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UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY
BEGINNING MAT TEACHERS

By

Li-Ching Hung

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Curriculum & Instruction
In the Department of Curriculum & Instruction

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2007

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES
FACED BY BEGINNING MAT TEACHERS

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Several states introduced alternative certification (AC) programs in the mid-1980s to alleviate the teacher shortage situation, and the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program is an example of just such a curriculum. Three research questions for this study were: 1) what were the challenges beginning MAT teachers faced? 2) what were beginning MAT teachers' perceptions of their training program?, and 3) what were the beginning MAT teachers' attitudes toward their teaching career?

Case methodology was conducted to highlight the research questions. Six beginning MAT teachers that graduated from Mississippi State University participated in this study. Data were drawn from interviews, observations, and a concomitant related

document analysis. Results revealed three themes as challenges for the majority of MAT teachers: (a) students' low motivation, (b) No Child Left Behind (NCLB)-accountability, and (c) lack of parental support. In terms of perception regarding their training program, all six MAT teachers exhibited gratefulness for their training program's availability, especially for the opportunity to gain teacher licensure. In addition, they reported they were confident about their teaching preparation. However, some teachers agreed that there was room for improvement. All participants suggested the following as potential enhancements for their MAT program: (a) exhibit more specificity concerning program requirements, (b) contain more content knowledge courses, (c) assign a mentor, (d) make the certification process easier and less complicated, and (e) add any training applicable to their future teaching career. Again, these findings could be perceived as guidelines for the improvement of the MAT program and as methods for ensuring effective AC teachers graduate from the training program.

Among the six participants, five wanted to quit teaching in the near future, with only one, an older second career seeker teacher, deciding to remain in the profession. Most importantly, she was the only one whose previous educational background and job experience were the same as the subject she taught.

The above findings filled several research gaps when compared with previous studies. For example, there is an inconsistency between MAT teachers' licensure area and content knowledge background. Further studies are needed to investigate samples of graduates from other AC programs.

DEDICATION

I want to take this opportunity and thank my family in Taiwan and my husband. My parents greatly value education and have always exhibited enormous faith in me in whatever I do. They love me unconditionally and have supported me both financially and morally whenever I needed anything. Moreover, my siblings have supported me in myriad ways, always letting me know that they will back me, regardless of the choice I make.

I especially want to thank my husband---Cary Stacy Smith--- for everything he has done for me, and dedicate this dissertation to him. As a doctoral student himself, he is very busy pursuing his own doctoral degree, but has always ranked my work as a priority. He has done more than his share as a husband; that is, he is more than my spouse, he is my editor, my therapist, my best friend, and my biggest supporter. In fact, he has done everything for me on a day-to-day basis, allowing me to devote my time toward my dissertation. He always had more faith in me than I had in myself and without his support, I could not have completed this task.

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Dr. Kay Brocato contacted her MAT students to enlist their aid for this study, thus relieving me of a great deal of stress. I want to thank her for the numerous messages she sent her students for me. Dr. Linda Coats, the Curriculum and Instruction department head, always offered me graduate assistantships, which helped me immensely from both a financial and professional growth perspective. Dr. Dwight Hare is the individual that inspired me with this wonderful dissertation topic that I have thoroughly enjoyed, and I thank him for that.

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or needed help, he was always willing to lend assistance. Dr. Looby has helped me, not only academically, but personally as well. She introduced me to people she knew with the intention of helping me find a job. I want to thank them for treating me so kindly.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Beck (1965) pointed out that public education was the second largest enterprise in America's political economy and was a growth industry for the nation. Statistics taken during the 1999-2000 school year show that a total of approximately 3,450,000 teachers worked in public and private elementary and secondary schools across the nation. This number represented about 2.7% of the overall U.S. workforce that year (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). In addition, total public elementary and secondary enrollment is expected to increase to 50 million by 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005a). While comparing the number of teachers currently teaching and America's future needs (due to the student enrollment increase), the nation would need to hire 2.2 million teachers by the year 2008 with an increase up to 3.35 million teachers by the year 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005b).

It is ironic that in a time of increasing student enrollments and increasing demand for teachers, researchers experienced a phenomenon regarding teacher turnover rate within the country's schools. In fact, school districts across the country were faced with a number of challenges concerning teacher recruitment and retention (Enwefa, Enwefa, Jurden, Banks, & Buckley, 2002). Research has shown that beginning teachers tend to experience critical challenges during the first few years of teaching (McCarra, 2003; Riley, 2004; Veenman, 1984), especially when compared with their more experienced

colleagues. More in-depth statistics further showed that approximately 25% of all first-year teachers left the profession after their initial year, and approximately 50% after five years (Boreen & Niday, 2000). Less experienced teachers taught at-risk students within high violence school districts; as a result, they tended to leave the profession quicker than those more experienced (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). Beginning teachers are 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession than their more experienced counterparts.

In fact, Angelle (2002) reported American school systems would need to hire an average of 200,000 K-12 teachers each year over the next 10 years. In addition, Fideler and Haselkorn (1999) predicted that in poverty-stricken urban and rural settings, the figure would balloon from 200,000 up to 700,000 teachers. These statistics provided ample cause for alarm, and illustrate reasons for concern with the quality and training of teachers. Many researchers (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Rockoff, 2004) have concluded that teacher quality plays a crucial role determining the success or failure of the educational endeavor. Since teachers are fundamental for a student's education, highly qualified teachers could make the difference between a child succeeding or being left behind. As a result, one of the most important educational policies in the USA at the beginning of 21 century is No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which required schools to ensure that their teachers were highly qualified for the purpose of raising the achievement levels of all students.

The teacher shortage phenomenon in Mississippi was, like in many states, quite severe. In other words, the state of Mississippi faced a critical teacher shortage both in specific geographical regions as well as in specific content areas, such as mathematics,

science, and special education. In those public school districts suffering a teacher shortage, the majority of students were minorities (Chambless, Sweeney & Thompson, 1999). The U.S. Education's Department of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2005a) indicated that not all states are equal; that is, some states have more to worry about concerning teacher shortages than do others. For example, some states experience a teacher shortage when attempting to fill positions late in the hiring process, often after school began. These are referred to as a "late fill." Based on the late-fill ratio estimate calculation, the teacher shortage rate has exceeded the national average (1.5%), and Mississippi has emerged as a state with high late-fill rates. In essence, Mississippi has difficulty in hiring qualified teachers (Murphy, DeArmond, & Guin, 2003). As recent as December 2005, the Mississippi Department of Education stated that 43 of Mississippi's 152 school districts were classified as critical shortage areas (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005).

With such a high teacher shortage, several states began to introduce alternative certification (AC) programs in the mid-1980s to alleviate the situation. They were viewed as another means of attaining licensure, though requiring less pre-service preparation. AC programs have proliferated across the nation as a response to the projected shortage of certified teachers (Birkeland, 2003). Bruno (2000) pointed out that AC programs were not just approaches for reducing teacher shortages, but also offered professionals trained in other fields a path for becoming qualified teachers.

The National Center for Education Information (NCEI, 2005a) wrote that 47 states and the District of Columbia reported having at least one type of AC program.

NCEI reported there are over 600 sites offering alternative certification through some 120 different alternative routes. Today, the majority of the states have authorized a variety of program sponsors, such as local school districts, universities, and non-profit organizations to provide the course work and field based experiences that lead the certification through an alternate route (Johnson, Birkeland & Peske, 2005). According to Blair (2003), hundreds of such programs have operated in at least 44 states, certifying nearly 25,000 teachers annually. NCEI (2005b) estimated there were approximately 35,000 individuals enrolled in the alternative certification program to start their teaching career.

Mississippi also has several alternative route programs as a possible solution for its high rate of teacher shortage. These programs were either under the category of State Alternate Routes to Teacher Certification or Local Alternative Teacher Certification programs. Programs for the former are: (a) Master of Arts in Teaching Program (MAT), (b) Mississippi Alternate Path to Quality Teachers, and (c) Teach Mississippi Program. Programs for the latter are Jackson State University's Masters of Arts in Teaching and University of Mississippi's Teacher Corps (National Center for Education Information, 2005a).

Each specific AC program possesses differences and similarities in several aspects, such as having varied course work, supervision requirements, and different training periods. For example, the Mississippi Teacher Corps is a two-year program that recruits college graduates to teach in the Mississippi Delta. The curriculum is designed for non-education majors and individuals interested in teaching (so they can receive

teacher training and certification) (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). The Master of Arts in the Teaching Program (MAT) at Mississippi State University is designed for teacher candidates with a bachelor's degree in a content area who wish to become teachers. The program consists of 36 semester hours of graduate level course work and qualifies individuals for certification in a secondary teaching field (Curriculum & Instruction, 2005).

As Hawley (1990) stated, several reasons exist regarding why AC programs have gained so many advocates, but the two primary reasons centered on practicality and philosophy. Marshall (2002) wrote that the disadvantaged and minority students were more inclined to be taught by poorly trained and inexperienced teachers, and was the greatest source of education inequality. AC programs tend to attract individuals more willing to teach at schools serving minorities and disadvantaged children. Moreover, schools of this nature were more likely to lose their teachers; thus, there was little doubt that AC programs could solve an integral part of the teacher shortage issue. From this practical reason, some researchers supported AC programs.

The philosophical justification for AC programs was that the more traditional programs were barriers, often preventing talented individuals from entering the teaching profession. Hawley (1990) explained: "most education courses have such a bad reputation that many talented and energetic young people not to mention older people simply turn and run" (p. 4). Overall, an alternate route is relatively quick and is a common solution for combating the teacher shortage issue that American schools have faced for decades (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2005).

Typically, alternative certification programs provide abbreviated pre-service training and a rapid entry to paid teaching positions. Recent research provides evidence that, for prospective teachers, the opportunity to skip traditional coursework in education serves as a powerful recruitment incentive. However, bringing new individuals into the teaching profession is only the first step in decreasing teacher shortage. Most importantly, if teachers remained in their positions, then ample job satisfaction must necessarily follow. Overall, alternative certification programs appeared to attract a large pool of candidates that might otherwise not have had the opportunity to receive teaching training prior to entering the teaching profession. It is not clear, however, how well they are prepared, and what types of challenges they face as they enter the teaching profession.

Some researchers stated that teachers receiving their training from the traditional route were better prepared, while perceiving fewer challenges, with the result being that they remained in the teaching profession for at least 10 years (Guyton, Fox, & Sisk, 1991; Lutz & Hutton, 1989). On the other hand, it was also found that alternatively certified teachers faced fewer challenges that could affect their job satisfaction, while indicating intent to stay within the teaching profession as a life-long career (Shen, 1997). However, several studies (Houston, Marshall, & McDavid, 1993; Johnson, Birkeland, & Peske, 2005) found no difference when comparing teachers' career plans based on the two training programs. Apparently, an inconsistency existed regarding different researchers' findings, and a vague explanation was provided from the research methodology design of these studies. The authors either concluded that their results were based on meta-analysis

studies and/or survey research design. Thus, the data results lacked deeper insight and understanding regarding what caused the difference(s).

Another serious concern for AC programs was that it has been seen as a quick fix to help alleviate the teacher shortage (Townsend & Ignash, 2003). Some states' legislatures have focused more on addressing teacher quantity, without equal concern for teacher quality. Thus, some educators worry that AC programs can only "fix the quantity problem temporarily but make the quality problem worse" (Hunt & Broad, 1999, p. 2). In fact, alternative route opponents stated that AC teachers lacked sufficient pedagogical knowledge skills (Oliva, 2005).

In 2001, the NCLB policy was established so require that each classroom, nationwide, as well as each individual classroom teacher, was "highly qualified" and accountable for their students' academic performance. As a result, NCLB has greatly impacted teacher preparation programs (Bednarz, Stoltman, & Lee, 2004). According to Marx and Harris (2006), the cornerstone of NCLB was that each teacher needed strong subject-matter knowledge to be considered "highly qualified". On the other hand, Bednarz et al. (2004) stated that a highly qualified teacher needed to have the following qualities: (a) pedagogical knowledge: referring to a teacher's knowledge regarding the curriculum, lesson plans, instructional strategies, and assessment; (b) content knowledge: referring to teachers knowledge in the subject they teach; and (c) practical professional knowledge: referring to teachers familiarity with the rules and routines in their classroom as well as the school where they teach, and knowing how to work with their colleagues and school support staff.

Various challenges individuals faced after graduating from a traditional or alternative route teaching program have been studied, as have the numerous reasons for these challenges and the reasons why teachers quit the profession. Volumes of research have been conducted examining beginning teachers that received their training from alternative route education programs, with an emphasis on their perceptions of any extant challenges. Little is known concerning how new educational policies, such as NCLB, contribute to how beginning teachers perceive their challenges. Do these challenges vary depending upon educational policies established and implemented into teaching practice, such as NCLB? To what extent do these challenges affect alternate route beginning teachers' career planning?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the challenges faced by beginning teachers who graduated from the MAT program at Mississippi State University. The findings will provide research data and will aid in understanding teachers' challenges as well as MAT beginning teachers' problem perceptions in Mississippi. In addition, the findings may provide MAT educators with a better understanding about students' needs concerning their teacher training, and help to increase teachers' retention rate.

Research Questions

The population for this study were the graduates of the Mississippi State University MAT program. The research questions for this study were:

1. What were the challenges beginning MAT teachers faced?

2. What were beginning MAT teachers' perceptions of their training program?
3. What were the beginning MAT teachers' attitudes toward their teaching career?

Justification for Study

There is a growing consensus that the single most important factor in determining student achievement is teacher quality. Thus, it is essential for America to concentrate and develop methods for retaining high-quality teachers in every classroom of every school district. However, across the nation, 14% of new teachers leave the teaching profession by the end of their first year, with 33% leaving within three years and almost 50% within five years (Feistritzer, 2005a). These attrition rates are even higher in high-poverty school districts. Beginning teachers cite stress and numerous challenges as reasons for leaving the profession.

In an effort to eliminate the teacher shortage phenomenon, 47 states developed AC programs to supply more teachers. Feistritzer and Chester (2003) stated that AC programs, often viewed as the last resort for filling the gaps and replacing emergency certification, have evolved into a widely used model for recruiting, training, and certifying new teachers. Although the programs have attracted considerable attention and commentary about their quality, intense debate exists regarding their advantages and disadvantages, due primarily to the wide variety of AC programs.

For example, the duration of one's training depends upon the type of program he/she is in, including the course requirements and training length. Some researchers reported that traditional teacher instruction could provide more in-depth training, and

would bring out a better student performance (Darling-Hammond, 1996). However, other researchers reported negative aspects concerning traditional training programs, such as the training lasting too long, being too theoretical, and being too expensive (Ruenzel, 2002). Stoddart and Floden (1995) concluded that teachers tend to learn teaching and pedagogical skills on the job, not during pre-service training. Other concerns about AC programs included whether they could recruit high achievers, more males, and more minorities in order to retain them for teaching in urban, high shortage areas, as well as retaining them for specific subjects like math or science.

During the last couple of decades, researchers (Ganser, 1999; McCarra, 2003; Veenman, 1984) targeted beginning teachers and studied them, broken away from traditional teachers training programs, thus illustrating their perceptions of challenges based on both qualitative and quantitative empirical studies. Many questions were answered, such as why beginning teachers from traditional teacher training programs left the profession, as well as their reasons for dissatisfaction concerning the teaching profession. However, beginning teachers from AC programs had not been studied to that extent; hence, more research is needed in order to fill the gap in the literature regarding alternative certificate programs. Another area of this topic also needs further investigation: that is, how NCLB affects AC programs regarding teachers' training, and whether it influences teachers' perceptions concerning teaching challenges.

The MAT program at Mississippi State University (MSU) is an AC program that is authorized to recruit applicants whose college majors are not related to education, but who are nonetheless interested in becoming a teacher. The MAT program is designed to

train individuals who can teach both middle and high schools throughout the various Mississippi school districts. Since Mississippi also suffers a teacher shortage (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005), the AC programs in Mississippi are designed to address the problem. Thus, this study was designed to investigate beginning teachers that graduated from the MAT program at MSU, and to gauge their training perceptions, teaching attitudes, and any perceived challenges experienced on the job. The findings of the study will provide information regarding the MAT program in Mississippi, which could be used for any future MAT program for recruiting and retaining teachers.

Definition of Terms

The following operational definitions were used throughout the study:

Alternative Certification (AC) Programs: a path to teacher licensure typically requiring far less pre-service preparation than do traditional programs, and which can be sponsored by organizations other than colleges and universities.

Alternative Licensing Routes: licensure programs not requiring the traditional, university taught, preparation work.

Beginning teacher: A certified teacher with three years or less of teaching experience (Veenman, 1984).

Emergency Teaching Licensure: involves the issuance of teaching licenses to individuals who have not completed a traditional college or university teacher education program.

MAT: the Master of Arts in Teaching Program is one example of an alternative certification program. It is designed for teacher candidates with a bachelor's degree in a content area that wish to become teachers.

Secondary School Teachers: Individuals who teach students grades 7 through 12.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of Related Literature

A literature review involves systematically identifying, locating, and analyzing documents containing information related to the research problem (Gay & Airasian, 2003). A review is collected after other studies have already been conducted, a strategy permitting a flexible and creative approach while providing the foundation for contributing to the knowledge base. In addition, it provides the researchers with an opportunity to be familiar with any previous research, as well as facilitating an interpretation of one's own study. As Creswell (2003) stated, one of the purposes for a thoughtful literature review is for "filling in gaps and extending prior studies" (p. 30).

For the literature review, descriptive studies and case studies were used as they discussed how beginning traditional teachers perceived their challenges. Fraenkel and Wallen (2005) described descriptive studies' aim as describing a given state of a phenomenon as fully and carefully as possible; likewise, they are considered the fundamental approach for presenting research findings. Merriam (1998) stated that a case study allows the researcher to use an "intensive, holistic description to analyze a single, bounded unit" (p. 193).

The review began by providing information regarding the teacher shortage phenomenon as background knowledge. The second section concerned traditional

certificate beginning teachers' perceptions regarding any challenges they faced. The third section reviewed types of alternative certificate programs and focused on beginning teachers' perception of challenges. The fourth section compared challenges both traditional teachers and those from alternative programs faced. This section used both descriptive and case studies, including Veenman (1984), Ganser (1999), McCarra (2003) and Riley (2004).

Teacher Shortage

Research strongly supports the idea that a schoolteacher's quality greatly influences his/her students' achievement. For example, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) specifically stated that teachers are the core of the mission to improve schools. Put simply, a school's excellence is more directly correlated with the performance of its teachers than any other factor(s). Hattie (2003) identified several factors that impacted students' performance, i.e., student's self, home, schools, principals, peer effects, and teachers. Among these factors, "teachers" account for approximately 30% of the variance, with only "student's self" reaching a higher percentage. In other words, teacher quality plays a crucial role in students' achievement.

On a national level, teacher shortage has been a serious problem for decades, a situation also affecting teacher quality. For the 2000-2001 school year, approximately 456,100 or 15.1% of all public school teachers left their jobs (Luekens, Tyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004). In fact, it has been estimated that this scarcity of educators will reach 2.2 million between the years 2000 and 2010 (Hussar, 1999), with retirement and class size restrictions contributing to the cause. However, Ingersoll (2001) found that

retirement accounted for only 12.3% of teacher turnover, indicating that 88% of teachers leaving their classroom did so because of other reasons besides retirement. Another figure was reported by NCES (2000), which revealed the percentage of teachers taking another job, rather than teaching at an elementary or secondary school was higher at the end of 1999-2000, when compared to the 1990-1991 school year. Such a situation also highly related to the challenges teachers faced (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Veenman, 1984).

While most classroom teachers reported that they were enthusiastic about their careers, the majority still chose to leave their profession after only a few years. In general, research shows that teachers tend to leave their profession at a rate of almost 50% after 5 years, and 80% after 10 years (Boreen & Niday, 2000). For example, the rate becomes approximately 25% of beginning teachers leaving the teaching profession after their first year, with nearly 30% leaving within 5 years of entry, (Darling-Hammond, 2000b; McCarra, 2003). Of specific concern were persistent teacher vacancies within districts and schools serving low-income minority students (Johnson, Birkeland, & Peske, 2005).

Some researchers have sought to understand which specific characteristic can more accurately predict why teachers leave the profession. Age was considered as one reason, with all researchers agreeing it was one of the most reliable predictors. Both younger and older teachers were more likely to leave, thus creating a u-shaped distribution (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; Grissmer & Kirby, 1997; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001). Based on Luekens et al. report (2004), teachers younger

than age 30 and older than 50 were more likely to quit. In addition, Luekens et al. (2004) reported that male teachers were less likely to leave than female teachers, minority teachers were slightly more likely than white teachers to stay, while general education teachers were more likely to stay than special education teachers.

Another factor is that NCLB has not been discussed in-depth in previous studies, in terms of its impact on beginning teachers and their perceptions concerning job related challenges. The NCLB Act of 2001 placed educators under tremendous pressure to create highly effective instructional environments (Lane, Pierson & Givner, 2004). NCLB not only required students to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), it also specifically mandated that each state ensure that their students will be taught by “highly qualified” teachers. One major goal of NCLB was to raise the achievement levels of all students, especially underperforming groups of students, while hopefully closing the achievement gap between different races and classes. One method for achieving this goal was to hire highly qualified teachers supported by an ongoing collaboration and professional development (NCLB, 2002).

NCLB (2002) defined “highly qualified” teachers based on the following requirements: the teacher candidate must (a) hold at least a bachelor’s degree from a four-year institution; (b) hold full state certification; and (c) demonstrate competence in their subject area . As mentioned above, NCLB required all schools to provide “highly-qualified” teachers to all students by 2006. In addition, each state was required to report the distribution information of underqualified teachers across low- and high-poverty schools, and must submit a plan to ensure that minority and poverty students will not be

disproportionately assigned to uncertified and/or inexperienced teachers. However, research still showed that students of color and poverty were more likely to be taught by ineffective and underprepared teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000c).

Under NCLB, many schools focused primarily on improving students' achievement and closing the achievement gap, and asked their teachers to narrow the curriculum, which distorted good teaching practices. In other words, schools did not emphasize the broad goals of education but, rather, the narrow list of NCLB. Lee and Luykx (2005) reported that some principals specifically requested teachers should not teach non-testing subjects, for at least a couple of months prior to statewide testing. This resulted in a gap in many teacher preparation programs regarding the training future teachers would receive, and the realities they would face once they embarked upon their teaching career. Accountability has caused tremendous stress for some teachers, and even increased turnover rate in some school districts.

Several studies reported that teachers felt their school emphasized too much on students' scores instead of what they had learned. They felt their teaching was criticized, and that their identity was negatively intertwined with their students' testing scores. As a result, these teachers felt restricted in their teaching curriculum. They were only encouraged to teach materials that raised students' scores, instead of what they thought was vital to students (Barksadle-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Luna & Turner, 2001). Such a phenomenon made it difficult for some disadvantaged districts to keep their teachers (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Aliaga, 2004).

Under these circumstances, specific areas within the teaching field accounted for much of the shortage. The shortages were most prevalent in the areas of bilingual education, special education, mathematics, and science (Hirsch, Koppich, & Knapp, 2001). In addition, school characteristics affected the turnover rate. Among public schools, schools considered high-poverty had a higher turnover rate (15.2%) when compared to low-poverty schools (10.5%) (Ingersoll, 2001). Minority students' enrollment also influenced the turnover rate. During the 2000-2001 school year, 35% of students in public schools were minorities, while the percentage of teachers leaving was 16.8%. When minority students' enrollment dropped to 10-34%, the percentage of teachers remaining also dropped to 14.7%; and when minority students' enrollment dropped to less than 10%, the percentage of teachers dropped to 13.5% (Luekens et al., 2004).

Student achievement scores also impacted teacher attrition rate. In Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin's (2004) study, schools using the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, coupled with bottom-quartile average scores for students, had almost 20% of the annual attrition rate, while schools with average scores within the top-quartile had a turnover rate of 15%. Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) combined these studies and suggested that students attending a high-poverty school with a high minority student enrollment, in a district that considered the school to be low-performing, were more likely to be taught by new and inexperienced teachers than their "more affluent, higher-achieving, and predominantly" white schools (p. 23).

Among the major issues most alluded to in the studies, two factors were the primary reasons for the teacher shortage in Mississippi - salary and location (Murnane & Vegas, 1997). Currently, America has approximately 3.1 million teachers, yet approximately 6 million Americans have a Bachelor's degree in education. Many never taught, and most of those that did drop out during their first five years (Chaddock, 1998). Murnane and Vegas (1997) wrote that it was very difficult to attract top talent teachers into the teaching profession when salaries were 50 to 70% lower than if they entered other professions. More specifically, both beginning and veteran teachers made considerably less money than their college-educated peers in other professions (Wilson, 2000).

Furthermore, during 1998, in terms of annual salary, a young teacher with a bachelor's degree made \$8,192 less than a non-teacher with a comparable education. At the same time, for those age 44 to 50 with a master's degree, the gap ballooned to teachers earning \$32,511 to \$43,313 less than non-teachers, where the average was \$75,824. When compared with teachers from other states, Mississippi teachers' salary ranks at or near the bottom of the teacher pay scale. The average Mississippi teacher salary was approximately \$6,000 less than the Southeastern average, and more than \$11,000 less than the national average. According to the American Federation of Teachers, Mississippi ranked 48th in average teacher salary in 2002-2003 (AFT, 2004). In addition, the majority of teachers with graduate degrees felt there were inadequate opportunities for their advancement in their teaching careers.

Critical shortage areas tend to lose desirable teachers easier than other areas. Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) concluded public schools possessing certain characteristics tended to have higher teacher attrition rates. Those characteristics include: high-minority student enrollment, high-poverty, and lower student performance. Most schools located in the critical areas in Mississippi met these characteristics. Thus, overall, schools in Mississippi suffered from a significant teacher attrition rate.

This section discussed the nationwide teacher shortage in Mississippi, as well as other factors contributing to the high turnover rate. The impact teacher shortage had on student achievement was addressed based on empirical studies. In addition, how NCLB attributed to the teacher shortage phenomenon was also discussed.

Traditional Certificate Beginning Teachers' Perception of Challenges

The section begins by reviewing several empirical studies in order to gain insight and understanding regarding the difficulties that traditional first-year teachers faced. The importance of perceived problems faced was raised by Veenman (1984) more than 20 years ago. He presented a meta-analysis of 83 studies concerning problems that different countries have in terms of their perceptions of beginning teachers. Issues discussed included reality shock, behavior and attitude change, situational and individual differences, principals' views, job satisfaction, teacher education, and in-service support. The participants of these studies were beginning teachers identified as being in their first year, as well as those with one to three years of experience. Most studies used questionnaires with rating scales, with the number of questions varying from 7 to 163. Some studies combined rating questions with open-ended questions, while others

followed up with interviews to supplement the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires.

Veenman (1984) determined teachers' perceived problems by compiling a list that ranked the most commonly experienced difficulties mentioned in all 83 studies. The questionnaire was most frequently used, whereas the rating scale method was used to determine the problems' rank. Participants were asked to rate the perceived problems on a point scale regarding the degree to which a problem was encountered. Veenman used a 4 point scale, ranking the problems from "no problem" to "a major problem". The number of items varied greatly, from 7 to 163. A frequency list was made to determine the 24 most often perceived problems. Each time a problem was ranked and mentioned in a study, it received a score.

Veenman (1984) reported the quantitative data based on medians and the semi-interquartiles, and identified the differences between teachers' teaching levels, i.e., elementary and secondary. The perceived problems were classified based on their importance and rank order. Sixty-eight problems were identified, with 24 being reported as the most common based on the reported frequencies. At the end of the study, Veenman (1984) ranked the top five perceived problems as: (a) classroom discipline, (b) motivation of students, (c) difficulty dealing with individual differences among students, (d) assessment of students' work, and (e) relations with parents.

Due to the studies' variety, Veenman (1984) took further steps to categorize individual and situational differences appearing in the studies, such as age, gender, satisfaction, attitude, teacher behavior, experience, concerns, personality traits, student

ratings, supervisor ratings, and teacher training. Some researchers tried to relate these variables with teachers' perceived problems. For example, Stanbrough (as cited in Veenman, 1984) found out that if beginning teachers had experienced eight weeks of full day student teaching rather than half days for an entire semester, their perceived problems tended to decrease. Gender and age also affected the number of problems beginning teachers experienced. For instance, Stone (as cited in Veenman, 1984) found that male, secondary education novice teachers perceived fewer problems than did their female counterparts. Beginning teachers under age 24 and above 35 years tended to experience more problems than did those between the ages of 24 and 34.

Veenman (1984) also reported problems school principals' thought to be the most pressing for "rookie" educators. The principals' felt that "class discipline" was a major difficulty; thus, it ranked as a high priority on the list. Principals felt that when dealing with differences between students, assessing students' progress, motivating students, teaching slow learners, organizing classes, and devising schemes of work, were all common problems for beginning teachers. In general, several of the studies Veenman (1984) listed revealed great similarities between what first-year teachers viewed as problematic and their principals' perceptions of what constituted troubling issues for novice teachers. However, Grantham (1961) and Fitzgerald (1972) (as cited in Veenman, 1984), reported considerable differences in the perceptions of problems between beginning teachers and principals.

Since the majority of studies reviewed by Veenman (1984) used questionnaires to identify problems, Veenman pointed out that "most of the investigators did not

distinguish the difference between “complaining” and “true experience” (p. 166). Thus, some teachers’ might rank things they wanted to complain about, such as shoddy school equipment, materials and supplies; hence, they may not be “real” problems. He further stated that perceived problems by beginning teachers were attributed to several factors, such as novice teachers’ personal characteristics, situational characteristics of the teaching environment, and teacher training programs. In addition, he also stated it was unfair to blame teacher education for the problems experienced by first-year teachers.

In order to provide a different perspective regarding the challenges faced by traditionally trained novice teachers, Baker and Grayson (1994), conducted a preliminary study of the University of Southern California Metropolitan Teacher Education Program. It was a 5-year program designed to ensure a ‘tight connection’ with the metropolitan schools in the area. Researchers surveyed 108 first-year teachers to reflect on their pre-service teacher education experiences and how well prepared they felt to accept a first-year teaching assignment. In addition, the school principals who hired the program’s graduates were also surveyed by the same questionnaire.

Baker and Crayson’s (1994) study showed that both first-year teachers and principals felt that beginning teachers lacked adequate training to instruct students in their (teachers’) subject area. Meanwhile, both groups indicated strength in ability to integrate the subject areas. In addition, there was a remarkable agreement between first-year teachers and their principals concerning the idea that overall preparation for first-year teaching was good. Likewise, a consensus was reached regarding the conception that the graduates’ subject matter preparation was not as good (excepting language arts, and (c)

there was agreement that the graduates' procedural and technical skills were quite high. However, the findings suggested that overall preparedness for both graduates and principals was primarily related to procedural instruction, with little or no relationship to subject matter knowledge, pre-student teaching academics, and professional socialization and development.

Walker (1996) conducted a case study with non-traditional, first-year teachers who graduated from traditional teachers training program, and their experience. Four first-year teachers participated in the study. The results suggested non-traditional first-year teachers expressed different concerns when compared to more traditional counterparts. For instance, participants had little to no concern about classroom management and classroom discipline, or parental involvement. In addition, interaction with other teachers or support from administrators was not mentioned; rather, their concern centered on the development of students. Walker concluded non-traditional, first-year teachers tended to be older with more life experience, and that these personal characteristics greatly influenced the differences in terms of how they perceived challenges.

Another classic follow-up study conducted by Ganser (1999), who surveyed three groups of teachers to investigate their perceptions of problems faced by beginning teachers. The study reexamined Veenman's (1984) meta-analysis. Participants were Wisconsin beginning teachers, experienced urban teachers, and cooperating teachers. Participants were surveyed and asked to rank the extent to which they believed each of several areas were problems for them.

Each respondent was sent a survey with one of three versions of an unranked and randomly arranged list of the 24 perceived problems identified in Veenman's (1984) study as troublesome for first-year teachers. The quantitative data showed that the rank order correlations for Veenman and the three groups of teachers were different. First, the rank order correlation between the Wisconsin teachers and Veenman was negligible at 0.04, while that found between the urban teachers and Veenman was slightly negative at -0.164. The correlation between the Wisconsin teachers and the urban teachers was extremely strong, at 0.895. Conversely, the qualitative data showed both that the Wisconsin and urban teachers gave numerous examples of time limitations which was often linked to general work demands, additional duties, meetings they were required to attend, and paperwork they had to fill out. Participants reported these as challenges.

The overall results showed differences among the three groups of teachers. Wisconsin teachers' comments tended to focus on problematic relationships with adults, including staff, administrators, and parents. In addition, Wisconsin teachers and urban teachers ranked lack of spare time, burden of clerical work, and heavy teaching loads as the three greatest problems (Ganser, 1999). All of those problems focused on limited time, whereas the three greatest perceived problems in Veenman's study focused on students, i.e. motivation, discipline, and individual differences. Apparently, the teachers ranked their perceived problems somewhat differently than did those in Veenman's (1984) study.

Research by Selzer (2000) was designed to investigate beginning teachers' perception of support and job satisfaction during their first-year. This study surveyed 553

beginning teachers in Kansas who taught during 1999-2000 school year. The survey consisted of a demographics section, a support section, and a job satisfaction section. The open response questions were used to determine the extent to which beginning teachers were supported during their first-year. The survey showed that the teachers considered (a) lack of staff development, (b) lack of support and respect from administrators and staff, and (c) lack of orientation to the policies and procedures of the district as the most difficult aspects concerning their teaching conditions. Thus, they stated that they needed more support within the same areas. The author listed 17 recommendations based on the survey findings: providing beginning teachers with comprehensive, ongoing support in eight support categories throughout their first teaching year, adapting the instructional environment for beginning teachers to accommodate for their lack of experience and expertise, and basing induction programs on beginning teachers' developmental needs.

In addition, some researchers found there was a need to survey teachers who had already left their teaching position in an attempt to understand the challenges they faced. Marshall's (2002) dissertation was designed to examine the factors associated with, and the reasons why, Texas public school teachers left the profession. The study used validated survey instruments to collect the data, as well as quantitative research methods. The participants were a random selection of 200 public school teachers who failed to return to the profession after their first three years of teaching. The return rate was 43%, with 66 returning the questionnaires. The author organized the questionnaires based on

four major factors associated with teacher attrition rate: (a) personal, (b) organizational, (c) monetary, and (d) teaching preparation factors.

