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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study investigated three first-year teachers at one high school during 1997-98, examining what factors contributed to their success or failure during their entry year and describing the process of teacher identity formation, what factors influenced the identity they created, and how they interpreted lessons learned. Data collection involved three formal, semistructured interviews; a stages of concern questionnaire; written or audiotaped journals; formal classroom observations; semistructured interviews with students of the teachers and their mentor teachers; document analysis of teachers' educational philosophies written as part of their undergraduate teacher education coursework; and informal observations of teachers outside the classroom. The beginning teachers felt a sense of strangeness as the school year began; they were continually surprised by things they were expected to know that they had not been told about. The mentoring program began too late to help during the initial weeks, when it was most needed, so the beginning teachers muddled through with help from colleagues. Five factors were important in their success or failure: communication, mentoring, classroom savvy, discipline, and expectations of various power blocks. The paper presents a Power/Discipline/Expectations model to detail how the factors interact and discusses lessons learned from each of the teachers' experiences. Implications and recommendations for school districts and preservice teacher education programs are provided. (Contains 74 references.) (SM)

First-Year Teachers: Strangers in Strange Lands

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by

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Objectives, Goals, Purposes

This qualitative study was a bounded case study with multiple cases: a collective study of three first-year teachers at one particular high school during the 1997-98 school year. It's purpose was to learn more about what factors contributed to the success or failure of these first-year teachers during their entry year into the profession. It describes the process of teacher identity formation in their entry year, what factors might have played a role in the identity they created, and how they interpreted the lessons learned this first year. By studying three different first-year teachers, teaching different subjects in widely-varying classroom situations, and with different expectations placed on them by the administration, I hoped to learn more about how these new teachers constructed their self-image as "teacher." I was also interested in the role school culture played in shaping of new teachers' images about themselves and how they should act as teachers.

Perspectives and Theoretical Framework

Numerous studies have been done on the problems associated with the transition from student teacher to classroom teacher, a phenomenon commonly referred to as "reality shock" or "transition shock." Simon Veenman described this reality shock as the "collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training by the hard and rude reality of everyday classroom life" (Veenman, 1984, 143).

Most educational research on new teachers in the past thirty years has been grounded in the Developmental Stages of Concern framework. The work of Fuller (1969) and Fuller and Bown (1975) on conceptualizing the "stages of concern" framework is the most frequently cited explanatory model. They concluded that teachers go through three stages:

survival, mastery, and impact (Fuller & Bown, 1975, 37). Each stage carries with it associated concerns regarding self, task, and teaching impact, respectively.

Teachers can also be "socialized" into the profession through the deliberate efforts of their teacher training programs, their new "bosses" in the workplace, their fellow teachers, or even through the responses they get from their students. The teacher socialization framework is based heavily on the studies of Lortie (1975) and Lacey (1977). Both Lortie's and Lacey's work in the 1970's talk about what is, in effect, teacher "enculturation" into the profession either through overt efforts by the administration or covert and/or accidental enculturation by the teaching situation itself, their colleagues, and students. New teachers pass through stages of compliance (behave as they're expected to), identification (recognize the difference between how they're expected to behave and how they feel they should behave), and internalization (they personalize their "role" as teacher, resolving the perceived differences of the earlier stage). This would seem to be a further development of stage theory. It includes the addition of conceptualizing the new teacher as going through a cognitive dissonance that, once resolved, leads to the adoption of a role that balances their personal beliefs about teaching and themselves as "teacher" with the expectations of the contextual situation in which they work. However, this approach is still based on a cognitive premise that is sequential and hierarchical, although it does recognize the social nature of our work in schools. While each of these frameworks recognize the occurrence of "reality shock" by entry-year teachers and could serve as a basis for conceptualizing teacher education courses, they differ in the amount of personal agency the new teacher has in dealing with the phenomenon of "reality shock."

Data from the study were examined from the standpoint of these frameworks to see if they were adequate to explain the perceptual and behavioral changes observed over the course of the study. A more postmodern framework of "identity construction" would recognize new teachers as having an active voice in determining, consciously, an identity of themselves as "teacher." This would take place through a complex negotiation between their ideal image of a teacher, expectations placed on them by others, and their perceptions of what they have to be like to survive. This sense of personal agency in identity formation sets this framework apart from the more traditional explanatory approaches of role "adoption" by new teachers as they instead struggle to construct an identity that allows them to find a place for themselves in their new setting.

Methods

The site used in this study was a high school is a small city school system in a predominantly rural county. It had an enrollment of around 700 students in grades 9-12. As a staff member at the school, I had a solid, professional working relationship with each of the teachers at this school and enjoyed the trust and support of the building principal. I was an "insider" in terms of my knowledge of the school, its culture, and the administration and staff.

Three first-year teachers, one male and two female, agreed to participate in the study.. All were 1997 graduates in their first year of teaching. All but one, were the typical entry age for new teachers (21-22 years old). The lone male first-year teacher, aged 24, taught college prep Chemistry and Physics, and the two females taught sophomore-level General Biology, and multi-grade-level Vocational Agriculture, respectively.

Data collection consisted of three formal, semi-structured interviews; use of a questionnaire developed to measure "stages of concern" (Rogan, Borich, & Taylor, 1992);

written or audiotaped journals; three formal classroom observations, announced beforehand; semi-structured interviews with the students of these teachers and their mentor teachers; document analysis of copies of their "educational philosophy" written as part of their undergraduate teacher education course work; and informal observations of them outside the classroom: in the halls, at lunch, at school events, and at faculty social events. I also kept a Research Journal which contained notes from the formal and informal observations I made. Data analysis was done using a constant comparative approach, merging the data collection and data analysis into a single, iterative process. Initially, semi-structured interviews were held with each of the participants to gain background information. The interviews were transcribed and logged (Lofland & Lofland, 1994) to allow ease of analysis. I followed Bogdan and Biklin's (1992, 167-172) use of dimensionalized "thinking units" to initially look at the logged data. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) open coding process was used to develop these thinking units, derived from the informants' own language, which were revised as additional data was collected throughout the study. Data was then compared to these thinking units; Bogdan and Biklin's (1992) axial coding. The data collected were then analyzed to find conceptual textual segments (CTS) (Hofmann, 1995): text segments that have meaning in the context of the thinking units being used to organize the data from the study. After the initial analysis, further interviews were done, with the same procedure of coding, analysis, revision and re-ordering of thinking units, review of previous interview data, and revision of scripted questions for further interviews. This process continued through the end of data collection in May of 1998. Frequent "member checks" along the way helped inform my analysis and allowed a check for accurate reflection or "sense" of the issue. A description of each case and its themes was done; a "within-case" analysis (Creswell, 1998, 63). Then a thematic analysis

of all the cases was done; a "cross case" analysis (Creswell, 1998, 63). This was repeated three times over the year. A final "within-case" analysis for each teacher and a "cross-case" analysis of all three first-year teachers was done for the entire year.

My "Read" on These Teachers' First Year

As the year began, each of these first-year teachers expressed the sense of strangeness they felt at being "the teacher." They were not from the community and knew no one at the school prior to their coming to Wabash High School. They felt lonely and isolated, personally and professionally. They had only their undergraduate field observations and student teaching experiences to prepare them for life in the classroom as "the teacher," and each realized those experiences were artificial and inadequate to a certain degree. They wanted to be told what was expected of them and were disappointed when their formal indoctrination meeting at the beginning of the year failed to do so. They were especially uneasy in the first few weeks, as they were continually surprised by things they were expected to know, or to be doing, that no one had ever told them about. The mentoring program did not get off the ground until November; too late to help during the first few weeks when it was most needed, especially by Bob. To combat this lack of communication about necessary information, the first-year teachers turned to faculty acquaintances for help, and to a greater or lesser degree, muddled through, learning as they went. They were all concerned about discipline, so they watched, listened, questioned, and learned from other faculty what was, or was not, considered "acceptable" behavior and how to deal with "unacceptable" behavior. They dealt with trying to motivate students and placate, or involve, parents. They sought to "fit in" with their fellow faculty and "be accepted." They sought to gain their students' respect for themselves as "the teacher." They balanced their work loads, their social lives at school, and their private lives.

