A Case Study of an Induction Year Teacher's Problem-Solving using the LIBRE Model Activity

Norma S.Guerra, Belinda Bustos Flores
Lorena Claeys
University of Texas at San Antonio

Abstract

Background: A federally-funded program at the University of Texas at San Antonio adopted a holistic problem solving mentoring approach for novice teachers participating in an accelerated teacher certification program.

Aims / focus of discussion: To investigate a novice teacher's problem-solving activity through self-expression of challenges and management of identified problems. Of interest was the level of novice teacher detail provided to explore specific problems, goals, and completion of developed resolution plans. The LIBRE Model, developed as a clinical tool, was used to facilitate "self-talk," and personal self-attention to concerns expressed within the person's "worldview" of social context.

Sample: One novice teacher in her induction year participated in this study. The information collected included her expressed: self-awareness, social expectations, skills, facility in processing identified challenges and willingness to invest in change.

Method: Three mentor facilitated novice teacher problem-solving sessions were conducted. With each session, a problem-solving exercise occured, which included the development of a resolution plan. Only the novice teacher's words and plans were recorded. This holistic approach was designed to capture the individual's tailored, supported, and transitional changes from novice to more experienced teacher. The sustainability of the teacher's self-managed changes was evident with the fourth problem solving activity which was completed independent of the mentor.

Results: Teacher and mentor feedback are presented. The value of monitoring teacher self-awareness and self-managed change are discussed as elements of the structured mentor – mentee communication.

Conclusion: Diagnostic/intervention tools such as the LIBRE Model introduced during the beginning teaching experience provide key information about the individual in terms of self-exploration, problem solving, and decision-making. As evidenced in the case study, the novice teacher found an approach based on her self-reflection and personal strengths, which increased her sense of self-efficacy and professional self-confidence.

Keywords: Novice teacher induction experience, Problem solving, Mentor – Mentee communication

新入職教師在解決問題時使用 LIBRE 模式活動的個案研究

Norma S.Guerra, Belinda Bustos Flores
Lorena Claeys
University of Texas at San Antonio

摘要

背景：一個在德州大學聖安東尼奧分校由聯邦資助的速成教師認證課程，採納了一種給新教師整全問題解決輔導的途徑。

議論焦點：探討新教師如何在解決問題活動中以自我表達去挑戰和處理問題的界定。關注新教師提供解決特定問題的細節、目標、和決議方案的完成。LIBRE 模式是一個用於促進「自我談話」和自我注意來表達個人社會背境世界觀的臨床工具。

樣本：參與研究的是一位就職未滿一年的新老師。收集的資料包括她表達的：自我意識、社會期望、技能、識別挑戰的能力和改變的意願。

方法：新教師上了三堂由導師指導解決問題的課，每一課都包括了一個問題和策劃解決方案的過程，只記錄新教師的談話和計劃。這個整全途徑的設計是為了要捕捉從新手到資深老師個人量身訂製被支援的過渡期改變，這些改變可從第四課的問題解決活動中不需導師干預看出，。

結果：這份個案研究的結果包括有關的老師和導師的意見，監控老師的自我意識、自我調息改變的價值包括在導師－學員有系統的溝通之中。

結論：如 LIBRE模式 這樣的診斷工具提供了有關新教師自我勘探、問題解決和決策等關鍵性的資料。在這份個案研究明顯看出這位新老師從自我省察和了解個人強項的途徑，增加了她個人和專業自信。

關鍵詞：新教師入職經驗, 問題解決, 導師－學員溝通

This study explores the usefulness of a structured problem solving activity in facilitating the success of a novice teacher's induction year. The "dispositions" of the field set the context for the one novice teacher's induction experience presented in problem-solving responses.