The data were analyzed as shown below: statistical results showed that under personal factors, “Teaching is a stressful profession” appeared to be the strongest issue causing teachers’ attrition. For organizational factors, “Discipline is the biggest problem faced by teacher” was found to contribute to teachers leaving their profession. The second strongest factor was “I am required to do an excessive amount of paperwork as a teacher”. Under monetary factors, “Teacher’s salaries are adequate” appeared to have the lowest mean, meaning that teachers did not feel their salaries were adequate. “Benefits are competitive with other salaries” also had the second lowest mean, meaning the educators did not feel their benefits could compete with other profession. For teaching preparation factors, most teachers felt that the training they received in college did not prepare them for discipline problems they encounter in the classroom.

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) studied a teacher follow-up survey where a questionnaire had been given to a national sample of U.S. teachers that had left the teaching profession a year prior to the study. Two main questions were asked: a) what was their primary reason for their departure and b) what were the major challenges they had faced as teachers.

The results revealed two main reasons for leaving teaching: a change of career path and job dissatisfaction. In addition, educators that left their jobs due to dissatisfaction were asked to list three main challenges they faced as teachers, and why they had terminated their teaching career. The results indicated three primary challenges:

salary, student discipline problems, and poor administrative support. This suggested that the root of teacher shortage was largely due to the working conditions within schools (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

Two other studies (McCarra, 2003; Riley, 2004) investigated the perceived problems of beginning teachers. Both were dissertations involving teachers who graduated from Mississippi State University. McCarra (2003) investigated problems that were discussed in Veenman's (1984) study. McCarra's study provided beginning teachers an opportunity to identify their problems, including the 24 perceived problems listed in Veenman's (1984) study. McCarra selected a stratified random sample of 932 graduates who were elementary education graduates from the Curriculum and Instruction Department between 1996 to 2000 at Mississippi State University and Mississippi State University—Meridian. In addition, the participants needed to have taught one to three years as a full-time contracted teacher.

The researcher sent them the initial survey packet; however, only 103 returned the survey. After receiving the questionnaires, 10 of the participants were interviewed to provide clarification and more in-depth information. A questionnaire was used to collect data, and it consisted of three sections. A Likert scale consisted of these four points: (a) major problem-4 points, (b) problem-3 points, (c) minor problem-2 points, and (d) not a problem-1 point. McCarra (2003) reported the findings based on the three sections of the questionnaire, and the overall finding indicated three major problems : (a) sense of being overwhelmed, (b) time, and (c) students' needs, such as dealing with slow learners. Other problems of major concern included (a) salaries, (b) parents, and (c) administrative

issues. In addition, McCarra also analyzed how demographics such as (a) age, (b) sex, (c) ethnicity/race, (d) school enrollment, (e) accreditation levels, and (f) campus-MSU or MSU-M related to the perceived problems. The results showed there was little variation in the demographic data. However, the greatest differences were in age groups and the area of the state in which the participants taught.

After combining all the problems listed on the three sections, the top eight perceived problems reported were (1) relations with parents, (2) accountability, (3) relations with principals/administrators, (4) discipline/classroom management, (5) training issues (pre-service), (6) inadequate guidance and support, (7) relations with colleagues, and (8) professional growth (McCarra, 2003). Five of these problems were listed on Veenman's (1984) and Ganser's (1999) studies, while three were not, (a) accountability, (b) training issues (pre-service) and (c) professional growth. When these findings were compared to Veenman's and Ganser's ranked lists, only two of Veenman's problems appeared while Ganser had five.

McCarra (2003) stated that beginning teachers had various suggestions for achieving success. They were based on two categories: District Recommendations and Teacher Education Recommendations. Recommendations that came from districts included: (a) providing mentors and improving orientation meeting, (b) implementing staff development based on individual teachers' needs and around the NCLB requirements, (c) encouraging principals to visit classrooms more and to consistently enforce school policies and procedures, and (d) providing more money for salaries and supplies. Suggestions under Teacher Education were centered around: (a) curriculum, (b)

realities of teaching, (c) classroom management, (d) survival skills, and (e) administrators/professors.

For survival skills, some beginning teachers suggested several methods for pre-service teachers, such as (a) encouraging them to ask questions, (c) advising them to take notes at staff meetings, and (c) urging them to update their knowledge about state law. Other suggestions concerning their teacher education programs were: (a) teaching specific programs, (b) requiring a master's level class in curriculum development at the undergraduate level, and (c) examining the Mississippi Curriculum at all levels. In addition, other suggestions for improvement included: (a) adding special education courses, (b) requiring more practicum, (c) emphasizing grades 3-8, and (d) teaching pre-service teachers how to effectively use textbooks and curriculum guides. Overall, most suggestions were concerned with improving the teacher education program, and how to design good schools (McCarra, 2003).

Riley's research (2004) examined a case study in order to understand the experiences of first-year teachers. She purposefully selected 7 Mississippi State University graduates who were elementary education majors and who taught in the elementary grades as participants. She found similar problems that consistently arose among neophytes. For instance, she found each of her participants repeatedly expressing feelings of being overwhelmed. She recommended a follow-up program, so the teacher education faculty could contact the first-year teachers and provide them with support. Participants expressed a wish that more classroom management skills training had been

offered before they entered the teaching profession. Mentor support also played an essential role in determining first-year teachers' success.

Liu and Meyer (2005) wanted to understand teachers' perceptions of their jobs, and the extent it would influence their decisions to stay at school or quit. The authors used data from NCES. NCES started collecting data in the mid-1980s and conducted the survey four times: Round 1 in 1987-88, Round 2 in 1990-91, Round 3 in 1993-1994, and Round 4 in 1999-2000. With each individual round, the NCES sent out separate questionnaires for participants and a random sample of teachers in each school. When this study was conducted, the most recent data came during 1994-1995.

Questionnaire items asked teachers about their satisfaction with various aspects of teaching; their answers were rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1-4). Overall, the questionnaire items used high scores for low levels of satisfaction except for a few items. The authors first selected 29 questionnaire items that tapped into five important aspects of teaching: (a) student discipline problems, (b) school climate, (c) professional support, (d) compensation, (e) and working conditions. However, principal component analysis was used to verify the validity, and the five job aspects were grouped into six main components. Therefore, 25 questionnaire items were used as data analysis.

The finding showed that low compensation was the primary reason causing teachers to quit their job. Student discipline was important, second only to low compensation. In addition, private school teachers revealed higher job satisfaction than public school teachers, despite the fact that public school teachers tended to receive higher salary than those employed at private schools. It was also reported that minority

teachers expressed that students' discipline problems bothered them more than non-minority teachers. They also revealed less satisfaction than did non-minority teachers. The authors concluded that the finding supported the need for effective measures in order to improve teachers' professional, especially in terms of compensation and/or student discipline problems.

The main purpose of this section was to review previous studies investigating beginning teachers that graduated from traditional teachers training programs, and the type of challenges they faced. Related studies pointed out that they all perceived some challenges similarly, but differently with others. These dissimilar perceptions might be caused by individual differences (e.g., gender, and age), different school environments, and different research designs (e.g., survey study, and case studies).

Alternative Certification Programs And Their Beginning Teachers' Perception of Challenges

The third group of related literature concerns both AC and traditional certification (TC) programs. There are three types of teacher certification programs: (a) TC programs, (b) AC programs, and (c) emergency teacher certificates (Qu & Baker, 2003). Traditional teacher certification curriculum is sponsored by colleges or universities, and has the highest requirement for teachers. Typically, teachers receive certificates based on their bachelors' degree in education; however, they must complete the other prerequisites, such as student teaching under supervision (Sandlin, Young & Karge, 1993).

AC programs, on the other hand, often require that participants have, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree, but the degree need not be in education. In addition, AC programs may be sponsored by non-university agents, require less course work, as well as little or no student teaching (Miller, McKenna, & McKenna, 1998). However, AC programs tend to attract a higher proportion of mid-career entrants. The third type is the emergency teacher certificate, which has the least requirements. When compared to the other two programs, emergency certificates may be given to those even less-prepared who may lack adequate training and, in general, tend to have only the minimal requirements (Qu & Becker, 2003).

Due to the nationwide teacher shortage, great numbers of prospective educators obtain certification through nontraditional means, particularly AC programs. In the early 1980s, only 8 states offered AC programs for individuals interested in teaching (Mayer, 2003). Since then, alternative route programs have proliferated, but research on the effectiveness of these programs was mostly inconclusive. Some researchers support AC programs (Feistritzer & Chester, 2000; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000), whereas others see them as a quick fix offering inadequate training for pre-service teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Stoddart, 1995). However, many states still choose AC programs as the best solution for dealing with teacher shortage.

Today, 47 states and the District of Columbia report they have at least one type of alternate route to teacher certification, with 122 AC programs scattered across the US. In addition, these states identify 619 sites that offer AC programs. Overall, the NCEI estimated that since the 1980s, at least 250,000 people entered the teaching profession

through some type of AC program. In addition, approximately 35,000 teachers obtained their teaching license through AC programs in 2004 (National Center for Education Information, 2005a). Feistritzer (2005b), in his report for the NCEI, summarized the results of a recent survey of teachers entering the profession through an AC program. He reported that almost half of the respondents (47%) indicated they would not have entered teaching if an AC program had not been available.

Since traditional teacher certification programs failed to supply the United States with sufficient educators to fill classroom vacancies, AC programs became a viable option. The term “alternative certification” applies to a variety of nonstandard options for obtaining state credentials required to teach in public schools. Thus, teachers receiving their training through AC programs might experience different preparation, depending on the state and its alternate programs. Some programs are night schools that deliver traditional teacher education programs for working adults. Some offered college courses designed to help individuals gain licensure through emergency certification. Still others are considered “fast track” and were designed to prepare teachers through a quick, basic curriculum (Basinger, 2000). However, as Holmes (2001) stated, recurring interest in alternative teacher licensure reflected not only teacher shortage concerns, but also mirrored concerns regarding content preparation of teachers. Recently, the most prevalent centers on the commitment, or lack thereof, of individuals entering the teaching profession.

AC programs vary considerably across the nation in their intent and format (Bucher, 1992). For example, some programs only accept candidates in shortage areas,

whereas others accept qualified candidates in any field. Mayer (2003) also indicated that AC programs are designed to provide a path for individuals holding a bachelor's degree to enter the teaching profession with "far less previous teacher training than that required by traditional certification programs" (p. 2). Most scholars were aware of the differences between TC and AC programs; thus, plenty of research has addressed the issue of teacher certification and its relationship to teacher quality.

Ruckle (2000) investigated different AC programs in several states, finding differences in degree. In New Mexico, for example, there was an alternative licensing program for candidates who had four-year degrees. After an individual completed 12 hours coursework from an institution of higher education and passed the state licensing test, he/she received a three-year alternative license.

In Colorado, formalized AC programs have existed for approximately 15 years. Candidates must meet subject area preparation as well as pass state testing requirements in order to receive the teaching license (Hirsh & Samuelsen, 2000). Individuals desiring to enter the AC programs in Arkansas were required to submit grade point average, a college major in the subject to be taught, references, meet for an interview, and pass two entry exams. In Michigan, each candidate had to hold either a bachelor's degree or be currently enrolled in a traditional program, as well as completing 90 semester hours of teacher preparation to enroll in the program. In Alabama, candidates earning at least a bachelor's degree can earn a Special Alternative Certificate. In Mississippi, candidates must have a bachelor's degree, meet the prerequisite Praxis I scores, and pass the Praxis II Specialty Area test (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2005).

Thus, it is apparent that the amount of pre-classroom training varied widely as did the amount and type of continued training/supervision and length of internship (Johnson, Birkland, & Peske, 2005). However, all of the AC programs generally consisted of some of the following components: (a) a bachelor's degree in the subject to be taught along with a passing score on a certification test, (b) a supervised internship coinciding with assumption of full teaching responsibilities, as well as additional hours of training and substantial supervision, and (c) certification recommendation by the employing district (Gettys, 2000). All AC programs have similar content knowledge expectations of their teacher candidates, but each state has its own unique pedagogical approach.

The demographics of the teacher pool that were attracted to AC programs differed from what was common for traditional certification programs. In essence, they tended to fall within 3 categories: (a) second-career seekers---this particular group of candidates entered the teaching field with strong subject content knowledge; (b) recent college graduates that decided to enter the teaching profession too late in their college programs to switch majors; and (c) new graduates that had only completed part of teacher education program (Ruckle, 2000).

AC programs have the potential to increase the diversity of the teaching force in terms of race, gender, gender, and real world experience of candidates (Legler, 2002). AC programs tend to recruit more qualified individuals of color into the teaching profession than does traditional programs, and while diversity has always been an issue in educational settings (26% of all students are minority), only 9 percent of teachers are minorities (Feistritz & Chester, 2000).

From the aforementioned characteristics, AC programs have both supporters and critics. Factors within AC programs that supporters felt important were: (a) AC programs can increase the number of minority teachers while increasing the number of teachers in shortage areas; and (b) Classroom performance and student outcomes of alternatively certified teachers were similar (not worse) to those of traditionally certified teachers. On the other hand, AC program opponents pointed out: (a) No increase in the retention rate of AC teachers in comparison to traditional certification ever occurred; and (b) Teachers certified from AC programs possess less content knowledge than do traditionally certified teachers (Legler, 2002).

Controversial issues exist concerning the different types of AC programs that are run by different states, as well as school districts to university and college control over pre-service teacher education (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). For instance, people opposed to AC programs argued that because of lower requirements for teacher candidates, AC could be viewed as undermining attempts to professionalize teaching, such as “all a teacher needs is content knowledge.” On the contrary, AC programs advocates supported the idea that an alternative route could enhance the teaching profession by bringing in academically competent individuals. Haberman (2006) defined AC programs as “a program in which it is possible for a college graduate with competence in a cognitive field of academic study and without previous courses in education to be employed in a school district as a paid, fully responsible teacher of record” (P. 11). Based on this definition, the following literature review will exclude alternative certification programs like Teacher for America (TFA) and Troops to Teachers.

Although all AC programs share several similarities, one component that definitely distinguished one from the other was the quality of each individual program. Feiman-Nemser (1992) conducted a study concerning the character and quality of mentoring in alternate route programs. The purpose was to investigate whether teacher mentor programs help retain capable teachers. In other words, the mentor program had the intent to provide incentives to teachers of demonstrated ability and expertise to remain in the public school. The results revealed several questions regarding how mentors teach their trainees. It showed it may be inappropriate to regard mentor teachers as field-based teacher educators. Another result showed mentor teachers might not be able to facilitate beginning teachers' ability to understand the central tasks of teaching and/or to engage in pedagogical thinking.

Other research examined how teachers' training related to student achievement. Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) randomly selected 24 science and 34 math teachers who either held temporary or emergency certification from the overall sample of 3,469 math and science teachers that served as participants. These specific teachers had students that tested in grades 10 and 12 in the NELS data, and the results were used to explore how teacher certification affects students' achievement in mathematics and science.

After comparing the test scores of students with uncertified teachers and students with teachers holding standard certification in mathematics, the latter group achieved at higher levels in mathematics. However, the findings held to a lesser extent in science. In addition, when comparing students with teachers holding emergency credentials with students with teachers that possessed standard teaching credentials, there was no

significance achievement difference between these two groups of students. Based on their findings, Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) concluded that certification should not be required of teachers.

On the other hand, Darling-Hammond, Berry and Thoreson (2000) argued strenuously against Goldhaber and Brewer's results. They stated that a comparison agenda should aim to understand how different teacher certification strategies encourage or discourage the construction of programs producing well-prepared teachers that stay in the profession.

Another study conducted by Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) investigated the relationship between teacher preparation with success within the teaching field. The author reviewed several studies regarding teachers that received their training from AC programs and examined their teaching performance. The first study was Gomez and Grobe's (1990) study of AC candidates in Dallas. The candidates received a few weeks of training before assuming full teaching responsibilities, and when compared to candidates that received their training from traditional programs, their performance was judged uneven. In addition, AC candidates were rated "poor" on most of the teaching factor evaluated items.

The second study was Stoddart's (1992), which discussed the turnover rate of candidates in AC programs. The data analysis revealed that half of them (in Dallas) did not return to teaching after their first-year of internship. In addition, only 40% planned to stay as compared to 72% of traditionally trained candidates. Moreover, the author stated that candidates from short alternative programs were more likely to have little

pedagogical training, as well as less student teaching experience, when compared with candidates of traditional teachers programs. Meanwhile, Darling-Hammond (2000c) also pointed out that the lack of student teaching experience, as well as course work, was supposed to be compensated for by intensive mentoring and supervision in the beginning of an individual's teaching career. However, mentors did not help inexperienced teachers as envisaged (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Furthermore, less prepared teacher candidates were more likely to teach disadvantaged students, such as minority and low-income schools, than were those better prepared (Darling-Hammond, 2000a).

In Legler's study (2002), alternative teacher certification in the NCREL region (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin) was investigated. He reviewed information on AC programs in these states, and designed a survey study to examine over 1,000 principals in the NCREL region, asking them about their experiences with teachers that received their licenses through the AC programs. The author sent out surveys to 3,400 principals in the seven states of the NCREL region, and received 1,110 responses. The questionnaires consisted of several open-ended questions and were related to the participants' experiences with alternatively certified teachers, the number of alternatively certified teachers they had hired, their quality, and the extent to which hiring those teachers had helped address their teacher shortage problems.

The principals were asked about the prior backgrounds of the hired, alternatively certified teachers. The answers showed that alternative programs could entice individuals possessing years of experiences in subject matter (such as math or science), and/or people working in the business community. The second question concerned the quality of

alternatively certified teachers. Results showed approximately 74% of the principals felt the performance of alternatively certified teachers as equal to or above other new teachers. Another question asked about the percentage of particular subjects (those with a shortage) taught by alternatively certified teachers, and almost 50% of the principals reported they had hired alternatively certified teachers for more than one subject area (Legler, 2002).

The last question was about the impact of alternative certification on the supply and longevity of teachers in their schools. The principals reported that alternatively certified teachers had been somewhat or very helpful in addressing the teacher shortage. The overall results of this study showed AC programs had a positive contribution in dealing with the teacher shortage issue (Legler, 2002).

Another study that examined the effectiveness of AC programs was the National Center for Alternative Certification (NCAC) (2005), which reviewed the AC programs in the Houston Independent School Districts (HISC) and assessed its effectiveness in terms of accreditation, teacher retention, and intern attitudes and perceptions. The results indicated that seventy-seven percent agreed or strongly agreed that intern orientation was effective. Eighty-five percent of the interns agreed or strongly agreed that the AC programs used effective instructional materials and techniques. However, the participants considered lack of time with their mentors as the central weakness in their training. Two recommendations were listed at the end of the study: (a) assigning a mentor to the intern would increase the length of time an AC teacher remained with the school district; (b) it

would ensure that all assigned mentors meet with their interns regularly in order to help the intern's professional growth.

As the NCAC (2005) study showed, evaluation studies that compared the effectiveness of traditional and alternative certification routes were inconclusive, primarily due to a lack of objective teacher effectiveness and evaluation models. As a result, the question of which certification route (traditional or alternative) could produce teachers that are more qualified may be unresolved. On the other hand, AC programs proved that they could successfully fill teacher shortage vacancies.

Hertzog (2000) conducted a study to that examined alternative novice teachers; one question was how alternative novice teachers perceived problems that arose in the classroom. Twelve alternative permit, first-year teachers, participated in this descriptive case study. Among the participants, ten were in their first semester of teaching while two were in their second semester. All taught in urban settings: ten taught in large urban school districts, one taught in a very small district, and one was in a state funded charter school.

Each participant was expected to complete an initial descriptive interview as well as a final interview, answer a weekly questionnaire for fifteen weeks, and would engage in bi-weekly interviews. In addition, the author observed each participant's classroom teaching six times, each class lasting one hour. The questionnaire included asking participants to describe the three most important problems they faced during that particular week, as well as who they sought advice from and whether they took any action. The finding was grouped into the following categories based on reported

problems: (a) interpersonal relationships, (b) school related business and routines, (c) classroom management, (d) behavior management, (e) time management, (f) curriculum planning, and (g) instruction (Hertzog, 2000).

Findings indicated that the following problems played an essential role in teachers' lives. Interpersonal relationships had significant impact on teachers' lives, and most importantly, it indicated when a teacher's instructional effectiveness diminished. Teachers also reported great concern when working with students possessing little English speaking ability. In addition, teachers also reported classroom management and clocking lessons, to the precise minute in order to maintain a time schedule, as problems. Teachers with good instructional ability tended to report more problems regarding instruction and classroom management strategies (Hertzog, 2000).

This section examined AC programs as a possible solution to address the teacher shortage. Several AC programs in different states were discussed, such as the training they provided, and the type of teacher candidates they attracted. In addition, what challenges the teachers of AC programs perceived were also addressed. Most importantly, studies of supporters and opponents of AC programs were also summarized to address the issue of teacher qualities and teaching effectiveness.

Comparison of Traditional and Alternative Certificate Programs

Lohmeier (2000) compared TC novice teachers with AC teachers, and arrived at several critical conclusions. In this study, the participants consisted of twenty TC novice teachers and twenty AC teachers, with the participants' school principals agreeing to

participate by rating the relative effectiveness of each group. Three research questions were: (a) were there any significant differences in the concerns expressed by first-year AC teachers when compared to first-year TC teachers?; (b) Were there any significant differences between effective teaching behaviors as demonstrated by first-year AC teachers and first-year TC teachers?; (c) Was there a relationship between the mean scores of the impact subscale (as self-reported by teachers) on the Stages of Concern Questionnaire?; and (d) Were the principals' mean total scores in the Teacher Evaluation Scale based on observations?

The findings revealed no statistically significant differences regarding the concerns about teaching expressed by novice AC teachers when compared to TC teachers. In addition, both groups of novice teachers rated highest on the instruction subscale, second on the professionally related subscale, and lowest on behavior management. Interestingly, principals rated novice AC teachers higher than their TC counterparts in behavior management, but rated TC teachers higher in instruction (Lohmeier, 2000).

Guyton, Fox, and Sisk (1991) investigated first-year teachers' preparation by examining traditional and alternative programs, their attitudes, and their efficacy. Twenty-three beginning teachers prepared through the 1988-1989 academic year at the alternative preparation institution, along with 26 beginning teachers that prepared with traditional education programs. All participants were required to complete the following instruments: (a) a 14, open-ended items survey, which queried the participant's decision to be a teacher, as well as his/her perception of teaching; (b) the Educational Attitudes

Inventory (EAI), which gauged teachers regarding student-centered and directive teaching views; (c) Teaching Attitude Inventory (TAI), which consisted of 43 Likert-scale items related to teacher attitude toward his/her students, school environment, attitude toward teaching, self-confidence, support, and teaching problems; and (d) Beginning Teachers Evaluation, which consisted of 15 items such as use of classroom time and enthusiasm, and an overall rating of teacher performance (Guyton, Fox, and Sisk, 1991).

The findings revealed several important points. First, the AC teachers were more positive about the value of their teacher education program after the first month of teaching. Second, the AC programs tended to attract people who made late decisions concerning the choice to become a teacher, but did not attract people with higher academic qualifications. Lastly, teachers prepared by AC programs revealed a higher retention rate (83%)

Knight, Owens and Waxman (1990-1991), stated that classroom environments have impact on students' performance. Thus, they conducted this particular study to compare students' perceptions of both traditional and alternative programs in order to examine the results. Six hundred and seventy-six elementary and middle school students, as well as their 24 classroom teachers, were randomly selected from several public school districts in the southwest as participants. A *My Class Inventory (MCI)*, a simplification of the Learning Environment inventory, was administered to all the participants.

The results revealed the following conclusions: (a) students of TC teachers perceived significantly more instruction and opportunities to engage in higher thought

processes than did students of AC teachers; (b) students of TC teachers perceived that their instructors moved through class work at a significantly more appropriate pace than students of AC teachers; (c) students of TC teachers perceived significantly more group cohesion and cooperation among students of teachers in AC programs; (d) students whose teachers were traditionally certified were perceived as more challenging by the cognitive level of their school work (Knight, Owens and Waxman , 1990-1991),

Wayman et al, (2003) examined teachers licensed by non-traditional programs and compared it with teachers that gained licensure in a TC program. The authors used 237 first-year teachers that received their preparation from TC programs in Colorado, and 154 first-year teachers in the Metro State College Teachers in Residence (TiR) program. In May 2001, at the end of their first-year of teaching, TiR participants completed a survey that assessed general areas of concern for beginning teachers. The survey was the same instrument the author had used one year prior in the Denver area to assess first-year, traditionally prepared teachers' perceptions in general.

The findings indicated very little difference between the two different teacher preparation groups regarding the rank of their concern. For example, for both groups, discipline and adapting instruction ranked as the highest concern while learning from peers and isolation from colleagues ranked as the lowest concern. However, teachers from the TiR program ranked their concern at a higher level than did teachers of traditional programs; that is, except for the item "adjusting to school culture." In addition, teachers of TiR program were over four times more likely to rank items

regarding “lesson planning” than teachers of traditional program. The TiP teachers also indicated higher concern in almost all areas (Wayman et al, 2003).

The overall results indicated a primary issue involved in AC programs: lack of pedagogy and instructional preparation, which is related and consistent with other researchers (Darling-Hammond; Chung & Frelow, 2002; Shen, 1997 ; Stoddart & Floden, 1995). As the authors pointed out, this can be problematic due to one aim of alternative licensure is the attempt to ensure that students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, would be taught by teachers with a strong subject background (such as mathematics and science).

Several studies were reviewed to examine teachers’ perceptions of their challenges regarding TC and AC programs. In addition, studies selected to discuss the teaching effectiveness teachers-in-training received while enrolled in the different programs revealed inconsistencies regarding their teaching effectiveness and perceptions about their training and rank of challenges they faced.

Summary

Based on the above selected literature review, several insights were gained that would help shape this particular study. Teacher shortage has been a severe problem for decades, and since the 1980s, 47 states have established the alternative route for teacher licensure as a possible solution for the relatively high teacher turnover rate. There are various types of alternative route programs, with some better than others. The major differences between the various program include the amount of course work, supervision requirements, and student teaching experiences. All of these components affect teacher

quality. Naturally, there were supporters and opponents of the alternative route. Opponents called it a “quick fix”, and questioned a teacher’s quality if he or she graduated from such a program. Opponents also stated alternative route teachers would not stay within the teaching profession. On the other hand, alternative route supporters claimed several advantages, such as their graduates possessed a much stronger content knowledge. In addition, alternative route programs tended to attract more male, minority individuals. Apparently, these disagreements will continue instead of abating.

Another factor concerns the impact of NCLB on teacher preparation programs. Since year 2001, NCLB established that each classroom and teacher listed under the rubric “highly qualified” must be held accountable for their students’ academic performance. Concerned researchers have written about the stress NCLB brought to teachers, especially those in their first-year. For the past few decades, beginning teachers’ perception of challenges has been studied extensively from both traditional and alternative programs. Although these programs can be very different, they share a great number of similarities regarding their perceptions of their challenges

The last part of the literature review centered on the comparison between TC and AC programs; that is, in terms of how beginning teachers from each program perceived their training, challenges, efficacy, etc. Overall, both groups reported both positive and negative aspects of their preparation. However, there is a need to combine NCLB with alternative route programs; likewise, teachers received training from alternative route programs, their perceptions of their challenges, and how NCLB affects their challenges and perceptions should be investigated. Thus, a study needs to be conducted that would

investigate alternative route teachers, and how NCLB affected, if any, their perceptions regarding their challenges as a novice teacher. For instance, how do they perceive their alternative route training? Most importantly, is the alternative route just a “short term, quick fix” or is it something else?

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research methodology. It is presented in six parts: research design, participants, procedures, data collection, data analysis, and methodological concerns and trustworthiness

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges beginning MAT teachers faced once they began their careers. Six case studies were conducted to present a more complete and in-depth understanding; data collection included interviewing, observing, and document analysis.

Case studies were considered more suitable for this particular study after comparing it with the other major types of qualitative research methods: ethnography, phenomenology, and ground theory. For example, ethnography tends to be chosen by researchers when their studies are aimed at understanding human society and culture. In this case, if ethnography were conducted, research questions would have to center around school environment, history, and characterized by its sociocultural interpretation instead of MAT teachers. If the study method was phenomenology, the focus would be centered on the essence of an experience, which would not be able to answer the current research questions. In other words, research questions would focus on beginning MAT teachers'

experiences, the essence of being a beginning teacher, as well as the essence of being a participant in the MAT program. If the study design were ground theory, the focus would be on “development”, with the research questions needing to be more like beginning MAT teachers’ teaching experience development from their first day of teaching to their most recent teaching stage and experience development (Merriam, 1998).

Creswell (2003) stated case studies allow the researcher to explore in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. Merriam (1998) further explained that the primary advantage of case studies is their unique ability to describe situations, and events allowing readers the vicarious experience of having been there. Patton (1990) wrote that case studies, “should take the reader into the case situation, a person’s life, a group’s life, or a program’s life” (p. 387). Yin (2003) also explained that when compared with other designs, case studies can provide “exploratory” and “descriptive” study reports, and that such a design focuses on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. In other words, case studies allow an opportunity to acquire insightful knowledge regarding an individual or event, as well as both social and political phenomena. The case studies of the MAT teachers will provide insight into the challenges they face in their first-year of teaching, perceptions of their MAT training program, as well as their attitude toward their teaching career.

Participants

Participants in this study were beginning teachers who had graduated from the MAT program at Mississippi State University. According to the data available through the MSU Office of Clinical/Field-Based Instruction and Licensure, and the Department

Curriculum and Instruction, only six beginning teachers graduated from the MAT program and are currently employed as full time classroom teachers.

Table 1: Teachers in Six High Schools

Participants	Race	Gender	Age	Teaching Subject	Undergrad Major	Certification
Alex	Caucasian	Male	20s	Special Education	Economics	Social studies Business Technology Special Education
Bill	Caucasian	Male	20s	Mathematics	Communication	Mathematics
Cindy	Caucasian	Female	40s	General Science	Medical Tech	Biology General Science
Debra	Caucasian	Female	20s	English	English Literature	English Special Education
Elan	Caucasian	Female	30s	History	Communication	History Communication Speech English
Flora	Caucasian	Female	20s	English	Communication	English

I chose these six participants as a convenient sample since they were the only graduates of the Mississippi State MAT program at the time this study was conducted. Overall, the proportion of MAT teacher candidates was approximately 90% Caucasian and 10% African-American; 30 % were male while 70% were female; thus, these participants reflected the diversity of gender, race and teaching subjects (see Table 1). In

addition, their career path, educational background before entering the MAT program, and life experiences were carefully described during the text. Such diverse backgrounds would allow readers to envision in a multifaceted manner the challenges each participant faces. On the other hand, the proportion of participants' ethnicity, gender, and age reflected a very close proportion of students enrolled in the MAT program (Curriculum and Instruction, 2005).

Procedures

The participants were the 6 beginning teachers that graduated from the MAT program, and were currently employed as full time classroom teachers. I first identified the participants and obtained information regarding the schools in which they taught. After that, I sent a letter to the individuals, their superintendents, and principals to explain the purpose of the study and requested permission for participation. After permission was received from the above parties, I sent each participant (beginning MAT teacher) a consent form asking for volunteers. Once each individual agreed, he/she was asked to complete the consent form and mail it back to the researcher.

I contacted each participant and set up a time for the initial interview and observation, immediately after receiving the consent form. Each participant was interviewed two times, face to face. Between the first and second interview, I transcribed the interview data, which I believed would provide me with a more complete picture regarding each participant. I also observed each participant's teaching twice. In addition, I asked for each participant's agreement to collect relevant documents. After completing

the second interview, and finished with my observations and document collection, several new questions came to mind. I e-mailed each participant several times with questions when I lacked the opportunity to ask during our one-on-one interview.

Data Collection

As Merriam (1998) stated, in case studies, data collection is viewed as asking questions, watching participants, and analyzing relevant documents. Thus, my data collection process was based on these three strategies, which involved interviewing and observing the participants, as well as collecting and analyzing relevant documents.

Interviews

In qualitative studies, the most common and efficient way to collect data is through person-to-person interviews (Merriam, 1998). To understand the challenges that beginning MAT teachers face, I interviewed the six beginning teachers that graduated from the MAT program at Mississippi State University.

According to Yin (2003), interviews are an essential source of case study evidence, allowing the researcher to report and interpret the study results through the eyes of specific interviewees; thus, providing important insights into a situation. Merriam (1998) stated that there were several types of interviews. Based on the unique research questions, the first interview was semi-structured and lasted approximately one and a half hour, during which time I asked each participant to answer questions that had been formulated in an interview guide (see Table 2). The second interview was unstructured,

lasting approximately 45 minutes; here, I asked participants a series of questions related to what was observed in the classrooms.

The study was conducted between August, 2006 and December, 2006. During this period, all participants were interviewed twice. Each interview was scheduled based on the participants' convenience and, thus, each interview occurred on different days. In addition, all interviews were conducted in each participant's classroom, and the overall environment was quiet enough for me to audiotape each conversation.

Observations

The second strategy regarding a case study involves observation. Researchers pointed out that observational evidence was very useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). For case studies, the site often allows the researcher the opportunity to view both relevant behaviors and environmental conditions. In this particular study, I observed beginning MAT teachers twice, and during that time, I observed participants' instruction, classroom interaction, classroom management, and behaviors occurring at special events.

Meanwhile, I constructed field notes along with the observations. Merriam (1998) encouraged qualitative researchers to record their observation notes in as much detail as possible so they could "form the data-base for analysis"; likewise, their field notes should appear in "many forms" (p. 111). In this study, the field notes included verbal descriptions of the school environment, the people who were involved, the

students, and the activities. In addition, my comments were documented as observation notes and integrated into the interview transcript.

Table 2: Research and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. What are the challenges beginning MAT teachers face?	1. Describe your teaching environment in detail? 2. Describe most common challenges you face in detail? 3. In addition to what you just mentioned, how about classroom discipline, motivation of students, relation with parents, -etc? 4. Do these challenges affect your job satisfaction, if it does, in what way? 5. What kind of support do you receive from your principal? 6. What kind of support do you receive from your colleagues?
2. What are beginning MAT teachers' perception of their training program?	1. How has the MAT program have prepared you to face the challenges? 2. How has the MAT program have prepared you to meet the requirement of "No Child Left Behind"? 3. While comparing with teachers from traditional teacher training programs, how do you perceive your training? 4. Describe the positive and negative aspects of the MAT program? 5. What kind of mentor and supervisory support do you receive from the MAT program? 6. If you have the chance to make recommendation to the MAT program director, what would you recommend?
3. What are the beginning MAT teachers' attitude toward their teaching career?	1. How does your education background influence your teaching? 2. How does your previous job experience influence your teaching? 3. How do your personal characteristics, culture and life experiences influence your teaching? 4. If you have a choice again, would you enroll MAT program? Why or why not? 5. What was your expectation of teaching before you attended the MAT program at MSU? 6. What do you expect to be doing 5 years from now?

