A Resident Teacher Program: Perceptions of Those Involved

Sara Beth Vinje Triggs

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A RESIDENT TEACHER PROGRAM: PERCEPTIONS OF THOSE INVOLVED

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota
August 2000
This dissertation, submitted by Sara Beth Vinje Triggs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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This dissertation meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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Date  
06.01.00
PERMISSION

Title A Resident Teacher Program: Perceptions of Those Involved
Department Teaching & Learning
Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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Signature  Sara Puggs
Date  April 27, 2000
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My experience in the doctoral program at the University of North Dakota has been both challenging and rewarding. Much like the participants in this study, my experience has consisted of peaks and valleys, highs and lows. There have been moments of frustration and self-doubt as well as those filled with pride and confidence at having accomplished what once seemed impossible. I would like to thank those individuals who provided me with encouragement, support, and reassurance through both.

I owe a debt of thanks to my committee members. Dr. Ron Kieffer studied my work with a critical eye providing feedback that enhanced and improved my efforts; Dr. Thomas Mohr supported my work with his positive feedback; Dr. Myrna Olson, my advocate, provided me with ceaseless support in the dissertation process as well as my graduate studies and teaching; and Dr. Kathy Gershman, my qualitative model, patiently guided my research efforts with unwavering support. To Dr. Lynne Chalmers, my Chair, I cannot begin to imagine this process without you. There are no words to adequately describe my gratitude for your patience, reassurance, knowledge, and support. Regardless of all the uncertainties that surrounded this process, I was always certain of you.

I would like to thank my mother and father for guiding me to understand the innate value of education, rather than viewing it as the means to an end. Their wisdom and support fueled my willingness to take the risks necessary to pursue this dream. I am grateful to my loving husband, Chris, who acted as a continual model of persistence and tenacity in the pursuit of his own studies while working to financially support me in mine. Thank you for your kindness, patience, and understanding.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the experience of master’s students in an elementary education resident teacher program. The experience of the resident teachers was generally defined as how resident teachers made meaning of a resident teacher program through the perceptions of the resident teachers themselves. The resident teachers’ perceptions and experiences were studied from January 1999 through the completion of their teaching experience in May 1999.

Qualitative research methods were used in this phenomenological study, including a brief period of observation, analysis of mentor/resident teacher communications journals, and interviews with participants in the Resident Teacher Program. Data were analyzed and one theme emerged. From the theme, assertions and sub-assertions developed based on commonalities. A description of the assertions and sub-assertions was discussed in reference to the literature. Recommendations for school personnel, teacher educators, and education policymakers were provided.

The study began with one question: How do students interpret their experience in an elementary education resident teacher program? Focusing on this question, one overarching theme evolved: The experience of the resident teachers was comparable to a roller coaster ride consisting of peaks and valleys, highs and lows. This theme was supported by the following two assertions which were further divided into sub-assertions.

 Assertion #1. There were aspects of the program that resident teachers valued and that contributed to their success.

 Sub-assertion #1a. The resident teachers valued their students and maintained a student centered focus regardless of the frustrations they experienced.

 Sub-assertion #1b. Mentor support was the single most beneficial and influential aspect of the program.
Assertion #2. Resident teachers felt deep frustration with aspects of their experience.

Sub-assertion #2a. Time management was an area of frustration for the resident teachers.

Sub-assertion #2b. Classroom management was an area of intense concern in the resident teachers’ experience.

Sub-assertion #2c. The grade level experience of the mentor affected the experience of the resident teacher.

Sub-assertion #2d. A lack of effective communication among participants in the Resident Teacher Program caused confusion regarding various roles and expectations.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Issues in Teacher Preparation

For decades the American public has been demanding reform in public education. Not surprisingly, the demand for educational reform has expanded to encompass the institutions responsible for preparing teachers. Both teachers and teacher educators have been under a continuous fire of questions and accusations from groups and individuals inside and outside the field of education. The criticism of the lack of conclusive answers to the problems posed has illustrated the need for schools and universities to unite in a collaborative effort of educational reform.

In addition to calls for reform, teachers and teacher educators are also faced with a nationwide concern regarding potential teacher shortages (Feiman-Nemser, 1996). The shortage is perceived to be, in part, due to the aging teacher work force but is compounded by the high rate of attrition in beginning teachers (Fagan & Walter, 1982). Educators attribute the high rate of attrition to negative teaching experiences related to feelings of isolation and insufficient support. A study by Chapman (1984) found that the quality of a beginning teacher's first experience is the greatest influence on his or her decision to remain in the field of education. While schools are struggling to acquire an adequate number of teachers, teacher educators are working to produce the number of teachers needed while maintaining quality standards.

It is issues such as these that have led educators to recognize the need for connectedness between teacher preparation programs and public schools. In a statement that appears ridiculously obvious, yet has been repeatedly ignored, Goodlad (1994) addressed the need for a partnership between schools and teacher educators. He stated, "We are not likely to have good schools without a continuing supply of excellent teachers. Nor are we likely to have excellent teachers unless they are immersed in exemplary schools.
for significant portions of their induction into teaching” (p. 1). Discussing universities’ oversight of a valuable resource, Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) stated that the “practical wisdom of competent teachers remains a largely untapped source of insights for the improvement of teaching” (p. 505). Recently, alternatives to traditional teacher preparation have been presented in hopes of creating this connectedness and “tapping the source” of which Feiman-Nemser speaks.

Many of the alternatives presented to reform traditional teacher preparation are based on this idea of developing an educational partnership between universities and schools. Two of the alternatives considered are mentoring and resident teacher programs. Both of these alternatives provide a connection between college preparation and classroom practice with the assistance of experienced teachers in cooperation with university faculty (Goodlad, 1994).

**Teacher Mentoring**

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (1996) document, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future*, lists “inadequate induction for beginning teachers” as one of the barriers to providing all students with a quality education. One of the authors’ recommendations in addressing this issue is to “create and fund mentoring programs for beginning teachers” (p. vii). These mentoring programs allow the university and novice teachers to, as Feiman-Nemser referred to it, “tap” the invaluable knowledge and experience of practicing teachers. Mentoring programs are an example of universities and schools addressing concerns through collaboration.

The term mentor was defined by Schmidt (1987) as “experienced professionals who enjoy sharing their enthusiasm, understanding, and perspective of the full meaning of a professional career with those entering the field” (p. 4). Cohen (1995) expands on this definition explaining that the term mentor “entered our contemporary language as a description of a nonparental, competent, and trustworthy figure who consciously accepts personal responsibility for the significant developmental growth of another individual” (p. 1). Providing beginning teachers with mentor support is one means of addressing the issue of teacher attrition.
In a 1995 study, Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, and O’Brien found that beginning teachers valued mentors as trusted confidants and felt safe confiding in them. Additional studies revealed that with mentor support, novice teachers reported an increase in self-confidence and job satisfaction (Fagan & Walter, 1982) and expressed more positive attitudes about teaching than individuals who had not been provided with mentor support (Henry, 1988). Studies such as these provide evidence of mentor support reducing the feelings of frustration and isolation common in first year teachers. Because of the positive results of studies such as these, many educational leaders are looking to mentoring as a means of developing and retaining quality teachers.

While a growing number of studies have been conducted in the area of mentoring, in a review of literature Little (1990) found “few comprehensive studies well-informed by theory and designed to examine in depth the context, content, and consequences of mentoring” (p. 297). Studies have focused on describing how mentors make sense of their role (Stanulis, 1995), how they think about the characteristics and purpose of mentoring (Franke & Dahlgren, 1996), and how mentors’ support influenced teachers’ preparation and performance (McNamara, 1995).

Literature on mentoring has traditionally “consisted of program descriptions, survey-based evaluations, definitions of mentoring, and general discussions of mentors’ roles and responsibilities” (Feiman-Nemser, 1996, p. 3). Little has been done to gain an understanding of how the mentees experience the process of mentoring. Abell et al. (1995) conducted a study to find how participants in a mentor/mentee relationship interpreted their roles; however, the authors addressed the need for additional research describing resident teacher perceptions stating, “Educators have much to learn about the mentor/intern relationship as participants perceive it. This perspective is particularly valuable as we implement these programs and consider other reforms in teacher education” (p. 174).

**Resident Teacher Programs**

While teacher mentoring illustrates a giant step in educational reform, a program born of university and school collaboration provides a vehicle for connecting theory and practice for beginning and pre-service teachers. Resident teacher programs have created “new ways for colleges and school systems to work together around instructional reform,
creating greater common ground and leveraging improvements in both settings” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996, p. 80). Resident teacher programs (also referred to as teacher induction programs) represent “one of the major innovations supporting . . . improvements in teacher education” (p. 78).

These programs provide graduate-level preparation beyond the traditional four year education degree. During the year of residency new teachers focus on teacher preparation through actual classroom experience accompanied by relevant and applicable course work. “Such internships permit integration of theoretical and practical learning, providing a much more compelling context for developing skilled and thoughtful practice” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996, p. 78). In a sense, resident teacher programs provide resident teachers with an assisted transition from educational studies to educational practices. The aim of the resident teacher program is to develop a foundation for continual learning about teaching -- the capacity to analyze learning and examine the effects of contexts and teaching strategies on students’ motivation, interest, and achievement -- rather than aiming only to transmit techniques for managing daily classroom activities. (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996, p. 76)

As may be expected, these programs (much like mentoring alone) produce progressive and high quality educators, who value reflection in theory and pedagogy. So far resident teacher programs have experienced much success, with principals rating resident teachers as more effective than graduates holding traditional four year degrees, and describing them as being as confident and effective as their colleagues (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). A study by Andrew (1990) also found that teachers who participated in a resident teacher program were much more likely to enter and remain in the field of education. Again, these studies are all evidence of the perceived success of resident teacher programs; yet there is little information describing the resident teacher’s experience.

Need for the Study

In the recent years of educational reform much has been done in an attempt to improve the pre-service education of teachers. Induction programs, or resident teacher
programs, as they are referred to in this study, have been one such attempt at reform in teacher education. Studies have been conducted to evaluate mentoring practices and how mentors make sense of their roles (Stanulis, 1995), but few have addressed how the participants perceive the experience. As Abell et al. (1995) stated, “Educators have much to learn about the mentor/intern relationship as participants perceive it” (p. 174). The authors go on to point out that “this perspective is particularly valuable as we implement these programs and consider other reforms in teacher education” (p. 174).

**Purpose and Design of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand the experience of master’s students in an elementary education resident teacher program. The experiences of the resident teachers were generally defined as how resident teachers made meaning of a resident teacher program through the perceptions of the resident teachers themselves. The resident teachers’ perceptions and experiences were studied from the middle of January 1999 through the end of May 1999. Qualitative methods were used in the study including a brief period of observation, analysis of mentor/resident teacher communication journals, and interviews with participants in the Resident Teacher Program. This study was approached from an emic perspective as recommended by Abell et al. (1995) since it provides “valuable insights for a variety of professionals participating in and evaluating such programs” (p. 175).

**Organization of the Study**

In Chapter I of this study the reader is provided with an overview of teacher preparation, mentoring teachers, and resident teacher programs. Also included is a discussion of the need, the purpose, and the delimitations of the study.

The methodology used for the study is described in Chapter II. This chapter begins with a discussion of other educational studies of mentoring and resident teacher programs and the rationale for the choice of methodology applied in this study. A brief description of qualitative research methods is included along with specific information regarding the data collected for this study and the method of data analysis that was applied.
In Chapter III the reader is provided with a vignette of each resident teacher as well as background information on each participant, addressing decisions and events that related to their development as educators.

In Chapter IV excerpts from the resident teachers’ interviews are sorted by similarities, categorized, and organized into one major theme. The theme is divided into two assertions supporting the theme. The assertions and accompanying sub-assertions are discussed with reference to the relevant professional literature.

A summary, conclusions, and recommendations can be found in Chapter V.
CHAPTER II
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand the experience of master's students in an elementary education resident teacher program. The experiences of the resident teachers were generally defined as how resident teachers made meaning of a resident teacher program through the perceptions of the resident teachers themselves.

Rationale for Choice of Methodology

"Qualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 19). As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to understand and describe the experience of graduate students in a resident teacher program from their perspective. As Strauss and Corbin stated, "Some areas of study naturally lend themselves more to qualitative types of research, for instance, research that attempts to uncover the nature of persons' experiences with a phenomenon" (p. 19). Understanding and describing how first year teachers experience a resident teacher program required the use of qualitative research methods.

Creswell (1998) explained that qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of a phenomenon according to the meaning that people bring to it. He more specifically defines qualitative research as

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

More specifically, this qualitative study took a phenomenological approach. The phenomenon, or "central concept being experienced by subjects in a study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 236), was the first year teaching experience in a resident teacher program.
In studying this phenomenon, the majority of the data was collected through a series of participant interviews. As Seidman (1991) stated, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3). An emic perspective, such as this, “compels the recognition and acceptance of multiple realities” (Fetterman, 1989, p. 31) which I found to exist amidst the study’s participants.

The main structures of the qualitative research interview used in the mode of understanding as described by Kvale (1996) include the following:

1. *Life World.* The topic of qualitative interviews is the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it.

2. *Meaning.* The interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject. The interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said as well as how it is said.

3. *Qualitative.* The interview seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language, and does not aim at quantification.

4. *Descriptive.* The interview attempts to obtain open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the subjects’ life worlds.

5. *Specificity.* Descriptions of specific situations and action sequences are elicited, not general opinions.


7. *Focused.* The interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standardized questions, nor entirely “non-directive.”

8. *Ambiguity.* Interviewee statements can sometimes be ambiguous, reflecting contradictions in the world the subject lives in.

9. *Change.* The process of being interviewed may produce new insights and awareness, and the subject may in the course of the interview come to change his or her descriptions and meanings about a theme.
10. Sensitivity. Different interviewers can produce different statements on the same themes, depending on their sensitivity to and knowledge of the interview topic.

11. Interpersonal Situations. The knowledge obtained is produced through the interpersonal interactions in the interview.

12. Positive Experience. A well carried out research interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee, who may obtain new insights into his or her life situation. (pp. 30-31)

A phenomenological perspective, as was applied in this study, “includes a focus on the life world, an openness to the experiences of the subjects, . . . attempts to bracket foreknowledge, and a search for invariant essential meanings in the descriptions” (Kvale, 1996, p. 38).

Procedures

Contained in this section is an explanation of the qualitative methods and procedures used in studying the perceptions of master’s students participating in a Resident Teacher Program in elementary education. Included is a discussion of the selection of the participants, the research procedures, including data collection and analysis, and a section describing each of the participants.

The Question

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand the experience of master’s students in a resident elementary education teacher program. Terms of the study that require clear definitions to provide a thorough understanding of the purpose of this qualitative study include Resident Teacher Program, resident teacher, resident supervisor (referred to in this study as resident mentor), university supervisor, and mentoring.

Resident teachers are certified elementary educators who have not previously taught under contract. In their first year of instruction resident teachers are enrolled as master’s students and are provided with the assistance of an experienced mentor teacher.

Resident supervisors, or mentor teachers, are experienced classroom teachers selected by a joint university/school committee. Mentor teachers are required to have a
minimum of five years teaching experience and a master's degree in education. As a mentor these experienced teachers agree to support resident teachers in their first year of instruction. Mentors are released full time from teaching duties and commit half of their contract time to assisting resident teachers, one quarter time to the university teacher education program, and one quarter time to school-wide professional development. Resident mentors provide the support needed to ensure a successful experience for the beginning teachers. The mentor does not act as an evaluator in the mentor/teacher relationship, but rather provides assistance and encouragement based on each individual's needs. The onus of evaluation is placed on the university supervisor, rather than the mentor, to ensure that resident teachers are not detoured from sharing problems and concerns with their mentor based on their fear of being judged. The role of the resident mentor goes beyond that of a teacher to include friendship and trust. As a teacher and friend the role of the mentor is expanded to include providing personal, emotional, academic, pedagogical, and moral support to the resident teachers (Johnson & Gates, 1998).

University supervisors are university faculty members who consult with the resident teachers and mentors. University supervisors lead the resident teachers in a biweekly or monthly practicum each semester in which the resident teachers are provided with the opportunity to share their experiences, ask questions, and receive guidance in their graduate related requirements such as portfolios and independent study.

Mentoring is the act of an experienced individual guiding and supporting an inexperienced individual (Cohen, 1995). More specifically, in this study mentoring refers to an experienced teacher providing guidance and support to a beginning teacher in their first year of instruction.

For the purpose of this study, the Resident Teacher Program is defined as a graduate program in which certified elementary educators who have not previously taught under contract teach full time under the guidance of an experienced mentor teacher. Program participants are required to enroll in a summer seminar prior to their first year of teaching and at least six credit hours per semester during their two semesters of full time teaching.
“The purpose of the Resident Teacher Program is to provide first year teachers (residents) with support as they enter the teaching profession and the opportunity to earn a M.Ed. in Elementary Education through course work and teaching experience” (Kenson & Gates, 1998, p. 75). The goals of the Resident Teacher Program for the residents were to “improve teaching performance, promote personal and professional attitudes about being a teacher, keep good teachers in the profession by building early career success, and develop a love for and a commitment to continued learning” (p. 77).

Description of the Setting and Participants

In this chapter, I will briefly describe the research setting and the study participants. A thorough description of each resident teacher and the setting will be provided in Chapter III. Fictitious names have been used for purposes of anonymity.

This study focused on an elementary education resident teacher program in Glacier, a rural midwest city. The Resident Teacher Program was the product of a collaborative effort between the Glacier School District and Northern State, the local university. There were two sites within the school district that housed the Resident Teacher Program. The original site, Washington Elementary School, had been involved since 1992, and the second, Jefferson Elementary School, since 1996.

The sample for this study included the six resident teachers who participated in the program beginning the fall of 1998. Three resident teachers were assigned to each site. The following briefly describes each of the participants:

Jeanine attended Northern State University as an undergraduate student and student taught in the Glacier School District. After completing her student teaching experience in December 1997 she continued to work in the district as a para-educator for the remainder of the school year. During the 1998-1999 school year she taught first grade at Jefferson Elementary School as a resident teacher.

Kathy received her undergraduate degree in elementary education from Northern State University and also student taught and worked as a substitute teacher in the Glacier School District. As a resident teacher during the 1998-1999 school year she taught third grade at Jefferson Elementary School.
Ken attended a small private university before entering the Resident Teacher Program. While his educational background provided him with a very conservative view of education, his student teaching experience broadened his vision. During his time in the Resident Teacher Program, Ken taught fourth grade at Jefferson Elementary School.

Susan was a graduate of Northern State University and student taught in the Glacier School District. Susan taught third grade as a resident teacher at Washington Elementary School during the 1998-1999 school year.

Michelle received her undergraduate degree from Northern State University in December 1997. For the remainder of the school year she worked as a para-educator at Washington Elementary School. During her experience in the Resident Teacher Program, Michelle remained at Washington Elementary School and taught in a first grade classroom.

Missy graduated from a small private college located approximately 70 miles from Northern State University. Her student teaching experience was in a sixth grade classroom and she chose to stay with the upper grades, teaching fifth grade at Washington Elementary School in the Resident Teacher Program.

In the remainder of Chapter II, I will discuss the process of gaining entrance, making contacts, collecting and analyzing data, and developing themes and assertions. Because the pilot and the follow up study were conducted over the course of one semester, I will address both studies in this section identifying any differences there may have been as they occur.

Entering the Field

Data collection began January 1999 in the form of a pilot study at Washington Elementary School, the Resident Teacher Program’s original site. Before beginning the pilot study, I conducted an interview with Ruth, one of the university supervisors who had played an active role in the program since its implementation. Ruth provided me with valuable information regarding the structural and organizational nature of the program and the participants involved. She also suggested how I might go about gaining entrance to the school and contacting the appropriate individuals.

Following Ruth’s suggestions, I began by contacting the building principal to request permission to conduct the pilot study. I explained that the intent of the study was to
describe and understand the resident teachers' perceptions of their experience in the program, and that the data would be gathered through a short period of observation and three open-ended interviews with each participant. I assured her of the anonymity of the teachers as well as the school, and after much discussion she agreed to present the proposed pilot study to the mentor and resident teachers.

I was contacted by the principal several days later. She stated that she had conferred with the mentor and resident teachers and they had agreed to participate. Once the mentor and resident teachers had given their approval, the principal signed a contract permitting me to conduct the pilot study. In addition to being granted entrance by the building principal, the district also required permission from the assistant superintendent of schools. The superintendent’s permission was acquired by completing a form in which I was asked to explain the purpose of the pilot study, identify at which school it would be conducted, and whether it required interviews with minor students.

Prior to initial data collection, I met individually with the mentor and resident teachers of Washington Elementary School. I assured all involved that they could drop out of the study at any time without consequence. I also addressed the issue of confidentiality explaining that individual and institutional names would be changed and anonymity assured. Each signed a contract which permitted me to observe in their classrooms and conduct three recorded interviews.

**Data Collection Techniques**

Formal data collection began early in January 1999 with a brief period (10 hours) of observation. The observation times were established around the mentor’s schedule based on duties and responsibilities she had to the university and school outside of the resident teachers. During this period of observation, I shadowed Donna, the resident mentor at Washington Elementary School, to observe mentor/resident teacher interactions over the course of several days. Five of the 10 observation hours occurred in the morning and the other five in the afternoon. During this time, I also became aware of the communication journals through which the mentor and resident teachers shared unspoken discussions. I felt that the journals may provide insight to the daily experiences and interactions between the resident teachers and their mentor. I asked the mentor and the resident teachers if they
would allow me to copy their journals to add to the information I obtained through the interviews. Again the participants were very cooperative and consented without hesitation. I encouraged them to fold or put a post-it note on any pages they were not comfortable sharing, but none chose to do so. The journals, which were collected and copied in their entirety, provided valuable insight into the resident teachers’ history in the Resident Teacher Program and perpetuated many questions for later interviews.

In mid-January, after the observation period, I conducted the first round of interviews with the mentor and resident teachers. The mentor was interviewed twice for a period of approximately one hour. Both of these sessions occurred in her office at Washington Elementary School, one during her preparation period and the other after school. The resident teachers agreed to be interviewed a total of three times. The three interviews with each of the resident teachers occurred between February 1 and April 22, 1999, with each lasting approximately one hour. At the first interview, I received the communication journals from the resident teachers which I copied, read, and used to develop questions for the second interview. The interviews with Susan and Michelle all occurred in their classrooms, either during their preparation period or shortly after school. Missy, who had already resigned from the program, and I had a more difficult time scheduling a meeting and finding an appropriate meeting place because she no longer lived in the Glacier community. We initially planned to meet at a coffee shop in the community in which she resided, but because of car troubles the interview ended up being conducted in her home. Missy chose to come to my home for the following two interviews.

The follow-up study at Jefferson Elementary School differed from that at Washington Elementary School in that I had already gathered background information regarding the structural and organizational nature of the Resident Teacher Program through interviews with the supervisors, resident mentors, and teachers from Washington Elementary School. The observation period during the pilot study had provided me with an understanding of the mentor’s daily functions and the nature of mentor/resident teacher interactions over the course of a day. Because of this, I chose not to repeat the observation period at Jefferson Elementary School; rather, I requested that the participants sign a
consent form allowing me to conduct a series of interviews that would be tape recorded and transcribed.

Lynne, the resident mentor at Jefferson Elementary School, was interviewed twice for a period of approximately one hour. Both interviews took place in the evening at my office on the campus of Northern State University. Interviews with the three Jefferson Elementary School resident teachers were scheduled to take place between April 22 and mid-June; however, two individuals had to be rescheduled and completed their last interview in July. Ken, Jeanine, and Kathy all chose to meet for the interview sessions at my office. The meetings generally occurred soon after the school day or early in the evening. Again, because of their busy schedules, the resident teachers chose to set future interview dates after each meeting rather than scheduling all three in advance.

**Participant Observation**

While participant observation was not a major component in the data collection it provided me with the background knowledge necessary to feel competent in proceeding with the first round of interviews. The brief period of participant observation allowed me to view the typical interactions between the mentor and resident teachers over the course of the day. During this time, I was able to observe the resident mentor work with the resident teachers in and outside of the classroom, model working with book clubs in small groups, conduct a brief writing session with a whole group of students, and pull students out of the resident teachers’ rooms to work with them independently. The data gathered were used in developing many of the questions used in the initial interviews with the resident teachers.

**Journal Analysis**

Much like the participant observation notes, the communication journals were not used in the process of data analysis; rather, they served to provide me, as an outsider, with a glimpse of the typical interactions between the mentor and resident teachers. Much of the communication journals consisted of questions from the resident teachers to their mentor and their mentor’s responses. It also revealed the range of emotions experienced by the resident teachers over the course of the year. In addition to providing this insight, the communication journals were also useful in developing additional questions for following interview sessions. By raising issues and discussions regarding past entries, I was able to
gather information pertaining to the resident teachers’ experiences during the first half of their year in the Resident Teacher Program as well.