Dispositions of the Field

The restructuring of educational systems has resulted in rapid and substantial change characterized by some as relentless reform (McCoy, 2003; Stevenson, 2007) that impacts not only students, but also teachers and teacher candidates. This "instability" in the field particularly complicates teacher preparation. In considering the impact of change on novice teachers, it is important to recognize that many of the challenges faced by these teachers require a willingness to accommodate factors and challenges outside the young professional's training or experience. In other words, the expected changes and accommodated responses often draw on negotiating expertise and system management not traditionally included in current training. The changes teachers experience are compounded by new student body demographic shifts requiring greater need for certified teachers in critical teaching shortage areas like bilingual education, mathematics, science, and special education (Flores, & Clark, 2004; THECB, 2007; Flores, Clark, Claeys, & Villarreal, 2007). Today's teachers face complex instructional challenges based on economic, psychosocial, ethnic, racial, cognitive and scholastic diversity. They are often held accountable for factors like student attendance or social-behavioral problem management in addition to academic success. This continued focus on "accountability" has resulted in shifts away from academic mastery goals to performance goals (Hagen & Weinstein, 1995). As a result, teaching can be characterized as being less student-oriented and more grade-oriented and as a consequence, many teachers leave the profession in frustration and disappointment. Tye and O'Brien (2002) reported that the top reason for teachers leaving the profession is high-stakes testing and "drill and kill" curriculum.

Buckley, Schneider, and Shang (2005) suggest that among idealistic novice teachers, drop-out patterns seem to be more associated with a lack of guidance and support concerning professional goals and evaluation of their efforts. Similarly, Tapper (1995) reports survey data indicating that large numbers of teachers believe that they did not receive the coping skills necessary to meet their first year challenges. McCoy (2003) identified the following reasons for leaving the profession within the first three years:

The need for respect for the profession
Low pay
Large classes
Limited support for clerical tasks
No release time for extra duties such as coaching
Inadequate supplies
Non-supportive administrators
Inactive mentors
Uninterested students
Uninvolved parents

Within the first five years, 25 to 30 percent of the entering teachers leave the profession (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2005; Ingersoll, 2003; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). Consequently, teacher attrition is often characterized as a "revolving door" resulting from mismatches between teacher expectations and student

characteristics (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Ross & Kennedy, 1990). Stevenson (2007) wrote:

> Caught in the middle of this relentless drive to raise productivity, teachers have often found themselves to be the victims of unwelcome change in which they have had their professional judgments curtailed, as witnessed in increasing marginalization of the educational process, and have been subjected to even more forensic scrutiny of their work.(p. 225)

Teacher attrition is the reason for nationwide shortages. Thus traditional four-year teacher educator programs are faced with the challenge of graduating an adequate number of teachers. Trends show that alternative routes to teacher preparation and certification are increasing in many states with the intent of meeting the rising demand for teachers in critical teaching shortage areas (Eick, 2002). Accelerated teacher certification programs offer second career individuals an opportunity to apply their content area skills in the classroom. Given the nature and focus of such programs, it seems even more unlikely that opportunity to prepare for increasing class demands (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Ball, 2003) will be offered.

This study suggests that similar to other high-stress professions, teachers are finding their effectiveness linked to coping skills that encompass the "whole person" at personal and professional levels. However, the teacher preparation literature is limited in terms of exploring the need for preparing candidates for these types of teacher engagement to stress and problem solving. This may be due, in part, to the assumption that teacher candidates as well as practicing professionals are equally and sufficiently engaged in the pursuit and practice of the profession due to a commitment to student welfare, social responsibility or some other internal motivation that goes beyond compensation or reward.

As an interdisciplinary research team, we determined to explore "self-talk" expressions of a novice teacher from an accelerated teacher certification program. This study examines a novice teacher's response to problem-solving using the LIBRE Model activity (Guerra, 2009). The LIBRE Model Stick Figure provided a skeletal framework, which was used to record and examine the novice teacher's "worldviews", and attention to "self".

Methodology

Rationale for Selected Instrumentation

The LIBRE Model problem-solving activity was selected as the intervention of choice after early success with its use in documenting culturally responsive practices (Flores, Claeys, & Guerra, 2007). The word "LIBRE" represents the acronym formed from the letters, which function as process prompts. Briefly stated, these steps include: *L-listen and list challenges as experienced, I-identify a focus, B-brainstorm options, R-reality test-developing plausible action responses and E-encourage the development of a personalized plan to solve the identified concern* (Guerra, 2001; 2009). Open-ended questions are used to help the participants identify and explore self-identified concerns (problems); Table 1 provides the instructions provided during the LIBRE Model administration.

