



Supporting Beginning English Teachers

Research and Implications for Teacher Induction

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The Problem of Attrition

In a sense, we began this study by writing a book (Johannessen & McCann, 2002). For years we have been principally responsible for the preparation, inservice training, and supervision of high school English teachers. Guided by our concern that beginning teachers often enter the profession without a realistic sense of the challenges that are likely to confront them, we began work on a casebook that would prompt discussions and lead teachers to develop the strategic and critical thinking skills that could help them to avoid or endure difficulties inherent in teaching. After more than twenty-five years of teaching, we believed that we had a clear idea of the kind of challenges that would seriously frustrate new teachers. Although we thought we knew about the chief concerns of beginning teachers, we decided we had better ask. Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Thomas “Tip” O’Neill, recalled that his long-time neighbor expected him to ask her for her vote, even though he thought he could take her vote for granted. She counseled O’Neill, “let me tell you something: people like to be asked” (O’Neill, 1987, p. 26). Before we proceeded with the casebook, we recognized that it would be not only polite but also prudent to ask beginning teachers about their concerns and about their strategies for remaining committed to teaching.

We began by interviewing the student teachers and other beginning teachers to whom we had immediate access. A somewhat casual process of conversation led to a more deliberate program of investigation. Our initial interviews highlighted two clear generalizations: (1) beginning teachers often have a difficult time; and (2) beginning teachers need help in coping with the difficulties they encounter during their induction into teaching. We could hear the distress in the responses of the beginning teachers, and we could recall seeing other teachers’ expressions

of frustration during their initial years of teaching. The responses reminded us of Whyte's (1948) sociological study about what makes waitresses cry. He reports that waitresses, caught in the middle between the demands of the customers and the expectations of managers and kitchen staff, often feel unremitting stress. Using different methodology, and with a different purpose in mind, we sought to learn what gives beginning teachers the greatest concern, and we hoped to prompt purposeful discussion about ways to ease the pain of the induction process.

As we planned to interview other beginning teachers and to survey both beginning and experienced teachers, we kept in mind two broad research questions:

1. What are the significant frustrations that could influence beginning teachers to leave the profession?
2. What supports, resources, and preparations influence beginning teachers to remain in the profession?

In the current climate of teacher shortages and rapid teacher turnover, it is critical for schools and teacher preparation programs to be able to answer these questions and to prepare to act on the directions the answers suggest.

The Impact of Teacher Shortages

Various sources point to trends in school enrollment data and project a continuing teacher shortage (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2000; Henke, et al., 1997; Texas State Board of Education, 1998). Hussar (1999b) projects that between 1998–99 and 2008–09, public schools will need to hire 2.4 million new teachers (p. 9). Furthermore, under one scenario that recognizes increasing enrollment and efforts at class size reduction, the projected need would grow to 2.7 million.

The data suggest that a main contributor to future teacher shortages will be a change in demographics: many teachers will retire in the next ten years (Hussar, 1999a; Gerald & Hussar, 1998). A smaller pool of qualified new teachers is prepared to replace the retirees. Henke and colleagues (1997) report that only

about half of those teachers who train to teach actually apply for teaching jobs. Darling-Hammond (1997) reports that little has changed since 1991, when approximately 25 percent of all secondary teachers did not have the appropriate subject area training to teach in the field to which they were assigned. And while many teachers are leaving the profession, high school enrollments continue to grow (Educational Resources Information Center, 1998).

Ingersoll (2002) and Ingersoll and Smith (2003) report that more people than ever are in colleges and universities preparing to become teachers. According to their analyses, the problem of teacher shortages is not so much a problem of retirements outpacing the preparation of new teachers as it is a problem of new teachers leaving the profession in such numbers and so rapidly that the newcomers do not stay around long enough to fill the vacancies for the long haul. A report of the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (2003) concludes, "It is as if we were pouring teachers into a bucket with a fist-sized hole in the bottom" (p. 8). Merrow (1999) observes, "The teaching pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak. That is, we're misdiagnosing the problem as 'recruitment' when it's really retention" (p. 64). The popular leaking resources metaphor reveals the frustrating difficulty of retaining the critically valuable new teachers who have spent much time to prepare for teaching and who offer much promise for the future of schools.

Teacher shortages are exacerbated when new teachers leave the profession after just a few years. According to Perez, Swain, and Hartsough (1997), 30 percent of beginning teachers leave the profession within their first two years of teaching. Darling-Hammond (2000) notes that the rate of attrition among teachers in their first two years of teaching is at least double the average for teachers overall. Attrition appears to hit hardest those teachers at the beginning of their careers. Hussar (1999b) notes: "Newly minted teachers and returning teachers have lower continuation rates than those of the same age who had been teaching the previous year. If the proportion of new teachers in the teaching force grows over time, it would tend to push continuation rates downward" (p. 6). Hussar's (1999a, 1999b) analysis suggests that when attrition rates grow, shortages will increase.

Causes of Teacher Attrition

Several studies report the many reasons for teachers leaving the profession. Hussar's (1999b) analysis suggests that within the next ten years teachers will be retiring from public schools in great numbers. In 1999 "there were more public school teachers age 46 than any other age" (p. 5). He also reports that most teachers retire before they turn sixty: "53 percent of those in their fifties retired; and over 90 percent of teachers 60 years and over retired" (p. 6). Hussar (1999a) anticipates that between 1998–99 and 2008–09, between 745,000 and 765,000 teachers will retire.

Ingersoll (2001, 2002) and Ingersoll and Smith (2003) note that factors other than retirement account for much of the turnover among teachers. Teachers leaving the profession cite job dissatisfaction and other job opportunities as key factors that influenced the change. The departing teachers cite as the primary sources of their job dissatisfaction "student discipline problems; lack of support from the school administration; poor student motivation; and lack of teacher influence over schoolwide and classroom decision making" (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003, p. 32). Whitener and colleagues (1997) also found that student discipline problems, poor student motivation to learn, and inadequate support from administration were the most often cited reasons for teachers' dissatisfaction.

Teacher attrition is a serious problem. Schools endure a fiscal cost when they lose a teacher. According to a study conducted by the Texas Teacher Certification Board, when a teacher leaves a district during the "induction years" of teaching, it costs the taxpayers about \$50,000 (Texas State Board of Education, 1998). The board measured the costs by considering the investment in preparation, recruitment and hiring, and professional development and supervisory support.

