Challenges In The First Year Of Teaching: Lessons Learned In An Elementary Education Resident Teacher Program

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that the first years of teaching are a challenge for all beginning teachers. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future's study (2010) first-year teacher attrition has been steadily increasing and many leave the profession even before they are proficient educators who know how to work with colleagues to improve student learning. The immense expense of this departure is a concern to the future of the nation's school districts. This paper will discuss an Elementary Education Resident Teacher Program that is a collaborative relationship between a College of Education and Human Development and a local public school system. This one year program mentoring program was developed to support first year teachers in their curriculum and instruction as well as to provide these individuals with educational growth as they pursue their master's degree. This paper will share the voices of six beginning teachers, in a resident teacher program, regarding the challenges they experienced during the first year of teaching, including classroom/time management, working with parents and other family members, differentiating instruction, handling difficult student behaviors, and how to effectively assess student learning. Each of the five challenges will be introduced with a brief review of literature and followed by the advice from the resident teachers to other beginning teachers.

Keywords: Elementary Education; Teacher Education; First Year Teachers; Mentoring

"Most of us end up with no more than five or six people who remember us. Teachers have thousands of people who remember them for the rest of their lives."
--Andrew A. Rooney

INTRODUCTION

*I*t is well known that the first years of teaching are a challenge for all beginning teachers. After leaving the role of being undergraduate students and taking on the role of teachers, they soon become overwhelmed with the responsibilities of the curricula, diverse students, behaviors, feeling a lack of support, and other school duties. These challenges and frustrations are an aspect of beginning teaching experience that is consistently featured in the literature (Fry & Anderson, 2011). According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future's study (2010) first-year teacher attrition has been steadily increasing since 1994. They reported that beginning teachers leave the profession even before they are proficient educators who know how to work with colleagues to iprove student learning. The immense expense of this departure is a concern to the future of the nation's school districts (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2010).

Research has shown that one out of every two beginning teachers, close to 50% leave the profession during their first five years of teaching with at least 30% of new teachers leaving by the end their first year and even more within 3 years. Additionally, the National Education Association (2007) reports the number of novice or beginning teachers leaving the profession is still increasing. Challenging experiences of a beginning teaching life do not only affect their moral and effectiveness but force large numbers of them to resign during their first years of classroom teaching (Odell & Hung, 1998). Watson (2006) for instance, indicated evidence of beginning teacher resignation

after a month of entry into classroom, because of inability to deal with classroom management and discipline issues. Hung and Smith (2012) have also reported beginning teachers' decision to quit teaching out of frustration.

As for possible explanations, Ingersoll & Smith, (2003) wrote the pursuit of a better career and job dissatisfaction contributes to approximately two-thirds of all beginning-teacher attrition factors. Many additional studies have been completed on why so many beginning teachers leave teaching as a career. Some reasons include insufficient materials and supplies, discipline and classroom management, students' individual differences, parent relations, assessment, and organization of class work, (Brock & Grady, 1997; Veenman, 1984), lack of emotional support, communication, understanding procedures and policies, using effective teaching strategies, planning and time management (Brock & Grady, 1997) and motivating students (Veenman, 1984). Ganser (1999) revisited Veenman's research and the results indicate that unfortunately after all this time the problems were essentially the same 40 years later for beginning teachers. Consistently, it is reported that between 40-50% of "beginning teachers leave this noble profession between the first five years of entry" (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 13) into the teaching profession, due to lack of needed support, feedback and guidance on how to help their students succeed (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). Goddard and Goddard (2006) summed the daunting experience of beginning teachers this way, "burnout is the lived experience of a large proportion of teachers at the commencement of their career and this burnout is emphatically associated with beginning teachers seriously contemplating leaving their jobs and their chosen profession" (p. 73). It is worrying to see young and energetic professionals forced to leave a profession of their choice.

Darling-Hammond (2003) also stated that teachers who lack adequate initial preparation are more likely to leave the profession than are those teachers with adequate preparation. Research relating induction programs to teacher turnover has found that a comprehensive induction program that includes planning and collaboration with other teachers has a positive effect on beginning-teacher retention (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Fulton et al., 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Induction is the term used to describe the period when teachers have their first teaching experience and adjustment to all the roles and responsibilities associated with teaching. At a Midwestern University the term *Resident Teacher Program* is used in lieu of a teacher induction program. Wong, Britton, and Ganser (2005) researched high quality induction programs in and outside the United States and reported that all had three major similarities, which included being "highly structured, focused on professional learning, and emphasized collaboration" (p. 383). The Elementary Education Resident Teacher Program has these components and has been in practice for over 20 years. The Resident Teacher Program is a collaborative relationship between the College of Education and Human Development and a local public school system.

This unique program provides a highly selective group of beginning teachers, called residents, with collegial support and mentorship as they enter the teaching profession at the elementary education level. This program was developed to support first year teachers in their curriculum and instruction as well as to provide these individuals with educational growth as they pursue their master's degree. This valuable opportunity allows these individuals to interweave theory and practice in a productive and exhilarating learning experience with mentoring in the schools and at the university level. Every year, six new resident teachers assume full responsibility of elementary classrooms for one academic school year. Resident teachers earn stipends and a waiver of university tuition for a major portion of the coursework toward the master's degree. They enroll in graduate study during the summer prior to assuming individual teaching responsibilities and complete their degree work the following summer. The program is demanding and yet, has proven to be effective in retaining new teachers. The resident teachers have an expereinced mentor who works with three residents in one school placement and another mentor in a differnet school for the other three resident teachers. The mentor's main responsibility in the school building is to be there for collaboration, observation, and for modeling of teaching as needed by the resident teachers. The mentors help the residents with the typical struggles that they will face during the first year of teaching.

The resident teachers typically enroll in the same weekly graduate courses, which helps them to form a close collaborative relationship as they experiences the same challenges but within their own classrooms. They also attend a weekly seminar with the university advisor to address situations, problems, and concerns. In these sessions, they brainstorm together and discuss many relevant topics of interests concerning teaching, learning, students, courses, and other graduate responsibilites. This paper will share the voices of six beginning teachers, in a resident teacher program, regarding the challenges they experienced during the first year of teaching. The resident teachers

(RTs) agreed to work together in an effort to identify the challenges associated with being a first-year elementary education teacher. Being qualitiative in design, it was unclear at the onset what the findings would reveal or if there would even be similarities or differences among the RTs and their classrooms.

However, by the middle of the school year after carefully reviewing journal entries and reflecting on videotapes, the results confirmed that each first year teacher was facing the same five main challenges within their first year of teaching. These included classroom/time management, working with parents and other family members, differentiating instruction, handling difficult student behaviors, and how to effectively assess student learning. These resident teachers chose a career in teaching for different reasons, but regardless, all of them also questioned their career choice a few times during this initial year of teaching. All six resident teachers stated numerous times that without the mentoring support of this program they would have contemplated leaving the profession like so many others. They needed the support and guidance of building mentors, university advisor, principals, and other faculty and staff members. By the end of this study it was very clear that each resident teachers had advice and important information to share with other new teachers. Each of the five challenges will begin with a brief literature review and following will be the advice from the resident teachers to other beginning teachers.

