Effectiveness Essentials

• Teacher preparation and credentialing are only the beginning steps of a long journey.
• There are multiple pathways into teaching.
• Part of the challenge of the first year is fear of the unknown.
• Teachers are a diverse group, although not as diverse as their students are.
• Teachers have to assume multiple roles.

CHAPTER 1

ARE YOU READY FOR THE JOURNEY?

I touch the future. I teach.

Christa McAuliffe
Why Don’t I Feel Prepared to Start Teaching?

This question, often posed by students in the last phase of the teacher preparation program, gives me pause each time I hear it. Having been through this experience myself, I know exactly what they mean. They’re anxious and scared. The valuable information they have learned and are still learning doesn’t make them feel competent and confident in light of their upcoming first solo day in a classroom.

Listening to my students’ concerns about the first years of teaching brings back memories of sleepless weeks prior to my own first teaching assignment. I had many methods courses under my belt but had not the vaguest idea of how to combine instructional ingredients to meet my students’ needs. I was anxious and sick to my stomach that first morning until I walked through the door and saw my class. My mother always told me to put my right foot forward before any new endeavor, and that’s what I did as I stepped into the room. I never regretted my decision to teach, and I remember each one of the students in my first class. I guarantee that you will too!

As years go by, you may not remember each and every student you encounter, but rest assured that they will remember you. I recently contacted a former student, an environmentalist and a mother of three, and asked her to collect her own children’s comments about their favorite teachers.

STUDENT SAYS . . .

I have modeled myself after you as a teacher of my own children. You were a patient teacher that gave each person a chance to reach their potential even if it was not evident initially. . . . Any public school teacher that does this gives each student a fighting chance. You gave me confidence that continues to this day. You weren’t afraid to love the students in your charge. To a little child with as many challenges in life as I had, this can mean everything.

Much love,
DEBBIE BRADSHAW
Silverbell, Arizona

Here’s my unforgettable second class.
Debbie was a fifth grader in my third year of teaching. We have kept in touch over all these years. She was the student who needed the extra attention and the extra push to excel. I pushed, and she resisted. Finally, she gave in and accepted my challenges to excellence. And, despite a very difficult childhood, she authored some of the most creative stories and poems I have encountered as a teacher.

I have kept Debbie’s letters over the years. Each one reminds me of the intangible rewards of teaching. Sometimes your students will keep in touch. Sometimes they won’t. But students never, ever forget a teacher who has touched their lives.

Another former student, Mark Young, pictured below as a third grader and today (and in the class photo on page 2), surprised me by writing to me a few months ago. (See the Student Says feature in the outside column.)

Teacher Preparation Is Only the Beginning
The proliferation of induction and mentoring programs and the new standards for the teaching profession all suggest that success in the first year is dependent on having certain knowledge, skills, and dispositions, as well as a great deal of support. Luckily, today there is a greater emphasis on helping new teachers through the challenges of the first year.

STUDENT SAYS . . .
I came across your name within a listing of teacher resources and stopped dead in my tracks. I attended public school in New York City in the 1960s, and had a third-grade teacher named Ellen Kronowitz. My Miss Kronowitz was a young and spirited teacher who stood out among the rest of the faculty, and made a very lasting impression on me.

I went to P.S. 15, Queens, and had the same teacher for both first and second grade. My report cards were filled with comments remarking on my inability to focus, my talking out of turn, my tendency to daydream, and other habits now often associated with ADD. I fear she almost had my mother convinced that I just wasn’t very bright, until I finally entered the third grade.

Miss Kronowitz, on the other hand, told my mother that she thought that I was quite bright indeed and that difficulties in second grade were likely the (continued on following page)
UNIT 1

Your Induction Into Teaching

After all of the educational psychology and methods courses, and the internship or student teaching experience, you still may feel uneasy. But you actually know more and are better prepared than you feel. Ask any veteran teachers you know, and they will tell you that it takes at least five years to build your confidence. We have all experienced the pre-service jitters. The treatment for this affliction is experience in the classroom.

There Are Multiple Pathways Into Teaching

Student teaching and traditional teacher preparation programs are just one avenue for becoming a teacher. Today, multiple pathways into the profession exist for teachers. Alternative credential programs abound. Some are tied to districts through internships, while others are free-standing and privately administered. Some of these programs have special emphases, such as Teach for America, Troops to Teachers, and the New Teacher Project. The responsibility for the entire day and all it entails is yours from the outset.

If you are a student teacher in a traditional program, your supervising teacher can catch you when you fall and cheer you on during rough times. The curriculum has been set, and you are responsible only for portions of students’ education. During your practicum, the ultimate accountability lies with the master or supervising teacher. In contrast, once you have your teaching credential in hand, the responsibility is all yours.

If you are an intern teacher in an alternative program, earning a credential while teaching and without benefit of a traditional supervised student teaching experience, you may find that guidance and supervision are less intense than you need during your first year. It is understandable why many first-year teachers spend restless nights before that first day of school. The good news is that, after the first year, it gets easier and easier, and there is a lot of help available to you.

APPLY IT!

Take a few minutes to reflect on the program that is currently preparing you. Or, if you are teaching, reflect on the strengths of the program that prepared you. Write down what you believe could have made you feel more confident in your first year(s) (see Figure 1.1).

STATISTICS

How prepared do you feel for the first year of teaching? According to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda (2008), these are some responses:

- Very prepared: 42%
- Somewhat prepared: 38%
- Somewhat unprepared: 16%
- Very unprepared: 3%
- Don’t know: 1%

STUDENT SAYS—continued

result of boredom and a need to be challenged academically. And challenge me she did. Looking back, I realize that Miss Kronowitz taught with a fresh enthusiasm and not only fostered in me a lifelong love of learning but also the freedom and courage to march to the beat of my own drummer.

