for remaining in teaching? Why? Finally, on a scale from 5 (highly likely to stay) to 1 (definitely not staying), the following question was posed: 3) How long do you plan to remain in teaching? Why?

The final section (E) consisted of questions regarding teachers' demographic and profile data. Questions were asked regarding gender, marital status, ethnic background, age, highest degree earned, years taught in education, and years taught at a K–5 grade level.

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<sup>1</sup> The pilot test was used to highlight concerns or issues that might arise regarding the survey question items and the instrument, as well as to assess the length of time it takes to complete the entire survey.

*Analysis*

The study applied descriptive statistics and linear regression analyses using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 (2007) to address the quantitative aspects of this study. Frequencies and percentages were gathered to develop the demographic and profile characteristics of the respondents. Following these preliminary profile statistics, additional descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviation) were used to present the issues perceived as contributing to the job satisfaction of Missouri public elementary schoolteachers, grades K–5.

The primary analysis applied multiple linear regression, a statistical procedure that is used to find the linear combination of independent variables (e.g., satisfaction issues, demographics) and is best suited for explaining multiple predictors on the dependent variable (intent to remain). Multiple linear regression separates the effects of independent variables on the dependent variable, allowing examination of the unique contribution of each variable (Allison, 1999). In this case, multiple linear regression was used to indicate how well Missouri public elementary schoolteachers' intent to remain in teaching can be explained by the independent variables (e.g., satisfaction issues, demographic and profile variables such as gender, race or ethnicity, marital status, age, years in education, highest degree earned).

In addition to the statistical analyses, data from the survey's six open-ended questions were analyzed inductively, guided by coding recommendations by Bogdan and Biklen (1998). Survey participants' written responses for each of the six open-ended survey questions were integrated and typed as six units of data (one unit of data per open-ended survey question). Respondents' repeated use of expressions, which illustrated commonly shared viewpoints and perspectives, were used to define the coding categories used for sorting the data. After additional review and analysis of the data, the coding categories were modified by adding or discarding categories until a final list of coding categories was developed. This code list was then used to mark the data, which enabled disaggregating the responses to further analyze teachers' perspectives on job satisfaction and intent to remain as guided by the tenets of Bogdan and Biklen.

**Results***Demographic and Profile Characteristics*

As shown in Table 1, the demographic and profile information<sup>2</sup> regarding those who responded to the survey indicates that 185 (92%) of the teachers were females and 16 (8%) were males. Of those who responded, 198 (98.5%) were Caucasians and 3 (1.5%) were ethnic minorities. A higher percentage of respondents were female (14%) and Caucasian (6%) in contrast to state averages (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003).<sup>3</sup> Respondents' marital status showed that 32 (16%) were single and 169 (84%) were married. There were 56 (27.9%) respondents under the age of 35, 64 (31.8%) were 36–45, 67 (33.3%) were 46–55, 14 (7%) were 56–65, and no respondents were older than 66. Respondent ages were similar to state averages (Missouri State Board of Education, 2007).

As for highest degree earned, 70 (34.8%) of the respondents held a Bachelor' degree, 126 (62.7%) held a Master's degree, 4 (2%) were Education specialists, and 1 (0.5%) held a doctorate. These data differ from state averages of which 68% held a Bachelor's degree and 31% held a Master's degree (Missouri State Board of Education, 2007). Sixty (29.9%) respondents taught in education for 5–10 years, 41 (20.4%) taught for 11–14 years, 47 (23.4%) taught for 15–20 years, 25 (12.4%) taught for 21–25 years, and 28 (13.9%) taught for 26 or more years. State averages reported 20% more teachers in the 5–10 year group and 20% less in the 11–20 year group (Missouri State Board of Education, 2007). All of the respondents taught in grades K–5 for 5 or more years, 69 (34.3%) taught 5–10 years, 36 (17.9%) taught 11–14 years, 47 (23.4%) taught 15–20 years, 25 (12.4%) taught 21–25 years, and 24 (12%) taught 26 or more years.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers and percentages may not total 201 or 100% due to missing data.

<sup>3</sup> These data were publicly accessed; therefore, we were unable to oversample the population by gender, ethnic minority, and marital status.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency (n = 201) and Percent of Respondents by Demographic Characteristics\**

<i>Demographics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Gender		
Male	16	8.0
Female	185	92.0
Marital Status		
Single	32	16.0
Married	169	84.0
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	1.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0
African American/Black	0	0.0
Hispanic	1	0.5
Caucasian/White	198	98.5
Age		
35 or under	56	27.9
36–45	64	31.8
46–55	67	33.3
56–65	14	7.0
66 or older	0	0.0
Highest Degree Earned		
Bachelor's degree	70	34.8
Master's degree	126	62.7
Education Specialist	4	2.0
Doctorate degree	1	0.5
Total Number of Years Taught		
10 or less	60	29.9
11–14	41	20.4
15–20	47	23.4
21–25	25	12.4
26 or more	28	13.9
Number of Years at K–5		
10 or less	69	34.3
11–14	36	17.9
15–20	47	23.4
21–25	25	12.4
26 or more	24	12.0

\*Numbers and percentages may not total 100 or 100% due to missing data.

*Teacher Job Satisfaction*

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze responses to the 24 Likert-type survey items and assess the importance of each item within the total survey group of teachers. The top five issues identified as contributing most to respondents' job satisfaction were: (a) I am evaluated fairly in this school ( $M = 6.14$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ); (b) I share similar beliefs and values with my colleagues regarding the central mission of this school ( $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = .95$ ); (c) I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school ( $M = 6.02$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ); (d) I make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my courses with that of other teachers ( $M = 5.99$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ); and (e) Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by me in this school, even for students who are not in my class ( $M = 5.98$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ).

*Qualitative Analysis of Job Satisfaction Responses*

A qualitative analysis was conducted on participants' responses to the three open-ended questions concerning their perceptions on job satisfaction.

*Q1: How satisfied are you with teaching as a profession? Why?*

The top three reasons based on 178 (88%) of the 201 total survey respondents, with 141 (79%) of those who were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied," were (a) working with students, (b) personal teaching efficacy, and (c) job satisfaction. The following are representative comments for each of these three reasons: (a) working with students (24 responses)—"I get to work with children, share my knowledge, experience new experiences each day, and grow in wisdom they enlighten me with" (Teacher 91—from this point on will be cited as T91); (b) personal teaching efficacy (15 responses)—"Teaching has its challenges, but I feel good almost every day knowing I've made a difference to at least one child" (T1); and (c) job satisfaction (14 responses)—"I love what I do, and this is why I get passed the red tape and politics" (T186).

An interesting part of this analysis was that 74 of the 141 "satisfied" respondents' written responses were negative in nature and similar to those participants who chose a response of "neutral," "somewhat dissatisfied," or "very dissatisfied." The top three reasons satisfied teacher respondents followed their positive comments with a statement of dissatisfaction were: (a) role overload (28 responses)—"I would be very satisfied if I could just teach the kids. The less pleasing part is the stress put on us about assessments, paperwork, etc." (T125); (b) low salary (22 responses) —"It is a rewarding job to see gains the children make. The low salary makes the job disappointing" (T169); and (c) lack of parent support (7 responses) —"I have a somewhat challenging class with little parental support. I feel we are moving at a much slower pace" (T93).

*Q2: How satisfied do you feel with your job this current school year? Why?*

The top three reasons based on 170 (85%) of the 201 total survey respondents, with 107 (63%) who were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their current teaching, were: (a) good students, (b) positive school environment, and (c) small class size. Representative comments for each were: (a) good students (30 responses) —"Life is good! I have a pretty good bunch of students" (T91); (b) positive school environment (16 responses) —"I think being at this building makes my job easier because we have so much support and encourage each other to do a good job" (T97); and (c) small class size (14 responses) —"Class size is small; 15 compared to 26 last year" (T148).

The top three reasons satisfied teacher respondents followed their positive comments with a statement of dissatisfaction were: (a) role overload (11 responses) —"I feel frustrated with the increasing responsibilities and time doing my best in this job takes each year" (T38); (b) student behavior (5 responses) —"We seem to be having more and more discipline problems making teaching extremely difficult" (T132); and (c) large class size (4 responses) —"My class size is the highest I've had in years" (T133).

*Q3: If you indicated that you were 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' [with your job], what is the number one reason you attribute to this satisfaction? Why?*

The top six reasons based on 149 (74%) of the 201 total survey respondents who were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied," along with a representative comment for each, were: (a) working

with students (32 responses)—“My own personal enjoyment in working with children” (T59); (b) teacher support (24 responses) —“The support offered by the administration and fellow teachers” (T87); (c) good students (18 responses) —“They [students] are a great group of kids. Well behaved and eager to learn” (T178); (d) job satisfaction (17 responses)—“I love teaching. It never has been a question for me of did I pick the right profession? I have always known that teaching is what I wanted to do” (T91); (e) positive school environment (13 responses)—“Comfortable work atmosphere and positive work relationships” (T109); and (f) personal teaching efficacy (12 responses)—“Seeing the light come on. I change lives” (T192).

In summary, the majority of respondents reported to be “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with teaching as a profession and with their job in the fall of 2004. Factors that positively influenced this satisfaction were working with students, personal teaching efficacy, job satisfaction, good students, positive school environment, and small class size.

### *Teacher Retention*

Descriptive statistics were first gathered to examine responses to the following question: “What satisfaction factors do Missouri public elementary schoolteachers grades K–5 perceive as influencing their intent to remain (i.e., position, school, profession) in teaching?” The analysis focused on three Likert-type statements originally developed by Johnsrud and Rosser (1999). The importance of each “intent-to-remain” item was then assessed within the total survey group of teachers. Results for the three retention measures are as follows: (a) I plan to remain in this position ( $M = 6.18$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ); (b) I plan to remain in this school ( $M = 6.22$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ); and (c) I plan to remain in this profession ( $M = 6.22$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ). Cronbach’s alpha was also employed for estimating the internal consistency of the construct intent to remain. The three items comprising the intent-to-remain construct or outcome variable for the regression analysis held together quite well as a homogenous concept ( $\text{Alpha} = 0.90$ ). Gable and Wolf (1993) note that a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.71 or higher is an acceptable measure of the construct’s internal consistency.

### *Qualitative Analysis of Teachers’ Responses for Staying*

Respondents’ written responses to three open-ended survey questions were analyzed inductively to understand their perspectives about issues they perceived as important in influencing their decision to remain in teaching.

*Q1: If the opportunity arose, would you leave the teaching profession for another occupation? Why?*

The top five reasons based on 179 (89%) of the 201 total survey respondents, with 108 (60%) of those who either “certainly would not” or “probably would not” remain in teaching, were: (a) job satisfaction, (b) retirement, (c) personal teaching efficacy, (d) schedule/time off, and (e) working with students. Representative comments for each were: (a) job satisfaction (58 responses)—“Chances are pretty slim that I would leave because I am quite satisfied with my job. I would greatly miss this profession” (T19); (b) retirement (19 responses)—“I have 22 years invested [toward] teacher retirement. I feel that teaching is ‘what I do’ and can’t see anything else having a pull to make me change” (T60); (c) personal teaching efficacy (8 responses)—“I enjoy making a difference in the life of children” (T5); (d) schedule/time off (7 responses) —“I like the work schedule—my days off are the same as my own children’s” (T199); and (e) working with students (6 responses)—“Even though teaching is more challenging than in the past, I still enjoy children” (T97).

