
9-22-2016

Voices from the Field: Preparing Teachers for High Need Schools

Tabitha Dell'Angelo

The College of New Jersey, dellange@tcnj.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

 Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Dell'Angelo, T. (2016). Voices from the Field: Preparing Teachers for High Need Schools. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(9), 1727-1738. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2774>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate
Indulge in Culture
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits
LEARN MORE

NSU
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

Voices from the Field: Preparing Teachers for High Need Schools

Abstract

It is generally accepted that many new teachers leave the profession within just a few years. The numbers of leavers increase in historically underperforming and under resources schools. This study examines a group of new teachers from a phenomenological perspective. Their experiences are presented through ethno-drama as a way to interact with the data and learn from the experiences of these teachers.

Keywords

Teacher Preparation, Urban Education, Ethno-Drama

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Voices from the Field: Preparing Teachers for High Need Schools

Tabitha Dell'Angelo

The College of New Jersey, Ewing, New Jersey, USA

It is generally accepted that many new teachers leave the profession within just a few years. The numbers of leavers increase in historically underperforming and under resourced schools. This study examines a group of new teachers from a phenomenological perspective. Their experiences are presented through ethno-drama as a way to interact with the data and learn from the experiences of these teachers. Keywords: Teacher Preparation, Urban Education, Ethno-Drama

The purpose of this study is to take a critical look at the experiences of beginning teachers who have completed a five-year program focused on preparing teachers for high need districts. Twelve graduates at various stages in their teaching careers were interviewed. They were asked about the process of finding a teaching position and transitioning into their new career as well as reflecting on their preparation and offering ideas and advice for the program from which they graduated. Through their stories we learn about the connections and disconnections between their preparation and the reality of their positions. This article provides insights into the teacher education program and its philosophy and then compares that to the lived experience of its graduates. Insights from the alumni offer valuable information about where we may see gaps in teacher preparation and suggest some areas for preparation and development.

Analytical and Theoretical Perspectives

This project utilizes an arts based research approach (Levy, 2009). Research findings were translated into performance texts as a way to challenge and disrupt the conventional ways that teacher education has been informed. Research on teaching is often fraught with problematic representations of teachers and their practice. This method allows the teachers to speak for themselves and thus is a more direct way of communicating participants' words and meanings. As Worthen (1998) explains, performance can be both an investigation and a representation. For this presentation, the performance will be both a way to represent and investigate the data. The lived experience of these new teachers are represented and at the same time the audience can make meaning of these data by experiencing word, image, gesture and sound (Leavy, 2009). Denzin (2006) writes about the ways in which performance can be employed as critical pedagogy because it can be used as a form of instruction that helps people think "critically, historically, and sociologically."

Discussions about how to best prepare teachers for positions in historically underperforming, low resourced, and largely minority districts have been a staple in the education literature for many years. Haberman (1995) outlined the qualities needed to be a great teacher for children in poverty, Ingersoll and May (2011) discuss the reality of shortages and the graying and greening (Ingersoll, 2010) of the teaching force. Geneva Gay (2010) and Christine Sleeter (2009) remind us of the importance of cultural responsiveness, Ladson-Billings (2007), Duncan-Andrade (2009) and others challenge teacher education to be critical educators for social justice, Noddings (2010) highlights the importance of ethic of care and Antonia Darder (1991) calls for a pedagogy of love, and Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (2009)

know that valuing the knowledge that classroom teachers have and produce is key to sustained and meaningful change. As we work to create teacher education programs that prepare future teachers for success in under resourced and over-burdened classrooms, it is important to include a myriad of perspectives — all of which are important and deep and sometimes difficult to synthesize and understand in ways that translate into solid classroom practice that serves all children well.

This project seeks to help the participants and audience engage critically, historically, and sociologically with some of the realities of the transition from a teacher education program into the early years of teaching. It also asks new teachers to reflect back on both their teaching experience and their preparation and offer insights and suggestions about what would have helped them be more prepared for the urban contexts in which they teach. The work is presented as *ethno-drama* because it allows us to explore multiple, simultaneous, and overlapping dimensions of this experience in ways that representation in traditional text does not allow.