Document Analysis

Yin (2003) stated that documents play an explicit role in data collection when conducting case studies. He suggested the researcher collect a variety of documents to meet the purpose of multiple sources of evidence. In this study, I collected relevant documents, such as lesson plans, teacher evaluations, notes sent home, to meet the multiple sources purpose. In addition, Merriam (1998) categorized three major types of documents available for researchers to analyze: public records, personal documents, and physical material.

In this particular study, relevant documents collection provided me with another perspective and further helped me to gain insight for answering the research questions. In addition, the relevant documents clarified some of the interview questions. For instance, research question #1: “What are the challenges beginning MAT teachers face?” There was no doubt that the types of interview questions provided information for that question. However, notices sent home to teachers, minutes from PTA meetings, students’ grade records, etc. offered another source of evidence. I also collected MAT beginning teachers’ background information such as courses taken in undergraduate study, courses taken during the MAT program, a description of employment before entering the MAT program, and so on.

Data Analysis

In a qualitative study, data analysis should be conducted during data collection, while the simultaneous processes require the researcher to become immersed in their data. This means data analysis begins with the first interview, first observation, and the

first document read (Merriam, 1998). Thus, in this study, I started data analysis as soon as the data collection process began. I analyzed data through beginning MAT teachers stories or scenarios that will be recounted in order to give in-depth descriptions concerning the research questions that were under investigation.

Audiotaped interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy against the original recording. The entire transcript task was completed by the researcher, and no one else due to the following three reasons: (a) lack of finances, (b) transcribing helped me to become more familiar with each case; and (c) it aided in the integration of observations and documents. Each case was reported primarily based on participants' verbal transcript (interview raw data), along with observational data and related documents; thus, when necessary, direct quotations were included to make a statement. In addition, each case report was written separately, lasting approximately 18 to 22 pages, with the six cases totaling 125 pages.

Each participant, the name of the school where each taught, and its location within a specific school district were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. In addition, each case was presented by its first name, and the name was given based on the order of the first interview. For instance, the first participant I interviewed was named Alex; the second was Bill; the third was Cindy, etc.

Yin (2003) suggested that researchers start their data analysis with several strategies: explanation building, time-series analysis, and cross-case synthesis. The first step consists of explaining each case by focusing on the research questions. As Yin explained, the necessity of explanation building is because in most case studies,

explanation building appeared in “narrative form and such narratives cannot be precise” (p. 120). One example was when I analyzed data that related to answering the research question concerning the challenges perceived by beginning MAT teachers. The first step I took was listing each challenge that was mentioned by each participant during the interviews.

Among six participants, Alex reported being challenged with low learning motivation, lack of resources, and the low level of trust between teacher and students; Bill’s challenges were: a low trust level between teacher and students, discipline issues, low learning motivation, and lack of parental support; Cindy revealed she faced two primary challenges: low learning motivation, and discipline issues; Debra’s challenges were: different academic levels between the students, and low learning motivation; Elan faced lack of teaching resources, lack of parental support, and low learning motivation; Flora’s challenges included: students’ low academic level, lack of parental support, and low learning motivation. In addition, five of them (except Alex) reported NCLB was definitely the challenge they faced during their teaching career.

After listing all challenges, I tried to find the “common ground” among them. In other words, I gathered “similar” challenges reported by more participants as major challenges and then categorized those challenges as “themes”, and this process is called cross-analysis. As a result, the following three primary challenges were revealed as common themes: (a) students’ low motivation, (b) NCLB-accountability, and (c) lack of parental support. Meanwhile, some of the challenges were considered minor because fewer participants perceived them as challenges, and they were: trust between teachers

and students, lack of school resources (teaching materials), discipline issues/classroom management, different academic level between students, and students' low academic level.

Although observational data and documents were not as “obvious” and/or “direct” as interview data, I strove to observe “themes” revealed from the interviews. Moreover, I attempted to ascertain whether field observations and documents verified these themes. The following example demonstrated how observation and document data complemented the interview data. For example, Bill explained the great extent his previous educational background (communication) impacted his teaching style. He tended to spend more time detailing mathematical idea(s) until his students understood, and allowed them more time in class to work on specific questions. After that, he would ask them to write their answers on the blackboard and explain their answers verbally. That way, they would have to “verbalize” the mathematical concept, which helped them achieve a deeper comprehension. During my observation, that is exactly what Bill did.

Documents also helped to complement interview data. For instance, when Elan expressed how little support she had from parents, she showed me a letter she received from one of her students' parents, thus explaining why lack of parental support caused her stress. Based on the entire data analysis, I gained insight from multiple sources, which connected data analysis to related literature reviews and made the data meaningful.

Methodological Concerns and Trustworthiness

I hold several concerns regarding my research methodology for this particular study. First, this was my first foray at conducting a study within a public school setting, and my own lack of K-12 public school education experience in the United States made my role as a researcher challenging in several ways. For instance, it took me a while to become accustomed (and thus, gain empathy) with the challenges each participant mentioned to me. On the other hand, my lack of experience gave me fresh eyes, without expectations or stereotypes regarding what I would “hear” or “see” from participants’ comments or behavior. Second, as a doctoral student, I interviewed participants that graduated from the MAT program within the same academic department in the same institution; thus my role was “unique.”. For instance, the participants would likely trust me and provide “real” data since we shared a bond based upon our attending the same institution. To address these concerns and indicate that the data collection was trustworthy, I adapted the three lenses strategy to enhance the level of trustworthiness: the lens of participants, the lens of the researcher, and the lens of people external to the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Lens of participants: one strategy was member checks. During the data collection and analysis process, I took data and tentative interpretations back to the participants and asked them if the results were credible. More specific, I either physically carried or e-mailed the data to participants and asked them to check the accuracy of the information that I received and transcribed from the raw data they provided. This method was practiced continuously throughout the study. Another strategy was my building rapport

with the participants, leading them to speak to me in a more honest manner and did not worry that I would judge them negatively. In addition, during our respective interactions, I expressed attending skills, such as listening, paraphrasing, and reflection to establish a trusting relationship. For instance, I used phrases like: “sounds like you are frustrated with your students’ low motivation.” This was done so my participants would express their opinion on these specific issues and more.

Lens of the researcher: to indicate that the data collection was trustworthy, triangulation was utilized to compare data across varying sources. For instance, documents were used to support what I observed in the classroom with each specific participant. One specific example would be Alex, the special education teacher, who had a notebook for documenting how he facilitated his student on a daily basis. What appeared in the notebook was consistent what I observed—there was no exact lecture from Alex and he was only there to help them with their studies. In addition, observation data was used to verify what each participant specifically stated in the interview. Finally, to ensure that data was reliable, I collected information using a multi-site design in which six cases were conducted and observations were completed with a different time and location (Merriam, 1998).

As a researcher, I gained insight from interviewing the participants, observing their teaching, watching their interaction with students, and analyzing related documents. I used the insights I gained to examine, clarify, and amplify the meaning of the data, as well as helping me address the various research questions.

Lens of People external to the study: I was aware of the potential bias that I might add to the research data; thus, I asked peers who were familiar with both educational and systemic issues unique to Mississippi to give me feedback. In addition, I asked the panel experts (dissertation chair and committee) to examine the data with a critical perspective and to provide feedback so I could reexamine and eradicate any possible bias.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter was divided into three sections. These sections were: (a) introduction, (b) six case study reports, and (c) cross-case analysis.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges that beginning MAT teachers face. Six MAT graduates were interviewed and observed by the researcher. They spoke about the many challenges they faced on a daily basis, such as interacting with administrators, students, students' parents, and colleagues. In addition, MAT teachers' perceptions of the training they received from the MAT program were also discussed. Finally, the MAT teachers' attitudes toward their teaching career were addressed from several aspects.

Cases Studies

Alex

Context

Alex was in his late 20s, and this was his second year of full-time teaching. His employment started one year prior to his completion of the MAT program and before that, he had worked as part-time teacher. He was certified to teach social studies, business, technology, and special education and was employed as a special education teacher at an alternative school in Mississippi. The school district consisted of an elementary school, middle school, and high school, for a total enrollment of 1960 students. In terms of ethnicity, 55% of the students were White, 44% were Black, and 1% was Hispanic. There were 67% of the students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

The school was in the 4A category in terms of student population, and was level 5, in terms of academic level. Student and teacher ratio was 14:1, whereas the state average was 16:1. The alternative school where Alex taught was separated from the middle school and high school buildings. The building was small and contained three teachers, including Alex (who was the SPED) teacher, one regular education teachers, and one assistant teacher. Alex taught grades 7 to 12, and most of his students were sent to him because they could not function in regular classrooms, and because they exhibited behavior problems as well. Thus, in many aspects, his job was quite different from regular classroom teachers'. For instance, assessment was not a major emphasis for him;

thus, he did not have to take his students' academic performance into consideration while implementing various teaching strategies. Meanwhile, his teaching style was very different from regular classroom teachers; for example, he never lectured in his classes. In fact, his teaching method was basically one on one tutoring. His primary instructional task was helping his students with their schoolwork, and helping them complete their assignments.

I am more like a facilitator, and I pretty much help them with their assignments, do small interventions, help them with their tests, and just make sure they are on task and do their school works right.

In addition, Alex's students were very different from "normal" students. They were more likely to have behavior problems and a lower academic ability, and Alex used different teaching strategies and classroom rules to meet his students' special needs.

I have a lot of behavioral kids, they have behavior disorders that I have to deal with. I usually have 4 to 5 students at a time, and they come here for 30 to 45 days period. The working environment is very strict, it is not like work at a normal class situation. I mean I am working with kids have been into trouble. I have to make sure they are held to standard, and we have different handbooks, which are different from regular school. They have more strict standards here than they can get from home school.

Alex also explained the differences in the teaching curriculum and goals as different from regular education classes:

For alternative school, the curriculum was set up by the state, we [alternative school teachers] just go by the curriculum the state wants us to teach, so far as prepare them for MCT [Mississippi Curriculum Test], and stuff like that, they send work here and we will prepare, basically we are just facilitators. Our goal is basically discipline.

My observation data confirmed the above statement. The alternative school was located in a very small, one story-building, and consisted of two small classrooms and

two restrooms. Its appearance was different from the other buildings, and looked sloppy and dilapidated and very easy for a visitor to miss. There was only one front door for people to enter or exit (which was different from most school buildings). As soon as I entered, I also entered the regular education teacher's classroom. In other words, there was no separate door to partition this room from the building. This room had approximately 10 chairs and a teacher's desk. It looked as it needed some "normal" classroom equipment, such as a blackboard.

Alex had his own room, and the other two teachers (the assistant teacher and the regular education teacher) shared a room. Like the other classroom, this one was very small. There were approximately 10-15 chairs for students. There was a computer at Alex's desk, and a phone. The room's décor appeared dull and gray. In the room, there were a small blackboard with a couple of maps hanging on the wall. In addition, there was a small book shelf with some books. I saw little communication between Alex and his other colleagues and it looked they shared the small building, but worked completely separate.

Each time I observed Alex, he never had more than five students with him. Due to these unique circumstances, his teaching style was more like a one on one tutor. He walked around the classroom, helping the students when they needed it and thus, he did not lecture. For example, one child had a problem with algebra, and Alex helped him solve it. Apparently, Alex's teaching goal(s) was not focused on lecturing, but emphasized helping each student complete his/her assignments.

In addition, Alex' students tended to look tired and appeared unmotivated for any learning. For instance, during my second observation, Alex walked out the classroom for a few minutes to talk with a parent. When he came back, he explained that the parent came to pick up his son because the boy fell asleep in class. He also stated that the child never got rest and it was all but impossible for him to sit in the classroom and function like a student. Hence, there was nothing he could do except send the child home. Alex also stated he was lucky he could contact the parent, since it was usually impossible to reach them.

Overall, I saw no student misbehave or disturb class. In fact, there was only silence. During my observations, Alex always had ample time to do his work. He had time, for example, to read a novel he brought from home. His schedule was unlike regular classroom teachers' with one class period ending, and another one starting. He stayed in his classroom, and his students came to him. I saw no energy in the classroom.

Alex received his undergraduate degree in economics in 2002, and then worked at a pharmacy for approximately one year. After that, he did construction work and substitute teaching. His substitute teaching experience consisted of helping high school and middle school teachers with their classes when they were out of classroom. After that, he decided to become a teacher, and this was his primary reason.

I just try to make a difference in societies, you know do something good besides just produce a product to do something, sale, I don't know, I feel like I can contribute to the society better as a teacher.

Just like the majority of MAT teachers, Alex had no background in education and matriculated in the MAT program at Mississippi State University in order to receive

teaching certification. He experienced unique challenges that teachers graduating from a traditional teachers' program might not have understood since they lacked exposure to such challenges.

Challenges Beginning MAT Teachers Faced

In this section, Alex discussed the following issues in his current job: (a) challenge(s) he faces, and (b) the type of support he receives.

Challenges

His students' low motivation challenged him immensely. In fact, Alex reported that most of his students came from very difficult environments and had low learning motivation. For that matter, most never had an opportunity to get motivated at home. Some of his students' parents exercised very little authority, with some being unable to get their kids to school. Moreover, many students did not live with their parents, causing Alex shock and frustration when he first started teaching at the school.

Some of my students' parents, they do what they can do to help their children but some of them don't want to do anything. And you really can't make them if they don't want to. Some parents just can't control their children, and I have some kids live with their grandmothers, and they are not live with their neutral family, they are living with uncles, grandmothers or other family members, and they can't discipline them really. They can't make these kids come to school, they have hard time get them to bed at night, things like that.

Even Alex viewed himself as a "facilitator" instead of a teacher, and he had to consciously remind himself of his students' situations, and adjust his teaching philosophy. Meanwhile he had to accommodate his teaching values, be flexible, and find the best interventions to help his students.

You have to learn how to accommodate and do interventions with them, But if you have ever, if I just start screaming, and try to force them to do stuff, that is not going to do any good. That is just going to cause more problems. So I have to work, I have to find solution with problems and do my best to try to accommodate that.

Since the majority of Alex' students had multiple family issues to deal with on a daily basis (to say nothing of their behavior problems), he had to take the factors into consideration before implementing any discipline strategies. As a result, Alex sometimes had to make difficult decisions when dealing with extreme situations. He was aware that his decision(s) might be too controversial from other teachers' perspectives, but he had to make decisions based on what he believed would meet his students' best interests. Here was one of the scenarios:

For example, this one here when you came in, he was asleep, he had zero sleep last night. There is no telling what he has been doing last night so I called his parents and had to send him home you know. So, I have to make that decision because he is not in the shape to be in school today. You have to do, you can't, as a special ed teacher at alternate school, so you can't force and expect everybody just follow. You have to be able to work and find solution for problems, and you know, try to do best you can do. If I came here and shout everyday, this is not going to do any good.

In addition, Alex's accommodation revealed other things as well. For instance, when dealing with students' behavior issues, he took students' culture, family background, environment, social class, and so on into consideration and developed the most effective disciplinary strategy for his special-need students.

These students are used to receive negative responses every day, and if I just sit here and holler, and give them negative response and say: "you are lazy, you are not doing anything, you are not working on anything, do something." That is nothing to them, they are used to that. So negative teaching focus are not what we do here. I know you got some teachers might use stuff like that but anything negative I am not going try to do. I would try not to raise my voice too much, I

mean I make sure they understand that I mean business, but if I sit and scream, that would not do any good.

Except for behavior problems, Alex's frustration came from the inadequate education his students received at the alternative school. As he stated, most of his students appeared to have an exceedingly low academic performance compared with regular education students. Therefore, for the majority of them, their final academic goal was to receive an occupation diploma. Naturally, few students planned to attend college. Alex felt the type of education they received from alternative school was not adequate and sufficient for college preparation. Some already had cognitive development problems that would prevent them from doing well academically, and Alex wished the alternative school could provide extra help for those few who wanted to attend college.

These kids are mostly on occupation diploma. Some of them plan to go to college, but they are not prepared for college. There is no way they can make it to college. They don't have the skill to go to college, I mean, you got to be, you have to step in somewhere they got to be proficient in English, there is no way they can get accepted into college even junior college. A lot of them cognitively speaking, their IQ is low, they just don't understand. So you have to be support of them, and say: "Ok, that's good."

While interacting with these students, he felt sad regarding their future. He wanted to do something that could potentially help them prepare for college. Alex reported his frustration was because he realized the entire alternative school system was not designed to prepare students for academic purposes. Those planning to go to college (very few of them) were victims of the system.

I feel sorry for them, but as their teacher, you have to be support of them. You don't want sit there and say: Ok, you are too dumb to go to college, you can't make good grade to go to college, you don't want to say that to some kids, you tear them apart. You just nod your head and try to be nice and go on. A lot of these kids have learning disability and their IQ is really low. A lot of them might

be social, some of them are internal, some are external but, a lot of that probably external. Because they come from an environment that you know nobody ever succeed in their family.

Alternative school had very limited resources compared with regular education classes. Alex viewed the lack of resources, poor academic performance, and low learning motivation as a vicious circle that never stopped.

Our building is old, the kids don't have individual computer, like computer lab, things like that. The kids just don't have enough resources to really get what they need, what they deserve. Unfortunately, lack of resources cause poor performance, and poor performance cause low self-esteem, and low self-esteem cause low learning motivation. This circle would never stop.

All the challenges he mentioned, the lack of resources was the primary reason for his dissatisfaction. He expressed how unfair it was for special education students to receive less resources than the regular education students. In addition, regular education teachers and administrators perceive alternative school as a place get rid of their "trouble" makers, causing Alex great frustration. In Alex's opinion, no one (regular education teachers and/or administrators) really cared what alternative school was, what the students needed, or what the teachers did. Once students were sent to alternative school, they showed no more concern.

There is nobody tries to help us, support us for what we are doing because they just want to get these kids out of their way because they are causing trouble.

Alex took a further step and explained the issue from his perspective. For instance, when a child was sent to him, he wanted to know more about the child's situation. He usually tried to contact the child's regular classroom teacher, but most of the time, the teachers did not respond back.

Alex's other serious challenge was the distance between him and his students. Due to the fact that his students' cultural background was different from his, a level of tension existed within the teaching environment. Consequently, the level of trust between he and his students was low. The situation discouraged him.

There are culture differences; I have majority African American students population, and me been Caucasian, is a little different. Um, sometimes, they don't relate to me as easy as somebody from their own culture. For example, a lot of them are from lower income families, to them, a white male is a threat to them.

He stated he would like to eliminate the tension, but realized there was little he could do. All he could do was being there when they needed help.

Type of Support

Alex discussed the type of support he received in two aspects: administration and colleagues. He stated the lack of communication between him and regular education teachers was a challenge he faced everyday, creating a certain level of difficulty for his job, as well as making it inefficient and frustrating. Although his students were from regular education classrooms, he never received any information regarding their reasons for being in alternative school. Generally speaking, there was no interaction between him and their regular teachers. He believed that if he had any information about his students' behavior, or performance before they were sent to him, he could provide better teaching as well as efficacious interventions.

With the way it set up in alternative school, there is a communication barrier between high school, middle school and us. Sometimes we have trouble to get work down here, but I can't get any help from any of the regular teachers. A lot of your regular ed teachers, and your regular administrators are kind of scared to do anything with you because they don't know, they are worry about the law,

stuff with special ed, they worry about get in trouble with certain things, so they kind of stay away from you.

In addition to the lack of support from his regular education colleagues, he expressed the low level of support from the regular education administrators. In fact, the high school administrators never provided the support he needed as a special education teacher. On the other hand, he was acquainted with the middle school principal and thus, he received a certain level of support from him.

I don't receive any support from the high school building principal. He is a poor leader, I have nothing to against him personally, I mean there is no support from him. So I never expect any support from him. But the middle school principal is my friend, and he always gives me support when I need it. For example, discipline issue, when somebody wasn't here to help, I have called him before, I went down there, take a student down there and tried to contact parents, things like that. I never have any kind of support like that at the high school. They won't do anything. Hopefully, he will retire next year anyway.

Alex stated that most regular education teachers and administrators treated special education as the "dumping ground." As soon as they sent their problematic students to special education, they wanted nothing else to do with them. This resulted in their staying away from the students, the special education teachers, and anyone involved with "troubled" students. On almost a daily basis, Alex felt alone since he received no help from administrators.

Alternative school is been viewed as dumping ground for behavioral kids, problematic kids, so you feel like well, there is nobody tries to help us, support us for what we are doing because they just want to get these kids out of their way because they are causing trouble. Like some of the teachers just like well when Johnny is over there (alternative school), we will not see him any more. We have a lot of teachers like that.

Overall, his experiences with regular education classroom teachers and administrators was negative. Since the alternative school building was separated from the

rest of the school, he and his alternative school colleagues spent most of their time in the building working alone. When asked about his working relationship with his alternative school colleagues, he stated:

If any student comes up here, they will be with me, it doesn't matter what grade they are. As long as they are special ed, they will be here with me. If they are regular ed, they will be in that room with the regular ed teacher. So basically, we work separately, and do our own work not bother each other.

Although there was little (almost none) support from the “regular” teachers and administrators, he reported his special education administrator had been quite supportive and he relied on her for help when needed. However, Alex wished he had more support from the entire school system. Due to the nature of his teaching environment, it was inevitable for him to feel abandoned by the entire school.

My special ed coordinator especially my support so I rely on her. I have her to help me but it would be helpful to have the whole school full of teachers that I can talk to. It seems like we are just on the deserted island and on our own.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Perception of Their Training Program

Alex described his MAT experiences as very “positive” and was the “right” investment for his career. He believed it would be quite difficult for him to be a certified teacher without the MAT program. In addition, the MAT program not only allowed him to be a licensed teacher, but also prepared him to be an “effective” teacher. He discussed his perceptions regarding the program and the training he received based on the following categories: (a) preparation for challenges, (b) preparation for NCLB, (c) comparison with teachers from traditional teachers training program, (d) mentor/supervisory support, and (e) attitude toward the MAT program.

Preparation For Challenges

Alex stated he had been well prepared by the MAT program. The classes he took while a student prepared him regarding how to bring in new teaching strategies for his classroom. For instance, he learned how to combine technology with his content knowledge, and made it interesting for his students.

It [MAT program] has helped me, um; I have some good classes, especially teaching reading, teaching social studies, taught me how to use new teaching message, how to integrate technology into my teaching. It has taught me a lot of interesting material.

As a special education teacher, Alex dealt with students who had disabilities and different needs. He stated that the MAT program taught him not only how to teach, but also prepared him for facing challenges from different students.

It has prepared me to deal with certain type of students, students with disability, such as learning disability. The MAT secondary program also taught me a lot of things not just teaching. The program taught me teaching methods, different type of learners, what to expect our different students, and the organizational skills.

While discussing the preparation issue, Alex stated how lucky he had been in terms of NCLB. He knew that the responsibility and pressure that NCLB brought to educators bothered many classroom teachers, but not a special education teacher like him. As he explained:

In terms of No Child Left Behind, it does not bother me because I have my standard to follow. Overall, I can see policy like NCLB bothers a lot of teachers, and the reason it does not affect me because I don't see any of that, you know standardized tests with special ed, alternative school students.

Although NCLB had no impact on him, as a teacher, he perceived the negative impact it had on teachers and students. Especially on the accountability issue, he acknowledged the responsibility should be on students and not just teachers.

You got to have rules, accountability got to be there. We focus too much on standardized tests, and testing scores but we are losing so much, I mean where is the accountability for these kids. They got to learn something, they got to be responsible citizens one day. We can't just feed somebody and expect them to be nothing to do nothing. That's not what education is designed to be, what society supposed to be.

Comparing With Traditional Teachers Training Program

Alex was very confident when comparing the type of training he received from the MAT program with other traditional teacher training programs. However, he declared that if the MAT program could offer more classes like dimension learning, it would be much more helpful.

Maybe MAT can offer some kind of mentor course, you can go in and work in school, otherwise we just don't know what are we really get into. We need something like that. See a class like dimension learning, all the MAT students have to take, when we take that course, we already got a job, I am talking about before we get a job. I mean talking about while we are in the program, they (MAT) can offer courses where you go in and actually work at schools. I believe that would benefit the program.

Dimension class was a course that every MAT student had to take before graduating. The class was similar to a supervisory course, so students could receive feedback. Based on the primary purpose of the dimension course, most advisors would not suggest their students take the class until the end of their program. Thus, when the time comes to take it, they usually have a teaching position. The course instructor would go to visit each student and observe the way he/she taught during the semester. In addition, students were encouraged to bring in questions for class they encountered while teaching. These questions could be anything related to teaching, interaction with students, colleagues, or administrators. MAT students learned from discussion and the feedback of

teacher and peers. Alex further explained how that could help MAT students receive “actual” classroom experience:

Let me give you one example to explain what can be beneficial. In my case, if you sit in a class, like, you got to have help, you got kids there with learning disability, behavioral problems, and if you have seen that before or have experienced something like that, you would know what to expect and what to do. So if teachers candidate can get out, go to school and see what their job is like, what their students like, what the teaching environment is like.

When compared with this year, he felt that last year had been much more difficult because it was the first time he had handled a classroom by himself. Now, if any problems arose, he faced the situation by himself. However, since he believed a teacher learns from teaching, he declared that he had learned a lot from his first-year.

Mentor/Supervisory Support

The MAT program not providing a mentor for its students was another negative factor that Alex experienced during the certification process. The lack of a mentor’s support came from both sides; that is, neither the MAT program nor his school district gave him one. In addition, he felt that the mentor system had not been implemented efficaciously into the MAT program---another disadvantage for the program since it minimized student preparation.

I really don’t have a mentor. The school I am teaching is supposed to assign every first year teacher a mentor, but it didn’t happen with me. I was sort of blun out there. I didn’t have anybody to help me. And I think for a lot of schools, that’s the way it is.

For Alex, the lack of mentor support was a sign of disapproval from the school district, and also revealed the potential conflict between more experienced teachers and those new

to the profession. He claimed that experienced teachers view novices as a “threat,” thus, they usually offered no help.

They [experienced teachers] don’t provide any support, they really have a lot of things to against us [beginning teachers]. Because teachers, for some reason, a new comer comes in sometimes is seen as a threat. I mean you have teacher who has been here twenty some years, that you come in and they probably think well, here is somebody thinks he know all and just come out from college, and I have been here forever, and I [experienced teachers]got seniority, and you [beginning teachers] are kind of stand on my way.

Attitude Toward MAT Program

The MAT program provided much that was positive to its students, and from Alex’s perspective, the most constructive was enabling students to have diverse training, as well as allowing for certification in several different areas.

The positive things are: you got to try a very new things, like teaching reading, technology, you have all these. I mean your work is diversified, even though you specialized maybe is social study or math, but the great thing is you do get a lot of specialization. Since I do social studies, I really learn a lot about what I need to utilized, what I need to do to be a successful social study teacher.

The second most positive aspect was the dimension learning class. He perceived the class as a way of “support” from the MAT program. He was already employed as a special education teacher when he took the class. The instructor came to observe him as he taught his class, giving him a chance to receive first hand feedback. During his first-year, he experienced several difficulties and was glad for the opportunity to bring the issues back to the dimension class, where he received feedback form his peers (they were also classroom teachers) as well as his dimension class instructor. The feedback and support helped him figure out the solution for the challenges he had faced.

One good thing about the dimension learning class is you can come back and work, and take that class and figure out what you are doing in the classroom as you teach, and what you can do is improving your teaching methods and stuff in classroom and you still have support there. You still have the dimension learning class to give you support there and your dimension class teacher comes to observe you once a semester and provide you feedback.

Alex was willing to discuss the negative aspects of the MAT program openly. In fact, he pointed out several areas where the program needed to make changes that would better prepare the students in a more efficient manner. Offering more practicum or dimension learning classes was the first issue he suggested for improvement. Since MAT students do not have a student teaching opportunity; he believed it would help them immensely in terms of gaining classroom experience.

He also argued that most teachers do not know how to be a teacher. In his opinion, teaching also involved other skills, which the MAT program never mentioned.

They [teachers] also need to be taught basic ethics. I think teachers need to know how to communicate with coworkers, how to organize. I know a lot of teachers come out, first, they get a job and get that attitude. I look at this from business perspective, I got a business degree, they teach you some ethic things, how to communicate with people. I noticed a lot of teachers, they don't really know how to communicate with people, on top of that, they don't have organization skills, too. And school basically is an organization, it's a business. With the same principle, in business, they might produce product and introduce that to customers, in school, students are product and customers. And the better the teacher, the better the instruction, the better quality the product is.

Another aspect was connecting MAT students with school districts while they were still in the program. In that sense, students would have more information about different school districts, and when the time came to find jobs, the transition from student to teacher would be relatively smooth.

Work and have connection with school, to help MAT students get job. It is very important for the MAT program to take some active role in that student and

school district. Maybe send them some information and stay in contact with the person in charge, and help students to get a job. They need to emphasize on this.

Alex stated that allowing teachers to be certified at more than one area was one of the primary advantages of the MAT program. However, the program needed to make the procedure easier for students.

They also need to make it easier for students to be qualified in teaching different subjects. That's say, someone get in the secondary program, and they want to do secondary social studies, they get enough hours to be qualified to teach secondary, while they are doing that, how about they also want to get enough hours to teach math. The MAT program should be able to make the schedule to fit people's schedule. That way, it makes easier for students to have more certification while they are still in the program.

To sum up his perceptions of the MAT program, he stated the training had been very practical and useful. He acknowledged that being a teacher had been an easier process than he envisioned due to the preparation received from the MAT program. In addition, the program made the transition to being a teacher easier for people like him who lacked an education background. Most importantly, the licensure process would be much harder if the MAT program was unavailable.

I thought that would a lot harder than it actually turned out to be. I mean it [teaching] is easier than I thought. I thought teaching is hard, but since I was prepared and taking classes go through program, and realized this is something I can do. See without MAT program, all I can have would be emergency license through school district not a fully certified teaching license. It [MAT program] prepared me well for what I am doing so I will do that again.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Attitude Toward Their Career

This section discussed how Alex's attitudes toward teaching arose from past experiences like: (a) personal, educational background, (b) job experience, and (c) how

personality, culture, and life experiences impacted his teaching. Finally, he spoke about his future career plans.

Education Background Impact

Alex was very proud of his varied educational background, and believed having an undergraduate degree different from education majors had helped his teaching in several ways. He explained:

I studied economics for my undergraduate, I got pretty good math skills, so I can teach my students math problem and facilitate them to work on their math questions. My business background, which is my first degree also taught me a lot of organizational skills, and economics gives me a good background on the public policy, things have to do with social studies, government, all those course high school students have to take.

Alex believed his combining his diverse educational background with his MAT training had helped his teaching tremendously.

For my MAT, my social studies, and my special ed certification, I learned a lot of interventions. How to motivate students, I also learn stuff like testing, diagnostic testing.

Job Experiences

In terms of job experiences, Alex had worked at different occupations before becoming a teacher and it influenced his teaching philosophy. He consciously chose to integrate those parts of his life experience into his teaching, thus making his teaching “richer”.

When I was working in different occupation, when I was in sale business, it gave me a kind of good outlook as far as you know, how to communicate with people, how to be professional, be ethic, which I think is very valuable.

Alex felt that his working experiences (dealing with different people with different issues) had helped him see the “real world.” Now he was in the teaching profession, a job in which many felt overwhelmed, but for Alex, he felt he had “been there”, and was very comfortable at handling issues encountered as a teacher. He also declared that he had developed a very strong work ethic after working at different jobs, and that was another positive aspect for a teacher.

A lot of people just come straight out of college, and they got a lot of book knowledge and no work ethic. I think this is the best part of life experience I have, working at different occupations before I became a teacher. You know when you work at different occupations, deal with different people, you have to deal with work stress at different level, dealing with problems, so since I have been through all of these, I have been there before, and I have a lot of experience with life and I bring that into teaching.

Personality Characteristics, Culture And Life Experiences

He affirmed that teaching was more than just understanding a subject and teaching. It involves a teacher’s personality, culture, and life experiences. He described his personality as “calm and laid back,” stating he had the right personality for dealing with alternative school students.

I go by nature, so I don’t like too many things get in the way, I try to keep my temper under control, and try to be friendly. Um, They [students]are not really progressing, they are not getting better as far as behavior going. Sometimes the system works, sometimes it doesn’t.

As with his work experience, his cultural background also greatly affected his teaching philosophy. Alex came from a culture that valued academic achievement---completely different from the majority of his students. He realized the difference and tried to teach

his students' about the importance of academics, and encouraged them to pursue higher education.

Um, I come from a background where academic is important, my family, everyone in my family is educated, or post graduated, my father is doctor, all my sisters are educated, so I value academic performance. So I try to teach my students the same.

Future Career Plan

As much as Alex enjoyed teaching, he had no intention of remaining a special education teacher for more than five years. In fact, being a special education teacher was never a long-term career path plan for him.

A lot of special ed teachers are like me, they get in special ed but they don't plan to stay, they will eventually go to something else. I am the same. I want to teach social study or math or something. I just want to teach special ed for few years and get a job as social study teacher or something.

While stating that he liked teaching, he did not enjoy working with special education students, primarily because it was frustrating trying to teach them. Although he strove to keep his disappointment with his students hidden, sometimes it became difficult and thus, he wanted to do something else for the future.

The thing is there are so many behavior problem at special ed, you have kids just can't control themselves in the classroom so that makes harder and difficult on teachers so try to, you know, get these kids to act right, you know, as long as they come to school, which some classes, that is almost impossible. Eventually, I want to teach something like social study or business or something, I want to get out of special ed one day, I don't see myself stay as special ed teacher for my whole career. I don't want to do that. Not all the time but if you let them bother you, you can't be effective teacher. But at times, that can be difficult.

He said he would quit teaching special education students and would teach something else, such as social studies. If he could not find an agreeable teaching position, he hoped to pursue a Ph.D. and perhaps do something else.

In five years, probably I would like to be out of the alternative school, maybe at the regular education classroom teach social studies. I love teach social studies, and then if I don't do that, I will go back to school and get some more education I would work on either Ph.D. or school administration.

Bill

Context

Bill was in his mid 20s, and was in his second year as a junior high school mathematics teacher. He taught 7th and 8th grade algebra and general math at a very small, rural middle school, located in central Mississippi. Bill's undergraduate degree was communications, with an emphasis in broadcasting. After graduating from college, he worked in the field of broadcasting. For the purpose of making extra money, he tutored math at a nearby community college, working a few hours at night helping freshmen and sophomore students. They had either physical or learning disabilities, and sometimes had both. He tutored several different subjects, but helped students with college algebra and geometry.

Tutoring in mathematics helped him realize that he loved the idea of being a teacher, especially by helping his students' progress. He stated:

I really enjoy seeing them [my students] succeed, or at least succeed to exceed their ability. To see them enjoy the satisfaction that I am able to do this, and to feel they are able to understand math concept.