Of the 179 respondents to this question, 71 (40%) individuals indicated a response of either “certainly would” or “probably would” leave teaching. The top two reasons were the same top two reasons stated for teacher job dissatisfaction: (a) low salary and (b) role overload. Representative comments for each were: (a) low salary (32 responses)—“I would leave because I don’t feel like I make enough money for all the time and effort I put in” (T44); and (b) role overload (17 responses)—“Teachers are expected to attend to such a vast array of problems and new problems and curriculum. New duties are added every year with virtually none taken away. TOO MUCH!!!!” (T62).



*Q2: Given that you have been a teacher for over 5 years, what is your number one reason for remaining in teaching? Why?*

The top five reasons based on 194 (97%) of the 201 total survey respondents who indicated the number one reason they remain in teaching were: (a) personal teaching efficacy, (b) working with students, (c) job satisfaction, (d) schedule/time off, and (e) retirement. Representative comments for each were: (a) personal teaching efficacy (69 responses)—“I know that I am making a positive difference in my students’ lives. I see improvement everyday in my students. This is the reason I went into teaching and why I will stay in teaching” (T189); (b) working with students (47 responses)—“I enjoy working with children.... I love seeing them become proud of themselves as they succeed” (T182); (c) job satisfaction (35 responses)—“It gives me a satisfaction that other jobs couldn’t give me” (T120); (d) schedule/time off (14 responses)—“There aren’t any other jobs that allow you the same work schedule and snow days as your kids” (T34); and (e) retirement (12 responses)—“I am currently completing my 20<sup>th</sup> year in education and I realize that it is too close to retirement to quit” (T87).

*Q3: How long do you plan to remain in teaching? Why?*

The top five reasons based on 171 (85%) of the 201 total survey respondents, with 141 (82%) of those who were either “highly likely to stay” or “very likely to stay,” were: (a) retirement, (b) job satisfaction, (c) working with students, (d) personal teaching efficacy, and (e) schedule/time off. Representative comments for each were: (a) retirement (68 responses)—“I will teach till retirement. I only have 14 years to go after this one. The first 15 went by really fast” (T88); (b) job satisfaction (55 responses)—“Teaching is very satisfying to me and I’m proud to be a teacher” (T189); (c) working with students (7 responses)—“I love working with the kids” (T117); (d) personal teaching efficacy (3 responses)—“I plan to teach as long as I can make a difference in a child’s life” (T139); and (e) schedule/time off (2 responses)—“The time at home during holiday seasons and summer allows me ample time with my family” (T74).

In summary, the majority of survey respondents plan to remain in teaching. Key responses articulated were found to group on five recurrent themes: (a) personal teaching efficacy; (b) working with students; (c) job satisfaction; (d) schedule/time off; and (e) retirement.

### *Explaining Teacher Retention*

Table 2 displays the results for the final regression model, which applied a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . The results indicate that the following five variables were significant and explained teachers’ intent to remain: (a) I am generally satisfied (satisfy) with being a teacher at this school ( $p = 0.00$ ); (b) What is your marital status? (dummy coded as single;  $p = 0.00$ ); (c) Often, I find it difficult to agree with this school’s policies (policy) on important matters relating to its employees ( $p = 0.00$ , reverse scored); (d) How satisfied (satteach) are you with teaching as a profession? ( $p = 0.01$ ); and (e) If the opportunity (opportun) arose, would you leave the teaching profession for another occupation? ( $p = 0.01$ ). When further examining the unstandardized regression coefficients ( $b$ ), the interpretation of the findings in the final regression model were mixed. Two variables in the model suggest that those teachers who were satisfied with the profession of teaching (satteach;  $b = 0.27$ ) and those who were satisfied with being a teacher at this school (satisfy;  $b = 0.30$ ) were more likely to remain in teaching. However, other variables, such as those teachers who were single (single;  $b = -0.85$ ), those who perceived school policies less favorably (policy;  $b = -0.14$ ), and teachers who had an opportunity to leave for another occupation (opportun;  $b = -0.21$ ) were less likely to remain in teaching. Other demographic and profile characteristics such as age, degree earned, years taught in education, and years taught at a K–5 grade level were not significant. Also, the satisfaction variable (How satisfied do you feel with your job this current school year? [satjob]) had no influence on teacher retention. The final regression model explained 39% (adjusted R square) of the variance or error (61% unexplained variance) in teacher retention. While we would have liked to explain more error variance in the regression model, the amount of variance explained is only one indicator (e.g., theoretical consideration, substantive reliability) of a complete model (Lewis-Beck, 1980).

**Table 2**  
*Regression Model Summary Table*

Independent Variable (Question Number / Coding Name)	<i>b</i>	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
A24/satisfy	.30	.09	.28	3.56	.00*
A25/policy	-.14	.05	-.20	-2.88	.00*
C1/satteach	.27	.10	.22	2.72	.01*
C2/satjob	.10	.09	.09	1.14	.26
D1/opportun	-.21	.09	-.19	-2.49	.01*
E4/age	-.10	.11	-.08	-.98	.33
E5/degree	-.09	.13	-.04	-.64	.52
E6/yrsed	.21	.17	.24	1.26	.21
E7/yrsk5	-.07	.16	-.08	-.44	.66
E2/single	-.85	.28	-.18	-3.07	.00*

*Note.* Dependent Variable: Intent to Remain

Adj. R Square = .39,  $F = 13.75$ ,  $df = 200$ ,  $*p < .05$

### Discussion and Conclusions

Although a random sample of 300 Missouri public elementary schoolteachers grades K–5 were sought out to participate in this investigation, the findings and conclusions are limited in their generalizability because they were derived from 201 public elementary schoolteachers in one midwestern state. With this caveat in mind, results have clearly demonstrated that the issues Missouri public elementary schoolteachers, grades K–5, perceived as most important when promoting their job satisfaction appeared to be as multifaceted, as stated in past empirical research. In light of previous research, the findings from this investigation are important because they provide teachers a more current “voice” and the opportunity to explain their perspectives on the teaching profession.

The individuals’ responses to the open-ended questions provide interesting insights in the area of teacher job satisfaction. The findings clearly show that intrinsic variables (e.g., working with students, job satisfaction, personal teaching efficacy), as well as extrinsic variables (e.g., good students, teacher support, positive school environment, small class size) appear to influence teacher job satisfaction. Only extrinsic factors were found to influence teachers’ dissatisfaction (e.g., role overload, low salary, parent support, student behavior, large class size). Previous research supports the notion that job satisfaction can be classified into intrinsic and extrinsic categories, with the major source of job satisfaction for teachers coming from the intrinsic category (Cohn, 1992; Lortie, 1975). These findings suggest that a lack of obstacles to teaching (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995) increase teachers’ job satisfaction, while amplification in obstacles and barriers would decrease teachers’ satisfaction with their position.

The data from the open-ended survey questions regarding satisfaction with the profession of teaching and with the job of teaching indicate several factors that influence these teachers' perceptions of satisfaction. The top three responses for satisfaction with the profession were more intrinsic in nature (e.g., working with students, personal teaching efficacy, job satisfaction), whereas the top three responses for satisfaction with the job of teaching were more extrinsic in nature (e.g., good students, positive school environment, small class size). The data from these same two open-ended questions also indicate a nuance of dissatisfaction issues among satisfied teachers that were extrinsic in nature for both the profession (e.g., role overload, low salary, and parent support) and the job of teaching (e.g., role overload, student behavior, and large class size). These findings parallel previous research in this area (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Cohn, 1992; Goodlad, 1984; Hargreaves, 1994; McLaughlin et al., 1986; Meek, 1998; Perie & Baker, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 1993) and appear to indicate that a difference in satisfaction exists between the teaching profession and the job of teaching, and that negative extrinsic factors acted as roadblocks to otherwise satisfied respondents.

The findings from this investigation also support previous research (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Meek, 1998) that points to the fact that satisfied teachers were more likely to remain in the teaching profession. For example, teachers who declared their intent to remain in teaching because of a high level of satisfaction were influenced primarily by extrinsic variables (e.g., their school, their profession). The findings demonstrate that teachers' top reasons for not leaving teaching, even if the opportunity arose, are weighted by both intrinsic (e.g., personal teaching efficacy, working with students, job satisfaction) and extrinsic (e.g., schedule/time off, retirement) variables. The findings also indicate that teachers' reasons for not remaining were solely extrinsic (e.g., low salary, role overload). Moreover, in this study, no significant relationship exists between teachers' satisfaction with the "job" of teaching and the intent to remain in teaching. This is contrary to previous research that indicates teachers who experienced satisfaction at their school and/or satisfaction with the teaching profession were more likely to remain in teaching (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Klecker & Loadman, 1999; Meek, 1998). This finding suggests that satisfaction with the profession of teaching—not the job of teaching—determined retention.

Evidence from this investigation suggests that the relationship of job satisfaction, intent to remain in teaching, and the demographic characteristics of the study participants shows that teachers who were single were less likely to remain in teaching. This finding echoes previous research (Karge, 1993). Even though previous research shows that males demonstrate an increased retention rate (Bobbitt et al., 1991), this study did not find a significant relationship between gender and intent to remain. Results of this investigation indicate that the demographic variables of age, degree earned, years taught in education, and years taught at a K–5 grade level were not characteristics that helped to explain teachers' intent to remain. These findings echo the research of Billingsley and Cross (1992) that demographics were not significantly related to job satisfaction and, therefore, were not indicators of retention. In addition, previous case studies that examine teachers' careers suggest that satisfaction with their job and/or profession and the intention to remain or not to remain may influence career decisions more than simple demographics (Lortie, 1975).

Moreover, these findings support the previous work of Herzberg (1966) in that those intrinsic factors or motivators relating to one's job content and the extrinsic factors or hygienes relating to the situation in which they work have a positive influence on teachers' satisfaction and, subsequently, their intent to remain in teaching. The intrinsic and extrinsic influences of satisfaction and retention that emerged from this study might assist school districts in their efforts not only to retain an experienced work force but also to search for new teachers.

#### *Future Research*

A significant finding of this study indicates a positive relationship between satisfaction with the profession of teaching and intent to remain; however, the study yielded no significant relationship between satisfaction with the job of teaching and intent to remain. Based on the previous research and the analysis and interpretation of this study's data, one area of future research would be to examine job

satisfaction through two distinct variables: one that focuses on satisfaction with the “profession” of teaching, and the other that focuses on satisfaction with the “job” of teaching. Billingsley and Cross (1992) made the recommendation for educational researchers to distinguish between commitment to the profession of teaching and commitment to the employing school because organizational “researchers often distinguish between commitment to the organization and to the profession ...” (p. 454). This same recommendation could also be applied to “job satisfaction.”