Personal Perspective

I have multiple roles in this work. The teachers who participated in this study are all graduates of a program that I coordinate. My relationship to them and to the program lead to both a personal interest and a professional one. Professionally I am hoping to learn more about the teacher preparation program and what we are doing well as well as areas we can improve. Making programmatic improvements based on interviews and observations with these teachers is a priority. Additionally, I have a personal interest in reconnecting with each of the teachers. Our program is quite small and built on a foundation of seeing each other as "academic siblings." We look out for each other, cheer for one another, and have a conscious goal of building a long term network of support. My colleagues and I make a conscious effort to support the development of "ridas" (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Ridas have a critical consciousness about teaching, they will risk emotional involvement with their students, and would sooner die than let their people down (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). My closest colleagues and I try to model this behavior and be "ride or die" partners (ridas) with our students. Our sincere hope is to produce teachers who are also ridas.

Therefore, my connection to this project is intensely personal. While it is about training, recruitment and retention of teachers in high needs schools more generally, it is also about these specific teachers, the promise I have with them, and my emotional connection to their successes and challenges.

Methodology

The type of qualitative design used in this study is a phenomenological approach. This approach seeks to explore the unique experiences of the participants as they are lived. A phenomenological approach in this case provides a lens into the subjectivity reality of new teachers as they prepare for and enter their first classrooms.

Participants

This study took place in a small liberal arts college in the Northeastern, US. This college began an "Urban Education Program" in 2009 with one student. The program is five years long and spans both undergraduate and graduate work. Graduates finish with a Master's and multiple certifications. Interviews for this study were conducted in 2014 with the 12 people who had graduated from the program since 2010. All of the study participants are female (2 Latina, 1 Asian, 1 Black, 8 White) and teach in grades 1-8. All but one of the alumni interviewed are

currently working teachers. The one who is not a working teacher moved out of state and is working as a substitute while she updates her credentials for her new state. Institutional review board approval was obtained through the author's home institution and all names found in this text are pseudonyms.

The program from which these teachers graduate was both new and small. The author of this article is the creator and coordinator for the program and the academic advisor for all of the students. As such, close bonds were formed between and among students that lasted beyond graduation. This allowed for relatively easy recruitment of participants for this study. I sent out an email to all participants letting them know that I would be reaching out about scheduling interviews, once the IRB approval was obtained from my institution I created an electronic survey asking for basic information, availability and consent for participation. Our program also maintains a presence on social media and I sent prompts for responses via our Facebook page as well.

Data Collection Procedures

Two main sources of data inform this work -- interviews and classroom journals. The interviews were designed to capture the transition from college to teaching including the job search process as well as classroom experiences that demonstrate both what is going well for these new teachers and the stories that illustrate challenges they face. Lastly, we asked all participants to reflect on their teacher preparation program.

The second data source were the classroom journals that these teachers produced when they were still pre-service teachers. All of these teachers took a course in their undergraduate career called, "Introduction to Urban Education." In that course they explored their own cultural identity, engaged with scholarship related to critical pedagogy, and volunteered in a local after school program. They maintained weekly electronic journals. The content of the journals were used along with the interview data as dialogue in the script.

Interviews

An interview protocol was created to capture several main ideas. These included the process of searching for and finding a teaching position, stories of successes and challenges, and advice for the program from which they graduated. We utilized semi-structured interviews that included 9 open ended questions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow for a more free flowing conversation (Drever, 1997). Interviewers were instructed that the questions were a guide and that they could diverge from the questions if the respondent introduced an idea or topic that they wanted to pursue. The questions were grouped thematically to help reduce the possibility of getting too much extraneous information. However, we allowed for slight diversions from the question so that we could learn from the ideas the respondent presented and consider revision of the interview protocol at a later date if necessary. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Classroom Journals

All of the participants took a class during their undergraduate program where they delved into their own cultural identity development, read and discussed white privilege, critical race theory and applied these concepts to both current events, their own lives, and the practicum sites in which they worked. During this course each student wrote weekly reflections. Some of the data for this work comes from the reflections of the students' written reflections. In some cases lines in the script were derived from these journals.