The rapid turnover of teachers affects learning. Even the most well-prepared and uncommonly gifted and mature beginning teacher is still a novice at the profession. One can imagine parents' concern if their children were to encounter a "newly minted" teacher in one subject area every year for four years of high school.

A rapid teacher turnover erodes public confidence in schools. Both schools and learners experience a lack of continuity.

Some causes of the early departure of teachers from the profession are beyond the control or influence of teacher preparation programs or of the schools. According to Wayne (2000), 44 percent of beginning teachers who leave teaching cite personal and family reasons as the key factors. If teachers leave because of changes in family obligations, a spouse's job transfer, or the winning of the lottery, there is nothing a teacher preparation program or a school can do to influence retention. But if teacher training programs and schools can recognize the sources of serious concerns and frustrations among beginning teachers, perhaps they can develop some interventions that will influence a greater percentage of new teachers to remain long enough to become veteran teachers and in the process become highly skilled and confident teachers.

A change in the policies of school districts and individual schools might offer some promise for keeping beginning teachers in the profession beyond their period of induction. Attractive salaries and fringe benefits and pleasant working conditions might influence teachers to endure the challenges that frustrate them (Whitener, et al., 1997). It is a cruel reality that beginning teachers often receive the most difficult teaching assignments, with multiple preparations, the sharing of classrooms, and classes with the most difficult students. Changes in these common practices might improve job satisfaction among beginning teachers.

Grossman, Thompson, and Valencia (2001) observe that district policy has an impact on the satisfaction and encouragement of beginning teachers. They conclude that the policies school districts follow will greatly influence the new teacher's experience: "The tasks they assign new teachers, the resources they provide, the learning environments they create, the assessments they design, and the conversations they provoke have consequences for what these first year teachers come to learn about teaching the language arts, and about teaching more generally" (p. 19). The study emphasizes that the particular setting for teaching will contribute to defining the new teacher's experience and will support or frustrate the new teacher, who will inevitably contend with challenges.

Concerns of Beginning Teachers

The influential work of Fuller (1969) and later work by Rutherford and Hall (1990) reveal that beginning teachers have serious concerns about managing classrooms, about being viewed as credible professionals by their colleagues and by parents, about being liked and accepted by students, and about being evaluated by supervisors. Borko and Putnam (1996) and Veenman (1984) also report that beginning teachers struggle with identifying effective approaches to classroom management, defining themselves as teachers, and finding meaningful ways to teach their subject. Preservice and beginning teachers also worry about how they will grade students, how they will respond to challenges about grades, and how they will handle a monumental workload. Preservice teachers also commonly express concerns about having the freedom to put into practice the concepts and beliefs about teaching they have embraced during their college or university training.

The previous research about teachers' concerns points to a number of problem areas. New data, in the form of interview and survey responses, reveal some patterns that underlie all the concerns that might, at first glance, seem rather disparate.

Research Questions

The current study focuses on the kinds of concerns with which teacher training and professional development programs can assist teachers in coping. Rather than preparing a laundry list of teacher concerns, we seek to identify common causes for the variety of frustrations that new teachers experience. We focus on the sources of frustration that might influence a teacher to leave the profession before attaining tenure. In the study, we seek to answer these questions:

1. What are the significant frustrations that could influence beginning teachers to leave the profession?
2. What are the factors that underlie the frustrations?

The Problem of Attrition

3. What supports, resources, and preparation influence beginning teachers to remain in the profession at least until they attain tenure?

We address the first two questions through several research methods, which we describe in the following chapter. In later chapters, we trace a general pattern of development for teachers' first year and after several years of teaching. We also explore the steps toward supporting the growth of beginning teachers that the research findings suggest need to be taken.



Research Methods

Research Procedures

To investigate our questions about teachers' concerns and their means for coping, we collected data in six stages: (1) we interviewed a series of beginning teachers and produced the transcripts from the interviews; (2) we surveyed preservice and practicing teachers about their anticipated and actual experience in teaching; (3) we conducted follow-up interviews with six of the original eleven teachers we had interviewed; (4) we tracked the progress of three first-year teachers over the course of one school year; (5) we conducted interviews with six experienced teachers; and (6) from six beginning teachers and their mentors, we solicited responses to a set of seven problem-based scenarios. Descriptions of each stage of data collection follow.

Initial Interviews

Over a two-year period, we interviewed three student teachers and eight other novice teachers. All the teachers taught English in a high school. Those we label *novice* teachers each had less than five years of teaching experience. The first five years of teaching appear to be a vulnerable time. In some states, teachers do not earn tenure until they have completed four years of continuous service, making the first four years of teaching probationary. We use the term *novice* here to designate nontenured teachers, and we use the term interchangeably with other terms and phrases such as *beginners*, *newcomers*, *newly minted*, *early career*. We do not mean to indicate that “novice” designates a specific developmental stage.

In all, we initially interviewed eleven teachers. The first six interviewees were working at a large, diverse suburban high school: two student teachers, one first-year teacher, one second-year teacher, one person in his third year of teaching, and one person in her fourth year of teaching. We also interviewed five more teachers from two other schools, to represent the experiences of high school English teachers in a variety of settings. Three of these interviewees were from an inner-core city high school in a large public school system. One of the three teachers was a student teacher at the time of the first interview. Two interviewees were from a suburban high school with a substantial minority population.

Seven of the subjects for the initial phase of the research were female and four were male. Ten of the subjects were white, and one was African American. The proportion of female to male and white to minority reflects the prevailing ratio in the teaching profession as a whole (Snyder & Hoffman, 2003; Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000).

The student population at the one urban school had the following ethnic composition: 50 percent African American, 40 percent Latino and Asian, and 10 percent white. Each of the two suburban schools had a significant minority population. The minority population, mostly Latino, at one of the suburban high schools constituted 40 percent of the enrollment. At the other high school, the minority population, mostly Latino and Asian, constituted approximately 35 percent of the enrollment.

The questions that were the basis for the interviews appear as Appendix A. In each case, we asked the interviewee to focus on his or her experiences from the first year of teaching. For the student teachers, the focus was on their student teaching experience. All the interviews were collected on audiotape and transcribed. The transcribed interviews were returned to interviewees so that they could check for any inaccuracies, and we subsequently edited and corrected the transcripts before doing any analysis.