Interviews

All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. The pilot study interviews at Washington Elementary School all occurred between February 1 and April 22, 1999. The follow up study at Jefferson Elementary School began immediately following the pilot study. Interviews with the participants from Jefferson Elementary School were conducted between April 22 and mid-July. The time, date, and place for the first round interviews were set with each participant during our initial meeting in which I explained the study and they signed their consent. Given the participants’ hectic schedules, they chose to schedule one interview at a time, rather than deciding on a time for all three. A few scheduling conflicts arose, such as staff meetings and assignment deadlines, but for the most part little had to be altered.

The interview format was very open-ended consisting of intentionally broad questions used to evoke broad responses that could be further probed for more detailed information. The first interviews consisted of general questions regarding the resident teachers’ educational history, decision to enter the field of elementary education, undergraduate and student teaching experiences, and their experiences thus far in the Resident Teacher Program. Many spontaneous probing questions were generated during the resident teachers’ responses to these broad questions. During this first interview, I also had the participants explain or describe the role of the university supervisor, resident mentor, resident teacher, and building principal as they saw them. To conclude the initial interview, I provided the resident teachers with a set of prompt cards, index cards marked with a key word or phrase. The words on the prompt cards included success, sad, important to me, torn between, frustrated, touched, angry, anxious, comfortable, and uncomfortable. The resident teachers were given the cards and instructed to respond in any way they chose to. Their responses to the prompt cards were generally brief but provided new avenues to probe further.

After the initial interview with each participant, I transcribed the session and read and reread the transcripts searching for questions that had gone unanswered, answers that
required further clarification, and new questions that arose in my own mind. This process of analysis was repeated after each participant interview. It was this process of analyzing each interview that generated issues to be explored and topics to be discussed in future meetings. Often, I would quote a statement from a previous interview to the participant and ask him or her to provide an example or further clarify or describe what he or she was feeling.

I found that for some of the resident teachers the tone of the interviews changed over the course of the study. Kathy, Susan, and Missy appeared to be very comfortable in the interview setting from the very beginning. The responses to my questions were quite extensive and required little probing. They seemed to be pleased to have the opportunity to share everything about themselves and their experiences. Michelle, Ken, and Jeanine, on the other hand, appeared very cautious during our first meeting. Before the end of the initial interview Ken and Jeanine had begun to open up and were freely discussing their experiences. Michelle remained cautious during both the first and second interview sessions. Her answers were well thought out and very brief. These two interviews required a great deal of probing. By the third interview Michelle appeared to be speaking much more freely. She did not hesitate in her responses and described events and emotions in much more depth than I had heard her before.

**Data Analysis**

Strauss and Corbin (1990) discussed the three major components of qualitative research. These include the data, the analytic or interpretive procedures, and the written and verbal reports. In this section, I will describe the second of these components as they relate to this study.

With a hard copy of the data set aside, I began the qualitative analysis process referred to by Seidel (1998) as iterative and progressive. Using the data analysis program Ethnograph, I began the four steps of phenomenological data analysis described by Creswell (1998):

1. The researcher first reads all descriptions in their entirety.
2. The author then extracts significant statements from each description.
3. These statements are formulated into meanings, and these meanings are clustered into themes.

4. The researcher integrates these themes into a narrative description. (p. 32)

Throughout the course of the study I consistently checked for validity by rephrasing questions and requesting clarification in follow up interviews. This was done to ensure that I had accurately captured the resident teachers' intended meaning. Multiple sources of data were collected through open-ended interviews with resident teachers, mentors, and university supervisors, as well as communication journals and related artifacts. Using multiple sources assisted me in making sure that the themes identified were consistent across all participants' experiences, albeit to varying degrees.

Throughout the interview process, I had been reading and rereading interview transcripts to assist in developing questions to gather further data. While doing so, I also began coding the transcripts by applying words or short phrases to identify a given section of an interview by its content. After I had coded and read through each transcript many times, I was able to eliminate code words that appeared to be redundant or were applied infrequently or inconsistently among the participants.

Although the code list was more manageable once it had been narrowed it was still too diverse to provide direction in identifying any common themes. I began to separate the codes by contrasting and comparing one to another. Codes that contrasted were separated and those that were similar in some respect were placed in categories. Each category in some way related to all of the codes that fell under it. An example of a category that evolved during this process would be that of mentor support. Codes that fell under this category included all references that the resident teachers made to the assistance they received from their mentor and included modeling, advice, feedback, planning, assistance, subbing, being there, accessible, student support, and knowing the children.

Through further study of the transcripts and categories it became evident that there was a story line that held the category together. These story lines were developed into statements about each category which I refer to as assertions. For example, after identifying mentor support as a category, I was able to focus my thoughts and further data analysis on what it was about mentor support that was being asserted across all of the
resident teachers' interviews. Narrowing my focus on this area, I was able to develop a sub-assertion regarding the category of mentor support. The sub-assertion is labeled #1b and is stated as follows: "Mentor support was the single most beneficial and influential aspect of this program."

Two assertions and their supporting sub-assertions were developed through this process of comparing and contrasting codes, categorizing them accordingly, and developing assertions about the categories through further analysis. The two main assertions are broad statements about the resident teachers' experiences. The sub-assertions under each assertion further support the statements by providing more specific support regarding the resident teachers' experiences. The first of the two main assertions is as follows: "There were aspects of the program that resident teachers valued and that contributed to their success." Two sub-assertions were identified that further supported this statement regarding the resident teachers' perceptions of their experience. The first of these is "The resident teachers valued their students and maintained a student centered focus regardless of the frustrations they experienced." The second supporting sub-assertion is stated as follows: "Mentor support was the single most beneficial and influential aspect of the program."

The second main assertion states, "Resident teachers felt deep frustration with aspects of their experience." The areas of frustration are more specifically addressed in the four accompanying sub-assertions: (a) Time management was an area of frustration for the resident teachers, (b) classroom management was an area of intense concern in the resident teachers' experience, (c) the grade level experience of the mentor affected the experience of the resident teacher, and (d) a lack of effective communication among participants in the Resident Teacher Program caused confusion regarding various roles and expectations.

After further analyzing the assertions and supporting sub-assertions that evolved through the process of data analysis, I was able to arrive at a theory, or umbrella theme, which encapsulated the resident teachers' experience in the Resident Teacher Program. My theory, or the umbrella theme, is stated as "The experience of the resident teachers was comparable to a roller coaster ride consisting of peaks and valleys, highs and lows."
The identified theme and assertions were presented to several of the study participants to be confirmed or denied. I met with two of the resident teachers personally to discuss the assertions and theme and contacted another resident teacher by phone to ascertain her feedback. All three of these individuals supported the assertions as stated and confirmed the theme.
CHAPTER III
DATA

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand the experience of master's students in an elementary education resident teacher program. The experiences of the resident teachers were generally defined as how resident teachers made meaning of their experiences as participants in a resident teacher program. In Chapter III, I describe the Resident Teacher Program as well as the supervisors, mentors, and resident teachers who participated in this study. Following the descriptions, I provide a brief background of each participant, addressing decisions and events that related to their development as educators. The background history will include a discussion of each resident teacher’s (a) decision to pursue a career in elementary education, (b) undergraduate memories and experiences, (c) student teaching experience, and (d) decision to apply to and their thoughts regarding the Resident Teacher Program.

Description of the Program

The Resident Teacher Program studied was first implemented at Washington Elementary School in 1992 in the large rural midwest community of Glacier. The program was established as a cooperative effort between the local university, Northern State, and the Glacier School District. In 1996 Jefferson Elementary School joined in the cooperative effort and is now the second site of the Resident Teacher Program.

To be eligible for the Resident Teacher Program, one must be a certified elementary educator who has not previously taught under contract. In the first year of instruction, resident teachers are enrolled as master's students and are provided with the assistance of an experienced mentor teacher. Entrance requirements of the program included meeting the university’s criteria for admission to the Master of Education in Elementary Education, a state teaching certificate, with the final resident selections being based on an interview with the building principal, mentor, and university supervisor. The Master of Education in
Elementary Education required that the resident complete 32 graduate credit hours which included 20 credit hours in elementary education, 6 credit hours of cognate (a related field of the resident's choice), and 6 credit hours of educational foundations course work. Included in the 20 elementary education credit hours were the 8 internship credits the resident teacher received for his or her work in the classroom. Additional degree requirements included the preparation and presentation of a portfolio and completing an independent study paper or project. Resident teachers were technically employed by the university as Graduate Service Assistants and received a stipend and tuition waiver.

Description of Participants

Resident Mentors

Resident supervisors, or mentor teachers, were experienced classroom teachers selected by a joint university/school committee. Mentor teachers were required to have a minimum of five years teaching experience and a master's degree in education. As mentors these experienced teachers agreed to support resident teachers in their first year of instruction. Mentors were released full time from teaching duties and committed half of their contract time to assisting resident teachers, one quarter time to the university teacher education program, and one quarter time to school-wide professional development.

Resident mentors provided the support needed to ensure a successful experience for the beginning teachers. The role of the resident mentor goes beyond that of a teacher to include friendship and trust. As a teacher and friend, the role of the mentor was expanded to include providing personal, emotional, academic, pedagogical, and moral support to the resident teachers (Johnson & Gates, 1998).

The two resident mentors at the time of this study were Donna and Lynne. Donna was in her third year as a resident mentor and was assigned Washington Elementary School. Donna was a graduate of Northern State University from which she received her bachelor's and master's degrees. Prior to her experience as a resident mentor, Donna had taught in the Glacier School District for close to 30 years. She described her grade-level experiences over the course of three decades:

I'm a K-3 teacher. Mostly early childhood, because that's always been my love, kindergarten. I spent probably 15 years as a kindergarten teacher. And I went to a
kindergarten/first grade transition room for a couple of years. Then I went to first grade . . . kind of making my way like baby steps here. Then I did a [first and second grade] combination [room]. Then I’ve been in a multi-age room . . . but most of it was kindergarten. That’s probably two thirds of what I’ve done, was kindergarten.

Donna’s teaching history consisted of primarily early childhood and primary education. In a discussion with her, I inquired as to whether she had ever considered teaching at the intermediate grade level. Her response was as follows:

Oh, no! A person that I worked with . . . he asked, “Would you ever like to try?,” and I said, “No way!” And at that time I said, “I’m not leaving kindergarten because they just love me, and I’m not leaving here.” Then he kind of got me into first grade, and then he kind of moved me into second grade, and I said, “Uh . . . uh” (shaking head to indicate no). He said, “Don’t worry about it. They’re just kindergartners in a big body.” Whenever I’m in a situation where I have to . . . I always think of him saying that. I always look at them and think “well, that’s probably true.” So I can handle it, but I’ve never wanted to teach older kids. I’ve always really liked younger kids.

Upon entering the Resident Teacher Program as a resident mentor, Donna had already had several experiences that related to her mentor duties. As a kindergarten and elementary teacher, Donna had supervised students for more than 20 years. She had also taught a methods and materials course at the university level before assuming the role of mentor.

Lynne, a first year mentor in the Resident Teacher Program, assisted the Jefferson Elementary School resident teachers. Lynne was also a graduate of Northern State University from which she had received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Her bachelor’s degree was in elementary and early childhood education, and after completing her undergraduate degree she pursued her kindergarten endorsement. Lynne taught in the Glacier School District for over 10 years. During that time she taught at the preschool, kindergarten, first, and second grade levels.
While Lynne's teaching history consisted of primary grade-level experiences, one of her professional goals had been to teach at the intermediate grade level. Through her experience as a mentor she was able to work with a resident teacher who taught at the intermediate level. She discussed her feelings about working with that age group after having had some exposure:

I really do enjoy the curriculum. I enjoy the age of the kids, and that's a nice change for me. As far as the intermediate grades go, I feel that discussions, asking questions, the critical thinking type of things, is at a much higher level, and I enjoy that. I feel that I can relate to [the intermediate grade-level students] a little bit better intellectually.

University Supervisors

University supervisors were university faculty members who consulted with the resident teachers and mentors. University supervisors led the resident teachers in a biweekly or monthly practicum each semester in which the resident teachers were provided with the opportunity to share their experiences, ask questions, and receive guidance in their graduate related requirements such as portfolios and independent studies.

Deb and Ruth were the two university supervisors during the 1998-1999 school year. Both women were literacy educators in the elementary education program at Northern State University. Ruth had been a professor at Northern State University since 1984 and had been actively involved with the Resident Teacher Program since the developmental stages. Prior to accepting an assistant professor position at Northern State University, Ruth taught at the elementary level for 14 years. Deb came to Northern State University as a professor in 1992, the same year that the Resident Teacher Program was being implemented, and she began working with the program soon after. Deb had taught at the university level since 1989. Prior to that she had taught at the elementary level for over 10 years.

Resident Teachers

Resident teachers were certified elementary educators who had not previously taught under contract. In their first year of instruction resident teachers were enrolled as master's students and were provided with the assistance of an experienced mentor teacher.
The sample for this study included the six resident teachers who participated in the program beginning the fall of 1998. Three of the resident teachers taught at Washington Elementary School and the other three were placed at Jefferson Elementary School. The following is a detailed description of each participant.

**Jeanine.** Jeanine was a soft spoken woman with a tall slender frame. She could not identify a home town as such as she had grown up in a military family and never remained in one place for too long. She settled in Glacier with her husband and intended to remain in one location for an extended period of time. Jeanine completed her undergraduate degree in elementary education in December 1997 at Northern State University and worked as a para-educator in the Glacier School District for the remainder of the school year. During her year in the Resident Teacher Program she taught first grade at Jefferson Elementary School. Jeanine was cautious about entering the study and chose to do so only after conferring with her peers who had already participated in an interview. Her caution faded as the interviews progressed and Jeanine openly shared her experience in the Resident Teacher Program.

Jeanine chose to be interviewed at my university office. She usually arrived in sweats having just returned from a workout, to which she accredited being able to maintain her sanity. She explained, “The thing that saves me from all of it is just making sure that I found some way to work out every day. To do something and just forget about school.”

Jeanine admitted that her decision to pursue a degree in elementary education came late in her academic career. Initially she was considering a career in the health care field and began work towards four different majors before she settled on education.

I didn't really have the ability to decide [on an academic major] until I'd done four other things. I came to school and I was going to be in Physical Therapy and then Nursing and then two more things. I've been a swim instructor since I was about 12 or 13 and then a lifeguard. I've worked with kids and I knew I either wanted to work with kids or work with babies or animals or something like that. And education just seemed like something that would be fun.

Reflecting back on her elementary education undergraduate course work Jeanine recalled “a lot of busy work” that she did not have the opportunity to apply, but she took
the opportunity to enhance her education with the experiences she believed to be most valuable, those in actual elementary classrooms. She recalls,

There wasn’t much time out in the classroom. I made sure that I had more time. I took more practicums, and did things so that I could be out in the classroom more, but as far as the class work went, it just seemed like busy work and we weren’t able to apply what we learned. But now looking back on it, I go back and read the books and I understand and I can use what I would have learned if I would have been applying it. But I had nowhere to apply it. So I wasn’t impressed.

Once in the Resident Teacher Program, Jeanine found her graduate studies to be much more beneficial than undergraduate course work because she had a classroom in which she could immediately apply new methods and ideas.

The graduate course work was much more beneficial than my undergraduate courses. I think the reason for that is that I was able to use it right away. Taking the classes I would think, “Oh, this is a good idea,” and I could try it the next day or the next week. It was right there for you.

Jeanine’s student teaching experience was unique in that her cooperating teacher began the year by introducing her to the students as a co-teacher, rather than a student teacher. Jeanine recalled how helpful that was and described her fourth grade student teaching experience as “wonderful.” Her cooperating teacher provided her with many opportunities to share and experiment with her ideas in the classroom setting. Jeanine explained,

I student taught in fourth grade at [Washington Elementary School]. I came in and I was able to say, “I want to do this. I want to teach two units.” And they were nutrition and geometry. I remember I came in a week before school started and I was able to say, “Oh, I really don’t like how you have the classroom set up. Can we change it?” And [my cooperating teacher] was open to that and I got to change that around, and help plan the year, even though I wouldn’t be there all year. And she put in the two units that I was going to teach.

While her cooperating teacher was quite traditional in her approach to education, Jeanine explained that she provided her with support and the freedom to try whatever she
wanted despite the differences in their approaches. Jeanine shared an example of the freedom she was provided despite the cooperating teacher’s traditional views. “She didn’t like kids in groups, but she let me do it. She let me put the kids in groups whenever I was teaching. But as soon as she was teaching they were back in their rows working at their desks.”

Jeanine learned about the Resident Teacher Program during a practicum in which she was assigned to a teacher involved with the program. At that time she decided to apply for the program. As she neared the end of her student teaching experience she began to question her decision. She felt that she was not ready to continue on in college, especially college in addition to full time teaching duties. “I didn’t want to apply anymore. I didn’t want to go to college anymore. I just . . . I kind of wanted to go to college, but I didn’t want to have to do it all in a year.” Days before the deadline she applied after several individuals encouraged her to do so. Jeanine described her decision:

The week of the deadline somebody came up to me and asked if I had applied, and then I had a whole bunch of other people telling me that I should. So it was like, “OK, I’ll apply. What does it really matter?” I applied and I didn’t really expect to get in. I didn’t care one way or the other.”

In discussions of her first year teaching experience in the Resident Teacher Program, Jeanine explained that she felt time management (in regard to the curriculum and district expectations) and student needs were the most difficult aspects of teaching to adjust to.

Trying to fit in everything that they want you to fit in. The curriculum, the principals, everybody . . . they want you to get character education in, they want you to get social studies, science, math, reading, writing . . . EVERYTHING in every day, or at least every week. And trying to fit it all in and covering . . . there’s so much to cover that you couldn’t get too deep into it. It was just too overwhelming. Not just for me, but for the students. If I followed the curriculum . . . they would not learn as much, but they’d be exposed to a lot more. And I don’t know which one is better, exposure or learning. I think learning, but the way
the curriculum is set up it’s exposure. So I chose the learning. Kind of the depth over breadth sort of thing. Balancing everything was hard.

When asked to describe her year in the Resident Teacher Program as a whole, Jeanine chose to base her description on what she had learned.

I think that I learned as much as my little first graders learned, and they learned a lot. Because at the beginning of the year I was so nervous and I wasn’t sure what I was exactly going to do, and it took me five hours at least, maybe six hours to plan my lessons for the week. I’d get there every morning before 7:00 and I’d leave at like 7:00 at night . . . just trying to get everything right. And by the middle of the year, about February, I was kind of getting the hang of it. Lesson plans were taking a couple of hours, and I didn’t stay as late. I left by at least 5:00. Towards the end of the year I could get there at 7:30 and leave at 4:00 and have all my lesson plans ready.

Jeanine went on to explain how her role as a student in the Resident Teacher Program further complicated her balancing act.

Between school, and school, just that whole balancing act between you’re a teacher first . . . that’s the way I was myself . . . I was a teacher first and then a student. And trying to make sure that I got the teaching part done, and still making it through the being a student part. That was also really hard. And then also trying to have a life splattered in there a little bit . . . not too much of one (laughs).

Jeanine was forced to make choices and prioritize her time in order to maintain her balancing act while keeping all the balls in the air. She shared her conscious decision to focus her efforts on the students while putting her own academics second.

I guess the course work took a back burner, because the children were so much more important. This is their only year in first grade, and they have so much they need to learn. No matter what grade I would have taught, they’re only in that grade for one year. The only time they’re going to have you as their teacher. And I just put everything into that. And then whatever time I had left I used to work on course work. I’d work on it at lunch or any other time that I could just sneak it in, because getting the classroom ready, getting my supplies ready, and being able to
do fun stuff with the kids, that was more important. Probably not what people want to know about this program... but... it was a lot to expect. But we knew that going into it and I took a heavy load during the summer and that helped a lot.

Jeanine discussed the important role that her mentor played in her experience in the Resident Teacher Program. She recalled an almost instant feeling of connectedness and security in her relationship with her mentor. Jeanine felt that she and her mentor shared a similar teaching philosophy and that hers was only further strengthened by her mentor’s influence. Jeanine described her philosophy:

I think that I need to teach the kids what they need to learn, and I like to find out what they already know and connect that to whatever they need to know or want to learn. I need to make sure that it’s in a fun environment where everyone feels safe to take risks, and they feel like they can make mistakes and other kids aren’t going to laugh at them.

Jeanine went on to describe her mentor’s teaching philosophy:

Hers seemed to match mine pretty well. She and I were just really soft spoken and then she taught me to be even a little bit more soft spoken, and make sure that the students knew what the rules were, but then you weren’t gruff about it. You just kind of went around and made sure that everyone was doing what they needed to be doing, and if they aren’t you talked to them quietly. And she was pretty much the same way. You want to keep it light and cheerful, but at the same time everybody knew what they needed to be doing. So kind of a balance there, and there was a mutual respect between the kids and her. So I think that [her teaching philosophy] was pretty much the same as mine.

Over the course of the interviews Jeanine frequently spoke about the importance of maintaining the “balance of mutual respect” between herself and her students and how that strengthened her classroom environment and helped to limit concerns regarding discipline. Jeanine explained how she created the balance to which she often referred:

I just had to kind of establish it right from the beginning. The kids helped me make the rules and then I had them sign it saying that they would follow those rules, and then they were sent home. Then throughout that first week I would read stories that
had to do with respect or other rules, and we just continuously reminded each other of what we’re doing. And then bringing in fun things for the kids to do, like maybe pulling plants apart and they can figure out what the different parts are, instead of just looking in a book. They get to feel it and then maybe they’ll color something . . . a little book or something that goes with it. I think that being able to laugh with them . . . some people say, “Don’t smile until November,” and that’s just crazy to me. You have to smile the first day, I think. And let the kids know that you’re there to help them. You’re not there to boss them around. And when they ask “Why?” you give them a reason why . . . not just “Because I said so.” And if that’s your answer, then maybe it’s not a good rule. Maybe it’s not something that should have been set. So having the kids help, that kind of brings the trust in, and then reminding everybody. I would remind them and they would remind me. We would all remind each other, and that just helps to build a community and it kept it so we could laugh.

While Jeanine discussed the cavalier attitude she took about the importance of getting into the Resident Teacher Program initially, she freely discussed how pleased she had been with the opportunities and learning experiences provided through the program. She stated how she felt she had grown and benefited from her experience.

I think that it made me a lot more confident . . . I know it did. It made me a lot more confident to go into a new school, because I’m in a new school this year that I had never been to, and I can walk into anybody’s room and just say, “Do you know anything about this?” I had to do that last year and I think that that has helped me a lot. Also having had someone there to just say, “Just do it! Go out there and try it and do it!” So I think being more confident, not just in being in the school, but also in the classroom and in teaching the kids. And also I think that just having the time to grow, and having help there if you needed it.

Michelle. Before my first interview with Michelle, I spent some time observing in her first grade classroom at Washington Elementary School. Michelle was a petite young woman with a slight frame. Her soft, calming voice seemed to draw the students in and when she spoke all attention was focused on her. Michelle completed her undergraduate
work at Northern University and student taught at Washington Elementary School. After completing her degree in December she continued on as a para-educator at Washington Elementary School.

Although education was not the first major she pursued, Michelle stated that teaching was always in the back of her mind. She explained how her interests came to focus specifically on elementary education.

[Teaching] was kind of in the back of my mind, even in high school. I came to Northern State University and I majored in a couple of other things, and then I decided to go for teaching. Originally I was going to major in Special Education, but then once I had some experiences in a regular classroom I kind of knew that’s what I wanted to do, versus the Special Education. I don’t think there’s ever been a time where I thought, “Gosh, maybe I should be an accountant or something.” I think this is the career that I’d stay in if I had to choose.

Michelle felt that her undergraduate studies at Northern University provided her with a “good base” for entering the teaching field. In selecting her courses she intentionally covered a broad range of areas, such as reading, math, science, and special education, rather than specializing in any one. The most valuable aspect of Michelle’s undergraduate experience was the time she spent in elementary classrooms.

That’s where I learned the most I guess, and where I got to see real life teaching. I got to see which things I had learned in class applied to what I might be doing in the classroom and which things maybe wouldn’t.

Michelle student taught in a third grade classroom at Washington Elementary School, the same school she would teach at as a resident teacher. She felt that student teaching provided her with an opportunity to better understand herself as a teacher while working with and observing an “expert.” She described her experience:

It was great because I got to see things I had learned in my course work at Northern State University would actually work in a classroom. It was a place where student teachers kind of tried out all these new ideas that you had heard about and learned about as an undergrad. To see if they worked . . . if I like them . . . if it was me.
It helped me to develop my teacher style, and it was wonderful because I had a chance to observe a really good teacher. She worked with me a lot. Just the little things of teaching that you don’t always think about, like the procedural types of things. Management and that kind of thing. She was a great role model. She shared her system with me; she said, “This is what I do, and it may work for you, or it may not.” But I know a lot of the things I use now in my room are ideas I’ve gotten from her . . . from what I remember working.