For a time, these were lives of "quiet desperation." By the end of the year, Liz and Rose emerged from the "initiation" into the profession and were seen as having "made it." Bob will have to go through the process again at another school.

Results and Conclusions

While each of the new teachers reported many of the concerns outlined by the work of Fuller and Bown (Fuller, 1969), interviews and observations reveal them to being more affected by their fellow teachers and the building culture than Fuller and Bown's model would suggest. The data indicate a much greater correspondence with the ideas of teacher socialization, as outlined in the work of Lortie (1975) and Lacey (1977).

Five factors were identified as playing a role in the success or failure of these three first-year teachers: communication, mentoring, "classroom savy," discipline, and expectations of various power blocs. The Power/Discipline/ Expectations (PDE) model was developed to detail how these factors interact.

The Power/Discipline/Expectations (PDE) Model for Interpretation of The First-Year Experience

I believe the success and failure of these teachers can be attributed to 1) the degree to which they were educated about, and adopted, the cultural norms of this school as their guiding principles for their classroom practice; and 2) how well they came to understand the power relationships that existed within the district. These two factors are so inter-linked as to be inseparable.

The power relationships that existed, both formal and informal, had a direct bearing on the expectations that were placed on each of these first-year teachers. The nature of the power

relationships was different for each new teacher. This produced a different set of expectations for each.

Bob was working with students who were in the "college prep" track. Much was expected of them by the school and their parents. Students had also grown to expect good grades; having usually gotten A's and B's throughout their high school careers. Many of the parents of these students had a great deal of influence with the Wabash Board of Education, and through it, the superintendent and principal. This informal power relationship had been chiefly responsible for the departure of the Physics and Chemistry teacher Bob replaced. That teacher was perceived as not being "demanding enough" by some of these parents, whose children had problems with these courses at the college level and who blamed that teacher for having not prepared them well. Many of those parents still had younger children who would be either in Bob's junior-level Chemistry or senior-level Physics classes. I witnessed Bob being told that his job was to "toughen up" the Chemistry and Physics classes. He was told, by the department chair (who became his mentor teacher), specifically, "I want you to make Physics the hardest class at Wabash High School." When I tried to explain some of the "past history" of his teaching position, Bob felt he could do what was being asked of him. I do not think he truly appreciated the amount of power this group of parents had. The ineffectiveness of his mentor relationship and his lack of "classroom savy" further compounded the problem of not dealing with the concerns that would have keep this constituency "happy." Bob never appreciated the consequences of failing to meet these expectations until it was too late. He never "got the message."

Liz dealt with students who were "average" or "low ability" (whatever those terms mean). They were, as Liz commented in her interviews, "happy to get a C." Their parents

rarely complained. In fact, most contacts with them had to be initiated at the school's initiative. Liz wrote in her journal of calling parents (calls which I witnessed her making on many occasions), trying to enlist their aid with students who weren't doing well academically or who had given her discipline problems in class. She reported that the contacts were generally "positive." As long as they behave themselves in class, Wabash High School treats these students with a great deal of indifference. After graduation they will more likely disappear into the blue collar work force than continue their education, unless at a two-year trade or technical school. Their parents are essentially "powerless" when it comes to influencing school decisions. As long as Liz maintained enough discipline to suit the principal, she was in no trouble. She would have administrative support and would be re-hired for the following year.

Rose, like Bob, also had extensive dealings with a powerful bloc of parents, the FFA Alumni group and the parents of her students in the Vocational Agriculture program. This program has had a long and successful history at this school. Recent problems connected with the high turnover of teachers in the program, and the resulting loss of continuity and focus, caused these two groups to become more vocal this year. They had high expectations for the program and enough power and influence with the Wabash Board of Education to make it impossible to ignore them. The administration was very aware of their expectations and passed them along to Rose, with emphasis added. Rose knew, early on, that she was expected to do three things well: the Annual FFA Banquet, the "Food for America" program for district third-graders, and make "a good showing" at the county fair. If she didn't get the message plainly enough when she was hired, her mentor, another vocational teacher, did deal with those issues (as reported by each: Rose in her journal; her mentor in our interviews).

While her students were similar in a lot of ways to Liz's students, her parents were much more like Bob's students' parents in terms of their influence and power over school officials. Rose understood the power relationships that were in play and managed to accommodate all their expectations. As a result, she was re-hired.

The more "in line with" the collectively-acceptable practices of their fellow teachers they were (and classroom management, or "discipline," was the most important one) and the more they were in agreement with administrative, student, parental, and community expectations for students and programs; the less likely it was they would fail to survive their first year.

On the following page, Figure 1 represents a "flow" outline of the Power/Discipline/ Expectations (PDE) model I have developed to explain this relationship between communication about power relationships, classroom discipline, and the building culture's expectations for first-year teachers and these teachers' success or failure for the year. A path through the PDE model, from top to bottom, represents a teacher's adaptation to both the existing power relationships and the building culture expectations they have come to produce. Solid lines between boxes indicate the most probable pathway. Dotted lines indicate an alternate pathway that might be followed under certain conditions, which will be outlined in the following paragraphs. A heavy dashed line indicates an alternative path actually followed.

Beginning at the top, Communication Of Knowledge About Power Relationships And Building Culture Expectations, one of two things could have happened. Either these power relationships and expectations were clearly communicated to these in-coming first-year teachers, or they were not. These may have been areas addressed in their employment

