Investigating the Experiences of First Year Early Childhood and Elementary Teachers: A Pilot Study

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Abstract

The purposes of this pilot study were to identify the lived experiences of a small group of first-year early childhood and elementary teachers to determine their levels of confidence (self-efficacy) and to generate ideas for improving the teacher preparation programs these new teachers completed. The researchers used qualitative methodology including focus groups with the teachers, interviews of the principals who hired them, and a self-efficacy survey to gather data. Results indicated that teachers were challenged by the realities of teaching every day compared to their expectations. This included the challenges within the day, the structure of schools, and a disconnect between teachers and administrators. In addition, teachers' self-reported ratings of self-efficacy contradicted their focus group discussions in some cases.

Keywords: new teachers, self-efficacy, mentoring, teacher education

The teacher shortage in the United States is an acknowledged reality. Fewer students are deciding to pursue a teaching career and a large percentage of those who do become teachers leave early in their careers. Nationally, enrollment in teacher preparation programs has dropped 23% from 2007 to 2016 (Will, 2018). Statistics suggest that over 40% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years (NEA, 2017). In Virginia alone, from 2012-2017, 19% of teachers reported that they either left the profession or planned to leave (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). For the first time in 50 years, the PDK annual poll of the public's attitudes towards public schools revealed a majority of parents said they did not want their children to become teachers (Phi Delta Kappa, 2018). The future impact on the education of children could

possibly be significant, as teacher vacancies may be filled with less qualified teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

While the reasons for these statistics vary, some of our classrooms are not being staffed with highly qualified teachers. What do new teachers say about the realities of their first year? How do those realities align with the expectations new teachers hold as they enter their classroom for the first time? The purposes of this pilot study were to identify the lived experiences of this group, determine the levels of confidence (self-efficacy) held by a small group of early childhood and elementary first-year teachers, and to generate ideas for improving the teacher preparation programs these new teachers attended.

Literature Review

New Teacher Needs

The needs of new teachers have been studied for decades. Veenman (1984) was among the first to compile a list of the perceived problems facing new teachers after reviewing 83 studies from 1960 to 1984. The top five areas of difficulty included "classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing student work, and relations with parents" (p.154). He also included administrators' perceptions of challenges facing new teachers, concluding that considerable alignment existed in principals' perceptions that classroom discipline was a major cause for concern.

Others have sought to document what new teachers need as they strive to *survive* their first year. Some of Veenman's top categories of needs continued to be supported (Ganser, 1999; Hudson, 2012; Odell, 1986; Odell & Ferraro, 1992). As the context of teaching has changed to reflect a growing diverse population and more emphasis on accountability, researchers are again revisiting the needs of new teachers to determine if those needs have changed. Mandel (2006)

concluded that school divisions' focus on raising test scores has caused them to neglect the supports that new teachers may need (practical advice about daily survival: setting up the classroom, grading, dealing with parents, etc.). In addition, because of this testing-focused culture, new teachers are heavily concerned about covering the curriculum and abandon creative, innovative instruction. The result is lackluster lessons, bored students, and more discipline problems: a recipe for teacher attrition (Mandel, 2006)

Additional needs of new teachers are emerging as well. New teachers want more logistical information; they want to know what the policies are and how they will be evaluated (Abrams, 2018; Bentley, Morway, & Short, 2013). Abrams (2018) suggests new teachers, who are the millennial generation, bring a different set of expectations as they join the ranks of teachers. They grew up in a time where answers are readily available and can use technology to access what they need when they need it. They also do not want their time wasted. In addition, they are collaborative and want to be members of a team. This desire for a collaborative element of teaching was also supported by Martin, Buelow, and Hoffman (2015). They found that meaningful conversations about instruction and curriculum between veteran teachers and new teachers were valued by the new teachers.