Following the methodology suggested by Erickson (1986), we read the transcripts of all the interviews several times and independently wrote a summary of the trends across the set of eleven interviews. Three other readers studied the same set of transcripts and produced summaries, or “conceptual memos.”

Each of these readers had a doctorate in education: two with an emphasis in curriculum and instruction, one with an emphasis in educational administration. The following questions guided the readers in producing the memos: (1) Among the set of interviews, what do the teachers' concerns have in common? Although all the stressful situations will be different, what *common underlying factors* cause the stress? (2) Can you identify a *pattern of ways* that the teachers have *managed to cope* with the stressful situations? (3) In general, how have the novice teachers *sought and used help* that might be available in the school? Did they believe that help was available? (4) In general, what observations do the teachers offer about ways in which teacher education programs can *better prepare* beginning teachers to anticipate and manage the stresses and frustrations of the job? (5) Note also any *other insights* that you can provide.

We reviewed the set of summaries to find common observations about the trends in interviewees' comments about factors that caused stress, the methods for coping with stressful situations, and the preparation and support for teaching. The initial analysis of the interviews suggested that much of the frustration beginning teachers feel derives from experiences that are drastically different from the ways they had anticipated teaching would be. To examine if this contrast between the anticipation and the actual experience was the source of the frustration, we surveyed preservice and practicing teachers, using survey statements that varied only in their verb tense, from future (anticipated) to present (actual).

Surveys of Preservice and Practicing Teachers

We constructed two surveys that differ only in the shift in verb tense from present to future. Each survey offers a series of statements, and prompts the respondents to indicate the extent to which each statement accurately expresses the subject's experience as a teacher or the anticipated experience. We labeled the survey for the preservice teachers the "Teacher Expectation Survey" and the survey for the practicing teachers the "Teacher Experience Survey." The surveys appear as Appendixes B and C,

respectively. The preservice teachers responded to statements that predicted what their experience as teachers *will be* in the future. One statement, for example, notes, “The parents of my students will appreciate the efforts I am making to serve and support their children.” The practicing teacher’s form for the same survey reads: “The parents of my students appreciate the efforts I am making to serve and support their children.”

In a pilot phase, we administered the surveys to five preservice teachers and five practicing teachers. After the subjects responded to the surveys, we interviewed the subjects to discover any problems they experienced with the instruments. The subjects commented on the clarity of the instructions, the focus of each item, and the distinctiveness of each response choice. The respondents’ comments guided us in adjusting the surveys.

We then administered the Teacher Expectation Survey to twenty-five preservice (undergraduate and graduate) teachers and the Teacher Experience Survey to twenty practicing teachers. A split-halves test of reliability indicated that the scales are reliable.

After we confirmed that the survey instruments satisfied tests of validity and reliability, the surveys were administered to two groups of subjects. The Teacher Expectation Survey was sent to preservice English teachers at six universities. Five of the universities were large state schools with many students enrolled in English methods classes. Two of these universities were located in large metropolitan areas. Two of the universities were located in the South, one in the Northeast, and two in the Midwest. A total of 218 preservice teachers responded to the surveys.

The Teacher Experience Survey was administered to English department faculty members at six high schools in the Midwest. All of the schools were public high schools. One was a small school in a rural area, and five were large high schools in suburban communities. A total of 141 teachers responded.

Follow-up Interviews

In all, we conducted six follow-up interviews with teachers who contributed to the initial set of eleven interviews. One subject was interviewed during her student teaching experience and then

interviewed a second time at the end of her first year of teaching. Two subjects were interviewed at the end of their second year of teaching and interviewed again after their third year. Another subject was interviewed after her second year of teaching at one school, and then again two years later, in her second year at another school. One subject was interviewed after his first year of teaching and interviewed again at the end of his third year, after he had resigned from his teaching position. One subject was interviewed after his second year of teaching, and then a second time after he had been away from teaching for a year. The summary in Table 2.1 outlines the breakdown of the subjects for the follow-up interviews.

The follow-up interviews were less elaborate than the first occasions, focusing on four general areas. The questions used in the follow-up interviews appear as Appendix D. Four of the interviews were conducted in person, with the interviewer recording and transcribing the observations. In each case, the interviewer read the transcript aloud to the interviewee to allow for corrections and clarification. Two of the interviews were conducted via e-mail, so the interviewee typed and transmitted the responses.

The follow-up interviews tracked changes in the experiences of the novice teachers over a year or two. The questions asked the teachers to explain what kept them in teaching so far and what would help to keep them in teaching in the future. We also asked two of the subjects why they left teaching and what would bring them back to teaching in the future.

TABLE 2.1. Summary of Follow-up Interviews

Subject	First Interview	Second Interview	Still Teaching?
1	Student Teaching	First Year	Yes
2	Second Year	Third Year	Yes
3	Second Year	Third Year	Yes
4	Second Year	Fourth Year	Yes
5	First Year	Third Year	No
6	Second Year	Year after Resignation	No

Each of us read the transcripts of the follow-up interviews independently and then wrote our observations about the patterns of speech that seem to distinguish the teachers who stay from the teachers who leave the profession. We then discussed our separate findings together to narrow our observations to a set of common statements. We report the general trends and the underlying factors for many concerns in the following chapter.

Other Methods

The initial phases of the study prompted additional research questions, requiring additional means for the collection and analysis of data. We describe here three sets of procedures we used for gaining insight into the experience of beginning high school English teachers.

Our initial interviews and the follow-up interviews revealed beginning teachers' greatest concerns and their means for enduring the difficulties they faced. We wondered if the critical periods in a first-year teacher's experience occurred at particular times during the school year. Having a sense of the pattern of experience of the typical first-year high school English teacher would inform teacher preparation, equip the new teacher with knowledge about what to expect, and allow mentors and supervisors to anticipate critical times. We tracked the progress of three first-year high school English teachers during the course of one complete school year. The teachers worked in three different schools, all fairly large suburban high schools. We conducted a series of interviews and classroom observations with the new teachers. We visited and observed the teacher's class twice during the year. Table 2.2 provides a schedule of these visits. After the interviews and observations were completed, we each produced a case study of the subject. The three of us read all the case studies and identified common trends. We then discussed our observations to generalize about a pattern of experience over the course of a school year.