Case Study Context

The researchers' intention was to highlight the

Table 1. LIBRE Model Instructions

Let's begin:
You will notice that this figure resembles a person; this is how we are going to work together in completing the activity. Beginning at the top with the head and working downward to the feet, I will be asking you several questions and writing your responses on the spaces provided. Only your words and thoughts will be recorded. Any questions? (Answer any question explaining that this is a problem solving activity / if no questions, begin)

Listening to yourself and what is occurring with you right now, **list** as many challenges as you can that you are experiencing (Offer at least three prompts: ***can you think of anything else; what else is going on; what else?)***

Summarize all responses offered (if you are completing this one-to-one, if working with a group, continue)

If you were to **Identify** one concern that is pressing you more than any of the others; what would that be? Let's take that focus item and write it as a question.

Now let's begin by **Brainstorming** all the possible and impossible responses to the question you identified. Remember we want both realistic and unrealistic options to solving this question so be as creative as you can be. (Prompt at least three times and make sure you have at least one impossible option included)

- Summarize options generated
- Now let's eliminate those responses that you know you will not attempt
  (Draw a single line through each option that is deemed unrealistic)
- Now let's prioritize the remaining options, beginning with the most realistic (that will be number 1)

The next step is **Reality-testing. Here we want to consider - What would it look like if each of the options were carried out as a plan? (**Beginning with the highest priority and work down to the lowest ranked option), with the statement: **What would it look like if you did . . .?**

Up to this point, you have considered a number of options in response to the identified question (summarized the goal, brainstormed options and the reality-testing processing), **now let's move to the feet of the figure. These are the encouragement steps and involve actually developing a plan of action.**

What are the steps to your best solution? (Write a #1 as the person(s) begins to speak; follow with #2, and #3). Once the plan has been developed; move to the second foot and ask the person(s) to identify a time / date for completing each step. Once complete, ask the person(s) to - **identify a word or phrase of encouragement.**

personal (self) knowledge and skills that a teacher candidate must possess in order to be an effective teacher (Shulman, 1987; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Banks, 2003; Guerra, 2006; Flores, Clark, Claeys, & Villarreal, 2007). Teacher candidates must learn not only content, pedagogy, learners, and communities, they must know themselves. In addition, given the diversity in schools, teacher candidates must acquire and sustain certain beliefs and reflect those same thoughts through demonstrated professional dispositions (Harrison, Smithey, McAffee, & Weiner, 2006). Holistic views toward self and healthy personal management have been identified as contributing factors to novice teacher success (Tondre-Garza, 2008). Feiman-Nemeser (2001) suggests that conventional approaches may no longer be adequate in preparing teachers given the powerful relationship between teachers' cognitive and affective actions and students' achievement. After observing teacher candidates express beliefs and approaches to their own learning, Dembo (2001) also criticizes the attention placed on theory rather than teacher candidate learning. Teacher candidates and teachers' implicit epistemological beliefs about learning have been found to be naïve (Brownlee, Purdie, & Boulton-Lewis, 2001; Flores, 2001) and often culturally bound (Chan & Elliot, 2004). This begs the question: do novice teachers' have the ability to handle the demands and stress of the classroom when they lack experiential understanding of the

skills associated with monitoring their own problem-solving and decision making processes (Guerra, 2004). Under prepared for stress and with the lack of workable alternatives, teachers have the tendency to teach as they have been taught (Ross & Kennedy, 1990). This is despite the fact that researchers have found that teacher candidates must possess self-regulatory skills to be able to assist their students in developing self-regulatory skills (Dembo, 2001; Randi, 2004). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) explains that to accomplish a level of efficiency, the first step is a greater understanding of self followed by structured attention to external demands. "Flow" is experienced when skill meets challenging demands with a positive resolution. Flow "tends to occur when a person faces a set of goals that require appropriate responses" (p. 29). "Successful people often make lists and prioritize all the things they have to do and quickly decide which tasks they can delegate, or forget about, and which ones they have to tackle personally, and in what order" (p. 106).