#### *Teacher Preparation and Professional Development*

The findings underlying educational research on teacher satisfaction suggest that employee job satisfaction would be a reliable predictor of certain behaviors. In essence, when the influences were satisfying, the outcome was retention (Bobbitt et al., 1991; Meek, 1998). Since this study parallels those findings, initiating and sustaining teachers’ satisfaction to teaching would appear to be an important step for those who employ teachers and to those who institute professional development. In doing so, districts could save capital—financial and human. Instead of spending precious dollars on teacher replacement and hiring, these dollars could be better spent on keeping teachers in our schools. This study identifies factors that influence job satisfaction and ultimately retention, which may provide solutions for promoting teacher retention. Those individuals (e.g., schools boards, legislatures, policy decision makers) who shape the conditions in which teachers work could take a major step in promoting teacher retention by ensuring that teachers have a positive school environment, adequate support, and small class sizes. Furthermore, other key issues such as low salaries, role overload, and student behavior must be vigorously pursued. Investing money to advance teacher job satisfaction should not only slow the exodus of teachers but also promote the building of successful learning environments. By closing the teacher job-satisfaction gap, educators may then have a tool for closing the student achievement gap.

While this study focused on 201 Missouri public elementary schoolteachers grades K–5, the findings may be relevant to teachers with similar profile characteristics, grade levels, and content areas, and to school districts within the state of Missouri. By giving credence to these participants’ perceptions and understanding the extent to which satisfaction influenced the intent to remain for teachers in this study, other school districts and administrators may seek new ways to enhance teacher retention, maintain highly qualified teachers, and reduce attrition in their schools.

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### Appendix: Job Satisfaction and Retention Survey

A. Please completely fill the one circle O that best represents your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree			
1. The principal lets me know what is expected.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. The school administration's behavior toward me is supportive and encouraging.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I am satisfied with my teaching salary.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. The level of student misbehavior in this school interferes with my teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I receive a great deal of support from parents for the work I do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I receive the necessary instructional materials to do my work effectively.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Routine duties and paperwork interfere with my teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. My principal enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. The principal talks with me frequently about my instructional practices.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree			
10. Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by me in this school, even for students who are not in my class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. I share similar beliefs and values with my colleagues regarding the central mission of this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. I am evaluated fairly in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. I participate in making the most of the important educational decisions in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. I understand clearly the goals and priorities for my school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. The principal knows what kind of school he/she wants and has communicated it to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. I feel there is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff members.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. In this school, I am recognized for a job well done.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. I worry about the security of my job because of the performance of my students on state or local tests.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. I am given the support I need to teach students with special needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. I am satisfied with my class size(s).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. I make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my courses with that of other teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. I believe that the amount of tardiness and class cutting by students interferes with my teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. I sometimes feel it is a waste of time to try to do my best as a teacher.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. Often, I find it difficult to agree with this school's policies on important matters relating to its employees.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B. Please completely fill the one circle O that best represents your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree			
1. I plan to remain in this position.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. I plan to remain in this school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. I plan to remain in this profession.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C. Please completely fill one circle O for the following two questions AND explain your reason for each choice. THEN completely answer question 3. Please use the back of this page if you need additional room for these responses.

1. How satisfied are you with teaching as a profession?
- Very satisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat dissatisfied
  - Very dissatisfied

**Why?**

2. How satisfied do you feel with your job this current school year?
- Very satisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Neutral
  - Somewhat dissatisfied
  - Very dissatisfied

**Why?**

3. If you indicated that you were “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” what is the **number one** reason you attribute to this satisfaction?

**Why?**

D. Please completely fill one circle O for the following two questions AND explain your reason for each choice. THEN completely answer question 3. Please use the back of this page if you need additional room for these responses.

1. If the opportunity arose, would you leave the teaching profession for another occupation?
- Certainly would
  - Probably would
  - Chances about even
  - Probably would not
  - Certainly would not

**Why?**



2. Given that you have been a teacher for over 5 years, what is your **number one** reason for remaining in teaching?

Why?

3. How long do you plan to remain in teaching?
- Highly likely to stay
  - Very likely to stay
  - Neutral
  - Not likely to stay
  - Definitely not staying

Why?

E. Please completely fill in one circle  for each of the following questions.

1. What is your gender?

- Male                       Female

2. What is your marital status?

- Single, never married       Married       Widowed/divorced/separated

3. What is your ethnic background?

- American Indian/Alaska Native       Asian or Pacific Islander  
 African America/Black                       Hispanic  
 Caucasian/White                               Other (please specify)

4. What is your age?

- 35 or under                       36–45                       46–55  
 56–65                               66 or older

5. What is the highest degree you earned?

- Bachelor's degree                       Master's degree  
 Education specialist                       Doctorate degree

6. What is the number of years you have taught in education?

- 10 or less (please specify \_\_\_\_)  
 21–25
- 11–14                               15–20  
 26 or more

7. What is the number of years you have taught at a K–5 grade level?

- 10 or less (please specify \_\_\_\_)  
 21–25
- 11–14                               15–20  
 26 or more

*Thank you again for your cooperation and participation.*

# Effective Student Teacher Supervision in the Era of *No Child Left Behind*

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## Abstract

*This research study addresses the issues and challenges for university supervisors of providing supervisory feedback in the accountability climate of No Child Left Behind. Several findings are detailed in the case below and include the following: (a) Feedback on individual learning needs of students differed between informal written observations and the formal feedback provided on midterm and final evaluations; (b) the supervisor's perception of a teacher candidate's success influenced the degree to which the feedback aligned with performance standards; (c) within the context of culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, supervisory feedback included attention to individual learning needs when teacher candidates were viewed as successful by the supervisor; and (d) for those candidates who struggled in their teaching, adherence to specific standards took precedence over the individual needs of students in the classroom.*

## Introduction and Theoretical Framework

The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (Pub. L. 107-110, NCLB) revised the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and has been described by some as among the most far-reaching piece of legislation affecting education in the United States in the past 30 years (Hardy, 2002). The tenets of NCLB establish standards for the evaluation of children in K–12 classrooms, the educators working in their schools, and the staff affiliated with service delivery (e.g., paraprofessionals). Attention to issues of teacher quality through NCLB has resulted, in part, on an increased focus on the preparation of teachers and the experiences they have in increasingly diverse schools and classrooms. It has further focused the efforts of teacher educators, including university student teaching supervisors, on the current reality and challenges of NCLB policies and practices as they are implemented in the public schools. Without a doubt, NCLB has had a significant impact on the practices of university supervisors, whether realized or not.

Historically, student teacher supervision has been seen as a low status, peripheral occupation within colleges and programs of teacher education, typically completed by adjunct faculty or graduate students (Slick, 1998). Additionally, the supervisor is commonly seen as an outsider interfering in the public school classroom and serving only an evaluatory role in the relationship with cooperating and student teachers (Slick, 1998). Much debate exists over the effectiveness of the university supervisor and the relative value of the role in student teacher learning (Bowman, 1979; Boydell, 1986).

Richardson-Koehler (1988) suggests that the university supervisor is in the unique position to raise the discourse of feedback provided to student teachers. Zeichner and Liston (1985) found four different types of discourse used between student teachers and university supervisors during postobservation conferences: factual, prudential, justificatory, and critical. Justificatory and critical stances allow student teachers to continue to grow beyond simply what happened to their decision-making processes and rationales for their instructional actions. These approaches encourage the development of teachers who are capable of becoming independent and thoughtful decision makers. Grant and Zozakiewicz (1995) advocate for a supervisor who will:

... listen and support their [student teachers'] work, while challenging students to think, grow, and act as multicultural educators. As with children in schools, supervisors need to accept and get to know each student teacher and their cultural background, educational knowledge, and unique experiences. (p. 271–272)

Such a personalized approach to supervision is complicated to implement but further supports the development of teachers who are responsive to student needs while modeling this process in action (Bates, 2005). However, Hawkey (1997) writes, "It is not clear whether the student teachers are learning what is intended from their interactions with different personnel" (p. 326). She goes on to write that there is little understanding of how student teachers "integrate" and make sense of the various perspectives they are given—particularly if they are receiving differing information from various personnel. Richardson (1996) found that teachers were more likely to generate alternative practices when faced with dilemmas while teaching (as opposed to isolated study of teaching). The role of the supervisor becomes particularly critical in providing preservice teachers with experiences that encourage alternative ways of examining teaching.

Like their K–12 counterparts, colleges of education and teacher-preparation programs are increasingly responsible for ensuring that graduates demonstrate adherence to performance standards established by national, state, and local credentialing bodies. A 2004 set of recommendations included in *Teaching at Risk: Progress to Potholes* encourage increased standards for teacher performance and teacher credentialing, as well as pay incentives for the teachers of high-achieving students (Teaching Commission, 2006). The pressure on colleges of education to adhere to practices that increase teacher quality is significant (Raths & Lyman, 2003).

The pull toward meeting the standards of NCLB has resulted in new policies and procedures that challenge teacher-preparation institutions to demonstrate preservice teachers' abilities to meet current accountability requirements. Under the provisions of NCLB, the characteristics of "highly qualified" teachers are delineated to include: raising standards for teacher training programs; requiring teachers to take more rigorous coursework; expanding teacher-preparation programs; increased rigor in professional development; and setting higher standards for teacher licensure, including competency testing (Hardy, 2002).

The influence of NCLB on the experiences of student teaching is obvious. One does not enter a school without hearing about NCLB and the particular school's challenges in meeting the requirements. For student teachers, the focus on NCLB is particularly prevalent as cooperating teachers are quick to inform novices of the specific academic needs and focus of their discipline, as well as the expectations that student teachers will include particular instructional activities to prepare students for mandated testing. Changing standards and mandates for practice have an influence on each of those involved in the student teaching experience, including the university supervisor, a historical outsider to the classroom/school context (Slick, 1998). The influence of NCLB and the climate of accreditation in teacher education has had a significant impact on the type and focus of the feedback that the supervisor provides to the student teacher during classroom observations and periodic formal evaluations.

One current challenge that supervisors face is the impact of NCLB on the classroom practices of many teachers. Specifically, the narrowness with which student teachers quickly accommodate to classroom practices that appear to be responsive to NCLB often takes place without considering the impact on student learning. Because different student teachers need different kinds of support and feedback as learners, the context of NCLB and teacher accreditation standards can further challenge a supervisor to differentiate types and areas of emphasis within feedback in order to meet students' learning needs. This study looks at the influence of assessment and accreditation standards on the feedback provided by a secondary supervisor to student teachers working in a diverse range of middle and high school field placement settings.

## Methodology

### *Research Objectives*

Our research question is, "What influence does the accountability context and teacher education standards (e.g., Praxis) have on the written supervisory feedback provided to secondary student teachers?" This research project looks at the feedback that a student teaching supervisor provided to her secondary education teacher candidates during a semester of student teaching. In particular, this study attempts to determine the influence of context through a focus on *No Child Left Behind* and teacher education accountability standards on the ability of a supervisor to effectively support the student teacher as an individual learner. Documentation of the written feedback provided to teacher candidates—both through classroom observations and evaluation documents—by the supervisor allows for exploration of the influence of an NCLB dominated context and the use of Praxis standards on the type and structure of feedback offered. It is critical to understand the influence of such factors on the experiences of student teachers as it impacts the learning opportunities that they are provided and the nature of the support they receive from the university supervisor.