During her student teaching experience Michelle grew in her classroom management and her understanding of special needs students. She recognized both of these areas as strengths of her cooperating teacher. Michelle explained how her cooperating teacher interacted with the students and described her classroom management style.

I would say her style was . . . the kids knew what she expected from them. She was very clear with that and she was consistent with her plan. She tried lots of different management plans, and so she had to be very consistent with all the kids for each of them [management plans]. She tried to never single out a student, but just to kind of make eye contact or kind of just go over and be close to them. Talk to them in private and try to work something out. She made them feel responsible for their behavior.

In addition to classroom management and working with students with special needs, Michelle described additional areas of strength modeled by her cooperating teacher. She knew her kids so well. And she was fair and consistent with them. She was understanding and caring as a teacher. She would listen to her kids. . . . She is very organized. She had some plans that were very well put together and she really made good use of resources. She had been a teacher for so long that she was unbelievably organized.

While she learned a great deal from her cooperating teacher, Michelle admitted that they had different teaching philosophies.

I would say that she is pretty traditional as far as she doesn’t do a lot . . . she doesn’t have the time to do a lot of Readers Workshop, Writers Workshop, and that
sort of thing. So I would consider her more textbook based and more traditional that way.

Although she had a very comfortable relationship with her cooperating teacher, Michelle admits that she did not try a lot of the new ideas she had hoped to because of their different teaching styles, and the [student] make-up of the classroom.

I’m not a teacher that teaches strictly out of the textbook and follows that. And in that classroom, that was more her style and more the way she taught. So I didn’t try a lot of those new things. Especially with the type of class we had. Because they were the kids who if you changed one little thing they just went nuts. So, I wasn’t able to try as many things as I am this year.

After completing her student teaching in December 1997, Michelle decided that she was not ready to return to school. After the Resident Teacher Program application deadline had been extended for the second time, she was approached by the principal at Washington Elementary School who encouraged her to apply for the program. Michelle described why she entered the Resident Teacher Program.

I thought that it was a great opportunity to get my master’s. My husband was going to be here anyway working on his degree, and so I had thought about applying to the program and that just kind of finalized my decision. Just knowing that it would work out time wise, and knowing that there would be no other school that I could go to as a first year teacher and get the support that I could get this way. That’s kind of why I did it.

While Michelle realized that participating in the Resident Teacher Program would be a great opportunity, she also explained why she struggled with the decision and how she came to apply.

I originally wasn’t going to apply and then I didn’t apply, and the deadline was extended because they had so few applicants. And then I didn’t apply again because I was ready to be done with school. I had graduated and I had worked for a semester. I really liked going home and having my evenings to myself . . . and, I didn’t know if I could do it. I had a lot of self-doubt about whether I could handle it. I’m just a person that if I’m in a classroom, I need to feel like I’m giving 100%
to my kids and I thought if I have classes on top of having students ... am I going to be able to devote the time that I want to my kids? I wrestled with that for a long time. So then I really thought about it, and it works out perfectly with my husband’s time frame and as long as we are going to be here it’s a smart way to get your master’s and I should do it. So I kind of decided then.

In our discussions of her experiences in the Resident Teacher Program, Michelle frequently addressed the important role her mentor played. She described the relationship she had with her mentor:

I would say that it is one of friendship, and also one that is a co-teacher with you. I guess our relationship has been one that has very much been a friendship and a colleague, on both levels. We’ve talked about other things besides school, and she’s helped me with both avenues ... in personal life and school.

Michelle valued the support she received from her mentor and referred to the reassurance she felt knowing that there was always someone there to listen, support her, and provide her with advice. She explained how having a mentor had assisted her in a variety of ways.

Just knowing that she is always available in case an emergency would come up. I know that there is someone here who can kind of give me some advice, or point me in a direction. If I have ... before I have had a question on how to deal with a parent, or how to deal with another teacher ... if I’m not sure how to approach it, or if I should. She is very good at bouncing ideas off of. You know? Giving me an honest opinion about what I should do.

Michelle provided a specific situation in which she turned to her mentor for ideas and opinions.

At report card time I had a little girl who [I] was having a lot of trouble with in the classroom as far as she wasn’t participating. She was very withdrawn, and very stubborn, and wouldn’t work. She was not paying attention at all. I wasn’t sure as to how to contact the parents. If I should call or write or what would be a practical way of saying that, or what would be a tactful way to comment on that on the report card. I remember asking [my mentor], “Where do I take this concern? Is it
something that you would write in a report card, or do you need to send a letter along with it?" That kind of thing.

Michelle explained that if she had a concern her mentor would be the first person she would approach. She discussed why it was her mentor she felt the most comfortable going to.

I guess she’s always the first person that I go to, because she knows my classroom so well, and she has watched me so much. I feel that she probably knows my teaching style better than anyone else, because of the amount of time she has spent with me.

Michelle also discussed why it was so important to her that her mentor became a part of her classroom and familiarized herself with the students.

I guess so much of how I see myself as a teacher ... the basic view I have of myself as a teacher is based on my kids. I mean they are what makes me what I am, really. Anything that happens is always because of them, and so if I need to go to her with something she can say, “Oh yeah, I can see why that would be going on,” or “I’ve noticed that too,” or “Here’s something I would do if I were in your shoes.” Or something like that. And Donna has done a super job of getting to know my kids. I mean just like the family that was just in ... the boy had been having some things go on and I have asked Donna what to do. “Did I do the right thing? What’s the next step?” That kind of thing. Because she knew the situation, because she knows my class and that child, she was able to make some suggestions and give me some guidance.

Michelle explained that her relationship with Donna, and her expectations of her as a mentor, had changed over the course of the year as she became more confident in herself. She described the change:

At the beginning [of the year] she would come in and read my journal and respond. I guess that one thing ... as far as expectations ... I guess that maybe I expected that she would do more teaching, and that I would observe more of her teaching my kids. But from the very beginning it was more that she would come in, and she might watch a little ... and still that’s kind of what it’s like. I don’t think that it has
changed a whole lot. I think that as the year has gone on I have begun to feel much more comfortable. In the beginning you’re kind of nervous about having someone else come in and watch what you’re doing, and wonder what they’re thinking. Now she is such a part of the room that it’s no big deal to have her come in and spend whatever amount of time.

Michelle shared the expectations she had for the role the university supervisor would play in her experience in the Resident Teacher Program: “From my university advisor I expected them to come in and observe and give me feedback on what they noticed and what they saw, and make suggestions.” She described how the university supervisor component of the program had been different than what she had expected. “They haven’t come out nearly as much as I thought they would to watch in my room. I haven’t gotten much feedback from them, I guess as far as on my teaching and that kind of thing.”

Michelle described the feedback she had gotten from a brief observation:

Ruth came into my room once and sat down and wrote down kind of what I was doing. But nothing . . . it was just kind of what she saw. There was no constructive criticism or anything . . . it was . . . nothing that she really commented on. It was just a list of what you were doing. It wasn’t positive or negative; it was just in the middle . . . neutral. Just kind of like, “This is what Michelle said, and this is what Michelle did.” And that was it. And she always said she was going to come back and do where she would write down everything that I say, and we would have a meeting about everything that went on, and that never happened. It really didn’t [help me], because it was just so neutral. I mean . . . I guess I reread it, but I already knew what I did and knew what I said. So it didn’t really do anything for me.

Michelle also explained what she would ideally like to see from the university supervisors.

With the university component, I think that I would like to see a more close relationship between the advisor and advisee. I think that I would have . . . especially the first semester, been really more appreciative of someone coming in
and sitting down and telling me, "These are the things you're doing well. These are some suggestions that I have." Something . . . more feedback that way.

In discussing the required course work that accompanied her first year of teaching, Michelle described the practical classes that she could immediately apply to her classroom as the most beneficial. She described the two courses that she felt had been the most helpful for this reason:

The summer reading class I had was basic reading, reading diagnosis and remediation, and reading clinic. That was a great class. Because I got to work with two kids that were going into second grade . . . two struggling readers. I really learned, and I really got the time to sit down individually with kids and just really zero in on what kinds of readers they were and what I could do to help them. I think that was a good class to have prior to coming in [to the classroom], because it really refreshed my memory. I had a math practicum, and that was good because I got to work on stuff that I would have done [later] that I wanted to do with my kids. I knew things that I wanted to do, but I really felt I needed to have some units to supplement the math curriculum of second grade. [The math practicum] gave me a chance to do that.

While initially Michelle valued what she considered to be "practical" classes over those that were more theoretically based, as the year progressed and her experiences in the classroom increased, she was able to find practical purposes for both. She explained her reaction to having to take Social Foundations of Education and how her feelings changed when she found she could apply what she was learning to her classroom.

[Social Foundations of Education] is actually a lot better than I thought it would be. I thought, "Oh, another foundations class!" But I really kind of looked more closely into some of the things that I've noticed about my kids. Some ethnic things, or just things that I've noticed that I want to find out about. I've really paid more attention to those things in that class. So it's been good. We studied poverty, and I have one little boy in particular that really falls into that category, I guess. So I did my midterm on just examining all the effects of poverty and cognitive development. I kind of looked back on all the research and found some things that
kind of really applied to him and can help me make sense of kind of where he's at. It helps explain . . . or it doesn't really explain, but it gives me some examples of things that have probably affected him.

In addition to the evening course work required of the resident teachers they were also required to attend a practicum meeting which met once or twice a month over the course of the academic year. The university supervisors took turns running the practicum meeting. Ruth was responsible for the meeting during the first semester and Deb for the second. Michelle discussed how she felt about making this change mid-year.

I had both good and bad feelings I guess. I liked Ruth's style and there wasn't that extra [work] to do for practicum. But with Deb it's nice to have that also, because we need to get started on our independent studies and our portfolios. And Deb really is a lot more organized as far as . . . "you need to have this, this, and this done, and make sure you're doing it, and get these things done." When Ruth ran the practicum we more or less just met as a group and we kind of went around the room and talked about how it was going and we would share stories . . . and it was nothing that was [college] related, like our portfolios or independent studies . . . it was more of a "How are you doing?" kind of time.

While Michelle enjoyed the discussion times they had in practicum, she felt that she would have liked that time to have been more focused on the requirements of the program.

It was nice to see everyone, and it was nice to have some time to kind of hang out . . . but I guess that I felt that it could have been more productive. I wish that we would have gotten going earlier on our portfolios, and that we would have been told a little earlier about all of the components of the independent study. So that we could have been thinking about that a little bit more ahead of time.

Looking back on her decision to enter the Resident Teacher Program, Michelle was pleased with her experience, but admits that she would have taken a regular first year teaching position if the opportunity had been there. "I knew that I wanted to get [my master's degree], but I would have rather waited until later in my career."

Michelle described her time in the Resident Teacher Program as her first year of teaching was coming to a close:
I would describe it as a year where I have never learned so much. I learned something new every day... I mean I’ve learned more from my kids that I could from any college class ever. It’s all hands on... it’s all practical. I think that the year as a whole I would just describe as a time to learn something new every single day. It’s a year that makes you realize what you have inside. You’re doing something that you thought maybe you could never handle. You kind of figure out that “Yeah, I can handle these things” or “I can’t handle these things.” You figure out that you have limits. You have to learn that you have to make time for yourself. That you can’t have your life completely devoted to school or you’ll drive yourself crazy.

While Michelle experienced a wide range of emotions over the course of the year she explains why she would do it again:

I would do it again, because I know that if I wouldn’t have done it, I would have regretted it. It has been a lot of work and there are days where I really think, “What am I doing? Should I have done this? Is this really worth it?” But then I think... I look back now at the beginning of the year... and all of the days I went home tired... I look back and think that I am glad that I did it. I’m glad... look, the year is more than half over... and I’m still alive. I’m still getting things done. So I think looking back that I would have to say that I would do it again. I think that I have become more confident in my teaching, in that I’m not afraid to try things... like a certain method or whatever. I pretty much try whatever... (laughing) and hopefully it works. I think that I have gotten more comfortable in the classroom and more comfortable with my kids.

Susan. Susan could best be described as bubbly and enthusiastic. She greeted all with a bright warm smile that, whether intentional or not, conveyed the message that she had been waiting the entire day to see you. Susan was an extremely sensitive and caring individual who was easily brought to tears over discussion of family, concern for friends, and issues involving students. Given the depth of her sensitivity, I was surprised by her openness and willingness to share her most personal thoughts and emotions.
Susan was the only participant in this study who would be classified as a nontraditional student. She attended Northern State University, but before deciding to pursue her undergraduate degree in elementary education, she had already established herself in a career and begun a life with her husband and two children. Susan felt that she may have gleaned more from her undergraduate studies than her younger counterparts simply because of her life experiences in the working world and as a mother. This was obvious in discussions with her. Susan passionately discussed the “rich theoretical background” she developed as an undergraduate and continued to develop as a graduate student, something that was not addressed by other participants. She shared a discussion she had taken part in in which the teachers at Washington Elementary School were debating the usefulness of the philosophy studied at Northern State University.

We had this discussion at lunch the other day that Northern State University is very constructive . . . which they should be. But you come out of there very grounded in that philosophy and you almost feel like you’re sinning if you do the opposite. And we had this discussion at lunch because it’s a very widespread belief [that] when people leave NSU they’re saying it wasn’t reality. But, as I said in their defense, it was good. I am full of philosophy. I know how it can be, now I have to blend reality and that philosophy and I’m better off having that philosophy behind me so I can meet in the middle. But their criticism at lunch was that teachers don’t . . . that NSU students do not come prepared to teach because they are textbook afraid. They’re afraid of the textbooks, they don’t know how to use them. Which is true, we don’t get a lot of training in that. But for me, it was okay to learn about the textbooks on the job and have that wonderful philosophy behind me. But perhaps for everybody else, they get lost and it’s too hard for them . . . they can’t blend the two. For me, it’s been a wonderful journey to go from that rich writing workshop, hands on math, hands on science, and then incorporate all that plus the use of textbooks a little bit, and meet in the middle.

Susan student taught in the Glacier School District at the fifth grade level. She described the first day she entered the classroom: "[My cooperating teacher] is just so nice
and sweet and welcomed me. And this group of perfect children were sitting there... I mean, they liked each other. I went through the whole thing enjoying it... loving it.”

Susan referred to her cooperating teacher as being traditional but described how she allowed her to try anything and supported and validated her efforts. “[My cooperating teacher] was so traditional, and she’d laugh at me a little bit like, ‘Oh, you’ll find out. Ha, ha, ha. All your methods don’t work. He, he, he. But go ahead and try them all.’” While Susan took the opportunity to try everything she had learned in her undergraduate studies, it was obvious that her cooperating teacher felt these methods were a stage that she would soon pass through. “She liked some of my ideas, I mean she validated me in every way she could. But then she’d also slip in there, ‘But you’ll learn... you have to do certain things.’”

Susan’s cooperating teacher had previously worked in special education and assisted her in developing a better understanding of working with students with special needs. Susan also described learning about the importance of warmth and how to be gentle yet firm with the students. While Susan was pleased with her student teaching experience she described what she had hoped for.

What I’d hoped for, of course, was a cutting edge person trying all these things... a little Northern State University prototype doing everything I had read about. So in that way it was disappointing, but in every other way it was wonderful.

While Susan thoroughly enjoyed her student teaching experience and her cooperating teacher, she was ready to have a classroom of her own by the end of the semester. She described realizing that she was ready to move on.

I mean 16 weeks is too long for me, because if I’m not in control, I’m not very happy. I liked to watch and I learned a lot from [my cooperating teacher], but after a while it’s like, “Ugh! When is it my turn?” Especially science. I had some great lessons but then on the two weeks that it was [my turn to teach full time], she wanted me to pick what to do of her stuff, because of course you get behind and she had a lot of things to cover. So that wasn’t a lot of fun that week because it was like, “OK, it’s social studies time. Take out your books. Read it together, da, ta, da, ta, da... And I got a little frustrated and I was very ready to leave. I so
adore her, she's just wonderful, but she was glad to see me go too. Not in a bad way, but she said it was time to get control back of her class.

Susan identified two factors that played a role in her decision to apply to the Resident Teacher Program. One of these she identified as the opportunity to have the support of someone with experience. However, the key factor in Susan’s decision was her desire to secure a teaching position in the Glacier School District, which is an extremely competitive district. Susan discussed the two key factors in her decision.

I wanted a job, that’s really the biggest thing. Because I wanted to stay here, and I wanted to teach and getting an interview in this town is difficult, and I knew that I would be guaranteed that. And also because of the support. Because when else can you have a year with somebody checking in on you daily ... to help you. I thought, “Wow! What an opportunity to have the support of somebody with experience, to have Northern State University behind you ... to get it all done.”

Susan explained her feelings on the master’s degree aspect of the Resident Teacher Program and described a conversation that she had with a former mentor.

The master’s wasn’t that important to me, and [a former mentor] said to me, ... and she says this to everyone that’s thinking about the program, “Don’t do it unless you really want your master’s. Because you’ll kick yourself for the time you’re spending on your graduate work.” And what she is saying is that if you love teaching, teach first. Do the master’s second. And that’s me ... but I ... to get a job here you have to have an in, and this is my in.

Although Susan would have preferred to have had more classroom experience before beginning work on her master’s degree, she found the required course work to be beneficial to her teaching. She found what she referred to as “practical” courses to be particularly appealing because she was able to immediately apply what she learned to her classroom. However, she also valued the classes that were from a more philosophical point of view, such as those she took to fulfill her educational foundations requirement. Susan explained, “I think that the foundations [classes] are more long-term, long-range benefits. It just helps you think past your lesson plan today. It helps you kind of see the big picture.” Susan sensed that she saw more value in these philosophy and theory courses
than her "younger counterparts" because she had a broader base of life experiences to relate the information to. She explained her interest in one such course compared to that of her peers.

Educational Thoughts . . . that was interesting. But again that’s a class [where] my age helps me because I just had more experiences. I think some [students] . . . it kind of went over their heads. I’m not meaning that in a condescending way, but that their perspective is different than somebody who has either taught for awhile, or has had more life experiences.

In her first year of teaching Susan experienced what she referred to as “culture shock,” from what she thought teaching would be and from what it was. She explained her misconceptions and feelings of doubt when she first began the school year.

I guess I always thought that the kids would be . . . come a little more prepared to learn . . . a little more prepared to cooperate. And I wasn’t prepared for [on] the second day of school to be offered sympathy from every teacher in the school that had had [the] same children. In one way it was a positive because I thought maybe it was me . . . I thought I have made a $20,000 mistake. I thought, “Oh my gosh! What have I done?” Because that’s about the financial burden I had placed on my family . . . which comes with some guilt. Then there is the opportunity cost, because I was making . . . well, I wasn’t making that much, but still when you go from making something to making nothing, plus borrowing money . . . you’ve got an investment. So it took me until . . . after Christmas vacation to really know that I am in the right place . . . I’d have these flashes of breakthroughs with kids, or enjoyment in my day. I mean at first there was nothing I liked about it . . . I liked nothing about it.

While Susan struggled with what she referred to as a “hectic and overwhelming” schedule she could easily identify what she found satisfying. She described the growth she had seen in herself and her students over the course of the year.

I guess what I consider satisfying is seeing growth in children and growth in myself as a teacher. I have to look hard sometimes for both. But like today . . . Writers Workshop, I mean I can see why people don’t do this. I can see why it
wouldn’t work in some groups. And then today, it went much, much better, and I
did a status of the class to find out where everybody is and some people were really
making headway. They had edited. And I think through those little editing
conferences, as short as they are, they’ve learned things about grammar, they’ve
learned things about punctuation, they learned more than [they would have with]
me standing up there lecturing them or doing workshops. That’s satisfying. And
then looking at the teaching and how I handle children. I mean, things that would
have totally shaken me at the beginning of the year, now I approach them very
calmly. Even though I still don’t like them. I’m not always calm . . . but . . . And
I’m seeking outside support more. Whether it’s right or not, I’m not sure. But
behavior problems are so bad sometimes that today two kids went to the office and
it had to be done. So in the beginning I didn’t want any of that, because I didn’t
want anyone to think I wasn’t managing it well, but these two needed to go to the
office, and they went. And I felt good about that decision, and I didn’t doubt
myself as I did in the beginning of the year. So that’s growth in me as a teacher.
Susan described how Donna, her mentor, had helped her to start the school year,
and how her role as the mentor changed over the course of the year.

At the beginning of the year, before school, we sat down and made up the
schedule. Donna answered all types of building questions and scheduling
questions, and first day things to expect. To have extra things planned, and all
those kinds of things. Where now she has an active role in Book Club, which she
helped me get started. But she allowed me to take ownership of them shortly after.
She’s very good at preparing kids to do things, which is something I . . . you
know, she kept saying, “Get them used to it. Teach how to go to the bathroom,
when to go. Teach when it’s okay to get a drink.” And after awhile I thought,
“Oh, please!” . . . I didn’t get that, but she was absolutely right. But you don’t
know that. Like I said, you have to find out for yourself. So she was very good
about things like that. And I think at first that maybe . . . she was a little more . . .
in the classroom a little bit more. She took some notes and observed and pointed
some things out. Like early on in math, that . . . she thought that I was letting the
kids run the lesson too much... that was like in a book lesson. And I think that that is my effort to stay student centered and be student responsive. But she was right, I had to watch it a little bit more and get more control of it. And I’ve learned that. Otherwise... she reads my journal. I guess for me the journal is sometimes... a place to vent, and for me, I have to write it down and get it out, or talk it out. And I think that Donna viewed it more as a question/answer type of thing. So I haven’t been using it as much as before because oftentimes my questions would be embedded in a philosophical question or a complaint of some kind, and it was harder for her to answer.

While Susan received a great deal of support from her mentor, she also credited her success in the Resident Teacher Program to supportive personnel of Washington Elementary School. She described her feelings about her experiences with the faculty.

I can’t get over the people here. I’ve e-mailed the principal after meetings that I have walked away from feeling like I have been here for years, because they don’t treat me any differently. But yet they give me that support. At Teacher Assistance Team meetings they honor everything I say... I mean I never thought that it would be that way. I mean, if I knew somebody was a first year teacher, I would take that into consideration when they came in with a problem. They don’t, and it’s just so awesome. They are just so wonderful.

In a later interview where Susan was discussing what aspects of the program had been helpful to her, she again addressed the importance the supportive staff at Washington Elementary School had played in her success. “The fact that Washington is the type of school that continually accepts people who are still learning, and that they accept them and embrace them and support them, probably is the overriding thing that makes the program work.”

Susan struggled with student behavior, classroom management, and a rigorous schedule throughout the year and credits her survival and success to the understanding and support of her husband and children.

My husband, bless his little heart, knew it would be like this, and last night I came home and... (whispering, eyes tearing) I could just cry thinking about it...
whenever he’s home if he hasn’t been at work I stay late, do my stuff, go to class, and come back. And I pull into the driveway, open the garage door, and I can smell supper. He greets me at the door, he takes whatever I’m carrying, puts it in the kitchen, says, “Welcome home, go get comfortable,” and I go “blah, blah, blah” (moving hand to mimic talking) about my day. The kids come in and say, “Hi, mommy,” and I feel bad for a minute and he’ll say, “They’re fine.” And then he puts food in front of me, lets me vent, and if I cry a little he says, “Hang in there, you’re doing this for all of us.” . . . Can you believe him (laughs with tears)? That’s the way he is . . . he takes care of me and tells me that it is all going to be worth it . . . and he cooks great, and he’s a good dad . . . I’m lucky. I could not do it without the support of my husband. Even if he had said, “Oh, are you sure you want to do that [apply for the program]?” It wouldn’t have worked. But he said, “Do it. It will be good . . . it will be good for you. You’ll learn a lot.”

Susan described the unconditional support she received from her family and explained how she determined her success based not on feedback from the mentor or supervisors, but rather on that provided by her family.

My personal success . . . and I don’t know about what happens in room twelve, but I’m a success at home, and that’s what matters. They’re proud of me no matter what I do. So that’s what success is really. I mean, when it’s all said and done, if you’re a success with your kids and your husband, you’ve got the battle pretty much won. Go out there and give the rest of it your best shot.

Kathy. Kathy was another Northern State University graduate and had also student taught within the Glacier School District. I had met Kathy prior to this study as she student taught with a teacher at the school where I was teaching. Kathy was a confident, outspoken young woman with a bright smile and a strong voice. Interviews with her were virtually effortless as she expanded on all of her thoughts and experiences, freely describing them with no need for additional questions or probes.

Kathy admitted that education was not her first choice as an undergraduate student and recalls referring to others as “crazy” for entering what she considered to be an
under appreciated, underpaid field. She initially considered several careers in the health care profession before being swayed to consider teaching by an enthusiastic friend.

I always said that I was never going to be a teacher, because I was one of those kids that . . . I did talk a lot, but I looked around a lot too. And you saw what teachers went through. I mean, when you are in high school, you see what they go through, you really do. At least if you’re perceptive to that. I had jumped from major to major, and then finally I was talking to a friend of mine . . . and I said, “I have to figure out what I am going to do with my life.” I mean, this was like the end of my sophomore year, if not the beginning of my junior year. I didn’t have a clue yet. And I asked him what his major was and he told me. And I said, “I’m going to go talk to those people over there.” And by this time I’m 20 years old.