CHALLENGE #1: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

"It is the teacher – what the teacher knows and can do – that makes the difference in the classroom." –Harry Wong

As a first-year teacher, classroom management brings its share of many unanswered questions. How do you obtain and maintain respectful control within the classroom? How do you manage a class in order to provide the optimum learning environment? Classroom management can be defined as "all of the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time and materials so that instruction in content and student learning can take place" (Jackson & Joyce, 2003, p.3). Many key components repeatedly surfaced in the research on classroom management. Open communication, classroom environment, high expectations, direct instruction, teacher planning, and modeling were fundamental aspects of establishing a positive classroom that fosters student learning. With management issues, Jackson and Joyce (2003) discuss the importance of three-way communication involving teacher, students, and parents.

This communication should include conversations about curriculum goals, student learning, student behavior, class activities, and ways for parents to be involved in their child's learning. Logan (2003) further encouraged teachers to make phones call to the students' parents mentioning positive as well as other issues that need to be addressed. Teachers should develop the habit of occasionally calling the parents at home just to share good news. Communication shapes expectations for both students and parents. Teachers should be clear and concise about classroom rules and behavior expectations (Jackson and Joyce, 2003). Teachers must teach students the standards upheld within their classrooms (Logan, 2003). It is important to develop procedures that will establish a smooth-running classroom (Greenberg, 2007). Some of these procedures should be teacher-directed and others should involve input from the students.

Classroom procedures need to be developed for attendance, tardiness, announcements, starting and ending the day routines, bathroom use, handing in papers, working independently, working in small groups, whole class discussions, and walking in the halls. Rules should be discussed and established during the first weeks of school. It is important to review the rules every day for the first weeks of school making expectations clear by reading each rule, explaining, modeling, and giving examples (Logan, 2003). Teachers need to politely, but firmly, insist that children adhere to these procedures and policies and consistently enforce the limits (Greenberg, 2007).

Furthermore, teachers should explain expectations for the students at the beginning of each activity. This technique is known as direct instruction. When the teacher outlines what students will be doing for a certain activity, uncertainty is decreased, and better classroom discipline prevails (Logan, 2003). Providing clear expectations using direct instruction and open communication only improves the climate within the classroom. By developing a positive environment, the students should feel safe and comfortable taking risks with their learning.

The classroom environment is directly affected by established management strategies. Consistency and structure, student involvement, self-discipline, routine, developing relationships, and even music are all aspects that should not be overlooked. Jackson & Joyce (2003) say, "If it is true that one of the keys to classroom management is maintaining students' interests, then music can unlock the door to their minds"(p.6). Music makes the day more alive and interesting for students, which can result in increased learning and decreased discipline problems. Music can also be used to change the mood in the classroom, assist with transitional activities, as well as help to alleviate discipline problems.

As for consistency and structure, these are also fundamental to creating a positive, smooth-running classroom. "The most important thing a teacher can provide in the classroom during the first week of school is consistency" (Wong & Wong, 2004, p. 84). Students yearn for a well-managed consistent classroom because of the security it provides. Consistency happens when the teacher installs, models, and practices procedures and routines. Logan (2003) and Greenberg (2007) emphasize the importance of helping students develop predictable, consistent routines. Most students thrive and respond better in a classroom built upon well-developed routines, order, and structure. It is the teacher's job to help students become comfortable by consistently following through with words, actions, routines and procedures.

Glazer (2003) describes the importance of guiding children to understand the school environment and how effectively it functions through student involvement. Children can be included in classroom decisions such as establishing hand signals to get ready for lessons. Similarly, Logan (2003) discusses the importance of helping students to develop self-discipline within a consistent and well-structured classroom. "The definition of discipline must be coupled with efforts to teach students appropriate behavior so that they can learn to be self-disciplined" (Logan, 2003, p.3). Teachers also need to teach students self-discipline in order to prevent the same inappropriate behaviors from occurring repeatedly.

Developing relationships and teacher attitudes are crucial components of building an environment for learning. Logan (2003) encourages teachers to find out as much as possible about each student; this information may help solve discipline problems. Different students will respond in different ways, so teachers need to take time and a genuine interest in their students by getting to know them. Effective teachers are good listeners that respect and care about their students including issues related to cultural diversity. These relationships and attitudes directly influence the overall atmosphere in the classroom.

Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004) state that given the increasing diversity in today's classrooms, a teacher's lack of multicultural competence can exacerbate the difficulties that novice teachers have with classroom management (p. 25). These authors discuss five essential components to a culturally responsive classroom management system which include:

- the recognition of one's own ethnocentrism,
- knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds,
- understanding of the broader social, economic, and political context,
- the ability and willingness to use culturally appropriate management strategies, and
- the commitment to building caring classrooms (p. 25).

Knowing about the students' backgrounds and cultures takes time, effort, but more importantly, it shows caring and respect for your students. The teacher's attitude toward students affects how students respond and learn within the classroom (Jackson and Joyce, 2003). Students want to be respected just as teachers do. Respect for teachers and students will be earned over time by developing open and positive relationships. Jackson and Joyce (2003) suggest that incorporating a little humor into a teacher's teaching style will engage students and help to develop effective relationships.

Time management and transitions are additional ways that the teacher demonstrates classroom management, preparation, and organization. When a teacher is well organized and prepared, it benefits everyone involved in learning. Classroom management allows the teacher to make the best use of time and resources to further support student learning (Jackson and Joyce, 2003). Additionally, Glazer (2003) specifically suggests using

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an egg timer with a child who needs control over time. Teachers can give a child an egg timer saying, "Try your best to finish your work by the time the sand is at the bottom" (Glazer, 2003, p.87). This simple, quiet technique makes students feel as if they are in control of the situation and defuses power struggles.

Praise and positive reinforcement through teacher modeling are two of the most effective management practices. Jackson and Joyce (2003), Logan (2003), and Glazer (2003) emphasize using praise and positive reinforcement daily and consistently. The rules, routines, and expectations established early in the school year should all be stated in a positive manner. Teachers should also look for opportunities to reinforce positive behaviors by consistently accentuating positive rather than negative behaviors.

Barbetta, Norona, and Bicard (2005) assert that it is difficult for learning to happen in chaotic environments; therefore, teachers need to create and maintain positive, productive classroom atmospheres conducive to learning (p.11). They also list a number of mistakes that are committed frequently at all grade levels and base their suggestions on the following assumptions and beliefs:

- Teachers have considerable influence over student behavior.
- Student misbehaviors are learned and occur for a reason.
- Prevention is the most effective form of behavior management.
- A proactive approach allows the focus to be on teaching appropriate behaviors rather than eliminating negative behaviors.
- Management systems should be flexible enough to meet changing needs.
- Students, parents, and professionals can be effective partners in behavior management (p.11).