Recognizing that teaching requires teacher engagement with multiple tasks and decision-making, researchers often advocate for the development of problem-solving skills (Swanson, O'Connor, & Cooney, 1990; Guerra, 2004; 2007). During the induction phase, Feiman-Nemser (2001) contended that novice teachers are in a formative stage ideal for actualizing their learning about teaching (putting what they have learned into practice). While teacher candidates may express high confidence in their ability to teach in diverse settings, their level of confidence often wanes when confronted by challenges without the "safety net" of a supervising, experienced teacher (Flores et al., under review; Turley, Powers, & Nakai, 2006). Induction support has shown some promising outcomes and impact on retention (Flores, et al., under review; Turley et al., 2006). However, given the variety of induction program philosophical approaches and implementations, the lack of clearly defined criteria has resulted in differences in vision, support for mentee and mentor, and/or preparations that would provide a supportive school culture (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Often mentoring/induction support does not provide adequate opportunities for novice teachers to develop, dissect, and internalize differing problem-solving and coping skills that have been actualized by experienced teachers (Swanson, et al. 1990; Niebrand, Horn, & Holmes, 1992). What is needed is a well-articulated holistic novice teacher induction program approach which would support and be conducive to learning during teacher development (Feiman-Nemser, Carver, Schwille, & Yusko, 1999). The design of this investigation is an exploratory case study research. According to Yin (1994), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The case being studied is the novice teacher and the contemporary phenomena being studied is the LIBRE Model problem-solving plan. Thus, this case study examined: (1) How using a structured problem solving activity facilitated the novice teacher's self-identification and expression of challenges, (2) What types of problems were identified, (3) What level of detail was provided concerning the identified problem, (4) What goals were expressed and (5) Whether the novice teacher actually implemented the LIBRE Model problem-solving plan.

Field procedures

A trained Master's level counselor was assigned a transitional mentor role to assist the novice teacher with the processing of challenges encountered. This

person conducted the LIBRE Model sessions. The rationale for the selection of a counselor was their curricular training in active listening and inquiry skills. The counselor as a mentor afforded the novice teacher clinical assistance as support (to the problem solving activity) given their training and knowledge of stress/coping management. Our intention was to provide a "blank slate" open dialogue to the novice teacher so that she might bring any experience or knowledge to the exchange concerning challenges. As part of the LIBRE Model training, this mentor was instructed to only record the words and expressions of the novice teacher. The mentor did not provide technical or professional assistance. Academic needs were recorded; however, it was agreed that it would be up to the novice teacher to request assistance. This allowed the novice teacher to speak freely about any challenges and it facilitated in the development of self-confidence in seeking solutions to classroom and other problems. Presented below are the training and procedures implemented to accomplish that objective.

Mentor training

The mentor training consisted of six hours in preparation which included (1) one hour LIBRE Model PowerPoint presentation, (2) one hour open question and answer discussion about the LIBRE Model focusing primarily on the parameters and directions for administration, (3) a thirty minute video demonstration with one hour of exercises in facilitating the administration of the problem solving process, and (4) one and one-half hours spent in practicing the administration of the LIBRE Model with feedback. The training, implementation, and data collection has been standardized and parallels other research with the instrument (see Sullivan, Hsieh, Guerra, Lumadue, and Lebron-Striker, 2006/2007).

Nature of the Data

The narrative structure of the study involved the administration of the LIBRE Model and written recording of all responses. The novice teacher was invited to dialogue with the mentor who offered the activity prompts and completed them using the problem-solving (LIBRE Model) protocol. This protocol functioned as a graphic organizer (LIBRE Stick Figure Tool, henceforth LSFT) and was used to record all novice teacher responses. Data included: (1) general problems, (2) one specific concern of interest interpreted as a goal, (3) individual "brainstorming" and "reality testing" statements, and (4) resolution plan.

Criteria for interpreting the findings

Engagement Styles as Data to Explore the Novice Teacher Experience. Learning to teach is a continuum and a holistic integration of academic, personal, and professional domains (Guerra, 2004; Flores, Claeys, & Wallis, 2006; Flores et al, 2007; Flores, García, Claeys, & Hernández, under review). To examine teachers' education requires the willingness (among other things not addressed here) and substantial personal changes to occur while in the preparation to become teachers. Failure to acknowledge teacher candidates' and teachers' change may contribute to their vulnerability as they struggle with professional demands and personal problems (e.g. family issues or personal sense of self struggles). A review of the teacher candidate and professional development literature did not suggest much attention to the inclusion of self-care skills as part of the continuum of teacher development perhaps due to the assumption that this group knows intuitively how to

handle problems or has adequate support mechanisms and personal strength to deal with personal problem solving. Whatever the reason, it seems clear that educator professional development must include personal problem-solving skill development (Flores et al., 2006; Flores et al. 2007; Flores, under in review).