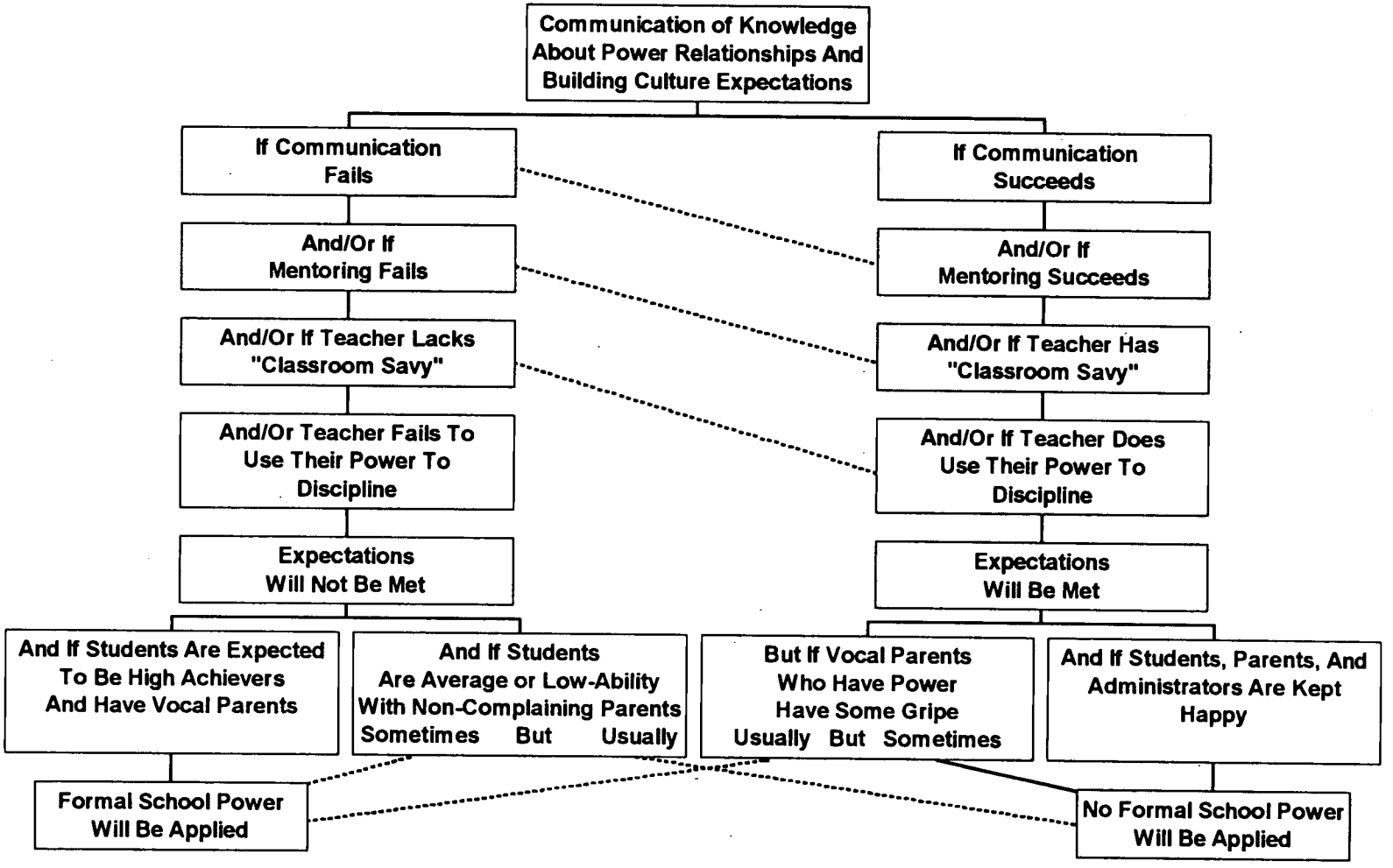

Figure 1: Power/Discipline/Expectations (PDE) Model

interviews. Only Rose mentioned having been told about her job expectations during her job interview. The formal administrative "indoctrination" meeting was a mandatory session for all first-year teachers prior to the opening of school. Here they were to become acquainted with the district and its policies. This meeting was arranged by the formal authorities in the district and consisted of a district-level meeting, chaired by the Superintendent, and was followed by a building-level meeting, chaired by the building principal. The first meeting left the new teachers confused by the many disparate pieces of information thrown at them by a succession of individuals, many of whom they never saw again the rest of the year. Rose mentioned being "intimidated" by the superintendent. At the building level meeting information flow dealt mainly with an "avalanche" of procedural details; forgotten as quickly as they were learned. First-year teachers were lucky if they could remember the names of the office secretaries who become key individuals in their lives in the coming weeks. Little was gleaned from these meetings with regard to power relationships or the building culture in which they were now deposited.

The next level, dealing with the success or failure of mentoring, reflects that the first-year teachers' next opportunity for learning about these things was through mentoring, formal and informal. They were each told they would be assigned a mentor; although they were not told who it would be, or the basis for assignment. This represented the "formal mentoring" that was to take place. "Informal mentoring" included the socialization effects of working with their fellow teachers; watching, listening, and asking them about the things they need to know. Even if the district and building in-service meetings failed, this formal and informal mentoring might still have been able to educate the first-year teachers about power

relationships and expectations for their performance (thus the dotted line from If Communication Fails to If Mentoring Succeeds).

But if both district and building-level formal communication and mentoring failed, the first-year teachers were likely to be left with "clueless" about expectations placed on them. But even if formal and informal mentoring fail, a perceptive first-year teacher may discover the power relationships and develop a sense of what's expected of them on their own. This brings us to the third level on Figure 1, dealing with "classroom savy." First-year teachers' own "classroom savy" may save them. By "classroom savy," I mean being able to perceive what is wrong and being able to do what needs to be done to "fix" it. This could include such things as: being able to "read" body language as a way of gauging student understanding; knowing when to apply discipline and when to "let something go;" being able to realize when one teaching technique isn't working and needs to be modified or scrapped; or understanding when to worry about a complain about you and when not to. So even if mentoring has failed, by their own perceptiveness, a first-year teacher may be able to survive, thus the diagonal dotted line from "If Mentoring Fails" to "Has Classroom Savy."

If communication doesn't take place, mentoring fails, and "classroom savy" isn't in evidence, a teacher is in trouble. Their only hope at this point is to resort to their authority as "the teacher" and enforce classroom rules strictly. Any hesitancy or unwillingness to apply this power will be seen as a weakness and students will take advantage of it. Many first-year teachers are concerned that if they are strict, students will not like them. Therefore, they are reluctant to use their authority to enforce discipline early in the year.

Even if a first-year teacher hasn't learned, formally or informally, what is expected of him by the various interest groups in the greater school community, and doesn't operate his

classroom in accordance with the building culture norms expected of him by fellow faculty and the administration, survival may still be possible. If the teacher works with "average" or "low-ability" students who have uncomplaining parents, and can get students to behave well on days the principal does evaluations, they will likely survive. Their long-term survival may be in doubt, but they are likely to get another year "to improve." Parents of high-achieving students (or those for whom their parents have expectations, whether they live up to them or not) have informal power over the school board, superintendent, and building principal. Parental complaints from this segment resulted in the departure of one teacher from Wabash High School last year. Complaints from parents of "average" or "low-ability" students usually receive less attention. First, because they complain less to begin with; and second, because they have no power or real influence over the district's formal authorities: the Board, superintendent, and principal. Only in rare cases, usually in conjunction with the other parental bloc or when a teacher is generally perceived as "bad," are their complaints responded to. But if they have been the object of complaints from vocal parents of "high-achieving" students, they are in trouble. Formal school power may be exerted against them: either they may be non-renewed or put on "probationary" status. If a first-year teacher can keep the administration, their students, and their parents "happy," they will usually have no problem with their contractual status. Sometimes, however, some very vocal parents, usually of "high-achieving students" or athletes, get upset with a particular teacher (or coach) over a specific issue and can bring enough pressure to bear to cause their ouster.

In summary, if first-year teachers do not "get the word," either from their district's formal authority structures, or from their socialization with fellow teachers, students, and parents, or doesn't have the "classroom savy" to realize these relationships and the necessity

of maintaining classroom discipline, then, given the student population with whom they work and the relative power their parents have to influence decisions, they could face administrative action that could lead to their non-renewal. And even if they keep most of this constituency satisfied, a few vocal and determined parents, if they have sufficient clout, can still cause them to lose their jobs.

