

The New Teacher Experience: An Autoethnography

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### Introduction

That moment had arrived; I was hired. Those are the words every freshly stamped, diploma-wielding teacher wants to announce: “I have a *job*.” Visions of grandeur swamp the mind of the new teacher; not, mind you, of fancy clothes and cars, but of long hours of instruction, light bulb moments, and impacting student lives. Of making a difference. I showed up to that first day of workshop full of hopes and dreams of success and of impacting students on par with Robin Williams in *Dead Poet’s Society* or Mr. Feeny on *Boy Meets World*. I held onto that powerful hope through the anti-bullying meeting, the data updates, and into the new teacher union lunch. It was at this point that my hopes and dreams were stomped under the boot heels of my new union president, as he strongly stated, “Keep your damn mouth shut, your head down, and your name nonexistent. We shouldn’t have to know you’re here.” With those small words, that lightbulb of optimistic hope shining inside of me dimmed significantly. I couldn’t grasp what he was telling us. How was I supposed to make a difference if I was to remain nonexistent? Did anyone dare utter those words to Mr. Feeny?

**Entering the limelight.** I tried my hardest to follow those directives, truly. I figured if the union president advised us to be quiet, invisible, and utterly opaque, then I would fit that bill. Unfortunately, I got handed a class that sat on the opposite of that spectrum: Media Productions. Through that class I gained a constant spot in the limelight, as I produced the school’s PBIS videos, student news program, and any other videos people could envision. If a teacher or administrator dreamed it, I was expected to produce it. Every video became a trial, as every veteran teacher in the school felt the need to email me about everything they didn’t like in the film, whether it was valid or not. Several also emailed the principal, especially if they

considered something inappropriate, calling these videos “red flags” about my “unprofessionalism,” sentiments with which the principal, who approved each video personally, did not agree. My principal also suggested implementing a school-wide lip dub, which is a school promotional video involving every staff member and every student. I was fully on board, and started planning out the whole event, positively over the moon with excitement for the project. Unfortunately, when we proposed it to the Building Leadership Team, I wasn’t asked questions regarding my plan, or what it would look like. Instead, I was asked how an “anorexic college student” could be in charge of something of this scale. One teacher asked if my mom would be there to help me; they followed that question with suggesting I wait a few more years before trying anything again, and to get some experience under my belt before coming to them again. Thus, I concluded my first face-to-face contact with my new workplace bullies, or “snakes” as Priscilla S. Hall (2016) dubs them. In her words, the snake is “a behind-the-scenes bully, appearing friendly and supportive in person while smearing your reputation among coworkers with cruel gossip or insults” (p. 46). Until that point, I had no idea that my workplace was anything but supportive. My department was helpful and informative, and mostly everyone greeted me in the hall, if anonymously. Humiliated and stricken, I retreated to my cubicle in the corner of the English Staff Office, and gave up any inclinations of grandeur once and for all.

**Out of the frying pan.** However, retreating to anonymity did me no good. If Media Productions put me into the limelight; my illness kept me there. Timing was a cruel mistress in my first year at work, as the second day of back-to-school workshop was the first day of my new hell. I got sick, so sick that I ended up missing forty-four days of work my first year, twenty of those absences due to hospitalization. While the union stepped in to help me with sick days, the teachers outside my department stepped back. The rumor mill started circulating, with teachers

calling my illness an eating disorder with a bow on top: something I was making up. It got so ugly that my supposed colleagues were even telling students these stories, recommending me for a primary source on anorexia nervosa.

My department recommended talking to my union president for help, as the union has a sick bank to ensure I never lose pay. He recommended that I share my illness story and updates with all of the teachers in the school, as they were refusing to donate sick days to someone like me anymore. It was not their problem that the “anorexic child” was not eating enough. They were unwilling to donate their hard-earned days to an “attention-seeker.” Teachers stopped looking me in the eye, few even spoke to me at that point, let alone greeted me in the hallway, but my name was being tossed around by nearly everyone. I researched bullying in the workplace, and everything I found told me to seek help from my union president. When I went back to him for help, he called me a loud mouth, told me to stop “pissing people off,” and said that I should practice being unnoticed, keeping my head down. There was the irony: my union president was one of my bullies. For months, I was limited to conversations within my department, as any interaction outside our hallway was either severely strained or somewhere on the scale of hostility. I was disheartened, isolated, severely ill, and ready to quit.