Role of Mentoring and Support

The work related to the needs of new teachers sparked an interest in designing programs to support new teachers as they experienced Veenman's *reality shock* (1984). In the early 1990s, school divisions created induction programs whereby veteran teachers acted as mentors to help new teachers transition into the profession. Some states passed legislation that mandated mentoring support; the Commonwealth of Virginia did so in 2000. Researchers began investigating the characteristics and effectiveness of induction or mentoring programs (Everston

& Smithey, 2000; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992; Houston, 1990; Odell & Ferraro, 1992). The conclusions from these early studies were that induction programs could be beneficial in supporting new teachers; however, they required specific attention paid to the design of the program, training of the mentors, and working conditions for new teachers. Recently, Helms-Lorenz, Slof, and van de Grift (2013) reiterated the importance of key design elements that were determined in the 1990s. When school divisions create support systems that embody reduced workloads, a deliberate acclimation process, professional development, and opportunities for pedagogical growth, new teachers report less stress. Kaiser (2012) presented statistics on new teacher retention, comparing the retention of those who had a mentor and those who did not. In 2007-2008, 8% of new teachers who were given a mentor left after their first year and 10% left after their second year. In comparison, new teachers in 2007-2008 who were *not* given a mentor, left the profession at 16% after their first year and 23% after their second (Kaiser, 2012, as cited in Bentley et al., 2013).

Supporting new teachers does not rest solely on the shoulders of mentors; administrators play a critical role. Abrams (2018) suggests that administrators have to be proactive from the moment individuals sign their contracts. “New teachers should be contacted immediately by their administrator…” as the millennial generation is accustomed to quick and easy access to information (p. 76). Youngs (2007) reported that principal leadership can significantly impact the experiences of new teachers. That leadership needs to provide visible time for supporting new teachers: carving out mentor/protégé meeting time, meeting with new teachers to analyze student work together, and orienting new teachers to the assessment tools. These visible opportunities helped to create and strengthen a culture of trust with all staff members. Youngs suggested that

deliberate support from principals can "strongly influence new teachers' self-efficacy and their labor market decisions…" (p.126).

New teachers hold particular needs that must be addressed if they are to remain in the classroom. Mentoring and administrative support can help address those needs. However, if teacher preparation programs can identify the needs facing their graduates, those data can help inform decisions made by faculty regarding their teacher preparation programs. The purposes of this pilot study were to identify the lived experiences of a small group of early childhood and elementary first-year teachers and to determine their levels of confidence (self-efficacy). Data were used to generate ideas for improving the teacher preparation programs these new teachers attended.

Method

The questions we hoped to answer through this qualitative pilot study included:

1. What are the daily, lived experiences of a small group of early childhood and elementary first-year teachers in the classroom?
2. What are the levels of confidence (self-efficacy) held by a small group of early childhood and elementary first-year teachers?
3. How might this information inform ideas for improving the teacher preparation programs these new teachers attended?

Participants

A total of nine first-year teachers from one university (eight female, one male) and two principals participated in the pilot study. This pilot employed a sample of convenience as all participants were first-year teachers in the local school division and known by the researchers. Six of the new teachers graduated from the five-year Elementary Education Master of Arts in

Teaching (M.A.T.) program, and were licensed to teach in grades PK-6. Four of these teacher candidates participated in a one-year paid residency program developed in partnership with the local city school division where the study took place. The residency teacher candidates were partnered with a classroom teacher to co-teach four days per week in the fall and five days per week in the spring while also taking coursework in their graduate program. Upon successful completion of the residency, the candidates were hired within the district. The other two teacher candidates from the elementary program completed the traditional fifth year with one semester of graduate level coursework and one semester of student teaching. Three additional participants graduated from the 39-credit post-baccalaureate Early Childhood M.A.T. (M.A.T.) program and were licensed to teach in grades PK-3. Details for each student are presented in Table 1. All participants gave informed consent to participate. A total of four principals from local schools who had hired the first-year teachers were invited to participate. Two principals responded and agreed to participate. Principals were included to give their perspective on the strengths and needs of new teachers to help inform decisions our elementary education program would be making related to our redesign.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	**1-year Residency Program**	**Grade level**	**Program of Study**
Amy	X	ESL	ELED M.A.T.
Charlene	X	4th	ELED M.A.T.
Janet	X	Dual Language 3rd - Spanish	ELED M.A.T.

Chloe	X	2nd	ELED M.A.T.
Rachel		Kindergarten	ELED M.A.T.
Karyn		Kindergarten	ELED M.A.T.
Emma		Dual Language Kindergarten-English	ECED M.A.T.
Kathleen		Dual Language Kindergarten-English	ECED M.A.T.
Chris		2nd grade - hired in October	ECED M.A.T.
Principal Hook	End of career principal, 2nd year at current school		
Principal Winston	Mid-career principal, 2nd year at current school		

Note. ELED M.A.T. = Elementary Education Master of Arts in Teaching; ECED M.A.T. = Early Childhood Post-Baccalaureate Master of Arts in Teaching; ESL = English as a second language teacher.