MARK YOUNG
Orlando, Florida

MARK YOUNG
Orlando, Florida
**TEACHER TALKS . . .**

I always remind myself of the "why" in my teaching. I love my "babies," who happen to be 16–17 years old; and I must remember that they are experiencing my themes, writing requests, and choices in literature for the first time rather than for the hundredth-plus time as I am doing. If my "why" is for money, then I am in the wrong position. If my "why" is job security, then I say thanks to my profession. If my "why" is because I love to watch my "babies" struggle with thinking and adjusting earlier thoughts with new information and synthesizing those thoughts into their own new forms that transfer to other disciplines and their own lives and that from them I also learn, then I'm in Nirvana.

BETH ANN WILLSTROP  
Reading and Literature Teacher  
Health Careers High School  
Grades 9–12  
San Antonio, Texas

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**Figure 1.1**  
Program Preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths of Program</th>
<th>Additional Preparation I Need</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading methods</td>
<td>Technology update</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**We Fear the Unknown**

Part of the challenge of the first year is fear of the unknown. What will it be like when you have to assume total responsibility for a class? Here's what lies ahead (the scary stuff):

- You are accountable for the planning, organization, instruction, and assessment of students.
- You are responsible for your classroom environment and the routines that keep it operating efficiently.
- You are asked to assume non-teaching duties such as lunch, yard, and bus duty.
- You need to meet new colleagues and possibly explore an unfamiliar community.
- You need to establish and maintain communication with parents and perhaps supervise aides.

- You are responsible for record keeping and ongoing diagnoses.
- You are assigned a challenging variety of students.
- You may have to teach unfamiliar material.
- You may experience impediments such as lack of parental support; overcrowded classrooms; outdated equipment; lack of adequate texts and materials; poorly maintained campuses; and some students who are disrespectful, angry, disengaged, or even violent.

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Here’s what also lies ahead (the fun stuff):

- The joy of watching your students “get it”
- The thank-you notes and letters from students and grateful parents
- The eagerness and excitement you see on students’ faces
- The letters of acceptance to college your high school students share with you
- The painting or drawing a student offers as a gift
- The affectionate comments you receive as the students leave your classroom
- The growth and development you see every day
- A letter from students like Debbie or Mark many years later
- The small successes and the large leaps
- The knowledge that you will make a difference and “touch the future”
- The joy of sharing a joke with your students
- The chance to celebrate your students’ achievements with them
- The ability to attend student performances, proms, festivals, homecoming, sports events, carnivals, and other significant schoolwide events
- The gratification of attending awards assemblies, promotions, and graduations honoring your students
- Lasting friendships and collegiality with the school’s staff
- Pride in your own professional accomplishments

Who Are We?

We Are a Diverse Group

However, we are not as diverse as the students we teach. A key to being a great teacher is spending time getting to know and appreciate the various racial, ethnic, and cultural groups represented in our classes.

We Have to Assume Multiple Roles

All teachers have to be cheerleaders, interior decorators, artists, systems analysts, efficiency experts, performers, nurturers, assessors, judges, mediators, diagnosticians, psychologists, communicators,
bookkeepers, managers, and friends—to name just a few. Many of these roles come naturally to teachers. Good communication skills, for example, are associated with the teaching profession. Other roles, such as assessor or diagnostian, are practiced during teacher preparation. Some roles, such as mediator and efficiency expert, are often learned on the job.

Every teacher you know was once a novice. As you look around the faculty meeting or the staff room, you need to realize that at one time all teachers experienced the same apprehension that you do now. Beyond all the anxiety of the first days and months of school lie all the rewards that motivated your choice of this exciting, challenging profession in the first place.

STATISTICS
A 2007–2008 profile of a public elementary school in southern California:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percentage of School Population</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>African American</td>
<td>14.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian or Native Alaskan</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple or no response</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special needs</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English learners</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TEACHER TALKS . . .
Every teacher must decide who to be—sculptor chiseling hard stone, potter molding yielding clay, cowboy herding wild bulls, pied piper leading the eager, mama nurturing the helpless, pioneer leading the way, clown entertaining the masses, doctor healing the damaged. Any of these or all of these? One at a time or simultaneously? No wonder new teachers are jittery.

(continued on following page)
UNIT 1

UNIT 1 Your Induction Into Teaching

WATCH IT! video

Becoming a Teacher
Teaching Fifth Grade

Two teachers talk about why they became teachers, how they decided on a grade level, and the challenges and joys they discovered. Compare and contrast their motivations, and then write about your own motivation for becoming a teacher.

Summary

Teacher preparation courses and internships leading to your teaching credential are the beginning steps of a long and worthwhile journey. There are multiple pathways into teaching. Among these are traditional programs and alternative programs such as Troops to Teachers and Teach for America. Part of the challenge of the first year is fear of the unknown. Teachers are a diverse group, although not as diverse as their students are. Teaching requires the assumption of multiple roles.

Reflect!

Review the statistics regarding teachers’ satisfaction with their preparation that appeared in the chapter on page 4.

1. How would you have responded to the question?
2. If you were to choose a metaphor for your teaching role, what would it be?
3. What are your greatest fears about your first year of teaching, and how will you go about facing them?

To make the job even more exciting, the students don’t come homogenized and labeled. They, too, are trying to figure out who they are, where they are going, and how to get there. Is teaching them scary? Yes! Is it worth it? Yes! Where else can one engage all of their being, talents, skills, and hopes; contribute in such an exciting variety of ways; and find such satisfying results!

BETTY ROSENTRATER
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TEACHER TALKS—continued