Rose and the PDE Model

Rose's first year is diagrammed in Figure 2 on the following page. Her main memory of the indoctrination meeting was the superintendent's stressing of the "chain of command." She reported how it had been very intimidating to her. The administration, principal and superintendent, made it very clear to her that she needed to stage successful public activities in relation to her work with the FFA group; particularly the FFA Annual Banquet, the FFA-sponsored "Food for America" program for district third-graders, and "a good showing" at the county fair. This message was also stressed repeatedly by her interactions with parents and members of the FFA Alumni Chapter, of which she was the de facto advisor. Rose also was cognizant of the principal's major observation focus for new teachers, discipline. Her mentor relationship undoubtedly contributed to her education about the building culture's expected discipline norms. In her case, enculturation came less at the hands of fellow faculty than indoctrination due to the pressure from administrative and community groups. She accurately perceived that as long as she kept these two groups "happy," she would be in good shape, contractually. The continued pressure from these two areas became, at times, almost unbearable. The newness of the teaching situation and the tremendous job demands, in terms of time and paperwork, contributed to the stress she felt. Her organization skill and willingness to devote countless hours to getting everything done allowed her to survive. She

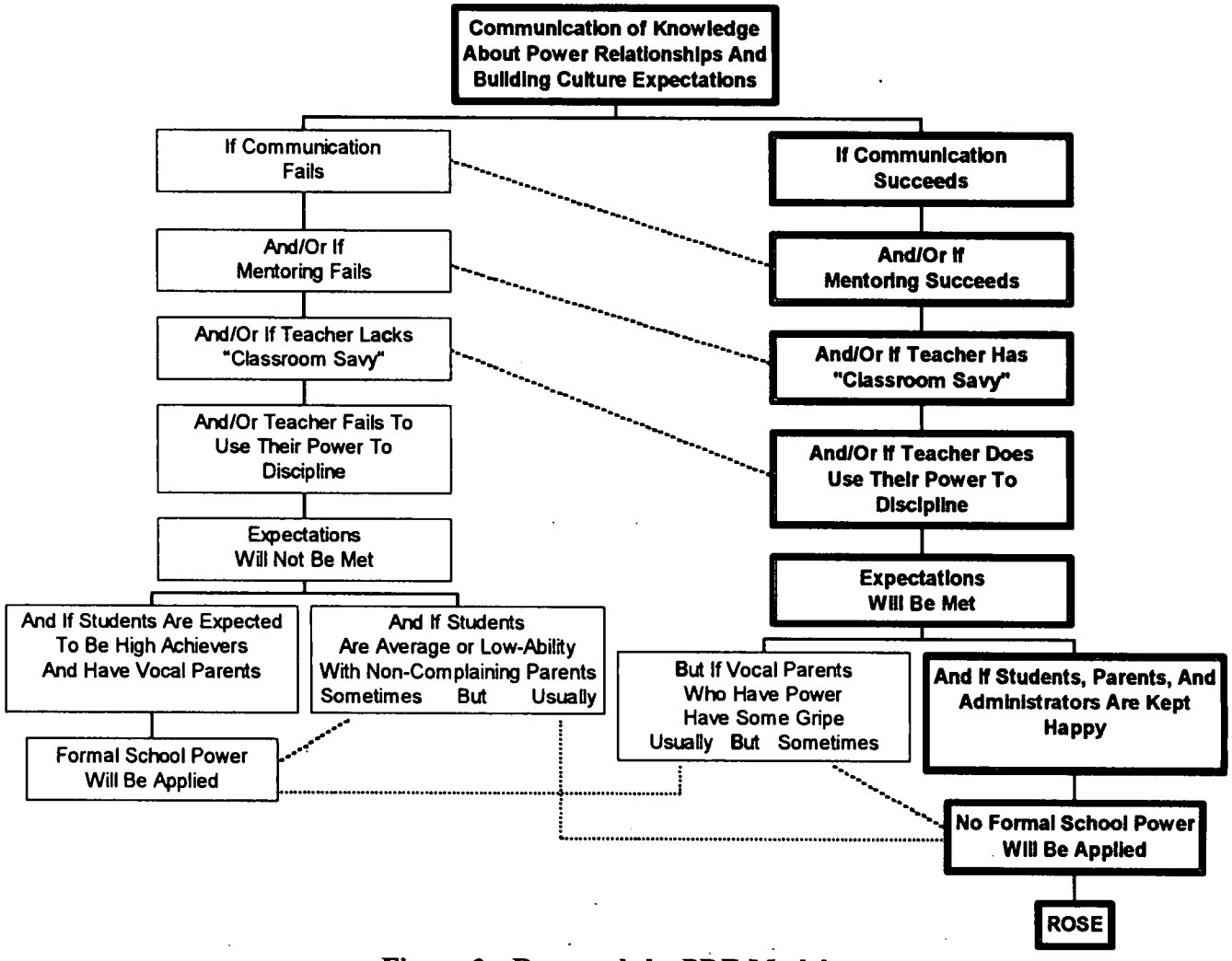

Figure 2: Rose and the PDE Model

had both good "classroom savy" and good classroom discipline. Rose, however, had gotten the message about what was expected of her and shouldered the extra work and went on. She was rewarded with a contract for the following year.

Liz and the PDE Model

In Figure 3, on the following page, I outline Liz's fit with the model. Liz could remember nothing of the formal indoctrination meeting other than a discussion of payroll dates and payment options. Comments made on her first evaluation by the principal, focusing on several students whispering, surprised her. She often wrote and talked of not knowing what was expected of her in terms of procedures and classroom discipline. The formal communication path had failed. With Liz, mentoring worked very well. She was the most enculturated of the three first-year teachers. Her year-long "internship" with her team-teaching partner and mentor, Mr. Williams, indoctrinated her into a pattern of lesson planning and delivery, student evaluation, and classroom control, and even a work ethic, that was ideally-suited to assure her of having no problems within this culture. Williams' teaching methods were highly-valued by the administration. His class control was highly effective. He had the "classroom savy" referred to in the previous section. Watching him, Liz further developed hers. She learned from other teachers through the social structure of the school as well. Lunch-time conversations, small talk at faculty get-togethers, and her social relationship with Mike and his friends, all contributed to her enculturation and her adoption of the building norms as her guidelines for her own classroom practice. When the principal's comments on her evaluations seemed to stress discipline more than anything else, Liz felt compelled to