### **Finding the Will to Fight**

I am really not sure what brought me out of that severe depression that I sank into; perhaps it was my department, which was incredibly sympathetic and helpful, or perhaps it was the few friends in the high school that I did find. I do not know if it was the illness, the workload, the union president, or the overwhelming bullying with which I was dealing at that point that caused the depression. One thing, though, is certain: I could not carry on the way I was. Two years into the career of my dreams and I was on the cusp of burning out. I was

devastated, bitter, and crestfallen. I spent a while blaming myself, but it wasn't until I managed to take that step and blame the bullies I faced that I was able to wake up a bit. I realized that I had actually not done anything wrong, at least not wrong enough to deserve the treatment I was getting. My only sin, my only faux pas, was being new. So what? Why did that give these people the right to step over me constantly, sometimes kicking me during their journey?

**Discovering new teacher burnout.** Upon talking with my colleagues outside my school district, I learned that my experience was not unheard of; instead, it was and is horrifically common. The “burnout teacher” was the joke of my college courses, that ever-feared, never-understood term applied to mythical teachers who do not know how good they really have it. I was officially another statistic, another burnt out teacher going through the motions and keeping my head down. My college classmates would not recognize me, would not recognize the timidity and desperate invisibility that I had adopted to work my way through the day. They wouldn't recognize a Sara devoid of passion, a Sara who didn't love teaching. I was a teacher burnout. Will J.G. Evers and Welko Tomic (2003) claim there are three types of teacher burnout: individual criticism, emotional distress, and the stressful environment. They write, “Examples of such environmental stressors are the social relationships of the teachers with students, colleagues and principals ... and the [organizational] working circumstances” (p. 2). While it was obvious that my illness (it was emotionally exhausting after all) was contributing to my burnout, the main keyword there was *environment*. My workplace, my coworkers, my administrators, and my illness had all joined forces to make me a lackluster, drained teacher with bags under her eyes and apathy in her heart. Kristina M. Valtierra (2003) addresses this loss of faith, arguing, “Yet, there are teachers who defy the burn out epidemic. Some highly skilled educators vehemently preserve their passion, commitment, and capacity to thrive despite

surmounting obstacles.... Therefore, it is essential that pre-service and practicing teachers are equipped with the tools necessary to preserve passion, hope, energy, and determination” (p. 56). I needed to regain my passion. I could not be the only one who lost it to burn out; there must be others. My brain started whirring again, and it occurred to me that my experience could actually be worth something more than just the bitterness I had adopted. I could either remain as I was, downtrodden and alone, or I could buck up. I could work through it: I could *fix* it. I reminded myself that I was not alone, that the new teacher experience is not limited to my situation. Every single educator out there had their own experience to share, their own background to reflect upon, their own opinions formed, and their own burnout to overcome.

Rather than becoming embittered and stressed, I decided to put that negative energy toward a solution, rather than toward gray hair. I determined to share my experiences as a new teacher with the end goal being something as simple as solidarity for another new teacher out there fighting a similar fight, or as complex as giving schools some valuable insights that inspire a new initiative that is really worth adopting. For this to come to fruition, I needed to research overall teacher burn out statistics, current supports for new educators already in place, current viewpoints of the non-tenured role in schools, and, sadly, bullying in the workplace. I also sat down with several fine educators and discussed the role of the new teacher with them, as well as their experiences as a new teacher and how that has shaped their views today.