While case studies are designed to "optimize understanding" they may function at times as an early step toward theory building or as a preliminary effort leading up to generalizable research (Stake, 2000). This exploratory case study intended to describe one contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 1994) contextualized within the induction year support provided by a Transition to Teaching federally-funded grant through the Academy for Teacher Excellence (ATE) at a southwestern regional institution. ATE employs a holistic developmental approach in the preparation of teachers which continues through the first three years of teaching. The LIBRE Model is a component of this effort. It was hypothesized that as Smith and Ingersoll (2004) assert, new teachers remain in the profession when they receive mentoring support. The support provided with this study was defined in: (1) the uncensored freedom to speak to a neutral, counselor-trained mentor, (2) the opportunity to identify and problem solve challenges experienced-professional or personal, and (3) the written record of "self-expressions" for personal reflection and personal/professional self-efficacy as solutions/resolutions are accomplished with positive returns.

Case Study-first session

About the novice teacher. Sally, a pseudonym for the African-American novice teacher, completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from an accredited public four-year university located in the southwest with an overall 2.9 G.P.A. After graduation she worked at a large financial institution intending at some point to become a teacher. Several years of employment occurred before she decided to return to college to seek teaching certification and a Master's degree through the ATE's Accelerated Teacher Education Program (ATEP).

The novice teacher problem solving interaction. The mentor, an ATE Induction Year field specialist, met with Sally. At this first meeting, Sally indicated that she wanted to become an educator who embraced and welcomed diversity by focusing on the uniqueness of each student. She also stated that she wanted to help every student become academically successful (Novice Teacher, personal communication, March 24, 2005). Sally prided herself as being "dependable and able to motivate and encourage her students." In a self-reflective essay she self identified as someone who welcomes hard work, is willing to learn new skills, and perseveres in Science education for "our youth".

Sally's goals as an educator were clear. Once she was accepted and enrolled in the post-baccalaureate ATEP, she completed 12 hours of graduate level coursework. She indicated she was pleased to be a part of the program and was eager to meet program requirements, some which included: specialized field experiences, intensive professional development workshops, and seminars before entering the classroom as a teacher of record.

LIBRE Model Administration

Rapport was quickly established; Sally was invited to problem-solve with the mentor using the

LIBRE Model protocol, LIBRE Model Stick Figure Tool (LSFT). This first LIBRE Model administration occurred during the second semester of Sally's professional preparation coursework. Concurrent with her university work, Sally's first year teaching assignment was Integrated Physics and Chemistry (IPC) in a federally-funded Title I, low income, high minority, urban high school. The majority of the students placed in her class were from minority backgrounds, mainly Latino, who were academically at-risk. Her responses to the structured problem solving activity identified challenges which were reflective of the demands of teaching in this highly demanding and stressful context. The table provides the highlighted narrative of Sally's self-expressed challenges.

Table 2. Narrative Profile of Sally

Novice Teacher

Sally (Secondary Science and Math certification candidate)

School content

Urban inner-city high school, Integrated Physics and Chemistry course

Grade level: 10, 11, & 12th

Novice Teacher experience with Mentor across the first academic year

First LIBRE Model challenge: "How am I going to juggle life at home and excel in classes?"

Second LIBRE Model challenge: "What new strategies can I implement to maintain effective classroom management?"

Third LIBRE Model challenge: "How do I close a lesson effectively?"

Novice Teacher experience without Direct Mentor support

Fourth LIBRE Model challenge (completed independent of mentor): "What can I do to pass the content exam?"

Sally was a twenty-nine year old African-American woman beginning her second career as a teacher after having left the banking business. Her undergraduate work had been in math and science; she embraced the opportunity to come into this new profession. She began her first interview activity as she began her academic and teaching experience. The anxiety and primary concerns she identified were in how best to manage the dual roles she was experiencing as graduate student and novice teacher. As Sally began to organize her personal schedule her concern shifted to the management of her classes. With the additional focused assistance, she was able to receive from her mentor; Sally experienced an increase in her self-efficacy. The result was an increased willingness to further explore her skills as a teacher. With the third problem solving activity she focused on "closing the lesson". Sally began to experience a level of "flow" as she responded to the challenge with her acquired skills. The feedback she received was positive and she continued to refine her teaching. By the time she completed her fourth problem solving activity, she was able to complete it independent of her mentor using the LIBRE Model as a means to "check-in" with herself.