Context

The study took place in the community where the University is located. The city school division is diverse reflecting the general population with a large ESL population and 57 languages spoken. The top five non-English languages in the schools include Spanish (79%), Arabic (9%), Kurdish (6%), Tigrinya (3%) and Swahili (2%). According to the school system's website, 131 (approximately 37%) students speak more than one language in addition to English. (HCPS, 2017). The University has a long successful history of teacher preparation in the Mid-Atlantic region and works in partnership with the local school divisions. Between 130-160 students in the Elementary and Early Childhood teacher licensure programs graduate each year.

Data Sources and Collection

Using a qualitative approach in the research design, the researchers sought to interpret why certain things happened rather than quantifying the findings (Eisner, 1991; Erickson, 1986). Instead of viewing teachers and pre-service teachers as research subjects, the researchers honored their interpretations (Charmaz, 2014). Data were collected via three focus groups, two one-to-one interviews with principals (Appendix A), and the Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk's (2001) Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES, Appendix B). The teachers completed the TSES (nine total) and brought them to the first focus group meeting they attended. Teachers participated in either the first (five participants) or second (four participants) focus group; the same questions (Appendix C) were used for these two groups. Because not all nine teachers could attend the same focus group, the investigators held two focus groups, asking the same questions in each group. A third and final focus group was held and all nine teachers were invited. Seven attended the final session. In the first and second focus groups, the investigators worked to establish trust and understand the teachers' collective experiences halfway through their first year. Trust was established fairly easily as the teachers were familiar to the investigators and questions were worded to allow participants to feel as though no judgments were being made. To develop the final focus group questions (Appendix D), an opening question was devised based on trends of responses from the TSES. The subsequent questions emerged from the conversation generated by the opening statement. All focus groups were facilitated by the two investigators and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. In addition to the focus groups being recorded, one investigator asked questions while the other took detailed notes. Using multiple sources and informants allowed for varied perspectives and added trustworthiness to the

design (VanMaanen, 1983; Guba, 1981). Triangulation of these methods allowed for a plausible and credible account (Eisner, 1991; Hubbard & Power, 2003; Mills, 2007).

Self-efficacy scale. The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Appendix B) is designed to illustrate what creates the most difficulties for teachers in their daily work and classroom environments. Using a sliding scale (1/nothing - 9/a great deal), it measures teacher's self-reported efficacy in three constructs: Student Engagement, Instructional Practices, and Classroom Management (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001). The long version, which was used, is 24 items; the short version is 12 items. The long version takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The scale was used as developed without modifications. Validity and reliability were established for the TSES instrument through a series of three studies using the instrument with pre-service and in-service teachers. "The results of these analyses indicate that the [instrument] could be considered reasonably valid and reliable" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001, p.801).

Focus groups and interview design. Each focus group and the two principal interviews were recorded and transcribed. Because experience strongly influences teachers' beliefs and opinions (Kvale, 1996), focus group questions were designed to be open ended to tap into the experience and program preparation each particular teacher had. For all groups, the focus groups took the form of a conversation rather than a structured interview. While the investigators used the same focus group questions for both groups (Appendix C) flexibility was important to allow adjustments to questions as they arose through conversations. Kvale (1996) argues that a benefit of the interview conversation is "its ability to capture the 'multitude of subjects' views of a theme and to picture a manifold and controversial human world" (p. 7). By participating in the focus groups, the teachers helped clarify information from prior conversations and the TSES

responses; this strengthens the validity of the methods. The use of member checks during the interviews and focus groups allowed for verification and ongoing analysis of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1983; Mills, 2007; Van Maanen, 1983).

Data Analysis

Drawing on Charmaz (2014) and Krippendorf (2004), the investigators used a grounded theory and content analysis approach to data analysis. Grounded theory is a systematic yet flexible mode of inquiry with direct but open-ended analysis. Content analysis allowed patterns in communication to be examined from the data. The investigators began their individual content analysis by thoroughly reading and rereading focus group transcripts, interview notes and transcripts, and the teachers' TSES responses to identify initial codes. Each investigator wrote analytic memos as they reviewed the data. This allowed them each to determine what was prominent in the data, develop codes, and reflect on the meaning of those codes. The investigators then came together to share their individual codes which were similar in nature, but worded differently: structure and nature of schools vs. no time for play; disconnect between teachers and administration vs. miscommunication and perceived expectations and reality. Following this step, the investigators identified themes which were then compared to the literature. These frequent debriefing sessions allowed the investigators to evaluate the project as it developed using reflective commentary (Lincoln & Guba,1985; VanMaanen, 1983).