### **It's Time to Redefine Our Roles**

While many new teachers face the obstacles of workload, curriculum planning, classroom management, and extra work assignments, the unspoken truth is that many districts provide them with an environment that enforces their silent agreement on all major, and sometimes minor, decisions. Due to the experienced, jaded veteran teacher, the new teachers learn the “duck and

cover” maneuver, which becomes their true key to success in their school. If they do not learn the duck and cover, many end up leaving the profession within the first five years, as the kick back from their fellow staff can be nothing short of bullying. In fact, seventeen percent of new teachers quit the profession entirely within five years of their hiring date (Fensterwald n.p.). Furthermore, more than half of new teachers change schools within five years, blaming poor facilities and working conditions, stress, professional isolation, and other factors: combined, fifty percent of Minnesota’s teachers do not remain in their initial district for more than five years (Fitzgerald 2, 6). Lucinda Gray and Soheyla Taie looked further into these statistics, determining the effects of life events and teacher satisfaction within the district. They determined that younger teachers are at a higher risk of leaving the district within five years for significant life events such as marriage or starting a family; however, they also noted that younger teachers are also the ones feeling the highest amount of dissatisfaction with their district as well. Lastly, they determined that new teacher salaries also played a role in Minnesota’s teacher retention, as twenty percent of new teachers leave the field due to a starting salary of less than forty thousand dollars (Gray & Taie 3). Gary James Harfitt furthered these claims by discussing the work environment’s effect on teacher retention. He writes, “The interaction between teachers’ professional and personal identities along with the personal scenarios they experienced in the workplace contributes strongly to their resilience as a teacher and, indeed, their effectiveness professionally” (Harfitt 31). In order for new teachers to be successful, in other words, they need their coworkers’ help and support throughout the course of their tenure.

So why, then, has the “duck and cover” become the norm of many school districts? Rather than accepting new teachers into the fold, there are those veteran teachers who refuse to acknowledge their existence until their tenured contract is signed, as if they are wearing an

invisibility cloak up to that pivotal moment. Instead of having an active role in the building or department, the non-tenured ghosts wandering the halls are expected to maintain hearty silence; voicing opinions and viewpoints is highly frowned upon. As Hüsrevşahi claims, “The behavior of silence can develop naturally among workers, as well as stem from the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effects of environmental conditions on workers, who then display the behavior of silence consciously or unconsciously” (1180-1181). While it is true that the untenured are novices at the teaching profession, this *persona non grata* status they are granted is unwarranted, as if the word *untenured* is the most horrific of swear words. As many teachers claim, new staff brings more light to a building, more energy, and more passion. New teachers can bring with them the up-and-coming ideologies being promoted and a fresh mindset dissimilar to that which has been said at every staff meeting up to their hiring date.

**New vs. Old.** Unfortunately, though, their role is that of a nonentity until the binding contract has been signed. They are told to keep their mouths shut until they have a few years of experience, with phrases like “‘speech is silver, but silence is gold,’ ‘let sleeping dogs lie,’ [and] ‘if you can’t beat them, join them,’” designed to “feed the act of silence and get rooted in individuals’ minds” (Hüsrevşahi 1181). Nevertheless, having the label of veteran does not make someone a perfect teacher, a Mr. Feeny. Instead, those teachers have just as many things to learn as new teachers, as the field is forever changing. Additionally, there is always the possibility of teacher burn *in* amongst veteran teachers, causing bitterness and apathy toward students and colleagues. As Jonathon Eckert states, there is a strong need for teachers to have a growth mindset in regards to their teaching: “We always should expect great things of ourselves and our students; we cannot give up when our classrooms do not run with the clockwork precision that we envisioned” (3). Just like we expect our students to constantly strive for improvement, we as



teachers do as well. With that being said, the number of years of employment does not matter. Every teacher has strengths, just like every teacher has weaknesses. Contrarily, though, veteran teachers have the advantage of fine-tuning those strengths and weaknesses throughout their years of experience. These weaknesses can be worked on through collaboration, even if that collaboration involves the non-tenured. Eckert writes, “In order to grow, we must be willing to try new strategies, to reflect, and then to decide if and how we will proceed” (6). Teachers of all experiences, tenured and non-tenured, can learn from each other to build their craft, but new teachers need to be given a role that involves voice in order for this collaborative work environment to emerge.