Babetta et al., (2005) discussed a dozen common mistakes that teachers make with classroom management and then explained and what to do instead. Their advice for teachers when misbehavior occurs is to ask, "What did the student gain from this misbehavior? Though students' misbehaviors appear to occur for no reason, they do serve a purpose, possibly hyperactivity, to get something, gain a privilege, or to avoid something (p.12). Another suggestion from these authors is to not ask the students, "Why did you do that?" (p.12). There is a good chance that as the teacher you will not like the response, and the student may not know the reason why s/he misbehaved. Teachers should instead gather more information and study what is happening in the classroom before and after it occurs.

Marshall (2005) describes three principles for superior teachers to practice to enhance classroom management and to promote responsible behavior. Following is a brief description of each principle (p. 51).

- Positivity- The first principle to practice is to be positive. Give compliments, and say things in a positive way. Instead of saying, "Stop talking," Say, "This is quiet time."
- Choice- The second principle is to offer choices in any situation or activity because choice empowers. People do not argue with their own choices; instead, this creates ownership. The article gave three options: "Would you rather complete this in your seat, in the back of the room, or in the office? (p. 52).
- Reflection- The third principle is the understanding of the differences between controlling someone else and attempting to change someone else. No one can control how another person thinks or what the other person wants to do because control is temporary. Instead of controlling and telling someone what to do, ask reflective questions. This is a skill that anyone can learn. Ask questions such as, "What would an extraordinary person do in this situation?" and "If I were a student, would I want me as a teacher?" (p.52)

Classroom management is an area in education that requires thought, confidence, and experience, as it always ranks high among first year teachers' concerns and challenges. An effective classroom is a ". . . combination of teacher modeling, clear and concise directions, consistency in responding to student behavior and teaching that motivates learning" (Jackson & Joyce, 2003). It is reassuring for beginning teachers to know that with open communication, teacher planning, and modeling it should be possible to establish a positive, student-centered, and smoothly functioning classroom.

Resident Teachers Words of Advice on Classroom and Time Management

Classroom and time management are two areas that are difficult for first-year teachers. The RTs learned that building positive relationships with the students was one of the main ways to develop a positive classroom community. These relationships had a better chance of being established when the students knew they were respected, cared for, and knew their teachers had their best interest at heart. With this feeling the children were much more willing to do what was asked of them because they did not want to disappoint their teacher. But this also worked for the students because the teacher also did not want to disappoint them. When first developing these relationships, the RTs found they needed to become familiar with the students' personalities, what they like and dislike, their strengths and areas for improvement, along with what motivates them. Knowing how to pace lessons kept the students more on-task and focused on their learning and as teachers they learned how to modify their teaching in ways that promoted students' best behaviors in the classroom.

Once effective classroom management techniques were established than the other aspects of teaching had a better chance of falling into place. In the first few days of schools, teachers needed to make expectations clear and then practice these expectations numerous times. Practicing is the most significant part of developing routines for younger students. When they can see what you want to happen in the classroom and what it looks like, they are more willing to meet the desired expectations. Also, giving the students chances to practice those expectations in non-threatening ways alleviated the stresses of "messing up. "An example of this would be a morning routine where the students enter the classroom, empty back-packs, put coats away, turn-in homework, and go to their desks to begin morning work. This expectation is structured through routines and practice. When setting routines it is important to remember to set clear, understandable expectations, model, have the students practice, and positively recognize their appropriate behaviors. For students who still experience difficulty, consider making a visual by taking pictures of the children doing each step and then putting this together on a picture board.

Ideally, teachers need to be thoughtfully prepared, and organized for any situation that arises, and this is how teaching is the majority of the time. In the first couple of days of school, be prepared to have large group discussions about how "our" classroom should be and how it should run smoothly. From these ideas, develop "Our Class Promise" which may include things such as sharing what we have, listening carefully, helping each other learn, working hard, having fun together, and standing up for ourselves and others. Put this group work on a chart, have students sign it, and then hang it on a classroom wall throughout the entire year. Remember to have new students sign it and have their classmates explain the chart. This Class Promise can help shape and mold a consistent, structured, safe, and positive learning environment where all students began to feel comfortable taking risks and building relationships.

With classroom management, it is important to be well-prepared but there are many times in teaching when teachers need to be able to think "on their feet" in order to continue fostering learning opportunities and building relationships. There will never be a school day that will go according to plan. At any time of the day, teachers will have to make quick decisions on how to best address a situation. When the majority of the children are not listening or quieting down, a teacher could consider a class meeting to discuss the problem and find possible solutions. If a situation occurred with an individual student or a small group of students, the teacher should talk to the student or students explaining the need to schedule a private meeting when there is a free moment. As soon as the rest of the class is engaged in a task, pull the student(s) aside and talk through the problem. Whether working through the simplest of situations or even the most bizarre incidents in the classroom, the students need to see their teacher as someone who is fair, consistent, caring, and trustworthy.

In classrooms with younger students incorporate music into the daily routines including silly songs, celebration songs, songs that give directions, songs for transitioning from one activity to the next, etc. Some teachers use a song for every transition in the school day including standing for the Pledge of Allegiance, walking to the whole-group carpet, lining up for recess, cleaning up, switching during center time, preparing to walk in the hallway, and saying goodbye at the end of the day. Some teachers use silent signals at times whenever giving a direction by asking students to show that they were ready with "thumbs up" or "the peace sign." Students often race to be the first one to show the direction and enjoyed giving the different silent signals.

For older elementary education students, music can also set the tone and provide a reminder of expectations without needing teacher presence or voice. For example, upbeat music told students to welcome their friends and share some exciting news while putting away their backpack, coat, mittens, and boots. When the soundtrack changed to quiet instrumental music, students knew to quiet themselves so that friends could focus on the morning work. Students then read until a particular song invited them to the whole group area to share daily news and morning messages. Since music guides students through tasks, the teacher is free to greet students, listen to stories, speak with parents, or help individual students. Although specifics such as the morning jobs and seatwork regularly changed, the flow of the morning was stable. Students were not left guessing about what they should be doing, and the start the day was usually stress-free for all.