Results

For the purposes of this article, the investigators focused on key findings that emerged from the data analysis and that seemed pertinent to the redesign of the education program. First, teachers' lived experiences were challenged by the realities of teaching every day compared to their expectations. This included the challenges within the day, the structure of schools, and a

disconnect between teachers and administrators. Second, teachers' self-reported ratings of self-efficacy contradicted their focus group discussions. These findings are expanded upon in the following sections in order to answer the research questions.

Reality vs. Expectations

Challenges. What readily became apparent was the expressions of surprise as the new teachers talked about the reality of beginning their first year as a classroom teacher. Clearly, it was not what they expected even though they reported feeling confident in their abilities related to instruction, classroom management, and student engagement. When the teachers started the year, they were full of hope and energy as well as content knowledge and skills. In the spring, their reality had shifted.

> This is hands down that hardest thing I have ever done in my life. It's been so hard that I don't think…. Emma and I talk every morning about keeping the boat just above water. We are just not trying to sink. We are just trying to keep it afloat. We are not trying to sail- we just want to stay afloat. (Rachel, 2/27/18)

> I think at the beginning of the year, I definitely felt like I was drowning… Now I feel like I am surviving, I feel that… there [are] still some difficult days and some difficult times, but looking back at the beginning of the year, I would not have been able to live like that all year. So there [has] definitely been growth and change, and I feel a lot more confident now, not to say that everything is easy and perfect, but it feels a lot better. It feels sustainable more than it did at the beginning of the year. (Karyn 4/3/18)

> I even said in my interview, classroom management is not going to be an issue…. I didn't say it that confidently, but I said that I felt like I was prepared when it comes to classroom management- and then [it] was like, "Haha." (Rachel, 2/27/18)

Some noted that they might be putting too much pressure on themselves to be perfect this first year. As teacher candidates, they were committed to being the best teachers ever; they had high expectations for themselves. In the vignette below, two of them discussed what it meant to be *good* as a new teacher.

> I would say that I feel like I am becoming a better teacher and I feel so much better about what my students are learning, but really, I don't. I settle more now, and that doesn't make me feel good. It just makes me know what I can accomplish and I can count as a success in my classroom even though it isn't really a success. And anticipating these things that are going to make me unhappy and sad and angry but know they are going to happen…doesn't make me feel any better. (Charlene, 2/27/18)

> You said settling but I don't think it's a negative version of that. We have such high expectations for ourselves and yet I've had someone say "Guess what? You're not going to be a great teacher your first year" and I was like okay sure. I was like okay it is what it is. And I have gone with that. My goal is not to be a good teacher, but my goal is to keep my head above water. If that's settling, it's not that I am doing a terrible job, it's just that I am not where I want to be. But I

think that's okay, I think that I will be in five years or ten years or twenty years. (Karyn, 2/27/18)

One positive trend reported by the teachers was the reduced amount of time spent at school into the evenings and on weekends compared to the beginning of the year. "I am finally coming to the point where things feel more possible now and I am less panicky" (Emma, 2/27/18). Another positive reality they experienced was working with a supportive team, collaborating and sharing resources. "For our team we actually collaborate … we work together as a team…." (Janet, 4/3/18). That came through clearly from each teacher, except for one, who worked alone as an ESL teacher and felt isolated in her position at times or pulled in too many directions with many schedule changes due to the nature of her position. This challenge leads to the next theme of the structure of schools.

Structure of schools. At times, the teachers noted how the actual structure or schedule of the school impacted their feeling of success as teachers. Amy worked with seven different classes, five different behavior plans, and 45 children in her work as an ESL teacher.

> I feel like every time I get my feet on the ground with ESL, things change. Like so and so is doing great and then a new student comes in and I have to look at my schedule and see where I can move things and change my schedule. (Amy, 2/27/18)

The organization for working with English language learners brought its unique challenges, but the challenges of the school schedule extended beyond ESL. Several teachers remarked how teaching in a dual language setting can impact learning. In these settings, the teachers dealt with two groups of children. They taught the same curriculum in a morning block and then again in an afternoon block. As Chris expressed:

> I got them for content and math, and I've got an hour and forty-minute block to teach them those two things. I get one class in the morning and one class in the afternoon; so the afternoon class, I get them after recess and before lunch, and after specials until they are going home. (Chris, 4/26/18)