Data Analysis

As with all qualitative research, the raw data go through a data reduction process. Saldaña (1998) discusses how data are reduced for ethno-drama and describes that in performance studies researchers attempt to create dramatic impact by retaining material that will likely elicit an affective response from the audience — “the juicy stuff” (Saldaña, 1998). In this study we began with a phenomenological approach (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). A phenomenological approach allows the analysis to focus on the subjective experiences of the participants and the ways in which they interpret their experiences. In the analysis I utilized an inductive coding process in which data from each interview was read and analyzed and codes were generated directly from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I used utilized in vivo coding — the participants’ own words were used as coding labels during the first few rounds of the analytic process. These codes helped determine categories and which passages might be retained for dialogue. The categories and themes that emerged were then each considered to become scenes in the script. In this case, four composite characters were created based on major themes that emerged.

Drafting a Script

The beginning stages of drafting the script included thinking about who the audience would be and the purpose of this exercise. The participants were not involved in drafting the first attempt at the script. However, after the first draft was written I used member checking and shared it with participants who were available to review it as a way to find out if they felt that it communicated the reality of their lived experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Of the five teachers who reviewed the script only one suggested a change. We discussed what I wrote and what I hoped to communicate as well as how she received it. After our discussed that passage was removed. I wanted the piece to easily be received by a non-exclusive audience that might include non-educators. However, my purpose was to provide an opening to have serious and frank discussions with teacher candidates about what their first few years of teaching might be like. Teacher candidates are at a dynamic developmental place where they are transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, changing the nature of the responsibility they have for themselves and others, and having to see themselves as the adult in the room, even though they may still feel like the student. It was my hope that helping pre-service teachers enter the profession with clear wide open eyes will aid in a more successful transition into the field.

One main purpose was also to be entertaining. While pre-service teachers can read a range of scholarly work focusing on becoming a teacher, I hoped that this medium would feel more authentic and resonate with them (Leavy, 2009). The program in which they all studied is one that puts me as both their academic advisor and in some cases their course instructor. While I knew all of them quite well, it wasn’t until I looked closely at their interviews that I realized the distinct voices that were evident. I played with the idea of creating dialogue and scenes but ultimately decided on four characters that corresponded with the points of view that seemed evident in the interviews. In all twelve of the interviews a myriad of emotions and perspectives arose. However, through the coding a few themes continued to arise. These were idealistic, pragmatic, cynical, and realistic outlooks on the teacher’s position in the school, their choice to become a teacher, the profession of teaching more generally and their outlook toward the future. I decided to take statements from the interviews and journals and categorize them based on those four themes. I then took all of that data (interview dialogue and journal entries) and created dialogue representing four composite characters. The four distinct points of view were; the idealist, the pragmatist, the cynic, and the realist. The reality is that each participant communicated multiple points of view. Every individual is multi-dimensional and complex

and offered nuanced and sometimes conflicting ideas. However, I decided to parse out these points of view so that each one was clear and unapologetic in its stance. The stage is set with just four teachers standing and facing the audience telling about similar circumstances, but through different lenses.

Results and Preliminary Discussion

Twelve interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Initial coding suggested a set of themes as program alumni told stories of successes and challenges in their lives as teachers and as they reflected back on their teacher education program. Since the results of this project are presented as an ethno-drama the framework and results are the storyline itself. However, as the process of script writing the original themes began to morph. This second set of more *focused coding* revealed more nuanced themes were bubbling to the service (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore the themes that are evident in the script are *culture, successes and failures, and work satisfaction*. The composite characters share stories related to each of these three themes. Stories sometimes seem to reveal feelings of empowerment and other times a sense of failure. These reflections deal with the reality of being a classroom teacher and how that reality may not match the expectations that existed about teaching.

Culture

In this section I will include and discuss parts of the script that fit into the particular themes. The first theme is that of *culture*. This is particularly significant because these teachers completed a program with a special focus on teaching in high need schools, confronting culture and privilege, and maintaining a social justice orientation in the classroom. It is the intention of this program to prepare teachers for the realities of teaching in contexts that differ from the ones in which they are accustomed and to be effective teachers in those contexts. In this opening of the play we are introduced to all four characters. It is important to note that the excerpt you are about to read has some words and phrases that are offensive. In some cases they are from journals where students reflected on ideas that they [or friends or family members] held. In some cases they are comments that were shared with them by other teachers or colleagues at the schools where they work. And, in some cases these were ideas that the participants admitted occur for them, often unexpectedly and unintentionally. Still, they wanted to share the reality of the thoughts that they and their students may encounter.