Kathy recalled beginning her elementary education course work and finding that for the first time she enjoyed being part of a class. She initially struggled with aspects of education that were unfamiliar to her, but found that as she spent more time in the classroom everything became more clear.

It was the first time that I actually got into the classes. And I was enjoying it, and I enjoyed the people, and I enjoyed doing it, once we got to start teaching lessons and stuff. And I don’t know . . . I wouldn’t say that I was good at it . . . I mean, I struggled with writing lessons, the actually writing out the objectives and stuff like that, because I hadn’t done it before. But once you get into the classroom, it was a lot easier. But it wasn’t the easiest decision.

While Kathy enjoyed her undergraduate studies, she felt that she could have used more exposure to all content areas. She felt that she was especially lacking in her background for teaching reading, phonics, and social studies. Kathy discussed what she remembered about her undergraduate course work.

I enjoyed the science courses. I took two or three of them, and I think that I should still have taken more. I don’t think that there are enough [courses on] reading, or how to teach children how to read, or how to teach them to become better readers. There’s not enough of that at all. There’s no phonics. In my personal belief, teachers do need to know a little bit about phonics, and I knew nothing. I mean, I
can read, but that doesn’t mean that I know how to teach phonics. If I would have been placed in a first grade classroom this year, I would have been in trouble, because you need a steady balance of phonics and whole language, and you don’t get that here [at Northern State University]. I didn’t learn anything about reading strategies or how to work with kids on reading until I was in graduate school. I learned how to do literature ideas and projects, but that’s different than working with kids on how to read. Writing . . . I liked writing. I had Mrs. X. She offered a lot of ideas and I enjoyed her class. We did a lot of different projects, and she actually let us write. We got to become writers, and that was good. There wasn’t enough social studies, and the teacher I had . . . was gone a lot. So we either didn’t have class, or someone else would come in. My social studies background is lacking. Off and on, I rely on the book maybe more than I should. I enjoyed math . . . I don’t think that I had enough of it . . . Maybe one or two classes. I don’t remember. And [the professor] does a very nice job in math, and exposes us to so much. And that is so hard because math is so widespread that she would do one lesson on area and perimeter, and that would be the only exposure that we would get to it . . . one lesson. But the good thing is that we got to work with manipulatives. I go back to that when I teach. If I didn’t know that . . . how to work with all of the different manipulatives . . . I wouldn’t have a clue. She also helped us develop the note card system. She would do a lesson for us, and while she was doing it we would be writing it down on a note card. So now I have a little binder full of note cards just with math lessons that she did. I still go into that binder.

Kathy was initially assigned to student teach with a first grade teacher who was moved to a kindergarten/grade one combination room. Because Kathy did not have a degree in early childhood, she had to be reassigned and requested a sixth grade placement. She described her cooperating teacher as “very caring” and willing to work with her.

Student teaching was really good. I was lucky. I was placed in a sixth grade classroom, which I asked for after the other one fell through. I was really nervous, [I] didn’t know a thing about older kids . . . but I didn’t know a thing about
younger kids either (laughs) . . . so. I was lucky, because [my cooperating teacher] was so willing to work with me. She would sit down and explain things to me, and try to get me to see the big picture. And that took . . . I think until December . . . to see the big picture of teaching and where you’re going with it. For social studies I did learn a lot from [my cooperating teacher]. She was very caring, and she spent time with me . . . and I think that that is the most important thing.

Kathy learned how to develop long-term plans with the cooperating teacher modeling her process by “thinking out loud” as she gathered thoughts and materials for a lesson or unit. The first time that I ever sat down and wrote lesson plans was with her. She would just say, “Today we are going to do this.” And I would lean over and copy off of hers. But I think that that is the only way that you learn. And to see her flip through things and to hear her say, “I want to do this lesson, and this . . .” And I didn’t have a clue, but she guided me through it.

She also developed her classroom management skills under the guiding hand of her cooperating teacher who modeled an approach that Kathy eventually chose to follow. One of the best things about her was that her classroom is very structured and sound. It’s structured in a way that it is the same, so kids know her expectations. And I think that I get that from her. I’m consistent . . . the kids just know. There’s a lot of classroom management things that I learned from her. I mean, we had some behavior problems, but I remember one of the best things that she said . . . we had a student that would just throw books down and would throw things around, and she said, “Ignore it.” And I thought, “What! You don’t just ignore that!” And she said, “If it’s just little stuff, ignore it.” And that is what we did, and it was gone by December. So there are a lot of classroom management things that I learned from her . . . that I basically accredit to [my cooperating teacher] and Lynne. And this year, which is really nice, people come into my classroom and say, “You’re a first year teacher and I can’t believe how these kids just . . . they know the expectations.” And for a first year teacher they can’t believe that my classroom management is pretty stable. And I have to say that it is because I am a
good learner . . . that I really worked at it. That is one thing that I really worked at this year. The thing that I can actually say that I am proud of.

Kathy had heard of the Resident Teacher Program while observing and interning out in the schools and had decided that she would apply a year before she completed her undergraduate degree. She explained what she knew about the Resident Teacher Program before she entered it.

I knew what the expectations were. Just by other teachers around Northern State University talking about it, and the fliers. I had planned on trying to get into this program for about a year. When I started student teaching is when I started talking about this program, so I was preparing myself that the coming April I would have to apply. I knew that it was a one year commitment, and I knew that you took graduate courses at the same time. I knew that there was no time for anything but school and school. And that the mentor program was what I liked best. When I heard people talking about that you had one teacher there to help you out, that if you needed something there was somebody there. That was the best part about it. I knew that we didn’t get paid very much, but the mentor program was the best thing about it.

Kathy was offered an out-of-state teaching position and chose to participate in the Resident Teacher Program rather than accept the regular first year position. Kathy explained her reasoning:

I wanted my master’s degree too, and I took this over another job just because I’m young. I was completely single at the time I started, not kids, not married. It was perfect. And I thought, “If I move will I ever get my master’s? Will I ever do it at a foreign place? When Northern State University is comfortable?” So that’s why I decided.

During her time in the Resident Teacher Program, Kathy taught third grade at Jefferson Elementary School. She described the environment of Jefferson Elementary School as very friendly and shared what she had heard about the school prior to her experience. “Before I got out there to Jefferson . . . even just as a student teacher, you’d always hear about that at Jefferson the people were so nice, that it was a friendly place, that
the principal was good, and that you had a lot of volunteer support.” Early in the year Kathy found the rumors to be true:

The first time that I went to Jefferson, I had people that would come in to my classroom and introduce themselves, and that hadn’t really happened before. A lot of people did that, and that was nice. The environment was very friendly. You can stop in that hallway and talk to anybody.

One of Kathy’s expectations coming into the Resident Teacher Program was that she would be assigned to a mentor teacher who would be there to help her. Kathy explained that Lynne, her mentor, had exceeded her expectations.

There are things that Lynne has helped me with that I didn’t think she would help me with. At the beginning of the year, when we all finally got into the school, she set a time with each of us to help us set up our rooms. I mean, I didn’t have a clue as to where to put anything. I didn’t know how the teacher who had the room before had put stuff. I didn’t see it previously. And Lynne came in and spent a hot summer day helping us move furniture. She spent a few days before school began helping me with what I was going to do the first week curriculum wise.

Lynne provided support for Kathy in many aspects of her professional and personal life. Kathy described the many ways that her mentor had helped her over the course of the year.

In the beginning, when I was learning about the students and getting to know the students, I told her, “I have a problem with this student, he is doing this. What do I do?” And she’d give me an idea and I’d try it. And 9 times out of 10 it would work. She helped not only with planning, classroom management, behavior, she [also] modeled lessons . . . she hasn’t done very many, but in the beginning she did a few. I was struggling with Readers Workshop before I stared working with the [reading] teacher, and [Lynne] modeled a lesson for me. With curriculum ideas she would say, “Well, you could do this, or you could do this.” Anything you ask her . . . you can stop her in the hallway, or go into her office. She’s just willing to stop and talk, and put down whatever it is she’s doing. It’s very evident that we [the resident teachers] came first . . . that the three of us came first. There have been a lot of times . . . on Thursdays my kids go to library for just a half hour, so I
have a half hour prep that day, and an hour and a half another day. She’ll come
down at 11:30 and I’ll be lining my kids up and she’ll say, “I’ll take them.” So she
takes them halfway through the building to library and then I’ll pick them up. She
doesn’t do it every week, but she does it a lot. And that’s just five more minutes
for me. Little things like that. She’s given us time off to do NSU homework. She
gave me an afternoon off two weeks ago to go home and search the Internet and get
applications. She subbed for me when I was sick. It’s the little things that really
make a difference. She’s made posters, or . . . my class came up with a variety of
words to use instead of “said” and I had them just charted on paper, and she came
in and typed them all into the computer and made a huge long list and had it
laminated for each of us. She has helped me cut things if I needed something cut.
If I had something that needed to go to the office, she’ll take it if she’s going that
way. She comes in every morning and says, “Do you need anything? What are
you doing at this time? I want to come in.” I don’t get to see her every day, and I
don’t expect to. But if she doesn’t make it down she always comes and says, “I’m
sorry I couldn’t make it today.” So it’s not that she’s not thinking about it. But
almost every single day I see her. When she does come in usually it is for about 45
minutes, if not more. She’s really good about just chiming in when I’m teaching.
She just chimes in with her ideas, thoughts, and opinions. And I’ll look at her, and
she just knows when I need help.

While Lynne worked to support Kathy by meeting her needs in a variety of ways, Kathy
also explained how Lynne helped her in meeting the needs of her students.

In the beginning [of the year], I was having trouble with math. I needed help.
[Lynne] was good with that, and would always try to come in during my math
time. Now she tries to come in a lot during writing. So it’s just two times a day,
when I needed it she just happens to show up. It’s like she just knows whenever I
need her. To have that second person in the room . . . not only for me, but also for
the kids. She not only supports me . . . but during the beginning of the year . . . I
have a lot of needs in my classroom, and I would have kids, when we were just
learning to add double digits . . . there [were] too many of them and I just couldn’t
help them all. I had come to the point where I said to Lynne, “I don’t know what to do . . . I can’t help them all, there’s too much need.” And that is all I would need to say and she would show up. She’d be there . . . I’ve never really had to come out and say, “Will you do this for me?” She just does it.

In describing her year in the Resident Teacher Program, Kathy referred to her experience as “overwhelming, stressful, but well worth it.” She explained:

Overwhelming, because you have the master’s credits to work on, and along with that the so-called 40 hours a week job that you have that turns into 70 hours a week. It’s so overwhelming to me because I try to go above and beyond because I’m so afraid that what I’m doing isn’t going to be good enough, or that I need to try and be better. Or, not having done this before, you spend more time because you haven’t done it before . . . never looked at some of these books before. So you spend a little more time going through them. The time issue has been a real factor for me.

Kathy explained how she had to force herself to slow down when the stress and the time she was putting in began to affect her health.

[It’s] overwhelming in the fact that the list is never cleared. You can add something on to the list every hour. There are times when I’ve gone home at nights and cried because I couldn’t knock anything off of the list at the end of the day. At the beginning of the year, I was always at the school by 7:00, if not earlier, and even that time from 7:00 to 8:00 was not enough. I wouldn’t leave until sometimes . . . 7:00 was early, 8:00 was some nights. It wasn’t much later than that. And that would be an everyday thing. Those first few months that I was there it was like that all the time. After Christmas it dwindled a little bit. And when I get really stressed like that I get sick, and in February I think that my system just kind of went, and I had bronchitis for a month. At that point I kind of said, “Oh boy!,” and I quit coming so early. I wouldn’t go until . . . 7:45 is when I would get there. And that’s a 45 minute difference in sleep right there. I’d try to get to bed a little earlier, and wake up a little later.
In discussing the overwhelming and stressful nature of the Resident Teacher Program, Kathy explained how while simultaneously acting as a student while teaching was distracting in both the classroom and university setting, it was also what she felt made the program successful.

You’re sitting in class going, “OK, I have this to do and this to do,” and you’re making a list about school things you have to do. Then when you’re in school, you’re thinking about the paper you have to write. So there are continually these two things pulling at each other. One good thing about this program as a whole is that things that we did learn . . . like since I took the reading cognate . . . we could apply. And that was one thing a lot of people say, was that the good thing about this program is that you can go to school, get your master’s, and you can apply what you learn right away. And that really is true. It depends on where your area is. Some things I didn’t try, and some things I did and I really liked. Another good thing is that you have that NSU connection continually with the staff here. You have the math teacher if you need it, you have [the reading teachers] if you need the reading and ideas for something . . . So there’s so much that you can apply right at the time. Because sometimes, when you learn about something, you might stick it away in a folder and forget about it. This way it’s a little more fresh. I’ve found myself a lot of times pulling things out and using things that we did in class. So that’s that good thing about it.

**Missy.** Missy was an extremely articulate young woman who thrived on academic challenges and tests of intelligence. She readily admitted to having high expectations for herself and others. Missy was the first of the participants described here who did not attend Northern State University as an undergraduate student. She attended a small private university within a 70 mile radius of Northern State University.

Missy came from a family of teachers, yet her decision to major in education did not come easily. Initially she was determined to not follow in her parents’ footsteps, yet throughout her undergraduate years she continually found herself focusing on the teaching of others. Recognizing that she always seemed to place herself in a teaching role, Missy determined that education was where she was meant to be.
My parents were teachers and I grew up saying that that was the last thing that I
would ever do. And then [I] ended up my sophomore year . . . it just seemed like I
would always go into a classroom and think, “If I was teaching this, I would do
this and this and this.” And then I thought maybe that’s what I should do.

As an undergraduate student in elementary education, Missy, who sought out and
thrived on academic stimulation, found herself frustrated by the “simplicity” of the course
work. She referred to the learning activities in her classes as “Mickey Mouse” and found it
difficult to find the connection between what she felt were essential elements of education
and what she was experiencing in undergraduate studies.

While she found her course work unstimulating, Missy was thrilled with her
student teaching placement and experience. Missy student taught at the sixth grade level in
a team teaching setting. Because of this, she dealt with two classrooms, totaling 48
students rather than one classroom of 24. Missy described the team teaching situation in
which she student taught:

I had a cooperating teacher, but in sixth grade they do something which is kind of
unique. What they do is they do a lot of teaming up as far as one teacher taught the
reading and science, and the other taught the math and the social studies. So they
would actually trade. The teachers would move, almost like junior high, so that
then they had fewer preps, since sixth grade can be kind of intense as far as the
academic material they go into. So the teacher who was my cooperating teacher
actually did the social studies and math portion, and so that I would have a more
whole experience, they kind of traded me towards the end [of my experience] so
that I worked in the other classroom as well, and had a chance to teach science and
English.

Missy described herself and her cooperating teacher as “two peas in a pod.” She credited
the perfect match to attending a small university where the individual who set up the student
teaching experiences knew the students well and was able to match teachers with similar
styles. Missy explained their unique relationship:

It’s really funny, because we were kind of like two peas in a pod, and that was
really neat. I think that’s one thing about where I went to undergraduate [school]
that they had to offer. Since it was a small school, the person who set up these student teaching experiences knew all of us personally, and was very good at matching people with cooperating teachers who had a similar style. So it was very easy for us. Like [my cooperating teacher] said, I understood what she wanted of me before she had to ask, because we were so similar. You know, as far as when she was up there teaching, I didn’t sit in the back and pretend I wasn’t there. I mean, to me that doesn’t make sense. I would walk around and help people. And we had very similar styles as far as our presentation and things like that. So we got along very well.

Missy described her cooperating teacher’s teaching philosophy as traditional, yet explained that she was flexible and willing to apply new methods of instruction.

I guess according to a lot of current philosophies she would be viewed as traditional, in that there was very distinct parts of the curriculum and very distinct subjects that she covered, versus three is one mass learning and it teaches us everything. But at the same time, that didn’t hinder her teaching or keep her from bringing everything into it. It was kind of like she would be considered traditional, but that wouldn’t stop her from using current practices that she knew would enhance learning.

Through her student teaching experience, Missy learned to value learning and students. Her cooperating teacher saw her students as a whole and taught Missy to teach to each child as a whole person.

From teaching with her, I know that she valued learning, and valued students... and not just valued learning, but valued knowledge. [She] said that education wasn’t... it was part of making you a whole person. And so if you missed out on learning, and you missed out on knowledge, you missed out on part of life. And yet she seemed to have a good grasp on education in relationship to the rest of the whole person. She taught [the students] that when you elect to be in certain things, that that doesn’t excuse you from homework. And that’s a really important transition for upper elementary students to make. I think she was very good at teaching to the whole person. Even bringing up issues with students such as
personal hygiene and things like that. She was just able to see them as a whole... and not just as what she was supposed to teach.

Missy was not aware of the Resident Teacher Program until she was introduced to the Washington Elementary School principal while attending a career fair. Although Missy had not applied to the program, she was contacted the following day and encouraged to interview for a position. She explained how these events unfolded:

I guess where I first found out about the program was at the job fair held at Northern State University. I was hoping to stay in [the state], but the schools that were there weren’t hiring for elementary education and had published that. But rather than stick with that, I went up to each of the tables from [this state] and said, “I know you aren’t planning on hiring elementary education teachers, but here’s my resumé, and if I could, I’d like to visit with you.” And I’m not sure who at the [Glacier Public School] table said, “Well, no, we aren’t hiring in Glacier for elementary education, but [the Washington principal] will be here later this afternoon, and we’d like you to speak with her about the Resident Teacher Program.” So I spoke with [the Washington principal] and she called that same day... either that day, or the next... and asked for an interview, even though I hadn’t really applied. So actually, I brought in my application materials the day I had my interview.

During her interview for the Resident Teacher Program, Missy recalled feeling that what she had learned as an undergraduate student was being called into question. She shared the differences in philosophies she sensed in the interview.

I guess I found it difficult because I had just come off of another interview where the interviewers were very empowering, as far as I would say something, and they would say, “We see where you’re coming from.” It was like that. Philosophies on reading and different things like that. Whereas when I went to [the Resident Teacher Program] interview, I would give my philosophy on reading, and they would [say], “Well, haven’t you ever done this before?” I guess... you know [the university I graduated from] teaches whole language, but not as exclusively as Northern State University seems to, and this area is much more focused on... I
don’t know whatever the term is, but [the school district I student taught in] has really gotten away from whole language. They didn’t see that it succeeded for them, so they’re really trying to work on a more balanced reading program. So, I went into the interview with kind of that philosophy of what I had experienced in student teaching and would kind of be shown that my philosophies weren’t exactly correct through the interview.

Because she was not familiar with the program, Missy began her year with limited and uncertain expectations.

I guess one of the things that I really was looking forward to, as far as the outline of the program, was the opportunity to have a mentor and someone to help out on my first year of teaching. And also to be in continual contact with peers and older people in the teaching profession through classes at Northern State University.

Academically, she was interested in focusing on the areas of math and science and was frustrated by what she described as the undeclared reading focus of the program. She described a meeting with her advisor in which she was to declare her cognate and shared her reaction.

I walked in to set my course load the first day of the program, and I was told that everyone who had ever been in the program had always had their emphasis in reading. And I hadn’t had an opportunity to look over the courses and I said, “Well, I don’t want to have my emphasis in reading. I want to do math, science, or gifted education.” And so right from the onset I kind of felt the struggle of being expected to do reading because that’s what everyone had already done. And I kind of felt that even in the classes . . . that because I wasn’t taking the kind of classes that everyone wanted me to be taking it was kind of like . . . then you go your way and we’ll go ours. I have a very good relationship with the person who does the hiring at my company, and he very much stresses that you need to be realistic about what you expect when you post a job, and you need to be very honest in the interview. And the interviewee also needs to be honest and not say, “I’m wonderful at organizational skills,” when applying to be a manager. Then they get into the job and they’re going to hate it if it’s mostly organizational things. You
need to reflect and see what your strengths are and find the job for which you are
best suited based on your strengths. You can’t just go out and choose a job based
on the salary or the company. You need to find a place where you will fit best.
And I guess I didn’t feel that [the program] was presented to me in a completely
honest way so that I was able to adequately make that decision. Like I said, if it’s a
reading based master’s program, then it needs to be addressed as such.
While Missy found some of her graduate course work to be helpful and was thankful for
the resources she found through required textbooks and other teachers in her classes, her
expectations of the value of graduate school exceeded her perception of the experience.
Like I said, I have very, very high expectations for myself and therefore my
expectations of others are very, very high too. And I really did not feel that the
courses were academic. I did not feel intellectually challenged or intellectually
stimulated by them. I did not feel like a graduate student. To me, the master’s
would have been just a piece of cake, but then I really wouldn’t have felt that I had
earned it... just that I had actually kind of put in the time.
Missy spoke of being particularly frustrated by the required summer practicum that
was taught by her mentor. She felt that the materials presented during the practicum did not
relate to her as an intermediate grade level teacher. She described the experience:
We met once a week and had sort of a class together for three hours to kind of get
us started in the process, get us started with our rooms, get some information that
would be helpful for the year, and give us some more information about the
program. And I think again it was very difficult because the program seemed to
have been very geared to the lower elementary... you know, reading and math
games. And there was myself, as a potential fifth grade teacher, and I don’t even
know what to say... we were being handed these games and these little fun
things. The things we were talking about were “Okay, here is this bathroom pass
that you can have [the students] wear it around their necks. Here’s this poem that
you can teach them all to say. And here’s this cute little bear letter that you can send
home so they can all be reading books together.” It was all cutesy, fun kinds of
stuff that really doesn’t apply to the upper elementary students. So then I kind of
felt [like] here everyone else is getting all this stuff to start their room, learning things that were going to be significant for their classrooms, and I felt like three hours of my week were kind of being shoved out the door, like it didn’t matter . . . that upper elementary students didn’t matter . . . that it was the younger kids that mattered. So that kind of upset me.

During her time in the Resident Teacher Program, she taught fifth grade at Washington Elementary School. Missy described her classroom as challenging and admitted to struggling with behavior issues and students’ ability levels.

Out of 24 students there were 16 with some type of special need. Whether they were on Ritalin, whether they had Attention Deficit Disorder, some type of learning disorder, school phobia. There was a whole lot of problems . . . The academic level of these students did not compare to the academic level of the third grade students I worked with. Academically, as a whole, the class was below the third grade classroom I had worked in. That was something that I really struggled with, because here I am with all of these fifth grade textbooks, and these kids aren’t even close to working at that level. They could not write, they could not read. I mean with math, we spent the entire first nine weeks on the first chapter, and that still was not successful. They did not know how to add and subtract, and by the end of the year they were supposed to be dividing. And, I don’t know . . . that was very much something that I struggled with. I had worked very little with the younger grades and I had no materials myself, and these students were not at grade level. So it was difficult to find things to do at their level.

Grade level appropriateness continued to be a struggle for Missy in her classroom, and she did not feel that she was provided with adequate support from the Resident Teacher Program.

From the program, like I said, I really felt that the focus seemed to be on the elementary side, so helping me with struggling fifth graders who can’t read just didn’t . . . I didn’t feel that support was being provided for me. I felt like I was being pushed too far as a teacher. I was told that it was because of the materials I was presenting, but I was a first year teacher. I don’t have any materials other than
what I was given. So, how can... you know, you can't just invent an entire social studies curriculum. You can't invent seven curriculums for non-reading students in one year. I mean it's just not humanly possible. I worked with what I had. And I was told, “Well, you can’t use the social studies book, because the reading’s too hard.” So what else can I do with it? ... You know, there just didn’t seem to be a whole lot of options available.

Missy struggled with issues of classroom management throughout her first semester and felt that she did not receive adequate support from her mentor or the supervisors in the program. Her mentor did not have the intermediate grade level experience which Missy felt was necessary to support her as a teacher.

I guess it was kind of a difficult situation for me in that very rarely had they had an upper elementary student take this position, and the mentor who was assigned as my mentor had only taught [primary grades]. So I think it was really a whole different ball game, knowing kindergarten and first grade, and then trying to mentor a first year teacher in fifth grade when you don’t even have that experience yourself.

Missy perceived her mentor to be uncomfortable with students at the fifth grade level and felt that she was purposefully avoiding her classroom.

I know that she was very uncomfortable in that I was teaching fifth grade ... and so for other [resident teachers’] classes she presented things ... but when I asked she’d say, “Well, I have to do this and this, and I need prep time.” She didn’t seem exactly willing to do a lesson or a presentation in my class. And, like I said, it was more than likely that she didn’t feel that it was an area that she could present.

A specific example that Missy provided came when she was struggling with her own reading curriculum. Missy described her emotional reaction to the situation:

I found out that the mentor in the program had started setting up workshops and book clubs in three other rooms but had not yet offered to help in mine. In fact, she had set up a reading program for a teacher who is not in this program before offering to help with my reading program. I guess that is what did hurt me because I was being told that [reading] was where my weakness lay, but I wasn’t being
offered help that was being offered to someone else who was [in] her second year of teaching and had received that help before. Missy explained how their relationship was further complicated by what Missy referred to as “different styles of communication.”