Puppets are also a great way to obtain and maintain children's attention. A teacher can use puppets to give directions, call on students, and talk with students. Puppets or stuffed animals can also be used as props during silent working or reading times. Timers are also effective for some students including those with oppositional behaviors. When students do not respond well to verbal directions a timer could be used and then all students have a set amount of time to either "cool off" or to complete a task. Most young students are easily motivated by a variety of things including words of praise and encouragement to individual students, to groups of students, and to the whole class. Praise must be specific and genuine. Some teachers use a method like giving "chance tickets" to individual students when they were "caught" following a direction, being a good listener, helping a classmate, etc. These tickets could be collected in a basket for weekly drawings. The more tickets students earned, the better "chance" of their name being drawn. Students who were chosen could select from lunch with the teacher or other random prizes such as pencils, jump ropes, decks of cards, books, etc. Most students are very motivated with this of management technique. No matter the motivation idea, the prize can be determined as a group and then picked from a "Mystery Motivator" envelope. It may include things such as a game day, watching a video, a popcorn party, ice cream party, pajama day, lunch in the classroom, sugarless gum, or extra recess or computer time for transitions, use a calm voice and simple body movements that rely on reminders/warnings such as a countdown from 5 minutes, 4 minutes, fun rhymes, chants, and songs, and consistent daily routines. Literacy and math centers were great ways to manage curricular activities. During centers, student would learn to follow directions, help their peers, be responsible for their own work, clean up after themselves, and transition to different activities. Many negative behaviors can be prevented with good pacing, engaging lessons, and clear communication of expectations. Most students thrive in a classroom where the expectations are clearly communicated, constantly modeled, and consistently reinforced with positive feedback and logical consequences.

CHALLENGE #2: WORKING WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

"Sometimes parents require new teachers to earn their trust. They view us as experimenting with their kid. If you show them you really care, then they are supportive."
--Mike Benevento

In February 2001, at an educational conference with Empower.org, U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett stated, "Not every teacher is a parent, but every parent is a teacher" (Bennett, 2001). This statement underscores the responsibility of parents to be actively involved in their children's education. The school teaches children how to read, but the home environment teaches them what to read. The school teaches children how to think, but the home teaches them what to believe" (Bennett, 2001). In essence, families have a huge impact on students' lives. With on-going debates about best practices and mandated testing and required scores in education, teachers need to involve parents to help improve student achievement, accountability, and daily attendance. Parents need to take an active role in their children's educational lives and they need to share responsibility with the schools for their children's education.

Parental beliefs can be molded from personal experiences growing up, previous school involvement experiences with their children, and current experiences with other key players in their children's academic career" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p.108). Several other factors that motivate parental involvement are their personal belief they should play an active role in the lives of their child, the belief that these roles make a positive difference, their attitude toward invitations to involvement, and the context of the parents' lives (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 106). Parents also need to feel they have been invited to help out at their children's schools. They need to feel

their participation is "welcome, valuable, and expected by the school and its members" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p.110). In other words, if families feel welcome and appreciated in the school setting, they will feel more motivated to get involved.

Parental involvement can take many forms. It can include communication between parents and teachers; parents' communication with their children regarding school issues; number of hours parents volunteer in their children's schools; parental involvement in school activities, such as conferences; attendance at parent meetings organized by the school; parental involvement in school-related activities with their children at home, for example, helping with homework; and parental expectations regarding their children's educational attainment (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004, p. 723). Different studies have produced different results in regards to the most effective forms of parental involvement. However, most studies have concluded that when parental expectations for students' academic achievements are high, students tend to perform better in school. These expectations tend to be higher when parents' educational levels are higher (Englund et al., 2004, p.724). When parents become involved, they reap many benefits. Parental involvement gives families the opportunity to socialize with the school and other parents, monitor the education of their children, and have access to "insider information" (Thurston, 2005, p.233).

As for facilitating conferences with the parents of students, it is an intimidating experience. In teacher education programs, teacher candidates are educated to work with children, but given little direction on how to conduct parent/teacher conferences. For beginning teachers, learning to engage in successful dialogues with parents can be a challenge that involves uncertainty and considerable anxiety (Clark,1999; Partin, 1999). However, teachers need to recognize that parents may also feel concerned about these scheduled meetings (Fielstein & Phelps, 2001). Simmons (2002) also presented excellent advice to teachers with approaches to preventing problems. The points included assuring the parents of support, valuing the parents' ideas and opinions, making the parents feel comfortable, keeping the parents informed, and offering helpful information. Teachers can help parents solve problems by following the steps of being honest, letting the parents know you like their child, outlining shared responsibilities, involving the child, and providing encouragement.

In a study conducted by Thurston (2005), results indicated, "several parental-involvement activities are significantly related to high academic achievement" (p.241). Thurston also found that parental involvement leads to a decrease in problem behaviors and revealed children whose parents attend PTA meetings, volunteer inside and outside the classroom, and check their homework are strongly associated with lower levels of childhood behavioral problems (Thurston, 2005, p. 243). Schools with strong parent involvement benefit students, and research is clear that parent and family involvement lead to higher academic achievement, better attendance, and improved behavior at school. With this information, schools and homes must make a conscious effort to work together collaboratively in the best interests of students. The focus in schools should not be on whether a teacher should try to involve the parents, but how to get parents motivated to be involved with their children's education.

Resident Teachers Words of Advice on Working with Parents and Families

Creating relationships with the parents is an ideal way to get to know the students. When you show the parent that you cared about their child as a person, situations that could have been very difficult were much easier. Parents need to be used as a resource as they truly are the experts on their child. If they feel their input and opinions are valued they are more willing to help with any request for assistance. For the most part, parents of elementary aged-children are involved and concerned about their child's education. In the opposite situation, it is so heart breaking to observe parents who are not involved or interested in what was happening with their child in school. At the start of a school year, it is typical to host an open house event for students and families. This is a chance to get to meet and greet students, parents, and other family members. It should also be a time for parents and students to begin to feel comfortable in the classroom. At this event, the teacher can initiate open lines of communication by providing contact information to the parents, making it clear they could contact me at school, home, or through e-mail if they ever had concerns or questions. Make sure that you also have contact information from your students' parents. You do not want to wait until an emergency occurs to find out you do not have that information. A teacher could also ask for parents to assist with various activities or projects, celebrate certain accomplishments, share talents, or read to and with students.

Teachers should also write weekly newsletters. This can include content areas goals for the upcoming week, announcements, reminders, "Star Student" information, high-frequency spelling words, event information, "Table Talk" to support parent and child communication at home, and teacher contact information. This form of communication helps parents to know exactly what was happening in school without even stepping foot inside of the classroom. However, it is still important to personally communicate with parents about their children. This can be done through phone calls, emails, or individually written notes. Always give positive feedback along with any areas of concern. If an issue is quite significant such as a child refusing to do something or a child hitting another child, then make contact at the soonest opportunity and schedule a conference with the parents.

Even with the toughest students, parents and the students need to hear positive comments and encouragement to know that their teacher still cares about them. Teachers should keep a log of the communication with parents including the date and the reason for the communication. This data provides important information for future collaboration, assessment meetings, and lets you know who you have or have not contacted to be fair and consistent with all students' families. Throughout the year, parents could be invited into the classroom for various events. Also, three-way conference with the parents and child is a way to see firsthand the interactions and dynamics of the family. These conferences should be formally organized and discuss student progress, growth, areas of strengths, and concerns. It is important for parents to be immersed and involved in their child's education as much as possible. These opportunities further influenced the development of a positive home-and school learning connection. During the first couple weeks of school, make a point to make positive phone calls home to let parents know how great it is to have their child in your classroom. With all of the effort put into establishing positive relationships with parents at the beginning of the school year, it was much easier to contact parents later if there is a concern. It is never easy to call a parent with a negative situation; however, it is much easier to make that call if the parent is not automatically on the defensive when they see the school's phone number on the caller I.D. Parents play such a critical role in their child's educational process, so it is essential that teachers work with them in a cooperative partnership to ensure success for their child in the school setting.