ASHLEY: *Faggot.*

MARIA: *Colored.*

ASHLEY: *Indian Giver.*

ERICA: *Kind of dumb for an Asian kid.*

AMANDA: *Lazy Mexican.*

MARIA: *Little thugs.*

ASHLEY: *Fatty.*

ERICA: *They smell like curry.*

MARIA: *I Jewed him down.*

ERICA: *Slutty little 5th grader.*

AMANDA: *What language do they even speak?*

ASHLEY: *I got gyped.*

AMANDA: *What do I even say to Muslim parents?*

MARIA: *I have a Jehova's Witness in my class, forget Halloween now!*

ASHLEY: *Stupid, close minded, Christian bible thumpers.*

AMANDA: *The good kind of black.*

MARIA: *Retard.*

ERICA: *I've said or thought all of these things. How can I possibly be a good teacher of other people's children. I am a fraud.*

AMANDA: *Me too.*

The play opens with the above exchange. It is meant to hook the audience in and to expose the thoughts that some of the audience may have had previously or even now. The comments made came out in interviews with the teachers although not all of them admitted to saying or thinking them. As stated earlier some of these statements were attributed to others but shared by the participants. Still, all of the comments were either spoken or unintentional thoughts that occurred in relation to school aged children. For instance, a colleague of one of the respondents referred to one of her Kindergarten students as a “little thug” because he wore his hair in locks. I wanted to include statements like this because it demonstrates the difficulty and resistance that exists in some high need schools in terms of working with children whose culture is different and sometimes not respected. It is also important that the participants in this study were willing to openly discuss the biases that they have. They sometimes expressed disappointment that negative thoughts ever pop into their heads. But, they are willing to acknowledge those thoughts and interrogate them. This was an important point for both the White and non-White participants.

What follows are reflections about what brought these teachers to high need schools as a career path. This section also comes from data that were coded as *culture* although this part of the script begins to move away from the individual looking inward and more toward thinking about the bidirectionality of one's own culture and the context in which they work. The quotes in the script are all verbatim directly from either the interviews or classroom journals.

ASHLEY: *As an undergrad I did a lot of volunteer work in a local urban district and found that I really enjoyed working with inner city populations.*

ERICA: *I decided urban education was a good choice for me because I wanted to do something impactful and rewarding.*

AMANDA: *I thought it would be the perfect way to get exposed to the differences between just teaching and then teaching in an inner city.*

MARIA: *Coming out with a Master's was big. Coming out with extra certs was big. Elementary jobs are not easy to find so having an extra certification was a route towards a job.*

AMANDA: *As soon as I had my first placement I knew this was the right fit. The children were engaged and motivated and very hard workers. I didn't see the sense of entitlement that I sometimes see in other districts.*

MARIA: *Oh yeah, those little suburban kids have no idea how good they have it.*

ASHLEY: *I definitely know that my kids are aware of the fact that I am white.*

ERICA: *Ya think?*

MARIA: *It's been more difficult than I ever could have imagined. These kids are so out of control. I am White, young looking, stressed out, overwhelmed and I don't know how to handle them.*

ERICA: *Damn, these white girls love to play the race card.*

ASHLEY: *I hate talking about behavior challenges, I don't want to seem like I am stereotyping. But, challenges do exist and I was not prepared for them.*

AMANDA: *Is it a stereotype if it's real?*

ERICA: *I'm good at building culture, establishing relationships and classroom management. I am not that great at teaching the actual content.*

MARIA: *Great, that's what I'm looking for in a teacher!*

AMANDA: *I think I can connect a little more with their culture because I am Latina, so I understand the language.*