This tutoring experience changed Bill's career plans, and he decided to go back to Mississippi State University to take education classes and receive teacher training. Later, he decided to work on his Master's degree so he could become knowledgeable regarding how to teach. Therefore, he immediately enrolled in the MAT program and worked on attaining a teaching certificate. He explained:

I thought this [teaching] is something I can see myself doing and enjoying, trying to help students, especially that type [low achieving] of students, the low achieving students. That is why I decided to be a teacher----taking

some courses in education at Mississippi State University. While I was taking those courses, I realized that I can also working on my Master's and become more knowledgeable about education and become a teacher so taking classes became certified and starting graduate school in the MAT program full time and started teaching full time.”

Once enrolled, he had a chance to teach summer school at a nearby High School, his first classroom experience as the only teacher in his own classroom. He described this part of his teaching experience as “it really opened my eyes, just how some of our students, how much they are struggling---that was a really good couple of months, that really get me ready for teaching full time.”

Bill was employed as a full time mathematics teacher upon completing the MAT program. He taught at a small school located in a rural area of Mississippi. It consisted of grades 6 to 8, with a total of 179 students enrolled, with 49% being males and 51% females. There were 17 classroom teachers, with a teacher to student ratio of 1:11, while the state average was 1:17. In terms of race, 99% were Black and 1% was White. In terms of student enrollment, it was a 2 A, with an academic level of 3.

Bill enjoyed working at the small school, which allowed him the opportunity to get to know his students better.

It is a small school, so it is a good thing, in a sense that all the teachers and students all know each other. We all teachers have taught or will teach at some point or the students that are in school, so the student and teacher ratio is very good.

He said all of his students came from low socioeconomic status families. In fact, 100% were below the national poverty level, and received free breakfast and lunch. As a teacher, Bill observed their needs regarding where they had come from and he tried to supply them with as much as possible.

For the most part, my students come from single parent homes. So it is environment where they constant struggle between structure and also feeling comfortable enough be able to ask question or speak their mind. It is some of the students come from home where it is no structure whatsoever. So when they come to school, they want structure, they want the teachers to tell them exactly what to do. Then other students who come from home where they are not allowed to do anything, so it is you know always been told been quiet, their opinion does not matter so they want to be feel comfortable, that they can able to express their opinion.

Bill was certified to teach both middle school and high school mathematics but he chose middle school for the following reason:

I decided to teach middle school because I feel I can be more helpful to the younger students and helping them get up to the level to be more successful when they get to the high school level.”

Bill had a very busy schedule: he taught one 7th grade math class, three 8th grade general mathematics classes, and one class of 8th graders studying pre-algebra. Every 8th grade student had him as a math teacher. Overall, his students’ math performance was a little bit below average.

I teach an algebra 1 class in the morning, and three class of general 8th grade general math. Most of my students who are at this level of math are one year behind where it should be according to the state of Mississippi as far as mastering certain objectives, certain concepts. In terms of their level based on state testing, my 8th grade general math, most of my students are below state average level. Most of my students at algebra 1 are above state average. And I have a class of 8th graders at pre-algebra, and most of them test right on at state average. And I have one class of 7th graders, most of them test above state average. So overall, three of my class, students score above state average, and three classes, students’ math below state average.

The semester schedule that Bill showed me verified the statement regarding the number of courses he taught. In addition, each time I went to observe his teaching, he was always busy either with grading students’ assignment or preparing his lesson plan. In fact, one time, he rushed to the cafeteria and brought his lunch back to his classroom before

teaching the next class. He also showed me his students' MCT scores and other performance scores, showing that most of his students' mathematics performance was below average.

Challenges Beginning MAT Teachers Faced

There were two major aspects that Bill discussed: (a) challenges he faced, and (b) type of support he received.

Challenges

As a teacher, Bill faced several challenges, some on a daily basis and some concerned a particular school period. How to make his new students trust him was the challenge he faced at the beginning of each school year. Every August when school started, he met his new students and it was then that his challenge began. The majority of his students were African American and it was not natural for Bill to earn their trust without effort.

The fact I am Caucasian, there is a barrier there, that when I first got here, I had to break down. Basically, when I had a student, what I did was, I am honest with him or her. So many of them either have contact with Caucasian, who has not been fair with them or have been taught not to trust Caucasian, so I was honest with them, and once they saw I was honest and was upfront with them on so many things, they realize ok, we can trust him, and we can listen to what he says.

In addition, he took time to establish rapport with his students. Therefore, his students realized he cared for them and would hopefully overlook any differences between them. Although it took time build a relationship, once they reached a level of understanding, it made teaching more enjoyable.

I also was patient with them, and patient with their lack of understanding, and also of actual math concept, I was patient there. And also let the kids see I actually care for their well being. But it took a while though. And that is something I have to repeat almost every year because even though I know who my students are going to be next year. So it is a challenge I face every August when school starts again.

The second challenge was related to parental communication. He had not had a problem dealing with parents; in fact, parents had always been supportive of what he did in the classroom. However, it had been extremely difficult to get in touch with some parents, and this inability to contact was a daily problem at the school where he taught. Bill had tried to solve the problem, but failed, resulting in his being discouraged.

The parental support here in this school is not very strong. There are a lot of students that I teach, that no matter what my efforts are, I would never be able to actually speak, or stick on the phone or talk to the person in person because they are hardly ever at home. So and most of our kids come from homes where there isn't a computer in house so I can't e-mail them.

Another challenge concerned discipline issues that occurred in his classroom. Like most teachers, classroom management /discipline challenged him in his role as a teacher. Bill established his own disciplinary system upon being hired by the school, and gave examples about how he applied his own disciplinary strategies within his classroom.

Of course, in every class, you are going to have the kids who every now and then would talk too much. And hold them in during the break; take something away, such as privilege of theirs, to show that you take that serious when they take something away from you. And I talk to them about this the first day at school that if you are talking while I am talking, you are taking away from my teaching time. So I am taking away some of your time later on that day.

He further reported that the primary disciplinary scenario in his classroom was students' talking to each other and not paying attention while he talked. His strategy (taking privileges away) worked well, and he made sure every student understood how the rule(s)

operated. For instance, he spent time demonstrating how he would apply discipline to them, if they misbehaved. He talked about how he showed them.

I spend about a week just doing role play situations so they can see how I administrated discipline or they can see when other students are out of line. Some days they come in, and they come in and they sit down and they go straight to work and you would not hear a word, and some days it is complete opposite. I try to be patient to a certain stand with that but usually as far discipline is concerned, I always give my students a warning anytime they are doing something that is inappropriate for the classroom just to remind them I am watching, I am taking notes, and that is your warning. Any usually that is all it takes. But if they continue interrupting the classroom, I will take their afternoon break away.

While setting the rules with his students, he tried to communicate with the parents to let them understand what he was doing in class.

I make a contact with their parents. Usually by phone, I will try to call home and make some contact so the parents know what that their child has been disruptive in the classroom, they know what I am doing do handle that. Well, as I said earlier, it is hard to contact parents but I always try.

What frustrated Bill the most was that the school had very few disciplinary rules that were crystal clear, thus, his rationale for devising his own system. Overall, his classroom rules had helped him immensely with discipline problems. On the other hand, it had challenged him (especially as a novice teacher) when he was forced to handle discipline issues by himself, admitting it took awhile to become comfortable and confident regarding discipline. As Bill stated “Classroom management is one thing that I was definitely lacking when I started teaching, and did not know exactly what to do.”

Based on classroom observations, I noticed Bill had to deal with students who talked in class, disturbing his teaching quite often. His discipline began as soon as the students walked into the classroom, and it took 3 to 5 minutes for him to tell them to sit down and focus on that day’s specific lesson. During the middle of his lecture, several

students talked frequently, and he implemented his discipline several times. In particular, a couple of students that sat next to each other talked continuously. Bill walked over and stood next to them for approximately 1 minute, which hushed them.

Students' motivation was another challenge. Bill admitted that he had culture shock when he first started teaching at the school. It was the first time that he had ever come into contact with students with such low learning motivation. For example, they would sometimes ask him directly that if they did not work on their assignment, what would be the consequences.

Motivation is another challenge. In our school, the majority of students has very little internal motivation. And this is something I am not prepared. For example, when I assign them assignments, they always want to know why do they have to work on the assignments, or do they really have to.

He also "learned as he went along" as well as learning how to motivate students and to increase their learning motivation. He realized no one had ever told them what motivation was, and it had never been explained to them how education affected their lives.

I have always been taught by my parents and my friends been taught by their parents, you have to do his work. And this is the difference, I feel my students have not been taught by their parents, grandparents, family members how important education is. So from this perspective, there is not much motivation because no one has ever sit down and show them, listen you have to graduate from high school, you need to go to college and here is why.

He also attributed his students' low motivation to their poor academic performance as well as low self-confidence. His students' motivation negatively influenced their perceptions of the future, such as whether to attend college or not. In fact, other teachers in this school faced the same challenge.

A lot of my students, college are not in their minds, a lot of them not even think about the prospective of college unless it is on sports scholarship. They never

have been taught they are capable to earn academic scholarship. So motivation is something that I and all other teachers, as well here at the school, have to really work on. Because for the most part, the motivation is very low at this school.

Other observations and documents also confirmed Bill's feelings about his students' low academic achievement. The first indicator was that the institution was an achievement level 3 school (not very high) . Based on the MCT, in 2006, for the 7th grade, their math score was 28% while the state average was 57%. For the 8th grade, their math score was 55% while the state average was 59%. Overall, the students' mathematics performance was below state average.

Bill admitted that the challenges affected how he perceived his job. Overall, he enjoyed teaching, but sometime his job satisfaction level was lower than he wanted, primarily because of the myriad challenged he dealt with on a daily basis. For example:

If I have a day, my students are not performing well on what is designed to be a review lesson, and I am reviewing or re-teaching a concept, they were supposed to learn last year or even two years ago, and I am just reviewing it to get through the next step, to reach our objectives and they are not doing well. And they either (a) never been taught that concept to begin with or (b) never grasp that concept. This is incredibly discouraging to me as a teacher.

Type of Support

Bill discussed the type of support he received from two main resources: the administration and his colleagues.

When Bill started teaching at the school, the principal was different from the current interim principal. Recently, the principal ran for political office and took a leave of absence; thus, the school had hired someone on an interim basis. Since the hiring had been recent, Bill had not had an opportunity to work with the interim principal.

However, he stated that he had received little support from his first principal, and in fact, there was a lack of communication between administration and teachers.

Just speaking on my experience with our former principle, the level of support is not very good at this sense [little communication between administration and teachers], the administration is not communicating well with the rest of the staff. It's probably the best way to describe it.

He expressed his frustration with his former principal regarding unclear instruction, and that he (along with other teachers) had been confused several times since the administrators had not expressed themselves clearly about their expectations. For a new teacher like him, it was very important.

And in a sense that the certain things we have to do. Well, we would have be told or asked to do those things but not taught how to do these things or we told this is what you have to do for me, and we would do that, but then when we turn it in, or when the deadline reaches, would have told well I want it to be in this format or this is not exactly what I wanted. But it is not given upfront but give way later, and that caused problems.

He also felt that many administrators did not understand the challenges that classroom teachers face every day; thus, they could not lend support, especially those that had never been classroom teachers. How could an individual understand the challenges a teacher faces if he/she has never experienced them himself/herself?

Our administration is one that does not have a lot of classroom experience. They always been administrative, and so they have hard time to understand what teachers are going through. They have no clue what is going on in classroom.

Although there might have been a lack of support from the administration, he reportedly had a good working relationship with his colleagues. He enjoyed being a teacher at the school where he worked. He liked the working atmosphere and the type of support he received from his colleagues.

It's a small school, all the teachers and students know each other. We all teachers have taught or will teach the students that are in school. The student and teacher ratio is very good. The teachers work well with one and another, and helping one another. I get a lot of support from the other teachers. If I have any question, I can go and ask any of them, and they have been more than happy to help me out.

Bill especially appreciated how much his colleagues understood his lack of “teaching wangle”, making him always feel comfortable to ask any questions he had. He specifically pointed out that as an MAT teacher, there were certain aspects of educational knowledge that he lacked, when compared to graduates of traditional teacher training programs. Thus, the support of his colleagues’ helped the transition from being a student to a teacher smoother.

Even it is a question that I feel maybe kind of dumb question, but they [my colleagues] understand from where I come from. They understand I didn't spend four years at an education program, so they have been very helpful to me. For example, I am not familiar with the teaching vocabulary that a lot of teachers use, names of forms, and I was humiliated with those, it is like I am learning a new language. From that aspect, they [my colleagues] have been very helpful. Anytime I have question, they help me out.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Perception of Their Training Program

Bill expressed his perceptions regarding the MAT training program at Mississippi State University. The discussion centered on the following five aspects: (a) preparation for challenges, (b) preparation for NCLB, (c) comparison with teachers from traditional teachers training program, (d) mentor/supervisor support, and (e) attitude toward MAT program.

Preparation For Challenges

Bill attended the MAT program prior to his current full-time job. He was confident enough to state that the program had prepared him for becoming a teacher. However, there were some challenges he felt he had not been prepared for.

I don't know if I was truly prepared for some of the challenges that I have mentioned as far as lack of support from administration. In fact, that is not something we even talk a lot if at all in our classes was the teacher and administrator relationship. It was something that I was not prepared for.

Bill suggested that the MAT program should prepare its students in advance regarding the inadequate relationship between administration and teachers. Specifically, the program should address issues that novice teachers are unaware of, such as the possibility of lacking support from his/her school's administration. While enrolled in the MAT program, his first-year of teaching served as his internship, and he brought this issue into class for discussion. After listening to Bill, most MAT faculty was surprised regarding the lack of support teachers received from their respective school administrations.

In the dimension learning class, we talked about what is going on in terms of teacher's administrator relationship. To be honest, the teachers were shocked when we told him the lack of support, or in some cases, the lack of respect even, the administration would give teachers. They generally was surprised and shocked by that. I think that is something we should focus more in the future, offer more dimension learning class for other MAT students.

Bill further stated that the lack of preparation on this issue had probably been "fixed."

He admitted that when he started the program, it had been new, but that it had improved greatly during the past couple years. However, he felt he had been a "guinea pig" and that he and the program had experienced many changes together.

He also felt he was well prepared was to meet the requirements for “No Child Left Behind”.

We focused a lot on “No Child Left Behind” at the MAT program. It was one of the things that was focused on a lot whenever school issues would come up. So we [MAT students] knew what it was, we knew what we would have to do in the classroom. To me, all the requirements, I was very aware of. And I feel as prepared as I could have been coming into the work force.

Bill admitted to feeling the strain of being a teacher in an NCLB induced teaching environment.

I personally don't deal with extra pressure, but I certainly believe that as faculty, all the teachers, we as school, definitely feel pressure, so much of the students' achievement, so much responsibility on us. As teacher, we have to prove that we are teaching what need to be taught. I don't feel any extra pressure to teach at a higher level, I am already teaching the best I can.

Moreover, he stated he had personally experienced pressure from his school administrators because of NCLB.

I am pressured by administrators, and superintendents. There has been situation where someone questioned what I am doing in the classroom because the score of my students, a certain student, or couple of students.

While he believed the idea of NCLB was good, it had created unrealistic expectations. He further pointed out that once people have expectations, it was easier to fail, which was exactly what happened to several people in his school. He insisted that he would strive to elevate his students' academic performance, but not “beat himself and his students up” if they did not perform as hoped for.

I understand try to reach for the highest possible goal but every school would have students who don't score what you would like them to score. Then it set you up for failure, and set up the entire school for failure. So I think it has been really unrealistic that every single kid, or every single student, or every single person can reach that you know, proficient score in every single academic level within one year especially for students are behind ever since they start school.

As a teacher, he felt he was doing everything possible to bring up his students' performance; that is, NCLB did not motivate him to do more or less. From a teaching and learning perspective, it was more important for a student to progress from point A to point B instead just increasing one's score.

I would prefer focus on how much has the student traveled from year to year, I look for progress, I see progress, then, I know ok, this teacher, and this student they do what they could to. You can't close gap in such a short time period, at least not to every child at every school.

Comparing With Traditional Teachers Training Program

When he compared himself to other teachers that graduated from a traditional teachers training program, he had no doubt that he was qualified as they. Meanwhile, he admitted that differences did exist regarding the two programs. From Bill's perspective, the only major difference was the absence of student teaching for MAT students.

One of the biggest differences was that a traditional program they spend, I believe an entire semester as a student teacher where they can pretty much just shadow a teacher and learn so much of what to do and what not to do from watching that teacher. And granted, in the MAT program, we did, when we took our specific courses for example, I took the course: "Teaching of Math", history MAT people took "Teaching of History". In those courses, we did have to spend a certain number of hours with a teacher at a public high school in the area so that was very helpful.

Although the MAT program arranged for students to observe other teachers teaching their class, it was a poor substitute for teaching experience. Bill wondered whether one semester of teaching experience would have affected his first-year as an educator. In fact, he believed that would "alleviate" many of the challenges he faced during his first-year teaching.

But it was not nearly as comprehensive as been a student teacher. For me, it is almost like been assigned to play third base for the ANKIE's, and all you done is just stand and watch someone else play third base and then you just been thrown out there. So you have to learn quick, and of course there is a lot of challenges. And I think a lot of my challenges could have alleviated if I have been able to do something very similar to a student teaching.

He also pointed out that teaching also involved certain things, such as documenting students' records, writing lesson plan, etc., except delivering knowledge to his students. He believed a teacher could not be well prepared for those things unless he/she had to "deal" with them. From a MAT teacher's perspective, Bill felt he was not prepared in those areas until he started teaching. He did not feel there was a better method of exposure than student teaching.

I believe if I and other MAT students had student teaching will be more prepared with certain things like be able to do document, intervention with certain students, making out of lesson plans, making out of tests, that sort of things. I believe student teaching experience would better prepare me for tasks like that.

Bill specifically pointed out of the challenges he had confronted:

For example, when I was first employed as a full time teacher here, I was not prepared for the fact I had to document everything, and able to justify the way I was teaching. If this student is failing, I had to document everything I was doing for that failing student. And that was assumed by my administration that something I would know by teachers come from a traditional teaching program at a university. That was one example, and there were so many things like that I have experience and let me know that I was not prepared for, and any teacher who comes from a traditional teaching program would be aware and would not be an issue.

Mentor/Supervisory Support

Mentor and supervisory support was another area in which the MAT program had helped him, but not as much as it should have. Although Bill wished the program had

assigned him an official mentor, he did somehow manage to receive mentoring from his MAT program advisor.

I didn't have someone, who is actually labeled a mentor. Instead, my advisor helps us out tremendously and acted as a mentor to us who were going to be alternate route certificate teachers. She really went out her way to help us, to show us what is the correct thing to do, help us at a lot of ways. In addition, she did set us up with specific teacher. In my case, that teacher took me under her wing and showed me the ropes, sort of speak.

In addition, Bill had a mentor from the school district and she reminded him about things needing to be done according to the school's schedule. Overall, his mentoring experience was pleasant and informative.

However, I had a teacher who was assigned to be my mentoring teaching, but that was not the type of situation where she came in to observe me, gave me tips and tells me what to do, that really wasn't. She mainly was a mentor in a sense that she just would come around and remind me, you know that's the plan we would do on Friday. Or she would come around and gave me little tips on something like: here is the lesson I did few weeks ago, you might want to do with some of your students, this is how it works, that sort of things.

However, if Bill could have selected his mentor, he would have chosen one that was more involved in helping him.

I didn't have a mentoring teacher who actually would tell me, ok, here is what you mess up with your teaching and here is how you fix it. That was not anything like that. So I did not get a mentoring teacher in that sense who could help me out like classroom management, or those sort of things.

Attitude Toward MAT Program

Finally, Bill described several positive and negative aspects of the MAT program, and gave several suggestions for improving the program's quality. He pointed out that the difficulty he would have faced getting licensed if not for the MAT program.

One of the positives of that was the fact it trains you, I believe to be the quickest

time possible to actually been an effective teacher. And certainly, it allowed me to become certified to teach, something I always wanted to do.

For the positive aspects, he specifically mentioned:

They [The MAT program] were very supportive and very proactive and help us all find employments. Telling us exactly what we have to do, how to approach it, places to look and everything, they were very supportive.

He believed the program had been wonderful, stating he had learned a lot. However, he had specific suggestions for one area:

One specific recommendation would be “been upfront” with all the MAT candidates, be complete upfront about everything that would be required of them. For example, I wanted to be a math teacher, but my undergraduate degree in college has nothing to do with math but I score high enough on the Praxis I and II to be the math teacher. Problem was in order to get my MAT degree, I have to have certain number of graduate level math courses, and I had to go back and take all the prerequisite for those math courses. And that was something that I had not been told upfront.

Since the MAT program was unable to provide better information regarding course work, he did not graduate as early as he should have. He hoped that for future MAT students, they would not experience the same frustrations.

I spent, granted, it is in a long run has helps my content knowledge. I am a better math teacher for that but I had to go back this summer, takes calculus I, and calculus II, then I will take calculus III, and calculus IV and bunch of other math courses, so it delay my graduation, and have been frustrating in that aspect. And that was something that I was not, that was not brought to my attention until I was already far enough in the program, that really was no turn back, I couldn't leave that program and go to different one. I would be out a lot of money, a lot of course credits so.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Attitude Toward Their Career

In this section, the discussion included: (a) educational background, (b) job experiences, (c) personal characteristics, d) cultural and life experiences, and (d) future career plans.

Education Background Impact

Bill's previous educational background had not been in education, and it had impacted his teaching methods and philosophy. He integrated part of his educational background into his teaching.

My education background has impact on my teaching in many ways. My undergraduate was in communication, a broadcasting emphasis. I never have realized that in fact I dwelt a lot on the vocabulary of math, I don't want students just be able to show me they can do it, I also want them to be able to verbalize it. Tell me that how you knew to work the question out that way. I want my students be able to use the correct math vocabulary, and part of that is because of my background in speech, broadcasting and public relations.

In fact, when he explained certain mathematical concepts, he spent more time detailing the idea(s) until his students understood and allowed them more time in class to work on specific questions. After that, he would ask them to write their answers on the blackboard and explain their answers verbally. That way, they would have to "verbalize" the mathematical concept, which helped them achieve a deeper comprehension. Bill further stated if a student can articulate the concept in his or her own words, they usually understood on a deeper level.

The observation data confirmed his statement. During the last 10 minutes of class, he had his students write their answers on the blackboard, and then had them explain their reasoning.

Job Experiences

Before choosing the teaching profession, he had worked as a public broadcaster. Bill explained how he brought that part of his job experience into his classroom. He saw many similarities between broadcasting and teaching.

I worked in and I still do work just part time in radio, and other forms of broadcasting, and so communicating well, presenting yourself well is one of the goals I set up for my self as well as for my students. It is something that I believe and I do in my classroom. And I also stress the importance of that to my students in the classroom. And how did my previous job always make it sure that people knew exactly that what I was saying that trade over I think in the classroom. So my students might be confused about the math concept but I don't think they would be confused about the construction that I give them or what I expected them to do.

Personality Characteristics, Culture, And Life Experiences

Except for the discussion regarding how his educational background and previous employment experiences affected his teaching, Bill also detailed the influence his personality, culture, and life experience had on him. He described himself as easy going and thus, he never gave his students too much pressure.

I am kind of easy going and laid-back guy, and that comes through in my classroom not lazy but where my students don't feel pressure to perform any high level constantly and so I think that is the characteristics that carry into the classroom.

In addition, he described himself as having the type of personality that students liked and it was easy to talk to him. Although he taught math, he believed it essential for students to express their understanding through verbalization. For him, teaching was exciting and he made sure that he brought that spirit into his classroom.

I am an outgoing person and I verbalize everything and I have no problem talk to people answer questions. I am also easy going so students feel comfortable with me. And I am always pretty I guess, I move at a pretty rate, I am energetic, and I bring that into my teaching, and sometimes my students have to tell me to slow down because I get excited at what I am teaching.

In addition, his culture definitely affected his teaching, and he explained:

I grew up in a family, education is very important, and there is no discussion about entering college or not, of course, you have to go to college, or even graduate school so education is valued, and so I try to express the value of education not just value of math, but also the value of academia to my students.

After teaching for two years, he looked back and stated that if he had to make the same career decision again, he would definitely choose the MAT program a second time. Although he could have a chosen an easier, and shorter teacher licensure program, such as TMI, he chose MAT to better prepare himself. He regretted nothing concerning the MAT program.

For me, the MAT program was the only logic way for me to become a teacher. I could have just done the TMI, but it makes a lot of more sense to me to go ahead and just stay to into graduate school and do the MAT program.

Bill was not the only person that chose teaching as a career in his family. In fact, his mother used to be a school teacher and so he already had certain expectations regarding teaching and being a teacher. However, he compared his expectations in terms of teaching, both before and after attending the MAT program, and there was a difference.

Before I attended the MAT program, my expectation of teaching was that I had high level of expectation, in a sense I value that the teaching profession. But on the other hand, I thought , this is bad, but I really didn't think teaching is the profession you have to work really hard, I really thought, I should know better than that because my own mother is a teacher, but I really didn't think teaching requires extreme level of hard work, high stress but now I know better of course.

After working as a teacher for a year, his expectations concerning the job were very different from when he first started. Now, he perceived teaching as a very time consuming and psychologically demanding job.

Now, I am at my second year of teaching career, and my expectation of teaching is so different from the one I had. I saw teachers, my colleagues, myself, have to put a lot of effort, a lot of work to be an effective teacher. Some teachers, me included, the work never ends, for example, even at home, I still work and prepare for my teaching.

He also expressed that as a teacher, he did not always receive the types of awards from his students that was important when he first began looking at teaching as a career.

But unfortunately , teachers don't actually get a lot in return. You really have to focus on the good stories. Focus on the good things about one of the good students in a class of 16 students, maybe other thirteen do not really care but you got to focus on the good things come from the effort you put out there.

Future Career Plan

Although Bill enjoyed working as a middle school teacher, he wanted to teach students with different ages, and his reasons were: "I don't see myself teaching with the same age group five years from now. Not because I don't like it, just because I want to experience other things."

He planned to teach either at a high school or college level because he believed he could have more impact on that student population. In addition, he wanted to see how his

teaching strategies worked with other groups of students, especially high school or community college students.

I want to teach the high school level and community college level so I can see how my teaching strategy been applicable at other levels, high school level especially, and the community college level. I would like to have a chance to work with students, who really want to be there not just they have to be there. And that is a complete different dynamic in terms of teacher, student relationship. And in my opinion, it opens the door to really make students more impact. And I believe I can make more impact on college level because the level of eagerness that they want to be there and to learn. So five years from now, I can see my self still teaching but at high school or community college level.

Cindy

Context

Cindy was a married White female, in her late 40s, and lived with her family. She had taught for two years, and was in her third year of teaching. However, she completed the MAT program during the Summer, 2006 semester and thus, was in her first-year of teaching after completing the MAT program. She was certified in secondary biology and general science. Currently, she taught 8th grade general science. She was employed at a school close to where she lived with her family.

Her job was at a rural middle school with a student population of approximately 400 to 450. In addition, based on the school information from the school district, her school was level 5 (superior rating) as designated by the state. The middle and high school together consisted of grades 6 to 12, with a total of 709 students. The student-teacher ratio was 19:1 while the state average was 16:1. In terms of students' race, 93% were White, 6% were Black, and 1% was Hispanic.

There is little diversity. Last year I had one ELL (English Language Learner). I have one out of the class of 100, so that is about the diversity rate here. We do not have many African American students here but that is lower than most of the Mississippi population for a rural area.

Cindy described her school as a “pretty little” school, and from an economic perspective, 44% of students were eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch.

In 2005-2006, Mississippi used the Subject Assessment Testing Program (SATP) to test students in English II, writing, biology, and U.S. History at the completion of each course. Since Cindy taught general science, she was accountable for her students' SATP

test scores. Based on SATP results, in 2006, the school average was 99%, while the state average was 93%. It showed her students' performance was slightly above the state average. However, this year Cindy would be evaluated for the first time concerning her students' performance.

This would be the first year of my class we actually going through the formal Mississippi Curriculum Testing at is mandated by the NCLB. So, right now, I don't have statistic basic of my students testing score to prove how well I am teaching.

Cindy spoke positively about her school. In her opinion, the teaching environment was warm and friendly. Most of students were well behaved, and even those that had behavior problems were not serious, i.e. using drugs, being in gangs, etc.

This is a small rural school, and for small rural area, we probably do not have drug, and other social environmental problem that some of the larger, urban, city schools have.

She expressed her pleasure at working there. For her, a teacher needed to have a certain level of comfort in order to be effective; that is, a teacher needed to feel that he/she connected to the students, students' parents, and the entire school environment.

I grew up in this area, which that allows me to understand a lot of the background of these students, their culture, their, um, life experiences, and situations they are in now.

Cindy decided several years ago that she wanted to become a teacher, after leaving her prior job. She had worked at a local hospital laboratory for 25 years, and her professional background was medical technology. One day, she felt she needed a change in her life, and so she changed her career. Teaching was the first idea that came to mind as a future career option.

I feel like, a lot of times, that I was led into this program [MAT program] and became a teacher. Because when I left the medical field, what happened to me was one day, I said, you know, I really feel like I needed change, I feel like you know I needed to do something different. And, I just called Mississippi State University, and I said what kind of program, or how would I needed to go about to and get enough education background to be able to teach.

She researched how a person could begin his/her teaching career. Since her previous educational background and job experiences were related to medical technology, teaching science became her licensure target. This resulted in her becoming certified in biology and general science.

She showed me some of the courses she took as an undergraduate and her PRAX II score for licensure. In addition, she showed me the courses she took while enrolled in the MAT program. The documents supported her statements regarding a science background.

Cindy also addressed the issue that teaching was not something “completely new” since her mother had taught for 38 years, and she defined herself as coming from a “sort of teaching background.” As she explained: “I used to hear my mother talked about her students, how much she enjoys teaching, etc. So it [teaching] was not new to me.

Challenges Beginning MAT Teachers Faced

Two major areas were discussed under this section: (a) challenges she faced, (b) the types of support she received.

Challenges

Cindy stated classroom management was a major challenge she faced on a daily basis. She declared her reason for lack of classroom management skills was because she did not come from a traditional teaching preparation program. Since she lacked “book” knowledge and training about how to deal with misbehaving students, when it occurred in her classroom, it was difficult for her to implement interventions or strategies. Even if she did, she lacked the experienced to know which intervention was the most effective under certain circumstances.

Common challenges for alternate route teachers like me would probably be the classroom management. Classroom management, when you come from an alternate route, your content knowledge and application ability is very very strong, but you have not been in the room with 25 students 7 hours a day and had to manage all of the aspects that go along with them.

For Cindy, the primary classroom management challenge was how to be organized, and how to establish effective disciplinary rules. Although she followed the school district policy, sometimes she felt a need existed for her to establish her own classroom management/discipline rules.

As far as discipline problem, the major discipline problem is getting organized, getting a classroom plan of action in place, establish roles, and procedures. And of course we have Lee County School handbook, that is the major policy and procedures we all have to establish in our classrooms. As far as maintaining students’ problem, and this has a lot to do with your teaching environment.

Although she realized her classroom management skill was her weakest area, she refused to grow discouraged. Instead, she established her own rules and adapted them to meet her students’ needs. Most importantly, she earned their trust first before implementing any behavioral techniques with her students.

Um, you know, one of the first thing that I know was, um, I wanted them to trust me you know, but the first thing I found that you have to establish is your position of authority with them. Um, from there, your classroom management, your rules, procedures, rewards, consequences, I found if you establish those upfront, and you don't leave anything to question, they feel more comfortable and you feel more comfortable. And after that, you can develop the more personal type relationship, and address their specific differential needs.

During observations, I noticed Cindy had established several of her own discipline rules. She preferred using positive reinforcement, instead of punishment. For example, when her students participated in class activities, such as answering questions, she praised them. If her students talked and disturbed the class (which occurred during the second observation), she either used a "tense" eye contact or warned them verbally.

Like most educators, she found motivation was another challenge, and she strove to motivate her students on a daily basis. In fact, the majority of her students had very low learning motivation while in class.

I have a problem with students motivation, in fact, um, it seems like probably 75 to 80% of my students come into class not motivated. It's common for kids this age, I mean, they come to class but their mind is not ready for learning.

However, Cindy was very insightful regarding what her students needed to increase their motivation. For example, she taught general science, an area in which she had both working and educational experience. Since she was aware of the types of things her students enjoyed learning, she integrated those elements into her teaching, thus, increasing their learning motivation. She mentioned that when she motivated her students, she always tried to find something related to a real life situation, such as telling stories, or even demonstrating the concept she was teaching. Interesting examples always motivate students' more than mere lectures.

My motivation strategies sometimes comes a fact that I have experience in my former teaching experience, my medical professional that affect me that in applying that I try to teach to into a life situation, to capture their attention. I use those experiences to describe situations that are interesting to them. And when I get their attention, I can motivate them because they are like look what she has done, and if I listen and learn may be I can have that kind of experiences.

She described the following teaching scenario regarding how she used her previous work experiences to motivate her students:

When we talk about the circulatory system, they might ask some questions like, Ms. White, we heard the blood is blue before it comes out from your body, you know, and I would say, no, blood is very red inside your body and outside your body. And you know, that would lead to the red blood cell, white blood cell, and different part of the blood. And um, I don't have any fear of like, stick my own finger, you know, to give them blood sample and let them look at it under the microscope that kind of thing.

Cindy stated her prior professional background and experiences were quite “positive” and were a “plus” in her teaching. She believed that, in comparison to traditionally trained teachers, she had experienced certain things that could motivate her students to excel in academics.

Besides motivating her students, Cindy spent time and effort recruiting their parents for help (for motivation). She strongly believed that gaining support from parents was as important as motivating the students in class. Once she had parents' support, her teaching became easier and thus, she tried to establish good rapport with them as well as letting them know what she was teaching. Generally, once parents understood her intentions and motives, they supported her instead of questioning her.

I have great experience with my students' parents. In the last couple of years, what I have learned is that if you established good relationship with the parents upfront just like with the children. The rest of the year goes much smoother because then the parents don't question who you are, what your motives are, how you are treating their children, and what their children are going to, um, receive

from you. You just alleviate the question if you develop good relationship with the parents.

Cindy was the type of teacher who went out of her way to contact parents. Although she sometimes experienced difficulty getting into touch with them, she tried several methods until she reached them.

One of the first thing I do is of course send out a parent letter. I also get as much demographic data on the students and their parents if I can so that my contact ways are diverse, mail, phone, um, personal contact, I have found the personal contact, just for example here, here an extra school activity, and you can go, and chat with the parent personally. And they are like, um, relieve their child has this teacher, that is concerned their personal well-being.