After listing her concerns and identifying the main challenge to be addressed as "How can I juggle life at home and excel in classes?" she processed with the mentor who listened closely and recorded all the possible options generated. Sally created a plan that allowed her to have personal time, school studying time, and classroom preparation time. She became even more focused about the level of support she needed. Of interest was how self-aware Sally was of her personal and professional needs. She indicated her strong need to be able to have "life" at home and school.

Sally received two to four hours of professional support each month. During the first nine weeks, it was noted that her major concerns were connected to classroom management (e.g., excessive talking, not following instructions, repeating instructions). Her mentor noted Sally's goal and asked her about her thoughts concerning her class' progress. Sally reported on the conduct and performance of her class and that she wanted to develop a plan of action. The generated plan indicated rearranging the students into smaller groups and distributing materials after instructions had been provided. Sally implemented

her plan as stated–group members were given assigned roles and the teacher walked around the room and monitored their involvement. Sally reported redirecting inappropriate behaviors, and focusing efforts to praise positive behaviors. She initiated a correct answer reward system that involved "Bonus Bucks" as an incentive. It was apparent that the implementation of her action plan was successful in addressing the concerns. Sally became more invested in her problem-solving activity; openly stating that she looked forward to the mentor's visit. Sally spoke of the success in the classroom and the increase in student participation. The mentor and Sally systematically revisited her plan to discuss other areas not yet implemented and portions of the plan not resolved. Included in Sally's overall plan was rearranging the room to decrease the number of students per group and making telephone contacts with parents or guardians.

Subsequent visit-second session

Sally talked about her anticipated visits with students' parents/guardians. By the second nine weeks, the support provided by the mentor helped Sally focus on lesson plans and use strategies that would address the needs of all learners. Her telephone visits with parents had been successful. The novice teacher continued to implement new strategies in order to better maintain effective classroom management (for example, using a timer to keep the students on-task, tardy logs, and using visual cues to maintain students' attention). During the third nine weeks, the mentor observed the teacher consistently redirecting inappropriate behavior. Sally began giving expectations before starting an assignment and had students working in small groups of three. Another challenge mentioned by Sally involved difficulties in bringing closure to her lessons. Using the LIBRE Model to explore Sally's thoughts about how her teaching was going, Sally's self-reflection provided an opportunity for the mentor to affirm her efforts and her new focus: "How do I close a lesson effectively?" Sally's plan included providing (1) visual cues (a blank LIBRE Model Stick Figure) posted at the front of the room, (2) having the students seated and quiet, and (3) following the lesson with a "clean up" activity. Sally decided that the lesson review would be more effective if it were presented as learner-centered rather than teacher-centered activity and she began to dismiss class only after a review of the lesson. The results of this adjustment left Sally feeling more confident and with a renewed energy to continue to refine her teaching.

Subsequent visit-Third session

In a follow-up LIBRE Model problem-solving session, the mentor noted that indeed "the teacher did have the students seated before closing the lesson and dismissing the class". In fact, the novice teacher used the LIBRE Model Stick Figure as a visual reminder to close the lesson with the students. Sally's comments included that she "dismissed class on a daily basis conducting a student led review." Although Sally's focus question was directed on lesson closure she also began to self-reflect on how she approached daily concerns. Sally began seeing her skills in student performance and how the students responded to her. The increased confidence and self-efficacy supported the development of new skills. Her desire to better process and respond to her students led her to being more responsive to the distinct classroom and student challenges.

A subsequent LIBRE Model interview occurred in late spring. This time Sally completed the LIBRE Model independent of her mentor. This time Sally identified a focused question of, "What can I do to pass the content exam?" The teacher's action plan included: designated times to study and read to prepare for the teacher certification exit exam. In the summer, Sally completed her graduate coursework required by the program and additional coursework needed to complete her master's degree. She reapplied for a probationary certification and continued to prepare for the state licensing (certification) exam.

Sally entered her second year of teaching at the same urban high school where she was selected as the science team leader continuing to teach Integrated Physics and Chemistry (IPC). During the first two nine weeks, Sally was asked to work with other teachers on her campus; her directive was to assist with support and other classroom management strategies. Sally was now helping her peers meanwhile continuing to receive assistance from her mentor.