We had different styles of communication, and so there just didn’t seem to be that bond. I guess I’m a very verbal person. I would always . . . she would write in my journal, and rather than write a note back, I’d go find her and talk to her about it. To me . . . other people think it makes more sense to write it down, because you have time to think about it, and I think it was useless. I’d always been a speaker, so I’d go and talk to her about things, and I guess she was somewhat hurt and upset that I wasn’t responding to her through the journal. But to me, I was responding verbally.

Missy considered feedback and evaluation to be an important aspect of communication and learning. She desired feedback that would help her improve as an educator, but felt that the feedback she did receive from her mentor was of little use.

I guess I didn’t find the feedback especially helpful. “Great job! Smiley face, smiley face, smiley face” means nothing to me. “Your intro was really good. You brought them in by doing this . . . in the future you may want to do this” is more meaningful to me. And I guess that’s the kind of evaluations I was used to with my cooperating teacher. She would make exact quotes: “Something you did was this . . . good way to bring them in.” And then maybe do a “However, it gets them too riled up to start with. Save some of the energy for later.” Or key in on specific parts and do something like that. And I know that some people get kind of upset in their student teaching when some supervisors or cooperating teachers will hone in on one thing . . . “You said ‘you guys’ 3,523 times,” but again, that’s a focus, something to work on, and then you know that you need to not say “you guys” all the time. But just focus in on something specific and give more instantaneous immediate feedback so that you know exactly what’s working and what’s not so that you can know right away what to work on. Because “good” or “not so good” are not very descriptive as to how to improve or what to continue doing.
Given Missy’s lack of confidence in her mentor’s ability to provide adequate grade level support, and the differences in their communication styles, Missy sought and found support from others in her school.

I guess I considered my relationships with most of the teachers to be, as a whole, quite positive, in that they were very open and willing to talk to me and provide me with assistance. They knew I was struggling, especially with the behavioral issues in my classroom. They were very willing to provide insight, very willing to provide suggestions, and then other times to just listen.

On October 29, Missy was informed that she would be meeting with her mentor, building principal, and university supervisor after school. At that meeting she received a letter of concern signed by the building principal, her mentor, and both university supervisors. The letter listed concerns that they had about Missy’s teaching that read as follows:

Our concerns are: first and foremost that you are no longer bubbly and enthusiastic, and it appears that you are sometimes passive to our efforts to communicate with and assist you. We have several very particular issues: 1) Your expectations for the students are too high -- academically, socially, and for behavior. This is then transferred and exhibited to the children through an inordinate amount of homework, negativity towards children, power struggles, and miscommunication with parents about their children. 2) You are demonstrating negative behaviors yourself with the children by screaming at them and threatening them, and this is not acceptable in your position as a teacher. 3) You seem to be less caring and interested in the students and teaching than you were at the beginning of the school year.

The letter concluded with three goals that had been set for Missy and a date for a follow up meeting.

We have devised an improvement plan consisting of three actions that you need to effect quickly. Our intent is to meet with you again on November 10 to discuss your progress in meeting these three goals. We will be as helpful as possible.
1) Create a feeling of positiveness in your classroom with the children (example: smile, be a bit playful, compliment children when they do things right).

2) Management -- Do not threaten or scream at the students. We will discuss some particular ways in which you may stop this negative behavior. 3) Adapt and possibly differentiate assignments in order that students can complete them in school. Do not use "the homework club" as a threat -- this is not the reason for the program. The goal here is to give the students a sense of accomplishment, as well as you. When both, you and the children, share an "I can do it" attitude, all of you will have feelings of self worth.

Having received the letter, Missy met with her local NEA representatives who provided her with some ideas as to what she could do to improve her classroom environment. They suggested that she request her mentor cover her room for a few mornings while she observe other teachers in the district to observe how they handle discipline. Missy explained that initially her mentor agreed to this arrangement, but the following day she received this letter from her mentor:

Missy -- I’ve been thinking about our discussion about my teaching a half day for you. I’m willing but the timing is too tight. I come back late Sunday night and I leave again Wednesday morning. I can’t give up the time (a full morning) and I won’t be able to prepare. I will however set another date. After we meet on the tenth [November] and further define our plan. I think we can do more with model teaching and management techniques. Also I’d like you to observe another fifth grade class in the district for ideas. I’m happy with all your recent efforts. You look so much more alert and enthused. I’m anxious to hear how you are feeling.

While the plans for improvement had not yet been implemented, Missy was scheduled to meet with the mentor, building principal, and university supervisor on November 10. On November 10, Glacier Public Schools were closed due to a snowstorm and the meeting was rescheduled for a later date. The rescheduled meeting was again canceled due to a winter storm. Missy approached her mentor to request that the meeting be rescheduled once again and was informed that the meeting with her would not be rescheduled. Soon after Missy resigned from her teaching position.
Missy took a position with a computer software company and stated that she will never teach again. However, she did substitute in another district for a month before her new job began and continues to occasionally do so on her vacation days. Looking back on her experience in the Resident Teacher Program, Missy described the most difficult aspect.

I guess feeling as if everything I did was wrong, and that who I was was wrong, and that everything I had lived up until then had to have been a lie. Because how could I have carried on all through my college career the way I did, and fail so miserably with [this] experience?

Ken. Ken was a tall slender man who spoke with a quiet voice and limited eye contact. Like Missy, Ken spent his undergraduate years at a small private college which he described as traditional in its approach to education. Ken began his undergraduate career with the intent of pursuing a biology degree in secondary education. He explained:

I went to college and originally I planned on majoring in biology because I had a biology teacher that I really looked up to, and he really coached me a lot through high school. So I kind of wanted to be in that role for someone. But I just didn’t like biology, so when I got to college I said, “That’s not for me.” But I still was interested in teaching. So I kind of thought that I would wait and see what was out there. So I took a bunch of different classes for a couple of semesters, and then halfway into my sophomore year, I decided that I wanted to get into some of the teaching classes. That’s when I started taking education classes and I did the practicum and the observing and different things like that.

Ken changed his focus to elementary education after one semester of education coursework and a field experience tutoring students at a juvenile delinquent facility.

After a semester, I figured it out. In that time, I was exposed to everything from first grade to senior high. What really made me change my mind was that I was working with some juvenile delinquents at the state hospital that were there for drug addiction and emotional problems and tutoring a girl for math. One day she leaned over to me and said, “You know, you really smell good.” And I decided that I didn’t want to have to deal with those kinds of things, so I went to elementary.
Because I think that it is a little easier because there’s not too many potential problems working at this age compared to working at the high school level. Ken described his undergraduate course work as very traditional and basic. His reading courses were primarily basal oriented and the math program was just beginning to apply some manipulatives instruction. Ken described this experience:

Undergraduate was a lot of basics. I wasn’t exposed to Writers Workshop or Readers Workshop; it was more basal oriented. The math was just starting to get the push for manipulatives, but it was pretty basic. There wasn’t a lot of games or math journals. I had never heard of Marilyn Burns [math education author] when I started or did my undergraduate. There was more emphasis on just what our professors thought about the curriculum or writing plans. There wasn’t a big emphasis on how kids learn or why they learn. I had a few classes that did, but for the most part it was just “this is what [the professor] thinks,” so that was different. Ken discussed how the very traditional education he received in his undergraduate classes was reinforced by the traditional views of the cooperating teachers many students were placed with.

We were taught in a very traditional way and [the instructors] really drilled that that was how it was when you got out, that’s how things were run, and that’s how things were going to be, and so that’s what we thought. And most of the teachers that I went to college with, their cooperating teachers were very traditional. And many of the teachers were older . . . getting closer to retirement, and they didn’t want to try the new things, and so that was the approach that [the student teachers] were exposed to so it made sense to us that that is why we learned what we learned, because that is how it is.

Fortunately, Ken’s student teaching experience was much different than many of his peers. His cooperating teacher supported hands on active learning and was very integrative in her approach to learning.

My cooperating teacher was very hands on. A lot of centers. A lot of manipulatives. But she still went very much by the textbook. Except for social studies. She thought that the social studies book was terrible and she and the other
third grade teachers . . . were in the process of rewriting the social studies curriculum for the district, so they were piloting a lot of materials. And they tried to tie [the social studies curriculum] to the rest of the third grade curriculum. So that if you were reading about penguins in the story, then your trip for the week would be to the Antarctic, and then the science would also tie in somehow. So they really tried to tie the whole curriculum together. They thought it would work best if you taught in thematic units as opposed to lesson by lesson.

Having come from an extremely conservative educational background, Ken was initially confused by the drastically different approach, but with the understanding and continued support of his cooperating teacher he became comfortable with these new ideas. While Ken admits that during his student teaching experience he did not completely understand the reasoning behind pulling everything together into a thematic unit, it became clear to him once he was responsible for his own classroom. He described how his traditional education hindered his understanding of what his cooperating teacher was trying to do.

I learned a lot from [my cooperating teacher], but I didn’t learn as much as I could have. Because all I had been exposed to was the very traditional way. And when I saw what this teacher did I thought that it made sense, but I didn’t pay attention to it the way that I should have . . . or the way that I now wish I would have. Because I just . . . I didn’t understand some of the little things until later . . . later in my first year of teaching I figured out what they were doing and why they were doing things. Like when I was student teaching and they were doing something I would think, “Why are they tying all of this together? You teach math, then you teach social studies, and then you teach reading.” So it didn’t really dawn on me at the time that there was anything wrong with it or that there was anything right with it. It was just different in the way things were done.

Ken’s student teaching experience was also unique in another way, in that he co-taught with another student teacher at the same grade level.

My student teaching experience was very different. They started it as a pilot with another student teacher. I cooperated with another student teacher in the same grade
level, and we split up the work, where . . . we would teach the same material, we
would work together. A lot of times . . . our rooms were connected and there was
a big curtain in the middle. We’d just open up the curtain and we’d teach all 50
kids at once with both of us teaching.

Due to the illness of his cooperating teacher, Ken was almost immediately thrown
in the role of head teacher and all of the responsibilities it entailed.

My [cooperating] teacher got sick my first week. So it was my third day in the
classroom as a student teacher and I had to do the whole class by myself because
the substitute [teacher] didn’t want to do anything. So I kind of just jumped right
in and then . . . she took some of the classes when she came back, [but] she was
gone for a week. So I had been doing plans, and things that I wasn’t ready for. It
was a positive experience overall. I really enjoyed doing the cooperating teaching.
Just having someone going in the same direction and being on the same page.
Knowing what you were doing and what they were doing. Being able to pull the
two classes together and separating them when you needed to . . . it was nice. If I
was doing a lesson and I couldn’t do it as well as I thought [the other student
teacher] could then she would teach it, and if she felt the same way, then I could do
it.

Ken learned of the Resident Teacher Program through a flier posted on a bulletin
board at his college. Before applying he talked to the supervisors involved in the program
and resident teachers who had participated in the program.

I knew that . . . talking to some of the professors [at Northern State University], I
knew that it was a one year program, that you had your first year teaching
experience in the program, and that you got a stipend and that you were expected to
take a full time master’s load, and that most of the interns got their master’s in one
year. And I talked to some of the [Resident Teacher Program] interns that were
teaching last year, and they told me their experiences throughout the year. So I
knew a little about the program, but I didn’t know about a lot of the little things . . .
on the university [side] . . . they didn’t tell us about a lot of things.
Ken described a specific example of an expectation of the resident teachers that was shared with him during the school year that he felt had not been adequately relayed.

I just had a meeting with one of the supervisors, and she said that it’s the university’s expectations that the interns will be better than a teacher who has taught for 15 years, because they are supposed to be the best of the best. And I said, “Well, that’s not right. We’re first year teachers. We should be given the same leeway as a first year teacher.” And she said, “No, because you’re supposed to be the best of the best. You don’t need that leeway. We have a selective program, and you should be better than anybody else.” And I don’t think that that was something that I was informed of before they started, and that I wasn’t informed of until the program is almost over now. I don’t think that that is a realistic expectation.

During his time in the Resident Teacher Program, Ken taught fourth grade at Jefferson Elementary School. He felt very fortunate to have the mentor who was assigned to him and indicated that her support exceeded his expectations.

I feel that I had a really good mentor teacher. She was in my room every day. She was in my room before school started . . . she was there two weeks before giving me ideas about classroom management and setting up my desks, and how to organize my room, and everything. I mean she went over every last detail. Whenever she would come in she would take notes and she’d write in the [communications journal] and give it back to me, or she’d leave a note saying, “This went really well!” or “You have to work on this.” She monitored my goals and my progress. She celebrated progress. If we weren’t doing something right, [she’d say] “This is what you’re doing wrong. Here’s five or six suggestions of how you could improve that.” It was a lot more support than I had anticipated.

One aspect of his mentor’s support that he was particularly appreciative of was her straightforward feedback. He felt secure in the knowledge that she would assist him in his growth as a teacher whether the feedback be positive or negative.

If you’re doing something good, she would leave you a note that said, “Your mini-lesson on parentheses was great! Way to go! Keep it up!” or “I know you had a tough time doing this at first. You’re really starting to get the hang of it!”
Just positive notes like that, and constructive criticism. It was a combination of both. She was very straightforward and honest all of the time. If she wasn’t happy, she’d tell you about it. If she thought you were doing something right, she’d tell you about it. It was just always very consistent with her . . . you always knew where you stood. You always knew what you were doing and you knew if you were on the right track. You knew if you needed to improve something.

Ken explained that during his time in the Resident Teacher Program he got the majority of his support from his mentor and the other two resident teachers at Jefferson Elementary School. He felt that his mentor provided him with the support he needed on a professional level, whereas his peers provided him with personal support.

The mentor teacher is more on the professional level. She’d be there as a friend, or as whatever you want to call it. She would say something that . . . you know, “I hope your day gets better,” or she’d leave a note or something. But it’s mostly just real professional and about what we were doing in the classroom. The personal support came from each of the residents. The three of us at Jefferson got real close, and it was a lot of “keep your chin up” type of things.

Ken further explained the types of support he looked for from his peers.

It depended, sometimes it was just getting through the day if you were having a bad day. Or if an assignment was really bogging you down and if we were in the same class it would be “Well, here’s what I did. I hope it helps.” Maybe it would have something to do with teaching and saying, “I’m confused about this. It was suggested that I try this, but I’m not sure exactly what it is. Can you explain it to me?” We did some work together for classes, so that we were supporting each other in our academics. We all know what’s going on in each other’s lives. Support . . . like if . . . a good example is that one of the residents just got engaged and one of the other residents and I, we both knew it before it was going to happen. So we’ve just been in all aspects kind of support. Trying to assure ourselves that we are teachers, that we’re not student teachers, and that we are doing the right thing.
While Ken stated that his mentor and peers exceeded his expectations as far as support was concerned, he felt that the role of the university supervisors did not meet his expectations. He described his expectations coming into the Resident Teacher Program: "My expectations were that someone from the university would be giving the guidance. Introducing us to the progressive techniques. But also teaching us how to implement them. And teaching us ... being there in our classrooms helping us." While Ken was under the impression that the university supervisors would have a very active role in his classroom, he described what he found.

They'd sit in the back of the room and take notes. Once in awhile they would walk around and talk to the kids, make suggestions. Things weren't discussed afterwards, they just left and went back to the university. Things weren't discussed as far as where you were at, or what you were doing. One time Ruth came out, some notes were left, and I tried to get back to her to talk to her about them, and she never returned my calls. Deb ... the first [observation] time said, "I have notes, but I'm not ready to share them with you." The second time she came in she shared the notes from the second observation, and I never received the notes from the first observation.

Ken recalled one meeting with Deb that he felt was very useful and enlightening. However, he felt that the timing of the feedback was inappropriate since it came at the end of the school year. He stated that he was disappointed that he did not receive this level of feedback and support throughout the school year. He described the meeting:

The last time Deb came out was actually probably the best time of any of the times that anyone's come out. She came out, took notes, saw where I was having some problems, and sent me the information that was relevant. We discussed things where I felt I was having a couple of problems, and where she thought I was having a couple of problems, and she discussed what she thought I could do to improve those areas. And she sent me some literature and some actual ideas to try ... something useful. But that happened ... you know, I only have three weeks left, and how does that help me compared to had they done that the whole way through? To come out one time and give someone something and say, "Well, that's
what I’m here to do.” Well, I thing that you’re not there to do that at the end of the
time. You should be giving us support the whole time through.

There was one situation during his time in the Resident Teacher Program that was
particularly frustrating and confusing for Ken. At the end of the first semester, he
discovered that he had received a B for his teaching performance while the other resident
teachers all received an A. He discussed his confusion regarding the grade and his search
for answers.

I asked and asked and asked, and no one would tell me why [I got a B]. And
[Ruth] came out to my classroom . . . and I said, “Why did I get that B?” And she
said, “Because compared to the other teachers, you’re not doing what we expect
you to do.” And I said, “What do you expect? I’m a first year teacher. I’m going
to make mistakes.” And she said, “We don’t expect that you will. You’re the best
of the best. We expect that you be better than someone who’s been here for 15
years.” It just wasn’t a real fun meeting. I told her that I didn’t think that that was
fair and she said, “Well, what can we do to make it better this time?” And I said
that I think that the resident mentor should give me my grade because she’s in my
classroom every day observing me. The university person was there twice this
semester, and I don’t think that you can base a grade on two observations. I know
that some of the other resident teachers feel like the university supervisors walked
in, sat down, took three or four notes and walked out, and they don’t feel that you
can base a grade on that either . . . and I told [my mentor] that being our [mentor]
and being in our rooms every day that she was much more qualified to give us a
grade than the university people were. And she said, “Well, maybe we will have to
sit down and have a meeting with the three of us,” but it’s never been addressed
again.

Ken did not feel that he was provided with the information necessary to understand
why he received the B for his teaching efforts or what he should be doing to improve his
teaching for the second semester. He discussed a meeting with his supervisor that occurred
towards the end of the second semester.
I asked again why [I had received the B], and they asked what I felt that I deserved this semester. And I said, “I don’t think that it matters what I think I deserve, you’re going to give me what you’re going to give me anyway.” And she said, “Well, do you think that you’ve improved from last semester?” And I said that I think I had. And she said, “Well, do you think that you’ve improved on the things that we wanted you to improve so that you deserve a better grade?” And I said that no one had informed me as to why I had received a lower grade and when I tried to inquire about it, no one returned my calls or they were too busy, and I just got the run-around. I still don’t know exactly why I received a lower grade than everybody else.

I asked Ken to describe to me how his first year of teaching was different than what he had expected. He explained, “The trials you go through as a first year teacher . . . I don’t think that you can prepare yourself for that. No matter how much you talk to first year teachers or other teachers. That’s just something that you have to experience.” I inquired as to what Ken considered to be some of the “trials” he had experienced in his first year of instruction. He identified several aspects of teaching that he had to learn and adjust to in his first year, such as trying to figure out how to stay organized, how to handle classroom management issues, discipline, learning about behavior characteristics of students with emotional disturbances, deciding what was acceptable, and where to draw the line. Trying to work with specialists in and outside of the classroom was difficult. Ken described the biggest of these trials as “wondering if I wanted to teach, if I had made the right choice.” He explained:

You know everyone else gets an A in the program for teaching, and you get a B, and you don’t know why. It really eats at you, and no one will explain it to you. I spent a lot of time saying, “Why did I get that?” And no one would tell me why. And now [the year] is almost over and I still don’t know.
Included in this chapter is a discussion of the major theme that emerged over the course of the study. This theme was divided into two assertions related to the theme and the assertions were further divided into sub-assertions. The data supporting each assertion and a discussion of each, as it relates to the literature, are also included. The patterns and theme evolved through the analysis of the interview transcripts in which the resident teachers described their experiences. Finally, the following theme and accompanying assertions were developed.

**Theme: The Experience of the Resident Teachers Was Comparable to a Roller Coaster Ride Consisting of Peaks and Valleys, Highs and Lows**

Through interviews with resident teachers over the course of this study it became evident that what they were experiencing was similar to what is often referred to as a yo-yo effect. Resident teachers vacillated between extreme highs and lows in discussions of their experiences. At times their enthusiasm over a perceived success could not be hidden, yet at other times the frustrations they were experiencing monopolized our time together. The following assertions and sub-assertions address both of these extremes. The first discusses the peaks in the resident teachers’ experience, which refers to aspects of the program that generated enthusiasm or that they valued. The second focuses on the valleys in the resident teachers’ experience, or the aspects of the program that caused the resident teachers feelings of frustration.
Assertion #1: There Were Aspects of the Program That Resident Teachers Valued and That Contributed to Their Success

Sub-assertion #1a. The resident teachers valued their students and maintained a student centered focus regardless of the frustrations they experienced.

Sub-assertion #1b. Mentor support was the single most beneficial and influential aspect of the program.

While certain aspects of the Resident Teacher Program were frustrating to resident teachers, there were also aspects that they felt were extremely valuable and contributed to their success in the program. While the frustrating aspects of the program could be viewed as barriers to providing resident teachers with the most successful experience possible, the aspects of the program that resident teachers valued could be viewed as a boost over those barriers. By focusing on the aspects of the program that they valued the majority of resident teachers were able to overcome the barriers of frustration and succeed in spite of them.

Sub-assertion #1a. The resident teachers valued their students and maintained a student centered focus regardless of the frustrations they experienced.

The resident teachers based their feelings of success on the successes of their students and valued the growth and development of each child as an individual. As participants in the Resident Teacher Program, resident teachers were faced with a number of commitments, duties, and responsibilities. In addition to the requirements of any first year teacher (e.g., teaching, planning, evaluating student progress, attending meetings, and serving on committees), resident teachers were also expected to attend graduate level courses in the evenings and maintain an acceptable level of academic performance.

While one may suspect that such an intensive and demanding schedule may result in teachers and graduate students who have time to be little more than mediocre, patterns in resident teachers’ responses clearly indicated that their teaching jobs, and especially their students, were their first priority.

Jeanine discussed points during the year in which she was overwhelmed by the sheer number of “to do’s” on her list and how she focused herself in those situations.
Balancing everything was hard. I was a teacher first and then a student. Trying to make sure that I got the teaching part done, and still making it through as a student was hard. When it came to that all I thought about was the kids. My first priority was to teach them. I maybe didn’t get my homework done, or get things done that were outside of the school setting. I got all of my classroom work done first and then I’d worry about everything else afterwards, because my kids and my job were first.

Jeanine’s concern for her students and their experience in her classroom was also evident in her later discussions of how she prioritized her time.

I guess the course work took a back burner, because the children were so much more important. This is their only year in first grade and they have so much they need to learn. No matter what grade I would have taught, they’re only in that grade for a year. And I just put everything into that. And then whatever I had left I used to work on course work. I’d work on it at lunch or other time that I could just sneak it in because getting the classroom ready, getting my supplies ready, and being able to do fun stuff with the kids, that was more important.

Kathy discussed how she organized her time while placing the students at the top of her concerns.

A lot of the stuff that I would have to do for university would usually come second. If I had reading to do it might get done the night before. If it was a paper maybe I would start it a couple of nights before, but not much. The biggest portion of my time goes to teaching, planning, and communicating with parents.

While in this statement Kathy directly addresses her students as a priority, it was also overtly evident in listening to her describe her experiences. Kathy’s discussions revealed how she valued her class as a whole as well as individuals. She discussed making time for each student as a top priority.

[The students] have shown me unconditionally that I love to teach and that I like being there. It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done, but they’ve helped me to realize that I like being there. But I think the most important thing that I’ve learned is that they need . . . I don’t know if I want to say love . . . but they need compassion.
Just to take five minutes in one week to sit down and talk to them might mean the
world to them. It means so much to them when you ask how their weekend was.
When they get to talk about themselves for two minutes it makes them feel so
important. My students are so important to me that I go home every night and think
about what I did well with them during the day, and what I could do better.
Teaching is important to me because I'm not just teaching third grade . . . I'm
teaching students.

It was obvious that Susan placed her concerns for her students and teaching above
those of her own work for classes. "I would be a better student if I wasn't teaching right
now, but I don't think the kids in my classroom would be any better off if I wasn't taking
classes because I have my priorities."

However, setting priorities and organizing time was additionally difficult for Susan
who also had to consider her two children. She spoke emotionally about having to make a
conscious decision to put her teaching before her family.