During my second interview, Cindy showed me the contact list she had with her students' parents. It was a small notebook consisting of communication records, and listed some of the issues she discussed with the parents. Cindy was highly organized, and documented each conversation, based on date and time spent in discussion . While checking the record, she knew which student's parent(s) needed to be contacted or what issues had been spoken about in the past. Cindy stated that such records helped her establish a relationship with the parents; as well helping her understand the student's home situation, academic progress, etc.

Cindy perceived teaching as her second career, and declared it as one of the most important decisions of her life. As she stated, teaching was an immensely important job and she was grateful that she was involved. Her teaching philosophy was to help as many students as possible. When her students performed well, she felt she was rewarded.

One of the things that I shoot for a spike. If I help just you know one student like out of a classroom, then I feel like, well, which I get a lot of personal reward, personal satisfaction from that because um, you know that is my job and so if your job is successful, then you feel successful.

Type of Support

Cindy discussed two types of support: (a) administrative support and (b) support from her colleagues.

One primary reason she enjoyed her job was because she had a very supportive administration. For her, a beginning educator needed his or her administration's support when parents disagreed with the teachers' decisions. However, from a teacher and a mother's perspective, she believed it essential to teach a child right from wrong. If a child did something wrong, he or she needed to be punished. In a classroom, the teacher is the one who needed administer consequences to a misbehaving child. However, some parents made the teaching process much more difficult by disagreeing with the teacher and it became essential for the teacher to know his or her administration would support them.

The major problem with parents I have found is that they are very defensive with as far as defending their children, you know, and sometimes, you do strictly have to go back to policy and procedures that has been placed and explained to the parents why their child is suffering consequences. Because there are some parents who believe that their children are above suffering consequences. And to me that is not a real life approach because when they [students] get out into the real world, there are policy and procedures, their jobs, um, you have to establish rules in your own home, and so on.

In her school, she received complete support from her principal about any discipline decision she made as long as she followed school district policies and procedures. If she had documented that she followed procedures, the administration would always back her.

He [principal] is very, very supportive. As long as you have your classroom management, and your policies established that go along with the school district policies and procedures, and you have apply them and document them, he fully back you up.

Therefore, she always documented any discipline that occurred in her classroom, as well as the type of interventions she implemented. If any parent disagreed with her decision, she had a record to show the administration, as well as the parent. She also made sure she explained to her students the type of consequence(s) they would face for their behavior before she applied them.

I think it is important for me as a teacher to make sure each student understands that organization, rules, policy, and procedures that have to follow and apply back to life. And I always make sure that they [parents] know that I have their children suffer consequences that is not personal, that is my responsibility to follow those rules and procedures.

When Cindy described how supportive her principal was, I remembered the first time I visited her. I sat in the main office waiting for her. When she came, after greeting me, she walked me to her principal's office, and introduced me to him. It impressed me because she was the first interviewee to do that. I also saw the interaction between her and the principal, which showed a very friendly, warm, and professional working relationship.

In addition to the administration, Cindy received great deal of support from her colleagues. She specifically pointed out that it was very important for teachers to support each other, and her school definitely had a supportive, warm environment. The teachers established a support team to consult with each other regarding teaching, problem students, and so on. She stated that being on a team helped her realize that she was not alone, regardless of a situation she might encounter.

In this school, we have teacher support team, and I am one of the members. The team consists of our principal, counselor, and four teachers as representatives. All the teachers teach different subject, such as English, Math, History, and Science at different grade level, it covers 6, 7 and 8th graders. We meet once a month or

twice a month, it depends on how many students have been referred to us, what their problems are and what kind of interventions they need to have.

They helped each other out in every way, such as sharing lesson plans and developing classroom management rules together. Teachers did not feel pressure to compete with each other because they cooperated and worked together.

I share my teaching information, such as lesson plan with other teachers in fact, um, the junior high situation here last year my colleagues and I sat down and developed the most of the policy and procedures for classroom management together. And we have them posted in our room, um, and they are all very similar in each room, you know, we all have our little difference here there, but they are basically the same, and that came last year when after been here the first year I realized that there was no consistency you know, so we kind of all got together developed the plan and we consistently reinforce in each room.

She reported that she loved her teaching environment and enjoyed working around her colleagues. She reported that the school district provided great support for the teachers.

Overall, I have a very warm teaching environment here. I have a lot of really good coworkers, co-teachers. Um, I have a lot of very good mentoring, and of course Lee County school assigns you a mentor for first year teach whether you are from the alternative route or the traditional education route. So I had very good mentor my first year but I continue to have really good relationships with my co-teachers that makes me know I can go to them for other mentoring advice if I needed.

Observation and documentation underscore Cindy's statements regarding a supportive working environment. For example, she showed me the list of her teacher support team, and their meeting schedule. In addition, she showed me some of the issues discussed during their last meeting. Lesson plans was another theme for their regular meeting, and she showed me the lesson plan she and the other teachers developed during their last meeting.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Perception of Their Training Program

Cindy discussed her perceptions regarding the training she received from the MAT program at Mississippi State University based on the following five areas: (a) preparation for challenges, (b) preparation for NCLB, (c) comparison with teachers from traditional training programs, (d) mentor/supervisory support, and (e) positive and negative aspects.

Preparation For Challenges

MAT prepared Cindy in several ways and assessment was one of them. Although she had experience teaching medical students, there was a huge difference between assessing medical students and children in middle school. During the MAT program, she took courses that prepared her for assessing her students.

Although in my background, I had taught medical students of the school medical technology, our form of assessment were not the same form of assessment that you would see in secondary education. So the management evaluation class that I took really helped me out on the assessment issue.

Classroom management was another area she had been weak in prior to enrolling in the MAT program. While completing the program, she had opportunities to take courses that helped her overcome any inadequacies while enabling her to become a more effective teacher.

The first course I took was classroom management, and it became one of the most important courses I took during the program, and it was definitely the most helpful course.

While discussing how well the MAT program had prepared her to meet the requirements for NCLB, she appeared highly confident and claimed that she was well prepared.

That is probably one of the areas that MAT program has been very good at help me with, I think that is one of the reasons I was chosen for the teachers support team is because my background with NCLB.

The MCT was used to test students' academic performance. Since she taught general science, her students would be tested upon completing the course. She knew their performance would reflect her teaching to some degree, and she felt anxious, but was not overwhelmed due to the supportive administration and colleagues.

This would be the first year of my class actually going through the formal Mississippi Curriculum Testing, which is mandated by the NCLB. So right now, I have not statistic basic for how well I am teaching.

She expressed her opinion about NCLB issues, such as accountability and improving students testing scores. She affirmed that a "good" teacher did not need NCLB to make him or her accountable. From her own experiences, from the moment she entered the MAT program, she had been ready to meet the NCLB standards.

I personally think a good teacher does not need NCLB to make him or her a good teacher or accountable. A good teacher is going to be accountable and, honestly, I don't care for NCLB but I think maybe to make some teachers who are not accountable but when the time you get through MAT program, you feel the persona; responsibility for the children and students learning and that is one of the greatest thing about MAT program.

Another important aspect of NCLB is improving students' testing scores. Cindy was aware of it and accepted it as part of her responsibility for being a teacher. She appeared to have a positive attitude concerning the requirements of being a highly qualified teacher and accountable for students' success or failure. In fact, she had established several

strategies learned during the MAT program and used them to help her students to raise their scores.

One of the courses I took during the MAT program was, how to, it helped me to give these children test taking skills, you know, so, before we take the MCT test, I have one day, what we do is going through test taking skill, like how to weir out answers, we know, there are usually two answers, they are totally wrong, incorrect, then you have two more, there are key words, you can teach them to look for in the questions for answers. And, um, the MAT program helped me to teach test taking skills.

Cindy had a copy she gave her students regarding testing preparation skills in her office, and she made a copy for me and explained some of the details to me. For instance, one of the skills was “Guess Smart.” She told her students if there were any questions that they were not sure, they should guess the best answer instead of leaving it blank. In addition, she discussed about how the MAT program had prepared her to face challenges; she made the following statement as her overall perception:

There are a lot of preparation, and just by going through the master program is extremely helpful. The program has taught me a lot of things I don’t know and prepared me to be a better teacher.

Comparing With Traditional Teachers Training Program

As an alternate route trained teacher, Cindy admitted her content area was very strong when compared with teachers that graduated from traditional teachers training programs.

My content area is very strong, I am very competent for what I am teaching. The teacher next door to me is going through the alternative route, and the administration here believe that people going through alternative route are very strong in their content knowledge.

After comparing the two types of teacher training, she believed she had a lot to offer her students; one reason was because of her very strong content knowledge.

My first year in teaching, the students that I had have been taught science by English teachers, math teachers, just whoever can pick up science that year, they did not have a certified science teacher. So I found that coming from a background that they had, I think be certified in science in teaching even at this stage of the game in middle school is very important. You know compare to the traditional way of education, which was hire teacher and let her teach whatever she wants to tech that year. So I think that been specialized is much better.

Mentor/Supervisory Support

Cindy expressed her regret at not having a mentor help her or answer her questions while enrolled in the MAT program. The only person she could contact was her advisor. Based on her experience, she felt it essential that a MAT student have a mentor to assist him/her. She felt that if she had been assigned a mentor, she would not have had to contact her advisor as much as she did. Moreover, with a mentor, many of the “smaller” questions could have been answered.

I didn't have any mentor through the MAT program so I would recommend the MAT program to find a mentor for each MAT student in the future. I mean other than your advisor, a mentor or a sort of filed guy to get you through the smaller questions that come up.

Though she lacked a supportive mentor, she served as another alternate route teacher's mentor. By serving another teacher who would go through the same program as she had, made her a more empathetic mentor. She understood the difficulties her mentoree had been through and thus, she provided support that was more objective.

I am mentoring another alternate route teacher. Because I have been through the same struggles, such as lack of classroom management skills, and I feel I can provide better mentor support. I also have more real classroom experience to share with him because I have been out the real world.

Cindy introduced me to the teacher she was mentoring during my first visit. The person enrolled in an MAT program at another institution, and Cindy volunteered to serve as his mentor. Their classroom was next to each other and they were assigned to the same teacher support team.

Attitude Toward MAT Program

Cindy was very grateful for having the opportunity to enroll in the MAT program, which allowed her to complete her “dreams.” In her case, it was a very wonderful thing that happened to her when she needed a change in her life. She had no doubt that enrolling in the MAT program and becoming a classroom room teacher was something she would enjoy. Thus, she believed if given another chance, she would make the same choice again.

This [attend MAT program] is one of the few probably experiences in my life, I would go through again, I would choose this again. Um, I feel like, a lot of times, that I was led into this program. It is just like dream come true. Without the MAT program, I would not feel I am qualified enough to teach in the classroom.

While she enjoyed the positive aspects of the MAT program, there were a few things that she would like to change: the lack of a mentor being a primary example. She felt that having mentor support would have helped her transition from student to the classroom easier.

Cindy also stated the program could improve if all MAT students were assigned a personal advisor. The personal advisor needed to be familiar with the MAT program and capable of answering specific questions related to teaching. The majority of MAT students lacked an educational background, and their content area was in fields other than

education. Thus, an advisor would need to be able to spend time searching for, and gaining, information regarding what courses students' needed to take from other departments in order to receive licensure. In other words, an advisor not knowing what classes a student should take could cause great frustration. In addition, some MAT students might be much older than traditional students, which means some of the courses taken as an undergraduate might need to be updated. Unfortunately, Cindy personally experienced this process, and she believed the current system could be improved if her advisor had spent more time contacting her content area department and gathering more correct information prior to advising her.

I would recommend that each MAT student not only have one advisor in the program but they would have a contact person who is familiar other questions you have an can answer them. For example, when the time came for me to pick my 6 hours in the content area, the science content are, I was not familiar enough with the Mississippi State science program anymore. I mean I have been out for almost 20 years. I was not familiar enough with the science program anymore to know which of the program would help me the most, ok, and when I went to my advisor, you know, she did not have time to dig through to find science curriculum, and what I needed versus what I didn't need and that kind of thing.

As a result, she had to spend deal of her personal time searching for information.

And so I had to get on internet. In my undergraduate work, I had taken almost all the science courses. Because in medical technology, you take all the upper level course, most of my undergraduate courses may be replaced my graduate courses. I need somebody to help me find what I need to fill in those areas of the curriculum, um, we had hard time finding someone for me to talk to, someone like one of the courses I ended up taken was direct individual study course, and since my advisor was not familiar with like bio science area and that kind of thing so I sort of have to do that on my own. I need somebody that is just there to help you with these things and would see you through the end to whatever you got to find out.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Attitude Toward Their Career

Under this section, several topics were discussed: (a) impact of educational background, (b) job experience, (c) personal characteristics, d) cultural and life experience, and (d) future career plan.

Educational Background Impact

Cindy stated her previous education background had helped her become the teacher she was. Although her background was in medical technology, she was creative and integrated it into teaching 8th grade general science, making the class interesting enough to grasp her students' attention.

My background is in medical technology, which is one of the largest sciences. I think that is the strongest influence that my education background has. It is the fact that I can use my personal experiences, my, um, even my education experience in my undergraduate work, it helps to motivate students, to um, give a real life situation application to the content I am teaching.

During my first observation, Cindy taught how scientists use the metric system to better express their hypotheses more precisely. During her 45 minute class period, she demonstrated how to use the metric system to measure or calculate length, liquid volume, mass, and temperature. In addition, when she measured temperature, she told students how the metric system was used in a hospital laboratory. She told the class about how bodily temperature dropped very quickly once someone was dead. Apparently, the story caught her students' attention because they asked her questions about dead bodies, although some of the questions were not related to the metric system.

Job Experiences

Before entering the teaching field, Cindy had almost 20 years job experience at a hospital laboratory, and such experience definitely helped her with teaching. In addition, for her, teaching was not just transmitting content knowledge to her students; rather, it also involved how to develop rapport between teacher and students.

With my previous job, what I did not only helped people through their physical problems but most of the time, I had a lot of other things going on with my patients. And that is the same thing with these children, you know, I am here to help them with their education but if there is psychological or mental situation interfering that, I need to be able to decide how I can help them maybe emotionally, spiritually or some other aspects in their lives to be able to prepare them to learn.

Due to her previous employment, she arranged for former colleagues to come to her classroom and talk to her students as guest speakers. Such activities helped her students see that what they study can be a real career choice for their future, and not just something they have to study before taking a test. She admitted having guest lecturers occasionally come to class was an effective motivation strategy. She noticed that some students talked to the speaker after class, and thought about majoring in science at college.

I can call some of my colleagues from that field, like, every year I used to have nurse coming, and they will demonstrate um, surgical techniques, or they would demonstrate stereo techniques, that kind of things, and that is part of my 8th grade science curriculum. So, I can apply all kinds of knowledge from my previous job to this job.

Personality Characteristics, Culture And Life Experiences

Cindy brought real life situations into the classroom, and it connected with what she was teaching. If necessary, she was willing to demonstrate the concept in front of her

students so they could get a better understanding of the topic. She realized that her life had been unique when compared to other teachers, and she used it to her advantage.

I have talked to so many of other science teachers, and they were like, we are not stick ourselves, so our students can look a real sample of blood, you know, that kind of thing. And that is just everyday stuff for me. You know, when I was in the lab, because you know, that was what you did, we looked at blood, and dead body. I have actually seen all kind of surgery, I have um, actually seen all kind of broken bones, and injuries, and when we talk about all these different parts of the bodies, it was easy for me to tell my students all the things I saw at hospital.

In addition, her culture impacted her teaching philosophy, and the type of school she wanted to teach. She felt that if she taught at a school where a different culture reigned, she was not sure how effective she would be.

It would be difficult for me to probably go teach, in like New York city because that is not my background. My background is um, southern, middle class, um, where if I have to go teach at a big city, or if I have to teach in a poverty situation, that would be difficult.

She described herself as very open-minded, and very adaptable to different cultures, people, and environment. Therefore, she saw no difficulty in “crossing barriers”.

I don't know that my life experiences would, um, I am very adaptable though. The medical field teaches you to be adaptable. So that is another experience very positive, in my classroom becoming from a medical background, I have had to experience people in all types of situations, I had to cross language barriers, I had to cross culture barriers, um, so that is another positive thing about my background. Um so, that is like I have to cross all these barriers, you have to cross to begin with. And I consider myself because of that, more open minded than someone that went through the traditional education background, um, and is now has to adapt to different situations, social economical situations, these students have come from.

Future Career Plan

Cindy has been very “satisfied” and “grateful” for her job. She enjoyed teaching science, and her plans for the future were:

Five years from now, I expected to be still teaching of course, and not sure will be 8th grade science, but at the moment, I am very satisfied for what I do. In fact, I don't see myself doing anything else except teaching.

One goal was to be a nationally board certified teacher. She believed that her MAT training would definitely help her achieve this goal, as well as helping her become a more effective teacher.

So five years from now, I do hope to complete the national board, that is one of my goals, I would like to do national board, um, I think that the MAT background will be very complimentary to national board, and what is expected out national board.

Cindy acknowledged any type of certification process would help her learn something new about teaching. She acknowledged there was a difference between working at a hospital lab and teaching science. For her, teaching was delivering what she knew to her students, which was very different from working at a lab, running experimental tests, etc. Thus, she wanted to be nationally board certified in order to become a better teacher.

She insisted she will remain in classroom because teaching was what she wanted. Although she may not continue teaching 8th grade science, she planned on remaining a classroom teacher.

I love science, I love biology, you know I might not be an eighth grade science teacher, but I will definitely stay in the science area in some forms. I will stay in classroom.

Debra

Context

Debra is a white female, in her late 20s, and was recently wed. She taught 7th and 8th grade English at a Middle school in her home town. She and her husband lived approximately 40 miles away from the school, but planned to move to the same town in the future. She had received an emergency teaching license four years before completing the MAT program. During that time, she taught special education and English at a middle school for four years. She completed the MAT program during the Summer, 2006 semester, and became certified to teach English grades 7 through 12. As soon as she completed the MAT program, she was employed at the school where she currently taught. In fact, when I first interviewed her, she had only been employed for a few months.

Debra's undergraduate major was English, and she always wanted to be a teacher. As soon as she graduated from college, she got her first full time teaching job. She was currently employed at a city school in her hometown. In terms of students' population, it was a level 4 A school with an academic level of 3. The school placed great effort at providing a safe environment, and according to Debra, it is one of the safest schools in Mississippi. For example, teachers had to walk their students into their next classroom.

There are rules in this school to make the teaching and learning environment as safe as possible. For example, we have to walk the kids to outside classes. Um, you know, they have classes within this hall way right here, but if they go outside this hall way, like down-stair, we have to be with them, and that makes the environment safe.

The school established several other rules as well. For instance, each visitor must enter through the main office in order to enter the building---yet another way of making the school environment safe.

If somebody comes into here and do something to someone, at least they can be saw in the office, so that is another safe thing, because I used to teach in a school, where you can just walk into the front door, and here you are, you might go by the office but you don't have to go through it. So it make sit safe, they put lock on the door at 7:30pm and they don't open until 7:30 in the morning, so you can't get inside this building after school hours unless you have the key or have somebody to let you in, which makes it a safe school environment.

My observation data confirmed Debra's statements. Every time I visited her school, I had to stop at the front door and tell the receptionist who I was and the individual I wanted to see (and had to give my reason as well). The receptionist called Debra, telling her over the PA who I was and why I wanted to see her. Finally, I had permission to enter the building. I observed Debra walking her students outside the building, something I had not seen at the other schools.

This school consisted of grades 7 to 8, with a total of 664 students enrolled, with a student-teacher ratio of 14:1, while the state average was 16:1. Among the students, 67% were African American, 29% were White, 2% were Asian, 1% was Hispanic, and 1% was American Indian. In addition, 67% of the students were eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch. Debra briefly described the population of her students as:

My students are basically African American, most of them come from single parents, they don't live in the same town with both of their parents. Some of their parents are in jail. In terms if social economic, no body is from poverty but the majority of my students are middle income to poor, a lot of them receive free lunch or reduced lunch. I would not call poverty because all of them have home to go to. Some live with grandparents.

In 2005-2006, Mississippi used the MCT to test students in grades 2 through 8 in reading, language arts, and math. Since Debra teaches English, she was accountable for their reading performance. For the 2006 academic year, the 7th grade students' reading scores were 56%, whereas the state average was 59%. In addition, the 8th grade students' reading scores were 49%, while the state average was 55%. Overall, the students at Debra's school performed slightly below state average.

Challenges Beginning MAT Teachers Faced

Two major areas were discussed under this section: (a) challenges she faced, and (b) the type of support she received.

Challenges

Debra expressed one primary challenge as being the different academic levels between her students. It was difficult for her to reach each student's academic level, while making learning interesting for everyone, and not neglecting anyone's needs. As a teacher, she wanted to challenge the brightest student(s) in her class to bring out their academic potential. Moreover, she wanted to create a comfortable learning environment for the slower learning students. In other words, she wanted to reach each child's potential, as well as meeting their other needs.

One of the challenges I face is, I have students on so many different levels, one is way up at the top, one is at the bottom, um, that is the challenge on how I reach them, how I reach the bottom, and how I challenge the top at the same time, that is always something I am trying to figure out.

Although she wanted to balance her teaching between helping both higher and lower level students, she found it all but impossible to do it. She did not want to focus exclusively on a certain group of students while neglecting everyone else. She wished she had learned how to solve challenges like that when she was in school.

And I don't know if there is a real solution there but that is the challenge for me. For me, a good teacher should take care every child in your class, not just the smart one or the one is not that smart. But I found that difficult. I know I want to do that and it is fair for all students in that way, but I just don't know how. I guess what I try to say is sometimes I worry I spend too much to challenge smart students and made it too hard for other students or spend too much time explain simple concept and make some students bored.

During the observations, I witnessed some of Debra's situations regarding different level students. For example, when she assigned class activities, it seemed as if the same group of students participated in the activities, with the rest did nothing. In one scenario, she asked her students to write an advertisement about selling a house. Only half of the students took part, while the others sat and stared. Debra used several different strategies to entice them to join the activities. For example, she placed them into groups and asked them to work with each other. That way, everyone participated.

Student motivation was another major challenge. It was hard to motivate both groups of students at the same time.

Student motivation is another challenge. I have a real good bunch of kids this year, but some of them I can already tell even though we have been in school only three weeks, it is going to be hard to motivate. And that is the problem, too. I mean how do I reach that child. How do I get them to be motivated?

Debra also stated how her students' motivational level affected her job satisfaction. From a teacher's perspective, when she saw her students highly motivated,

and enjoyed working on their assignment, it made her feel effective as a teacher. Thus, when she saw a student who was not motivated, she tried to motivate him/her.

If I see a child who hates grammar or hates something in English and really working on a project and motivate to do something then I am going to be excited. That would really satisfy me.

When I observed her teaching, there were times when she looked frustrated.

Consequently, she raised her voice, attempting to bring the students' attention back to the task.

Discipline was another challenge. Debra stated most of her students did not have serious behavioral problems, but a few did. Once a student exhibited behavioral problems, she followed school policy and attempted to correct any misbehavior. The demerit system allowed her to teach her students the consequences for their misbehavior, and she appreciated (and liked) the school's disciplinary system.

There are few students you have to get demerit and that's all, you know they will respond to, but for the most part, we have the ISS (In-School Suspension) It is a demerit system, so anytime a child gets the demerit, we have to call the parent. Demerit , it is part of the discipline policy. So you know certain demerit equals to certain consequence. For example, 3 demerits equals to ISS, 6 demerits equals to, you know, there is a consequence with that. Um, so anyway we have to call the parents that day to tell them that their child has received demerits, which is something that I like.

For the majority of the time, if students' interrupted class, the demerit system was enough to get their attention, leading them to behave for the rest of the class. Most understood what would happen if they misbehaved. Debra liked her school's demerit system, and she believed it helped teachers immensely regarding misbehaving students.

Most of students, when they get demerit system, they will correct their behavior. They don't want to have that kind of punishment and they are going to get better. You don't have to call the parents, you don't have to take that step.

When she compared her current school to her previous school, she said she could tell her current school had a much more effective discipline system. Specifically, the administration supported the system, and Debra felt she did not have to worry about disciplinary effectiveness. At her previous school, she worried about the usefulness of any discipline system that she had to create herself.

However, the demerit system failed to work with certain students. For them, she felt the only solution was either suspension or alternative school. Debra took a further step and explained under which situations the demerit system did not work.

We have a child in alternative school right now, because she got demerit but she had psychological problem, behavioral problem. I think alternative school for child like that, they can one on one attention, so it is better for them because they can get that one on one attention.

As a teacher, Debra believed that student misbehavior was caused, at times, by a number of reasons, i.e. psychological stress, family problems, etc. As a general rule, those students need more attention. In other words, misbehaving students use their misbehavior to gain attention. She wished she could give each student the amount of attention he/she wanted, but it was impossible.

For students have psychological behavior problem, they need one on one attention, so it is better for them if they can get that one on one attention. That is something I would like to do but when you have 24 kids in the classroom, you can't get them one on one all the time. If I have my wish, I wish I can have a smaller classroom but that is not possible.

In terms of the school's disciplinary system, Debra liked that the school required teachers to contact parents, which provided a chance for teachers to communicate with parents. Parents would understand how their child misbehaves, as well as the consequences he/she would receive. In addition, parents could come to school and talk about their children

during a specific meeting time every day. Such open communication helped to build a more constructive communication between parents and teachers.

Contact parents is something that I like. Because you know, it makes as soon as the child gets in trouble, the parent is contacted. Um, another thing that I like with the parent is that we have meeting, where each day we have the time set, during that time, parents can come to us, talk to us, or you know we can have or maybe request parents to come, so that is something that I like. There is an open communication there. We have open houses and different things to involve the parents.

Type of Support

Although she faced numerous challenges, she stated she had a great deal of support from her administration and colleagues. While she had heard that some administrations did not support their teachers, that was not the case at her school. In fact, if a teacher followed school policy, and if the school followed district policy, he or she would received complete support from the district administration. While she never experienced parents arguing with her regarding her teaching, she had recently seen something similar, and the teacher received complete support from the administration.

As far as you are doing what's right, I mean you are not just doing something totally outrageous, and yes, they will back you up. Yesterday, a teacher who has a parent disagree with her discipline, and the assistant principal said the child will be sent to the parents, the assistant principal completed back up the teacher. So I feel this is the environment, they [administration] would support you, the assistant principal said if that is what you have to do, then that is what you have to do.

Such support was very important if she was to play a teacher's role effectively.

Especially, the administrative support made her feel appreciated and comfortable when implementing discipline to misbehaving students.

Debra received support from the administration in many areas, not just discipline. For example, her administration cared about her professional growth, and recommended she attend academic conferences. If she had any questions, the administration was always willing to help her.

I have good support from my administration, principal. For example, at the first week of the full class, I had all three of my principals come to my classroom, just walking, and observing, you know, I think that is great, that their present. Um, really good support, they always, you know, I have been here three weeks, and I have already, my principal has already signed me up to go to conference. So you know, I think it is very encouraging you know, if there is a question, you know they are there to answer that, or to help, so I am very happy with my administration.

In addition, Debra acknowledged that she had strong colleague support at her school. They have “support teams,” and the team met regularly to provide support for each other.

This school is wonderful, um, you know, especially my team if I have a bad day, they are there to talk. You know, and I am very open to listen to them, so we are there to support each other. Um, as far as other English teachers, they always there to give me ideas if I need help, so it is great support.

They support each other in every way. From a professional perspective, they share teaching experiences and write lesson plans together. From a personal aspect, they have social activities outside teaching, which leads to a warm working environment.

With my team, we meet every day. There are 16 teams at this school, and each team has a science teacher, history teacher, math teacher, English teacher, and creative discovery or computer discover. So within that team, we work together, 5 of us work together, and um, that is what I was referring to our planning time, that is who we plan with. We have two planning periods a day, one is our personal, and one is with our team. In addition, we also have social activities. For example, faculty would go balling in a month, you know, it just a lot of things that we do together outside of the school and also in school.

Debra made a statement regarding how grateful she was for having the chance to work at her school. Overall, she believed that she could not find a more friendly working environment.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Perception of Their Training Program

Debra discussed her perceptions regarding the training received from the MAT program at Mississippi State University from the following aspects: (a) preparation for challenges, (b) preparation for NCLB, (c) comparing with teachers from traditional teachers training program, (d) mentor/supervisory support, and (e) positive and negative aspects.

Preparation For Challenges

Debra was not a typical MAT teacher. In fact, before entering the MAT program, she had taught for several years based on an emergency teaching license. However, there were teaching skills and strategies with which she had not received training and thus, the MAT program taught her several things that she applied to her daily teaching. One thing she liked about MAT was that she could apply almost everything she had learned from the program to her teaching.

In the MAT program, it seems like everything I did was applicable to my teaching courses. After I completed my undergraduate education, I got my alternate route license and started teaching. I was teaching special ed my first year, and then I went to English, and I was, you know before I entered the MAT program, my classroom management skills were lacking. Um, you know, my lesson planning was lacking, you know all the typical things I mean yes, you learn as you go, I mean yes, I can do lesson plan before I entered MAT program, I lean it as , you know, but still, some of the skills that I learned from the MAT program, you know, I learn, some of the skills I learn as a teacher, I learn by entering the MAT program.

The MAT program had also helped her in terms of teaching preparation. She compared her undergraduate courses with her MAT courses, and felt that every minute in the latter was relevant to her teaching. Each class provided different skills, and for her, that was very helpful, especially since the MAT program was designed for people who already had a full time job and wanted to go back to school to become a licensed teacher. Thus, it was important that no one felt he/she was wasting time taking irrelevant courses, especially those that could never be applied in the classroom.

Well, my situation was a little different considering I was already teaching before I entered the MAT program. But it helps me tremendously, um, I am just going to give you an example, in my undergraduate work, some of the courses were irrelevant, I never use that or never applicable, you know, that is the way it is in undergraduate school. Where everything, everything I did in that program, I use that either today or that I feel, something, I added something to it everything. And you know, it just, it wasn't necessary, I would not say it was easy for me but it was worthwhile for me, I didn't consider hard because I was already teaching and so I wanted to learn more you know, so it was very helpful, very helpful.

While discussing how the MAT program had prepared her for dealing with the NCLB issue, Debra stated that she was already familiar with the federal requirements that NCLB mandated for classroom teachers. She did not feel it was something a teacher could be prepared for.

We study what was required by the No Child Left Behind, how to meet the individual needs. Yes, as far as testing, the stress is there for every teacher, and I really don't know can the MAT prepare you for that. I mean that is just individual stress tolerant. I mean honestly I don't think they have prepare them. In addition, before I entered the MAT program, I was already familiar with the no child left behind so I don't really know if they have prepared me for that because I have already knew about that.

She stated it was unfair for teachers to be accountable for each student's academic performance. In terms of NCLB, a teacher would be judged based on his or her students' score, and that could be very subjective.

That is sad and that is one thing I don't like about NCLB, I can work my back off but there are just some kids would never get it, that again my name is still attach to their tests, and some people, I am not saying is my administration, but some people would say I didn't do my job.

Debra believed that NCLB had not taken "reality" as a consideration regarding the accountability issue. She argued that if a student did not reach a certain academic level, it did not mean his or her teacher was incompetent. On the contrary, not every student can achieve a desirable academic level, regardless of the teacher's quality.

So as far as NCLB, I understand the accountability, I understand as teacher, we should have accountability, I mean I work really hard, I mean some people might not work hard, I understand accountability, but I also, I feel reality that people are not going to get the score, sometimes that is not the case, sometimes the kids are just low. A teacher can only do so much especially if you have students are not motivated. You can only do so much, you can give them the information, you can teach to the way they can understand it, and hopefully they can be interested to the message, but some kids don't have the home life, they are not motivated to study, they don't care.

Debra was happy her administration did not judge her teaching ability based solely on her students' scores. At the same time, she declared if any one wanted to judge a teacher's ability, he or she needed to be in the teacher's classroom, first, before any judgments were made.

I believe if the administration wants to give feedback to the way I teach, they should be in the classroom observing what teachers are doing. A lot of teachers work all the time and preparing for lessons, you know, I don't believes all administration know that.

Comparing with Traditional Teachers Training Program

Debra reported the training she received from the MAT program was as good (if not better) than what one received from a traditional training program. For her, being an effective teacher was not about the type of training one received, rather, it was about an “innate” quality.

I think there are wonderful traditional teachers, just I think there are wonderful alternate route. I don't think the training has anything to do with it. I think as a teacher, you have to have the gift to be a teacher. In other words, it needs to be in you, the innate characteristics.

She distinguished herself as an alternate route teacher, as compared to traditionally trained teachers, based on her superior content knowledge. In her case, since her undergraduate major was in English, she took many more courses than other English teachers that graduated from a traditional teachers training program.

I think I am just as good as teachers that went through the traditional training program. I am not bragging but I think I am better than some of the teachers that went through traditional teachers training program. Not only do I have the content knowledge at English, you know, with traditional trained teachers only have 18 hours, and I have 40 something hours in English.

Mentor/Supervisory Support

Debra declared that she had not been assigned a formal mentor in the MAT program. However, each MAT student had to take an internship class, since part of the course requirement was every MAT student had to have real classroom experience. For those already teaching, the instructor of the internship course observed each student teaching in his/her classroom, and provided feedback. For those not yet teaching, when the time came for them to take the course, the experience resembled student teaching.

Since Debra was already teaching, the instructor observed her class and gave her feedback regarding her teaching style.

The MAT program had internship, for the one who was not already teaching, they do like student teaching, For us [already teaching], professors of the internship course came and observe me, um, I think twice in the fall, twice in the spring. And they were two different ones, and they would give me feedback, I mean just like I was student teaching.

The experience had been positive and for her, it was similar to student teaching. The feedback supplied by the professor had improved her teaching efficiency.

I was teaching, they would observe me and they would gave me feedback on it, and we had like conference and go over something they like, something I can improve on, I mean that was student teaching except I was already in the classroom, I was already in control of the classroom where I was you know, not under another teacher.

Another type of mentor/supervisory support came from her school district. The school district assigned each new teacher a mentor with the purpose of making the transition easier. The mentoring was mandatory for all new district teachers, including teachers formerly employed at other schools. They [mentors and mentorees]met regularly and discussed any problems they experienced with their mentors. Even though she was not a “real” brand new, inexperienced teacher, the school district still assigned her a mentor. She attended the mentoring meetings with a positive learning attitude.

It is a school district policy that all brand new teachers who never taught before and first year teachers at the school district would be assigned mandatory support group. I am required to go and spend like an hour every week. At the beginning of the semester, we met them and then, during that hour, we got to know all the new teachers at the school district. Just basically what’s going on, if you have trouble, they will help you , if you have something exciting, they are there to share that with you.