Others agreed that the afternoon blocks were problematic because of the placement of specials and recess. Added to this was the timing of when teaching assistants were placed in their rooms. Most reported that they had additional, adult support only in the mornings. Without this additional support in the afternoon, teachers reported a difference in what could be accomplished in the afternoons. While the structure or scheduling within the school day presented challenges, teachers lamented the focus of the curriculum that left little time for exploration, creativity, or play. Each teacher had completed a teacher preparation program that valued the role of play in teaching and learning. They knew the importance of social-emotional development and how play can foster this. However, the nature or focus of their school's curriculum did not encourage play as a learning strategy. This was heard over and over, regardless of the teachers' grade level.

> The expectations are so high, that we as teachers feel pressured, and I think there might be room for play, but there are so many things that we put on our shoulders that we can't do what we want to do. I think we probably have similar philosophies, where play is important to us, and we just can't, there is no room for it. And I don't think if our administrators walked in they would be happy to see play in kindergarten. (Kathleen, 4/26/18)

Janet quickly chimed in, "That's because our administration says, if you have time to play, where is that extra time coming from, it's coming from instruction time" (4/26/18). And others added to the conversation, stating:

> Maybe if I was allowed to have [dramatic play], and blocks. I miss dramatic play a lot. I feel like they [the children] need it, I mean they are doing it, outside, and they want to talk to each other all the time in the classroom, they need it… If they want that content vocab, we can design a dramatic play area that goes along with content, where they can use it in their own way, but we aren't allowed to have things like that. (Karyn, 4/26/18)

> During the few times they get to play with blocks and things, they are so few that really they are like 'these are mine now, I need to use these right now!' and they feel rushed, and that's part of [the children's] hoarding. (Rachel, 4/26/18)

> They [the children] don't have enough time to talk it out and fix their problems, so they hoard everything up and fight, they feel like they can only fix things by telling the teacher, so they are always tattling because they don't know how to talk things out. (Janet, 4/26/18)

A curriculum devoid of play was causing these new teachers to struggle with the ways in which schools were organized. Interestingly, both principals when interviewed mentioned the emphasis that should be placed on social-emotional development and building communities of learners. This was not the only place there seemed to be a disconnect between the teachers' and administrators' perspectives.

Disconnect. There seems to be a disconnect when it comes to who should reach out to whom for help. Both principals we spoke to felt it was the teacher's role to reach out for help as the following quote suggests.

> I guess they [the new teachers] don't want to ask for help because they think it will look like they don't know how to do the job well. But the only way to learn is to fail and we talk about celebrating failure. (Winston, 4/12/18)

Principal Hook echoed this when she suggested that new teachers needed to find someone who could support them during their first year. She encouraged teacher preparation programs to talk about the importance of new teachers finding the right person.

> We also love the people who come in and are like, 'can we meet once a week with a coach, or the reading specialist after school?', and they [the teachers] are talking about the best strategies for these kids. So, people who are willing to take some kind of initiative. (Hook, 7/12/18)

Both principals reported that their schools had instructional coaches available for all teachers. These coaches would assist teachers when they requested specific needs or areas for growth. The new teachers, on the other hand, felt they didn't always know what to ask for in terms of help.

> My instructional coach came in but never offered suggestions. It would have been nice to have someone come in and say "why don't you try this?" [and provide some] affirmation, like I am doing something right 'cause you don't hear it and you don't always know [what you're doing well.] (Rachel, 2/27/28)

This conflicted with the identified role of the coach which was to only look for the specific concern that the teacher has asked about, not commenting on anything else she sees, "in order to build trust" (Winston, 4/12/18). In general, it seemed that the two administrators felt it is up to the teacher to ask for help and that teacher education programs should ensure their candidates know it is the new teacher's responsibility to seek assistance. However, it was

apparent that the new teachers do not always know what to ask and/or might be unwilling to risk acknowledging they do not know everything.