ERICA: *She's Portugese.*

The section above highlights some of the cultural disconnect between how teachers may have idealized teaching in high needs contexts and the reality of teaching in these schools. As the participants reflected on their original intentions for choosing this path we hear them say that they, “really enjoyed working with inner city populations” and “wanted to do something impactful and rewarding.” Comments like these are not uncommon and are often very well intentioned. However, it can be problematic when one chooses to pursue a high need district because they feel they can “save the children.” In our program we actively work against both deficit model thinking and a missionary type orientation toward teaching. Deficit model thinking in teachers is sometimes expressed as negative beliefs about student ability and parent engagement in historically marginalized communities. If teachers enter the profession with this type of bias they may feel that their role is to save the children from their circumstance. This view is extremely problematic and therefore when students make statements like the ones in this section we as a faculty open up critical dialogue to help unpack the meaning behind their words. Still, engaging in the discussions in class is only a start. The reality of being in the classroom often creates a one step forward, two steps backward scenario. We seem to make progress in our coursework but then when the students get to the classrooms and encounter difficulty they have quite a bit of cognitive dissonance. Certainly this is the case for White teachers who choose to teach in schools where the majority of students are non-White. Many of these teachers, while perfectly competent to have a meaningful and candid discussion about White privilege in a classroom find themselves surprised that they are not immediately trusted and accepted in a school setting where they are the minority. They expect that their good intentions will earn immediate trust and they are not used to having to earn credibility in this way. Conversely, some of the non-White teachers in this sample grew up with a fair degree of economic privilege and while the urban high needs schools are as foreign to them as they are to their White counterparts they are surprised that they seem to be taken into the fold more quickly. For all of the participants they found themselves sometimes feeling uncertain about how to discuss their challenges. For instance, quite a few of them reported that they felt unprepared to deal with classroom management issues related to student behavior. However, they were apprehensive to discuss it for fear it would be received as having deficit model thinking. In the exchange between Ashley and Amanda we see this played out:

ASHLEY: *I hate talking about behavior challenges, I don't want to seem like I am stereotyping. But, challenges do exist and I was not prepared for them.*

AMANDA: *Is it a stereotype if it's real?*

Ashley is a White student and did a lot of hedging when discussing anything that could be perceived as negative regarding her students. Amanda and some other non-White students were more open in discussing challenges and would sometimes open the door to these conversations when the White students seemed to be avoiding these conversations.

In this section I also wanted to communicate the positive community that has been built among these participants. From the first meeting as undergrads and throughout their time at the College our faculty promote a familial atmosphere. The pre-service teachers are encouraged to think of themselves as academic siblings – they will go through a lot together, they may not

always get along, but they will always have each other's back. Most all of the alumni stay in touch via social media and personal visits. In fact, three of them who have been teaching two and three years live together. In two exchanges between Erica and Maria and Amanda and Erica, I attempted to show the ways in which these women can joke with each other and bring some lightness to serious discussions. When Erica laments that she is finding success classroom management even though some of her fellow teachers are not but struggles with teaching content, Maria teases her.

ERICA: I'm good at building culture, establishing relationships and classroom management. I am not that great at teaching the actual content.

MARIA: Great, that's what I'm looking for in a teacher!

And, when Amanda brags a little bit about her ability to connect with her Spanish speaking students, Erica takes the opportunity for a little dig. This exchange is particularly interesting because all of the students in the program are required to take three semesters of a foreign language. During their time in the program there is a range of commitment to obtaining fluency in the language. However, as they get out in the field it becomes apparent how much capital that skills carries.

AMANDA: I think I can connect a little more with their culture because I am Latina, so I understand the language.

ERICA: She's Portugese.

Success and Failures

The interview included two questions that were directly related to the theme of successes and failures. The participants were asked to tell about something that went well or that made them proud and a story of something that went wrong and how they dealt with it. This comment from Maria was part of a description of one of her teaching observations. After the observation she debriefed with her principal. She reported that while her principal did give her some encouragement, she found that most of the comments were not helpful and suggested that the principal was out of touch with the reality of her classroom.

MARIA: My principal told me I had to do more hands on activities. Ha! Some of my kids don't even show up with a pencil. If they do, they want to throw it across the room. The administration wants me to do full blown experiments with chemicals? I don't think so.

This comment was made during Maria's third year of teaching. When she was a pre-service teacher her second major was and integrated Math, Science, and Technology program. Maria is one of the participants who entered the teaching profession with a great deal of enthusiasm about inquiry based science teaching. However, as evidenced by this comment, in just a few years she is avoiding the teaching methods that she was most excited about when she began her career. In further conversation she expressed some embarrassment about admitting how few hands on activities she does. She blames this shift on difficulty keeping students engaged and safe during this type of activity. Maria reported that she told her principal that she would try if she could get some support like an aid during those periods. However, she was told that they did not have the extra personnel for that and she would have to manage it herself.

