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AUTHOR Gee, Jerry Brooksher  
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors that most concerned beginning teachers about their first year of teaching. The study assessed the attitudes of 24 preservice teachers who were enrolled in a senior-level undergraduate methods course and 36 graduate students with teaching experience who were enrolled in a graduate level methods course. Participants completed a questionnaire that focused on: discipline and classroom management, the Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program, planning and meeting curriculum standards, portrayal of teacher confidence and assertiveness, student age levels, student apathy, approval and respect from colleagues, student diversity, working with parents, and motivating students. The strongest concerns of both groups related to discipline and classroom management, the Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program, and planning and meeting curriculum standards. Respondents in both groups also agreed that approval and respect from colleagues should be ranked seventh. Differences in the ranking of the other six items indicated some disparity between the groups (SM)

WHAT GRADUATES IN EDUCATION FEAR MOST  
ABOUT THEIR FIRST YEAR OF TEACHING

A Paper

Presented to

The Louisiana Educational Research Association  
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by

Jerry Brooksher Gee, Ed.D.  
Department of Teacher Education  
College of Education  
Nicholls State University  
Thibodaux, Louisiana

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Teaching in an environment subject to much litigation, incorporated in an age of rage and violence, has produced fears of working with students and their social problems. This, combined with a need for a higher financial income, the recognition of a lack of administrative support, and increased teacher accountability; has brought doubts to prospective teachers entering the teaching profession. Unlike acts of violence in the seventies and eighties in inner city schools, there have been major acts of violence resulting in multiple deaths of students since 1996; all in relatively unlikely, peaceful, rural settings. Additionally, the increased use and addiction of narcotics among the very youngest of students has reinforced these doubts.

This study attempted to identify factors which concern beginning teachers most, in order to better prepare teacher candidates, enrolled in methods classes, to be able to cope, and more effectively work in realistic educational settings.

The study was designed to provide two perspectives; a pre-service view from 24 prospective teachers currently enrolled in a senior-level undergraduate methods course, in their final semester before student teaching and graduation; and a post-perspective view from 36 graduate students with teaching experience, enrolled in a graduate level methods class.

Based on the reality the graduate students had actually experienced their first year of teaching, the graduate respondents were surveyed first. Using the question, "What did you fear most during your first year of teaching?", the graduates were requested to answer by open response. The answers to this question were categorized into ten statements and ranked according to frequency of response. Five of these responses were those most often reflected in the literature.

Using the ten ranked statements as a basis for the data gathering instrument, a questionnaire consisting of five-point likert-type rating scales was constructed, ranging from "low", to "moderate", to "high" levels of concern. The 24 undergraduates were then requested to record their perceived "levels of concern" in answer to the question, "What do you fear most about your first year of teaching?" These responses were then ranked according to the "level of concern" each statement received. A coefficient of correlation from rank differences was computed to compare responses of the two groups of respondents. Correlation was found not to be significant at either the .01 nor .05 levels.

#### QUESTIONNAIRE (RESULTS)

"WHAT DO YOU FEAR MOST ABOUT YOUR FIRST YEAR OF TEACHING?"

Directions: Circle the number that corresponds with your perceived "Level of Concern".

Rank Order:	Graduates	Undergraduates
(1) Discipline and Classroom Management	1	1
(2) The Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program	2	2
(3) Planning and Meeting Curriculum Standards	3	3
(4) Portrayal of Teacher Confidence and Assertiveness	4	6
(5) Age Levels of Students	5	10
(6) Student Apathy	6	9
(7) Approval and Respect from Colleagues	7	7
(8) Diversity of the Learners	8	5
(9) Working With Parents	9	4
(10) Motivating Students	10	8

An analysis of data revealed a perfect correlation of the first three items. In rank order the strongest concerns by both groups of respondents were (1) Discipline and Classroom Management, (2) The Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program, and (3) Planning and Meeting Curriculum Standards. Twenty-six (72%) of the graduate respondents ranked "discipline and classroom management" as the main concern, thirteen (36%) ranked "the Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program" second, and seven (19%) ranked "planning and meeting curriculum standards" third by open response. Using the five-point rating scales in the instrument, the undergraduates weighed the first concern with 65% of possible points, 58% for the second concern, and 54% regarding the third concern.

Disparity or difference in the correlation first occurred in placing the fourth item by the two groups of respondents. Seventeen percent of the graduates ranked "portrayal of teacher confidence and assertiveness" fourth; the undergraduates weighed this item sixth, and ranked "working with parents" fourth.

An even wider difference of correlation occurred in ranking the fifth item. Thirteen percent of the graduates ranked "age levels of the students" as the fifth concern; the undergraduates weighted this concern as tenth. Differences in ranking and weighing continued with items six, eight, nine and ten. Both groups of respondents placed "approval and respect from colleagues" seventh. This is one of the concerns often appearing in the literature regarding "what teachers want most".

Reflecting on the results of the study also revealed that the undergraduates were weighing several concerns, which were possibly unknown to them. Specifically, item nine, "working with parents", was ranked fourth by the undergraduate respondents. This

is an experience that is not included in most undergraduate teacher education programs. Item eight, "diversity of the learners", is another area in which undergraduates have little or no practical experience other than through simple classroom observation. The undergraduate respondents ranked this concern fifth. A final revelation appeared with the difference in rank orders by the two groups of respondents concerning "age levels of the students". The graduates perceived this concern ranking it fifth; the undergraduates weighed this factor tenth.

In summary, there was perfect agreement between the groups concerning item one, "discipline and classroom management" (1<sup>st</sup>), item two, "the Louisiana Teacher Assessment Program" (2<sup>nd</sup>), and item three, "planning and meeting curriculum standards" (3<sup>rd</sup>). The respondents in both groups also agreed "approval and respect from colleagues" should be ranked seventh. Difference in the ranking of the other six items indicated some disparity.

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