The survey data from preservice and experienced teachers revealed distinct differences between the two groups. We questioned what happened to experienced teachers over time that

TABLE 2.2. Schedule of Visits for First-Year Teachers

September:	Initial interview: What classes are you teaching? What are your impressions of the school and the students? What has been the high point of your experience so far? What challenges do you face and what concerns do you have at this point? What support do you have in the school to help you face challenges? To what extent do you rely on help from outside the school? How well has your college or university program prepared you for your current teaching experience?
Late October:	Interview and classroom observation: How have you been able to contend with the curriculum you have been assigned to teach? How much time do you typically spend each day, and on weekends, to prepare for lessons and to grade papers? How has the workload affected you? General impressions from the lesson observed: classroom management/rapport, knowledge, pedagogy.
December:	Third interview: Are there changes from the original responses? What has been the high point of your experience so far? What challenges do you face and what concerns do you have at this point? What support do you have in the school to help you face challenges? To what extent do you rely on help from outside the school? How well has your college or university program prepared you for your current teaching experience?
Early March:	Fourth interview: Focus on supervision/teacher evaluation. Describe your rapport with your supervisor(s). Describe the teacher evaluation process. To what extent does the teacher evaluation program support your professional development? To what extent have your colleagues been helpful in supporting your development as a teacher? To what extent has your teaching experience changed during the course of the school year: relationship with students, colleagues, supervisors, parents; handling workload; command of subject/curriculum, grading/assessment, autonomy? Second observation: what changes do you perceive from the first to the second observation?
Late May:	Fifth interview: As you reflect on your first year of teaching, what were the most memorable experiences? What were the greatest challenges? What advice would you offer to someone who was beginning his or her first year of teaching? What advice would you offer school administrators to guide their efforts toward supporting new teachers and encouraging retention? What advice would you offer the directors of teacher training programs to prepare new teachers to enter and remain in the profession?

would account for the distinctions. We interviewed six experienced teachers about the areas that the survey data revealed as showing significant differences. The interview questions asked the experienced teachers to explain how they had changed over time and to describe the factors that influenced the change. We produced transcripts of the six interviews. Again, three outside readers studied the transcripts and wrote conceptual memos to note common trends among the experienced teachers.

We sought also to discover how beginning teachers are distinct from experienced teachers, especially in shaping who they are as teachers. To explore this topic, we produced seven scenarios that embedded major concerns of beginning teachers. The scenarios appear in Appendixes E and F. The protocol for this stage of the research included these steps: (1) Each of us individually provided six first-year teachers with the scenarios and asked each teacher to write an explanation of how he or she would respond if faced with the same difficulty. (2) We asked each first-year teacher to identify someone in his or her department that the beginning teacher recognized as a very good teacher. (3) We met with the experienced teachers that the first-year teachers identified and asked each of them to write responses to the same set of scenarios the first-year teachers had responded to. The experienced teachers wrote three responses: (a) how they would have responded to the situation during the first year of teaching; (b) how they would respond to the situation now; and (c) how they would explain any differences between the initial response and the current response. (4) We shared with each first-year teacher the experienced teacher's current response to the problem situation. In the related interview, if the first-year teacher noted any differences between the projected actions of the experienced teacher and his or her own projected actions, the first-year teacher offered an explanation of the differences.



Common Concerns

The General Trends

The quality of a new teacher's experience and the specific concerns and frustrations of each beginner will depend on a number of factors that will be unique to the specific teaching situation. A new teacher's experience will be defined in part by the beginner's preservice training, by the quality of support within a school, and by the match between the school environment and the teacher's disposition. Although each situation will be unique, it is helpful, as a beginning point, to recognize general trends. It would be useful to those training prospective teachers, to those mentoring and supervising beginning teachers, and to the new teachers themselves to be familiar with some common concerns among the beginners. For trainers, mentors, and supervisors, being able to anticipate concerns and frustrations allows them to plan supports. For beginning teachers themselves, the familiarity with common concerns allows them to gauge how usual or unusual their teaching experience is. At the same time, we recognize that the common concerns are only part of the story, because each new teacher's experience in a particular classroom and in a specific school will have its own unique character.

The interviews with eleven novice teachers support earlier research about the concerns of beginning teachers. Based on the analysis of the interview transcripts, we identify the major concerns of novice teachers under six general headings and nine categories overall. The general headings are Relationships, Workload/Time Management, Knowledge of Subject/Curriculum, Evaluation/Grading, Autonomy/Control, and Physical/Personal Characteristics. Under the Relationships heading, we have identified four subcategories: Relationship with Students, Relationship with

Parents, Relationship with Colleagues, and Relationship with Supervisors. The list of issues and their related reflective questions appear in Table 3.1. Classroom management is also a predictable concern of beginning teachers; we see this issue as part of the larger concern about relationships with students. The discussion that follows cites interviewee testimony to illustrate some of the concerns, but we emphasize those issues that the five readers of the transcripts identified as common factors in difficulties and frustrations, and the patterns of the means that the teachers used to cope with difficult situations.

The analyses of interview transcripts suggest that a major difficulty beginning teachers face is the challenge to define for themselves their *teacher persona*. One of the readers noted that the teachers report difficulty with “constructing an authentic self . . . in an organizational structure where first-year teachers are overwhelmed by a teaching assignment that requires too many preparations, too many classes, and too many classrooms.” Before entering teaching, novice teachers have assumed many roles—son/daughter, student, employee—but the role of teacher is a new one. They apparently struggle with questions such as the following: How am I *supposed to* act in this situation? How do *real teachers* do this? Am I aggressive enough in contending with management challenges? Am I overreacting? Am I insisting on unreasonable standards? Am I being too lax? These are the kinds of questions that must be answered over time and by means of comparing one’s behavior against a recognizable and legitimate standard.