CHALLENGE #3: DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS

"I cannot teach anybody anything; I can only make them think."
--Socrates

In schools everywhere, teachers are facing classrooms full of students who think, act, and learn in different ways. Research in education shows the way a teacher approaches his/her instruction significantly affects student learning. The word associated with this is differentiation. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* defines differentiation as, "the ways in which teachers tailor the curriculum and pedagogical practices to the unique cognitive and socio-cultural understanding and practices that each child brings to the classroom, while at the same time maintaining group cohesion" (2005, p. 225). Teacher instruction should be adapted to all levels of learners in the classroom to help students experience a better chance for success with their learning. Tomlinson (2001) states that several key points should guide differentiation. These elements of the curriculum are Content, Process, and Product. These can be summarized in this way:

- *Content-* (What students will learn) though the same concepts are addressed, the level of complexity is adjusted for individual students.
- *Process-* (Activities through which students make sense of key ideas using essential skills.) this could be whole-class discussion of content followed by small group, partner, or individual work.
- *Products-* (How students demonstrate and extend what they understand) Teachers need to conduct initial and on-going assessment of student readiness and growth. A well-designed student product allows diverse means of expression, alternative procedures, and provides varying degrees of difficulty, types of evaluation, and scoring (Tomlinson 2001).

According to research, a significant benefit to differentiated instruction is the ability to accommodate students' individual needs. A key component to differentiating instruction is the understanding of the students' thinking styles in order to maximize their learning (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 1997). Once teachers understand the thinking and learning styles of individual students, they can begin to adjust their curriculum instruction accordingly.

Gardner (1994) echoes the belief that teachers need to know students' interests and learning profiles. Differentiated instruction is a philosophy that can increase learning, accommodate special needs, build self-esteem and self-worth in students, and maximize student achievement. While researchers have found several benefits to differentiation, there are also barriers that teachers may face. Some educators incorrectly view differentiation as a method that requires them to teach everything in several different ways. Certainly, a differentiated classroom looks different from a traditional *one-size-fits-all* classroom, but the differences between the two are often less dramatic than most teachers believe. In all actuality, many teachers were experts at differentiating instruction before the term was re-popularized. Through experience, many teachers naturally find methods and strategies to accommodate their students' needs in order to reach optimal learning (Carolan & Guinn, 2005).

Despite the barriers that often stifle teachers' willingness to differentiate their instruction, research shows a significant benefit to differentiation. In today's diverse classrooms, teachers are required to prepare themselves with a variety of different instructional strategies in order to accommodate and capitalize on each student's unique learning style and natural intelligence. The important thing in differentiated classrooms is that teachers begin where their students are, and not at the front of the teachers guide (Tomlinson, 2002). It is expected that teachers accept and build upon the belief that students differ in many ways. Tomlinson (2002) also stated, "Thus, they also accept and act on the premise that teachers must be ready to engage students through different learning modalities, by appealing to differing interests, and by using varied degrees of complexity" (p.23).

As Sternberg and Zhang noted, "Children learn well in different ways, and seem to profit most when instruction is differentiated in some manner to accommodate these differences" (2005, p. 254). By using the latest research and information on learning styles and intelligences, educators have the ability to make every minute of the school day purposeful by implementing differentiated instructional strategies that accommodate all students' needs. To differentiate instruction is to recognize students for who they are when they enter the classroom. It is a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same classroom. It is a teacher's duty to do what is needed for each student to insure they feel respected, valued, and supported in the classroom.

Resident Teachers Words of Advice on Differentiating Instruction for Students

The RTs wanted to be the best possible teachers for their students and this included differentiating instruction for all students' needs and abilities. But to be honest, the idea of differentiation was very overwhelming and scary for them. They started the process of differentiating instruction in basic ways by learning about students' interests, learning styles, and abilities through interviews and inventories. They re-taught as needed when the students did not understand concepts and put more challenging material in front of students who were easily flying through the concepts. They knew they needed to do more for their students. The ultimate goal was to differentiate instruction for the students by varying content, process, product, and the environment of learning.

Pre-tests served as a means for collecting information about what students already knew and what the teachers could reasonably expect to achieve during lessons. Each child worked at a different pace so as an accommodation, less time was given to some students and more time was allowed for others. Differentiating the process was also achieved through graphic organizers, maps, diagrams, and charts to vary the products of learning; options and choice were given as ways to show mastery of skills. Many times, this was in the form of a center activity or small group work. Other methods included manipulating the environment for certain students. This may include using a sound system to accommodate a student with a hearing disability, preferential seating to help students stay actively engaged, or close proximity to a learner that supplemented learning. No two students are alike so teachers cannot expect to reach all students using the same method of instruction. Differentiated instruction strives to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is at and assisting in the learning process. Students come to school with different backgrounds, knowledge, interests, attitudes, home environments, learning preferences, and readiness for concepts.

Teachers should consider sending questionnaires home that provide basic information about the children. Commonly teachers administer multiple intelligence's surveys and learning style inventories which provide an understanding of the students' strengths. Some students will do better on regular paper and pencil tests while others love the opportunity to showcase what they had learned in their own way with projects. Some students are talkers

and others are builders who would prefer to demonstrate the newly learned skills through show-and-tell methods. If only one method of relaying information is offered to students, the end results may be poor even though the student's knowledge of the facts is accurate and impressive. Not only should assessment be varied, but also instruction needs to be provided in many different modes including visual, auditory, tactile, musical modes, etc. Flexibility for planning instruction and modifying it to fit the needs of individual students is one of the most beneficial ways to maximize student growth in different areas. Children need to be involved in individual, small group, and large group activities. Essentially, differentiated instruction is providing students the opportunity to learn at their ability levels. It is common knowledge that all students vary in their abilities and needs when it comes to learning, and there will never be a classroom of students that will be an exception to this rule. As first year teachers, do not try to differentiate all content areas at once, as you will become quickly overwhelmed with planning. Instead focus on one of the subjects as far as differentiating for individual needs and put your focus on that for the first year of teaching. For example, maybe choose reading because all elementary education teachers want their students to become capable, independent, and confident readers. Understand that differentiating instruction will be an ongoing process of reflection and change for the students in your classroom.