Although Debra already had several years of teaching experience, for her, the mentor system was still beneficial. In her case, her former school and her present one differed greatly in several aspects. Just like any new teacher, she became frustrated adjusting to some of the new things, such as getting used to her students, and dealing with parents while trying to be an effective teacher. Thus, her mentor helped her a lot and definitely eased the transition [from her prior school].

Sometimes it is really benefit especially if you are frustrated with something. When I first came here, it was very confusing because the system here is very different from the previous I taught. With the support people, they have been here for several years and they help us [novice teachers] to deal with those frustrating things like for example, when I first got here, I never walked my students to class before, you know, and there are policy, which side of the hall you walk, and which way you go, and which way you go for lunch, that was very frustrating at first. I feel I was like a brand new teacher because I have to learn all these new systems. So they [the mentor support group] really helps a lot and provide useful advice.

Overall, the school district had a very positive mentor system, but the MAT program did not. However, this lack of mentor support from the MAT program did not negatively impact her because she had been in the teaching profession for several years and knew what to expect. However, she took the mentor requirement upon herself and went to ask some very experienced teachers to observe her class in order to give her feedback. There were English teachers who had taught at her school for many years, and they provided useful feedback.

The MAT program did not officially assign me a mentor, there was one class I took, I think that was a method class, and we had mentor. I don't really remember. My situation was different. A lot of these people are not teaching, so they kind of forced to get a mentor, because they have to go in and observe the classroom where the rest of us already worked in the classroom, the teacher kind of let us go do our own thing. So I just took upon myself, one of my mentors, some of them have been in my English department for probably 20 or 15 years, I

took upon myself at that time to go, um, go to her and ask her to observe me. That was not really required but I just wanted that feedback. I wanted to see what she was doing. So you can say I had a mentor but I didn't officially had a mentor.

Attitude Toward MAT Program

Debra stated that there were several positive aspects regarding the MAT program and for her, the most important had been the collegial atmosphere. In her opinion, sharing about one's teaching experience and exchanging teaching ideas was a very valuable part of the learning process.

The positive is my cohort, the people that I started the program with, we went through the classes together, and that was very positive. You know, they all were teaching, most of them, I was with at the beginning, we were all teaching, and so we can kind of share what we were going through, and what our experience is. That was nice, that was very positive to share what we were going through, and also to help each, like, say somebody has discipline problem, some student motivation problem, we all suggest, oh, you should try this, or maybe this would work, and they come back to class, and they said they tried or not, I mean we were all try to help each, it was not like we competing with each other. We were helping each other, tried to solve problems.

She felt she had learned a lot from classmates that attended the MAT program with her. In fact, during the observation, she showed me the e-mails she and other MAT teachers wrote each other. From the messages, I could tell they all attended the MAT program together. One person is also teaching in Mississippi, and they wrote each other frequently to see how things were going, as well as exchanging teaching tips and discussing student behavior. According to her, she received messages like that on a weekly basis.

From Debra's perspective, the only negative aspect of the MAT program was that she had a tight schedule while in the program. For her, it had nothing to do with the

program, but was due to her own busy schedule. She admitted that if she had not been as busy as she was, she would have enjoyed the program more.

The negative, the only negative of it was I was working, teaching long, and doing the MAT, and that was stressful. I had to drive 45 minutes to class, um, I get out of work, and I go to class, and I came home late. That really was the only negative I can think of is just working while I was doing the MAT program. So it was personal stress not the program itself

Although there were no negative aspects, she definitely believed the program could be better. She made the following suggestions:

Make sure that everything the professors give to the MAT teachers, make it applicable to the classroom, make sure that they can take that and use it not just, do a project, or do a portfolio that kind of thing. Make sure it is applicable.

In addition, she mentioned her expectations about the MAT program. For her, MAT had opened a door for her to gain licensure. While taking courses to meet the program requirements, she had a pleasant learning experience. Overall, her expectations had been met.

I had the expectation to become a better teacher, help me and give me the tool that I need. I mean I knew going to that program, I was hoping that was something would prepare me to be a better teacher than what I was. That would train me on things like classroom management, that I was struggling as a first year teacher not have any experience.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Attitude Toward Their Career

Under this question, several topics were covered: (a) educational background, (b) job experience, (c) personal, culture, and life experiences, and (d) career plans.

Education Background Impact

Debra's undergraduate major was in English Literature, and she acknowledged that it had helped her immensely in terms of being an effective teacher. Her content area knowledge was much stronger than traditionally trained teachers. As she reported, if anyone compared her transcripts to a traditionally trained teacher, it would be easy to see that she had many more courses in her content subject areas.

I think my undergraduate education really benefits. Um, my undergraduate major was English, and I have more hours on my content area. I think it makes me a better teacher just the knowledge of the content I teach.

Job Experiences

Debra stated that she entered the teaching profession upon graduating from college. Thus, she had no job experience other than teaching. Her previous teaching played an important role in her current job, and she discussed its significance in her life.

My other school that I taught for 4 years, that was more stressful because they didn't have support system as far as with your colleagues, they didn't have um, the extra planning time, you know, um, it just it wasn't very um, friendly. I was very unhappy. I was very stressful in that environment. It was a sports school so academic kind of take back seat, and that was very stressful for teachers who view academic is the main thing, don't get me wrong, I mean sports also could be the motivator but it shouldn't be (nervously laughing), should not be the most important thing.

Thus, she was grateful when she found her current teaching position. Now, she could address the importance of academia to her students and not feel inadequate or underappreciated by her students and their parents (as she felt at her first job). For instance, she felt she had the freedom to tell her students how beautiful English literature

was, and her students would not look at her with a “confused” facial expression as her previous students did.

Debra also pointed out that her previous teaching experience taught her how to handle stress. As she admitted, each school had different issues and as a teacher, she would face stress regardless of the district. Since her previous school did not actively support her, she had learned constructive methods for handling stress and she applied them in her new teaching environment. Consequently, she handled stress better and did not worry or fret if students misbehaved in class, or if their performance was substandard. In addition, she learned to adjust to her new teaching environment very quickly.

In terms of administration support, there was no support, so I feel like, it kind of stressful. Now I am teaching here, it is also stressful not because it has no support but because it is new, and I have to learn a new system of doing things, and just the different type of routine. But it is getting better. You know the first week of starting this job, I was very stress because of learning different things. I mean, you know, you can be teaching 20 years and change your job, and there are going to be new things to learn. But now, I feel better.

Although the previous teaching job was very stressful and she has negative memories regarding its teaching environment, it had forced her to be a better teacher. Here was how she perceived the entire learning process:

So although my previous teaching experience was negative, I helps me a lot. I mean I was the only 7th grader and 9th grader English teacher at my old school so I basically have to do everything by myself where I didn't have any colleague to rely on. I was alone. It did help me even though it was very stressful, it did help me because I had to do it. You know, so it did benefit me but it was very stressful and have some negative affect by that.

Personality Characteristics, Culture and Life Experiences

Debra described herself as an “individual,” and that part of her personality had greatly affected her teaching philosophy. From a teaching perspective, every child was an individual, and she wanted to reach every one of them. In other words, she did not view her students as a class, but strove to see each student as an individual. As a result, she cared about reaching every child, regardless of how much effort, time, and energy it took.

I am also an individual person, for example, I try to reach every individual. Um, that is one thing you know bothers me, if a child, some people, if a child is struggling, you know, and he or she is the only child go on and leave them, I can't do that. I have to figure out, you know, what, how can I help this child.

She also showed compassion and a loving attitude toward her students. Teaching was not just delivering knowledge to students; rather, it also consisted of the relationship between teachers and students. She wanted her students to know that she was approachable whenever they needed help.

My personality is very, I am very passionate. I am also loving, and I love the student, I want to develop that personal relationship with the student, and I don't mean, let me clarify that, I don't mean, you know, calling me up at the middle of the day or middle of the night, that is not what I mean. I mean I wanted to be, I want them to know, that they can come to me, and talk to me about the problem that they might not talk to or be able to talk to their parents. Um, if the child has a horrible home life, you know, that is something that I want to be part of influence that child's life, if it means my husband and I, taking, you know, him or her to the movie or doing something special with me, you know, I want to be that kind of person. And I think that definitely influences my teaching.

When she was in college, she had a chance to travel to Europe. As an English teacher, she tried to incorporate that part of her life into her teaching.

But one thing in college I did was I traveled to Europe, and to different countries, and that place as far as with literature, and English itself, it helps me to bring in some of my personal experiences with my travel and cooperate that to literature. And that really interests students, I showed them pictures of Shakespeare's birth

place, and you know, things like that makes things come to live, and they really like that.

She showed me the pictures she took while traveling in Europe. She explained that when she taught Shakespeare, she used those pictures as an introduction, and it always snagged her students' attention. Even low motivated students asked her questions regarding Shakespeare's life, work, etc. She also pointed out that the students that did not enjoy reading, upon looking at the pictures, felt that English literature could be close, beautiful, and appreciated. She felt that showing pictures was an excellent activity for any literature class.

She said she was a firm believer that a good teacher brought "life" into teaching and integrated things into a whole. She further explained that if teaching had no "spirit", it was nothing more than "book knowledge".

Future Career Plan

Debra enjoyed teaching and found it rewarding. She chose English as her major because she had always liked English literature and writing; however, for the future, she wanted to teach different subjects.

I am going to be honest to you. I probably, five years from now, I won't, I will be in teaching but I am gonna try to get out of English.

In fact, she has already started searching other options, such as being a librarian, teaching history, special education, etc. She enjoyed being a classroom teacher but was tired teaching English.

So I am looking at other area, not just English but like either history or librarian, I am looking at the librarian certification. I feel myself teaching in classroom five

years from now, but I don't see myself teach English five years from now. I would even consider teaching special education.

She realized that she liked working with children, so other careers like writing children's books are possible career options.

I always want to be involve with children in education, I am also looking, one of my friends is writing a children book, and we don't know is that going to be, you know successful, but we hope it is. And so who knows, but I always feel when go back and be involve in education.

Her primary reason for wanting to quit teaching English was the amount of time she spent on preparation. As long as she was unmarried, the time concerns were not serious, but now she was married and planned on having children.

I see myself with children, my husband and I just been marry for an year, and as an English teacher, to me, it is very time consuming, I take work home all the time. I am a person that likes to be perfectionist at everything I do. And I feel like when I do have children, as much pressure I put on myself to be the best teacher I can be, I feel like I can't do both.

Elan

Context

Elan was a White female in her late 30s. She graduated from the MAT program in August, 2005, and was in her second year of teaching at her current school. Before that, she was a part time teacher and taught an Employability Skills course at a school in Mississippi. She taught there for two years, including a one year internship for the MAT program requirements. In addition, she was employed as a librarian at a county library in Mississippi from 2000 to 2004, which she quit once she found a job teaching.

She is certified to teach history, communication, speech, and English, and is currently employed at a very small, rural school. She was required to teach five subjects within seven periods during her first-year of teaching. The students were 10th and 11th graders while the classes were U.S. History, U.S Government, World History, Economics, and one elective course-Bible. Among these five subjects, U.S. History was the one for which she was accountable; that is, it would be her fault if the students did not pass a state subject test. The situation had improved, and she currently taught three subjects instead of five. The three subjects were U.S. History, World History, and one elective course-Annual Staff.

The school she taught at was a very small rural school, and in terms of students' enrollment, it was a level 1 category. In terms of academic level, it was a level 5 school. It consisted of grades 7 to 12, with 340 students' enrolled and 20 teachers. The teacher to student ratio was 1:17, which was same as the state average. Among the students, 54%

were male, and 46% were female. In terms of race, 84% were White, 14% were African American, 1% Asian and 1% unspecified. From an economic perspective, 53% were eligible for a free or reduced –priced lunch while the state average was 70%. The 2003 graduation rate of this school was 91.2%, based on 9th grade enrollment. Among the subjects she taught, U.S. History was a subject under the Subject Area Testing Program (SATP). The state average for U.S. History was 96% in 2006 and Elan’s students scored 100%.

Challenges Beginning MAT Teachers Faced

Two areas discussed under this section are: (a) challenges she faced, and (b) type of support she received.

Challenges

Elan mentioned several challenges including, the lack of adequate teaching material/resources, lack of parental support, and students’ low motivation. She repeatedly emphasized “lack of adequate teaching material” was her primary challenge. Without teaching materials, she found it very difficult to bring in more information for her classroom. Consequently, she had to spend a great deal of her personal time conducting research for her classes.

I don’t have adequate material is my biggest challenge. Adequate material where I can draw information and apply to classroom. Resources I guess, adequate resources is what I need. For me, teaching is very exhausting.

Lack of teaching material/resources made her feel that she needed to advance her own content knowledge on the subjects she taught. She believed that if a teacher had a higher level of content knowledge, it would be easier to increase his/her students' knowledge.

Material, resources, um, a lack of understanding of my subject, I feel that I can have room for improvement, which is another challenge. It is constantly try to succeed my knowledge to a higher level so I can bring up my students' knowledge.

The strong desire to bring in more information to her students caused her to continually enroll for classes at Mississippi State University. In addition, she had tried to talk to teachers at other schools for the possibility of exchanging teaching resources with each other. She also examined her teaching, compared this semester/year with what she did last year /semester, and tried to improve her teaching.

I just want to have enough material for my teaching. For example, there are a lot of areas that I would like to get more information on, but last summer, I took a civil right movement class at Mississippi State University because I did not feel I cover that the year before adequately enough that I can bring in something to the classroom beyond just basic what is in the book.

She tried to contact textbook publishers for more teaching resources or testing materials for her students to practice. For example, during the observation, Elan showed me the message she wrote one of the publishers and asked if they could provide some extra resources for her, such as test questions. In addition, she found multitudes of information she printed from the internet regarding U.S. History (primarily dealing with the American Depression of the 1930s).

The following statement illustrated her opinion of how a teacher's knowledge can affect students' understanding of the subject.

I took a class to advance my knowledge, to expand it further so I can bring the kids to a better understanding, a higher level of learning. I want to better educate myself as far as the core subject I am teaching. You know, it's content material, like I am teaching history so I want to have more material, information about that. I want to have more content knowledge, content information knowledge of history.

Elan mentioned that she was the type of teacher that believed if she knew the extent of her students' knowledge, it would help her teaching, as well as making teaching more meaningful to her (and her students). Hence, she always tried to assess the level of her students' comprehension of the material and how ready they were for a test. However, the central challenge was the difficulty that involved assessing her students' academic level. Some students would not apply what they knew in the classroom, so she never knew which subject area needed more time. Elan's main concern was their readiness to take a test, and though there were methods for assessing their comprehension, such as evaluating their homework results, some students would not engage regardless of her concern.. As a result, the situation was confusing..

Sometime confirmation of their level of understanding. I would really like to get, I would like to confirm, just even outside the test, I try to confirm the questions that I ask on the test, but, I would really like to confirm exactly how much they know. That is a challenge to figure where the child is, and if they are ready for the test or not. Because sometimes they would not apply in the classroom what they actual know. And because they won't do the homework, you would assume the child may not know the concept of the big picture of history and perform well on the test, you know. So sometimes it's hard to distinguish if they are prepare and ready for the test. And how much they really comprehend in the classroom.

She stated that if she knew her students' academic level , she could help them achieve higher marks. As a teacher, that was her primary goal. Like most teachers, her students' low motivation challenged her. For example, her students had poor reading ability but they hated to read and their level of ability did not increase. Such a poor

learning attitude bothered her, especially when she asked them to participate in any class activity which involved reading.

Most of my students have no motivation, I just can't get them to motivate because I haven't figured out why I can't get them to motivate. Some just will not pay attention in class, they also hate to read. I think they are poor readers, so when I say read and answer the questions, they don't do that.

Based on my observations, her statement above was validated. When I visited her school, one of the class activities was reading and answering questions. Elan gave them a handout regarding farmers' economic situation during the depression period. She gave them 10 minutes to read the story, and after that, she had some questions for them to answer. Many of the students did not read and instead put their heads down on their desk. Moreover, Elan had to call out each of their names constantly just to have them answer one question. Although she had not yet figured out why she had difficulty in motivating them, she had tried several methods such as implementing activities in her teaching. .

The other challenge she faced was the lack of parental support. In general, she had a good relationship with some parents, but not so well with others. She did not understand why some parents respected her authority and trusted her, while others argued with everything she tried to accomplish in class. She described herself as an excellent communicator with parents, especially when a student was failing or having problems. However, not all parents backed her. In fact, she had recently experienced a serious confrontation with a parent, which discouraged Elan greatly. In this case, a female student violated one of Elan's classroom rules, which was the use of inappropriate language. The student was punished by having her look up in a dictionary the appropriate

definition of the word and copy one correct sentence 20 times. However, the student's mother refused to have her daughter punished in such a manner.

Remember last time, the parent, she didn't back me. The principal told her it is my classroom, and that in my classroom the child has to follow the instruction of the classroom. She didn't agree with it. In fact, she said "pull my child from her class." And he said, "I can not do that, I would not do that." Now, the child knows that now, so how can I ever get her to motivate to stretch. I can't. The child does not feel like she has to listen to me or do the work I told her too. In fact, she does not turn in any work, and she does not feel like she has to. Because if I reprehend her, and her mother would get her out of it just like what she did last time. In a way, her mother told her that she does not have to do her work or follow instruction in classroom.

She did not understand how a parent could want a child to disobey his/her teacher. In her opinion, the parent taught her child that it was okay to shrug off responsibility for her actions:

In the real world, even on jobs, she [the student] has to follow guidelines of the job whether she likes them or not. There are things I don't like but I follow them because I need the job. That's why I don't understand some parents, the way they think. The mother who argued with me last time, I don't think she understands what kind of lesson she taught her daughter.

Elan was disappointed about the lack of parental support in the school and she compared this incident with her previous school, and she was shocked at the huge difference between the two. In fact, at her present school, students had more authority than any other place she had ever seen.

That is just extreme opposite from one environment[her current school] to another [her previous school]. Here things are different, unless you've got proof, they question everything, what I do what, and their child has larger right here. Teachers should have authority privilege than students.

Once her authority was challenged, the student did not take her discipline seriously, which resulted in the child never paying attention in class.

What discourage me the most is I can't approach the children because they know their parents back them up. And this is what the challenge is, get them to motivate because they would say "I don't have to do this because my parents would let me get by with not doing it."

In fact, during the first observation, one parent went to see her and argued about the way Elan disciplined her daughter. The mother was upset, forcing Elan to call the assistant principal to have a quick conference with her and the mother. The parent insisted nothing was wrong with her daughter's behavior and would not allow the girl any discipline from Elan. Elan also showed me the e-mail from the student's mother, and its tone was highly disrespectful. In the e-mail, the mother said "I somehow think this assignment is ridiculous and I have told her not to do this assignment."

While this was not her first teaching job, she was inexperienced regarding such poor parental support. Although Elan lacked empirical evidence, she thought maybe the reason for such different responses from her students' parents was due to different socioeconomic status levels. At her previous school, most students came from lower income families, and they tended to respect authority.

Sometimes we would call a parent up and said how can we address this with this particular child because I want the child to succeed, and I want them to do well, and this is my plan, and I would share with the parent, and of course, I never have a problem, and I don't know is that because the economic status, and that is what I assume was or I don't know.

The following statement illustrated the type of parental support that she received at her previous school. At that school, students had higher motivation and parents supported her classroom discipline, leading her to feel appreciated for her effort. Most importantly, she knew the parents would support her decisions. It was very different from

the current school, where she had to explain everything she did; otherwise, she would be questioned constantly.

I want to tell you my experience at my previous school, I was a teacher there and I taught an Employability skill class, and in order to be in the Employability skill class, students have to be qualify as a welfare family, and they have to bring paper to show proof of income because they couldn't exceed so much an year, or they couldn't been in class. They have to be on food stamp, Medicaid, free lunch, they have to show prove that they income of \$15,000 less than an year for family of four, and the family must be in poverty level. But and of course, part of the job was, I went home visit, and meet the parents to get the paper work and have a copy to show the proof. But the support of the parents, anything, anything I did at all, they were behind me 100%. And here the economic level been different, the parents are not as supportive but more judgmental are from the middle class and upper class. And the support I got in that different environment has changed my attitude of the whole world of about, we achieve so much, the kids just know their parents, no matter what I said or what I did, they are going to be what Ms. Johnson said or did, or they are going to be punished at home, the parents back me up 100 %.

Type of Support

There were two major types of support that Elan wanted to discuss: (a) support from the administration, and (b) support from her colleagues. Much of her stress came from the administration, and she claimed that she received absolutely no support from the administrators. In fact, their reactions had been, for the most part, very negative. Some administrators judged her teaching effectiveness based on her students' state test performance, which discouraged her greatly.

In fact, this year because students, everyone passed but they didn't score above state average, so he said, the material was not presented well enough, but he said in front everyone, he said my class was not give enough instructional, in depth instruction but he never been to my class or observe my class.

Elan was disheartened that the administration judged her teaching without ever entering her classroom to observe her. What made everything worse was that their [administration] judgments were made in front of everyone, including her peers.

He made that judgment without entering my classroom. He made that judgment only based on the scores of the students. He is from the superintendent's office.

Elan thought it unfair to judge her teaching effectiveness based on her students' scores. She believed it was the students' responsibility to do well at school, not the teacher's.

He passed judgment because my scores are poor so I am a poor teacher. But he said that in front everyone. The stress should be on the students not one the teachers because some students just don't want to study. But he puts the responsibility of passing and achieving on teachers.

In addition, she stated if they [administration] wanted to give her feedback in terms of her teaching, they needed to tell her specifically which part needed improving. Instead, they only told her that she needed to do "something" to bring up students' score.

Administration don't tell you how to improve your teaching just say you need to make your kids perform better. But if they don't provide more specific feedback, how should I know what to fix? And sometimes I feel I have already tried my best.

These challenges made her teaching stressful and she had grown very dissatisfied with her job. Although she had not liked the administration's feedback, she tried to improve her teaching. She spent a lot of time outside of class on preparation. In fact, she spent so much time on her teaching preparation that she sacrificed her family time. Unfortunately, she was still blamed when her students' scores were not as high as the administration expected.

I spend a lot of personal time to prepare for the classroom and that is just frustrating. I spend so much of my weekends, and I neglect my family and then I

get reprehend when they don't perform well. I don't like it, it is very much whether you like your job or not.

In addition, she received little support from her colleagues. However, she attributed this lack of support to the size of the school, which was small, size 1-A; thus, she was the only history teacher on staff. Since there were no history instructors, she could not consult someone regarding what to do to ameliorate her situation. Much of the time, she struggled to find teaching resources to bring to class.

No, I don't get any support from my co-workers, I am the only one teach history. There is no sharing of lesson plan, or sharing of task, or anything. I spent so much time, I go to bed at 11, and get up at 3:30 just because I have so much to make out like multiple choice test, and research because I don't have any material I can use.

The fact that she was assigned to teach three courses left her exhausted. Although her current teaching load was not as bad as last year, she still had to spend a great deal of time preparing for class.

I am exhausted all the time, and my first year was even more a nightmare because I taught five different subjects, and this year I teach 3 and I still have to spend a lot of time to create my teaching.

In her school, most teachers prepared individually and there was little communication between them, so she usually sought support from teachers outside her school. However, she did not always receive the help she desired.

I don't talk to other teachers. We stay busy and we just don't talk. I am in my classroom all the time, I mean I got my kids here, you know I go to take care of them first. Since I don't have other teachers here to work with me together so I contacted the teacher at Eupora three times this semester but she couldn't meet each time. So I don't know is that she doesn't want to meet or what so finally I told her you just contact me when it is good for then I will make time to meet. It is important to me but she never contact me. I have to do all of this because there is no other teacher teaches the same subject here.

The challenges she had faced and her lack of support had deleteriously affected her job satisfaction. She felt that she was responsible for her students' performance since the teachers' were blamed for their students' lack of academic skills. In other words, if students did not perform well, the teachers were considered incompetent.

Anyway, these challenges affect my job satisfaction. Because they perform well, perform poor on the state test, you, the teacher is held responsible. Therefore, it reflects you as a teacher so the you are satisfy. It also affects the way administration evaluate my teaching ability. If your students have poor performance, the administration would point out in front of your peers, and the county during the county teachers peer meeting.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Perception of Their Training Program

Elan revealed her perceptions regarding the training she received from the MAT program at Mississippi State University from the following aspects: (a) preparation for challenges, (b) preparation for NCLB, (c) comparison with teachers from traditional teachers training program, (d) mentor/supervisory support, and (e) positive and negative aspects.

Preparation For Challenges

Elan asserted that the MAT program had prepared her for becoming an effective teacher in everyway possible. The courses the MAT program required benefited her greatly, such as the dimension learning course, evaluation course, etc. However, there were several challenges the program had not sufficiently prepared her for. The first one was how to deal with inadequate teaching material, especially when she had to teach several different subjects.

MAT program has prepared me in every ways except preparing me how to goggle when you are five subjects to teach (laughing). My first year here I had five subjects, and every night I had to study my textbooks, and every night I had to prepare 50 minutes for the teaching lessons for five different subjects.

Because of the heavy teaching load, Elan did not enjoy teaching as much as she wanted.

Although she understood the disadvantages of teaching at small rural school, she still thought had the administration had taken advantage teachers like herself.

I don't think any body should have to teach five subjects. In fact, that is illegal, a teacher should teach three subjects as the maximum. Sometimes I feel I am been taken advantage of because this school is so small, and we have to offer all the classes. And this is the disadvantage teaching at 1A schools.

During her first-year teaching at the school, her teaching load had been all but unbearable (she taught five different classes) and it was extremely hard when the stressful situation at school combined with her personal situation at home. She did not think teachers should experience the stress she faced on a daily basis.

I cried a lot during my first year teaching and taking MAT classes at night and my Dad was sick, he died of cancer that year. And I had to keep him during the weekend to give my Mom rest. I tried to do lesson plans for five subjects. Take care of him, feed him, bath him, take care of two kids and take night classes. That was hard, that was really hard.

She acknowledged that it was essential for her to feel she had adequate content knowledge, but in her case, possessing "adequate and sufficient" content knowledge did not mean she should be held responsible for her students' performance.

I need something have more content. It is nothing the MAT program has done, has prepared me. I feel like I am not adequate because I don't know enough history. You know there is a lot out there, there is just so much, you know, I just feel inadequate because I don't know.

Another area the MAT program did not prepare her for was NCLB. In fact, it [NCLB]has made her teaching quite stressful. Although some of her students scored high,

it did not capture the administration's attention; rather, what mattered were those that scored low. She received no reward or praise for her students' good performance, but she did receive the blame for those scoring low. Her opinion regarding NCLB was negative.

It stinks, I don't like it. I mean I hate the "No Child left Behind" policy. My students score under state level, they have not met state average, two years on the row. Some scored really really high, some scored really really low, but when you average them together, they are below average, and it discouraging.

Although she has tried to be an "effective" teacher by meeting the NCLB standards, she felt she had failed. She felt overwhelmed by trying to teach her students important information that would help increase their scores.

Because I have spent so many hours on the weekends, at nights, and doing research, draw resources, spend my own time, gas to go to Starkville, try to find teaching stuff, and their [students] performance is like this, it is very discouraging. Because the administration said "you are not doing enough." I was told, but I just don't think I can do more.

In addition, she suffered from bad health due to her extreme level of stress. Since she taught a state testing subject, history, she felt responsible for how the academic level of her school was determined. In fact, among the school's teachers, she and three colleagues are the only four educators that have to "share" this responsibility.

You know I am seeing the cardiologist four times this summer because of the stress. Since I feel I am inadequate, I am out there chase everybody down, try to find information and bring to the classroom, and my score is not going up. I am under a lot of stress because my students' scores determine the school is level five. And there are four teachers here that determine that level five, that is the American History test, the biology test, the English test, and the algebra test. Out of everyone the employees here, these four determine everybody else's.

Elan used to enjoy teaching before she entered the MAT program. Now, she lacks passion for teaching, nor does she worry about her students like she once did. She was

sad about her loss of pleasure for teaching, and she thought seriously about leaving the teaching profession.

Before I got in MAT, I was part time teacher, and I wanted to teach forever but now I just want to quit. I am not going to teach for another year. I will never do this again.

Comparing With Traditional Teachers Training Program

Elan admitted that there was a downside of the training, primarily the lack of content knowledge for subjects she was teaching, especially U.S. History. However, she expressed doubts about how MAT or any program could prepare a teacher from this viewpoint. She believed the only way a teacher would realize what he or she needed would be when he/she is already in the situation. In her case, she lacked content knowledge of U.S. History and was inadequate until she started teaching.

I think I am as adequate as any others. The only downfall that I perceive my training is that core material knowing my subjects. But again, you can't do that until you get to the teacher book.

The MAT program did not prepare her for how stressful teaching was. For her, she had to prepare everyday so she could have enough information to offer to her students during each fifty minute class period. The preparation consumed more time than she had expected. When she attended the MAT program, no professor ever addressed this issue.

When I was enrolled at MAT program, I had no idea how stressful teaching can be. They didn't tell you what you are going to hit the brick wall (laughing). When I was at my first year, it was hard, and my second year, they still say I am not giving enough instruction in my classroom, prepare my students, that I am not, um, expecting enough out of them to make them strive, to achieve higher. How do you do that when you don't have the support.

Mentor/Supervisory Support

The MAT program did not assign a mentor to Elan. However, she took the dimension learning class when she worked as a part time teacher at another school; every time a problem appeared in her classroom, she could always contact the class instructor and get assistance. The instructor was very helpful in terms of answering her questions, and providing feedback.

What most surprised her was when she was hired as a novice teacher, the school did not assign a mentor to help her. She had to rely on herself for everything. Consequently, when she compared her current teaching experience with her previous one, there was a big gap; that is, one was positive, and the other was negative. She attributed the difference to the lack of a mentor. In other words, she thought that if she had had a mentor to assist her, her teaching experience would be more pleasant and positive.

I didn't have any mentor from the school district but I was teaching five subjects. They want me to make high score but did not prepare me. Because I believe if I had a mentor, my situation would be better. Because experience from a mentor would tell you how to address the issue about testing.

Attitude Toward MAT Program

From a positive perspective, Elan appreciated the courses that the MAT program offered. They prepared her to handle classroom situations, such as classroom management. In addition, the program had the "vision" regarding how to become an effective teacher. In other words, after graduating from the program, Elan felt she was ready for anything that might occur in her classroom, including students' behavior, disciplinary issues, etc.

All the classes are exceptionally chosen, I mean I would not take away any of the classes that I took, they are all needed, any one of them. They have prepared me classroom management, and other stuff as well, they have all that done before you even get into classroom. So you have perception of everything.

However, in terms of negativity, Elans's only complaint was the lack of content courses. She wished she had more knowledge about her subjects upon graduating from the MAT program. In her opinion, if she had that knowledge, she would definitely focus more on her subject area, as well as being better prepared

The negative thing is students need more content material. First, they really need to know what they are going to be teaching with the MAT so they can, while they are giving their MAT focus on the specialty area and take some courses under that.

In addition, Elan wished the program had required teachers to take more courses at their content area. Elan was licensed to teach subjects like history and communication. However, she only took one course in history, and one course in communication, instead of taking two courses in history. She believed that if she had more coursework in history, she would have stronger content knowledge and thus, teaching would not be as stressful as it currently was. For her, not having adequate material and/or resources to bring in to classroom was extremely stressful.

There are only two required in the MAT program, and I wish there are more. I have to take history class; I took history class and speech communication class. You have to take two classes under the MAT program that you have your license in; I took one in communication and one in history. And I don't feel I have enough content knowledge. See at the time while I was in the program, I took one course for each content because I didn't know what I was going to teach.

From a MAT teacher's point of view, Elan made the following suggestions so students enrolled in the program would be better prepared. The first suggestion was helping MAT

teachers learn their subjects before entering the classroom. In her opinion, it could be a very harsh experience if a teacher had no prior preparation.

I wish the teachers can some how learn their material before they enter classroom. Its hard to try and stay one day ahead of the student, coming from the MAT program and to a classroom. Who is teaching five, I mean it was so hard to study five subjects, prepare five 50 minutes lesson every single night. That was hard.

The second suggestion was encouraging MAT teachers get to know each other and share their teaching material if they taught the same subject. Even teachers that lived far away could take advantage of technology equipment, i.e. chatting to each other online and exchanging teaching resources, materials, and ideas.

Teachers would share lesson plan from the same subject you are going to be teaching. Information can share or if they can still meet , they require to meet or sharing information something like that. If they have to rely on distance, technology, they can still share. You can even have mentor through long distance. Or teachers can get on line chat at the same time, and say” hi, I found this great resource and I applied to this lesson in WWI, and this is how I applied and it works really well. And this is how it is going to be asked in the State subject test , if I can learn from people like that , you know, I would feel better. Teachers need to share information.

The idea of teachers sharing teaching materials with each other was both applicable and beneficial. In fact, when she started the MAT program, she had witnessed several teachers helping new MAT teachers through sharing their teaching materials. As a result, that eased the transition for the novice teacher.

Some of the MAT teachers are that lucky. There was this guy in the MAT program with me, he had two other teachers teaching at the same subject that he was hired to teach at junior high school and they both gave him lesson plans to correspond and tests already been made out by them. They just gave him the material and said “this is the lesson for tomorrow” and he was just read and prepared ,and he didn’t have to actually research and prepared. That was prepared for him already. So I thought if every body can have teachers that was so generous, their first year of teaching would be easier.

Elan wished she had been that lucky. In addition, through sharing and the exchange of teaching materials, a beginning teacher would gain adequacy regarding content knowledge.

From my own experience, it was hard for me, the first year to search you know, five lesson plans every night because I didn't have anybody hang in me lesson plan and said "this is what we have tomorrow." At the same time, I would feel not adequate because I know my administrators think I are incompetent, you know.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Attitude Toward Their Career

Under this question, several topics were discussed: (a) the impact of her educational background (b) job experience, (c) personal characteristics, cultural and life experience, and (d) future career plans.

Education Background Impact

Elan's educational background was in communication, which was the primary factor that motivated her to enter the teaching field. She received many aspects of communication knowledge through her undergraduate training, and felt it would be beneficial in her teaching. Moreover, she believed that she could apply her communication skills into the classroom and "grasp" students' attention easily.

My undergraduate was in communication, so I think with my communication background, I can go in classroom and my skill can be effective to grasp people's attention. That was what taught in communication, is to get the information out there that would draw attention of everybody.

Now, Elan looked back and felt she had been naïve for believing that excellent communication skills was all a teacher needed. Based on her current experience, she

realized that even teachers with first-rate communication skills would have a difficult time if they did not receive support from the school administration and/or colleagues.