I have to make choices, and right or wrong my priorities . . . and I know that one
of them is wrong, but I've been putting my classroom first (minute pause, covering
face and crying), my family second, and graduate work third. (pause, still crying).
[My family] know[s] it . . . they know I've put them second sometimes . . . and
it's been a hard choice . . . but it's short, it will be done . . . and then I'll do things
for them. (Susan requests a minute to regroup)

Discussion: Sub-assertion #1a

The data in this study suggest that while resident teachers were faced with
numerous challenges and responsibilities, including a heavy course work load, they were
purposeful in organizing their time and efforts to meet their students' needs. Varah,
Theune, and Parker (1986) conducted a study comparing first year teachers in an induction
program that included mentor support and first year teachers who were not involved in an
induction program. The researchers found that while both groups of beginning teachers
experienced problems similar in nature, "inductees had less difficulty in motivating
students, had more success in responding to students' misbehaviors, and had more positive
relationships with their students" (p. 33). These findings seem to indicate that the
inductees, much like the teachers in the Resident Teacher Program, approached teaching by focusing on students' needs. Hawley and Rosenholtz (1985) described the typical induction period as being so chaotic and unsupported that beginning teachers often end up focusing on controlling student behaviors rather than fostering student learning. This is contradictory to the resident teachers' focus on student needs. It was interesting that the resident teachers did not mention the course work and its tie to what they were doing in their teaching, but instead focused their discussion on the children.

**Sub-assertion #1b.** Mentor support was the single most beneficial and influential aspect of the program.

Sub-assertion #1b was easily identified because during the majority of the interviews resident teachers chose to focus on the variety of support that was provided by their mentor. Early in the data analysis process subdivisions of the code “mentor support” were identified and used to further understand how the resident teachers experienced this support. The categories of mentor support included modeling, assisting with planning, providing direct support with students in the classroom, providing advice and feedback, and being accessible to the resident teachers.

**Modeling**

Modeling referred to demonstrating activities, teaching methods, behavior management techniques, and unfamiliar teaching concepts, allowing the resident teachers to experience them as they applied to their classroom rather than simply trying to understand and implement new ideas based on an explanation. Kathy relied on her mentor's support in the form of modeling to get Readers Workshop established. “I was struggling with Readers Workshop and she modeled a lesson for me.”

Susan chose to use book clubs with her students and felt that her mentor's modeling and support made that possible. “[My mentor] has an active role in book clubs, which she helped me get started. But she allowed me to take ownership of them shortly after.”

Michelle explained how her mentor's modeling provided her with insight and gave her the confidence to try things that she otherwise may not have.
If I wouldn’t have had the support from Donna I wouldn’t probably have tried a lot of things I’ve tried in my room. The Book Club concept was totally foreign to me before this year, and if I wouldn’t have had Donna to come introduce it to me and my students I don’t think we would be doing it.

Michelle went on to further describe how her mentor’s modeling allowed her to learn and take ownership of a new concept.

I had her help me start book clubs and she did some demonstration teaching where she came in and she kind of led the lesson and taught it and showed me how to get it set up. She kind of gradually pulled back, and the more I watched her the more I felt comfortable with it, and then I was able to do it.

Kathy discussed how she created an environment in which she expected good behavior and how her mentor guided her in creating that.

Instead of harping on children, you just sit and wait. It’s their environment and they have to choose what kind of environment they plan on being in. I have students who at the beginning of the year would blurt out answers all the time and I would, of course, look at them and say, “Please don’t blurt.” I’d be focusing my attention on them. And watching [my mentor] do one lesson and tell the other students to ignore the blurring and by a month or two later I didn’t have much blurring in my classroom. So she [mentor] showed me how to do that. Just the simple little things . . . she does a lot of peace signs with her fingers. When she’s ready to take the kids down the hall, she’ll just stand there and wait, and talk in the quietest voice, (whispering) “Third graders, I’m going to wait until you’re ready.” In just that tone. And she’s so petite and quiet to begin with, and they just respond. And if all it is is going over to a child and softly touching them on the back, it has a strong effect . . . it says, “This is what I want, and I don’t have to say anything to you for you to know what I expect.”

Kathy discussed the strategies she applied for classroom management which she learned from observing her mentor.

If they [students] are all lined up and waiting, I don’t mind if they whisper, but part of management is just talking to them to keep them maintained, instead of just
standing there looking at them. Asking them questions: “What’s two times two? What’s four times four?” Asking math facts. I probably would have never thought of that on my own.

**Assisting With Planning**

One area that the resident teachers felt that they needed and received a great deal of mentor support in was planning. Susan discussed the assistance she received from her mentor in planning and preparing for the first day.

At the beginning of the year before school we sat down and made up the schedule. Andrea answered all types of building questions and scheduling questions, and first day things to expect. She made sure we had extra things planned, and all those kinds of things.

Jeanine valued her mentor’s assistance in her short-term planning and felt that she was able to provide her with more ideas and materials than she would have been able to produce as a first year teacher on her own.

She’d see that we were doing something and she’d bring something from home the next day just to go with what we were doing. She would ask, “What do you plan to teach next week?” or “What are you doing for the next unit?,” and then she would bring in all the things she had that I could maybe use. She was always just sharing and giving you new ideas.

Michelle shared how with her mentor’s support she was able to plan and organize Writers Workshop which she would be using for the entire year.

A lot of things in Writers Workshop would have been different as far as the structure of my Writers Workshop. I now have it broken down into mini-lessons, and then we have our quiet writing time and then our conferencing time and then our sharing. Donna helped me kind of focus on those components, and she just told me how she did it. It just kind of gave me an example . . . something to go by, and help me guide mine. I don’t think I would have done those things without having her there.
Providing Direct Support With Students in the Classroom

The resident teachers perceived mentor support to include not only getting to know and helping them, but also learning about and assisting in providing support for their students. The residents frequently spoke of how important they felt it was for the mentor to be familiar with their students and how that was reassuring to them when trying to solve a problem or deal with a particular issue. Susan discussed how this type of support provided her with reassurance. “I feel that it is easier to approach Donna about a problem because she has been in my room, and I am hoping that she sees some of the things that I’m seeing and that it isn’t just me.”

Kathy spoke of being thankful for another adult’s perspective when considering issues and concerns in her classroom. “Sometimes when you’re by yourself, I start to wonder if I’m just thinking things up, but when she’s there and sees it too, I know that there is a true problem.”

Kathy discussed a specific incident in which she was grateful to have a mentor who was familiar with her students and class.

Yesterday we were talking after school about a family that I’m having a problem with in my room. And it’s so nice because I’m struggling with a couple of [students] and she knows my students as well as I do. And to have her know them as well as I do means another person I can talk to. So I’m not alone when I’m trying to come up with ideas.

In addition to getting to know the students and providing assistance in problem solving, part of having mentor support in the classroom included working with individual or small groups of students who needed assistance. Resident teachers recognized the importance of the extra attention and support their students received because of their mentor.

Michelle discussed how her students benefited from time they spent with her mentor.

My kids wouldn’t have had a lot of the individual attention. I have a couple that go with [Donna] every once in a while. One goes with her three times a week to work on writing. My kids really have a lot of that one-on-one time with her.
Kathy felt that without the additional support of her mentor she may not have been able to meet the needs of all her students.

I have a lot of needs in my classroom, and during the beginning of the year when we were just learning to add double digits I had kids who were struggling. There were just too many of them, and I couldn’t help them all. I came to the point where I said to Lynne, “I don’t know what to do . . . I can’t help them all, there’s too many needs.” And that is all I needed to say and she showed up . . . she’d be there. Not having even asked her to come in, just asking her, “What do I do?” I’ve never really had to come out and say, “Will you help me?” She just does.

Providing Advice and Feedback

The resident teachers were very appreciative of advice and feedback provided by their mentor, whether it came in the form of ideas and suggestions based on the mentor’s experiences, or recommendations and comments that arose from observations of the resident teacher and knowledge of his or her classroom situation.

Susan recalled advice given to her by her mentor before the school year began. She acknowledged not giving the advice (which was based on the mentor’s experience and not her own) much consideration but coming to realize the value of it.

[My mentor] is very good at preparing kids to do things . . . you know she kept saying, “Get them used to it. Teach them how to go to the bathroom, when to go. Teach when it’s OK to get a drink.” And after awhile I thought, “Oh, please.” . . . I didn’t get it then, but she was absolutely right. But you don’t know that coming in. Like I said, you have to find out for yourself.

Looking through the data, it was obvious that the resident teachers valued honesty in the feedback and advice they received from their mentors. Michelle felt that her mentor was honest in the opinions she shared with her and valued her ideas.

I have had a question before on how to deal with a parent, or how to deal with another teacher, and if I’m not sure how to approach it, or if I should. [Donna] is very good at bouncing ideas off of . . . giving an honest opinion about what I should do.
Ken enjoyed the feeling of security that came with always knowing where he stood with his mentor. He discussed his appreciation for her honest approach.

[Lynne] was very straightforward and honest all of the time. If she wasn’t happy she’d tell you about it. If she thought you had to improve on something, she’d tell you about it. If she thought you were doing something right, she’d tell you about it. It was just always very consistent with her. You always knew where you stood. You always knew what you were doing and you knew if you were on the right track. You knew if you needed to improve on something.

**Being Accessible to the Resident Teachers**

The resident teachers also felt that an essential element of mentor support was their accessibility because of their presence in their school and classrooms. They often described the sense of security they felt knowing that even if they did not need advice or assistance, there was always someone there to turn to if they did. Michelle discussed the sense of security she felt knowing that she had access to support when she needed it. “Just knowing that she is always available in case an emergency would come up. I know that there is someone here who can kind of give me some advice or point me in a direction.”

Kathy shared Michelle’s feelings about the value of having a mentor at her disposal. “Having a mentor is beneficial because I can just go in to talk to her and say, ‘This is what happened today. What can I do about it?’”

Jeanine realized that she could also find support from other faculty members but appreciated knowing that the mentor was there to meet her needs.

Just the thought of having somebody that that was their job. It wasn’t a neighbor teacher that had their own classroom to take care of and you’re going over asking them questions … but that was their [the mentors’] job. They were there to give you support … give you ideas.

The resident teachers did not expect their mentor would always have an answer; however, they did look to them for reassurance that what they were feeling and experiencing was normal and acceptable. Resident teachers considered this to be a valuable form of feedback. Jeanine discussed how at times this was all she was looking for from her mentor.
Just having somebody that you can go to if you’re having a bad day. To be able to just sit there and talk. She doesn’t have to say anything, she could just sit there and say, “OK,” “Well . . .,” Good,” or “I’m sorry to hear that.”

Many of the resident teachers also felt that they were a priority for their mentor. Kathy explained how her mentor’s accessibility made her feel like her concerns came first. You can ask her anything. You can just stop her in the hallway or go into her office and she’s just willing to stop and talk and put down whatever it is she’s doing. It’s very evident that we came first . . . that the three of us came first.

Jeanine also discussed how her mentor’s attitude and actions clearly portrayed her desire to help the resident teachers and their students. “You could tell she loved her job, and she loved the kids and she was willing to do anything for any of us.”

Discussion: Sub-assertion #1b

The resident teachers in this study strongly voiced their appreciation of their mentors’ diverse means of support. Parallel to this finding, a study by Huffman and Leak (1986) revealed that in response to an open-ended question, “96% of the teachers endorsed the mentor role as being the most important element in the induction process” (p. 23). The resident teachers also discussed issues that they felt they may not have been able to deal with, as well as teaching and assessment methods that they may never have tried had they not had mentor support. This contrasts Evertson, Hawley, and Zlotnik’s (1985) conclusion regarding traditional induction that “the induction phase of a teacher’s career more often narrows than expands the range of instructional strategies teachers perceive they can employ” (p. 8).

The literature also reflects that an effective mentoring relationship provides new teachers with support in all aspects of their first year experience. According to the Huffman and Leak (1986) study, beginning teachers felt that “mentors were able to provide assistance in addressing their needs by providing encouragement, collegiality, and specific helpful suggestions for the improvement of teaching” (p. 23).

The resident teachers frequently spoke of the importance of “just having somebody there.” In these discussions, they referred to having another person to talk to about a problem, bounce ideas off of, and ask advice of. Similarly, a study by Odell and Ferraro
(1992) found that what beginning teachers valued most about the mentoring relationship was the emotional support they received. These results support the idea that mentoring lessens the feelings of isolation and lack of support that seem to have a profound negative impact on new teachers.

When paired with a mentor, beginning teachers are less likely to experience the feelings of isolation generally associated with the first year of teaching. In a study by Abell et al. (1995), researchers found that resident teachers valued mentors as trusted confidants in whom they felt safe confiding. An additional study revealed that, with mentor support, novice teachers reported an increase in self-confidence and job satisfaction (Fagan & Walter, 1982). Studies such as these illustrate the potential the practice of mentoring may have in retaining teachers by assisting them through the feelings of frustration and isolation common to beginning experiences.

As previously mentioned, resident teachers frequently referred to the importance of “just having someone there” in case they needed additional assistance. Resident teachers also related this to the access that they had to their mentor because of the mentor’s presence in the building. Abell et al. (1995) found that beginning teachers listed physical proximity among the issues that assisted in the development of the mentor/mentee bond. Physical proximity refers to how accessible the mentor is for the mentees. It was important for mentees to feel that they were close enough in proximity to receive immediate assistance or advice from their mentor (Abell et al., 1995). Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, and Niles (1992) found that “because of the spontaneity with which many of the most crucial mentoring interactions occur, the mentors and [beginning teachers] cited proximity as important for frequent and timely assistance” (p. 210).

Closely related to the issue of physical proximity is what Wildman et al. (1992) referred to as “position-specific responsibilities” (p. 211). Wildman et al. found that mentors often had responsibilities beyond their role as a mentor which often took their focus away from further developing the mentoring relationship. In a study by Hawk (1986), mentors criticized the program they were involved in due to the lack of time provided to adequately respond to beginning teachers’ needs. The same sentiments existed in this study, in that mentors had a number of position-specific responsibilities in addition
to their role as a mentor. Resident mentors were expected to supervise student teachers, teach a course at the university, and perform administrative duties within the school they were assigned. The resident teachers were very aware of the mentors’ rigorous schedules and admitted not approaching them at times because they felt that they were too busy. Susan explained her feelings: “I know that [my mentor] is so busy with things at the university and meetings at the school. Sometimes I feel like I shouldn’t bother her with my problems.” Huffman and Leak (1986) suggested that “further study is needed regarding the amount of time required for mentors adequately to address the needs of beginning teachers” (p. 24).

The resident teachers in this study valued the advice, feedback, and problem solving discussions provided by their mentors. They referred to discussions with their mentor that provided opportunity to talk through an issue, but they also shared specific situations in which they were content to rely on their mentor’s advice or suggestions based on the mentor’s teaching experiences. A study by Wildman et al. (1992) identified seven approaches mentors used to provide assistance for beginning teachers. The approaches ranged from very direct, telling the mentees how to deal with certain situations, to indirectly modeling “a reflective posture while trying to analyze a situation or solve a problem with [the beginning teacher]” (p. 207).

The mentor’s approach, direct or indirect, was generally chosen based on the nature of the issue and time. Mentors who were concerned with the development of beginning teachers and their ability to think through problems on their own generally used an indirect approach that encouraged reflection. The indirect approach often involved discussion and brainstorming which were used to “draw beginners into a purposeful deliberation of the various choices they might reasonably consider in reaching their own conclusions or solutions to problems, questions, or dilemmas” (Wildman et al., 1992, p. 207).

Establishing a reflective environment requires an understanding by both the mentor and the mentee that the role of the beginning teacher is not to imitate the mentors’ behaviors and teaching style. Rather, within the mentoring relationship, beginning teachers are “expected to construct their own emerging theories of teaching and learning, call into question
conventional practices, write about their work, and participate with their experienced mentors as inquiring professionals" (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 305).

While the reflective approach in this study provided beginning teachers with the opportunity to develop as educational decision makers, it was extremely time consuming and not always feasible. Many situations arose in which mentors chose a more direct approach, which the researchers referred to as directing and supporting. Wildman et al. (1992) felt that directing and supporting actions were reflective of "mentors' concerns with getting their beginners to take action, sometimes in the context of problematic situations that could deteriorate more rapidly than beginners realized" (p. 207). This direct approach, which generally consisted of advice or immediate solutions, was also used when mentors felt that beginning teachers would "flounder over decisions unnecessarily, or run out of time for careful reflection" (p. 207).

Franke and Dahlgren (1996) discussed both types of mentor support in the student teaching experience, which is similar to the experience of a resident teacher. They stated that while there is a time and place for both types of mentor support, there is a "demand for a professional training that enables the student teachers to learn to integrate in a reflective manner their theoretical knowledge with practical work" (p. 627). While the quality and suitability of the mentor's advice and support is important, it is crucial that student teachers have the "capacity to reflect upon it and incorporate it into their own teaching" (McNamara, 1995, p. 59). Franke and Dahlgren warn that

if the student teacher is not encouraged to reflect on what is done and why with respect to teaching and the teacher's work, there could be a risk of solely practical work contributing towards an acclimatization of prevailing routines where the ongoing teacher training is labeled as an ideology. (p. 639)

Another role assumed by mentors to meet the needs of beginning teachers was identified by Abell et al. (1995) as "the mentor as support system and troubleshooter" (p. 181). As a support system and troubleshooter the mentor helps the mentee "on a day to day basis and during moments of crisis" (p. 181). In this role mentors thought of themselves as individuals who could help interns head off troubles by being a trustworthy
source of information in helping the mentee get to know the school climate, routine, principal, and procedures.

When beginning teachers felt they needed support in specific areas, mentors found themselves in the role of “a scaffolder” (Abell et al., 1995). In this study, mentors took on the role of a scaffolder in much of the modeling they did for the resident teachers. Examples of the mentors as scaffolders were evident in the resident teachers’ discussions of how their mentor modeled the use of book clubs and then slowly retreated as the resident teachers grew more comfortable with the Book Club procedures. In this role, the mentors shared their experience and knowledge to help mentees work with students, design curriculum, and solve problems in the classroom. By sharing their own related experiences, mentors provided mentees with a “conceptual scaffold upon which to build experiences as a teacher” (p. 182).

The resident teachers frequently discussed their mentors’ willingness to share their materials and knowledge with them. Kathy referred to her mentor bringing items from home that related to lessons she was teaching, or sharing lessons that she had taught relating to a specific unit. Beginning teachers in a study by Huffman and Leak (1986) also perceived their mentors to have provided them with help by sharing instructional materials and assisting in familiarizing them with the curriculum. A study on the roles of mentors (Wildman et al., 1992) identified a category of mentor activity that involved “providing products and information that beginning teachers needed to address short and long term problems” (p. 207). This category specifically included

those instances when the mentors offered a variety of pertinent information or products and the beginners could choose to use whatever they believed would work. Without this type of assistance, novices reported spending much of their time inventing procedures and products, often with little idea of what would work. (p. 207)

Assertion #2: Resident Teachers Felt Deep Frustration With Aspects of Their Experience

Sub-assertion #2a. Time management was an area of frustration for the resident teachers.
Sub-assertion #2b. Classroom management was an area of intense concern in the resident teachers’ experience.

Sub-assertion #2c. The grade level experience of the mentor affected the experience of the resident teacher.

Sub-assertion #2d. A lack of effective communication among participants in the Resident Teacher Program caused confusion regarding various roles and expectations.

Assertion #2: Resident Teachers Felt Deep Frustration With Aspects of Their Experience

Interviews with resident teachers often turned to discussions of frustrations resident teachers were experiencing in the Resident Teacher Program. Some aspects of the program that resident teachers found frustrating included time management issues, classroom management and discipline, the grade level experience of one’s mentor, and ineffective communication among participants in the Resident Teacher Program. Those aspects of the program that proved frustrating to the resident teachers could be perceived as barriers to providing resident teachers with the most successful experience possible. A discussion of each area of frustration follows.

Sub-assertion #2a. Time management was an area of frustration for the resident teachers.

Resident teachers were presented with a number of responsibilities beyond those of a regular first year teacher. Because of the sheer number and variety of responsibilities, management became the key to their survival in the resident teacher experience. Within their classrooms resident teachers had to develop effective classroom management, discipline, and home school relations, while outside of their classroom they had to manage their course work, long-term and daily planning, faculty and committee meetings, and outside life. Most frequently discussed by the resident teachers were their struggles with and growth in managing their time.

Kathy described feeling overwhelmed with time commitments. She explained: [It’s] overwhelming because you have the master’s credits to work on and, along with that, the so-called 40 hours a week job that you have that turns into 70 hours a week. It’s so overwhelming because I try to go above and beyond because I’m so afraid that what I’m doing isn’t good enough, or that I need to try and be better.
The time has been a real factor for me... overwhelming in the fact that the list is never cleared. You can add something onto the list every hour. There are times when I’ve gone home at nights and cried because I couldn’t knock anything off of the list at the end of the day.

Jeanine struggled to develop a time management schedule to fit everything in. She shared how she divided her time to try to meet all of her responsibilities.

I got up early in the morning and we’d try to get to school early and get things done. I’d bring my books or whatever I needed to do for college with me to school and a lot of times that’s why I’d stay after school so late. I’d stay until I got all my stuff done for the next day and then I’d work on my course work while I was still at the school with the computer and no noise. I would try to be sure that I was home before 9:00. And I spent a lot of weekends mostly just on college work and then on Sundays I’d go out to school and get ready for the next week.

An important consideration for Jeanine in her time management plan was to include a time for a mandatory daily workout. She explained that making time to exercise was a necessity for her to maintain a healthy perspective throughout the year.

The thing that saved me from all of it is just making sure that I found some way to work out every day, or some way to exercise. To do something and just forget about school, forget my homework, forget about everything.

Missy’s fifth grade class consisted of a number of struggling readers. Because of this, the curriculum materials provided by the school district were not appropriate. Missy discussed the feelings of frustration that came with the expectations that she could modify the majority of the curriculum without having the time to do so.

I felt like I was being pushed too far as a teacher. I was told that it was because of the material that I was presenting, but I was a first year teacher. I don’t have any materials other than what I was given. So how can you... you know, you can’t just invent an entire social studies curriculum. You can’t invent seven curriculums for non-reading students in one year... I mean, it’s just not humanly possible.
Ken discussed the difficulties he had staying alert and motivated in his graduate classes after spending the entire day teaching. He described one of his evening courses and the professor’s expectations.

By the time we got there at 7:00 we were pretty much beat. We had to stay there until 9:00. I don’t think that it’s a realistic expectation that we’re going to be bright eyed and chipper all of the time. That was [the professor’s] expectation and we didn’t live up to it. And, I don’t know if you want to say she had to do something so that she didn’t think it was her? But that’s how I feel about it. She wanted to be able to say that it wasn’t her fault, which it wasn’t. It was just the fact that we taught all day and we were tired . . . it’s going to be pretty hard to be interested at 7:00 and be attentive in a lecture.

Michelle discussed how frustrated she became with the amount of time she was spending on her teaching and university course work, and how she came to realize that she could be a better teacher for her students if she would allow herself time to focus on life outside of school.

At the beginning I was spending every weekend at the school both days, and I was here until 8:00 or 9:00 every single night. I just got to the point where I was never seeing my husband, I was never home. I was always here, and I was getting to the point where I was sick of it. And it was only October or November and I thought, I don’t want to be sick of it, I still have half a year to go. And so I remember the first weekend that I took one of the weekend days off. I just went for a walk and I made cookies and all these stupid things happened to me. I got chased by a dog and I forgot to put the butter in the cookies and just all this really stupid stuff. And I came back to school on Monday and had all these funny stories and I was going to share them with the kids. I saw the connection that it made with the kids, that they knew that their teacher had a real life outside of school and that I was a real person just like they were . . . and I felt better. I was behind in the stuff that I had to get done, but I felt better inside. I think that that was kind of the point where I thought I need to remember to try and be home by a certain time every night and be sure that I take one day off every weekend where I just do nothing with school.
Michelle also discussed how her frustration with the number of directions she was being pulled affected her mentally.

I think what really got me down . . . what gets me down is when I’m so busy that I don’t have the time to spend with my husband, or when I forget a meeting or forget that I need to be somewhere. I forget to call a parent back, or . . . you just have so many things. . . . That’s when I get kind of stressed and tired and . . . and . . . I don’t know.

Michelle shared how she gradually changed the amount of time she spent at school as the year progressed, which allowed her to create a more reasonable balance in her life.

At the beginning of the year I was here pretty much at 7:00 every morning and stayed until 7:00 or 8:00 at night, unless I had class. I would go to class and often I would come back to my classroom after class. On the weekends I was usually here part of both days. Then as the year kind of went on, I really set a goal for myself to try to be out of here by 5:00. I know I could stay here every night until midnight. You just kind of have to set a deadline because you can always find little things to do. I haven’t been coming in the mornings quite so early. I don’t come in until about 7:30 and I just try to get more of my things done during the day. I just have kind of been more efficient at getting more things done in this half hour if I can. On weekends I try to have at least one day where I do not come at all. I’m trying to make sure that I set aside some time to not be here. I usually take things home with me, but that’s different. You’re more relaxed.

Time management was a particularly troubling issue for Susan. In addition to her graduate course work and teaching duties, Susan was also responsible for two children. Because she was pulled in many directions, Susan had to prioritize her responsibilities and in doing so felt that her family was being shortchanged.