Some of the other participants shared stories of challenging situations that turned around for the better and other situations that were more disheartening.

ERICA: I reached out to help this little girl who had been struggling. She was smart but she seemed so angry and out of it. I wanted to make sure she knew she had someone who cared. I sat next to her, softly told her that I believed in her, I walked her through her writing prompt. She turned to me and said, "Get away from me ugly!" So that happened.

AMANDA: I told this kid that he needed to believe in himself. I don't know what I did, but this kid just sat down and started crying. This was a tough kid. I wanted to put my arm around him but... I really felt he just needed some time. He changed after that. His work wasn't great, but he put more effort in. He never said anything about that day, what I said, why he cried. But, he worked harder after that. (Pause). There are days I go home and I cry and I don't want to go to work the next day.

Both Erica and Amanda shared stories of reaching out to students who seemed to need an extra push. Both of them expressed how much they cared about their students and that they wanted the children in their classes to know, above all else, they had someone on their side who believed in them and wanted them to succeed. In Erica's case she experienced resistance from the student that quite frankly, hurt her feelings. She shared that when the student called her ugly she felt her face flush and an immediate feeling of "wanting to get away." Her experience highlights the reality of wanting to feel competent and successful in your position. When a student continuously struggles or pushes you away more explicitly like Erica's student, it may be hard to stay engaged with them. It feels so much better to help the children who want to be helped, who say "thank you," who you see improve. However, teachers must push through the discomfort and engage the students whose performance or disposition makes them feel like failures. Erica's story continues with weeks of this same kind of push back from the student. Then, when the winter break was upon them the student told her that she would miss her over the break. Erica was incredibly surprised as she had never thought the student had anything but negative thoughts about her.

Amanda's story is similar in that she sought to support a student who seemed to be having difficulty except her student seemed to respond in a way that was more reassuring. Still, Amanda shared that while she is finding success at her job she often leaves work and cries when she gets home. This feeling of exasperation was shared by quite a few teachers who shared that tears were a common occurrence. A teacher who was interviewed recently [not included in this study] shared that she cries at least once a week. I asked her if she thought she might look for another job or transition out of teaching. She said, "No way, I love teaching." "But you cry everyday," I said. She told me that she gets frustrated and overwhelmed but there is nothing else she would rather do.

Work Satisfaction

I am still considering this theme and whether what is happening here is really about work satisfaction. The mismatch between the expected and reality of teaching is evident and sometimes discouraging for the participants. However, Ashley shares,

ASHLEY: Your first year is just a lot of trial and error. You just have to expect that and not give up and keep working and trying new things.

Ashley's comment is encouraging because it suggests that she does not expect that she will always be successful. She expects that some ideas and strategies she has will not work and is comfortable with failing and "trying new things." Ashley later shares that she feels supported by her administration. She states, "They are supportive and I definitely feel like I have help and resources when I need it." Having that level of support buffers the stress of making mistakes and encourages new teachers to employ creative strategies in their teachers.

On the other hand, some teachers shared stories that suggested that they did not feel supported by administration or colleagues. For instance, Amanda shared the many times when teachers would joke about why she would choose her district.

AMANDA: When I started working in this district all of the older teachers would say, (sarcastically) "Welcome to Trenton! You sure you want to do this?"

When Amanda discussed this she shared that she felt immediately deflated by these comments. While some of the veteran teachers were good mentors, there seemed to be equally as many who openly told her she was making a mistake and should start looking for another job in a "better" district. Although Amanda expressed that she was still committed to teaching in high needs schools at one point in her interview she wavered, saying, "*I am not sure if I want this job even if it is offered to me for next year.*"

A few of the other teachers shared stories of perceived lack of support from administration. These comments came in the form of lack of resources, lack of time to do their jobs well, and uncertainty about job security.

MARIA: They gave me, what they called a classroom. It was a closet. Literally, it had been used as a storage closet for years.

ERICA: I don't know, my job is a little iffy right now. At this moment ... I don't know if my department is even going to be around much longer.