### *The Case of Bobbi: Study Participant*

This study focuses on the case of a university supervisor of student teaching, Bobbi (further details about Bobbi's background are described in the introduction to her case). A close and careful look at the practice of a particular supervisor allowed us to focus deeply on her experiences and those of her student teachers through her feedback. We highlight the experiences of Bobbi as a supervisor who possesses what Gitlin, Ogawa, and Rose (1984) describe as an ability to provide supervisory support, which challenges teacher candidates to reflect upon their teaching in ways that extend beyond technique. Bobbi was chosen as a supervisor due to her interests, personal experiences working with urban secondary students, and her demonstrated ability to link theory to practice as a continuous process of reflection.

At the time of this study, Bobbi, a white female, was a university supervisor for secondary education at the local, large research-focused university where she was also a graduate student during this period. Bobbi had recently completed a period of working as a high school English and journalism teacher in a diverse, local, urban high school before returning to the university to work on her master's degree. The university program in which she worked is a four-semester Masters of Arts in teaching for secondary licensure students, certifying across content areas. Bobbi's supervisory support took place during the third semester following coursework in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and management. Student teachers completed a 12-week student teaching experience in ethnically and culturally diverse middle and high schools. During the school year of this study, Bobbi worked in four different urban public schools supervising 11 student teachers in placements ranging from 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades and across content areas. The students in this program typically range in age from the mid-20s to early 40s and are mostly female and Caucasian. The period of this study was Bobbi's first experience as a university supervisor.

Bobbi's teaching background influenced her experiences and practices as a university supervisor. The high school where she taught in the local community serves as the English as a Second Language (ESL) magnet program for all secondary students new to the district and offered a learning environment in a neighborhood school context with students from 79 different countries. Bobbi taught basic English courses for both mainstream students and students recently mainstreamed from the ESL program. With an undergraduate degree in English from a small liberal arts university in another state, Bobbi earned her teaching certification in the focus program of this study four years prior to the study. She student taught in another of the city's diverse schools and had a focus on English language learning in her student teaching semester.

Bobbi's experiences as a teacher candidate at our university and in the local schools as a teacher increased her familiarity with the program as a supervisor and offered her some degree of comfort with expectations and student teaching program structure. Her position as a graduate of the same licensure

program, and graduate student in a master's degree program in reading, offered her students a unique view on the learning experiences of the program. As a supervisor for the department, but not as a faculty member who participated in the development of program structures and evaluation tools, she held both insider and outsider views of the supervision process. While Bobbi's status as a graduate of the program in which she is supervising might be unique, much of the work of university supervision—particularly in large programs—is done by graduate students and adjuncts. These are typically people who are outside of the departmental realm of program design and development. Ideally, Bobbi's experiences can do much to inform the design of supervisory tools, forms, and practices by those with the responsibility to document programs. Developing this comprehensive view might further help universities gain insight into the influence of accreditation measures such as NCLB on their programs and practices from the perspective of those who do the groundwork in practice.

#### *Data Sources and Collection*

We collected written feedback provided to teacher candidates by the supervisor. Formative feedback included a set of four written observation feedback forms for each of the supervisor's 11 teacher candidates. The supervisor also provided copies of the mid-semester and final student teaching evaluations. The midterm and final evaluations consisted of a Likert scale rating of the teacher's readiness on a variety of factors correlated to the Praxis standards, as well as a narrative describing the scores given in each section. Additionally, we collected formal evaluations from the Site Teacher Educators (STEs) as a source of corroboration on the supervisor's feedback for the perspectives of student teacher success. Finally, the supervisor was interviewed at the end of the student teaching semester to help us better understand her background experiences in education and teacher education, stance toward supervision, and attitudes toward assessment and evaluation in the context of student teaching. This interview allowed us to evaluate our understanding of the feedback and ask supporting questions to ensure that we were reading feedback comments in concert with the attitudes and beliefs of the supervisor.

It is important to understand the program origin of the data that were collected in this study. The university's supervisory tools that were formally used to evaluate the teaching progress of preservice teachers were developed in response to state and national evaluation criteria affiliated with *No Child Left Behind* and state-based accreditation standards. The evaluation tools were informed by Danielson and McGreal's (2000) teacher evaluation tools and align with the Praxis III standards for classroom performance described by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). The midterm and final evaluation tools are used as part of a comprehensive evaluation protocol designed to generate a profile of candidate performance. These tools were collected as a source of data for this study; however, it is important to note that they were one piece of a complex puzzle, generated by the supervisor, for evaluation that tied in the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in the process. The midterm and final evaluation ratings are used in conjunction with portfolios, formative classroom evaluations, and course performance to develop a profile of candidate performance over time. Portfolio artifacts are developed throughout coursework and field experiences.

#### *Data Analysis*

The study presented here looks at the case of Bobbi, a secondary supervisor working with students in a range of culturally and linguistically diverse middle and high school settings. This paper describes her case in detail to document the relevance of the findings in the "real world" experiences of a supervisor and her student teachers. The analysis of this study focuses on the development of a case centered on the feedback provided by Bobbi, and the difficulty she faced in tailoring feedback to an individual student teacher's learning needs in the NCLB climate of accountability. According to Yin (1994), a case study approach to qualitative research provides an in-depth look at the nuances of a particular situation or experience. As such, the use of case study methodology in this paper provides the opportunity to look closely at the influence of context and current educational climate on the day-

to-day work of a supervisor. Looking closely at Bobbi's experiences allowed us to analyze her experiences and work, teasing out the subtleties across various student teachers.

The data analysis process began with a reading of the supervisor's set of observation feedback provided to the student teachers. Initial coding categories were created based on this data and then revised by reading through the supervisor's mid-semester and final formal evaluations. These revised categories included: attention to the nature and content of the feedback as it related to the individual learning needs of the student teacher; specific references to the Praxis standards; and feedback focused on specific needs of diverse learners as related to the school context. Based on the similarities and differences between the informal and formal observation feedback, assertions were made about the data and used as guideposts for comparing the feedback with the STE evaluations and the interview data from the supervisor. These assertions are presented in the findings section below.

### Findings

This study found that Bobbi, the supervisor, was heavily influenced by the department's teacher education standards and the degree to which she felt an obligation to utilize and document specific responses to the standards used by the program within the context of the more formalized midterm and final evaluations. Several findings are detailed in the case below and include the following: (a) feedback on individual learning needs of students differed between informal written observations and the formal feedback provided on midterm and final evaluations; (b) the supervisor's perception of a teacher candidate's success influenced the degree to which the feedback aligned with performance standards; (c) within the context of culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, supervisory feedback included attention to individual learning needs when teacher candidates were viewed as successful by the supervisor; and (d) for those candidates who struggled in their teaching, adherence to specific standards took precedence over the individual needs of students in the classroom.

As a university supervisor, Bobbi demonstrated particularly tight connections to and reliance on the standards in crafting and providing feedback. As seen in the case described below, the standards provided the supervisor with an evaluation scaffold that resulted in limited feedback designed to specifically meet the needs of the individual student teacher as a learner. Possible reasons for this reliance and the outcomes for teacher preparation will be considered in the implications section.

#### *Finding One: Mixed Messages—Increased Attention to Standards at the Cost of the Individual Learner*

Increasingly, the influence of national and state standards movements has pressured teacher educators to align their feedback on student teacher performance with established criteria for success in the classroom, rather than on pupil learning. These alignment trends were particularly evident in the contrast in feedback Bobbi provided to teacher candidates working in urban middle and high schools. Bobbi developed a feedback pattern that differed based on the perceived purpose of the feedback (formal or informal). Bobbi's feedback during classroom observations was noticeably different from the feedback provided on formal observation forms in tone, content, and explicit reference to the Praxis standards. This dichotomy is described in the examples below, illustrating the differences in feedback based upon the structural frameworks of the tools guiding the presentation.

During regular classroom observations for each of her 11 student teachers, Bobbi provided written, open-ended feedback on their teaching that was generally customized to each candidate. She began each feedback session with an icebreaker that was designed to welcome the candidate into the feedback discussion. For example, comments related to hectic schedules, the weather, or general activities within the school were always a part of Bobbi's introductory feedback remarks. For most teacher candidates, Bobbi's written feedback included a range of open-ended comments addressing student diversity, assessment, and classroom management. Her feedback was consistently individualized and directed candidates' attention to specific students in their classrooms, or to previously identified goals for most of her students. Bobbi's written feedback provided clear

directives to her teacher candidates where she identified linkages between curriculum, instruction, and middle and high school students as individual learners. However, when completing midterm and final semester evaluations that required both numerical ratings and narrative text on the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher candidate, the differences in the type of feedback shared became clear. When compiling feedback for the midterm and final evaluations, Bobbi's language and tone became increasingly more focused on the nuances and rigidity of teacher education standards with an emphasis on the Praxis standards within this particular teacher education program. For example, when responding to Wanda's teaching, Bobbi wrote in her informal classroom observation feedback: Excellent incorporation of technology into your lecture, supporting learning for diverse learners and increasing engagement.... Throughout your lesson you asked important lessons and made some important connections for your students. (Wanda, #3)

This text demonstrates an interest in specific strategies that Wanda used to support her diverse learners and sought out ways to ensure that they were engaged in their learning. In another informal observation analysis, Bobbi posed questions and pushed Wanda to think specifically about strategies to make her teaching responsive to students:

... you provided a good use of descriptions to draw students into life during the Renaissance and [you] made some connections to their lives. You have made good use of visuals at some points in the lectures. Have you considered more visual material (or technology) to support your presentation? When describing Gothic style, how might a visual representation have helped students? Especially for those students who may be diverse learners? (Wanda, #4)

This example details ideas that Bobbi is sharing to encourage Wanda's development of responsive and interactive teaching approaches that clearly recognize the value and purpose of focusing on students. However, the next example demonstrates the change in tone and focus in the comments provided on a formal midterm evaluation (note that the codes like A1 refer to program standards):

You demonstrate an understanding of student skills and knowledge in your content area (A1)... Your lesson plans, which include goals and teaching strategies, are vague.... It is evident from your lesson plans that you are selecting appropriate and varied teaching methods (A4).... (Midterm evaluation for Wanda)

The two different styles of writing for feedback are noticeably distinct in tone and structure as well as specificity to the classroom environment and the needs of middle and high school students.

#### *Finding Two: Variations in Feedback and the Success of the Teacher Candidate*

General patterns in Bobbi's feedback during lesson observations included statements that positively invited teacher candidates into discussions of their teaching, highlighting the strengths she had identified during her visits. Oftentimes she included explicit references to the skills she was encouraging student teachers to develop and was able to tailor these to the specific needs of the learner. However, when she was less comfortable sharing feedback, particularly for student teachers who struggled in their teaching, her comments were more prescriptive and directive, relying much more heavily on the language of the standards without individualization to the student teacher or the context. That is, there were clear distinctions in the type of feedback Bobbi shared with teacher candidates depending upon her interpretation of their respective skill levels.