I wanted to teach. I wanted to get in and do it. And, I wanted to get my master’s. . . . This isn’t the way that I would have preferred to get my master’s. I almost wish that . . . and this wouldn’t work for everybody, but I have a year of teaching with the [mentor] support, and then do the classes the next year. Because I have to make choices. And right or wrong, my priorities . . . and I know that one of them
is wrong, but I’ve been putting my classroom first (minute pause, covering face and crying), my family second, and graduate work third. (Still crying) “Forgive me for that, huh?” They’ve been patient . . . and they know it . . . they know I’ve put them second sometimes . . . and it’s been a hard choice . . . but it’s short, it’ll be done . . . and then I’ll do things for them.

Discussion: Sub-assertion #2a

The resident teachers in this study struggled in developing a system to efficiently manage all of their roles and responsibilities. A study by Huffman and Leak (1986) found that beginning teachers perceived mentors as having helped them by providing suggestions for organization of time. Hall and Loucks (1978) identified concerns about managing the many facets of the classroom and getting all tasks accomplished as one of the stages of concern that beginning teachers evolve through. In this stage, the resident teachers looked to their mentor to assist them in developing a time schedule for the school day and learned through time and experience how to manage their own schedule. While the resident teachers in Hall and Loucks’ study valued mentor input in the area of time management, teachers in a study by Odell and Ferraro (1992) placed the least value on mentoring support they had received in managing the school day and functioning within the school district. While the participants in this study often discussed their frustrations with time management, they did not specifically refer to their mentor assisting or supporting them in organizing their time. However, mentors did provide assistance in the form of substitute teaching and classroom support when resident teachers became too overwhelmed.

Sub-assertion #2b. Classroom management was an area of intense concern in the resident teachers’ experience.

Classroom management was one of the greatest concerns of the resident teachers, but it was also an area in which by the end of the year they all felt they had grown. In discussing difficult aspects of his year, Ken quickly responded, “Trying to figure out classroom management or discipline issues.” Michelle discussed the anxiety she experienced in regards to classroom management.

The biggest challenge of this year was classroom management and knowing what to do with discipline problems. And knowing what to do when situations come up.
That has been the most stressful because everything I do and everything anybody says I take so much to heart and I have to learn not to do that because I will give myself an ulcer... if I don’t have one already.

In a later interview Michelle discussed what and how she had learned about classroom management over the course of the year.

I’ve learned about classroom management through situations coming up. If I do something and I step back and think, “Hmm, I don’t know if that was the right move there, if I should have done that.” Maybe I should have done it a little better.

I’ve learned to hear all sides of the story. A child comes up to you and says, “So and so is kicking me” or “teasing me” or whatever... listen to all sides of the story before making a decision. Don’t make quick, rash decisions. And I think that first graders are very capable of thinking of better choices than what they make. Some people think that children can’t rationalize stuff at that age. Well some can’t, but you know a lot of them really can. They know what is right and what’s not, and they can make better choices. They just need to not react so quickly. And so I think to work with my kids on making appropriate choices and to have them be responsible for their behavior, not me.

With the help of her mentor, Michelle adopted class meetings as one way to deal with classroom management difficulties. Michelle used class meetings as a time to discuss problems that had or could arise in class. These meetings provided students with ideas and strategies that would help them to take responsibility for their own behavior.

Through our class meetings students have learned to become more responsible for their own behavior. Talking about it and modeling it. “Let’s say this situation happened, what would you do? What should we do?” Or if an incident has already occurred, taking the approach of “How could you have handled that differently? What could you do?” Just talking about it and modeling, and telling them that this is what you need to do if this happens.

Even though Jeanine struggled with classroom management at the beginning of the year she discussed what she learned over the course of the year and how she approached it.
I think that being able to laugh with [the students]... some people say don't smile until November, and that is just crazy to me. I think you have to smile the first day. Let the kids know that you're there to help them. You're not there to boss them around. And when they ask why you give them a reason, not just "Because I said so." And if that's your answer, then maybe it's not a good rule. Maybe it's not something that should have been set. So having the kids help, that kind of brings the trust in, and then reminding everybody. I would remind them and they would remind me. We would all remind each other and that just helps to build a community and it kept it so we could laugh.

Missy recognized that behavior management was the area she most struggled with. She described one situation involving classroom management in which she was threatened by a student.

A student sat in my classroom during a spelling lesson and colored her hand for 10 minutes and refused to work. And finally I told her, "You have two choices, you get to work or go to the office." And she said, "I'm not going anywhere." So, I took her marker and I set it down and said, "You get to work or you go to the office." She said, "I'm not going anywhere." So I asked another student to go find my mentor, and at that point she stood up... and she said, "I will beat you, and you know that I can. I am bigger than you and stronger than you, and I don't care if you're older than I am."

During the first semester practicum meetings, the resident teachers would get together and discuss their teaching experiences. Susan shared why her struggles with classroom management made it difficult for her to attend the practicum meetings.

[For] everybody else it was going pretty good. And, I mean... great for them, but I couldn't help but feeling like, "Oh, shut up!," which I don't even say. It's not in my vocabulary. But, oh... I didn't want to hear their rosy stories. I hate kids going bonkers on me, rolling their eyes at me, sticking out their tongue, yelling at other kids, shoving, hitting, all those behaviors. I didn't want to hear how good their [class] meeting was and went. Isn't that awful? But that's the darn truth.
Five of the resident teachers spoke of classroom management as one of their greatest concerns. The exception to this was Kathy who was very confident in her ability to maintain a comfortable learning environment. While she did not discuss classroom management as one of her bigger concerns, she still spoke of what she had learned about classroom management from her recent experiences and what she had gleaned from interactions with the students and her mentor’s advice.

This year people have come into my classroom and said, “You’re a first year teacher? I just can’t believe how these kids just know the expectations.” And for a first year teacher they can’t believe that my classroom management is pretty stable. And I have to say that it is because I am a good learner . . . that I really worked at it. That is one thing that I really worked on this year. The thing that I can actually say that I am proud of.

Discussion: Sub-assertion #2b

Classroom management was a great issue of concern among the resident teachers in this study. This is consistent with research on beginning teachers that indicates classroom management and discipline are the strongest concerns among beginning teachers (Applegate et al., 1977; Veenman, 1984). Fox and Singletary (1986) developed four goals for induction, one of which specifically addresses beginning teachers’ need for support in this area. This goal states that induction should “assist in the development of acceptable methods for solving problems that typically confront new teachers, especially methods of classroom management and discipline” (p. 13).

Fox and Singletary (1986) explained first year teachers’ need for support in classroom management techniques stating that while teachers are exposed to classroom management and discipline in their student teaching experience, it is not until the first year of teaching that they must set up and maintain their own system of classroom management.

Sub-assertion #2c. The grade level experience of the mentor affected the experience of the resident teacher.

While resident teachers valued the support and advice of their mentors, they gave the mentor’s grade level experience a great deal of consideration. Resident teachers felt that there were several situations where the mentors with primary grade level experience could
not relate to intermediate grade level concerns. Susan discussed how she felt about the advice she received from her mentor, whose grade level experience was lower than the grade level Susan was teaching.

I’ve sort of taken [my mentor’s advice] with a grain of salt. Because her background is rather limited. As far as grade level, because there were some times where I was talking content and she was talking activity.

Susan provided an example of a situation in which she felt her mentor’s grade level experience affected her ability to provide Susan with adequate assistance.

In math I would be talking about understanding, even with just addition and subtraction, and where I’d be trying to approach it or regrouping or whatever, and she’d have some kind of cutesy thing that I could have them do. When I’m thinking, “Oh, I’m pretty much writing this off.” Because let’s face it, in first grade they do things at a different level. Third grade you have to really . . . we’re building here and sometimes in first grade you are too, but I think it’s a pretty important big concept. So with things like that I just really had to get rid of that idea because I didn’t want to fall into the activity type of teaching. Because it gets you through the day, but it doesn’t get you through the year . . . is my perspective.

Susan shared what she saw to be some of the differences between teaching at the intermediate and primary level.

I think that there are management differences. I think there are expectation differences. I think there are approach differences. I mean, first grade you can maybe whip up more cutesy activities, and I think you can get more learning across that way, but if you go to third grade, you risk [the students] shutting down if it’s too simple.

Missy, who taught fifth grade, was assigned to a mentor whose experience was in primary grades. She discussed her concerns regarding the grade level difference.

I guess it was kind of a difficult situation for me in that very rarely had they had an upper elementary resident teacher take this position and the mentor who was assigned as my mentor had only taught kindergarten and first grade. So I think it was really a whole different ball game, knowing kindergarten and first grade and
then trying to mentor a first year teacher in fifth grade when you don’t even have that experience yourself.

Missy stated that while the other resident teachers were provided with assistance from the mentor in their classrooms, her mentor never set a time to come into her classroom, and never asked to participate or assist. Missy discussed her perceptions as to why the mentor did not participate in activities in her classroom.

I know that she was very uncomfortable in that I was teaching fifth grade and she had never taught any grade higher than first, and so for other classes she presented and things like that, but when I asked she’d say, “Well, I have to do this and this, and I need preparation time.” She didn’t seem exactly willing to do a lesson or a presentation in my class. She didn’t feel comfortable with 10 and 11 year olds. I have very high standards and expectations and I expected from a mentor someone who would teach me how to deal with what I was going through, and I didn’t feel that she had the knowledge nor the expertise to be a mentor for me.

Related to the issue of the mentor’s grade level experience were the resident teachers’ perceptions of the grade level appropriateness of the Resident Teacher Program’s focus and the related university courses. One of the courses that resident teachers felt over focused on primary grade level issues was the required summer practicum. This was a required course that provided students with the opportunity to get to know each other and their mentors, while being prepared to begin their year as teachers. The summer practicum ties into the issue of grade level experience because it was taught by Donna, the mentor at Washington Elementary School, who had only primary level experience. Kathy felt that the required summer practicum was focused on the primary level and that she did not benefit from the time she spent there. When asked what she found beneficial about the course she discussed the extent of her memory of the course.

They gave us a big blue binder, and every week [Donna, the mentor from Washington Elementary School] would give us handouts of neat writing paper you could use with your kids, and some spelling things . . . but a lot of it didn’t pertain to me, it was more like Jeanine and Michelle because it was more primary . . .
don’t think Ken’s ever used any of it. When we took home the binder, I took all of the stuff out and put other things in it. So I haven’t used it.

Much like Kathy, Ken felt that his time could have been spent in a more productive way. “There just wasn’t much that pertained to me as a fourth grade teacher.”

Missy shared her thoughts regarding the required summer practicum:

I was going to be a fifth grade teacher and the things we were getting in these classes and the things we were talking about was “OK, here’s this bathroom pass you can have [the students] wear around their neck. Here’s this poem that you can teach them to say. Here’s this cute little bear letter you can send home so they can all be reading books.” It was all cutesy, fun kinds of stuff that really doesn’t apply to the upper elementary students. So then I kind of felt like here everyone else is getting all this stuff to start their room, learning things that were going to be significant for their classrooms, and I felt like three hours of my week was kind of being shoved out the door like it didn’t matter... that upper elementary students didn’t matter, that it was the younger kids who mattered.

While some resident teachers struggled with issues regarding their mentor’s grade level experience, those who were paired with a mentor with a similar grade level experience identified benefits of the match. Jeanine explained that because her mentor had taught at a similar grade level, she was able to provide her with additional ideas and materials.

She’d see that we were doing something and she’d bring something from home the next day just to go with what we were doing. She would ask, “What do you plan to teach next week?” or “What are you doing for the next unit?,” and then she would bring in all the things she had that I could maybe use. She was always just sharing and giving you new ideas.

Having taught at the first grade level for several years, Michelle’s mentor, Donna, was able to introduce her to teaching methods or techniques that she had applied in her own first grade classroom. Michelle explained how her mentor’s modeling provided her with the opportunity to learn a variety of effective instructional ideas.

If I wouldn’t have had the support from Donna, I wouldn’t probably have tried a lot of things I’ve tried in my room. The Book Club concept was totally foreign to me
before this year, and if I wouldn’t have had Donna to come introduce it to me and my students I don’t think we would be doing it.

Kathy struggled with finding interesting materials and ideas to supplement the school district’s science curriculum. Because her mentor had experience at a similar grade level, she was able to assist her by providing Kathy with materials that she had used. “Lynne did help out with a lot of science materials and I used some of her files that she had.” Kathy also felt that Lynne’s background experience helped her to develop a more interesting and effective social studies curriculum. She explained:

I didn’t enjoy sitting down and opening a book in social studies and just sitting down and reading and discussing with the kids. But, I didn’t have time to go and plan all these extravagant social studies lessons and units. Most of it was things that Lynne helped me out with, so that was a big help.

Discussion: Sub-assertion #2c

In a study by Driscoll, Peterson, and Kauchak (1985), beginning teachers stressed the importance of a proper match in grade level and subject area in the mentoring relationship. McNamara (1995) discussed the importance of mentors having grade level experience similar to those they will be mentoring stating that the mentor must have a sensitive appreciation of the children’s prior learning and abilities so that he or she is uniquely placed to offer that particular advice about the circumstances of the class and the children that the [new teacher] should bear in mind when planning to support and foster learning. (p. 60)

Likewise, Wildman et al. (1992) stated that mentors and beginning teachers cited similar grade level as an important influence on the mentoring relationship stating that “the match helps to ensure that mentors will have the knowledge and tools to fulfill their role” (p. 210).

Similarly, in this study, resident teachers at the intermediate grade level were frustrated by mentors who lacked teaching experience at a similar grade level. Individuals spoke of “taking the mentor’s advice with a grain of salt,” because they did not feel that their mentor had the experience or knowledge necessary to provide them with useful advice.
Huffman and Leak (1986) found that beginning teachers indicated that they would prefer to have “competent mentors, who were genuinely interested in the mentoring role, to less competent mentors chosen” (p. 22) based on grade level. However, these researchers also found that to “maximize their effectiveness” the mentor and beginning teacher should work at the same grade level.

A study by Abell et al. (1995) found that mentees felt the success of a mentoring program was based on the bond between the mentor and mentee. Beginning teachers listed grade level as one of the issues that assisted in the development of this bond. If a mentee does not respect the mentor as a professional, even though they may have a close personal relationship, the mentor’s advice will most likely not be respected (Abell et al., 1995).

Much like Abell et al.’s study, this study also found that resident teachers failed to acknowledge advice provided by a mentor who they perceived not possess the knowledge or experience necessary to assist them.

**Sub-assertion #2d.** A lack of effective communication among participants in the Resident Teacher Program caused confusion regarding various roles and expectations. Communication was an overarching issue that affected several aspects of the resident teachers’ experience. Resident teachers frequently discussed aspects of the program that they were uncertain of including program requirements, participant roles, and specific procedures. From the interviews it was clear that the resident teachers felt that there were several issues that had not been effectively communicated to them, and they voiced frustration with these gaps. Resident teachers often spoke of the need for three way communication among the mentors, university supervisors, and resident teachers and of their desire to have an opportunity to share feedback and program suggestions.

Michelle discussed what she felt was an important characteristic of an ideal mentor. “I think that it is very important to make it real clear to [the residents] what you can do for them.”

Michelle went on to discuss her uncertainty as to what she should expect from her mentor. She credits this confusion to inadequate communication regarding the role of the mentor. “There have been times where I’m not sure what kind of things to expect of [my mentor], or what kinds of things to ask her.”
Missy felt that having a different communication style than her mentor became an issue and in the long run negatively affected their ability to work together.

I'm a very verbal person. [My mentor] would write in my journal and rather than write a note back, I'd go find her and talk to her about it. To me . . . other people think it makes more sense to write it down because you have time to think about it and I think it was useless. I'd always been a speaker, so I'd go and talk to her about things and I guess she was somewhat hurt and upset that I wasn't responding to her through the journal. But to me I was responding verbally. We had different styles of communication and so there just didn't seem to be that bond between us.

Missy further discussed her frustrations with the communication among individuals in the program and explained the effect that it had on her.

In my case, I almost felt as if I was the one who was not being communicated with. That everyone else, the mentor, the principal, the supervisors, were all talking about me, but not to me and with me. I would hear from one mouth something that had been said confidentially to another. So I felt that things were being talked about me, but not with me. So I did not feel that I was being communicated with as an adult, but almost rather as a child.

Five of the resident teachers had one of the two university supervisors as their master’s advisor as well. Approximately half way into the school year, two of the resident teachers were asked to change from one of the supervisors as their master’s advisor to the other. Kathy discussed being upset by the change and the lack of explanation. She was uncertain how to perceive the change.

I really didn’t know. I knew that Deb [one of the university supervisors] was very big in this program the year before and in previous years, and I didn’t know if she just wanted to have more say in what was going on, or if Ruth just didn’t want it.

Susan discussed the fear and uncertainty she experienced having received a negative evaluation from a university supervisor, and what she perceived to be occurring in the program after one resident teacher had resigned.

They [university supervisors] had given Missy an ultimatum already and I was the only other intern that they visited. So I was . . . in my paranoia . . . connecting
myself as being in her shoes. And when Ruth said nothing positive I thought, “Ya know . . . is there nothing positive?” I thought that I was going to get a little sheet and have to sign it (referring to being asked to resign from the program).

Jeanine addressed her concerns about the lack of communication within the program.

I think that just the communication needs to be open, and people can’t feel like they’re being attacked. And I think that a lot of people, just when they are being given a suggestion feel like they are being attacked. Because they are like “Oh no, I did something wrong and somebody noticed” instead of “Thanks, I can do it better now.”

Jeanine also felt that some of the communication issues could be addressed by conducting a mentor/supervisor evaluation, something that was not offered to the resident teachers.

It just seems like suggestions should have maybe come from us at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year. And maybe we should have had to do an evaluation on both our mentor and our supervisor. Then they could read those and take into account that these are maybe some things that they could work on for the next year. Not to be mean . . . but there are things that we would have liked to have known more about. I think that the program is old enough now that they should all kind of have it down. I know that each year there are different people in it, but they should know what they expect, and they should be able to let us know what they expect. And they should let new mentors know what is expected of them.

The lack of effective communication sub-assertion was further divided into two categories which included confusion regarding the role of the university supervisors and confusion about how the resident teachers’ teaching performance would be graded.

a. Confusion regarding the role of the university supervisors.

As a result of the lack of effective communication, confusion developed regarding the role of the university supervisors. Failure to communicate the supervisor’s role in the resident teachers’ experience caused feelings of abandonment and unmet expectations.
Deb, one of the university supervisors, described her role as one that was “limited by time and travel” and has “changed over time.” She further described how she viewed her role as a supervisor in the Resident Teacher Program.

My role, as I see it right now, is . . . one of the prime things I try to do with the residents is to be sure that they know what they’re doing in the graduate program. And, I guess on just a purely practical level, that they know how to do their program of study and what should be on them, and how to get associated with an advisor for their independent project. Some of that logistical stuff. On one level, that doesn’t sound like that much, but on the other level, they are first year teachers. They are very overwhelmed, our expectations for them are high. So I try to use practicum time to keep them informed and rolling on that type of thing . . . I try to make the link between what they are learning in their graduate courses and the applications they can make to their classrooms. Helping them see that what they are learning helps to inform the decisions that they make. . . . My role is to communicate with the resident mentors, we talk on the phone about the residents. I go out and visit their classrooms, not to really even observe, but more to participate in whatever it is they are doing, so I can get a feel for what their classrooms are like.

Deb also explained how the university supervisors have had to adapt their role in the Resident Teacher Program because of the limited amount of time allotted by the university for their work with the resident teachers.

I think also one of the role changes has been because it’s never been very clear that there was release time for the university person to be in that role of university [supervisor]. And suddenly we realized that that wasn’t really happening. So we minimized our role a little bit in some ways. And I think maybe made it more efficient. I don’t think that it’s less good . . . maybe just a little bit more efficient.

Michelle discussed her expectations of the university supervisors and the reality of her experience.

I expected that the university supervisors would come in and observe and give me feedback on what they noticed and what they saw and make suggestions. I thought
that they would pop in three or four times over the course of the semester and maybe sit down and watch and observe and take notes . . . and that didn’t happen. Susan recalled being equally disappointed when her expectations were not met.

"[The supervisors] always talked about having such an active role in the classroom and I thought, ‘Oh, that’s cool,’ and I didn’t get it. So that was disappointing . . . it really was.”

Jeanine had similar expectations of the supervisors and discussed her feelings when her expectations were not realized.

I thought the university supervisor would be coming out to observe because they grade us. And I thought that they would be giving us feedback about how things are going, because they have been teaching a long time. And maybe trying to relate what the course work was that we were doing to how I was teaching. I thought they’d be out in the classroom a little bit. At least once a month . . . maybe six to nine times over the course of the year. I guess we were told that they would be in and then they weren’t. So it seemed like we were kind of put on the back burner. I know they have a lot of work to do at the university, and I know that they are so busy because there is not enough staff and whatnot . . . but still it is their program. So I thought that they would at least want to get out there and see what their program was doing and how the people they had hired to be in it were doing.

Jeanine described the few visits that she did have from her supervisor and her frustration with having to request that she be observed. She was also disappointed by the lack of feedback provided and felt that the supervisor chose an inopportune time for an observation.

At the beginning of the year the supervisor came into my room twice. The first time was for about three minutes and the second time was when I invited her. She didn’t plan on coming in and observing or anything like that. Maybe the first time she was there for about five minutes. The second time she was in there for a half hour and she wrote notes . . . this was after I had asked her [to come in]. And my mentor had said, “You probably shouldn’t have to ask her to come in,” but I did ask. She came in and observed right before Christmas. I think it was the day before we went on Christmas break, when all the kids were wild . . . I was wild
(laughs). I got the write up, oh . . . the beginning of February, and that was after I had called a few times. [She indicated that] there wasn’t anything that I should work on, and I really thought that . . . I knew there was stuff that I needed to work on . . . so I thought I would have been told something from the university people. Instead I got it from my mentor teacher, not the supervisors. And at the last part of the year my supervisor was [a] different [person] and came in three times. One time [she came] when there weren’t any students, and that was just for about two or three minutes. And then two times when I had students for about maybe 10 minutes, and I never got any feedback from that.

Jeanine described what she would have liked to have seen from the supervisors in the way of visits and feedback.

At least for them to come out three times in a semester wouldn’t be too hard. You know, once at the beginning and then in the middle and towards the end. Just to see how you’re doing. Maybe just stay for 15 minutes, but that’s going to give you more of an idea than five minutes . . . walking in and walking out. At least stay in and have a time that they know is a good time for you and then they can give you feedback, and they could base your grades on your growth.

Lynne, the Jefferson Elementary School resident mentor, recognized the time constraints faced as being the reason that they were not visible in the resident teachers’ classrooms. She discussed the benefits of providing the supervisors with more time to spend in the classroom.

The university end of it is very infrequent. I do appreciate their schedules and respect the time that they have to put into their own classes and position and their loads are very, very heavy. But I hope that in the future, if this program continues, and there is a supervisor responsible for that program, that their hours can be arranged accordingly so that there is more support. Not just with the practicum . . . that’s nice, and it’s very crucial. That time during the practicum is great, but also, that time in the building is wonderful. I have sensed from the residents that “Why aren’t they here? Where are they?” kind of thing. . . . It’s very short when they’re
there. Very brief and almost impersonal. Because when the supervisor does come they’re trying to get to everybody in such a short time.

Ruth, one of the university supervisors, also felt that she could contribute to the resident teachers’ experience by spending time in the classroom. She explained that because of their workload at the university they had decided that this was one area in which they could cut back, given the resident teachers also had daily support from their mentors.

As a faculty, since we hadn’t gotten more faculty involved, we decided we needed to back off a little because it is so time intensive . . . and we have not always been given credit in our teaching load for the time that we are doing that. But I spend a lot of time in the schools, and there is some disagreement among faculty about whether that role should include the university person spending a lot of time in the classroom. I feel like I can do them the most good there. Other people feel that maybe it infringes a little bit on the resident mentor’s role.

Ken spoke of his desire for feedback, which he felt he did not adequately receive, as well as frustrations with what he felt was a lack of follow through on the part of the supervisors.

Things weren’t discussed after the observations, [the supervisors] just left and went back to the university. Things weren’t discussed as far as where you were at or what you were doing. One time Ruth came out and some notes were left and I tried to get back to her to talk to her about them, and she never returned my calls. Deb the first time said, “I have notes, but I’m not ready to share them with you.” And the second time she shared the notes from the second observation, but I never received the notes from the first.

Ken did recall one helpful visit in which he received feedback and assistance; however, this meeting occurred at the end of the year. While he was pleased with the feedback and recommendations he received, he was disappointed that it did not materialize until the near completion of the program.

The last time that Deb came out was actually probably the best time of any of the times that anyone’s come out. She came out, took notes, saw where I was having some problems, and sent me the information that was relevant. We discussed
things where I felt I was having a couple of problems, and where she thought I was having a couple of problems, and she discussed what she thought I could do to improve those areas. And she sent me some literature and some actual ideas to try . . . something useful. But that happened . . . you know I only have three weeks left, and how does that help me compared to had they done that the whole way through? To come out one time and give someone something and say, "Well, that's what I'm here to do." Well, I think that you're not there to do that at the end of the time, you should be giving us support the whole time through.