CHALLENGE #4: STUDENTS WITH DIFFICULT BEHAVIORS

"A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after success."--Anonymous

Dealing with difficult students is a critical aspect of teaching. There are a variety of behaviors that occur in the classroom that affect not only the teacher but also the entire group of students. There are differing viewpoints on what management strategies work best for the children who are having difficulties beyond those typical of ordinary developmental issues. Difficult students do not have specific behaviors they all display so researchers categorize in a variety of ways. Henricsson and Rydell (2006) divided children's behaviors into two categories: "externalizing problems" and "internalizing disorders." Externalizing problems are "behaviors that are harmful to others or disruptive, such as impulsivity, hostile defiance, destructive behavior, temper tantrums, and over-activity" (p. 348). These behaviors are associated with "long-term negative outcomes such as school failure and adult criminality" (p.348). "Internalizing disorders are signified by intropunitive emotions and moods like sorrow, guilt, worries, and by loneliness, withdrawal and somatic complaints" (p. 348). Externalizing problems would potentially have a more noticeable impact in the classroom setting.

Externalizing problems and internalizing disorders are not the only two categories that have been developed to group behaviors. Hardin and Harris (2000) talk about behaviors as "crises" in their book, *Managing Classroom Crises.* They have determined four different categories: *Bolt from the Blue Crisis*, *Developmental Crisis*, *Exacerbation Crisis*, and *Relationship Crisis* (p. 12-13). Bolt from Blue Crisis is "when there is a sudden, unexpected event in the student's life" that causes the student to go into a crisis (p. 12). A developmental crisis can occur because "of the expectations and role changes resulting from growing older" (p. 13). An "exacerbation crisis involves a situation where functioning has been at a low level and many continuing problems already exist. With an additional stressor added the 'straw that breaks the camel's back' syndrome develops" (p. 13). Last, the authors describe a "relationship crisis" as resulting "from a breakdown in a relationship" (p. 13). They say that it is important to know what type of crisis a student is going through in order to know how to best address the situation. If teachers know what kind of crisis a student is having, they would be more capable of selecting proper techniques to de-escalate the situation.

Another aspect of dealing with difficult students is getting to know your students and figuring out what kinds of things are causing the negative behaviors that they display in the classroom. Marzano (2003) categorized the most current "severe problems facing students" today. Marzano also summarized eleven different categories including homelessness, depression, suicide, violence, eating disorders, alcoholism, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, sexual orientation, incarcerated parents, poverty, and sexual and physical abuse (p. 46-47). These are only some of the issues occurring in the lives of students, either directly or indirectly. Teachers try to determine what the student is experiencing to understand why a student may be acting a certain way in school. Once teachers have considered the behaviors and why they may be occurring, they can begin to implement a management technique. Charles (2002) discussed different behaviors teachers may encounter with a group of students. This list included students who are withdrawn, super-talkers, arguers, and monopolizers. Teachers will deal with these

personalities as well as a variety of other special needs; the possible list of what this could entail is endless.
Resnick (2001) added to the list of challenges by discussing parents who are disinterested in their children's well-being, are too busy, over-zealous, or over-concerned with every detail. Some students come to school from homes with conflict and divorce, or live in foster homes, while others deal with racial, religious or ethnic prejudices, poverty, or other emotionally disabling issues. In order to provide a successful learning environment, teachers must search for methods that are effective in dealing with all types of needs. If successful strategies are not found, the learning for a few or even many students will be disrupted. Appropriate interventions will depend on the individual and may range from tracking classroom interactions, a combination of both positive and negative consequences, to changes to the curriculum to more closely match a student's needs. Studying the interactions students have with others in the school environment is one option. According to Shields and Green, (1996) tracking classroom interactions with teachers and peers can be a beneficial first response because it can pinpoint specific sources of conflict. This method can be used with teachers to help them rethink classroom problems by looking at how their decisions and the choices of other students impact students with behavioral issues (Shields, 1996).With an understanding of the causes of student behaviors, teachers can go about planning more effective ways of interacting with particular students. Marzano (2003) stated that teachers can go about making a plan that will "provide a balance of positive and negative consequences," that includes, " . . .teacher reaction, tangible recognition, direct cost, group contingency, and home contingency" (p. 35).

Marzano (2003) reported that an analysis of many studies on "classroom discipline show a mix of positive and negative consequences and techniques as the most effective response to inappropriate behavior" (p. 28). Like other students, difficult students need both positive and negative feedback about their choices. Marzano writes that "human beings do best in an environment of feedback–in this case feedback to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors" (p. 28). Even the most difficult students need positive reinforcement and praise. Rather than changing the way teachers respond to difficult students, it may also be possible to modify problem behaviors by altering the way in which the curriculum is taught. Nystrom and Anderson (2001) argue for the use of experiential teaching with "the student who experiences tasks as boring, repetitive, and meaningless, or, who feels empty, despairing and alone" (p. 204). Difficult students must be engaged in purposeful activities that impact the academic and social aspects of education. According to Nystrom and Anderson, (2001) lessons need to emphasize the development of personal and social skills; teachers "need to inquire about situations and respond verbally to events; and, in general, focus on developing student's abilities to apply knowledge to the real world" (p. 204).

Tasks should go beyond rote memorization or drill and take on a purpose outside of the classroom. These activities "carry with them the additional gain of promoting judgment, valuing discussion, and the expansion of definition and development of assessment skills while allowing students the freedom to extend boundaries and to make choices"(p. 205). Along with reaching important academic standards, students would at the same time be making progress toward social goals. As with the social aspect of school, another difficult classroom behavior for teachers to handle is bullying. Bullying is a significant problem in schools and according to Smokowski and Kopasz (2005); it affects one in three children. Research is consistent that bullying has serious long-term negative effects on bullies, victims, and victims who turn to bullying as a coping strategy. Bullying is defined by Glew, Rivara, and Feudtner (2000) as a form of aggression in which one or more children intend to harm or disturb another child who is perceived as being unable to defend him or herself. Bullying could be in the form of name calling, assaulting, threatening, stealing, vandalizing, slandering, excluding, or taunting (Beale, 2001).

Coloroso (2005) explained that there are three characters in the tragic interplay of bullying that happens daily in schools. These are the bully, the bullied, and the bystander. The bystander is the person who witnesses the bullying behaviors but may or may not do anything to stop it. All children can act out any of these roles at any certain time. The roles of the bystander, as discussed by Coloroso's (2005), include those who are often afraid to get involved because of fear of getting hurt, fear of becoming a target, or simply not knowing what to do. Bystanders have options for their actions; these include refusing to be a part of the bullying, talking privately to the victim later, talking to the bully in private or public, or actually intervening during a bullying situation. Either the bully, bullied, or bystanders should talk to an adult or teacher who will offer support and guidance to handle this difficult situation.

Marzano (2003) believes that student behavior is one of the major issues facing beginning teachers because many teachers do not feel that they are prepared to understand or deal with disruptive behavior (p. 27). By seeking

to understand the students behind the majority of classroom disruptions, teachers can be more effective in their responses. Learning strategies and methods for dealing with difficult students such as curriculum changes, discipline methods, or tracking of target behaviors can prepare a teacher to manage difficult students more effectively. This preparation will provide teachers with a better opportunity to use class time for instruction which relates to the ultimate goal of increasing student learning. Teachers need to create a culture of learning, respect, and acceptance in their classrooms. When this does not occur, no matter how good the teacher is, many students will not experience success. First year teachers will soon realize the educational training needed for student achievement is life-long; colleagues and other professionals will become resources, and the parents of the students must be treated as valuable partners. But most importantly, it is the responsibility of teachers never to give up on students because it may be their only chance for success in their lives.

