



INTRODUCTION: First-year teaching is a difficult challenge. Ellen Moir, Director at the Santa Cruz Consortium New Teacher Project and Director of Student Teaching at UC Santa Cruz, has been working with colleagues to support the efforts of new teachers. In their day-to-day interactions with new teachers, they have noted a number of phases in the development of new teachers during their first year. While not every new teacher goes through this exact sequence, Ms. Moir believes these phases are very useful in helping everyone involved-administrators, other support personnel, and teacher education faculty-in the process of supporting new teachers. These teachers move through several phases from anticipation, to survival, to disillusionment, to rejuvenation, to reflection; then back to anticipation. Here's a look at the stages through which new teachers move during that crucial first year. New teacher quotations are taken from journal entries and end-of-the-year program evaluations.

1. ANTICIPATION PHASE



The anticipation phase begins during the student teaching portion of pre-service preparation. The closer student teachers get to completing their assignment, the more excited and anxious they become about their first teaching position. They tend to romanticize the role of the teacher and the position. New teachers enter with a tremendous commitment to making a difference and a somewhat idealistic view of how to accomplish their goals. *"I was elated to get the job but terrified about going from the simulated experience of student teaching to being the person completely in charge."* This feeling of excitement carries new teachers through the first few weeks of school.

2. SURVIVAL PHASE



The first month of school is very overwhelming for new teachers. They are learning a lot and at a very rapid pace. Beginning teachers are instantly bombarded with a variety of problems and situations they had not anticipated. Despite preparation programs, new teachers are caught off guard by the realities of teaching. *"I thought I'd be busy, something like student teaching, but this is crazy, I'm feeling like I'm constantly running. It's hard to focus on other aspects of my life."*

During the survival phase most new teachers are struggling to keep their heads above water. They become very focused and consumed with the day-to-day routine of teaching. There is little time to stop and reflect on their experiences. New teachers spend up to seventy hours a week on schoolwork. Particularly overwhelming is the constant need to develop curriculum.

Veteran teachers routinely reuse excellent lessons and units from the past. The new teacher, still uncertain of what will really work, must develop much of this for the first time. Even depending on unfamiliar prepared curriculum, such as textbooks is enormously time consuming.

"I thought there would be more time to get everything done. It's like working three jobs: 7:30-2:30. 2:30-6:00, with more time spent in the evening and on weekends." Although tired and surprised by the amount of work, first-year teachers usually maintain a tremendous amount of energy and commitment during the survival phase.

3. DISILLUSIONMENT



PHASE

After six to eight weeks of nonstop work, new teachers enter the disillusionment phase. The intensity and length of the phase varies among new teachers. The extensive time commitment, the realization that things are probably not going as smoothly as they want, and low morale contribute to this period of disenchantment. New teachers begin questioning both their commitment and their competence. Many new teachers get sick during this phase. Compounding an already difficult situation is the fact that new teachers are confronted with several new events during this time frame. They are faced with back-to-school night, conferences, and their first formal evaluation by the site administrator. Each of these important milestones places an already vulnerable individual in a very stressful situation.

Back-to-school night means giving a speech to parents about plans for the year that may yet be unclear in the new teacher's mind. Some parents are uneasy when they realize the teacher is just beginning and sometimes pose questions to make demands that intimidate a new teacher.

Parent conferences require that new teachers be highly organized, articulate, tactful and prepared to confer with parents about each child's course of study and progress. This type of communication with parents can be awkward and difficult for a beginning teacher. New teachers generally begin with the idea that parents are partners in the learning process and are not prepared for parents' concerns or criticisms. Unfortunately, these criticisms occur right at the time when their self-esteem is waning.

This is also the first time that new teachers are formally evaluated by their principal. They are, for the most part, uncertain about the process itself and anxious about their own competence and ability to perform. Developing and presenting a "showpiece" lesson is time-consuming and stressful.

During the disillusionment phase classroom management is a major source of distress. *"I thought I'd be focusing more on curriculum and less on classroom management and discipline. I'm stressed because I have some very problematic students who are low academically, and I think about them every second my eyes are open."*

At this point, the accumulated stress of the first-year teacher coupled with months of excessive time allotted to teaching often brings complaints from family members and friends. This is a very difficult and challenging phase for new entries into the profession. They express self-doubt, have lower self-esteem and question their professional commitment. In fact, getting through this phase may be the toughest challenge they face as a new teacher.

4. REJUVENATION

The rejuvenation generally begins in allows them to resume



phase is characterized by a slow rise in the new teacher's attitude toward teaching. It January. Having a winter break makes a tremendous difference for new teachers. It a more normal lifestyle, with plenty of rest, food, exercise, and time for family and friends. This vacation is the first opportunity that new teachers have for organizing materials and planning curriculum. It is a time for them to sort through materials that have accumulated and prepare new ones. This breath of fresh air gives novice teachers a broader perspective with renewed hope.

They seem ready to put past problems behind them. A better understanding of the system, an acceptance of the realities of teaching, and a sense of accomplishment help to rejuvenate new teachers. Through their experiences the first half of the year, beginning teachers gain new coping strategies and skills to prevent, reduce, or manage many problems they are likely to encounter in the second half of the year. Many feel a great sense of relief that they have made it through the first half of the year. During this phase, new teachers focus on curriculum development, long-term planning and teaching strategies.

"I'm really excited about my story-writing center, although the organization of it has at times been haphazard. Story writing has definitely revived my journals."

The rejuvenation phase tends to last into spring with many ups and downs along the way. Toward the end of this phase, new teachers begin to raise concerns about whether they can get everything done prior to the end of school. They also wonder how their students will do on the tests, questioning once again their own effectiveness as teachers. *"I'm fearful of these big tests. Can you be fired if your kids do poorly? I don't know enough about them to know what I haven't taught, and I'm sure it's a lot."*

5. REFLECTION

The reflection over the year,



phase beginning in May is a particularly invigorating time for first-year teachers. Reflecting back they highlight events that were successful and those that were not. They think about the various changes that they plan to make the following year in management, curriculum, and teaching strategies. The end is in sight, and they have almost made it; but more importantly, a vision emerges as to what their second year will look like, which brings them to a new phase of anticipation. *"I think that for next year I'd like to start the letter puppets earlier in the year to introduce the kids to more letters."*

It is critical that we assist new teachers and ease the transition from student teacher to full-time professional. Recognizing the phases new teachers go through gives us a framework within which we can begin to design support programs to make the first year of teaching a more positive experience for our new colleagues.