JESSICA: I am the ELL teacher for K-8 and have about 100 students in my caseload. To be in compliance I am supposed to see them for 90 minutes every day. Hmm...so let me see — I mean I wasn't a math major, so maybe have this wrong but, let's see — if have 100 students for 90 minutes each that is about 150 hours of instruction that I need to pack into a 6.5 hour workday. If I can just figure out how to fit 23 days into one day I can get caught up.

Discussion

This work is significant because it draws parallels between the lived experiences of new teachers, the social and political context of teaching, and how we can best prepare teachers for urban contexts. The data, presented through dialogue and monologue, offer a window into the lives of new teachers in these early years when many choose to leave the profession of teaching. Listening to their stories, discussing, and making meaning of them has the potential to create supports to better prepare and sustain a strong teaching force in high need contexts.

This work has been performed twice as of this date. Once it was performed at a local play festival to a diverse public audience. The second time it was read as part of a seminar course for student teachers. After the first performance I was approached by several audience members who either are currently teachers or were formerly teachers. They all shared that the text spoke to them and they felt they really understood the perspectives being shared. The public audience laughed in some places and shook their heads in agreement in other places. However, the reading in the student teaching seminar class went much differently. After that

reading I asked the students to turn to a partner and discuss something from the script that stood out for them. It could be something they agreed with, could relate to, or thought was not relatable. The conversation that followed was largely about how to stay encouraged and motivated to take on the challenge of being a teacher. It seemed to be a reality check for these pre-service teachers and open up a conversation that they had not yet had.

While I missed the laughter that accompanied the first reading I believe that the reading with the student teachers was important. It is possible that being forced to confront the reality of working hard and still failing sometimes, meaning well but still being rejected by your students, and admitting the bias that you may hold is a good step in preparing to become a teacher. Perhaps engaging with these topics before you enter the field will buffer the stress of experiencing these realities once you are out there and make it easier to cope with the challenges.

References

- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: Practitioner research for the next generation*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Darder, A. (1991). *Culture and power in the classroom: A critical foundation for bicultural education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Denzin, N. K. (2006). *The politics and ethics of performance pedagogy: Toward a pedagogy of hope*. In D. S. Madison & J. Hamera (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of performance studies* (pp. 325-338). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Drever, E. (1997). *Using semi-structured interviews in small-scale research*. Edinburgh, Scotland: The Scottish Council for Research in Education.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. R. (2009). Note to educators: Hope required when growing roses in concrete. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(2), 181-194.
- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gay, G. (2010). Acting on beliefs in teacher education for cultural diversity. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1-2), 143-152.
- Haberman, M. (1995). *Star teachers of children in poverty*. Indianapolis, IN: Kappa Delta Pi Publications.
- Ingersoll, R. (2010). Who is teaching our children? *Educational Leadership*, 67(8), 14-20.
- Ingersoll, R. M., & May, H. (2011). Recruitment, retention and the minority teacher shortage. CPRE Research Report # RR-69. *Consortium for Policy Research in Education*.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2007). Pushing past the achievement gap: An essay on the language of deficit. *Journal of Negro Education*, 76(3), 316-323.
- Leavy, P. (2008). Performance-based emergent methods. In S. Nagy (Ed.), *Handbook of emergent methods* (pp. 343-357). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Leavy, P. (2009). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Noddings, N. (2010). Moral education and caring. *Theory and Research in Education*, 8(2), 145-151.
- Reid, K., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2005). Exploring the lived experience. *The Psychologist*, 18, 20-23.
- Saldaña, J. (1998). *Ethical issues in an ethnographic performance text: The "dramatic impact" of "juicy stuff."* Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University Press.

- Sleeter, C. (2009). Developing teacher epistemological sophistication about multicultural curriculum: A case study. *Action in Teacher Education*, 31(1), 3-13.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Worthen, W. (1998). Drama, performativity, and performance. *Post Modern Language Association*, 133(5), 1093-1107.

Author Note

Tabitha Dell'Angelo is an Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Urban Education Program at The College of New Jersey in Ewing, NJ. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: dellange@tcnj.edu.

Copyright 2016: Tabitha Dell'Angelo and Nova Southeastern University.

Article Citation

Dell'Angelo, T. (2016). Voices from the field: Preparing teachers for high need schools. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(9), 1727-1738. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss9/11>