### **When the Age Gap Leads to Bullying**

One of the saddest facts I came across in my research is that the field of education has the highest reported percentage of workplace bullying in the world: “Education is cited as a high-risk profession; in fact it is the highest of all the professions listed in the survey results at 13.8% compared to, for example, Health and Social Work (12.4%), Public Administration (13.2%), and Construction (3.3%)” (Fahie & Devine 236). The number of teachers reporting bullying has become so high that countries such as Canada, Ireland, Finland, Norway, and the United States have started using government mandates to try to dissuade the practice. For the United States, their first mandate was the bill offered in 1968, which aligned with all workplace bullying. As Hall states, “House Bill 1968 defines workplace bullying as ‘conduct that (a) a reasonable person would find hostile or offensive and unrelated to an employer's legitimate business interests; and (b) causes physical or psychological harm to the employee’” (45). Today, at least one in six teachers has been or is being bullied according to this definition in their workplace (Hall 45). Why, though, is the field of education such a hot plate for negativity? As Adrienne van der Valk

states, “‘The professionals who get into these fields [have] a prosocial orientation,’ he says. ‘They’re helpers. For teachers, they’re really development specialists. ... They’re not political animals. They have their back turned to the politics, which of course, then opens them up to this attack. Because of their goodness in a way, because of their motivation. This is why they get targeted’” (5). While bullying can take many forms, the effects on the victims are still traumatic and unwarranted.

Particularly in a school setting, there really are very few options for the victims to escape the problem. Turning to the administration does nothing but antagonize the culprits; confronting them is typically out of the question, as they habitually attack those people who are not confrontational by nature. Unfortunately, many teachers being bullied just have to learn to survive, to live with it as best as they can. However, this causes many symptoms in the victim:

The data suggest that, at a psychological level, workplace bullying impacts on individuals in different ways. While some interviewees stressed that the psychological impact of the bullying was negligible, others, like Olive, spoke candidly about her desire to take her life. These extremes suggest that the psychological effects of workplace bullying may be seen as a continuum, with the different manifestations of psychological distress outlined above occupying different positions, dependent on the severity of the experience and the personal resources of the individual concerned. (Fahie & Devine 242)

With these facts and figures, the concept of workplace bullying in schools is clearly a national issue that should be addressed, but as of yet it remains simply a discussion topic. One of the major factors in this lack of action is the pure subjectivity of the topic. What constitutes *bullying*? How should it be reported? What are the consequences? As it stands, these questions are huge barriers for districts to overcome before change can happen. This research regarding

bullying was highly enlightening regarding my situation. It became obvious that a large portion of my depression was solely due to the menial forms, and less menial forms, of bullying I encountered in my first years here. I also had no way out, like many other teachers reported, as my union president was untrustworthy, my principal would do nothing but stir the pot, and I have never been good at defending myself. I, like so many others, was stuck.

### **Real New Teacher Experiences**

Beyond this background research of burnout, the non-tenured role, and bullying, though, I knew I had to delve further into the realm of the non-tenured/tenured divide. I had to talk to teachers in the field and walk a mile in their shoes to see what their experiences were, what their viewpoints entailed. I started out in my own school. I spoke with three different teachers within my district to see how they viewed the new teacher experience and several others outside my district to get a wider look at the overall experience and environment available to new teachers.

**Teacher One.** Teacher One has been teaching for thirteen years, and was a late bloomer. She became a teacher as her second career, so she avoided the stereotypes of the generation gaps many new teachers face. Her experience as a new teacher was relatively low-key, in a sense, as her main hurdle was joining into a tight-knit department, leaving her with a feeling of isolation that was hard to overcome. Harfitt's study subject, Cameron, felt a similar experience in her first teaching position: "Carmen's anticipated life as a teacher built on a successful navigation of her teacher training and teaching practicum at university was very different to the 'reality' of her first professional landscape. In her story, she made frequent references to 'always feeling alone' and how she suffered from a 'sense of helplessness' for most of her first year" (27). However, Teacher One also noted that, beyond the isolation in her department, her first school had a culture of shunning new teachers, encouraging them to remain silent until they are tenured. She