To illustrate the pattern of concerns and the common difficulties, we cite from the initial interviews with eleven early career teachers, including three student teachers. The three student teachers reported on their student teaching experience. The other eight subjects focused on their first year of teaching. The demographics for the group of teachers and the school populations where they worked are described in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Throughout this book, we have assigned pseudonyms to preserve the anonymity of the participants in the study. Here is the way a first-year teacher we call Jonas expresses the difficulty of determining who he is going to be as a teacher:

TABLE 3.1. Major Concerns of Novice Teachers

Issue	Reflective Questions
<u>Relationships:</u>	
Relationship with Students:	Will students like me? Will they accept that I am a bona fide teacher?
Relationship with Parents:	What will I do if a parent is upset with me? Will parents accept me as a legitimate teacher?
Relationship with Colleagues:	Will my colleagues believe that I know what I am doing? Will they respect my efforts?
Relationship with Supervisors:	Will I satisfy the expectations of an evaluator? Am I doing what “real” teachers do?
<u>Workload/Time Management:</u>	
Fatigue:	How can I get it all done? Do I have a life any more?
<u>Knowledge of Subject/Curriculum:</u>	
Focus and Framework:	In the end, what is <i>really</i> important to teach? What <i>principles</i> guide the development of the curriculum?
<u>Evaluation/Grading:</u>	
Value Judgments:	What am I measuring? What do I do when the numbers don’t match my subjective impressions?
<u>Autonomy/Control:</u>	
Independence and Integrity:	Can I teach the way that I was prepared to teach, and the way that I believe is the best way to teach?
<u>Physical/Personal Characteristics:</u>	
Appearance and Identity:	How will my personal and physical characteristics help or inhibit me in doing my job?

Common Concerns

I'd stay up kind of late trying to get something that I thought was really good and have sleepless nights, but in the morning I was actually . . . I'd have an almost like dry-heaving anxiety. You have to understand how strange that is for me, because normally I am a very "type B" personality: no stress whatsoever, take one thing at a time. Just having those kinds of mornings was totally strange for me. I don't think I changed eating habits or anything. I actually started out in the morning pretty well. I would wake up and have a nice breakfast. Maybe it was because . . . I was trying some new things that I didn't normally do. I kind of had to reinvent myself to do this that some of that happened, but it was just really going to school and not being 100 percent confident in what I was going to present to the students.

Jonas reports that he was a successful student throughout high school and college. His academic success promoted his confidence in his role as student. Faced with the novel situation of being the teacher, however, Jonas experienced so much doubt and conflict that he became physically ill. Part of the challenge for Jonas in reinventing himself is that he assumes he has to pretend to support a curriculum in which he is not totally invested:

It's still kind of a challenge, because I know a lot of the times that I'm not good [at] faking excitement about content that I know a lot of effective teachers do. It's just not part of my personality and I haven't developed it yet, so if I have something that I'm not totally pumped about teaching, it shows. I kind of wear my heart on my sleeve as far as that goes.

While Jonas confesses that he is not good at faking enthusiasm, he assumes other teachers are.

Although he was in his second year, a teacher we call Brendan reports on the stresses from his student teaching experience. His student teaching assignment required him to teach with a partner for four periods a day and to teach alone for one period. Like Jonas, Brendan recalls the doubts he had about fitting into his role as a teacher:

What I started to notice was, whereas the first day they [students] were sitting up straight, over the next couple of days, you could noticeably tell that they were slouching, that they were

starting to slide down in their chairs a little bit, not getting eye contact. Speaking to students, learning their names, calling them by name to try to develop some kind of personal contact and [there were] a lot of shrugs, a lot of mumbling, no clear answers, never a hand up, except that one student, a lot of downcast eyes. And that really, from point one, was really tough. I felt like something was missing here.

Brendan contrasted this one frustrating class with others that he taught with a partner. In the team-teaching situation, Brendan had someone modeling teacher behavior and validating his behaviors during each class meeting. When Brendan taught alone, he contrasted the response of the one class with the responses of the other classes that he taught with a partner. He began to doubt that he was doing what accomplished teachers do.

I thought, “Boy, I don’t know if I can do this, maybe I’m doing this wrong.” It’s the only class I had solo without a team teacher. . . . From this high coming down to this low, walking back down the hall to [the other class], which wasn’t far, I just remember every once in a while thinking, “I don’t know if this is going to work out. I don’t know if I can do it by myself.”

The difficulty in measuring up to the standard he saw in the other classes made Brendan wonder if he were cut out to be a teacher:

The ultimate doubt started to come in. . . . I started thinking, “What if I never get it? What if I just don’t get it?” I think about all these thirty students. It’s only one class and I think of how I have thirty years and I’ll have many classes like this, and so it occupied most of my thinking.

Part of Brendan’s reaction to the apparently unresponsive class was to question whether he was doing what the accomplished, experienced teachers were doing. Although he could not identify anything he was doing wrong, or anything he was doing differently from the way he operated in his other classes, he saw that the students’ responses were different from one class to the next. On reflection, he judged that the only difference was the presence of an experienced teacher as a partner in the other class. Things went well when the veteran was present; lethargy appeared

to set in among his students only when Brendan operated alone. He could only conclude that the fault was with him, and he had his doubts that he could grow into the model of the experienced teacher.

These excerpts from the interviews with Jonas and Brendan illustrate three recurring experiences among the novice teachers: (1) the negative episodes with one class may not represent the experience of the teacher overall; (2) the negative episodes with one class or even one student tend to taint the experience of the teacher overall; and (3) the inexperienced teacher sees the negative episodes as evidence that he or she is not doing what “bona fide” teachers do, leading to doubt about whether he or she is qualified to perform as a teacher. There appears to be a tendency among beginning teachers to fail to recognize that other teachers struggle from time to time with classroom management problems, curriculum conundrums, or other instructional challenges; and the new teachers cannot yet envision that the difficulties will diminish to an acceptable level over time.

The analyses of the interviews also reveal that frustration results in part from the significant mismatch between the teacher’s *expectations* for the experience of teaching and the *realization* of the actual experience. Whether the stressful experience has to do with an unruly class, an angry parent phone call, or a supervisor’s highly critical assessment of a lesson, the common element is that the experience was not what the teacher had expected. In the interviews, one student teacher, Clara, reported that her encounter with a disruptive class was a “shocker.” Clara describes her frustration:

Just an overall general sense when I went into the room every day, it was an overall sense that I am not in control of this class whatsoever, none. Feeling like that can be particularly frightening. For example, they obviously did not respect me, that’s evident. They did not respect one another. They would run around, yell, scream, throw things, you name it.

The teacher describes the experience as being a “frightening” one, but her frustration resulted from the contrast between her initial belief that she knew how to manage the class and the sub-

sequent discovery that she could not do what she thought she should. Clara characterizes the frustration in this way:

I knew what I was supposed to be doing. I thought I knew how to do it, but their behavior was so poor. I had a real hard time dealing with it, especially that week and weeks after, because I had no experiences, no nothing. It was just like, OK, figure it out. Get some control and figure out how to do this; but it was a shocker.