For teacher candidates who were successful in their teaching and seemed able to tackle the requirements of their placements, Bobbi's feedback was much less rigid and open-ended. Bobbi's language in the feedback to these students included terms like *fun*, *enjoyment*, and *role model*. Her comments focused on the curriculum, engagement, rapport with students, and the overall culture of

the classroom. During a visit to Bart's middle school social studies classroom, Bobbi made the following observations:

Your use of the land chart along with lecture provided reinforcement of the class content—an important component of the lesson. Excellent opportunity to provide students with feedback.... The video at the opening was a great way to capture interest.... It was fun to provide students the opportunity to ask you questions—your rapport with students is evident and your enjoyment of them is evident. (Bart # 4)

Bobbi's feedback to Bart reflected her attention to multiple factors simultaneously. In addition to the curriculum, Bobbi's feedback addressed students' interactions with the curriculum, as well as the overall feel of the classroom. For students such as Bart who were more successful in their student teaching experiences, Bobbi's attention to the Praxis standards for performance was clearly understated in comparison to the feedback provided in her midterm and final evaluations.

During Bart's midterm evaluation, Bobbi's feedback becomes much more standardized and follows a formulaic reference to the Praxis evaluation standards. While Bobbi makes some attempt to personalize her feedback, the references to a teacher candidate's performance are strictly guided by the standards and only allow for a slight reference to a candidate's content area or teaching methods. In her midterm feedback, for example, she only attended to whether a student teacher made "connections with the content knowledge" (Praxis standards A4), instead of documenting praise or concern relevant to the candidate's specific content area.

At the midterm, Bart's evaluation was quite similar to the feedback shared with his peers, regardless of their degree of success. Bobbi reiterated standards verbatim, citing the standard number, and giving general linkages to the ways in which Bart met the standard. For example, the first two standards require evaluators to rate the degree to which a candidate is familiar with students' background knowledge and experiences and whether the candidate is able to plan lessons that are appropriate for student learning. In her feedback to Bart under this category Bobbi notes:

You demonstrate knowledge of students' background and experiences in creating lessons that are engaging and interesting for students, making appropriate connections to their lives. You have an awareness of what students know and do not know that enables you to scaffold learning activities as well (A1). (Bart's midterm evaluation)

Bobbi's patterns of feedback were consistent across her students, whether they struggled within the context of their teaching. That is, while the feedback shared during classroom observation visits included fewer defined linkages to the Praxis evaluation standards for most students, her midterm and final evaluation comments were inextricably linked to the standards—to the point of allowing almost no variation across candidates. Further, the language used within each narrative to students at the midterm and final includes direct reference to the standards, with an explicit reference to the standard number.

For candidates who struggled in their teaching assignments, classroom-based feedback was much more directive and included explicit questions that were designed to focus the preservice teacher's attention back to areas in need of further development. While supportive in her approach, feedback was much more pointed, linked to procedural elements of teaching, and failed to address areas such as the curriculum. Bobbi's lack of attention to the curriculum was more evident in her feedback to those who struggled with management issues. Bobbi's comments to Natalie, a high school Spanish teacher candidate, reflect a very formulaic approach to teaching.

... you gave good directives to students while teaching the persuasive paragraph—giving them something to look for while reading. Students are responsive to your instructions. You are very



clear and they meet the standards of behavior.... The use of groups for this activity was appropriate but required too little accountability. (Observation 2/14)

Bobbi's comments are focused on management and provide praise for specific action on Natalie's part, as well as further advice for improvement. During a later observation in Natalie's classroom, Bobbi noted:

I feel you have progressed in your management strategies during the past couple of months, and you did an excellent job waiting for student attention before talking. Several times you directly addressed off-task behavior by students, effectively demanding their attention and communicating your standards for behavior.... You have a friendly approachable rapport with students that is supportive of their learning. (Observation 3/20)

While Bobbi's feedback to Natalie evolved somewhat to include a commentary that extended beyond the technical levels for Natalie, for the most part, it remained regimented and failed to provide guidance on how to improve her practice through reflection on the factors impacting decision making. This example demonstrates the tendency of Bobbi's feedback to focus narrowly on the basic requirements laid out by the standards. She paid little attention to her own expertise as a graduate student and teacher practitioner as a foundation for mentoring the student teacher.

For another candidate who struggled in his ability to adequately scaffold student learning within lessons, Bobbi's feedback again lacked a connection to the candidate on a personal level, and was very directive in nature. In observation feedback for Harvey, Bobbi writes:

I like that you explicitly addressed the concerns at the beginning of class, stating for students why you have made certain choices. You approached it in a fair way, explaining how you want to help students learn Spanish now that you have set up new policies.... You described how correcting homework in class is not valuable.... Can you let them know why it's not valuable? Can you find a way to make it more so? (Harvey's observation notes 2/21)

The feedback provided to Harvey addressed the sequencing of his lesson plan, emphasizing the importance of an introduction to the lesson, the rationale for the lesson, and the need for developing the purpose of the lesson. For this candidate, feedback was focused on weaknesses in the technical elements of his teaching, with little attention to individual student's experiences. To some extent, the curriculum was referenced in general terms, with most suggestions geared toward the delivery of the curriculum or orchestrating classroom management. As evident in Harvey's feedback, the structure of the midterm and final evaluations aligned most closely with the type of feedback shared during the classroom observations. The following is an example of the feedback on Harvey's mid-semester evaluation where the letter-number sequences in Bobbi's text refer to specific Praxis standards as included on the evaluation form.

(A1). There is little evidence that you are writing daily lesson plans, and in the lesson plan I saw, your learning goals are not clear. Write lesson plans with clear and specific goals that will direct your learning activities and assessment. You did write your learning goal for students on the board in World History when I observed you—continue to articulate these goals to students, to give them a sense of relevancy and direction as they learn (A2). Create more connections between past and current content to remind students of where they have been, and build on what they already know.... I did not see any explicit connection to what students have been working on (A3). You have a developing skill at creating lesson activities that engage students in a variety of learning approaches—including reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. Attempt to engage students in more meaningful learning experiences (A4). As you

more clearly articulate your goals for learning, continue to create appropriate assessment tools (A5). (Harvey's mid-semester evaluation feedback)

The reiteration of individual standards within the context of Harvey's evaluations provided for few connections to nuances in his teaching. By focusing so specifically on the linkage between the two, it is possible for a teacher candidate to take the message that learning to teach and completing an effective evaluation on student teaching are summarized in the ability to systematically move through and check off a sequence of teaching skills.

The distinction between the feedback provided to strong teacher candidates and those with more challenges in learning to teach is noticeable. Ultimately, Bobbi's hesitancy to craft feedback responsive to the individual teacher candidate who struggles results in scripted and formulaic text that does little to instill a sense of "teacher as decision maker and critical thinker" in the process of learning to teach.

### *Finding Three: Issues of School Context and Student Diversity*

Perhaps the most dramatic differences between the content of lesson observation feedback and the midterm and final evaluation feedback were found in the narratives of those student teachers working in highly diverse classroom settings. For three student teachers working in a diverse high school, with a population of linguistically diverse students, the feedback provided during lesson observations included direct feedback linked to individual learners and their language needs. Bobbi's comments to Warren, a high school history teacher, are noted:

... I appreciate the lesson component that gave each student an assignment, including each student in the activity.... Your debriefing comments reinforced relevancy of this topic for students' lives, reflecting your goals.... It provided an opportunity for students to do research, writing, and speaking about a relevant and compelling topic. It is an excellent example of an activity that extends student thinking, broaching on a truly student-led discussion (in fact the open discussion following the formal activity was an enjoyable opportunity to hear from students). (Observation 2/28)

The feedback provided to Warren highlighted the need to move beyond the technical elements of his teaching. Bobbi's comments focused on reflection as a tool for increasing the variety in his teaching; students were clearly the center of the feedback; and the curriculum and instructional methods were highlighted specifically. The following is an example from Bobbi's final evaluation of Warren's teaching:

Warren's teaching includes thoughtful and explicit directions to students. His efforts to connect students to content are evident in the creation of authentic learning experiences. Warren demonstrated his ability to structure an activity to encourage independent discussion by students in the creation of a class debate. It was enjoyable to watch students engage in truly a student-led discussion about a relevant and compelling issue. (Warren's final evaluation)

For this final evaluation, Bobbi focused more closely on the specifics that Warren engaged in to support students in a given content area. This attention to student learning and students as individuals was evident primarily in those evaluations for student teachers who worked in diverse school settings and reflected greater attention to the context of the individual student teacher. That is, in ethnically and culturally diverse classrooms Bobbi's feedback lacked the formulaic approach to evaluating her students' teaching. She was able to use the diverse needs of students in the classroom as a platform from which her feedback evolved. She focused specifically on language differences among students, provided feedback that challenged the teacher candidate to consider whether the content was relevant to students, and purposefully asked candidates to attend to their own reflective practices.

### **Implications for Teaching and Teacher Education**

The impact of NCLB on education is far-reaching. In addition to defining standards of performance for children and teachers in K–12 schools, teacher education programs are equally responsible for documenting their teacher candidates' abilities to meet the criteria from a range of evaluation standards. On the positive side, the standards of NCLB have challenged colleges of education to identify "success" in their students' performance through demonstrable measures related to instruction, classroom climate, professionalism, and curriculum development (Raths & Lyman, 2003). Where previous evidence of success may have been in the form of anecdotal narrations and portfolio documentation, current measures are designed to specify and enumerate performance against relatively defined criteria. This process has provided a guide for teacher education programs to use when supervising student teachers in the field that ensures attention to issues of classroom and student diversity.

Alternatively, the standards-based rigor of many evaluation tools is having an impact on the degree to which supervisors are able to draw from the "teachable moments" within classrooms. The oftentimes narrow bands of many standards-based checklists force supervisors to evaluate teaching using defined criteria in ways that reinforce the notion of teaching as the culmination of a formulaic set of patterns and responses. Narrowing this view has limited the teaching and modeling of the process that we value for our student teachers—namely, paying attention to the students as individual learners with unique views, learning needs, and perspectives on the world, and helping our teacher candidates to become critical thinkers with a multicultural awareness (Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995).

Equally limiting for university supervisors is the degree to which current standards-based movements transfer the role of supervisor to evaluator. Opportunities for getting to know students, reading the cultures of classrooms, and understanding the context of classrooms and schools are highly limited when fixed evaluation criteria are depended upon too heavily. Finally, teacher educators must evaluate the impact of the final messages sent to our students as they leave our programs. We must consciously consider whether the focus on a checklist of standards diminishes, or perhaps obliterates, any of the other feedback shared, instead of taking the opportunities described by Richardson-Koehler (1988) to raise the level of discourse between supervisor and student teacher. What message do our teacher candidates take as they leave to begin the early years of their teaching careers? What continuing internal dialogue might student teachers have or not have with their university supervisors as a result of this experience?