Contradictions: TSES vs. Conversations

A breakdown of the data from the TSES showed that our participants' sense of self-efficacy in each construct (student engagement, instructional practices and classroom management) was quite high. A majority of participants scored the eight questions in each construct at a level of a "5" (Some influence) or higher (see Table 2). These data suggest that the first-year teachers are confident in their abilities across the three constructs. When comparing the teachers' answers on the TSES to the analysis of the focus group data however, there were notable discrepancies. Teachers expressed less confidence in their abilities when talking with a group of their peers who shared similar struggles openly. The teachers explained the discrepancy between their TSES rating on student engagement as directly attributed to their college preparation. When asked why she rated herself high on being able to help children think critically, Janet responded, "Throughout college, professors always asked us to think critically, … that's how I was brought up through college and it made me think about why was my decision the way it was [on the TSES]" (Janet, 4/26/18). Yet, in the interviews, teachers supported each other as they talked about how the realities of teaching colored what they could do. "..It's just, it's just, even though you think you are prepared, … you never think, wow this is real life, so it's like really hard…" (Janet, 4/3/18).

Table 2

Frequency of TSES Responses by Construct Item

Student Engagement Construct									
Item #	*Rating of 1 Nothing*	*2*	*3 Very little*	*4*	*5 Some influence*	*6*	*7 Quite a bit*	*8*	*9 A great deal*
1				1	2	5	1		
2						3	3	3	
4			1	1	4	1	2		
6						2	1	6	
9				1	2	2	2	1	1
12					3	1	1	3	1
14		1			2	4		1	
22				1	2	2	3		1
Total	0	1	1	4	15	20	13	14	3
Instructional Strategies Construct									
Item #	*Rating of 1 Nothing*	*2*	*3 Very little*	*4*	*5 Some influence*	*6*	*7 Quite a bit*	*8*	*9 A great deal*
7					1	4	3	1	
10						3	4	1	1
11					1	2	3	2	1
17				1	1	1	3	2	
18		1		2	1	3		1	1
20					4	2		3	
23				1	1	4	2	1	
24				1	1	2	3	1	1
Total	0	1	0	5	10	21	18	12	4

Classroom Management Construct									
Item #	*Rating of 1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*
	Nothing		*Very little*		*Some influence*		*Quite a bit*		*A great deal*
3			1		1	4	1	2	
5					1	2	2	1	2
8				1	1	3	1	2	1
13			1		2	3	1	2	
15				3	2	1	2	1	
16				2	2	5		1	
19		1	1	2	2	2	1		
21		1		1	3	2	1	1	
Total	0	2	3	9	14	22	9	10	3

Discussion

Reality vs. Expectations

Challenges. The teachers' realities of their first year of teaching align well with Moir's (2007) phases of first-year teacher attitudes toward teaching. Moir's phases begin with anticipation and survival in the beginning of the year, but find new teachers disillusioned by November and December. After a break during the holidays, teachers come back rejuvenated according to Moir. Some of the teachers stated that by February they had a better sense of what had to be accomplished each day, were spending less time at school, and were feeling less overwhelmed. In some cases, the teachers described a rapid pace through Moir's stages at an earlier point than Moir projected. This was the case for the teacher who felt her struggles had been a necessary part of learning which would be indicative of reflection that would occur in the summer after their first year.

The teachers found support when working with a collaborative team, which aligns with much of the research on the needs of new teachers by Martin et al., (2015), and particularly the description of the millennial generation by Abrams (2018). They appreciate the give and take that working with others provides. In terms of the reality of teaching, the teachers also reported classroom management as a major struggle, supporting Veenman's seminal work in 1984 and subsequent studies (Ganser, 1999; Hudson, 2012; Odell, 1986; Odell & Ferraro, 1992) which all name classroom management as a challenge for beginning teachers.

Structure of Schools. Both the daily schedule and the focus of the curriculum had an effect on the teachers. Teachers were faced with fitting into daily schedules that were not always conducive to students' learning. This is especially true for resource teachers (like the ESL teacher in this study) who deal with multiple classroom teachers as they work with individual students. As a new teacher, it can be difficult to understand the complexities involved in the whole school schedule. All classes have to have lunch; all classes need specials during the day. Not everyone can have recess at the same time. Therefore, daily schedules are designed to meet the needs of the whole, not an individual class. However, some research suggests that scheduling does have an impact on learning (Strohbehn, Strohbehn, Lanningham-Foster, & Litchfield, 2016). Students who had recess before lunch seemed to have fewer behavior problems, although this finding was not widespread.