Clara reports that she contended with the difficult class for weeks: “It took a long time because the things I thought would work didn’t work.” Clara thought about her difficult class often. In fact, when she left school and was away from the troublesome class, “I was thinking about it all the time.”

Clara thought she was prepared to contend with a classroom management challenge. She had learned some strategies from education classes, and her mentor teacher could advise her; but the various strategies that she had expected would produce some results seemed to fail her. She was left with a feeling of confusion, rather than fear or anger, because she had entered an intolerable situation with the expectation that reasonable interventions would solve the problems. Clara reports that she thought she knew what to do. When the strategies that promised some success actually had little effect, she was left confused and frustrated.

Teachers can expect to encounter challenging groups of students every so often, but it would be difficult to enter the classroom every day with the belief that the students are unmanageable and that anything the teacher tries will have little effect in governing the unruly. Nadine, another of the student teachers, reports this frustrating experience: “I felt like I was pulling teeth in trying to get them to do work. I would get nervous before the class because I would always hear comments like ‘This sucks’ or ‘Why are we doing this? I don’t understand.’” Nadine did not expect that all her students would love her class and love the study of English; she had thought, however, that she could make the study of English appealing to many students. She had not anticipated a daily barrage of complaints when she was making honest efforts to provide engaging lessons.

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Nadine points to another disappointment. She had referred a student to the dean when the student made what Nadine judged to be a serious physical threat toward her. The dean met with the student and then sent him to the school's learning resource center (LRC) without any corrective, intervention, or punishment, and without sending him back to the teacher's class. Nadine describes her disappointment:

Immediately, my heart dropped because we didn't have anything going on in the LRC. He had nothing to do in there. I thought, here is something that the kid could've gotten in really serious trouble for and I felt like the repercussions should have been more stiff. I don't know if they [students] see that and think that nothing is going to happen anyway. I'm sure it's a problem at any school.

Nadine had expected support from the dean and judged that the student would likely receive an appropriate punishment. When the dean reported that he had taken an action Nadine had not expected, her "heart dropped." The perceived lack of support left her wondering how she could judge the seriousness of and appropriate response to other, similar situations. Nadine was frustrated and anxious when her expectations were not satisfied at all, and she was left to puzzle out how she should proceed in the future.

In the interviews, novice teachers report that their tasks as educators were especially fatiguing. In addition to the stress of contending with the energy and occasional resistance of adolescents during the day, the teachers spent their evenings and weekends in grading papers, responding to students' writing, completing administrative paperwork, and planning lessons. Gordon, one of the interviewees, reports that the workload was the most stressful part of the job: "I think I've had a level of stress the whole year just in terms of worrying about planning, grading, and anything like that. In order to do that, there's been a lot of twelve-, thirteen-, fourteen-hour days of work." As a first-year teacher, Gordon shared his classroom with another teacher, had several preparations, and managed a significant extracurricular activity. He reports that in his first year of teaching

the job was all-consuming: “I usually work about eleven or twelve hours a day. There are other effects of that. . . . That involves giving up your whole day to that and having just moved here too and not really knowing anybody and hardly time to get out.” He recognized that the current conditions in his life on a new job would dictate the investment of time:

The people that I do know who are relatively close friends are forty-five minutes to an hour away and that is sort of a whole day trip to go there. I’ve taken a couple days off on weekends here and there and definitely would do that, but it’s not like it’s down the block where you can walk there and go shoot some pool or something. I think, “Nobody there, so I might as well grade a couple more papers.”

This new teacher, who had relocated away from family and friends for the job, found himself isolated. The isolation served to define teaching as the person’s sole interest and enterprise. While the teacher’s isolation helped him to focus on his work, it allowed him few distractions that might have provided healthy relief from the daily routine.

The novice teachers report a variety of frustrations. The examples discussed here emphasize difficulties with managing students, planning engaging lessons, and contending with an overwhelming workload. In general, the teachers experienced frustration when they faced difficulty in defining themselves as teachers, and when their actual experience as teachers contrasted widely with what they had anticipated the job experience would be.

The Cases of Winnie and Christy

Thus far we have emphasized general trends across the experiences of all the teachers we interviewed, but we must acknowledge that the specific contexts of the teaching situations will define these experiences and cause particular persons specific kinds of difficulties. The interplay between who the individual is and where he or she teaches influences the kind of experience the novice teacher will have. Any number of factors—the age of the teacher, the physical stature and appearance of the teacher, the size and

location of the school, the demographics of the student body, the administrative support for the teachers, the induction program of the school—contribute to the level and kind of stress and frustration new teachers might feel and the coping mechanisms they might invoke.

We discuss here two cases to illustrate how distinct circumstances raise special challenges. The two particular cases are noteworthy because although the experiences might seem exceptional when contrasted with those of the other nine subjects, they are likely to be the norm for many teachers in the future. The experiences of these two teachers might be characterized as the teachers' being underprepared for the school setting in which they found themselves; both teachers' physical characteristics contrasted markedly with the dominant culture of the school. As school populations across the United States become more diverse, teachers will need to understand and appreciate groups of students who, in many instances, are quite different from the teacher.

Winnie's Case

In her first year of teaching, Winnie worked in an all-male parochial high school. Winnie was petite and young, having just graduated from college. The high school had seldom employed women as teachers, making Winnie something of a rarity in the building. She reports that her youth, gender, and physical appearance and stature were all connected to the stress and discomfort she felt in her first year of teaching. First, she recalls the aggressive behavior of some students toward her:

The older boys would whistle and catcall after me as I passed by. Some would be brazen enough to ask my age. One boy, a senior, told me he would "catch up" with me in four years. Of course, there were also the frequent stares; some would call them *leers* of nervous students. In my first few months at the school, I would have to mentally prepare and bolster myself for the long walk to my classroom.

Winnie reports that she dressed in a rather conservative fashion and had never received a similar kind of attention before. Initially, boys would leer at her in the hallways, but a few sought

her attention after school in her classroom: “A group of boys even started to come to my classroom after school, and although they were only acting flirtatious in a quiet way, their presence made me feel uncomfortable and awkward.” The experience occupied much of her attention and made the performance of her job difficult. She describes her emotional response in this way:

For the first few months, I would dread cafeteria duty and the hallway walks down the hall. I would spend time thinking about the ways I could handle the situation. I felt shocked, then embarrassed, and then angry. But overall, I felt powerless. I was battling a powerful attitude of a culture with which I was unfamiliar.