As our study indicated, Bobbi demonstrated differing forms and degrees of feedback to student teachers depending on the context's focus on NCLB mandates. One positive outcome of the attention to standards was an increased focus on student assessment in the content of the feedback, with less focus on isolated issues of pedagogy or management. Additionally, for a supervisor, the structure and guidelines of evaluation criteria provide a framework for providing fairly specific feedback. However, supervisor feedback in final evaluations resulted in less recognition of the individuality of the student teacher, instead focusing on global evaluation criteria, regardless of particular situations or learning needs. These outcomes suggest a need for additional attention in teacher education on the preparation and support of supervisors for the challenge of working in today's political climate. Teacher preparation programs must also recognize that developmental differences across supervisors will impact the degree to which they are bound by fairly structured evaluation tools. For the supervisor in this study, the formalized standards of the midterm and final evaluations offered a safety net or safeguard when providing summative feedback, thereby reinforcing teacher candidates' trust in and reliance upon standardized measures that appear to supersede the nuanced needs of students and classrooms. A range of evaluation and feedback strategies must be used to find the balance in preparing student teachers in this situation of high accountability. The supervisor's role has value as it addresses both the reality of the teaching experience and the individuality of the student teacher's learning needs (Bates, 2005). It is the responsibility of teacher-preparation programs to ensure that these strategies are explored and occur in supervision to the benefit of programs and student teachers.

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### Conclusion

For teacher education to continue to grow and develop to meet the needs of the diverse public schools, teacher candidates must be supported in determining how to best develop learning experiences that are responsive to this diversity. In the case of NCLB, the situation is further complicated with the increased attention to assessment and accreditation standards that influence the preparation of highly qualified teachers. Reconciling the tension between teacher education standards and the individual learning needs of a teacher candidate falls to the university supervisor who is responsible for overseeing the transition from student to novice teacher. Further research that examines the responsibilities and opportunities afforded university supervisors is necessary. Such examination allows for the professional development of supervisors and encourages supervisors' responsiveness to teacher candidates and their learning needs as they prepare teachers for the challenging reality of *No Child Left Behind*.

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# Exploring Graduate Elementary Education Preservice Teachers' Initial Teaching Beliefs

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## Abstract

*States, universities, and school districts have responded to teacher shortages by designing programs that transition college graduates into teaching careers. The result is an increase in the number of graduate preservice teachers preparing for teaching careers in colleges of education. The purpose of this study is to explore graduate preservice teachers' initial teaching beliefs so as to understand the educational perspectives they bring into the graduate classroom. Data were collected from the initial philosophy statements of 21 graduate preservice teachers enrolled in the first course of a comprehensive MAT program. Findings suggest that graduate preservice teacher educators bring strengths to the classroom that distinguish them from "traditional" undergraduate preservice teachers. These differences warrant careful consideration by teacher educators.*

Many states are facing historic shortages in all teaching areas, and today's alarming attrition rates simply exacerbate this shortage. Ingersoll (2002) reports that 14% of all new teachers nationwide leave the profession within their 1<sup>st</sup> year, and by the end of their 4<sup>th</sup> year, over 40% of all new teachers are no longer in classrooms. Florida is an excellent example of this national crisis: The state is currently experiencing a profound teacher shortage, with up to 20,000 new teachers needed each year for the foreseeable future (Matus, 2005).

As the demand for teachers increases, states, universities, and school districts are designing programs that quickly transition college graduates into teaching careers. Currently, 47 states have alternative program routes to the classroom, varying in terms of length, coursework, field experiences, degree offered, and rigor (Levine, 2006). This trend results in a marked increase in the number of *graduate* preservice teachers in colleges of education. These students range in age, previous career, background, and the nature and extent of their experiences in classrooms, when compared with undergraduate preservice teachers (Morton, Williams, & Brindley, 2006). Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research involving this unique and growing population, and as a result, research in this area is both timely and necessary.

The authors in this study assert that an exploration of graduate preservice teachers' initial beliefs about teaching would assist teacher educators in understanding the educational perspectives this growing population brings to the graduate school setting. Furthermore, studying initial beliefs of graduate preservice teachers may assist teacher educators in understanding the working philosophies through which this population explores, develops, and refines their beliefs about teaching during graduate teacher preparation coursework.

## Literature Review

### *Teacher Beliefs*

The notion of teacher beliefs is a complex construct that is difficult to identify, define, and describe. A review of the research literature reveals a plethora of terms used synonymously with teacher beliefs including *attitudes, dispositions, knowledge, and perspectives* (Pajares, 1992). Because of this variety, defining beliefs is challenging, with much of the confusion resulting from diverse philosophical perspectives. For example, Nespor (1987) described beliefs as being evaluative, affectively stored, and episodic or experience-based in nature. Rokeach (1968) defined beliefs as having multiple components,

with cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements, in essence suggesting that beliefs are comprised of knowledge, emotion, and action. Brown and Cooney (1982) described beliefs as “dispositions in action and major determinants of behavior” that are specific to the context in which they occur (Pajares, 1992, p. 313). The variety of terms and definitions used when discussing teacher beliefs underscores the complex nature of this construct.

Researchers assert that preservice teachers’ beliefs are a powerful vehicle for providing effective teacher preparation and for understanding teachers’ classroom practices and behaviors (Hart, 2004; Pajares, 1992). Preservice teacher beliefs are formed long before they enter their first education course, through a multitude of experiences including students’ apprenticeships of observation (Lortie, 1975), their life stories, their work in schools, and media portrayals of teaching (Pugach, 2006). Weinstein (1988) described preservice teachers as having an “unrealistic optimism” regarding their future teaching careers. Similarly, preservice teachers conceptualize teaching as the teacher delivering knowledge and students receiving the content (Doyle, 1997; Richardson, 1996). Researchers suggest that failure to study pre-existing beliefs can inhibit preservice teacher development and the acquisition of new knowledge about becoming a teacher (Morton et al., 2006; Pajares, 1992). Ultimately, studying teacher beliefs is essential given “unexplored entering beliefs may be responsible for the perpetuation of antiquated and ineffectual teaching” (Pajares, 1992, p. 328).

### *Alternative Certification*

Alternative certification programs have been increasing in popularity since the early 1980s due to a combination of factors: teacher shortages, state-sponsored certification programs, and desires to improve teacher preparation (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005); however, research on alternative certification programs is underrepresented in the literature (Levine, 2006; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). One explanation may be the wide parameters used for defining *alternative certification*. Alternative programs run the gamut from traditional graduate programs to expedited licensure in fast-track programs to school district-based certification options (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Some alternative approaches have been described by Masci and Stotko as a “quick fix” (2006, p. 47), and by Weiner and Newtzie as “fast-track” (2006, p. 155). Levine (2006) summarizes the disparity among alternative certification programs as “linked more by what they *are not* than what they are” (2006, p. 16). In fact, Sindelar, Daunic, and Rennells (2004) suggest that alternative certification programs may be heterogeneous to the point that discussing them as a “whole” is inappropriate. Despite this disparity, alternative certification programs can successfully produce quality educators “when certain program elements—meaningful methods courses, field experience, supervision and mentorship—are in place” (Sindelar et al., 2004, p. 210). Unfortunately, the contention is that many alternative certification programs typically lack these critical elements and are ultimately inefficient (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

While assumptions are made that participants in alternative certification programs are more diverse, older, and include more males, this is largely context-specific, and there are no definitive trends in the literature (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Some research suggests a larger number of alternative candidates take positions teaching in urban schools (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). The diversity of students enrolled reflects how alternative programs were often created to target specific clientele: career-switchers, racially diverse populations, retired military, and paraprofessionals (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). In essence, the purposes of program creation may influence the demographics of the students who enroll in these programs, and the demographics may influence the type of program.

One model frequently associated with alternative certification is the initial graduate certification program situated in universities. Despite the rapid increase in these programs, there is a lack of research involving graduate preservice teachers. We contend that the life experiences of graduate preservice teachers distinguish them from traditional undergraduate preservice teachers. Consequently, there is a pressing need to develop research that provides insight into the working philosophies through which this student population experiences teacher preparation. As teacher educators, understanding students’ beliefs provides a framework for creating classroom experiences

that intentionally support or conflict with the existing beliefs of students. The significance of this research strand should not be understated as the existing research literature on preservice teacher beliefs focuses almost exclusively on traditional undergraduate preservice teacher education students.

## Method

### *Context of the Study*

Five years ago, professors in an elementary teacher education department at a large university in the southeastern United States developed a Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) in Elementary Education. The program was designed to attract candidates with a baccalaureate degree in a field outside of education into a comprehensive graduate program. Although much of the research literature would categorize this program as alternative certification, the authors contend that this program is *not* by definition "alternative"; rather it is comprehensive. As a result, we consider the classification of comprehensive MAT programs in the literature alongside state and school district pathways to alternative programs (see Zeichner & Schulte, 2001) to be an oversimplification. Alternative pathways to certification in this southeastern state feature reduced training offered to temporary teachers seeking state certification while already beginning to teach in the elementary classroom.

In contrast, the MAT students in this study are required to take 53 credit hours towards their elementary certification, including 9 hours of graduate coursework for English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), 12 hours of coursework in literacy education, and 3 hours each in content methods (science, mathematics, and social studies), classroom management, measurement and assessment, and psychological foundations of learning. In addition, MAT students must successfully complete two semester-long field-based experiences. This MAT program was tailored to meet the specific needs of the prospective second-career teacher, to maintain the high expectations and integrity of graduate level work at the university, and to fulfill the state mandates for elementary certification.

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were 21 first-semester graduate preservice teachers (GPSTs) enrolled in the fall cohort of the Elementary MAT program (see Table 1). All students in the fall cohort chose to participate. They ranged in age from 22 to 49. Two participants were African American and one was Latino; however, all remaining participants were Caucasian. One of the 21 participants was male. All participants were enrolled in an introductory methods course that addressed a wide variety of topics including foundations of teaching, diversity, learning styles, and lesson and unit planning.

Information regarding previous experience, educational background, and degree of experience in elementary classrooms was gathered from the participants during the first class meeting of the introductory methods course.

**Table 1**  
*Demographics of the Sample*

Gender		Ethnicity	
Females	20	Caucasian	19
Males	1	African American	2
		Latino	1
Number of children		Prior experience in schools	
No children	17	No experience	14
One child	1	Substitute teaching	3
Two children	2	Volunteer	1
Three children	1	Tutoring	1
		Temporary teaching	2

The participants included full-time graduate students with part-time jobs, classroom teachers on temporary certification, and full-time employees from other professions. These students had a wide range of previous experiences and careers in fields such as real estate, banking, event planning, preschool teaching, and restaurant management. In addition, the participants held a wide variety of undergraduate degrees including accounting, communications, and psychology. Of the participants, 6 had experience in elementary classroom settings but the remaining 15 had none. Several of the participants also had their own children in schools. The diversity in age, background, undergraduate degrees, and work experience reflects the varying characteristics of graduate preservice teachers (Zumwalt & Craig, 2005).