The nature of education reflects the focus placed on the activities that occur throughout the day. Several teachers bemoaned the lack of time for play activities. This concern emerged from the value that play held in their teacher preparation program and, in addition, to what best practice indicates is developmentally appropriate. Play is long recognized as a developmentally appropriate practice where children can explore and follow their curiosity; it allows for growth

across all domains (Berk, 2009; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2010). Play contributes to the social-emotional development of children. Hough, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2017) reported findings that suggest that measures of social-emotional learning "…are useful predictors of academic outcomes" (p.8). Finnan (2014) found that when nonacademic activities, such as yoga, were practiced throughout the day, "rather than detracting from students' academic performance, steady improvements in students' test scores indicate that … non-academic learning activities [are] far from a waste of time" (p. 42). If play results in social-emotional growth and social-emotional growth is tied to academic achievement, then one would expect play to be an essential component of elementary education.

Disconnect. Not wanting to reach out to ask for help and yet expecting help is a challenge to tease apart. Abrams (2018) suggests that Millennials want mentors with whom they can collaborate to talk about what is working, or suggest ways that might work better, and these findings support this. However, these new teachers wanted more than they were getting from a mentor or a coach *and* they didn't feel comfortable asking for specific help when policies were not clear. Abrams and Von Frank (2014) suggest that when teachers are unaware of policies such as when to call the front office for help when a child is exhibiting extreme behaviors, frustration and anxiety grow. Providing specific details up front about policies and having clarity before accountability is important. Allowing the new teachers and mentors to work together in the beginning of the year to develop a checklist of expectations and specific tasks as well as who is responsible for each is even better (Abrams & Van Frank, 2014).

Contradictions between TSES and Focus Groups

It was interesting to note that the focus group responses provided a different perspective than the survey instrument (TSES). Kvale (1996) reminds us that a richer picture is provided

through focus groups, and they also help to keep participants honest. Another explanation may be that the participants may have exaggerated their confidence on the survey, perhaps because they had just graduated from a teacher education program that is well known for its excellence and tradition of preparing highly qualified teachers. Further, the participants may have been more comfortable sharing how they really felt in the presence of their like-minded peers who were also feeling less confident. This supports Moir's phases of first-year teachers where they come into their new teaching position with idealistic views and then begin to suffer from self-doubt (2007).

Implications for Teacher Education Preparation Programs

The findings from this small pilot study provide information that can help shape the elementary education teacher preparation program at this institution and promote further discussions at other institutions who engage in program improvement. The pilot data are especially informative as the institution considers redesigning its program to be a four-year program with an education major. To address the needs of new teacher candidates, several suggestions emerge. These include (a) providing more opportunity for involvement in classrooms, (b) strengthening the dialogues that occur among teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, administrators, and higher education faculty, (c) building the advocacy skills of teacher candidates.

In the design of a new elementary education program, faculty may want to consider additional opportunities for teacher candidates to experience actual classrooms in more depth. The purpose of extended placements would be to broaden the teacher candidates' knowledge of the realities of everyday teaching. This could be achieved by having longer field placements, mini-blocks of field placements, and/or using case study scenarios. Teacher candidates need

more than just one day per week in an early field placement. Extending field placements would also help teacher candidates develop their skills in classroom management. The investigators recommend that faculty explore the following questions: How could a schedule be designed where weeks of course content are alternated with weeks of field placements prior to student teaching? How could a year-long student teaching placement be designed while still delivering content? Answering these questions would strengthen a teacher preparation program.

In addition, the investigators recommend increasing the dialogue among teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, administrators, and higher education faculty related to the logistics of teaching. The teachers in this investigation thought they knew what life in the classroom was like as evidenced through their TSES rankings; however, in conversations, it became apparent that some nuances of the reality of teaching were unexpected. These new teachers had questions related to transitioning from subject to subject, school-wide routines and procedures, calling the office for assistance, and the role of mentors, coaches, and administrators, to name a few. The work of preparing teachers needs to be explicit in addressing logistical issues that these new teachers identified as problematic. This can be accomplished when mechanisms are in place for faculty, cooperating teachers, administrators, and teacher candidates to candidly discuss the logistics of teaching. Knowing what teacher candidates need can help structure the conversations and relationships between cooperating teacher and candidate, between cooperating teacher and faculty, and between candidate and faculty.

To address the other issues that emerged, the investigators suggest building the advocacy skills of teacher candidates. Throughout the elementary education program, teacher candidates should develop and refine their beliefs about what good teaching and learning should look like. If they can articulate what they need to be those exquisite teachers, then they can begin to advocate

for those needs. That would start in their field placements where they learn to ask questions about why their cooperating teacher does what s/he does. As teacher candidates move into the interviewing process to secure their first job, they can ask questions related to their beliefs and needs. This would allow them to decide whether the school division is a good fit for them. Once hired, they can continue to advocate for their children and themselves in terms of what is best practice. After data collection, the investigators heard from two of the teachers in the study that their administrator allowed more time for play in their kindergarten classrooms this year, which had been missing during the study. They advocated and succeeded!