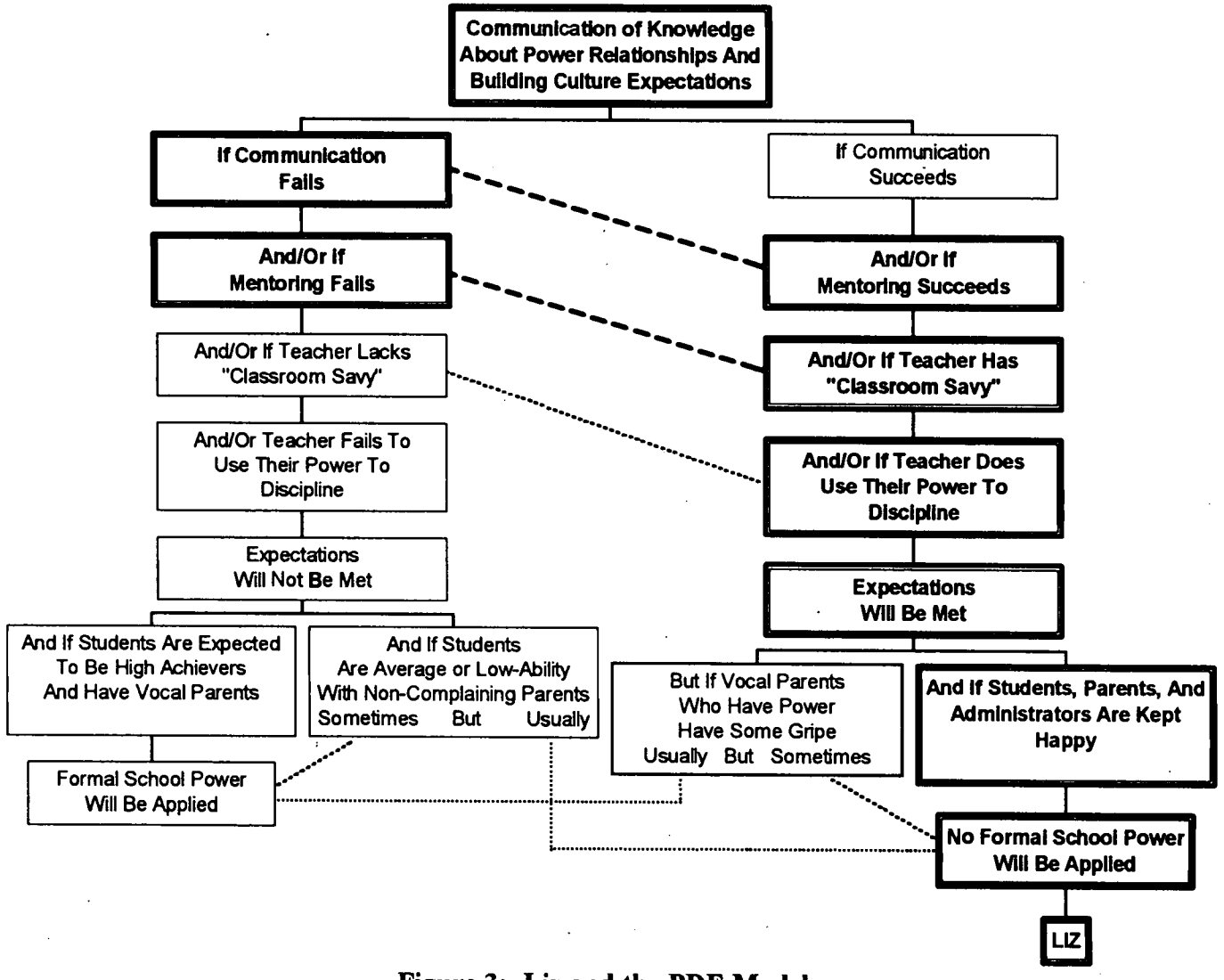

Figure 3: Liz and the PDE Model

make that her "number one priority" for the year. The formal power of the administration, with regards to her contractual status for the following year, the informal power of building culture expectations, and the "internship" relationship with her mentor, combined to instill in her a "model" for how she should act and what should be important for her to be concerned about if she wanted a job at Wabash High School the following year.

Would Liz have survived with the same student clientele Bob had? She approached discipline much the same way Bob did at the beginning of the year and also had problems. She showed a lot more "classroom savy" than Bob did. Whether that would have allowed her to avoid the problems Bob had is a matter of conjecture. My "sense" (from casual conversations with them, Liz's journal entries, and my interviews with both) is that Liz "had more going for her." She was a self-described "people person." Bob was not. Her "people skills" and her "classroom savy" might have allowed her to avoid the worst of Bob's classroom problems, specifically, dealing with students who were having difficulty learning. In their year-end surveys, many of Liz's students complimented her on her ability to "explain things so we can understand them." Bob never seemed to be able to do that with his students. So assuming that Liz had the content-competency to teach Bob's classes, I think she might have survived. How her students perceived her and how they might have reacted to her discipline at the beginning of the year would have been another thing. She might have had a rough time with discipline, but the parental complaints would probably not have been as harsh as they were with Bob. Discipline problems alone, with her student clientele, unless very bad, and the absence of complaints by parents, probably would be survivable.

Bob and the PDE Model

Figure 4 presents Bob's pathway through the model. He reported remembering "nothing" about either the district-level or building-level in-service for new teachers. By his isolation, he failed to get a sense of the building culture's expectations with regards to discipline, and especially with regards to appreciating the role his students' parents, who were very vocal and very powerful, were having on the administration. Thus, the formal communication path from the administration downwards failed to connect with Bob.
He was a loner who participated, rarely and peripherally at that, in the social activities of the school, whether it was a school event or a faculty social get-together. Professionally, as the only Chemistry and Physics teacher, he felt he had no one to turn to for subject-matter help. The few times he approached me for content-specific help (I was the only other Chemistry and Physics-certified teacher in the building), I tried my best but often the questions were beyond my understanding. (I do not know if this says more about my own expertise in those areas or the level of difficulty of the material Bob was presenting to his students, who had considerably less Chemistry and Physics expertise than I did.) The formal mentoring process failed as well. Bob and his mentor never "connected." To describe the mentor's frustration over his dealings with Bob, using Bob's own metaphor, "When every time you throw the ball, they drop it, you get tired of pitching it."

Bob neither embraced, nor was embraced by, the culture of Wabash High School. Although he was under pressure from the administration and department head (who was also his mentor) to "toughen up" the program, he could have done so in a way that would have not caused him the problems he did. His previously-discussed problem with "classroom savy"