### *Data Collection*

As part of a regular course assignment, the GPSTs were asked to write an initial teaching philosophy during the first week of class. The assignment was created by the instructor to establish the GPSTs' initial beliefs about teaching and learning, using six structured prompts related to the course objectives: teaching and learning, classroom environment, students as learners, teaching methodology, parents and communities, and collaboration (Appendix). The course instructor emphasized with the GPSTs that there were no right or wrong answers, and that assignment grades would be earned on task completion, not on the nature of their beliefs. Further, the instructor emphasized her desire to understand what perceptions the GPSTs brought to the first course as a means of designing course instruction. This assignment was completed prior to any course content delivery. A structured approach was chosen over a more open-ended philosophy assignment to encourage GPSTs to consider the multifaceted nature of teaching in elementary classrooms and to activate existing schemas for upcoming course content. In accordance with the literature on teacher beliefs, it is essential to explore preservice teachers' pre-existing beliefs in order to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge (Morton et al., 2006; Pajares, 1992). We acknowledge that structuring the assignment forced students to consider their beliefs in accordance with the six prompts; however, these prompts were directly connected to course content, and it is what they stated within these prompts that was of interest to us. Their beliefs written in response to these six prompts were entirely of their own construction. The students were given the week between the first and second course meetings to complete the assignment. So as to not unduly influence the GPSTs' responses to this graded assignment, they were not invited to participate in this research study until after their final course grades were submitted at the end of the semester.

### *Data Analysis*

Content analysis required the authors to "search the text for recurring words or themes" (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Initial analysis began with a thorough reading of each participant's teaching philosophy. During this first read, the authors worked independently of one another with their own copies of the data sets, and they made analytical notes as they familiarized themselves with the students' philosophies.

Next, working collaboratively and beginning with the first prompt, we read through each participant's writing, charting key phrases, words, and concepts. We were interested in the emerging themes within each of the six prompts. While we acknowledge that we asked them to reflect on their beliefs about certain aspects of teaching, it is what they said in response to each prompt that is the focus of the analysis. We then clustered like comments, using analytic memos—"developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis" (Patton, 2002, p. 463). No predetermined themes were used for organizing the GPSTs' comments; rather as clustered units of meaning accumulated, we were able to establish emerging themes. This process was repeated for each of the six prompts. On numerous occasions during the data analysis process, we returned to the GPSTs' original philosophy statements to confirm the viability of emerging themes. Initially, the emergent themes were focused *within* each prompt. As the analysis continued, it became apparent that the prompts themselves were interrelated and that notions and concepts described by the GPSTs were not



confined to the six individual prompts, but instead appeared *across* the students' responses to the prompts. As a result, the responses across the sample are best represented by five interrelated themes indicative of the six original prompts. The subthemes that emerged are representative of the GPSTs' specific pre-existing beliefs described in their philosophy statements.

### Findings

The following themes are reflective of the GPSTs' responses to the six prompts and are summarized in Table 2. Emerging subthemes, indicative of the GPSTs' pre-existing beliefs in each of the themes are shared below. These results feature the voice of the sample by using the words *they* chose in their writing and by citing sentences and paragraphs attributed to particular students as illustrative of a theme. In order to demonstrate the results are representative of the sample, we used the assigned number codes with each of the following examples.

**Table 2**  
*A Summary of Themes*

Theme	Subthemes
Learner success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning theories</li> <li>• Characteristics of successful learners</li> </ul>
Elements of teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining teaching and learning</li> <li>• Role of teacher in learning process</li> </ul>
The learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional and social climate</li> <li>• Classroom conditions for learning</li> </ul>
Collaboration within the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration within the classroom</li> <li>• Collaboration among teachers</li> </ul>
Community beyond the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families as teachers</li> <li>• Communities as resources</li> </ul>

#### *Theme 1: Learner Success*

Across the six prompts, the GPSTs described learner success as dependent on the teacher's knowledge of learning theories, as well as on the characteristics of the individual learners.

*Learning theories.* Despite just beginning formal teacher preparation, the GPSTs already owned clear notions of learning theory, and prior to any coursework were able to share these ideas. They depicted learning as a cognitive activity and wrote about conceptual connections, discovery learning, and multiple intelligences as mirrored in the following three statements:

Student 13: "Students learn best when they understand the concepts and reasons for doing things and make connections in their brains, not simply memorizing facts."

Student 5: "Learning based on creating conceptual connections strengthens our comprehension and encourages curiosity."

Student 1: "Learning is best facilitated when students are guided toward a concept, and then they are left to develop it in their own minds."

In addition, seven of the students spoke specifically to the notion of "active" learning and participation. Typical of these comments, Student 13 asserted:

I believe my students learn best when they actively participate in the learning process. As active learners, my students are excited about learning and eager to get involved. I create an environment where they feel that there is value in asking questions. As inquisitive students, they challenge their minds and their interest grows in unison with their learning.

*Characteristics of the successful learner.* This subtheme was evident in the philosophy of every GPST, and the descriptions of learner characteristics were entirely positive in nature. Most students spoke to the dispositions required of the successful learner, using descriptors such as *excited*, *energetic*, *responsible*, *motivated*, and *hardworking*. There were also several comments regarding the diversity of the learner—the fact that they have different interests and backgrounds and bring different perspectives to the classroom. Typical of these, Student 8 commented, “I believe that every student is different and that every student brings with them something special ... and I get them excited about their strengths.” Similarly, Student 6 summarized the notion of diversity saying, “All of my students are smart. They just have different interests, backgrounds, and ways of learning.”

The GPSTs asserted that the students must be engaged for teaching and learning to be successful. They suggested students should pay attention to directions, use original thoughts and ideas, keep their interest in learning and have a desire to learn, while looking to the teacher with “respect and expectation” (Student 13).

### *Theme 2: Elements of Teaching*

The GPSTs identified the critical elements of teaching across the six prompts by defining the language, recognizing the interpersonal relationship between teacher and learner, and identifying specific teaching strategies.

*Defining teaching and learning.* Seventeen of the GPSTs defined the relationship between teaching and learning. They chose broad, sweeping descriptors such as “the basis for productive society” (Student 17), “learning as the key to knowledge” (Student 21), “learning as a constant state for all of us” (Student 14), and “the sharing of culture” (Student 3). Most students, however, also spoke specifically to the relationship between teaching and learning. They described this relationship using terms such as *intertwined*, *reciprocal*, *meshed*, and *connected*. They asserted that this relationship is vital and continuous and requires reciprocity and responsibility from both the teacher and the learner.

*Role of teacher in learning process.* The GPSTs considered the role of teacher as critical in teaching and learning. They claimed the attributes of a successful teacher included confidence, comfort, responsibility, trust, and an understanding of the developmental needs of children. Further, they suggested that successful teachers knew the children that they taught and empowered the students through authentic, engaged, and creative learning experiences. Two students noted how the teacher also learns from the child.

Most GPSTs also associated methods of planning and delivery with successful teaching, describing specific active learning strategies such as notions of interactive group work and the use of games and projects in an engaging and fun learning environment. They spoke to the teacher’s role in capturing the students’ attention to increase comprehension. The list of recommended techniques included engaging their minds, using imagination, stimulating discussion, being available to the students, making learning fun, and utilizing positive reinforcement and encouragement. The word *fun* was frequently used in statements such as “create fun, trusting, and informal learning environments” (Student 20), “use varied learning activities that are fun and stimulating” (Student 21), and “learning can be fun” (Student 1).

In addition, three students overtly referenced “planning” in lesson construction, and other GPSTs also referred to activities such as independent work, group projects, using technology and multimedia, and honoring recess time as methods for helping engage students. The GPSTs discussed their role in engaging the learner with phrases such as “making connections to interests,” “various modalities,” “higher level thinking,” “multiple intelligences,” “scaffolding information,” and “using patterns.”

*Theme 3: The Learning Environment*

Elements of the learning environment emerged across the GPSTs' responses to the six prompts. They described the environment in terms of the social and emotional climate and the conditions required for learning.

*Emotional and social climate.* The emotional and social climate was prioritized and elaborated on in their narratives. Each one of the GPSTs spoke to notions of warm, safe, inviting, comfortable, and happy classroom environments. Student 9 asserted, "My classroom is a home away from home, and the members are a family. We are there to support and care for each other." Similarly, Student 5 concluded, "I believe that my classroom is a sanctuary for free thought and respectful self-expression." The students also made statements of expected behaviors in the classroom. These included notions of students learning from one another, learning about and appreciating cultural differences and diversity, and interacting with one another respectfully. This idea is best summarized by the statement, "My classroom is a place where students can learn not only about key subject areas, but also key social skills such as responsibility, empathy, self-control, and cooperation" (Student 21).

In addition, GPSTs described the need for teachers to challenge and encourage the students while demonstrating compassion, treating them with respect, and giving them personal attention. A common notion that underpinned this theme was the idea of teacher responsibility in the classroom environment. As Student 16 asserted, "I believe all of my students are smart and capable of learning. It is my responsibility to find the trigger for each child that will open up a new world." Further, students described their responsibility in terms of professional reflection and development. The GPSTs stressed that teachers must be interested in the material, retain a positive attitude and devotion to children, continually re-evaluate and improve themselves as professionals, and be organized and enthusiastic in their work. Examples include:

Student 19: "My energetic, positive attitude captures my students' attention and allows them to easily understand my lesson plans. Negative feedback, negative experiences, and a negative attitude equal unmotivated students."

Student 9: "As a teacher, I must continue to learn from further schooling, from workshops, from reading, and from sharing with my peers. There is always room for more knowledge and more growth as a teacher. I am presented with new problems and need to find new ways to solve them."

*Classroom conditions for learning.* The GPSTs suggested that a climate favorable for learning, where children feel supported and respected, is essential for successful class discussions, meaningful choices in activities, authentic cooperation, real-life connections, and nurturing relationships. As Student 3 said:

The teacher can help motivate students to learn by giving them a choice in what they learn... I believe that students learn best when it is something that interests them. If you relate the topics that the students are required to learn to things that interest them, then they will be more motivated.

The GPSTs portrayed the physical environment by describing stations and centers, seating arrangements, and the classroom library. The GPSTs recognized that student learning is dependent on the physical resources associated with learning, including books, technology, learning centers, and the use of music. Fourteen of the students spoke specifically to the aesthetics of the classroom describing posters, pictures, plants, and furniture. As Student 17 noted, "My classroom is colorful, with no dead space, meaning there is always something to provide visual stimulation."

*Theme 4: Collaboration Within the School*

When asked to describe their beliefs about collaboration, GPSTs used descriptors such as integral, necessary, fundamental, and vital. Two subthemes emerged in terms of GPSTs portrayal of collaboration: within the classroom and among teachers.

*Collaboration within the classroom.* This theme focused on teacher-student and student-student relationships. Fourteen of the 21 GPSTs wrote specific comments about the interdependency of the teacher and the students. They noted the learning process is collaborative and that everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner. Student 5 exemplified this interdependency:

I believe that teaching and learning are processes not roles. Though traditionally I am the 'teacher' and my students are the 'learners,' I stand to learn as much from them as they from me. My students are full of original thought and ideas from which all other members of our classroom community can benefit and grow.

Two-thirds of the GPSTs asserted that teachers should both ask for and be open to students sharing their opinions and feedback. The GPSTs suggested that within-class collaboration occurred through creation of classroom rules, opportunities to input their ideas, practice in collaborative group settings, making choices in assignments based on interest, teachers' pedagogy, and negotiating time management. An additional seven students focused on the developmental value of teacher-student collaboration, stating students would develop social skills such as respect and would practice interactive experiences that would prepare them for life. These notions were best summarized by Student 17.