The primary response was the feeling of powerlessness, which is a debilitating situation for a beginning teacher. The experience fostered a sense of hopelessness because Winnie knew she had no prospects for making the situation better.

Winnie looked to colleagues, parents, and school leaders to help her contend with this difficulty. Her search for support and assistance led to further frustration. She recalls her attempts to find help:

It took me a few months, maybe two, to seek out help. I resisted confiding in administrators because I didn’t want my gender to be an issue. I was concerned they would see this situation as a weakness of mine, not the school’s or the boys’.

Even if the people who had hired Winnie encouraged her to come to them when she needed help, she retained the impression that any calls for help would be perceived as an admission of fault on her part. In time, however, she sought some support:

Eventually, I confided in another female teacher and a male teacher/football coach. She offered commiseration, and he often would walk down the hall with me whenever we had similar schedules. The dean of students told me, “Well, boys will be boys. After all, you’re all they’ve got to look at.”

She notes this response from a parent: “Once a father of one of my students said to me, ‘Oh well, I see how Tom has a hard time

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concentrating, now that I see you.’” The consistent response was a validation of the boys’ attitude; it was embedded in the school culture. Winnie was left with the impression that it would be futile to try to change the boys or to equip herself with a strategy for contending with the behaviors she found disturbing.

When it was clear that others were not going to intercede on her behalf, Winnie took matters into her own hands.

I started to confront some of the boys directly about their behavior or attitudes. It was a difficult task since I often didn’t see who was whistling or making comments. I recall walking up to one group and asking, “Who is whistling at me?” They all looked sheepish and no one responded. I then told them it was wrong to whistle at a teacher that way and that I was disgusted, not flattered. My attitude also changed as I learned to accept that it wasn’t my problem, it was theirs.

Any change required Winnie to take action herself by addressing the boys directly. To be able to confront the boys, she first had to deny the prevailing attitude that “Boys will be boys” and acknowledge that the problem lay with the boys and not with her being young, female, and attractive. In a sense, she had to convince herself that she was not at fault for being who she was.

Winnie makes it clear that the problems occurred outside of her regular classroom environment, with students who were not from her classes and with whom she was not acquainted. It appears that when she was in the classroom with students she knew, with her teacher persona established, and with a rapport already developed, Winnie had a more positive experience. It was in the relatively unstructured climate of the hallways, where some students could retain anonymity and assume roles that were distinct from their role in the classroom, that Winnie felt most stressed and vulnerable. Her school experience, then, was defined by factors that went beyond how well she was doing in planning engaging lessons and managing students in the classroom. Several factors—the school culture, the parents’ attitudes, the lack of support from school leaders—combined with Winnie’s personal characteristics to determine the nature of her first-year experience.

Christy's Case

For her first year, Christy taught in a predominantly white high school in an affluent community. Christy herself is African American. This is the way she describes the setting:

Last year I taught in a very affluent high school . . . very high in socioeconomic status. Most of the students were [children of] CEOs or of that nature. . . . This was a public school. These kids come from well-off families. I say that because . . . when dealing with these types of children, if anything went wrong a parent would respond, "Well, did you see my kid do such and such?"

Christy had anticipated that the parents might be aggressive in advocating for their children. Christy also anticipated that she could rely on the support of her department chair, who was the only other African American on the faculty.

Christy's experience with a series of frustrations began when she took her class outside of the building on a warm day. They sat on the lawn near a lagoon and read *Romeo and Juliet*. When the class attempted to return to the building, Christy discovered that they were locked out of the entrance from which they had exited. While the class waited for someone to open the door, two boys who had long been adversaries began to scuffle. They threw some punches before Christy broke up the fight. By this time, an assistant principal was at the door and witnessed the brief fight between the two boys.

For Christy, the difficulty occurred when the students were suspended and a parent of one of the boys directed criticism at the teacher.

The following day, there was a photocopy letter in my mailbox. It wasn't addressed to me. It was a photocopy addressed to the dean from this boy's father who blasted my reasoning, my thoughts for becoming a teacher, told me that I was influencing young minds, and I need to rethink my career choice and just blasted my integrity as a teacher.

Although it was disturbing to face the criticism of a parent, Christy felt confident that she could rely on the support of her depart-

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ment chair. She judged that it would be best to share the letter with him so that he would be aware of any parent concerns.

I went and I told my department chair, who said, “Oh, don’t worry about it. We’ll take care of it, no problem.” I let him read the letter, and I felt real good because up until this time we had always had a good relationship. He said, “We’re going to have a meeting with the vice principal and we’ll fix it.”

When the subsequent meeting occurred, Christy did not receive the support she had expected. Instead, she felt attacked and betrayed.

When we get into the meeting with my department chair and one of the vice principals . . . [and] closed the door, . . . they proceeded to talk about the incident plus every other mistake I had made as a new teacher . . . EVERYTHING! . . . They apparently had been documenting everything and they resurfaced *everything*. . . . They were so gentle in tone and so politically correct in their verbiage. . . . I was still very, very angry. I felt very betrayed because up until this point, it was all . . . everything is harmony . . . everything is wonderful. . . . Not only had I been ripped up by this parent indirectly, now I have my two superiors doing the same thing.

Christy had believed that any correctives that supervisors had recommended for improving her performance were no longer issues once she had corrected the problems. She had not expected there to be a cumulative effect from earlier observations and discussions of her shortcomings. She also judged that her supervisors were now finding fault with her when she had not done anything wrong. She was especially disappointed that her department chair did not support her. She notes, “He was also of the same ethnicity as me, and we were the only two in the entire school. I didn’t trust him at all [from then on] because it went from this identity of same culture to something . . . total surprise.” She had thought that she and her department chair had a positive rapport, a shared experience, and an unstated bond. When she experienced what she considered a betrayal, she distanced herself from her department chair and from administrators in the school.

At that point as a new teacher, I was afraid of administration. I was thinking that this was going to go on my permanent record. I was up for an evaluation soon. I was like, “Oh, my God, they are going to fire me.” None of which they did. . . . It never came up again. . . . I never heard from the parent. I never heard what steps were taken . . . *nothing!* At the end of the year, I quit.