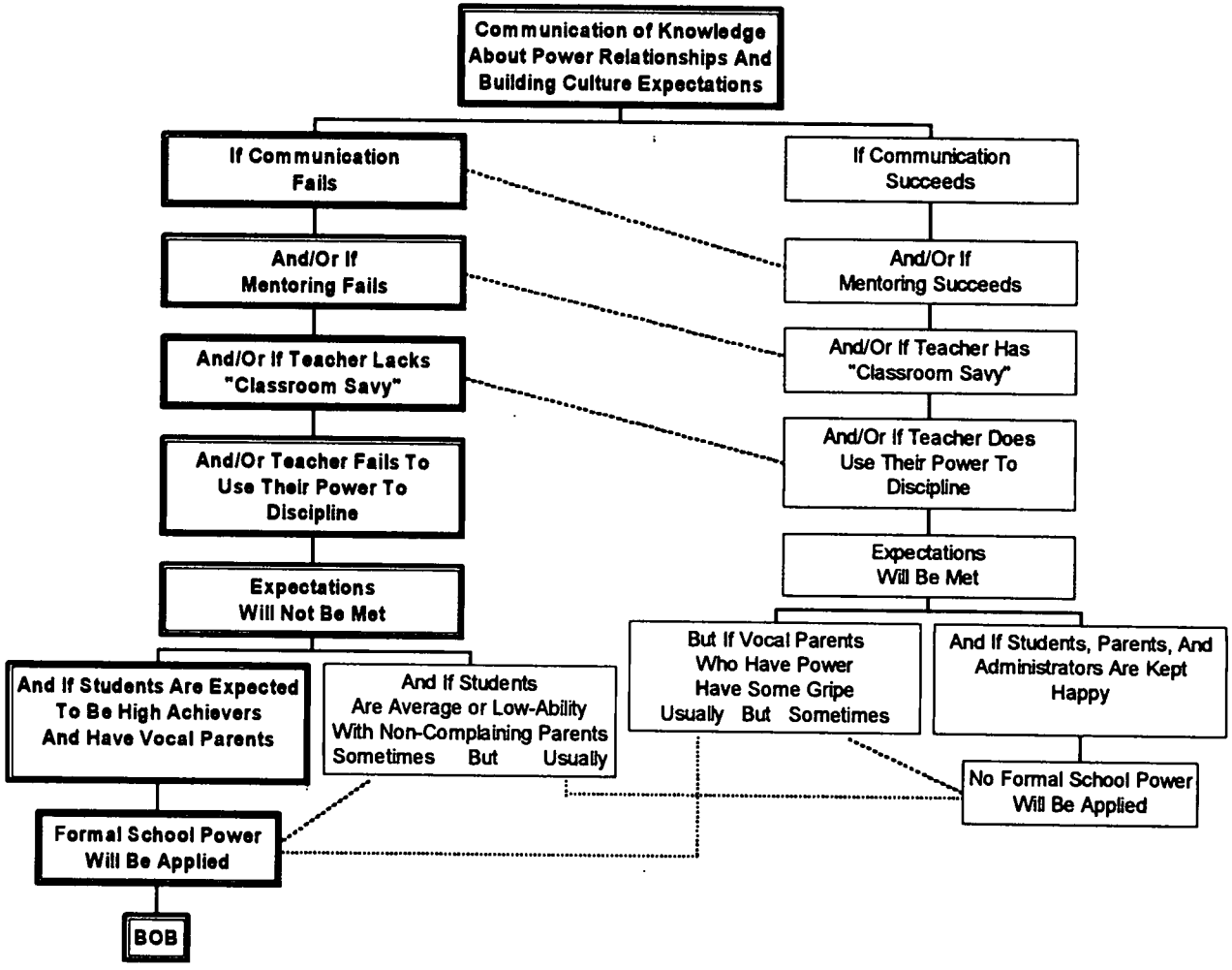

Figure 4: Bob and the PDE Model

caused him to not realize the significance of the problems he was having. A key problem was his continuing difficulties with classroom discipline. Not only did they draw the attention of the administration but they also sparked even more complaints from parents.

Bob never paid enough attention to parent complaints and didn't realize their "informal" power and influence over the formal power structure within the building. Our principal (now retired) was perceived by building faculty as being overly-sensitive to parental complaints about teachers and, indeed, such complaints played a major role in the departure of Bob's immediate predecessor. This fact was known to Bob; I told him the story myself on the first day of school! Bob's failure to appreciate this and the breakdown in communication throughout the mentoring relationship combined to produce his eventual, almost inevitable, exit.

The fact that the mentoring program didn't really get going until late in November; the fact that no release time was built-in to the program for mentor observations of new faculty; and the fact that the mentor made no direct classroom observations of Bob on his own time; all contributed to Bob's "not getting the message" about the expected "norms" he should be trying to meet. As a result, he never met them and was asked to leave.

The expectations for teachers relative to classroom discipline; work ethic; student, parent, and community relations; and ability to relate to students as "the teacher;" all combined to produce in Rose and Liz an image of what they had to do to be successful. This set of norms was a compilation of expectations from the administration, their fellow teachers, their students, their students' parents, and the community. Rose and Liz managed to accommodate enough of these expectations to keep these constituencies satisfied and gain a new contract for the next year. Bob alienated the principal, disappointed his mentor (a fellow

teacher), and upset his students and their parents. As a result, he is gone, only to be remembered as a "negative example" of "how not to be," and a more-subtle, reinforcing, example of the school's and community's power to enforce (or "force") their expectations on teachers, regardless of how that set of expectations is developed.

Summary

The PDE model was derived from my interpretation of the data obtained over the course of this study. The presentation of my conclusions as a linear arrangement of the factors involved in the success or failure of these first-year teachers (communication, mentoring, "classroom savy," discipline, and differing expectations of parents and students) should not be construed as hierarchical or to mean that I think that's the only way "the world works." These influences co-mingled and interacted constantly throughout that entry-year. Any model used to describe the first-year teacher experience is, at best, a simplified version of a very complex set of circumstances. The power of this model lies not only in being able to explain the data obtained in this study, but it's congruence with data from previous studies; the interplay of factors identified in this study is supported by data obtained in previous studies.

Lessons Learned

Lesson 1: Communication

Communication is critical to a first-year teacher. First-year teachers want to know what is expected of them, both in terms of school procedures and their teaching duties. They want to know what is expected of them in terms of student performance and their own. Coming from various college or university teacher education programs, beginning teachers bring different experiences that will now have to be transferred to a new context; a new

school setting with differing district, building, and community cultural expectations. The more quickly they learn what is expected of them, the better their chance of surviving their first year. The key for them to learn what they need to know is communication.

The teacher in this study who most clearly learned what was expected of her was Rose. Through administrative channels, the pressure from community groups involved in her program, and working with her mentor, Rose learned what those expectations were and attended to them constantly. Liz eventually came to the perception that discipline was the principal's main focus regarding her classroom. She worked hard towards accommodating that expectation and made strides, although not as much as she wanted, in that area by the end of the year. Bob never seemed to get the message. While he was aware of expectations place on him regarding the academic nature of his classes, he seemed to remain unaware of the consequences of not meeting those expectations. He also never seemed to realize the importance of the continued student and parent complaints when they perceived him as not being able to meet their academic expectations.

Lesson 2: Mentoring

The quality of formal and informal mentoring that took place had an affect on how well the first-year teachers did. Mentoring which resulted in increased reflection about the tasks of teaching was better than mentoring that consisted of prescriptive advice. Mentoring that involved the mentor and the first-year teacher observing each other teach worked even better. Informal mentoring can also occur at the hands of fellow teachers within the social context of the building culture and helps increase communication about expectations for first-year teachers.

Rose also got the benefit of a very good mentoring relationship, arguably the best formal mentoring of the three first-year teachers. I think that she and her mentor, Anne, being the same sex helped them relate to each other better. Both taught in a vocational area and expectations were similar in terms of paperwork required at the local and state level. There were some problems of communication, however, as Rose was reluctant to ask for advice, and Anne was hesitant to give it, unless asked. I also think that the extensive audio-taped journal Rose kept for me as part of this study helped her be more reflective, an unintentional side-effect of the data collection process. Liz's "internship" with her team-teacher/ mentor, her formal evaluations from the principal, and her socialization by the faculty members who befriended her, helped Liz get the message about what was expected of her. She adapted her teaching style to meet those expectations. Probably the greatest effect on Liz was the informal mentoring that occurred during her team-teaching assignment with her mentor. Neither reported having formal meetings following the mentoring guidelines set up this year, but she saw him daily, modeling successful lesson planning, preparation, and teaching strategies. It could be argued that she actually had a better mentoring experience than Rose, although it was much less formal. A good mentoring relationship might have helped Bob reflect on the roots of his problems. Instead, he was given prescriptions to treat the symptoms and the problems continued. Bob's lack of socializing with the faculty further reduced the informal communication that might have helped him become more aware of the importance of the parent and student complaints.

Lesson 3: Classroom Savy

First-year teachers who are able to "read" their students are going to be more successful than those who can't. While there are many tasks that could fall under the aegis of

the term "classroom savy," the most important is that ability to know when students are having difficulty and to be able to modify instruction accordingly. Teachers who have good "people skills" are better at gauging student's understanding than those without such skills.

Rose had great "people skills." With her students, she was outgoing, friendly and clearly projected her concern for them and their success. She was able to "read" students very well. She used her "people skills" to help her deal with the parents and program alumni who were constantly applying pressure on her to take on more work than she could handle. This allowed her to successfully juggle all the expectations placed on her. Liz described herself in her journal as a "people person." Her students confirmed her openness and warmth in their year-end surveys. She also had the ability to "read" students. She could anticipate student questions and "change directions" when she perceived students were not "getting it." She may have felt she had discipline problems, but her ability to anticipate student behavior allowed her to head them off before they became serious enough to require attention. Bob, although friendly and personable, never seemed to be able to gauge student problems well. On the surface, he could see they had problems, but he had difficulty in getting to the root cause of those problems. This is not an indictment of Bob; many teachers have trouble with this. However, Bob's inexperience, and his rejection of much of his educational coursework from college (which might have helped him) as "theorizing," left him with no way to work around this problem. In the absence of a good mentoring relationship, he was left on his own and his previous experiences failed to provide him with a way of dealing with his problems.