The investigators recognize that this pilot study and its findings may not be transferable to other contexts and must be understood within the context and geographical area where it was conducted. Results will be directly used in the development of a specific program's redesign. A pilot study to include the 2018-2019 elementary education graduates is planned for the future. Data from key stakeholders should support and shed light on what our teacher candidates need as teacher preparation programs continue to make data-driven decisions.

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Appendix A

Principal Interview Questions

1. What do you see as the role for teacher education programs during the induction period of new teachers?
2. What would the ideal partnership between public school divisions and teacher education programs look like during candidates' preparation? As they begin their first year?
3. Have you hired elementary teachers from JMU in the last five years?

   If yes:

   What do they do well as new teachers?

   Is there an area where JMU graduates could be more prepared, considering they are beginning teachers?

   (If no, then proceed to the next question.)
4. For all your new teachers, what is one skill you wished they all possessed coming into the profession?
5. In general, when you compare graduates from the last three years to those you have hired before that time frame, what is a change in recent graduates? How do you see that affecting their performance in the classroom and the profession?
6. As you know, the Commonwealth is suggesting Colleges of Education prepare teachers in just four years as an undergraduate degree and license. What are your thoughts on this move?
7. As we wrap this up, what else would you like to share with us?

Appendix B

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (long form)

Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.

Nothing = 1; Very little = 3; Some influence = 5; Quite a bit = 7; A great deal =

Teacher Beliefs	**How much can you do?**
(1) How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(2) How much can you do to help your students think critically?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(3) How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(4) How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(5) To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(6) How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)

(7) How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(8) How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(9) How much can you do to help your students value learning?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(10) How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(11) To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(12) How much can you do to foster student creativity?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(13) How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(14) How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(15) How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(16) How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)

(17) How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(18) How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(19) How well can you keep a few problem students form ruining an entire lesson?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(20) To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(21) How well can you respond to defiant students?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(22) How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(23) How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)
(24) How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9)

Appendix C

Focus group questions (groups 1 & 2)

1. What has your first year of teaching been like?

2. Is teaching what you expected? (Probe as needed)

3. How well did your teacher preparation program prepare you for the classroom? Is there something that the program emphasized that you would need to do as a teacher, but found that you either couldn't or didn't need to do? (Are we emphasizing the right aspects of the position? Are we missing opportunities to prepare you for other parts of the position?)

In what areas did you feel most prepared?

In what areas did you feel least prepared?

4. When you think about where you were in August and September, what do you find still challenging?

What were your biggest concerns then?

What are your biggest concerns now?

5. What do you consider your successes to be?

6. Reflect on the content/subject matter that you are teaching. –What do you need to teach that you feel you do not have sufficient knowledge/preparation for in terms of content knowledge and/or pedagogical (teaching content) knowledge. What would have helped? Pay special attention to the time of year and how this may or may not present additional challenges.

7. Do you still have the same perspective on teaching that you did when you started? If it has changed, how so?

8. What have you learned that will help you in the future?

Appendix D

Final group focus group questions

Final whole-group interview questions (Questions emerged from conversations participants developed in response to our opening statement. No preconceived questions were developed other than the first one.)

1. We have had two focus groups; this is our third one. We looked at your self-efficacy scores and developed some questions from those to follow-up from the last two times. We were wondering why you ranked yourselves pretty high in the category of student engagement?
2. You were also quite confident in your ability to help children believe they can do well in school… so what are your thoughts on that one?
3. Does anyone have any ideas about why you feel confident?
4. Motivation was a topic that wasn't scored as high as some of the other areas. It's not that everyone scored it really low, it's just that it wasn't one that stood out as a high one. What do you think contributes to you feeling less confident in motivating children?
5. As I am listening, how much of this lack of confidence to motivate is really a problem with being a new teacher or a problem with the school system? Is it a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate?
6. Shifting gears to the survey questions about instructional strategies, what do you think contributes to your high confidence in being able to ask and field questions during instruction?
7. This last question came up after we interviewed a principal and she mentioned the instructional coaches; she was talking about the coaches and their role with new teachers.

Our question is can you tell us about your experience with the instructional coaches in your building?