Like Ken, Susan also felt that the feedback she did receive from the supervisors came at a point when it was too late. Susan discussed her feelings of frustration after receiving feedback too late in the year, even though she had indicated to the supervisors that she was struggling.

At first I was really disappointed with Northern State University because I thought there would be more of a supervisory role, but perhaps I misinterpreted that. So again I just roll with the punches. I know if I needed someone I could ask them to come into my room, but I thought that it was going to be there in the beginning and when it wasn't I handled it on my own. And for them to come in later . . . it's almost too late. And I did mention to them the management problems that I had. They needed to be there from the get-go . . . from the beginning, but to come in my room in the third month and say, "This has got to change. Drop this, change this . . . boy you've got some kids in trouble." Well, yeah . . . I've known that since the first day. It just wasn't the feedback I needed. . . . You know, saying, "Boy, when [the students] move they talk." Well, yeah, I know this, I've been with them for several months now.

While Susan was interested in feedback she expressed her disappointment in the tone and form of the feedback that she did receive. The lack of positive feedback, and the overwhelming number of negative comments, caused her to doubt her ability to teach.

They were all wonderful suggestions, but she laid them on me SPLAT! (slapping her hand on the table) and it was too much. It would have been nice for Ruth to just pick an area and kind of reassure me a little bit better . . . she has a lot going
on, and I know that it probably wasn’t personal, but I went from . . . because I thought that I was a prize student . . . to a (sticks out tongue and points thumbs down) feeling teacher in one fell swoop. It was very difficult for me to handle. Because it was all just BAM!

Susan also discussed what she felt could have been done to help her through her first year struggles.

At the university level I think that there could have been a little more support . . . in the way of observations most of all. I would have benefited more from visits from the Northern State supervisor one-on-one where I could have poured my heart out and had everything validated . . . and not even solutions, just “We understand” or “Wow, isn’t that tough? How can I help?” or just “Hang in there.” You know what? I bet it will get better. I just felt like I could have used a couple more large shoulders.

Although Susan had hoped for more support from her university supervisors, she recognized the underlying issues behind their absence.

They need more employees, that’s the bottom line. Because Deb says she wants to be here, and I know she does, and she hasn’t been. And Ruth was here just that one time and told me everything I needed to improve and then left and didn’t come back. That wasn’t what I was looking for. But I do like to be evaluated. I enjoy that.

Kathy was the exception in her feelings regarding the involvement of the university supervisor. She was pleased with the involvement of one of her supervisors, but recognized that the other resident teachers were not being as frequently observed. While she did not find the feedback she received particularly useful, she appreciated the opportunity to be observed by someone she had a great deal of respect for.

I was happy with Ruth, because she came to observe me. [Other residents] she didn’t, but she came in maybe three times and wrote every time. She wasn’t as good with the others. One time we were making some decorations and Ruth came in and wrote down everything that I said. So she tried to write as much as she could of the directions I gave for this art project. I don’t know that you would say
it was useful, but it was nice that at least she could see me teach after these couple of years knowing her and guiding me through and teaching me things, that she would be able to see me in action. And that made me feel good, that this was a person I had admired for a long time. She is very honest and very straightforward, and didn’t have anything negative to say.

b. Confusion about how the resident teachers’ teaching performance would be graded.

The lack of communication and the absence of a written or stated formal objective grading procedure for the resident teachers’ teaching performance was a great source of frustration and confusion for the resident teachers. Missy explained her perception of the grading issue.

I didn’t feel that there were set expectations and set goals and a set understanding so that you knew, “If I do this, this is what I get.” It kind of felt like you just keep on doing what you’re doing and hope that that’s what you’re supposed to be doing. Jeanine recalled feeling uncertain and confused by how her teaching would be graded.

The first grade was given for the first semester and we had no idea what it was based on. The second semester the supervisor had made a list like rubric and gave us a grade according to that, but she never showed us before we were graded. Jeanine recalled inquiring about how grades were given after they had received the first semester grades.

We had no clue . . . all of a sudden we had a grade on our report card. We’d ask why or how and we wouldn’t get an answer. And then we got a new supervisor in January and we asked, “How are you going to grade us?” And the answer was, “Nobody’s ever asked me that before.” Well, you’ve been doing this for what . . . eight years, I think? And you don’t know . . . you’ve got to know. There’s got to be something you’re looking for. Are you grading us? Is our mentor grading us? How is this going to work? And our answer still was, “Nobody’s ever asked.” We never got an answer. Then we got grades and a check sheet, and it’s all checked off, but [the supervisor] was never in our room to observe us do it.
Jeanine also discussed the resident teachers' reaction to learning that one of their peers had received a lower grade without an explanation.

This year somebody got a B and we all... it felt like all of us did. Because all of us that got A's kind of went, "What? Why is this?" So we all brought it up because it could have happened to any of us, and we all just wondered how this person got this grade.

Ken, who received the B, discussed the frustration he experienced in his search for an explanation of the grade.

No one had informed me as to why I had received a lower grade and when I tried to inquire about it no one returned my calls, or they were too busy. I just got the run-around. I still don't know exactly why I received a lower grade than everybody else.

Another grading issue that evolved due to the lack of effective communication was the resident teachers' perceptions of who would and who should be grading them. The resident teachers felt strongly that the university supervisors knew very little about the daily occurrences in their classrooms, while their mentors were in a position to evaluate how things were going on a daily basis, as well as how the resident teacher was progressing.

Kathy shared her reaction upon realizing that the supervisors were responsible for assigning the grades.

I was upset when we found out that [the supervisors] would be giving us our grades. Our question was, "How can Ruth and Deb be giving us our grades when Ruth's only been here three times?" I did get an "A," but what if she would have caught me on a bad day, or when a student was acting up, or whatever? Three times to decide on a person's grade for 90 days of instruction total is pretty unfair.

Ken was also very discouraged by the supervisors providing the grade and shared his concerns with his mentor. "I told our mentor teacher that I thought that being in our rooms every day, that she was much more qualified to give us a grade than the university people were."

Lynne, the Jefferson Elementary School mentor, was also uncertain as to the criteria used in grading the resident teachers. She discussed her confusion:
I asked [the university supervisors] about the grades . . . what are the grades based on? The response was very interesting. I was looked at like “What do you mean? What are you asking? Nobody’s ever asked this before. The program’s been in place for this many years and that question has never came up. I wish I could see your face while you are asking this.” And that took me by surprise. . . . Look at my face? There’s nothing wrong with me, I’m just asking what I thought was a simple and very logical question. Because I was their mentor, and this was my first year in the program so I needed to know . . . wanted to know what the grade was based on . . . very simply. And it wasn’t based on my work with them, which was hard, because I spend almost every day with them. And if it isn’t, how do I give the university any feedback so that they know these residents are doing their job . . . and all the observations that I’ve done are mine and in my files, and help me with recommendations if [the resident teachers] ask me for a recommendation? . . . So the grade was based, evidently, on their participation in practicum, which was once a month first semester and maybe twice a month second semester, and also observations which weren’t made very often, and if they were made they were very infrequent. . . . So anyways, the grade was just . . . I guess if they didn’t hear that there were any concerns? Maybe that’s what they thought. I don’t know. I was not involved in the grading first semester. I was just told, “I gave so and so this, and so and so this, and . . .” And they really didn’t ask if that was OK, that was just [the university supervisor’s] decision. And I felt that I had spent so much time with the teachers that I should have some say, but I didn’t.

Discussion: Sub-assertion #2d

Driscoll et al. (1985) address the need for ongoing beginning teacher and mentor evaluation and communication over the course of the year, as well as program reassessment at the end of the year to provide direction for the following year. The Resident Teacher Program did not appear to have a system of ongoing or year end program evaluation. However, in interviews with resident teachers they discussed their interest in providing constructive feedback regarding program areas of strength, as well as areas that could be improved. Several resident teachers also questioned why they were not given the
opportunity to evaluate their mentor and supervisors as they were for professors in their graduate courses.

A portion of the university supervisors’ role in the Resident Teacher Program included organizing and running the biweekly or monthly seminar. Fox and Singletary (1986) discussed the importance of induction courses being run by university faculty rather than school district administration. They stated,

New teachers are often uncomfortable with district administrators or curriculum coordinators whom they perceive as being in evaluative positions; they are reluctant to discuss problems or concerns that they are experiencing in their classrooms for fear of receiving low assessments and jeopardizing their jobs. This basic fear can be reduced by creating a situation that allows them to express themselves openly and without fear of external evaluation. (pp. 13-14)

The induction seminar in this study was run by the university personnel, as recommended by Fox and Singletary; however, in the case of the Resident Teacher Program it was the university personnel who evaluated the resident teachers’ performance, not district administration. This seems to contradict Fox and Singletary’s suggestions that the seminar be run by individuals who are not in an evaluative role.

The evaluation of beginning teachers by mentors is referred to as a “thorny issue of policy and practice” by Feiman-Nemser (1996) who addressed the debate as to whether the mentor’s role should be to assist or assess. She indicated that novice teachers may be less likely to share problems and seek solutions from individuals in an evaluative role. Studies have revealed that both the beginning teachers and mentors felt that to develop the trust necessary for a productive mentor relationship, it is important that the mentor is not put in the position of a formal evaluator (Clemson, 1987; Huffman & Leak, 1986). Stanulis (1995) asserts that rather than evaluating the mentee, the mentor has a supportive role as someone who “helps guide the student to reflect on the day’s events, sealing deeper understandings of teaching problems and possibilities” (p. 332).

The Resident Teacher Program was aligned with the findings of Huffman and Leak and Stanulis in that the mentor was not put in the role of an evaluator. However, the resident teachers in this study felt strongly that the mentors, and not the university
supervisors, were in a better position to evaluate their teaching and progress based on the mentors' proximity and familiarity with the classrooms and students.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and understand the experience of master’s students in an elementary education resident teacher program. Six resident teachers who participated in the Resident Teacher Program during the 1998-1999 academic year were interviewed over the course of their final semester in the program. Five of the resident teachers completed their year in the program, and one resigned mid-year. Two resident mentors and two university supervisors also participated in brief interviews for this study. Chapter I contained an overview of the study.

The qualitative methods used to understand and describe the experiences of first year teachers in a resident teacher program were described in Chapter II. Participant observation, a review of mentor/resident teacher communication journals, and interviews with the resident teachers, supervisors, and resident mentors were conducted. The brief period of observation and the review of the communication journals focused on the nature of the roles of the program participants and the relationship between resident teachers and mentors.

In Chapter III, the reader was provided with an image of each resident teacher as an individual. The profiles highlighted aspects of the resident teachers’ lives that related to their growth and development as educators. The experiences and perceptions of all the resident teachers were combined and analyzed. The patterns in the data resulted in one major theme. The theme was divided into two assertions related to the theme and then further divided into sub-assertions. They were as follows:
Theme: The Experience of the Resident Teachers Was Comparable to a Roller Coaster Ride Consisting of Peaks and Valleys, High and Lows

Assertion #1: There Were Aspects of the Program That Resident Teachers Valued and That Contributed to Their Success

Sub-assertion #1a. The resident teachers valued their students and maintained a student centered focus regardless of the frustrations they experienced.

The resident teachers in this study clearly indicated that their teaching jobs, and especially their students, were their first priority. They spoke of their struggles with teaching, but focused on the rewards of working with children. They frequently discussed having to prioritize their time because of the intense nature of the Resident Teacher Program’s schedule. In these discussions the importance of meeting the needs of the class as a whole, and addressing the needs of each student as an individual, were directly communicated by the resident teachers, but were also overtly evident in the descriptions of their experiences with the children.

Sub-assertion #1b. Mentor support was the single most beneficial and influential aspect of the program.

All of the resident teachers who completed their year in the Resident Teacher Program frequently focused the interview time on the support they received from their mentor. The resident teachers perceived this support to include modeling teaching methods or management techniques, assisting with long- and short-term planning, being familiar with the classroom and providing student support, providing feedback and advice, and being accessible to the resident teachers.

Assertion #2: Resident Teachers Felt Deep Frustration With Aspects of Their Experience

Sub-assertion #2a. Time management was an area of frustration for the resident teachers.

The resident teachers in this study balanced busy schedules which included responsibilities far beyond those of a regular first year teacher. Because they were being pulled in several directions, time management skills became an essential element in succeeding in the Resident Teacher Program.
Sub-assertion #2b. Classroom management was an area of intense concern in the resident teachers’ experience.

Resident teachers were faced with developing and maintaining an effective system of classroom management. They were greatly frustrated by students’ inappropriate behaviors and their feelings of loss of control.

Sub-assertion #2c. The grade level experience of the mentor affected the experience of the resident teacher.

Resident teachers who taught at a grade level unfamiliar to their mentor felt that there were situations in which the advice, insight, and experience of their mentor did not apply. Often these teachers disregarded their mentor’s advice because they did not feel that she had the experience necessary to provide them with adequate assistance. Related to the theme of the mentor’s grade level experience was the resident teachers’ perception that some of the courses required for the Resident Teacher Program were overly focused on primary grade level issues. The mismatch between the instructors’ primary grade level focus and the resident teachers’ intermediate grade level needs caused resident teachers feelings of frustration with what they perceived to be wasted time.

Sub-assertion #2d. A lack of effective communication among participants in the Resident Teacher Program caused confusion regarding various roles and expectations.

Resident teachers were frustrated with what they perceived as inadequate communication between the participants in the Resident Teacher Program. Several aspects of the resident teachers’ experience were affected by the lack of communication, but the two main concerns that arose had to do with confusion regarding the role of the university supervisor and confusion about how the resident teachers’ teaching performance would be graded. These areas of concern were categories within the communication sub-assertion.

a. Confusion regarding the role of the university supervisors.

As a result of the lack of effective communication between participants in the Resident Teacher Program, resident teachers became confused about and frustrated not knowing the role of the university supervisor. Upon entering the program the resident teachers believed that the university supervisors would play a significant role in their year by observing their instruction and providing them with frequent and useful feedback and
suggestions. As a result of the failure to accurately communicate the role of the university supervisors, the resident teachers experienced feelings of abandonment and unmet expectations.

b. Confusion about how the resident teachers’ teaching performance would be graded.

The resident teachers in this study were confused by the lack of formally stated criteria for grading their teaching performance. The absence of a written or stated formal objective grading procedure, as well as the absence of an explanation of the procedure when requested, was a great source of frustration for the resident teachers. Although only one resident teacher received a grade lower than an A, the others were incensed by the mysterious origin of the lower grade given to one of them and were extremely defensive of this individual.

Conclusions

This study focused on the experience of graduate students teaching in a resident teacher program. To understand and describe this experience, resident teachers were interviewed and asked to share their perceptions of the resident teaching experience. Over the course of these interviews, it became clear that there were aspects of the experience that were frustrating to the resident teachers as well as aspects of the program that they valued. Areas of frustration included time management, classroom management, the grade level experience of the mentor, and a lack of effective communication. Aspects of the program valued by the resident teachers included students and mentor support.

The resident teachers in this study struggled to develop a system of time management in which they were able to meet all of their commitments and excel as teachers. In doing so they often neglected themselves and their families. It took an entire semester for the resident teachers to realize that the pace they had set for themselves was one that could not possibly be maintained. A great deal of frustration could have been avoided by providing support and time management tips early in the year to assist resident teachers in developing a realistic system of time management.

While the resident teachers were working to develop appropriate time management strategies, concerns regarding classroom management also consumed them. Resident
teachers often expressed feelings of self-doubt in their ability to maintain an appropriate learning environment in the classroom. These feelings of self-doubt regarding classroom management erased their confidence in their ability to teach and caused several resident teachers to question their capacity as educators. Because these feelings of self-doubt based on concerns about classroom management were so all consuming and had such a profound effect on resident teachers' self-esteem, it is obvious that this is an area in which resident teacher programs must provide resident teachers with considerable support.

For those resident teachers who did not have the support of a mentor with experience at a similar grade level, the frustration continued. These individuals were torn between their desire for support, advice, and feedback and their unwillingness to trust that which was provided by a mentor who had no experience with students of a similar age to the students of the resident teacher. Resident teachers in this situation often listened to the mentor’s advice, “taking it with a grain of salt,” because they did not believe that their mentor had the knowledge or experience necessary to provide appropriate advice. Generally, the concern heard was that the mentor’s focus was on the primary grades and that she could not relate to intermediate grade level issues and concerns.

The greatest cause of frustration among the resident teachers seemed to be related to the lack of effective communication among individuals involved in the Resident Teacher Program. The resident teachers discussed several instances in which they felt they had not been adequately informed, or where their questions and concerns had been heard but had gone unaddressed.

One area affected by ineffective communication was the resident teachers’ perception of the university supervisor role. Based on early communication with the university supervisors, the resident teachers believed that they would have an active role in their classroom and provide them with frequent observations, feedback, and suggestions for improvement. When this active role was not realized, resident teachers expressed feelings of being “abandoned” by the university component of the program. First year teaching experiences are often accompanied by feelings of isolation and abandonment; however, in this program many of those feelings could have been avoided if the roles of each individual had been clearly defined and communicated to all program participants.
Had the resident teachers been provided with appropriate expectations of the university supervisors, the feelings of abandonment may have been avoided.

Communication also affected the resident teachers’ understanding of the evaluation and grading procedures of their teaching. Because there was no formal written or stated explanation of the grading procedure, the resident teachers were confused about who would be grading their teaching performance and what criteria would be considered. This may never have been an issue had one of the resident teachers not received a B in the first semester evaluation; once this occurred, grading became an issue surrounded by feelings of frustration and animosity. Resident teachers’ frustration over this issue could have been avoided by providing clear objectives and criteria for evaluating teaching performance and, again, carefully describing the role of each individual in the program.

The aspects of the program that resident teachers valued included focusing on their students and the support provided by their mentor. It is equally important that the valued aspects of the program are acknowledged and that there is a conscious and continuous effort to maintain and improve these program areas as well.

The first aspect of the program that resident teachers obviously valued was their students. They spoke of their struggles with teaching but focused on the rewards of working with children, as challenging as it may have been. The importance of the children in the resident teachers’ experience was evident in their desire to remain student centered and student focused. The resident teachers prioritized their time based on their understanding of how they could best meet the needs of their students. If the resident teachers had not valued the students, their year in the program would have been much different. While the stress of time management may have been somewhat alleviated if meeting students’ needs was not of concern, the year would have been filled with meaningless and unrewarding tasks which one may suspect would lead to failure in the program. One of the resident teachers described the important role the students played in her year, explaining “[the students] have shown me unconditionally that I love to teach. . . . It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done, but they’ve helped me to realize that I like being there.”
Mentor support was the other highly valued aspect of the Resident Teacher Program. Resident teachers described mentor support as being the single most beneficial aspect of the Resident Teacher Program. They relied on the mentors to provide them with various means of support ranging from the emotional support of just being there and listening to direct intervention and assistance when needed. The resident teachers’ growth was obvious over the course of the semester and was generally credited to the support provided by the mentor. Many spoke of slowly gaining confidence in new teaching methods or discipline strategies by observing the mentor modeling useful techniques. There was also a level of reassurance that came with knowing they had immediate access to their mentor if needed.

The interviews with resident teachers in this study provided strong evidence of the importance of the mentor role in resident teachers’ experience. This needs to be acknowledged as a strength of resident teacher programs and careful consideration must be given to providing resident teachers with mentors who possess the knowledge necessary to provide support in all areas.

This study revealed aspects of the Resident Teacher Program that were frustrating to the resident teachers as well as aspects that were valued. By considering both of these areas, one can identify critical components necessary to provide the most successful resident teaching experience possible. To do so, the areas of frustration must be addressed so as to alleviate unnecessary tension and anxiety, and those areas valued by resident teachers must also be acknowledged as essential components of the program and continue to be celebrated as such. Each of these critical components are specifically addressed in Recommendations for Practice and Research.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study had three limitations. The first limitation had to do with the sample population. Due to time constraints, I limited the population of this study to the six resident teachers participating in the Resident Teacher Program in Glacier School District during the 1998-1999 academic year. This study cannot be generalized to resident teachers who participated in the Resident Teacher Program other years or to resident teachers in similar programs at different locations.
A second limitation of this study may be that I was familiar with four of the resident teachers who participated in the study. One of the resident teachers, Kathy, was placed at the school where I taught during her student teaching experience. Also, being a graduate student in the relatively small elementary education department, it was not surprising that I had had classes with three of the other resident teachers as well.

Time was the third limitation of this study. Given that I did not begin the interview process until January, halfway through the school year, it did not span the entire experience of resident teachers in a resident teacher program. Had the study begun in August, when the resident teachers were first entering their classrooms, it may have provided additional insight into the continuously changing thoughts and emotions experienced by resident teachers.

The final limitation of this study had to do with my role at Northern State University as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the elementary education department. Because of my role as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, I had a working relationship with the university personnel involved in the Resident Teacher Program. While the majority of research time was spent with the resident teachers themselves, this relationship was at times strained due to the nature of this study.

**Recommendations for Practice and Research**

The following recommendations are made in an effort to promote discussion among public school personnel, those individuals at the university level responsible for educating teachers, and education policymakers. This study provided an incentive for further investigation into the induction experience of first year teachers in a supportive environment.

1. Provide resident teachers with assistance in developing time management skills. Given the overwhelming number of commitments and responsibilities placed on the resident teachers, it is necessary to provide them with assistance or instruction in time management strategies. This assistance could take the form of a time management seminar and include discussions with resident teachers from previous years who were able to develop a successful and maintainable system of time management.
2. Provide resident teachers with intense support in the area of classroom management. Given the high level of frustration with and concern regarding classroom management, it is evident that in order to have the most successful experience possible resident teachers must be provided with support from mentors and university supervisors. There are various types of support that resident teachers must receive from program personnel, including acknowledging concerns regarding classroom management and assuring resident teachers that their experiences are normal, brainstorming or assisting in providing a variety of classroom management techniques, modeling various management techniques, and providing direct assistance in situations where it is required.

3. Match mentor/mentee grade level experience. When assigning a beginning teacher a mentor it is important to consider the grade level experience of both in making the match. To develop an effective mentoring relationship, the mentee must respect and value the mentor’s feedback and advice. Often when there is a vast difference in grade level experience, beginning teachers question the relevance of the mentor’s input and knowledge.

4. Establish and maintain effective lines of communication. Formal and informal lines of communication need to be established and maintained during the induction period. A teacher’s first year is filled with uncertainty, self-doubt, and confusion. To counteract these emotions and limit the feelings of isolation, beginning teachers need to be provided with opportunities to communicate their success and concerns knowing that their experiences will be acknowledged and that they will see offers of support followed through. Specific lines of communication that must be in place and functioning include thoroughly communicating the roles and responsibilities of the mentors and university personnel, developing and relaying clear expectations and criteria to be met by resident teachers, providing a clear explanation of the program’s focus, and developing a system of checks and balances by providing the beginning teachers with several opportunities over the course of the year to evaluate their experience, the assistance and support they have received, and clarify misconceptions they may have.

5. Choose resident mentors carefully based on their ability to effectively provide resident teachers with all levels of support needed. The resident teachers overwhelmingly
identified mentor support as the single most beneficial aspect of the resident teacher program. This, along with their discussions of various methods of support they received from their mentor, clearly indicate the importance of the mentor role and the essential nature of filling that role with an individual who will be able to meet the resident teachers’ needs.

6. Conduct a similar study across one entire academic year. I recommend that a study be conducted that spans the entire experience of resident teachers in a resident teacher program. Given the extensive number of experiences resident teachers have encountered by the mid-point of the year, a study of this nature would provide a more complete understanding of the entire resident teacher experience. Interviewing resident teachers over the course of an entire year would provide a more thorough description of the entire resident teacher experience, including the broad spectrum of continuously changing thoughts and emotions experienced by resident teachers. In addition to providing valuable information regarding the changes experienced by resident teachers, a study such as this would also provide the researcher with the opportunity to observe all stages of the mentoring relationship. This would allow the researcher to further understand how the mentor/resident teacher relationship evolves and changes as the year progresses and the resident teacher gains experience.
To Whom it May Concern:

Permission is requested by Sara Triggs to conduct a dissertation study at _____________ School.

The subjects in this study are involved in the Resident Teacher Program at _____________ School and include the resident teachers and a resident mentor. The purpose of this study will be to describe and understand the lived experience of three resident teachers in a resident teacher program.

The study involves interviewing the mentor and resident teachers participating in the resident teacher program. Two interviews with the mentor, and a minimum of three with resident teachers, will be conducted. Interviews will be taped and transcribed verbatim.

The anonymity of the school and all involved will be honored in discussions of the study and final paper.

If you have any questions you may reach me at 795-9493, or my advisor, Dr. Lynne Chalmers, at 777-3187.

The undersigned grants permission to conduct this study as stated above:
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