Resident Teachers Words of Advice on Students with Difficult Behaviors

The RTs all had challenges dealing with students with difficult behaviors. This included students who had a hard time following directions, being disrespectful to the teachers and other students, not being truthful, not accepting consequences for the negative actions. Other types of behaviors encountered were constant interruptions, blurting, extreme silliness, and inattention. It is also common for teachers to have students who display characteristics of Oppositional Defiance Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder/ Hyperactivity, depression and anxiety, emotional disorders, or a combination, or an unlimited number of other possible situations.

At times, it will be difficult to understand what exactly triggers certain behaviors and then subsequently equally difficult to figure out how to appropriately handle the child and behavior in the least disruptive manner. Teachers need to have a mental bag of "tricks" ready that constantly evolves. Some techniques that have worked include offering choices because the students feel in control when they are able to "decide" but the teacher still controls the choices. Using the clock as a tool is helpful because control is a major issue for some students. In this case, develop a habit of deferring "control" to the clock. For example, say, "Oh, the clock says it is time to pull out our math journals," instead of saying "Students, please pull out your math journals." Students are not able to argue with the clock since it is an inanimate object. Try using personal timers in two different ways. Give the students a task to complete and certain amounts of time to complete the task and then displayed the allotted time on the timer. For students who need to cool down, a sand timer could be placed in a safe and out-of-sight location in the room. The sand timer is tipped over, and then the student has that amount of time, 3 minutes, to cool down and come back to join the class.

Provide a "Cool down" spot within the classroom where students feel safe going if they needed a moment to cool down. Students could take a book to read or just take a timeout for those who prefer to just sit to calm down. Use preferential seating as a strategy for dealing with students with difficult behaviors can be effective when the teacher gets to know each student and the class atmosphere as a whole. It will soon become apparent if there are students who cannot handle sitting by each other. This is important to keep in mind when making and changing seating arrangements. Modify assignment for students who are extremely intelligent and able to complete any task, but refuse to follow directions. These students have accomplished the skills so it is not necessary for them to complete every problem or task. As an example, in a math journal, I would assign only half of the problems and the student might be more cooperative and still work alongside their classmates. This may help these students feel more in control of the situation. This strategy can also be done with students who struggle with concepts as the sheer number of problems may trigger negative behaviors.

Other techniques tried by the RTs included writing different behavior plans to try to motivate students, giving one-on-one time order to build our relationship, talking with specialists, removing students from the classroom anytime inappropriate behaviors occurred, collaborating with parents, teachers, special educators, principals, doctors, or having scheduled "Class meetings" for many reasons including open communication, building community, celebrating as a whole, addressing any needs, etc. Always try to be patient, avoid power struggles, and find something positive to verbalize either individually or to the group. Being patient is sometimes a tedious task, but a little goes a long way in this business of education. A technique used was frequently was taking a "cooling period." Let the child know that you need time to think about the situation, and then plan to meet during lunch, after school, etc. This was a time for both teacher and student to think about consequences and let the situation simmer in

the child's mind. Try to always avoid power struggles because nobody ever wins. Remain a role model with your words and actions when dealing with issues because if you act mad and angry, the students would likely mirror these feelings in return. Always try to look for something positive. For some students, this could sometimes be a struggle, but it is such an effective technique. You could frequently praise a student who is having a rough time or right before the misbehavior is about to happen and most of the time; this redirects their thinking, in turn eliminating the negative behaviors. Throughout the year, it was important when dealing with an assortment of difficult behaviors to always ask the child to explain what was going on and ask for help when deciding on appropriate consequences or punishments. Parental involvement and support are also crucial when handling children with difficult behaviors.

Remember to approach every day with a new attitude and the determination to keep searching for alternatives and answers to handling certain behaviors. This consists of continually questioning what went wrong, what instigated a particular behavior, and why and when it happened. Always ask yourself, "What could I do differently next time?" Many times behaviors were not random, but there usually was a triggering point. It is easier to treat the behavior with a consequence and never search for the trigger but then you are not really ever going to find a way to prevent that behavior from occurring again. Try and find the source and never quit trying to help your students. If the 100th strategy doesn't work, try the 101st, but never give up! All students need love, especially those who display challenging behaviors. Learn to give *the look*, and also use your stern teacher voice at times, but the number one thing is to always maintain a positive attitude when dealing with students.

Without this feedback, interaction, and encouragement from other professionals and specialists in your building, the students in your classroom will not get all the chances for success. Use positive reinforcement on a continuous basis with all children in your classroom. Make it more than, "Good Job," but provide specific feedback about particular actions, words, or accomplishments. "Thank you for sitting at the carpet criss-cross," "What a great listener," and "Wow! Look at Taylor's hands while he walks to the carpet...he is keeping them to himself." They are not only compliments to students, but also reminders to others to do the right thing. Instead of always telling somebody to stop making noises at the carpet, it worked better to compliment the person next to them on how nice and quiet they are sitting. By getting to know your students, you will learn what to ignore, or when you must pick a battle. Make continuous efforts to build strong relationships with each child and get to know them individually and then you may be able to douse the spark before it grows into a fire because of this relationship. You can utilize individual behavior plans with students with reoccurring behaviors that needed more attention, discuss the plans and behavior goals with the parents, and work to find possible positive reinforcements. Consider every day to be a good day, regardless of the challenges that arose and accepted this as part of the responsibility of being a teacher. Start each day and end each day standing at the classroom door with a hug, handshake, or high five. Let it be the student's decision and a special way to greet or leave the classroom.

CHALLENGE #5: ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING

"The more you prepare outside class, the less you perspire in class. The less you perspire in class, the more you inspire the class."
–Ho Boon Tiong

A key to teaching involves the understanding of assessment as a necessary part of curriculum and instruction. Assessment should inform teachers on past, present, and future teaching practices with the goals of improving teaching and the students' learning and success. For this reason teachers need to assess where their students are in current knowledge to make decisions on where to proceed with instruction. Gronlund (2006) describes assessment as a continuous process whose primary purpose is to improve student learning. Most teachers use pre-tests to assess their students' current knowledge. This gives important information about what students know concerning subject matter and who needs to be taught pre-requisite information. Assessment results also help teachers know where to start instruction in the content areas. Many resources are available for teachers on a variety of assessment techniques to use with students. A list of possible techniques could include observations, questioning, presentations, problem-solving investigations, problem-based learning, journal writing, interviews, projects, performance-based tests, experiments, portfolios, tests with true/false questions, multiple choice, or short answers, essays, open-ended questions, and rubrics.