The balance of the year was uneasy for Christy because she felt she could not perform as the person she imagined herself to be: “I couldn’t really be *me* anymore because my first thought was to stay out of trouble and not to cause any more ruckus. It definitely took away from my teaching style.” Although there were no similar episodes for Christy, the experience tainted everything about the job for the rest of the year: “I still got a nice evaluation. There was no follow-up, so for a while I walked on eggshells because I thought it was going to come back up, but it never did. It never came back up.”

In her reflection on the episode, Christy notes that the uniqueness of her situation at the school contributed significantly to the long-term effects:

The distrust afterward definitely was a race thing. We were the only two there. I had that understood trust, most definitely . . . but after that situation, I still talked to him; he was still a very good source of information. He still told me the right thing to do. He was still a very wonderful department chair, but the personal trust was gone. As far as administration, I don’t tell them everything. They’re administration. I didn’t have any personal relationship with the administration.

Several factors combined to affect Christy’s initial experience in teaching. A problem that began as an isolated classroom management issue extended into a conflict with a parent, which in turn evolved into erosion of trust in supervisors of the current job and in those in the future. As was the case with Winnie, a dynamic complex of interactive factors defined this teacher’s first-year experience. Although we can generalize about the experiences and concerns of beginning teachers, we must also realize that the factors unique to the person, to the assignment, and to the school setting will combine to present both joys and frustrations.

The experiences of all the new teachers in this study illustrate the potential difficulty that inexperienced teachers are likely to have in entering a school where the students represent a variety of cultures that are largely unfamiliar to the newcomers. Johnson (2004) summarizes the increasingly common challenge:

[T]he students—their behavior, their skills, and their needs—can be the most surprising part of teaching for new teachers. This is particularly true for those who have been out of school themselves for a long time, or who are teaching in schools outside of the communities most familiar to them. (p. 74)

The contrasts can take many forms. Obvious contrasts will be like those Winnie and Christy experienced—based on differences in gender, culture, or ethnicity. Less obvious contrasts might include the new teacher, who has often been academically successful and enthusiastic about school, meeting in the first teaching assignment a group of students who struggle and hate school. In all cases, the new teacher will have to develop ways to contend with the unfamiliarity. As we discuss in Chapter 9, it is the clear responsibility of universities and schools to prepare new teachers to work successfully in an unfamiliar environment, and in that chapter we suggest some modest steps that preparation and inservice training can take.

Coping Strategies

One can imagine the negative effect on a teacher's health when a relentless pageant of obligations consumes most of his or her waking hours. The picture that beginning teachers report appears a bleak one, with long hours, some episodes of disrespect and disorder, and lack of support. An objective observer would have to wonder how these teachers survive and why they continue to do what they do. Another pattern among the interviews sheds some light on endurance and growth.

First, teachers manage to cope because they hold on to the belief that ultimately things will get better. They have a realistic projection that they will find a way to correct or improve situa-

tions that are the source or irritation, frustration, and anxiety. In the interviews, teachers identify an important element in their coping strategies as simply enduring difficulties until the situation improves. Here is what Gordon says about managing the stress of an exhausting workload:

I think I went through some mild depression for a little bit, but I realized what it was because I was killing myself with these hours. I'm not getting out and I'm not seeing the sun all day. I recognized that and said, "It will be over soon." The second year will be better and the third year will probably be better than that. I guess my plans are to bite the bullet for the first year and second year, too, and push through it.

Gordon is not a glutton for punishment. He does not plan to continue his career in the same way he worked his first year. He has learned from experience and realistically expects that the hours will be fewer and the activities in his life will be more balanced. He is confident that he has a strategy that works for him:

I think essentially that the way I'm looking at it has helped me get through to know there is a light at the end of the tunnel. . . . Things will get better and it's reasonable to expect to do a ton of work, especially at the very beginning; then you learn to manage that a little bit of what you need to do and what you really don't need to do in your preparation. Think about the entire year that way. Going into it, I thought about the entire year being a ton of work at the beginning that would taper off just a little bit.

We would have to wonder about the wisdom of sending into a classroom every day a teacher who feels that the situation is bad and will never get better. The beginning teachers report that a teacher has to have a sense of hope and tenacity. Clara, a student teacher, reports this experience:

I remember I would go home and I would tell myself that "you're only doing this for a couple of weeks. Do the best that you can. Don't be too hard on yourself. Just try to do the best you can." I started experimenting and tried different types of strategies to get [students] to behave. I started using different types of activities: things that they might be more engaged in, things that might

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interest them. It took a long time because the things I thought would work, didn't work.

But Clara endured until, as she describes,

Once I got adjusted, they adjusted to me. I started doing things differently. I seemed to encounter some kind of hurdle, and once I got past all of this it has been completely better ever since I got over this hurdle essentially with them. . . . It is just totally different.

Clara emphasizes, however, that she did not just passively accept abuse or ignore reprehensible behavior:

It was kind of like I just thought, "I need to stick it out. It's probably going to be unpleasant for a while, but that's how I have to deal with it, how they should learn to deal it." It wasn't like a passive endurance. During this whole time, I was working my butt off trying [as] many different things as I could. I was racking my brain at night: What can I do better tomorrow? Is it my lesson? Is it my behavior? I was constantly thinking of things.

A sense of hope that things will get better apparently supports the teacher's endurance; but at the same time, the teacher is consciously working strategically to make things better.

The good news in the bleak reports is that over time things got better for the teachers. They report that along with the fatigue and frustrations they experienced fun lessons, developed strong personal relationships, and witnessed growth in student learning.

Why do some early-career English teachers leave the profession while others stay?

Supporting Beginning English Teachers extends earlier research about the concerns of beginning teachers in general and also examines specifically the frustrations of beginning high school English teachers. Based on their findings from a three-year research study, the authors review the common concerns among beginning English teachers and the underlying factors that make these issues distressful; they also describe new teachers' means for coping with difficulties, their journey toward competence and confidence, and the measures that universities, schools, and new teachers themselves can take to increase the likelihood that promising new teachers will remain in the profession. Educators interested in the induction and retention of new high school English teachers can pursue the new questions and methodologies suggested by this study to learn more about the pressures that drive newcomers away from teaching and the factors that can encourage retention.

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