found that viewpoint incredibly sad, as new teachers come into the district with the newest ideas and methods, and can help veteran teachers just as much as those veteran teachers could help the new teachers. As we discussed it further, it quickly became apparent that this enforced silence was, in fact, a form of bullying. She realized that throughout her first years' isolation was a coalescence of many negative factors that added up to a stressful and depressing situation. As Declan Fahie and Dympna Devine claim, "While bullying behaviors may appear insignificant or innocuous to an outside observer, it is sometimes the aggregation of seemingly inoffensive acts that coalesce to form an insidious pattern of destructive interaction, leading to profoundly negative repercussions for the individual" (238). We examined the impact those years had on her as an educator, and she was surprised to realize that she had stepped across the line to the other side of the spectrum, and had in turn started expecting new teachers to be silent just like she was, and that they needed to "pay their dues" just like everyone else. She believes that expectation of new teachers has become so ingrained in her school's climate that it is "second nature, unfortunate, and toxic."

**Teacher Two.** Teacher Two took a different approach to the role of the new teacher in a school. Rather than discussing teamwork or voicing ideas, she instead discussed the workload piled onto the shoulders of the new teachers in a building. She finds it very sad that so many different committees, activities, supervisions, and anything else are dumped onto the shoulders of the new teachers in a building. While she understands that it is considered "paying dues," she mentioned the irony that the people who need the most support in the building are also the ones forced to do the most work. She discussed her years as a new teacher as a blur, as she was hired as coach for all three seasons of the school year, and was encouraged to wear many other hats at the same time. She felt that all of those additional responsibilities made her role as teacher

become secondary, playing out what Teacher One described as simply “going through the motions.” Harfitt and his discussion of a new teacher, Alice, in his study, echo her views on the new teacher workload. He writes, “She regretted ‘not being able to concentrate on her lesson planning’ and feeling underprepared.... She spoke with a senior teacher at the school to ask how she might withdraw from her role as discipline coordinator but was met with a surprised look and a reminder that ‘All teachers must be responsible for other duties and give service to the school’” (29). van der Valk proclaims this immense workload as another form of new teacher bullying, saying that “the hierarchical structure of many schools and districts combined with the isolation many teachers experience due to the nature of the job can create an environment” where bullying, silencing, and delegating “can easily go unchecked with devastating consequences for the targets of the behavior and the kids they teach” (6). As we discussed her first years teaching, we determined that the role of the non-tenured teacher is highly ironic: her coworkers do not trust new teachers in their department to share thoughts and opinions, but they trust them to be a part of every other committee or event that they do not want a part of. Teacher Two worded it as such (I modified the names for anonymity): “Deb hates new teachers. She thinks they are a waste of space, and not worth knowing names. Then she turns around and tells the same new teachers to handle all of our data collection and common assessments because she is too *busy*.” Teacher Two is tired of this mindset in her department, but she voiced often that she is not sure how to change it or improve the situation at all.

**Teacher Three.** Teacher Three had a similar experience to mine as a new teacher. His first year, he had a tenured teacher say to him that his name would not be learned until his fifth year; they simply did not care who he was. Furthermore, he said the break room had a bet chart by some of the veteran teachers, and they placed bets on how long each new teacher would last.