I really thought I can use those skills in the classroom to present material for their comprehension, which works well, is just now you got to figure out how you make them comprehended (laughing). My communication background work well, I thought. I thought I can do it (teaching) by having a communication background.

Job Experiences

Elan specifically mentioned two of her previous jobs that had significantly affected her teaching; one was part-time teaching, and the other one was being a librarian. There were many things about teaching she enjoyed, i.e. students “eager” to learn while never questioning her competence.

I thought teaching in that class, that environment have 22 to 25 students twice a day, and them been so eager as they were because these students were serious about learning. I found them a job to work, 10 hours a week, so with me found them a job around town, and I went and supervise them where to go and work help them to keep with their hours. They were so happy that someone gave them the opportunity to actually show they could achieve beyond what normal expectation was for them. They were so eager to learn everything I show them.

For those students, she was more than just a teacher, she was also a mentor, and she helped them with their problems. Those students could talk to her about any problem they had. Most importantly, she provided them an opportunity they never had before.

They are amazing, just because their economic level basically would not give them opportunity so with me been mentor and the teacher, and me communicate with their employers, um, and some of the students to be employed by their ability can have job through me. And of course, if the employer has problem, the he can come to me say, and I would address to the student about the problem, and teach them work ethics, what do they do with their jobs, I mean little things like that, everything. I can talk to them with different subjects, could be economic subject, and of course they are eager to learn things.

She enjoyed that teaching experience greatly and, though the situation had not remained as positive, it motivated her to become a licensed, full time teacher. As she stated “My previous job made me want to go into teaching.”

As a result, she brought expectations into her current teaching job, and she had been bitterly disappointed. For her, teaching was no longer a job she enjoyed. In fact, it her psychological and physical health had suffered..

I thought, this [teaching] is so much fun, students are great (laughing). But now, I hate this job, I hope it doesn't show but I really hate it. I don't like it, it is a bad experience just because it is exhausting, it is very exhausting. I stay tired all the time.

Personality Characteristics, Culture and Life Experiences

Elan described herself as friendly, caring, and sometimes was like a mother that would consistently remind her students' of important things, such as turning in their homework on time, studying for tests, etc. In the classroom, she liked seeing her students participate as much as they could. For her, when students participated, it was a sign that they were eager to learn, which was extremely important to Elan.

I like it when my students participate in the classroom. Um, it goes back to my communication degree, that is what I like, public relations, and working with kids. I also carry me been a mother into the classroom, I care about my students, and try to understand their needs, try to comfort them when they are upset. Being a mother definitely affect my teaching style .I like my students especially those are eager to learn.

Future Career Plan

I was expecting less hours than 50 (boy, was I wrong). I was expecting to have the opportunity to get a lot of what is expected of me as a teacher done at school and have time for my family at home (boy, was I WRONG). I wanted the same

working hours as my children's school hours but with me having to attend EVERY event at school to take pictures for the annual (boy, was I wrong).

Apparently, her expectations were different from what she had to deal with. Among all the issues bothering her, she admitted the heavy teaching load was the most serious. She said it was much heavier than what a normal classroom teacher could expect. In addition, the never-ending preparation was not something she expected, and it took a great deal of time and effort to raise her students' performance.

My hours increased and I've had less time with my family and have lost my weekends because of lesson preparation, grading, or school events. I thought I would be able to teach and go home. I didn't realize the difficult task of teaching numerous subjects. I think if a teacher only teaches ONE subject it would enhance quality of life for him or her. Let me know if this will do or if you need more.

She was sad about how she perceived her job, but at the same time, she felt it was the school's responsibility to ensure a "happier" teaching environment for teachers. In her case, what made her dislike her job was the teaching load, and it needed fixing.

I do not agree that someone without at least three to five years teaching experience should teach subject area test. I don't think it should be someone that has never taught this subject before to teach subject area test. This school is so small and they don't want to, and they can't hire any more teachers. My first year, I had to teach 5 different at 7 periods and one of those was failing.

When she compared her attitude between her first teaching position and her current job, her attitude changed completely. The current environment gave her nothing but stress, and her attitude had changed from "enjoying" to "hating" teaching. In fact, she wanted to quit the profession.

While I was first teaching, I really care about my students. Now, I feel I care about their performance more than anything because they take the joy of teaching, and been a teacher away. I used to care on my previous teaching job, but now the administration hold me so accountable. I just want to quit. I go home and cry every day, I hate my job.

Elan declared that she could not stand being a classroom teacher any longer. In fact, she had decided to quit her teaching job and go back to being a librarian.

I am exhausted all the time, I hate it, I want out of it [teaching]. I have already take my library science, practice Praxis so I can work at library, get out of the classroom because our librarian will retire at the end of this year. And I will move in that because I was a librarian before I became a teacher. I worked at library for 4 years.

Flora

Context

Flora is a married White female, in her late 20s, with a 10 month old boy. She is currently teaching 10th and 11th grade English at a high school located in Mississippi approximately 20 miles away from where she and her family lived. She completed the MAT program in 2006 August and is in her second year of teaching. The majority of her family members are educators, and she grew up in an environment where teaching was considered a very valuable profession. However, she did not decide to be a teacher until she started graduate school. Her undergraduate major was in communication, and after attending graduate school for one semester and majoring in business, she realized that she wanted to be teacher. Due to her family background, she did not enter the profession “blind”.

As I said a lot of my family members are teachers, educators, principle, except my Dad. So I am pretty much knew what went one in the classroom. So for the most part, I knew what I am getting into, it is not like I walked in this profession blind.

The school she taught at was a 4A, level 3 city school. It consists of grades 9 to 12, and student to teacher ratio was 18:1, comparable to the Mississippi school average of 17:1. Based on the teacher qualifying information from the 2003/2004 school year, 95% of the 140 NCLB core academic classes were taught by a highly qualified teacher. In Flora’s school, the student body was 48% were male 52% were female. In terms of ethnicity, 79% were African American, 21% were White, and 1% was Hispanic. From an

economic perspective, 75% of her students were eligible either for a free or reduced lunch. In addition, based on 2003 data, the graduation rate was 85%.

The majority of her students were from low-income families, and many lacked computer access---a fact she takes under consideration when assigning homework. In fact, she tends to assign homework that her students can complete without using a computer. As a teacher, she believes it is essential to treat every student fairly, especially if his or her grade would be affected by whether he/she has access to a computer.

Based on observations and collected documents, Flora has always tried to assign homework that did not require a computer for completing the assignment. In addition, she provides copies as extra resources so each student can work on his/her assignment. For example, she assigned reading during the Fall break, so even if a student lacked a computer, he/she could complete the work.

There was only one computer in Flora's classroom, situated next to her desk. When I asked whether the students could use the computer for academic purposes, she told me that they were not "allowed" to use a teacher's computer. However, if they need anything, they could tell her, and she would get it for them. Flora also expressed her frustration at the lack of technology, but she could do nothing about it.

Challenges Beginning MAT Teachers Faced

Several areas are discussed under this section: (a) challenges she faced, (b) the type of support she received.

Challenges

Flora reports the number one challenge she faced everyday was her students' low academic level. Sometimes she felt there was absolutely nothing she could do to increase their academic performance. She taught 10th and 11th grade English, but many of her students' reading level were much lower than that; thus, she was very frustrated with the situation. She wondered what she could do to fix such a big academic gap concerning where they needed to be academically, and where they actually were.

Students are every far behind from where they should be. They have very poor reading skill, writing skill, you know, they do horribly on the state test, subject area test, very far behind. I would say on the average probably 7th, 8th grade reading level and I am teaching 11th grade. So it is kind of challenge on that manner.

Other observations and documents also confirmed Flora's statement regarding her students' low academic achievement. The first indicator that this was an achievement level 3 school (not very high) was their test scores, which specified their reading ability. For the 11th graders, their MCT and Subject Area Testing Program (SATP) score stated their achievement level. In 2005-2006, Mississippi used the SATP to test students in English II, algebra I, biology I and U.S. History at the completion of each course. The SATP is a standards-based test, which measures how well students master specific skills defined for each grade by the state of Mississippi. The goal is for all students to pass the test. The subject Flora is teaching-English II, has a state average of 78% in 2006, but students at Flora's school scored only 66%.

In addition, during the observations, I noticed the majority of her students were late for class, and Flora had to stand outside the door, waiting for them to come in. She

had something on the blackboard for them to copy, which she announced as soon as they entered, but not a single student pulled out his/her notes and started working. They just sat there, yawning.

Another challenge bothering Flora was poor parental support. Although she tried to contact the parents, encouraging them to get involved in their children's school activities, it was very difficult for her to get in touch with them. Even after she reached them, they appeared lackadaisical regarding their child's problems. She tried to understand the reason(s) behind the parents' sloppy attitude, but she feels it is because they are too busy to care or maybe just do not care. In her school, many students are from low socioeconomic status families, with parents having to hold more than one job for survival.

Poor parental support is another challenge, you know, parents not care, not coming to open house meeting, may be 15 parents came when I have 130 students. So you know, very little parental involvement. When I have open house meeting, very parents come for that, and when they call, I will try to call them back. But very few of them will call me back, very few of them want to meet. Um, I can't e-mail them because very few of them have computer.

Flora showed me the record she kept regarding how many parents showed up for her last open house meeting, and the parents' participation level was very low. In addition, Flora also kept all the contact records between her and the parents, and it showed she had extreme difficulty getting in touch with the parents. Every time she has tried to contact the parents, she documents it. If she could not get in touch with them, she would leave a message. Though the primary method for contacting the parents was by phone, few parents returned her calls. When I asked about the possibility of a home visit, she, she replied that her busy schedule would not allow it.

Another challenge Flora mentioned was the apparent lack of leaning motivation. Few of her students ever thought about attending college. As a result, they did not care about receiving a diploma, nor did they care anything about their grades. They just wanted to finish high school and start working. College education was never a part of their plan, and they never saw how a college education could benefit them.

Lack of focus on education they should have. Um, they don't think about going to college, and that is kind of challenging because it is hard for me to show they can go if they like to. Um, they don't see how education can help them in the future.

In line with this observation were students exhibiting low motivation when Flora assigned them a class activity. She placed them in groups and instructed them to write a paragraph about the story they had read the previous week; however, most talked to each other instead of following her instructions. Moreover, Flora has a record showing how often each student checks out the novels she selected for them to read during the semester. Based on the record, only approximately 5% of her students checked out any of the novels, which indicated very few cared about reading.

They cared very little about school work, resulting in a poor academic performance. Flora realized that students should be responsible for their academic performance, but tried several things in an attempt to inspire them. Sometimes she slowed down her curriculum, in order to help them catch up. For her, this wasted precious time, and slowed the class down---likewise, it prevented them from learning a new curriculum. Here was one of the scenarios:

For example, I gave them a reading assignment during the Fall Break, and out of my third period class, I have 25 students there and only one person completed the reading assignment. So it frustrated me because I am supposed to move on and I

can't but I don't want to go back because that is their responsibility to have those reading skill before they came to this level. So I feel like I am spend too much time to do things that they should do on their own. You know, for example, they want me to read the entire novel to them when they should do this by themselves.

During the second observation, she asked her students to discuss the English literature reading assignment she gave them to read during fall break. Only one student completed the assignment. As a result, Flora had to go back and review the material she had already covered before the break. I heard the frustration in her voice and saw the disappointment on her face.

As a teacher, Flora strove continually to motivate her students. She added more activities to her lesson plan, such as choosing novels they would find interesting.

Regardless of her effort, there were some students that showed no interest whatsoever in learning. Thus, for Flora, learning how to motivate her students was a primary challenge concerning her teaching.

It is very hard to motivate some kids, I have kids get zero on their papers and they just don't care. I never seen that on anywhere. It is hard for me to believe that, I try to encourage them, motivate them, try to do that on my lesson plan, but it is hard. I tried to find literature they would like to read, but it still, some of the kids just can not reach to that point.

When the teacher asked a question, there was always silence. Students showed no learning enthusiasm or excitement. They would look at each other but did not answer the question. In addition, classroom management and discipline were difficult. She felt she was not prepared for handling misbehaving students and lacked the requisite skills to establish effective classroom management. However, she slowly overcame those challenges with more teaching experience.

During my first year teaching, classroom discipline was hard for me, and I feel I

have learned a lot from my last year of teaching. And because I have one or two classes that teach me how to manage my class. I feel that last year experience helps me a lot. But last year, it was my first year teaching, well, my class were very well managed while comparing with other teachers, but you know, I still feel it can be better.

Although Flora became really frustrated when facing these many challenges, she still liked trying new teaching techniques, new classroom management strategies, etc. with her students. Her central concern was how to create a conducive learning environment.

I try to look these challenges from a more positive side. I mean I kind of like challenges, I kind of like to try different things out and see how they work, you know with different technique, and try them in classroom.

When facing these challenges, she often grew frustrated. However, her administrative and colleague support helped alleviate her many frustrations. That was another reason why she was not overwhelmed, tending to face adversity with a more positive attitude.

Type of Support

There were two major types of support that Flora specifically discussed, and they were (a) administrative support and (b) support from her colleagues. First, she revealed that the administration usually provided good support, making her feel appreciated for what she was doing. The only requirement was that she follow the school and/or school district policy, and document everything she did in the classroom, especially when implementing disciplinary strategies.

If some things happen to me in class, then I discipline them, I need to write that done, then the administration would back me up. The administration would based on what I wrote and pull out the rules and said to the parents , these are our rules and we discipline your child based on the rules. For some teachers have parents come and complain, the administration always back the teachers up if they follow the discipline rules.

Flora declared that none of the students' parents ever questioned her regarding her methods for disciplining their children. However, as instructed, she documented any disciplinary action she implemented in her class on any particular day. She said it was the way to prevent any misunderstandings between her, the parents, and the administration. For example, during the second observation, when she realized her students had not completed their English literature reading assignment during Fall break, she told them to redo it. At the end of class, she recorded their names in a notebook to show that the students' failed to complete their work.

Flora also stated that she maintains an excellent communication channel with her principal. Her principal used to be a classroom teacher and is very familiar with the teaching profession, in terms of the challenges that teachers face. He sometimes observed her teaching and afterwards, usually gave positive, instead of negative feedback. Thus, Flora never felt pressure when her principal monitored her classroom.

Our principal come in and evaluate us on regular basis not you know not make teachers nervous like you are going to loss your job, that kind of thing, is for support, to give you strategy. I talk to my principle on regular basis because he is on classroom for 20 something years. He gives me strategy all the time, you know classroom management that kind of things. And the way he gives strategy is very positive, he would say something like, "try this out", "see this works for you" "let me know how it works".

Flora provided an example to illustrate her principal's strategies. One time, when her principal came to observe her, she was teaching her students how to write advertisements. Most students had difficulty coming up with ideas about how to structure their sentences. After the observation, the principal suggested that Flora should use a newspaper or even

magazines in the library, and copy some of the advertisements for her students. When she tried that next class, the students were much more engaged in the writing activity.

Flora reported that she had benefited by the feedback her principal had provided her. She felt the strategies helped her immensely, especially in her weakest areas, i.e. classroom management. In a way, the principal was like her mentor who always helped her when she needed it.

At Flora's school, there were 10 English teachers, and she taught 10th and 11th grade English. Flora had very supportive colleagues at the school, and they helped each other if they needed it. They met on a regular basis, shared teaching material with each other, complimenting each other's needs.

We share teaching materials, there are 10 English teachers here, and three of us, we teach the same thing, we made out the curriculum map, and we just write along together, we are exchange some of the novels we are teaching based on number of novels, materials we have available. Basically, we share everything. Our English department meets once a month, but Ms. White and I, we just do our own thing. We are not required to do that but we just do that [share teaching material]. She has been teaching for about thirty years so she kind of help me out, she gives me guidance, at the same time, she feels like I help her, too because she feels I give her fresh ideas from a new teacher perspective.

Flora showed where she and the other teacher met on a regular basis. She said the meeting time was flexible, and it depended on how busy they were; that is, if the time needed to be changed, they would try to meet each other's schedule. She also showed me the curriculum map they had made together, the teaching plan they made together for that specific week, as well as the novels the teachers' selected for their students that particular semester.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Perception of Their Training Program

Flora discussed her perceptions regarding the training she received from the MAT program at Mississippi State University. There were five aspects: (a) preparation for challenges, (b) preparation for NCLB, (c) comparison with teachers from traditional teachers training program, (d) mentor/supervisory support, and (e) positive and negative aspects.

Preparation For Challenges

Even though Flora attended the MAT program, her internship experience was different from other MAT students. In fact, she had one year student teaching, and a one year internship. As a result, by the time she was working on her internship to complete her MAT program, she already had one year of student teaching. The main advantage for student teaching was she had more experience, meaning that whenever a situation occurred, she had support. However, by the time she completed her internship, she had her own classroom. Thus, she had to handle any unexpected situation by herself. Although she felt she had learned a lot from the MAT program, she believed getting in classroom and teaching was more like the “real thing”. In addition, she felt she was more prepared because of the student teaching and internship.

I felt I was well prepared. But, um, I have extra one year student teaching and one year internship, and that really helps me a lot. Internship kind of reinforce me and prepare me. And my student teaching allowed me the opportunity to make mistakes, and I learn from my mistakes. One more good thing about student teaching is, I have supervisors, and they are like my role model, they gave me guidance, and they gave me a chance to learn how to been a teacher.

Flora strongly recommended that MAT programs provide student teaching opportunities for their students. When she was student teaching, other teachers served as her mentors, which helped her deal with difficulties. However, during her internship, she had to rely on herself. Thus, she felt her decisions concerning her student teaching and internship were correct. Why? Because most MAT students are only required to have an internship, but she had the advantage of an internship, as well.

So I really believe MAT program should consider have student teaching option instead of just internship because I feel I learn more student teaching than internship. The internship is kind of reinforce everything I was learning but I feel I got most of my experience from student teaching. Plus, although they are teacher would help you during the internship, they are busy so basically I was on my own, it was not like student teaching. The thing is I am the only one have done student teaching in my program and I really believe everyone should do that so they can learn more.

Overall, Flora felt her MAT program prepared her to face a host of educational issues, such as diversity, students with different learning styles, how to handle students' misbehavior, etc. On the other hand, during the past few years, one widely discussed topic in education has been NCLB, but Flora did not feel she was well prepared for that specific issue. She admitted that, though MAT professors extensively discussed the topic, she was not intellectually prepared to actually deal with it.

We discussed the policy of NCLB in class a lot, I know basically what it is about. I know in the MAT program, we just talk generally about it and I have read couple of articles but we didn't get in detail about it. As far as been prepared, trained to teach my students to meet the standard, I don't think I have that much training.

Flora taught 11th grade English, and her students took the state test when they were 10th graders. By the time they made it to her classroom, it was too late for her to prepare them

for the test. Many of her students have a poor English foundation, causing her to spend extra time preparing them. From this perspective, she felt frustration when trying to meet the NCLB standards.

10th grade level is on the testing and I am teaching 11th grade, and most of my kids are behind. I really don't feel I have get that much prepare for no child left behind, other than just talk about that. In my case, my students don't have that kind of foundation, background, so I have to spend the entire quarter of school year teach things they should have already know. For example, now we are just done that and start literature. And you know we should learning literature the whole time instead of spend so much time reviewing. But they don't have that basic writing, reading and grammar skill. So I have to go back, um, you know kind of prevent us from doing what we suppose doing. So it is kind of frustrating.

While not personally prepared to confront the issue, she believed it was the school district's responsibility to prepare teachers for the NCLB standards, not the teachers' training program. She also stated there was little a teacher could do to prepare his/her students regarding test-taking strategies if the student lacked the motivation.

But I feel that is probably more school district responsibility than MAT program responsibility. I think more of that should be the state, and the district responsibility rather than MAT responsibility. For example, my 10th graders, they take the test in 10th grade, I teach 11th grade, I am not responsible for teaching them you know for the test. But I do have several of my students who didn't pass the 10th grade test and they have been retest it over and over again. So they can have several opportunities to pass the test.

Flora believed a teacher needed to be accountable for what he/she did to help his/her students, instead of just looking at students' testing scores.

So I help them if they come to me and need help one on one. Last year I taught 9th grade and 11 grades, and when I taught 9th grade, we did a lot of sample essay we talked about that 10th grade test several times.

Meanwhile, she felt no pressure from the administration about her students' low levels because they were already behind when they came to her. In fact, she stated she could not

remember ever receiving any criticism from her administration regarding her students' academic performance based on NCLB policy.

However, it does not directly affect me about how administrator view me, because when the time I get to that, they are behind already so it is not really my fault. I just try to help them to pass the test when they suppose pass it at 10th grade.

She expressed gratitude for the administration's understanding, especially since the academic level of her school was only level 3. She stated that if her school held her accountable for her students' testing scores, she probably would not like teaching as much as she currently did.

Comparing With Traditional Teachers Training Program

Flora was very proud of her training. She expressed that before the program, she knew nothing about education, especially since her undergraduate degree was not in education. She said the program prepared her to handle many education issues, such as classroom management, discipline, writing teaching plans, and so on. When compared with teachers that received training from traditional programs, she felt she was as good as they.

I don't feel I am behind while comparing with traditional teachers. I don't feel I am behind or anything, I feel my training is just as good as people from traditional teaching program.

To confirm Flora's statement regarding her training, I used one of the lesson plans she developed with another teacher as supported documentation. This teacher graduated from a traditional teacher training program, but based on the content of the lesson plan, Flora's content knowledge was as strong as the other teacher.

One of the primary reasons that Flora felt so confident was because she had one year of student teaching. Other MAT students only had an internship, but Flora also had student teaching. Based on her personal experience, after completing the student teaching, she felt more confident.

Because I have that student teaching experience, that helps me a lot. But again, like I said a lot of the things help me are from my student teaching, and I feel I am a better teacher this year than I was last year. I feel I am more confident this year.

Mentor/Supervisory Support

She did not recall the MAT program assigning her a mentor. She stated that anytime she had a question, she would call her advisor, as well as the program director. Her advisor always helped her solve any questions she might have; thus, she did not experience any frustration or difficulty about consulting with others. In fact, she had an excellent relationship with her advisor, making up any deficiencies due to lacking a mentor. As a result, she showed no concern regarding her lack of a mentor.

I don't remember I ever had mentor. I mean every time when I had question, I just called my academic advisor at Mississippi State University and she was quite helpful so I never thought about that. I have very good relationship with her, and she is definitely there if I needed anything. There is no mentor at all.

When she started working at the school district, the school assigned her a mentor, but her experience was not positive (the mentor was too busy to help Flora). After a while, she received help from one of her colleagues, instead of her official mentor.

I had an advisor that's it. I didn't have any mentor from the MAT program. However, when I first came here, the school assigned me one. My mentor helped me some, you know, she is kind of young and busy so I kind of went to another lady for advising, ask things I didn't know to get more help.

In Flora's opinion, a mentor was someone she could discuss her teaching with. Someone that could observe her class or vice-versa, and someone that can instruct her in new teaching strategies for her students. They could exchange teaching tips, ideas, etc. For her, that would be more beneficial. Therefore, she believed having a mentor for support would definitely help.

I sort of wish I had a mentor, we can go to watch class together, something like that. That would be a lot better.

Attitude Toward MAT Program

Flora mentioned the MAT program had many positive aspects, and the training she received was quite valuable. She specifically pointed out the availability of the MAT program for anyone that did not attend a traditional teachers training program but wished to become a teacher. In her case, it would be much harder, if not impossible, for her to enroll.

Some of the positive things about MAT program is people who wants to enter the teaching profession and did not have undergraduate degree in teaching, MAT gives them a chance to further their education, get a Master degree and get that certificate.

In addition, the MAT program prepared Flora in several areas, such as evaluation, classroom management, etc. Such preparation helped her become an effective teacher.

Also, I feel the MAT program at Mississippi State University has prepared me from a lot of different angles, different areas. You know, I got um, evaluation, instruction, I got classroom management instruction, I got reading strategy instruction, that I can use in classroom.

However, there were negative aspects, but most of them did not bother her. The only aspect that Flora mentioned was “unorganized”. In her case, the program provided her incorrect information due to poor organizational skills and it had affected her financially at one point during the program.

It is very unorganized. I was told one thing but another would happen. For example, when I was graduating, I was told, you know, my thesis, I did not have to enroll, then, the last minute, they told me, I had to enroll, and that cost me thousand dollars more, you know, just very unorganized.

That was the only negative aspect that bothered Flora. However, she assumed the reason for the program’s disorganization was because it was new, and she believed it was better organized now.

For the negative part, um, I don’t know it is because it is a new program, beginning program, but it is very unorganized. Now I look back and I believe it is because such a beginning program, early program, I am sure they are much better now.

To sum up her perceptions of the MAT program, Flora suggested several areas for improvement. The first was to provide every MAT student an opportunity for student teaching. Flora was a firm believer that a teacher needed to get in the classroom to learn about “teaching,” and not just study theories. For her, a teacher can learn teaching theories without any classroom experience. Unless a teacher has experience dealing with issues important to students and parents (along with other issues), a teacher is not really teaching.

Definitely give students option between student teaching and internship. They can pick one or the other. Um, some people would, if they can student teach, they can do that first instead of going to internship first. They can get more out of that. Because a lot of time get in the classroom and teach can make a teacher learns more than study theories.

Another recommendation was offering more courses for different content areas. She made the argument that if she had taken more content area courses, her teaching would have improved.

For instance, I would like to take classes in teaching literature or teach writing. I also like to take more literature classes, such as Shakespeare's plays or modern English Literature. Course like that would definitely help my teaching.

In her case, her undergraduate major was not in English, but she is now certified to teach English. As a result, she often had to do extra research or reading to prepare for teaching. She pointed out that other MAT teachers experienced similar situations and that if their programs could offer more content area courses, they would gain more content knowledge.

Um, other than that, I think the program I have at Mississippi State is very good program. I felt like I had to work hard to get prepared. That was challenged but in a good way. I mean it was a good challenge. At the same time, I felt MAT can offer more content are courses. Content knowledge is very important fro teachers. You know, there are MAT teachers like me, we don't have enough content courses.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Attitude Toward Their Career

Under this question, several topics were covered: (a) education background impact, (b) job experiences, (c) personal characteristics, culture, and life experience, and (d) future career plans.

Education Background Impact

Flora's educational experience affected the way she taught, especially her view of education. She strove to communicate to her students and let them understand the

importance of education. She encouraged them to set education goals and achieve their goals. In addition, she mentioned herself as an example to encourage her students that college was possible for them. She returned to school to get the career she really enjoyed; thus, she felt there was no reason her students could not do the same things for themselves if they wanted to.

Um, my undergraduate major was communication, and since my major was not in education, I feel like maybe I have more bibliography because I am more sure what I wanted to do. So I went back and changed my career path. Um, in terms of go to college, get my Master's degree, I kind of feel like my students should have the same type of goal, but I know a lot of them don't. Um, I and I try to let them know that they can go to college if they like.

Flora stated that sometimes she told students how their lives would change if they attended college. She brought some of the pictures she took in college to show them. Many times, they showed interest, with some making the statement that they would like to attend college.

Job Experiences

Flora possessed little job experience before entering the teaching profession. In fact, before enrolling in the MAT program, she worked on her Master's degree and majored in business. It took little time for her to realize teaching was what she really wanted, so she changed her major, enrolled in the MAT program, and worked toward attaining her teaching license.

Well, I did not much real job experience before I entered MAT program, What I meant by that is I did not have job, job because I was enrolling in Master program to get my business. Then, I changed my mind, instead of getting MBA, I went to education, and got in MAT program.

Since she started teaching, she realized her business background had influenced her teaching. For example, when she wrote lesson plans, she always tried to include activities that related to the “real world”, and could help her students function within the business community. She believed that this “business oriented teaching philosophy” would benefit her students, especially since the majority of them were going to work upon graduation.

But I guess going to business, have that little bit of business background, communication and publication background. I guess I can see, I try to relate what we are doing here to the business world. So they can see that, you know, learn how to write correctly does help you at school and will help you find a job in terms of interview. Everything we do here, I try to show them how can that help them in the classroom and in the real world. I always tell them in the real world what kind of skills they have to have.

In addition, she included her communication skills into her teaching, which helped her students develop the kinds of skills needed for any future jobs they might have.

My communication background kind of help me because you know, these skills would be used not just in classroom, pass the test. For example, the persuade skill, this skill can be used to write a persuade letter. If the company makes you mad, and you want your money back, you have to how to use this skill to write a persuade letter to get what you want.

Personality Characteristics, Culture and Life Experiences

Flora described herself as a “laid-back” teacher, easily approachable to students. In her teaching, she liked to include students in class discussions. At the same time, she liked to keep things orderly, especially within the classroom setting. She had culture shock upon first entering the field, and she tried to “install” the importance of education into her students’ belief system, highlighting how education could help them for their future.

My parents taught me at my early age that education is important, and I have always try to install that in my students because I know their parents don't do that. Um, education is just not important to them.

Based on her WASP (White Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) culture, she had difficulty understanding why people did not value education. Flora realized that many of her students had families that cared little for education and she tried to help them understand how important education was. She attempted to help each student, and tried to prevent some from doing things they might regret later in their lives, such as dropping out of school.

I never understood that people didn't, not everyone did get high school diploma, and that is something I am seeing here. These kids drop out and I think that kind of changing me because I try to prevent that happen to a lot of my students. You know where I came from is no one drop out of school, the same everyone graduate and go to college, and it is a lot different from here.

She was especially concerned that some of her students had a very small world view. They had no idea how many opportunities they had outside Mississippi. In addition, her students' lack of motivation in education also disturbed her. In fact, many plan to work at a local factory upon graduation from high school. Flora tried to tell them that most major factories were gone from the area and, most importantly, they would have brighter futures if they received a college education.

I want to make sure they know there is a lot more opportunities than this small town can offer. There is a big world out there for them, they just need to make sure they get their education first and experience that. These kids here never feel that way, they all believe after they can work at factory, and make good money. And now they are finding out the factory don't want you unless you have high school diploma. And they also see their parents lost their jobs, you know these factory are not permanent, a lot of them are leaving, been out source, close down or we have a lot close down at west point just last year alone.

Flora believed some kids were caught up in certain cultures since they lacked self confidence in their own ability. As a result, they were scared since they felt could not achieve their dreams, and that it was easier to follow what everyone was doing.

A lot of kids in this area, they got caught up in certain culture, and there is not much room for them to grow. They have a lot of fear. When I was in high school, I did not know people drop out, you know, I mean there was one person dropped out, and we all kind of “what an idiot, you would never make it yourself”. But here is different.

Future Career Plan

Overall, Flora was grateful for the MAT program, which made the licensure process easier for her. She specifically pointed out it was a good program for people wanting to enter the teaching profession, especially those whose previous job had nothing to do with teaching.

I feel the program has prepared me and helped me. You know, change career, um, you know, I mean I am here because I want to be here. There is this program available so I will definitely recommend others about the MAT program. If not because MAT program, that would be harder for me to go to education.

However, she planned to pursue further education in the future. Although she enjoyed being around students, and took pleasure in teaching, she did not see herself staying in the classroom forever.

I still like to be teaching. I eventually like to go back and get my doctoral degree, too. But, we have a little baby at home, so probably wait until he starts school. Actually, my husband is working on his doctoral degree now.

Her future career plan was to be a consultant or specialist. She enjoyed coming up with new ideas regarding lesson plans and implementing those ideas into teaching. Although

she liked teaching, there were certain parts of being a classroom teacher that she did not enjoy, such as grading.

I would like to be curriculum consultant, or specialist something along those lines. I really enjoy coming up with lesson plan, and implement them, try to find new strategies rather than just teaching, I don't like grading (laughing). So that is something I really to do.

She explained that being a curriculum consultant would allow her to stay in the teaching profession. Although she would not be in the classroom, facing students on a daily basis, she would interact with students through teachers. She hoped to combine both her classroom experience and teaching strategies in order to help teachers.

In that way, I will be still in classroom in different way, I will help other teachers you know try new strategies, give them advise, give them, you know how to implement reading strategies in classroom, stuff like that, that really interested me.

Cross Case Analysis

In this chapter, six cases were analyzed using a cross-case comparison. The primary areas were discussed as challenges beginning MAT teachers faced, beginning MAT teachers' perception of their training program, and MAT teachers' attitude toward their respective teaching career. These six MAT teachers' teaching and training experiences were compared to each other and made meaningful statement.

Challenges Beginning MAT Teachers Faced

MAT teachers reported the types of challenges they faced in their current teaching career from classroom perspective and relayed educational policy impact (NCLB). Meanwhile, when discussing challenges they encountered in their teaching, they discussed the type of support they received from their respective administrations and colleagues. Apparently, talking about support was another way to discuss challenges for the participants.

Challenges

Three primary themes emerged when the participants discussed their daily challenges, and the list order was arranged based on the number of participants that perceived it as a challenge: (a) students' low motivation, (b) NCLB-accountability (c) lack of parental support.

Each teacher faced several issues in their daily teaching, with all six reporting that students' low motivation was a major challenge. However, although each participant experienced students' low motivation as challenge, each interpreted it differently. For

example, Bill and Flora both reported their students' had low motivation regarding future education---all they wanted to do was find employment after high school (e. g., "there is not much motivation because no one has ever sit down and show them"). Cindy, Debra, and Élan felt their students exhibited a great lack of enthusiasm for class, regardless of the topic. They all perceived students' low learning motivation as a challenge, but their students demonstrated their apathy in various ways. Bill and Flora's students lacked knowledge regarding how education could help them, while Cindy, Debra, and Elan's students lacked interest in academic work.

While discussing the type of challenges they perceived, each participant was asked to address how prepared they were at meeting the NCLB requirements, such as accountability. All revealed a level of "not well prepared", and all stated that NCLB was a challenge to their teaching.

Three teachers, Bill, Elan, and Flora, mentioned they were not prepared for NCLB, adding that accountability challenged them greatly. Bill's administration held him accountable for his students' performance, and if his pupils' scored badly on standardized tests, he was questioned. His teaching did not motivate him to do more or less since he already did everything that was required of him. Elan tried to be an "effective" teacher and meet the standard of NCLB but she felt she was "failing". Elan did not feel the MAT program had prepared her to meet the NCLB requirements, and had caused her great stress. Her administration held her accountable for her students MCT scores and criticized her ability based on the scores. Flora also stated the MAT program did not prepare her for NCLB. She declared when she was a MAT student, the topic was

discussed often, but no one was trained how to cope with the NCLB standards. As an English teacher, her students' testing score were well behind the state average, and she had no idea how to meet the accountability expectation.

Cindy was confident that the MAT program prepared her for NCLB. She also reported the policy had not influenced her yet because it was the first-year her students took the MCT, and she had no idea how they would perform. In fact, she felt a little "anxious" about her students' testing outcome. Meanwhile, she believed a good teacher did not need NCLB to make them accountable.