Lesson 4: Discipline

If first-year teachers do not really know what is expected of them and if they do not have a good mentor or social network to help them find out and if they have trouble "reading"

their students and acting on that information, then they better have good discipline. Good discipline can make up for a multitude of sins and "deficiencies" in other areas.

All three first-year teachers in this study worried about discipline. Rose, to a lesser degree, because she had it. By thorough planning and her use of her "people skills," she avoided the problems that troubled Liz and consumed Bob. Liz perceived discipline as her main need for improvement the principal made comments about students "whispering" in class. She tried to "tighten up," beginning with the second semester, and felt she was making some progress at the end of the year. But, as did Rose, Liz used her "people skills" and "classroom savy" to handle most routine misbehaviors. She consciously avoided sending students to the office. This kept her discipline problems from the notice of the principal. Rose and Liz accepted their role as the authority figure in their classroom, although Liz seemed to be much less comfortable with it than Rose did. It could be said Rose "adopted" the role of disciplinarian, while Liz "adapted" herself to the role. Rose dealt with the disarray in her program due to teacher turnover by assuming a "take charge" attitude. Her approach to classroom discipline followed a similar approach. Her "people skills," however, kept it from being an overt and heavy-handed affair. Liz was still negotiating and reconstruct-ing her self-image as a disciplinarian at the end of the year. She was still trying to square her image of herself as she wanted to be with the image she felt she needed to project; an image more in agreement with the principal's expectations. Bob rejected an image of himself as a disciplinarian. Because of this, he never felt comfortable using his formal authoritarian power as "the adult" or "the teacher" in his classroom. Without utilizing that formal power, he was unable to maintain classroom control. Given his problems with understanding difficulties student were having in his classes and his admitted lack of organization, this further

contributed to student inattention and misbehavior. His failure to enforce discipline gave the administration the excuse they needed to force his departure.

Lesson 5: Differing Expectations

First-year teachers have to realize that there are differing expectations for their students, depending on their academic level, the degree of involvement by their parents, and the socioeconomic strata to which they belong.

In this district, there were much higher expectations for the high-achieving, college-preparatory track students than for students in general or "low-ability" tracks. "College-prep" students are expected to take more rigorous classes and do well in them. The administration and teachers expect this, as do these students' parents, and even the students themselves. Parents of these high-achieving students at Wabash High School are predominantly upper or upper-middle class. Though relatively few in number, they wield considerable influence over the school board, and through it, over the district administrators. Their complaints usually get listened to and are taken more seriously than complaints from other community parents. They had been indirectly responsible for the departure of the previous Physics and Chemistry teacher, Bob's predecessor. Bob failed to live up to these parents' expectations for their sons and daughters. Even with discipline problems, he might have survived. What he couldn't survive was having discipline problems with these students and with these parents.

In contrast, while they are not as high on the "social ladder," the parents of students in Rose's Vocational Agriculture program also wield considerable influence. In spite of Wabash High School's location in a small city, the community is basically an agricultural community. The long history of the agriculture programs at this school, and the connection of many parents and program alumni to it, give it status and visibility in the entire community. Like

the parents of the high-achieving, more-academic students, these parents also have "clout" with the school board; they get listened to. Rose met their expectations: she put on a good FFA banquet, her "Food for America" program for district third-graders went well, and she restored some order and sense of accomplishment to the FFA program (e.g. the chapter had a member receive their State Farmer Degree; the first one the chapter had in several years).

Liz had "the best of all possible worlds." She had the "average" students with uncomplaining parents. There were no great expectations placed on these students for achievement. Most of them do not go on to college, and those that do are probably the ones who could have done well in the more-academic track but chose to avoid it. As long as Liz maintained adequate discipline, she would receive little official criticism for anything else. While generally supportive, parents of her students are also relatively uninvolved with the school and usually come to school only when there's a severe discipline problem requiring their attendance. Liz made many calls to parents, enlisting their aid in her efforts to get better classroom performance from her students. She reported mixed results but continued to make phone calls throughout the year. Essentially, all Liz had to do was avoid drawing attention to herself in terms of what discipline problems she might have and get her students to behave on days she was observed. This she did well.

Implications For the Local School District

The district should try to be as specific as possible about expectations they have for first-year teachers, especially in terms of classroom discipline. This would be more appropriately done at the building level. The earlier this information is given, the better. An in-service on discipline techniques in November is not going to help beginners since classroom behavior patterns for the year are already set and hard to change; a third of the

school year having passed. Classroom management expectations should be made very clear to first-year teachers.

Mentoring can work to help relieve the concerns and stress of first-year teachers. However, unless the district is serious enough about the program to provide mentors with adequate training and release time with which to work with beginning teachers, the program is a waste of time. Handing someone a mentoring "handbook" with a list of topics to discuss each month (and this done in the second week of November!) did little to prepare prospective mentors for the job of working with a beginning teacher effectively. Arranging for release time is also important. Had Bob's mentor been given time to monitor Bob's classes on a regular basis, he might have been able to help Bob develop strategies for dealing with the problems he was having.

School officials should also realize that the one-shot orientation program for first-year teachers just does not work. Too much information is thrown at them by too many people. This has to be changed. Communication is so vital it cannot be left to chance. A new-teacher orientation, a day or so before school starts, is not enough. At that point the beginners are too concerned about the opening day logistics and their own uncertainties about themselves to pay much attention to anything they perceive as irrelevant to their immediate needs.

Implications For University-level Teacher Educators

None of the three first-year teachers in this study could remember having what they perceived as useful instruction in classroom management. They each said it was more or less "understood" that they would learn that during student teaching. More attention has to be paid to this in college methods classes.

More field experiences over the course of the undergraduate education might expose prospective new teachers to more teaching styles and more classroom management techniques. More experience teaching students at various grade levels and of varying abilities could help beginners feel more comfortable in front of a class, as well as give them more opportunities to gain experience working with recalcitrant students and those who need more work to understand the material presented. "Practice teaching" in front of peers in a methods class, or a lesson or two, in a field experience setting were not "authentic" enough experiences to be seen as useful by the teachers in this study.

How a school functions and its relationship to power blocs in the community also needs more attention in college classrooms. What Kuzmic (1994, 24) referred to as "organizational literacy" needs to be included in undergraduate education courses to better prepare beginning teachers for the "real world" of public education.

Recommendations

Huling-Austin (1986) lists four goals for teacher-induction programs: to improve teaching performance (p. 2); to increase the retention of promising beginning teachers during the induction years (p. 3); to promote the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers (p. 4); and to satisfy mandated requirements related to induction and certification (p. 4). Keeping these goals in mind, and based on the results of my study and an examination of the literature on new-teacher induction, I would like to offer the following recommendations to local school districts and teacher education institutions.