Some would even get very competitive about these bets, and would try to manipulate a win. “I once had a fellow teacher in my department come barreling down the hall at me, telling me my kids needed to ‘Shut the f\*\*\* up or he’d shut me up.’ They were barely making any noise, but I was humiliated. I felt about as tall as an ant.” To this day, he is not sure if that teacher was trying to get him to quit or simply breaking him in. He finds veteran views of new teachers “frustrating and pathetic” and he has learned to not trust anyone in his building, save a select few. The bitterness and anger rang true when he described veteran teachers as stubborn, stuck in their own ways, and ignorant. I shared with him a story from my first year teaching, when another teacher informed me what I would be teaching for a class, what I would be using, and also informed me that I could not have autonomy over the class until I was tenured. He simply rolled his eyes; he was so used to that sort of reaction from certain coworkers. He said, “You know? I’ve talked time and again with the powers that be about climate change. The problem is that it starts from the top, not the bottom. It’s a chain reaction.” In other words, change will not be happening today, tomorrow, or even next week, an idea substantiated in “Negative Workplace Behaviours at the University of Hard Knocks”: “Thus, it would seem that leadership plays a crucial role in creating destructive workplace cultures and in creating environments in which negative workplace behaviours such as bullying can thrive” (Cleary et al. 254). This change needs to happen through leadership, over the course of time, as an entire climate change. He has been in his district several years now, but it was not until he made a name for himself as a coach and committee leader that anyone cared enough to hear him when he spoke. He is not sure such a change is even possible in our building.

**Teacher Four.** After talking with Teacher Three, and sharing our horror stories, I ventured outside district lines; I spoke with several different colleagues of mine to gain insight

into other environments. The first, Teacher Four, spoke of a support system that was top of the line. In his school, new teachers are given mentors, curriculum materials, support meetings, and even other teachers' classrooms to make sure they are successful. As Cleary et al. state:

To successfully negotiate the teaching, research, governance, and engagement aspects of the academic role, academics can find it helpful to form collaborative relationships with colleagues, rather than work in isolation. However, the success of such collaborations is dependent on collegial trust, and the nature of the professional networks and types of working relationships that can be developed. (264)

Teacher Four took the stance that a new teacher is a professional colleague, whether they have a lot of experience or not. He shared one particular experience with me that substantiated this opinion: "There was a day last year that I was meeting with my mentee teacher about his first trimester at work. We got around to talking about some details we were teaching in class, and it turns out he was rocking theme statements way more than me. He gave *me* advice that day; it was not the other way around." Sometimes, he reminds veteran teachers that it is the passion that has the answers, not the file cabinet of lesson plans: "Teachers who care are teachers I want to work with. I've worked with old and bitter and new and cynical. They're all the same. It's the ones that give a crap that are worth collaborating with, whether they've been on payroll a month or thirty years."

**Teacher Five.** Teacher Four's opinion was vastly different than Teacher Five, as Teacher Five strongly believes that new teachers should learn the field before offering advice, or speaking in general. In all reality, my conversation with her was highly difficult, as it was like interviewing some of my coworkers regarding their views of me. She explained that a new teacher talking about classroom management is like her trying to fix her own car: "Just because

you have been in it, sat in it, and driven it, that does not make you an expert.” She acknowledges that they may have some ideas fresh from their college classrooms, but they should be given time to implement them on their own before suggesting them to others. Teacher Five’s opinions resonate strongly with those found in “Beginning Teachers’ Perceptions of their Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills in Teaching: A Three Year Study.” In this article, it was determined “that beginning teachers lacked the conceptual understanding that is needed to respond to students’ questions and the abilities to extend the lessons beyond the basics” (Choy et al. 68). In their study, they found that many new teachers felt significantly more qualified after their three years of teaching, and felt that they had developed a stronger skillset that bettered them as a teacher. However, that’s where the similarities end, as Teacher Five is a strong proponent for new teacher silence, while Choy and her cowriters feel that teachers need extensive interaction and mentorship from their colleagues to gain as much success as possible. We spent two hours conversing about the new teacher role in the building, trying to see the other’s side. She gave me some insights into why my coworkers may have been acting the way they did, but not many. She did not understand the cruelty; on the contrary, she was highly offended on my behalf. As we talked, our sides became clearer, and more aligned. I shared with her an article written by Thomas R. Hoerr, called “Who’s the Bully on Your Staff,” specifically this quote: “Collaboration and respect among teachers must be an expectation. Teachers who take the lead in working with others should be applauded, and those who need to work on their interactions should have this expectation as one of their yearly goals” (83). She agreed with this statement, and admitted that she finds herself in conversation with new teachers quite often about classroom management techniques, parent communication, or new technologies out there. “I didn’t really think about it, but talking with new teachers is a reflection for me. It makes me actively think



about what I do and why I do it. I don't do that nearly enough otherwise." We determined that the new teacher role is that of a rookie anywhere: soak in as much knowledge as possible, and work with others to garner experience. At the end of our conversation, she said, "No one should start cold. I may not think them an expert, but that doesn't mean they have the chicken pox. There shouldn't be this barrier, and I'm not sure why I thought there should be one."