By the second year, Sally reported that she felt more comfortable with the professional demands of her teaching practice. However, despite previous effort and success, she was still dissatisfied with the closing of her lessons. Sally indicated that she "finds it difficult, at times, to bring closure to an activity due to the amount of time allotted for the class or an activity." The plan of action she now developed included the use of *exit passes* (such as, closing questions to assess student understanding of the material presented)*;* this new approach allowed students' the opportunity to ask questions about the information presented as they reviewed and completed the lesson. If an activity required several class periods for implementation, students would be asked to summarize their learning to prepare them for the next phase of the activity. By the end of year, according to the mentor, reported that the teacher "has a positive attitude towards learning and instruction which was also supported by her students. Students understood what the expectations were and rarely challenged classroom rules"(personal communication, April 25, 2007). A recommendation was made to the teacher to attend additional professional development opportunities in how to close lessons and transition from activity to activity. The teacher did indeed follow-up and she also passed the state exam for standard certification in the late spring of her second year of teaching.

By the summer of 2007, Sally met with her mentor to complete an annual performance progress report. In this meeting, the novice teacher shared the following:

> I love being a teacher and wouldn't be anything else.
>
> I wanted to make a difference and this has really been happening.
>
> It's necessary to give of yourself to the students.
>
> You need to do what you have to do, not complain,
>
> and approach things from a professional place.
>
> If you can, love what you do.

Presently, Sally is in her third year of teaching at the same urban high school serving as a team leader for the science department. Sally now serves as an informal mentor for teacher candidates who have applied to the ATEP program allowing them time to complete the LIBRE Model. She also offers classroom observations and provides them with the

same reflective approach to identify the ideas and teaching strategies and helping them identify areas needing further development and assistance. More recently, Sally was awarded the outstanding teacher of the school.

Analysis

(1) *How did using a problem solving activity facilitate the novice teacher's self-expression of challenges?*

The simplistic steps and familiarity with each problem solving prompt provided a structure to the dialogue that resulted in a focus on problematic content rather than the less structured approach that held the possibility of going "off-track" as either personal experiences or emotions were expressed. Rather than shifting experience away from the novice teacher, the problem solving activity anchored and held the focus on the novice teacher and her strengths in both identifying and resolving concerns. The problem solving activity also offered her the freedom to seek assistance on her terms and according to the timeline she believed to be more efficient. The completed LIBRE Model Stick Figure provided a visual of the novice teacher's attentiveness. Using a narrative graphic organizer, goal orientation, coping strategies and social contextual patterns were observable to Sally and the mentor. In addition, the LIBRE Model Stick Figure tracked information that was then used as a referent in processing accomplished and non-accomplished plans. Sally's self-regulation patterns could be monitored in how and what the novice teacher presented as challenges. The novice teacher was then able to self-monitor effort/energy toward greater efficiency. And as the novice teacher began to see problem-solving change, greater self-efficacy was achieved.

In Sally's case, she wanted to try several approaches before she sought outside help. The initial changes that she implemented helped her in developing her confidence and in giving her some basic experience from which she could extend her skills. As she became more focused in what she was feeling and experiencing, she became more confident and willing to take more risk in learning to teach.

(2) *What types of problems were identified?*

Sally's primary concerns provided information about how she as a novice teacher felt; personally and professionally. She was aware that she had to make adjustments to herself that would impact her personally and professionally. As time continued, she began to adjust her attention to her teaching and student feedback. Only after the class began to experience some gains did she shift back to personal matters. Table 3 provides a listing of the problems she identified over the course of her induction experience. The problem solving activity allowed her to reflect holistically on her professional and personal growth and development. As such, rather that experiencing an internal battle of professional needs to personal needs, she was able to integrate and prioritize as she managed both.

(3) *What level of detail was provided to explore the identified problem?*

Table 3. Problems Identified

Personal	Academic	Financial	Professional
Time management at home for household chore	Maintain GPA	Work part time to supplement household income	Secure students' attention
Limited time off to spend with children	Balance school & home life		Lack of strategies for closure of lessons
Limited time for exercise and recreation (e.g. dance)	Preparing for teacher exit examination		Responding to students' questions in a timely manner
Married—limited time with spouse	Preparing school work project		Addressing negativity with colleagues
Dealing with depression due to father's death			Teaching students respect
Home life			

Sally was very detailed in the responses she offered to each identified problem. She brainstormed both realistic and unrealistic options and addressed her primary attention on those options that were feasible and were in-line with her experience. Suggested in this focused self-expression was her willingness to explore and manage challenges as distinct goals that she developed for herself. The mentor assisted with the recording and reflection however it was Sally who determined when and how she would resolve her identified concerns.