As a teacher, it is a necessary to constantly evaluate students' skills and abilities to assess where continuous learning is needed. Through assessment, teachers can modify the ways they teach and present information to create meaningful, authentic and purposeful learning experiences for *all* students. Teaching should address the needs of students of color, those with disabilities, those from poverty, and English language learners. The effects of academic failure can follow students long after they leave school. Schools should always open doors, not close them. Assessments should benefit children, and if they don't, there is little reason for the collection of data. It is easy for teachers to take notes or conduct running records with students, but until the teacher actually uses this data to move children forward and determine the next steps of teaching, assessments may waste precious time. It is also important for assessments to be modified in order to fit every child's needs and capabilities. Both formal and informal measures should be completed weekly during individual, small-group, and large-group learning activities.

Using assessments to improve instruction and learning is an important part of a classroom's daily routine. Routman (2003) explains that we need to make assessment work for teachers and students and one way to do this is by asking ourselves these important questions: Is this a valid and useful assessment? How am I using this assessment? What goals am I setting? Who do I need to inform? If any answers to these questions result in useless information, then the assessment should not be used. Consistent routine assessments provide the best information and when utilized efficiently, assist student learning in exciting ways. As one begins the journey of teaching and conducting assessments, remember to experiment and continually modify to meet the needs of students to gain insight into what they truly need to know to progress in their reading. When teachers know what their students can do, the planning of future lessons is based primarily on assessment information. As a new teacher, Lynne (2004) wanted assessments to be meaningful and understandable to students. She felt uncomfortable with the grades she gave to students because of the uncertainty that they were accurate reflections of her students' efforts and abilities. Lynne (2004) realized she had no procedure for assessing her assessment and that resource was needed to be effective with teaching. As elementary teachers, it is important to monitor and assess students' understandings of new concepts to evaluate when things need to re-taught and what skills they have already secured. This is true of each and every subject area.

Through teaching lessons, teachers can gain information about the students' abilities through informal observations. The active engagement and feedback received can guide the lessons and provide information on which students needed more time to develop skills. Through observational records, a recording system tracked which students were beginning, developing, and secure with specific skills. From these records, further instruction can be provided for individual students, a small group, or if the entire class needs to be re-taught specific concepts. It was also possible to observe those who were excelling beyond grade-level expectations and subsequently develop something more challenging and motivating for these students. Teachers should not use just one method of gathering information about their students as it does not give a clear or comprehensive picture of what the students know or understand from the material. An alternative to written tests is commonly referred to as authentic assessment of performance assessments. Frederiksen and Collins (1989) write that performance assessments are more authentic, use context, encourage higher order thinking, support engagement and motivate students, and are more systematically valid. A part of the motivation for the performance-based assessment movement was the work of classroom teachers in assessing students through projects and portfolios.

A portfolio is a place to collect individual information on each student where both teacher and student can submit information for review. Each portfolio should contain a variety of items such as written and non-written work, projects, and tests. In science and social studies, as with the other content areas, rubrics are also a commonly used method of assessment. The benefits according to Huffman (1998) are that rubrics can provide students with clear targets. They help students become more self-directed and reflective, which can create a greater sense of ownership for learning (Branch, Grafelman, & Hurelbrink, 1998). The creative activities and projects that could be implemented are limitless. The students should be given choices and a time to shine in front of their peers while showcasing their individual talents and strengths. They should get a chance to show what they know and what they can do and not just the things they do not understand. Gardner (1985) is well known for his theory of multiple intelligences and the belief that culture, language, and the environment all influence how an individual's intelligence is expressed. He views intelligence as a combination of these abilities to solve real life problems, to find and create problems, and to offer a product or service that is valued in at least one culture (Gardner, 1985).

Gardner (1996) is also simultaneously known for developing the multiple intelligences theory in education. He writes that individuals have at least nine intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual, spatial, musical, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and the newest existential, which refers to the human desire to understand the meaning of life. This theory supports all students and allows for personal choice where students should be allowed to choose activities and projects that support their strengths and abilities. Teachers of even the youngest students should highlight how each student is smart in a different way and by using the multiple intelligence theory; students' learning can be expressed in a variety of ways. Success and respect are two things that students should experience in their school settings; it is critical for teachers to let children know that they have talents and are smart. This will boost their confidence levels and belief in themselves as a person and as a valuable and contributing member of the classroom community.

Resident Teachers Words of Advice on Assessment of Student Learning

The ultimate goal of teaching is student learning. To monitor this learning, a teacher needs to be constantly assessing their students to see if they understood the concepts or if you need to re-teach these concepts. Be prepared to monitor your students' learning through both formal and informal assessment techniques. Formal assessments consisted of miscue analysis, running records, and the end of unit assessments in math, science, and social studies. From these assessments, you should monitor your students' understanding and observe when they needed additional practice. Assessment is important for guiding your instruction. At the beginning of the year, you will need to assess your students' knowledge to begin planning lessons. The more information gained from these assessments, the more you can meet the needs of your students. Assessment needs to be ongoing, accurate, and varied. This includes assessing students every week, and every day. You could assess daily though the use of running records, anecdotal notes, and observations. Other assessments to guide your instruction will include formal reading inventories, content area chapter tests, and math exams. The type of assessment and the quantity of assessments differs depending on the specific subject area and concept. There will be district-mandated assessments as well as state and national assessments. Assessments, whether formal or informal, provide a wealth of information about students as learners. Since not all students are the same, it would not be effective to use only one means of assessing students' knowledge of a concept. Beginning teachers will need mentoring in the area of assessment and knowing which assessments are best for assessing a particular skill or concept. A teacher learns so much from daily observations and interacting with my students.

Teacher needs to continue to ask the following questions: What do we want our students to know? How will we teach it to them? And how will we know they mastered it? When teaching students, it is very obvious that each of them learns in different ways; therefore, differentiated instruction is very important, as well as continuous assessment to ensure students are mastering concepts and skills. Remember creativity and allow your students to demonstrate their knowledge in various forms like experiments, projects, books, posters, activities, and performances. Assessments should not only given at the end of a learning task, but also at the beginning, middle, and as a teaching too. Use assessments to guide instruction for optimal learning so students can learn to share their knowledge, at the highest possible level, and to the full extent of their levels of achievement.

In closing, I asked the RTs to share in one phrase why they still love teaching after their first year of teaching. The answers included the following: Hugs and being a positive role model for children, every day is different and presents a new challenge and an opportunity to learn something new, working in a supportive environment with colleagues who love what they are doing as much as I do, the students' notes, pictures, drawings, and other thoughtful gifts and words, being able to create a safe place for children to learn, love, and grow, watching children learn what I have taught them, sharing my love of books but most of all the STUDENTS!

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Dr. Bonni Gourneau has degrees including a Doctoral degree in Teacher Education, a Masters degree in Special Education with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education, and a B.S. in Elementary Education. My teaching experience includes being an elementary classroom teacher, the director of an early childhood program for children with special needs, and an Associate Professor for the Department of Teaching and Learning. I serve as the graduate director of the on-line and campus-based Elementary Education Master Programs and the University advisor for the

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