Recommendations to Local School Districts

School districts need to plan and organize in-service activities specifically designed to deal with issues of concern for beginning teachers (Ryan, 1986, 33). These programs should

"provide them with practical answers to immediate problems" (Ryan, 1986, p. 33). The programs should not be "one-shot" but continued throughout the entry year. Meetings should last no more than an hour and a half. Meetings before an Open House might discuss procedures for dealing with various parent concerns. A meeting near the end of the first grading period could discuss how to calculate and record grades according to the building or district policy guidelines. Meetings in the first week or so of school could focus on classroom discipline. A key purpose of these meetings are that they serve as a "support group for beginning teachers" (Ryan, 1986, 34). Odell (1986) found that emotional support was more appreciated by first-year teachers than instructional advice. A local district should establish an effective mentoring program. Teachers who volunteer to become mentors should receive training in cognitive coaching techniques that would allow them to work with beginning teachers and help them become more reflective practitioners. Fox and Singletary (1986) describe one such program, the assistance and support model, which they believe "encourages self-evaluation through reflection and appears to include the necessary elements to provide new teachers with essential skills to prevent, reduce, or manage many of the problems they are likely to confront" (p. 15). Mentor teachers should be given released time to observe and work with their new colleagues. A "developmental supervision" mindset should be used, rather than merely a "supervisory" and judgmental approach (Glickman, 1995). Another suggestion is that consideration should be given as to how first-year teachers are assigned. Giving them students "no one else wanted" is not wise. This sets the stage for discipline problems and will cause more problems later. Giving them classes which are highly academic, and often require advanced course content knowledge may also set first-year

teachers up for failure, especially if they are the only ones teaching those courses and have no one to go to for help.

Wilkinson (1994) supports my contention that one of the best things a local school district can do to aid beginning teachers is to "establish supportive relationships through specific feedback to the novice early in the year" (p. 57). Frequent observations by administrators and mentor teachers can spot small problems early before they develop into major problems later. Working early to help beginning teachers improve is a better investment of time than having to deal with their problems this lack of help produces later.

The more the local district can do to make beginning teachers aware of the expectations they have for them, the better. Communication is the key to a first-year teacher's success.

Recommendations to Teacher Education Institutions

Hitz and Roper (1986) say that preservice teachers would

> benefit from opportunities to work in a variety of school settings, analyzing similarities and differences. They could be encouraged to tour and study different communities... students need time to observe and talk with administrators, teachers, and even school board members in order to gain insight into different educational philosophies. (Hitz & Roper, 1986, p. 68).

Summarizing works by Popkewitz and Giroux, Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981) state "the university fails to provide prospective teachers with the conceptual tools which would enable them to transcend the cultural contexts within which teaching and learning currently occur" (p. 9). This leads to what they call the "wash out" effect (p. 7). Within the context of the first-year experience, much of what beginning teachers perceive as "theory" is discarded in favor of their "fly by the seat of their pants" experience. Hitz and Roper (1986) think that "a good theoretical background along with a realistic view of teaching, could prepare teachers

to be more reflective and to cope better with the diversities of settings and the inevitable uncertainties of teaching" (p. 69). Universities have to provide prospective teachers with more authentic teaching experiences prior to their release in to the workforce. All three teachers in this study rejected much of their university training as "too theoretical." This is not surprising when universities themselves separate classes in "learning theory" from "methods" classes. They should go hand in hand in every class prospective teachers face.

Universities have a responsibility to make sure the teachers they train are ready to handle a classroom. If they have doubts, they should take steps to remedy the problems they see before certifying the new teacher. I would hope that the current revisions in teacher licensure programs, particularly here in Ohio, should address this problem more effectively in the future. Working more closely with schools when their education graduates have problems in their new jobs would be a way of bridging the artificially-created gap between theory (as the universities are seen to represent) and practice (as the local school site is perceived). The growth of school-university partnerships and the formation of professional development schools linked to those partnership arrangements should be encouraged.

Lastly, universities have to pay more attention to discipline as a concern all first-year teachers are going to have and for which they must be prepared. When students enter their student-teaching phase, they enter classrooms where discipline is usually well-established by the teacher. The "real" teacher is close by...and students know that. Therefore behavior is never what it would be if this were the first day of school for the beginning teacher in his own classroom. Ryan (1970, 177) calls discipline "the great unmentionable" in higher education. It cannot afford to remain so. Prospective teachers must learn to appreciate the importance of classroom management skills if they are to achieve their goals for students as learners. They

need to understand why careful planning during the opening weeks of school is so important in setting the tone for all that follows. Planning to maintain focus on educational issues, establishing expectations for student behavior, and then following through by enforcing them, have to be stressed to prospective teachers. Developing, and consistently maintaining, good discipline cannot be stressed too much. Poor discipline is the bane of too many beginning teachers and the source of additional headaches for administrators who have to deal with the problems it brings.

Areas for Future Research

The most obvious suggestion is that others replicate this study in different schools in different locales. Data from more teachers at more grade levels and more sites, could further refine the model. Following these teachers over the next five years, adding a greater longitudinal dimension to the study, could also furnish data on the new-teacher attrition rate issue.

Other than identifying the existing power relationships in operation at Wabash High School, and their effect on this particular group of teachers, I did not investigate the broader role these power relationships play in determining overall school curriculum and shaping the differing expectations held for students perceived to have different ability levels. How is the curriculum determined in this district? What influence do parents actually have in setting school expectations for students? Are there really differing expectations or is the difference in the level of performance that is acceptable? Are expectations for "average" or "low-ability" students really different? What is the effect of these lower expectations on the students and parents in the "average" or "low-ability" groups? Much more detail could

probably be learned about the way the informal power and influence of parents and other segments in the community have over school officials.

A study could also be made of university/school relationships with regards to student teachers and in-service beginning teachers. What should be the responsibility of the university if a first-year teacher is not doing well? What do you tell prospective employers if you know a student teacher had problems during the student teaching phase? What are ways the school and university can work together to help struggling beginning teachers? In general, what can teacher education programs do to better prepare first-year teachers for the strange land they find themselves in?

Mentoring and its effects on raising reflective thinking could also be investigated more thoroughly. This study suggests that mentoring can take many forms. Which ways of mentoring work best? Do they work the same for all new teachers? Who should be mentors? What kind of training should mentors receive? Do formal, arranged mentoring sessions help more than informal meetings? Would group mentoring work better than individual mentoring? What role does a first-year teacher's observations of his or her mentor play? Would regular observations by each, of each, make mentoring more successful?

And if a mentoring program isn't in place, what can be done locally to help first-year teachers "make the strange, familiar" and feel less lonely and isolated during the opening weeks or months of school? Would cognitive coaching techniques help? Would special in-services for first-year teachers on discipline and classroom management in the opening weeks of school help? Would a "buddy-system," as proposed by Liz in her final interview help? (She suggested having a relatively-new teacher work with a beginning teacher to "show them the ropes," feeling she might be better able to remember what it was like being a new teacher

and provide more appropriate help, having gone through the process much more recently than a twenty-year veteran.)

A study of the informal socialization that occurs during and after the school day could also be done. Much informal mentoring in this study occurred through these informal social exchanges. How do these social relationships affect the classroom practice of first-year teachers? Are the effects mainly in the passing on of school lore and building cultural norms; socializing the new teachers into the "tribe" by sharing the school history with them?

Another important area for further study would be in learning how to better communicate to first-year teachers the expectations being placed on them. The lack of communication about these expectations, experienced to different extents by each new teacher in this study, played a role in their success or failure. How can communication be improved? When is the best time to meet with beginning teachers? Their attention is focused on their first day survival at the district and building in-services before the school year begins. Other information given then that they do not perceive as applying directly to that concern is forgotten. What subjects should be discussed in meetings with these new teachers? Would a series of meetings throughout the first grading period help? We need to know more about what we should be telling new teachers, how we should tell them, and when we should be telling them, and even why we feel this information is important to them.

Closing

First-year teachers come into their new school thinking they know what it means to be "the teacher." They think they are familiar with its workings from their years of observation as students. But when they arrive, they find themselves strangers among other strangers. And the familiar world of the school, which they thought they knew so well, is suddenly a very

strange land when viewed from the other side of the teacher's desk...the side they now find themselves on, all alone, on that first day of school.

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