(4) *What goals were expressed?*

Table 2 provided a pictorial presentation of the primary concerns that then became the goals for the dialogue and plans. The language and goals as each was created, reflected Sally's words and expression. This allowed Sally an increased "buy-in" to the process and the resolutions created.

(5) *Did the novice teacher complete the developed problem-solving LIBRE Model plans?*

In follow-up sessions with the novice teacher, all developed plans were completed and self-evaluated. For those plans that the novice teacher was hesitant about, the mentor explored content and context needs to make sure that the novice teacher was not avoiding a challenge out of fear or limited information. By the close of the final academic year, the novice teacher operated with confidence using the LIBRE Model not only with her challenges but also as a tool to explore the challenges of her students.

Implications and Conclusion

Limitations. The results of this inquiry do not extend beyond the one novice teacher involved with the study. As such, our goal was to illustrate both the use of a problem-solving activity approach as well as to introduce the LIBRE Model as the tool of choice in managing a strength-based novice teacher transition.

Implications. The case study examines the integrating experience of a novice teacher as she processed personal, professional, and academic challenges. Through her own problem solving and with the induction support of mentoring and coaching, the teacher experienced success in classroom management, and specifically, in the closing of a lesson. Her success was largely dependent on self-awareness and personal engagement style and the creation, implementation, and modification of action plans. The teacher also experienced opportunities for continued professional growth (e.g. passing the state's exam) modifying her plan for preparing for the exam continuing to study independently but also study as a part of a group. In the teacher's third year of teaching, she is still working to improve areas of professional

growth and develop new ways to close her lessons. She passed the state exam (Spring of 2007) and was named the outstanding teacher on her campus. As we look forward, the transformational skills she has learned and implemented have given her the tools to be successful within the field of teaching.

Conclusion

Cultural values, beliefs, confidence, and prior experience were visible within the social exchange Sally experienced as she moved from banker to graduate student to novice teacher. Consistent with an information processing framework, the attention Sally assumed in processing each of her concerns was followed from the "entry" of data into the cognitive processing system. This is most often a deliberate activity leading the person (Schunk, 2004) to her ultimate resolution. The novice teacher's attention was visible not only in self-expression of prior experiences, beliefs, values, and levels of self-monitoring (of the problem solving), but also in the differences found in the production (or nonproduction) of a plan of action. Cialdini (1993) explains that in a time of information overload and stimulus saturation, individuals tend to shortcut their self-management of situations by instead depending on "reliable" processing features—ones that have proved satisfactory in the past. However, success in problem-solving more often than not requires the assumption of an active role in resolving the challenge. When this sustained attention is considered in association with an identifiable stimulus or degree of allocation of cognitive capacity (Anderson, 1982; Palmer, Stowe, & Kueker, 1986), a more concise picture of the individual's engagement is possible. The result is found in distinctions in compliancy, assertiveness, and willingness to seek a solution through a plan of action.

As she engaged in problem-solving, Sally gained greater confidence and demonstrated self-regulation in resolving challenges. The success found in this example however, need not be a unique experience. For the induction year, the mentor listened and supported the novice teacher in her identification of challenges and personal strengths. The mentor facilitated assistance which valued the person as a professional while helping her further hone her teaching and learning experiences.

Diagnostic tools such as the LIBRE Model introduced during the beginning teaching experience provide key information about the individual in terms of self-management as a teacher and a mechanism for self exploration, problem-solving, and decision making. As a result, Sally found an approach based on self-reflection, which increased her sense of self-efficacy and professional self-confidence. She reported using the LIBRE Model with and without her mentor's assistance. The LSFT graphic organizer helped her address and deal with issues both within the context of the classroom and in other personal domains. This type of support has been found to be useful in the transformational periods when attrition is more likely to occur. The problem solving activity as provided at key points during the induction period offered the novice teacher a context to examine individual decision making and self-development. From this activity, the novice teacher was able to incorporate personal coping strategies and identify the need for better assistance in response to personal and professional challenges. These needs, while they may have contributed to the leaving or delays in personal growth, allowed for a more in-depth approach to a personalized professional development.

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Authors

Norma S.Guerra, Ph.D. [norma.guerra@utsa.edu]
Belinda Bustos Flores, Ph.D.
Lorena Claeys, M.S.
University of Texas at San Antonio

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