Collaboration also teaches children important social skills. They learn how to work with others, how to accept responsibility for their portion of the work, and how to deal with people with whom they do not get along. Working together also allows students to see other students' view points on a topic or subject, which will ultimately enrich the students' learning experiences.

*Collaboration among teachers.* The data indicated that collaboration among teachers leads to a sense of community and teamwork. In terms of teacher-to-teacher collaboration, the GPSTs noted benefits such as a knowledge sharing, professional support, and mentoring. Specifically, students described these notions in terms of discussions of the scope and sequence of curriculum, coplanning, new teacher mentorship, the sharing of resources, and purposeful partnerships. They also identified the interpersonal benefits of listening to and understanding one another's perspectives, the benefits of consultation, and of simply "bouncing ideas." Illustrative of these ideas was the following quote from Student 13: "As part of a dynamic team ... [teachers should] use our expertise to help each other be better at teaching and visit each other's classrooms to share with the students our talents and our areas of specialization. We often collaborate and partner in order to maximize our creativity and resources." Furthermore, collaboration among teachers was viewed as a professional responsibility.

*Theme 5: Community Beyond the School*

When asked to reflect on their beliefs about families and schools, the GPSTs conceptualized *community* in broad terms and focused on collaboration across community stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, parents, extended families, community leaders, mentors, and the students. A common notion was that the teacher is the liaison between all stakeholders and should initiate interaction and encourage communication.

*Families as teachers.* Fundamental to the GPSTs' views, families are responsible for the primary caregiving, the emotional growth and development, and the values associated with schooling for their children. As Student 22 noted:

Students' mindsets about school and learning are often already shaped by the time they begin school, especially if they have observed older siblings' positive or negative reactions to and experiences in school. What students have seen around them in their families and communities regarding reading, school, learning, exploring, questioning, and other issues greatly affect students' perspectives. I want to make sure that parents are aware of this influence on their children so that they can make sure that the students see school and learning as positive experiences.

Eight of the GPSTs noted that teachers depend on parental participation as volunteers in the school environment. An additional seven GPSTs described this participation in the school environment as essential and integral, and they listed numerous volunteer activities, including field trips, reading tutors, speakers. Student 5 illustrated this theme through the following comment:

I believe community and family are my greatest allies in my students' education. Strive as I may, I cannot always teach alone. Each student's family and community is a welcome contributor to our class, be it through at-home involvement, in-school volunteering, or any other assistance willingly provided. I cannot be there to answer my students' questions around the clock, but they can.

Finally, students noted specific procedures for communicating with families, and recognized that the teacher must ensure that families know what is happening at school. Five GPSTs captured the notion of regular updates. As Student 13 explained, "I am sensitive to obstacles that families may face in communicating with teachers. Therefore, I do whatever I can to keep the lines of communication open with parents." Suggested communication modes include letters home, phone calls, newsletters, e-mails, and second-language translations.

*Communities as resources.* Volunteering in the school reflects a second theme: the community as resource. The GPSTs spoke to the construct of community in the classroom and within and beyond the school. Five GPSTs wrote that within the school community, teachers should share their diversity and different cultures, inform instruction as experts, and contribute as leaders in school events. Beyond the school, GPSTs recognized the students are shaped by their diverse backgrounds and the influences of the community. Believing that students sense support from the wider community, GPSTs emphasized how teachers must be familiar with the community and its influences on students. Ten GPSTs described this influence in terms of diversity of backgrounds, support, community resources, and social problems. They wrote of how teachers should be aware of happenings elsewhere in the school and beyond, and should be sensitive to the anxieties children bring to school. As Student 14 noted:

Community and family can provide a great support system for children, but if a child does not have access to those two things, we as the school must be certain to take their place. The school acts as the community and family in situations in which the students have neither, and I, as their teacher, act as their mother, father, neighbor, confidante, and mentor; every role community and family typically provide.

### Discussion

The process of reviewing the results led to extensive conversations between us, but three particular observations merit further discussion: images of teaching at the point of program entry, limited understandings of curriculum, and implications of these beliefs and understandings for program delivery. Given our sample size, we do not claim generalizability. However, we suggest that the insights derived from this study may resonate with teacher educators by demonstrating the importance of exploring the preexisting beliefs of graduate preservice teacher populations in planning programmatic experiences.

### *Images of Teaching*

In the first week of their MAT program, these GPSTs were able to convey some clear, distinct images of teaching through both examples and nonexamples. They were able to articulate images that were quite progressive, such as notions of engaged and active learners and student-centered learning. This is contrary to the research literature that suggests preservice teachers enter teaching programs with beliefs reflecting teaching as giving of content, and learning as receiving content (Doyle, 1997; Richardson, 1996). In addition, the GPSTs frequently represented teachers in the data as being concerned about the role of others in the child's life and in their learning processes. Numerous GPSTs asserted that it was the teacher's responsibility to not only affect the child's learning in the classroom, but to also purposefully influence the ways in which the family valued and supported the child's education. GPSTs did not shirk their responsibilities as educators, although it is noteworthy that they only addressed the contextual pressures of teaching in very limited terms.

We are unsure the extent to which the GPSTs' perspectives derive from their own experiences. Did strong examples or nonexamples influence their subsequent images of teaching? We recommend that program faculty deliberately encourage GPSTs to identify their teaching beliefs, as the students may not even recognize their pervasive beliefs and certainly may not have articulated them. Armed with this information, teacher educators can plan for program experiences that will validate or act as dissonance for the GPSTs, understanding that persevering beliefs are part of the students' latent philosophy (Bolin, 1988) and are often difficult to reposition (Schommer, 1990; Weinstein, 1990). For example, because the pre-existing beliefs for this sample were quite progressive, we need to consider ways to support these beliefs through programmatic experiences. In addition, these GPSTs may experience dissonance when their progressive beliefs are challenged by traditional experiences in field placements. As teacher educators, we need to design experiences to help them make sense of this conflict. If the literature is accurate (Hollingsworth, 1989; Pajares, 1992; Wubbles, 1992), then the identification and articulation of beliefs is essential prior to any efforts to assimilate or accommodate new information.

### *Limited Understandings of Curriculum*

Without exception, the GPSTs were able to describe instructional strategies for delivery of content knowledge, evoking numerous organizational structures such as centers, peer tutoring, literature circles, and learning groups. In other words, the GPSTs' writings situated curriculum as primarily the act of teaching content knowledge, but there was no reference *at all* to what they would teach in terms of national standards and the state curriculum. We are left wondering to what extent the GPSTs understand curriculum beyond the instruction of content.

None of the GPSTs referenced planning beyond the lesson plan, and there was a complete absence of statements about measurement or evaluation. They did not associate the act of teaching as being driven by assessment of students. This was the case in spite of the persistent and comprehensive focus by the regional and national media on student achievement, standardized assessment instruments, and legislative policy related to evaluation of students. Within the classroom, the assessment of discrete units of knowledge, such as weekly spelling tests and end-of-unit assessments, was not mentioned. As faculty, we recognize that the GPSTs will receive a healthy dose of federal and state policy, summative/formative testing, and assessment and evaluation coursework, both within the university and during their field experiences. Nonetheless, it was surprising to us, particularly given that several GPSTs are parents of school-aged children, that the role of evaluation in the classroom was not expressed. We wonder whether this phenomenon can be partially attributed to the fact that most of the GPSTs graduated from high school prior to the present educational climate emphasizing standardized student achievement. For this sample of GPSTs, it is what they chose NOT to include in their philosophy statements that provide insight for teacher educators in terms of needed coursework and experiences.

### *Implications of Beliefs*

Consistent with the literature (Weinstein, 1988), the GPSTs' understandings of both teaching and the curriculum are illustrative of their naivety about the emphases of teaching in the current educational context and reflect a degree of idealism. On the other hand, they recognize classrooms as complex places, describing them in terms of emotional, social, and physical domains, and recognize the role of cognitive development in instruction. We question if these holistic notions of the child and of learning are derived from several students' backgrounds in psychology and the social sciences. This recognition of teaching as akin to caring (Noddings, 1999) is in some ways reassuring. Upon entry into an initial certification masters program, these students are able to convey notions of the whole child. On the other hand, we are also well aware that we need to prepare these GPSTs for an educational landscape where adequate yearly progress, high-stakes standardized testing, and school grades have encouraged the use of didactic teaching practices (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005). Teacher educators should aspire to prepare professional career educators, rather than short-term occupational teachers, and should not assume that GPSTs hold a broader world view of education simply because they are older. For this sample, we assert that it is essential to support the GPSTs' idealistic and worthy visions of teaching while enculturating them to the realities of present policy and curriculum in the elementary classroom.

### **Conclusion**

The literature to date has been remiss in establishing preservice teacher beliefs for second-career educators. In limited ways, the GPSTs in this study remind us of seminal research on traditional undergraduate preservice teacher beliefs (Pajares, 1992). For example, the GPSTs' idealism and unfamiliarity of the curriculum in all its facets seems to mirror the literature on undergraduate preservice teachers' perspectives (Weinstein, 1988; 1990) and how they define successful teachers (Calderhead & Robson, 1991).

On the other hand, we perceive some distinctions in the data that warrant careful consideration by teacher educators who work with initial certification graduate students. Research indicates that second-career teachers bring strengths to their teaching (Mayotte, 2003), and the data in this study suggests similar findings. Unlike our "traditional" undergraduates who attended middle and high schools within the present era of high-stakes testing and view this emphasis as the norm, these GPSTs articulate different perspectives. Furthermore, these GPSTs bring background experiences, such as baccalaureate degrees in the Humanities, and values found in other career fields, that inform and shape their beliefs about teaching. They seem to suggest that education is an academic, social, and reciprocal enterprise.

We recognize that this study is limited to one cohort of graduate preservice teachers, and that these results are not generalizable. However, we believe that this study of GPSTs' pre-existing teacher beliefs will resonate with teacher educators. There is great value in understanding the beliefs that GPSTs bring into the classroom as a platform for designing teacher-preparation experiences, and we contend that teacher educators have an obligation to design course and field experiences that foster their professional development based on these beliefs. Furthermore, we suggest that this data informs continuing reflection about graduate certification programs and graduate students in teacher education. During a time when teacher shortages have resulted in the recruitment of second-career teachers, we recommend that further studies need to be conducted with this dynamic population. Additionally, we recommend expanding the study of graduate preservice teachers to include those seeking certification in secondary education. Perhaps similarities and differences between the two groups might inform program design in teacher education. It is our fervent hope that teacher educators can utilize this fledgling research-base to deliberately plan for GPST program experiences that address both the common and distinctive philosophies of this specific student population.

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## APPENDIX

### Prompts for Philosophy Assignment

- I believe that teaching and learning ...
- I believe my classroom is ...
- I believe all my students are/they learn best when they ...
- I believe my students learn best when I ...
- I believe community/family is/are ...
- I believe collaboration is ...