### **Conclusions**

Based on my research and interviews, the role of the new teacher in any district, any building, sounds relatively similar, with a few slight adjustments. Most new teachers are not paid enough for the work they put in, some of that work being extra assignments heaped onto their plates by other teachers and administration, and many do not receive the supports necessary for them to not burn out. Unfortunately, the more teachers that burn out and resign, the wider the gap between tenured and non-tenured grows. For many tenured teachers, seeing one after another new teacher leave the school permanently has to be disheartening, frustrating, and beyond irritating. Of course those staff are not going to go out of their way to befriend and welcome the new. However, that also does not give license to be cruel and apathetic to those new teachers seeking help. The overall climate of the educational building needs to be shifted, for it affects a lot more than just the teachers themselves. The climate of the building shifts everything that building touches: student life, academics, teacher success, activities, events, and every single person who works in the building. As Marie-Nathalie Beaudoin writes, "A school climate of gossip and cliques greatly interferes with trust, collaboration, and openness. It stifles creativity and makes it daunting for many teachers to share anything personal, making them feel isolated, disconnected, and sometimes reluctant to go to school" (42). The reality of the matter is, for our students to be happy and successful in our buildings, so too do our teachers.

In truth, non-tenured, new teachers to the field can benefit immensely from their experienced mentors' experience. There are certain things the college lecture just cannot teach in regards to education: communicating with parents, classroom management, finding time to grade papers, etc. Someone who has worked in the field can offer advice and expertise regarding these elements of the craft, as they have been around to learn it. That does not mean, however, that a divide is necessary. The problem lies in that divide, as that is when teacher bullying steps in, along with isolation, overload, and burnout. I believe the best way to truly keep new teachers in a successful position, and as successful educators, that divide needs to be bridged so that collaboration can occur. New teachers need to be given opportunities to prove their leadership abilities, as "being empowered with opportunities for curriculum development, instructional decision-making and leadership" offers new educators a strong way to increase and maintain their passion in the field (Valtierra 60). As Valtierra claims, "Next, the extended education family is the notion that familial-like relationships at school nourished ... deep bonds necessary to support the complex needs of the systematically marginalized youth she served" (60). Both old and new can benefit from the others' skillset. It just needs to be talked about. For many schools, that talking is the first step of many to fix this unspoken truth in the field of education.

### **Implications**

As I reflect on my experience as a teacher, I often wonder why I am still in the field. I do not know where I got the strength to work my way through illness, through hateful words, through silencing stares. There were days that dragging myself out of bed was almost too much effort, even though I knew I had no more sick days to take a mental health day. I do not know how I sat through complaints of the "millennials" (yes, they include me in that category) and how ungrateful, lazy, and worthless that generation is. It is hard to stand up in front of a

classroom full of students and demand attention when told time and again to shut up, when reminded often how worthless I am. I am not saying my experience is the new teacher experience in general. In fact, many schools have taken care to create a nontoxic environment for new staff, one that is full of supports and mentors similar to Teacher Four. However, my research and interviews do show that there is a problem in the field of education. This disturbing execution of new teacher hazing that is detrimental to the health of a building and the teachers themselves. Until new and veteran educators can form an alliance that bridges that divide, my story is going to happen time and again, in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. It will happen to that new math teacher in California, or the new choir director in Maine. Veteran teachers will bully, isolate, and overwork new teachers simply because they need to “pay their dues,” because that is what was done to them, and because that is what is expected. It is not up to administrators, superintendents, or therapists to fix this; it is up to us as teachers to take control of our building and our attitudes and recreate the dynamic of generation-gapped colleagues.

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