Although Debra was already familiar with NCLB in terms of teachers' accountability, she stated it was unfair to judge a teacher's teaching effectiveness based solely on his or her students' test scores. She also pointed out NCLB does not take "reality" as a consideration; that is, some students would not be able to meet the expectations in terms of their score. In such a case, she wondered about teachers that had worked hard trying to get their students ready, but still did poorly. Those teachers would be held "accountable," regardless of how hard they had worked. As a special education teacher, Alex reported it had no impact on him and that his role was more like a facilitator. His primary goal was to help students with their school tasks. However, he believed students should be responsible for their performance, not just their teachers.

The participants reported that NCLB was, or had the potential to be, a great challenge, but the degree varied depending upon each teacher's unique situation. If one taught a testing subject, but received little support from his or her administrators, the accountability issue could become daunting. For example, among the six participants,

Alex was the only one that stated NCLB had no impact on his teaching, due to this status as a special education teacher. On the other hand, Elan and Bill taught subjects that were tested, and both had little support from their respective administrations; as a result, the accountability issue challenged them.

The lack of parental support was another challenge that was acknowledged by three teachers (Bill, Elan, and Flora). For Bill and Flora, it was difficult to contact parents, and the only available method for getting in touch was calling, since e-mail was out of the question (they lacked access to a computer). The lack of parental support was different for Elan. In her case, the scarcity of parental support meant they questioned her disciplinary strategies, her teaching, etc. This situation caused Elan great stress, which was intruding in upon her private life. Flora reported her students' low academic level as a challenge. Her students' academic level was much lower than the state average, and she felt great stress as well.

However, other themes were reported by only one or two particular participants, such as: trust between teachers and students, lack of resources (teaching material) from the school, discipline issues/classroom management, a different academic level between students, and students' poor academic ability. The different themes reported by different participant could be explained as individual differences, and included teaching subjects, student population, school district where they were employed, different administration support level, educational background, job experience prior to enrolling in the MAT program, etc.

For instance, the trust level between teachers and students was reported by two participants, Alex and Bill, as a challenge. Bill expressed that his students did not trust him. He had to break down barriers between him and his students before earning their trust (e. g., “the fact that I am Caucasian, there is a barrier there”). Alex faced a similar situation. His students did not trust him due to the cultural divide separating Black from White. Since he was Caucasian and the majority of his students were Africa-American, differences were inherent and thus, they had difficulty relating to him (e.g., “they don’t relate to me as easy as somebody from their own culture”). Interestingly, this particular challenge was reported by the only two male participants in the study, while the remaining four participants, all females, did not mention any challenge related to the different culture between them and their students. One of the possible explanations was their unique teaching environment.

Based on classroom observations, they both taught similar student populations--- all of their students were African American. Apparently, both teachers were aware of the trust issue and adapted different strategies to establish rapport. Bill’s strategy was being honest with them, and whatever he promised them, he would always try to keep his promise. Alex’s strategy was more like being “kind” to them, and was “there” for them if they needed help.

Two teachers (Alex and Elan) reported a challenge due to the lack of resources/teaching material. Alex stated that his students received “less resources” than regular education students, i.e., no computer labs were available for his students. In his estimation, no resources helped induce poor performances, low self-esteem, and low

learning motivation---a never-ending vicious cycle. In Elan's case, her teaching outcome also suffered greatly due to the lack of teaching material (e.g., "material, resources is what I need"), and had seriously affected her job satisfaction. She specifically stated that this paucity of materials was her "biggest challenge." In her opinion, if she had adequate teaching resources, her content knowledge would expand while her student's knowledge base would increase. Apparently, they both perceived lack of resources as challenges, but the severity level was different. Since Alex was a special education teacher, such a challenge did not affect his teaching outcome (he was not accountable for his students' performance). On the other hand, the lack of resources negatively impacted Elan's teaching outcome.

Disciplinary issues and classroom management were issues declared by two teachers (Bill and Cindy). What challenged Bill was the absence of clear disciplinary rules at his school, which forced him to establish his own. Overall, his strategies had helped him, especially during his first-year of teaching. Cindy perceived classroom management as her weakest area, but she was unsure about how establish effective disciplinary rules, nor did she know how to organize her classroom, and/or initiating a classroom plan of action to increase student motivation.

Overall, different teachers faced different challenges, but similarities between the teachers did exist. Every teacher reported student motivation as a challenge, while lack of parental support was a problem for three. Two Caucasian male teachers reported lack of trust as being a major headache. Bill and Cindy both reported that discipline/classroom management as major challenges, but from different perspectives. The remaining

challenges were lack of resources from the school, different academic levels between students, lack of teaching material, with students' low academic level being the only area in which all six educators saw as challenging. Among all the participants, Elan revealed the highest level of stress that occurred due the challenges she faced, such as lack of teaching material, lack of support from administration and colleagues, and attempting to raise their academic ability, especially when nothing seemed to work.

Type of Support

All six teachers discussed their experiences regarding the types of support they received from three aspects: administration, colleagues, and school level.

Among all six teachers, three of them, Cindy, Debra, and Flora, reported positive experiences with their administration. Cindy reported that she received complete support from her principal, a fact that was extremely important for her. All she needed to do was follow the school district's policy. If a parent argued with her about instructional methods, the administration backed Cindy. Debra also reported having a supportive administration. As long as she followed the school's policy, she was assured of having administrative support. In addition, she received administrative support in her professional development. For instance, during her first semester of teaching, the administration recommended she attend academic conferences. Flora stated that her administration would support her as long as she followed the school district's policies. Such excellent support showed that the administration appreciated her teaching efforts.

The other three teachers, Alex, Bill and Elan, reported having negative experiences with their respective administrations. They either received very little or no

support at all from their administration. Bill received no support from his former principal, but since then, the school had hired an interim principal and thus far, Bill had not worked with him. Elan reported negative experiences as well. Her administration judged her teaching effectiveness based solely on her students' performance. In her opinion, it was unfair to gauge her fitness as a teacher on how well students' scored on a test.

Although Alex reported having negative experience with his administration, his situation was different from Bill and Elan. As a special education teacher, his superiors were in both regular education and special education. He received excellent support from his special education coordinator, and whenever he needed help, he received it promptly. On the other hand, Alex reported that the regular education administration never provided the type of support he needed. For example, the high school principal provided no support for him, even though he sometimes needed it. However, since the middle school principal was his friend, Alex never experienced frustration when he needed support.

Colleagues

Four of the six participants revealed that they enjoyed a certain amount of support from their peers. For example, Bill was appreciative concerning his colleagues "warm" attitude, as well as helping him learn some of the unfamiliar teaching vocabulary. Cindy stated her peers made her feel she was "not alone" and always had some one to consult with if she had a question. Debra acknowledged she had "wonderful" colleagues and whenever she needed help, her colleagues always provided support. Flora proclaimed she

had “very supportive” colleagues, and they met on regular basis to check each other’s needs, as well as sharing teaching materials, providing help, etc.

The remaining two teachers, Alex and Elan, reported having negative experiences. Elan received little support from her peers, mainly because the school she taught was very small. As a result, she was the “only history teacher” and had no one she could exchange or share teaching materials, lesson plans, etc. In Alex’s case, his peers included two groups: (a) regular classroom teachers, and (b) the other two alternative school teachers. Alex reported he received no support from regular education teachers. In fact, regular education teachers wanted no interaction whatsoever with alternative school teachers (e.g., “I can’t get help from any of the regular classroom teachers”). Meanwhile, the other two alternative teachers in the same building with him had different responsibilities; thus, they tended to work alone (e.g., “we work separately, and do our own work not bother each other.”).

Although Elan and Alex both reported negative experiences regarding colleague support, the reasons were different. Elan’s lack of colleague support and sharing was more likely caused by her teaching environment. If the school had been larger, and/or if she had been the sole history teacher, her collegueship might have been more positive. However, in Alex’s case, he perceived that the entire educational system structure was the cause for the lack of collegiality. In other words, there has been always a lack of communication and interaction between regular and special education teachers.

School Level

The only school level support mentioned by participants was mentoring. Three participants (Alex, Cindy, and Elan) reported that their school district did not assign a mentor, while the other three teachers (Bill, Debra, and Flora) stated their school district had assigned them a mentor. In Bill's case, his school district did assign mentors that reminded new teachers about how things needed to get done based on the school's schedule. Although such mentoring was not specifically what he wanted, he did want to know what to do if he made a mistake. Overall, he declared the mentoring experience had been both pleasant and informative. Debra's school district assigned her an excellent mentor upon being hired as a teacher. Although she was not a "brand new" teacher, she believed the mentor had helped her immeasurably. In Flora's case, although the school district assigned a mentor to assist her, the mentor was too busy to provide any helpful guidance.

Alex reported never having mentor support. In his opinion, the lack of mentoring in his school district was a sign of disapproval and conflict between more experienced teachers and their novice counterparts. Cindy's school district did not offer her mentoring support. Due to the lack of mentor support, she served as a mentor to another alternative route teacher. When Elan first started teaching, the school did not assign a mentor, and she relied on herself. In her case, it was extremely stressful not having a mentor because her teaching load was very heavy. She believed a mentor would help alleviate her day-to-day stress.

Based on both participants' statements that their school districts had not offered mentors, real mentoring (as opposed to an "advisor") was not always available for beginning teachers. Even though some school districts offered mentoring, the relationship depended upon how mentor and mentoree interacted. However, if mentoring was available, most beginning teachers would enjoy having someone skilled and wise to help them make the transition from student to teacher less stressful.

Beginning MAT Teachers' Perception of Their Training Program

All participants discussed this section based on: (a) self-perception of teacher training, and (b) attitude toward the MAT program.

Self-Perception of Teaching Training

First, all six participants reported they were confident about their preparation concerning different teaching skills, and their insecurity with others. They all reported specific areas that they felt well prepared. Alex felt well prepared for trying out new methods for teaching, such as combining technology with his content knowledge and making class interesting for students. In addition, he stated the MAT program had prepared him to work with students of different needs, e.g. students with learning disabilities. Bill acknowledged the MAT program had prepared him to be an effective teacher. For instance, he learned how to deliver mathematical concepts to his students from some of the MAT courses, such as "Teaching of Math". Cindy said the program had prepared her in many ways, specifically mentioning assessment. Although she had college teaching experience, the assessment system was quite different, so she was

pleased to receive assessment training. She also declared that the program had prepared her concerning disciplinary/classroom management issues.

Debra felt the MAT program taught her various teaching skills that could be applied to classroom teaching. Elan's beliefs were similar. She specifically pointed out which courses had benefited her, though she admitted the program had insufficiently prepared her to deal with inadequate teaching materials, especially since she taught five subjects. Flora declared the MAT program had prepared her to face a host of educational issues. However, she insisted the program needed to provide each student with student teaching opportunities.

Secondly, all participants compared their alternate route training and spoke about the differences between their training and traditional teaching programs. Two themes were reported as primary differences between the two teacher training programs. Alex and Bill both revealed the amount of real classroom experience distinguished TC programs from AC programs. Alex was confident about his training, but thought the program should offer more courses like dimension learning to increase teacher preparation. He insisted classed like dimension learning gave him the opportunity to have 'real' classroom experience. Bill reported feeling very qualified to be a teacher. However, he believed the main difference between the two programs was the lack of student teaching for alternative route teachers. In his case, when he first started teaching, he had to learn how to write lesson plan, and document students' grade, etc., which was stressful. Thus, he insisted student teaching would eliminate some of that stress for novice teachers.

Cindy and Debra mentioned that they had very strong content knowledge when compared with traditionally trained teachers. For both of them, their college majors were the same as what they taught (eg., general science, and English). Elan was very confident about the training she received from the MAT program. However, the downside was the lack of content knowledge. Flora expressed that the program had prepared her to handle different educational issues, and admitted one primary reason for her confidence was her one year of student training teaching and one-year internship. The other MAT trained teachers had only experienced a one year internship.

Attitude Toward MAT Program

Each participant expressed both positive and negative aspects of the MAT program. In terms of what was positive, four themes emerged: (a) helping MAT teachers gain licensure, (b) diverse courses and training, (c) collegueship with other MAT students, and (d) employment opportunities. All six participants mentioned that the single most important aspect of the MAT program was that it provided them the opportunity to gain their teaching license. For example, Alex reported that the program gave him the chance to be certified in more than one subject area, which opened several doors for his teaching career. Bill felt that the single most positive facet of the program was that it allowed him to become licensed in the “quickest time possible”.

Diverse courses and training were also considered highly positive aspects of the program, as mentioned by three participants (Alex, Elan, and Flora, e.g., “all the courses were exceptionally chosen”). Each participant stated that the courses had prepared him

or her to become effective teachers, though each was affected by different facets. Each course was designed to help MAT teachers in various areas. For instance, classroom management provided them training regarding discipline issues. A dimension course allowed opportunities to gain real classroom experience, as well as providing supervision from their instructor and consultation from their peers.

Debra revealed the collegueship between her and other MAT students was another positive feature of the MAT program. She revealed that they exchanged teaching tips, and helped each other, and she especially enjoyed the friendship they established. Bill mentioned that the MAT program provided employment assistance, and was very impressed by the program's effort at finding employment for MAT teachers (e.g., "telling us exactly places to look for employment").

On the other hand, all participants reported the following negative aspects of the MAT program: (a) lack of specifics about program requirements, (b) more content knowledge courses were needed, (c) a mentor should be assigned to each student, (d) the certification process needs to be easier, and (e) training needs to be more applicable. Bill, Cindy, and Flora both mentioned the "confusion" they experienced while enrolled in the MAT program. For example, Bill pointed out that the program needed to be more "upfront" with MAT teachers in terms of their requirements for graduation. In his case, his graduation had been "delayed" and he had been "frustrated." Cindy experienced a similar situation and frustration when she had to choose which courses she needed in order to complete her content area. Thus, she wished someone more familiar with what

she needed had been able to help her (e.g., “who is familiar with questions you have and can answer them”).

Alex, and Elan believed there was a need for the MAT program to offer more courses. In Elan’s case, she believed that if the program had provided more content knowledge courses, much of her stress would have been alleviated. Alex would have appreciated one or two semesters to take courses like practicum and/or dimension learning to learn more “real” classroom situations. Cindy pointed out the need for all MAT teachers to have mentor support, and that a mentor could provide extra help that was unavailable with only an academic advisor. Alex stated that he would like to see the MAT program make the entire certification process easier. In his case, he worked full time while working toward his licensure, so he would like the MAT courses to better “fit” a student’s schedule. Debra said she would like to see that all training MAT students received was “applicable” to their future teaching.

Beginning MAT Teachers’ Attitude Toward Their Career

All participants stated the following influenced their teaching as well as their future career choice: (a) how their educational background affected their teaching, (b) job experiences (c) how personality, culture, and life experiences impact their current teaching, and (d) future career plans.

Education Background

All six participants reported their educational background had influenced their teaching. Two major themes stood out in this section: Various educational backgrounds

and previous education integrated into teaching. In terms of background, four of the six teachers (Alex, Bill, Elan, and Flora) were licensed and taught subjects completely different from their undergraduate major. Debra was the only teacher whose undergraduate major---English--- was both her licensure and teaching subject. Cindy's undergraduate major and teaching subject was similar; that is, her undergraduate degree was awarded in medical technology, and she taught general science.

In addition, some found that when they integrated their previous educational training to their new teaching career, their teaching style was influenced by their previous education training. Three teachers (Bill, Elan, and Flora) whose undergraduate majors were in communication, decided to be licensed secondary education teachers. As a result, their communication background affected their teaching style to certain degree.

For example, Bill's educational background reflected in his teaching philosophy and teaching methods. Since his undergraduate major was in communications, he made sure his pupils' used a correct mathematics vocabulary in his class. In his opinion, it was essential for students to verbalize mathematical concepts, and so one aspect of his classroom activities was having his students' write (in the English language, not symbols) down their answer to certain math questions, and "verbally" explain the concepts to the entire class. Elan's undergraduate major was also in communications, which was the primary reason she entered the teaching profession. She used to think that since she had good communication skills, she would enjoy teaching. However, after beginning her career, she quickly realized communication skills were not enough for her to enjoy teaching.

Such a finding was not surprising. As a general rule, MAT teachers were individuals whose undergraduate major was something besides education, and such diverse educational backgrounds naturally had an impact on their being considered “highly qualified.” For example, in order to attain the “highly qualified” standard of NCLB, teachers need to meet the following requirement, (a) they must be licensed, otherwise they can not teach, (b) they must possess a minimum of a bachelor’s degree, and (c) they must have adequate, subject-content knowledge. Apparently, all six participants met the standard. However, the subjects they taught were not the same as their undergraduate major, which could create potential challenges.

Job Experience

Since the alternate route was primarily designed to attract second career seekers, the majority of MAT teachers had originally chosen other occupations upon graduating from college. Meanwhile, they had similar experiences with some form of teaching, such as tutoring, substitute work, etc., prior to enrolling in the MAT program. In fact, among the six participants, Debra was the only one that chose teaching as her full time job immediately after graduating from college---the rest were second career seekers. In addition, Cindy was the only one that had a long, successful first career before she decided to enter teaching. The rest were either new, second career seekers (Flora) or already had part time teaching experience before enrolling in the MAT program (Alex, Bill, and Elan).

For example, Alex had several different job experiences before he became a licensed teacher, such as working as a substitute teacher, a salesperson, and construction worker. Bill had been a broadcaster and part-time tutor. Debra and Cindy were the only participants whose previous job experience was either exactly the same or closely related to the subject they were teaching (e.g., English, and general science).

Personality, Culture, And Life Experiences

All participants reported how their personality, culture, and life experiences affected their teaching experience as a beginning teacher. There were three themes emerged in this section, and the most common one was the different value system between MAT teachers and their students. Three teachers (Alex, Bill and Flora) revealed they came from families value education greatly but their students seemed not care much about education at all.

Alex described himself as growing up in a family that valued education greatly, so he tried to teach his students to value education, but it was not an easy task for an alternative school teacher. In fact, the majority of his students and their families did not value education at all, and he tried his best to not create more stress for himself because of the different value systems. Bill also came from a White, middle class culture, and his family always encouraged him to pursue further education. In a similar manner, he tried to point out the importance of education to his students. Flora's family also valued education greatly and when she started teaching, she experienced culture shock. She

tried to teach her students to appreciate education as well, and wanted them to view the world from a broader point of view, and education was the only way to do it.

Another theme was that the same teachers adapted a more “laid-back”, “easy going”, and “happy go lucky” attitude toward their lowly motivated students who did not see the importance of education. For example, Alex described himself as a “happy go lucky” kind of person, who did not allow too much to bother him. With students sent to alternative school, he controlled his temper and was friendly. He admitted that his personality helped lessen any potential dissatisfaction with his teaching career, especially since he dealt with students that had numerous behavior problems. Bill described his personality as “easy going” and “laid-back”, and it reflected in his teaching. For instance, he tried to be the kind of teacher that students learned easily from, while not putting too much academic pressure on them.

In addition, the third theme was about how MAT teachers integrated their life experiences into teaching methods/activities. Debra expressed that when she was in college, she has traveled to Europe, and brought that specific life experience into teaching the English language. Elan described herself as a friendly and caring individual, and her personality reflected to the way she interacted with her students. For instance, she reminded her students to bring their assignments to class, as well as to study for tests. Flora described herself as very “laid-back”, and liked to keep things orderly.

Teaching students’ with similar backgrounds and/or cultures was another theme. Cindy was the only participant described her own culture was very close to his students, and such a similarity made her teaching environment quite enjoyable. She described her

culture as southern, middle class, and rural which made her feel very connected to her current teaching environment. Overall, MAT teachers expressed a similar background concerning various personalities, culture, and life experiences.

Future Career Plans

In this section, there were only two themes: staying within the teaching profession or quitting teaching. However, differences existed regarding their individual choices to stay or not. Among all six participants, only one (Cindy) teacher declared teaching would be her life long career. Three of them (Debra, Elan, and Flora) revealed they had no intention to remain teachers in the future, whereas Alex and Bill reported that if kept teaching, they wanted to teach a different student population (e.g., “social studies”, “high school or community college”). The theme of this section appeared to be different career paths, age, and gender. The only older participant, a female, who stayed in her first career for long time, was also the only one who would stay in the teaching profession. The only two males, who revealed that if they continue be teachers, they would like to teach different subjects or student population.

Debra, decided to quit teaching English in the future for personal reasons. She had recently married, and declared unequivocally that teaching was too stressful for family life. She planed to either be a librarian or write children’s books. Élan had no doubt about quitting teaching and becoming a librarian. However, Elan’s reasons for leaving included accountability issues, lack of support from administrators and/or colleagues, students’ low motivation, and lack of parental support. Flora also planned to remain in education,

but not as a classroom teacher. Her future career goals were to attain a higher degree, and become either a curriculum consultant or specialist.

Overall, participants' different career plans were also influenced by the type of challenges they faced, the support (or lack thereof) they received from their administration, the NCLB influence, their previous job experience, and educational backgrounds. The best example would be Cindy. She was the only participant that showed a definite desire to stay in teaching. She was also the only one whose previous educational background and job experience was related to the subject she currently taught. In addition, she received great support from her administration and colleagues, and NCLB had very little impact on her teaching. She did not have a mentor from her school district, but it did not seem to bother her at all.

The opposite example was Elan, who had experienced various limited support from her administration and colleagues. She also faced several challenges in her teaching, resulting in the fact that teaching had overwhelmed her. She was the only subject that wanted to leave the teaching profession as soon as possible. The other participants, while wanting to leave, stated they would remain for a few more years.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research was to document and understand the challenges beginning MAT teachers faced, in tandem with how these challenges became linked to their perceptions of their training program. Moreover, their career plans were extensively discussed here. Although the conclusions and implications were drawn based solely on six MAT teachers' perceptions, the results provided insight for other educators wishing to understand the various challenges and related issues common for alternate route teachers. This chapter consists of (a) discussion that related to research questions, (b) conclusions that were drawn from the study, (c) limitation(s) of this study, and (d) implications for future research.

Summary

Insights into the challenges faced by MAT teachers, their thoughts about the alternate route training program, and their future career plans was discussed. Such insight provided educators with another perspective regarding teachers' retention rate. All six participants reported different challenges, though there was significant overlap with previous research results. The similarities and differences varied based on the different type of subjects, students, the school where they taught, and MAT program experiences.

However, in terms of challenges, one participant stated NCLB was a major challenge, but had not been well addressed in previous literature.

Teachers that taught testing subjects were held accountable for their students academic performance in order to meet the NCLB standards and so teaching was seen as a stressful profession. Besides the accountability issue, if teachers were employed by a school district which did not provide much administrative, colleague and school level support, teachers tended to perceive their challenge as being more severe. In other words, teachers that perceived less support administratively tended to report more challenges, and that the challenges deleteriously affected their pleasure in teaching. Interaction between teachers and students, as well as their parents, greatly influenced how teachers perceived their challenges.

When discussing how the MAT teachers perceived their training, all six participants saw their training in a positive manner. They acknowledged that without the program, becoming teachers would have been immensely more difficult. However, they also pointed several areas in which the MAT program needed improvement.

Their personal teaching experience also contributed to how they viewed their training. In addition, mentoring (or the lack thereof) affected how they interpreted teaching experience. The instructors that reported positive teaching experiences either had access to a mentor or had taken part in a satisfactory mentoring experience. Although all six participants stated they enjoyed teaching, only one declared that she would stay in the teaching profession, whereas the other five wanted to quit or wanted to teach different subjects with a different student population. Among these five, the two male teachers

would continue teaching, but only with different subjects and/or different students. The three female teachers planned to leave the profession.

Discussion

Beginning MAT Teachers' Challenges And Received Support

In this study, the MAT teachers revealed the types of challenges they encountered as: (a) students' low motivation, (b) NCLB-accountability (c) lack of parental support, (d) trust between teachers and students, (e) lack of resources (teaching material) from school, (f) discipline issue/classroom management, (g) different academic level between students, and (h) students' low academic level.

These findings were somewhat consistent with several researchers' findings (Liu & Meyer, 2005; McCarra's 2003; Riley, 2004; Veenman, 1984). For example, Veenman's top five perceived challenges by beginning teachers were: (a) classroom discipline, (b) motivation of students, (c) dealing with individual differences among students, (d) assessing students' work, and (e) relations with parents. "Assessing students' work" was the only one not listed by the MAT teachers. One possible explanation for the difference was that all MAT participants had already listed their concerns regarding assessment while discussing the NCLB issue, and how the accountability issue had affected their job satisfaction. In other words, assessment is part of the accountability issue regarding NCLB standards. Thus, they did not list assessment in the challenges section.

The beginning teachers in McCarra's (2003) study reported one specific challenge that reflected a more recent phenomenon---accountability, which was not listed as a challenge by other researchers from prior studies (Clayton & Wilson, 1984; Ganser, 1999; Martin, 1991; Veenman, 1984). In the current analysis, MAT teachers had listed accountability as a challenge and shared about how the NCLB accountability had negatively affected their teaching. Apparently, this study revealed more details regarding how beginning MAT teachers perceived accountability issues and its challenges for them as educators, as well as how accountability had created tension between administrators and teachers. Such a finding was related to a new, highly influential educational policy (NCLB); thus, there was little discussion about this topic in previous studies.

In this study, all participants shared their thoughts about NCLB while two reported that much of their stress came from trying to improve their students' scores. The other three participants reported raising students' testing scores was not solely the teachers' responsibility, but the students as well. In fact, participants stated the accountability issue had created a challenge for them, especially those that lacked supportive administrators. In addition, in Veenaman's list, "assessing students' work" was more like creating an extra task instead of causing stress or challenges for teachers. On the other hand, MAT teachers revealed a much higher level of stress, with one participant attributing her decision to leave teaching as an outcome of the accountability issue. For instance, in Elan's case, she was held solely accountable for her students' academic performance.

Another reason might be how and why NCLB could cause such tremendous stress to MAT teachers. As one of the most well-known alternative route opponents, Darling-Hammond repeatedly made the same kind of statement in her previous studies (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Darling-Hammond 2000b)---many alternative route teachers do not know how to work effectively with students, and lack pedagogical skills to deliver their knowledge to students. She also stated that NCLB permitted new teachers possessing content knowledge, but lacking basic teaching skills, to take over middle and high school classrooms.

The findings of this study suggested that support from administrators and colleagues greatly affected how teachers perceived their and the concomitant satisfaction with their teaching career. Such a statement concurred with other researchers' findings (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). In Ingersoll and Smith (2003)'s study, student discipline and poor administrative support were listed as two of the three major challenges teachers faced. In addition, their participants suggested that unsatisfactory working conditions within the school were the roots that caused teacher shortage.

Selzer (2000) wrote that the lack of respect and support from administrators and staff affected how beginning teachers' perceived job satisfaction. Based on the findings of the present study, MAT teachers also pointed out that poor administrative support was a primary reason for their job dissatisfaction. Likewise, they declared that teaching conditions influenced their level of job satisfaction. However, the study revealed a newer aspect regarding the issue of how the lack of administrative support could become a challenge for beginning MAT teachers. When the lack of administrative support was

connected to the accountability (NCLB) issue, a great deal of stress was created for the beginning teachers.

Ganser (1999) concluded that part of teachers' challenges were attributed to general work demands instead of teaching, such as paper work. The current study was in line with that statement. MAT teachers reported they lacked training concerning general work, such as "filling out" certain forms, and being "unfamiliar" with some educational language. As one MAT teacher explained, the "alternate route program is not like traditional teacher training program." Students of the MAT program spent little time studying education and did not receive adequate training for dealing with excessive paperwork. Such a statement would provide more insight to educators regarding the training issues within alternate route programs.

Different researchers (Ingersoll, 2001; Luekens et al., 2004) revealed that other school characteristics affected teacher turnover rate, i.e. poverty and school location. The current study supported such a statement to a degree. One beginning MAT teacher revealed she felt more comfortable teaching at a school where students' culture and social class were similar to hers. Interestingly, she was the only teacher committed to staying in the teaching profession, while the other five either decided to leave the teaching profession. Such a situation brought a question concerning teachers' culture and their retention rate. How well can middle class, white teachers (are most are) teach students with a different socioeconomic class, as well as a completely disparate culture? In addition, the other three teachers (Alex, Bill, and Flora) also mentioned that they came

from families that valued education greatly---directly opposite from their students. Such cultural differences shocked them when they first began their teaching career.

Such a finding from the current study was drawn from six middle class, Caucasian teachers. However, a study concerning more diverse teachers might draw different findings. This phenomenon reflected back to the hypothesis that typical alternative route programs tended to attract more minority teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005).

Perception of Training program

In the current study, the beginning MAT teachers all exhibited a grateful attitude for the availability of their training program, especially for the opportunity for teacher licensure---thus supporting Guyton, Fox, and Sisk's thesis (1991). In addition, all six participants reported they were confident about their teaching preparation. Their confidence included trying out new teaching methods, working with students with diverse needs, working with the learning disabled, and better teaching skills. As in Guyton, Fox, and Sisk's study (1991), it was reported that AC teachers revealed more positive attitudes toward the value of their training when compared with teachers of TC programs.

However, this statement was based on MAT participants' self-perception, without any data available from teachers of TC programs. Therefore, there was a lack of empirical data to draw the conclusion that teachers of AC programs were more qualified than teachers of TC programs. In addition, the participants' self-perception also revealed how MAT teachers perceived alternate route training and the differences between it and

its TC training counterpart. These dissimilarities included the lack of student teaching for alternative route teachers, stronger content knowledge, and less pedagogical skills than TC teachers.

The participants either felt confident regarding their content knowledge or questioned the preparation given by the MAT program. However, an inconsistency exists among the participants' undergraduate major, certification subject area, and current teaching subjects. For example, as Table 1 showed, Alex taught special education, and his undergraduate training was in economics, and he is certified in four different subject areas. Such an inconsistency might explain their future career plans (of the six, five wanted to leave the teaching profession). In addition, Elan was certified to teach History but lacked a "History" background, which caused tremendous problems and often overwhelmed her. Another example was Debra. Although her undergraduate major was in English, and she currently taught English, her training was not related to her material and hence, she often felt overwhelmed. On the other hand, Cindy's undergraduate major and her lengthy work experience were in line with her subject. As a result, she was more satisfied with her job and decided to stay in the teaching profession.

The MAT program was initially established to recruit teacher candidates who already possessed content knowledge prior to their matriculation in the program. However, the Mississippi Department of Education intends to make the certification process easier, and teachers that received training from AC programs (though they might have a poor grasp of the subject) could gain their teaching license. As a result, some individuals enrolled in the MAT program lacked adequate content knowledge, causing an

undue amount of stress on their teaching and preparation for class. Content knowledge would not be a concern for teachers already possessing it in the subject they were employed to teach, but for those who lacked the requisite knowledge prior to entering the alternative route could experience great levels of stress.

These conclusions provided a new perception regarding the debate about content knowledge of TC and AC teachers. The previous studies offered no explanations addressing the content knowledge issue (Leglar, 2002; Ruckle, 2000). More specifically, when alternate route teachers teach the same subject as their college major, they showed higher levels of content knowledge. On the other hand, if they were certified to teach subjects that were different from their college major, they were more likely to feel inadequate. This phenomenon reflected a certain level of similarity in out-of-field teaching. According to Ingersoll (2003), out-of-field teaching refers to teachers that might have majored in certain subjects, but has minimal coursework and/or experience for teaching another subject. Based on the NCLB standards, every classroom teacher must be highly qualified, and out-of-field teaching runs counter to NCLB.

Wayman et al, (2003) found few perceptual differences between teachers of TC and AC programs regarding their particular training. However, in their study, AC program teachers indicated concerns about their lack of preparation, but failed to provide further information for elaboration. The current study contributed data in this area. Moreover, some teachers agreed with this assumption concerning lack of preparation and stated there was room for the MAT program to improve. All participants suggested the following improvement were needed: (a) more specific information regarding program

requirement, (b) more content knowledge courses, (c) each student should receive a mentor, (d) the certification process needs to be easier, and (e) training that is applicable for each student. Again, these findings could be perceived as guidelines for the improvement of the MAT and a method to ensure effective AC teachers graduate from the training program.

In the present study, all six participants either revealed a certain level of negativity toward NCLB or stated their lack of preparation for dealing with this issue. This supported findings from Lane, Pierson and Givner (2004). The present study found mentoring was not always available for beginning MAT teachers, a finding in line with previous research (Darling-Hammond, 1992; Riley, 2004). Even if an MAT teacher (Flora) reported the availability of mentoring support from school district, the mentor was not always able to provide services. The statement agreed with previous studies (Feiman-Nemser, 1992).

Moreover, several MAT teachers suggested the possible benefit of student teaching or internship opportunities would help decrease the lack of preparation. Such a finding also concurred with Darling-Hammond's study (2000). In addition, Johnson, Birkland, and Pesker (2005) acknowledged that length of internship varied based on different alternate route programs. Unfortunately, the MAT program selected for this study did not provide any student teaching, and several participants reported that as one of the areas that sorely needed improvement.

Attitude Toward Teaching Career

In this study, participants discussed their career plans, and three out of six wanted to quit teaching in the near future. Two wanted to quit their current job, and teach a different subject with a different student population. Only one teacher out of six decided to remain a classroom teacher. The three teachers who decided to leave teaching mentioned that teaching was too stressful. Such a finding agrees with other researchers' findings. In Marshall's (2002) study, the single most prevalent reason causing a high teacher attrition was stress: "Teaching is a stressful profession." In addition, the current study agreed with Boreen and Niday's (2000) findings, i.e. 50% of teachers quit the teaching profession.

Veenman (1984) reported that perceived problems by beginning teachers were attributed to several factors, such as beginning teachers' education background, personal characteristics, and teaching environment. However, he did not provide sufficient detail to explain how the factors caused the challenges in the first place. Therefore, one of the contributions of the current study was to provide empirical evidence to address this issue. All participants stated that the following influenced their teaching as well as their future career choice: (a) how their educational background affected their teaching, (b) job experiences (c) how personality, culture, and life experiences impact their current teaching, and (d) future career plans.

All six participants reported how their educational background had affected their teaching. As a general rule, MAT teachers had undergraduate majors in areas other than education, and such a diverse educational background positively influenced their

teaching. Furthermore, some found that when they integrated their previous educational training to their new teaching career, they elicited their students' best performance. On the other hand, those that taught dissimilar subjects tended to experience more challenges and negative teaching experiences.

Three teachers (Bill, Elan, and Flora) had undergraduate majors in communication, and decided to be licensed secondary education teachers, but taught subjects different from their major. As a result, their communication background affected their teaching style to a certain degree. For example, Bill always made sure his pupils' used a correct mathematics vocabulary in his class. Elan's undergraduate major was also in communication, which was the primary reason she entered the teaching profession. She used to think that since she had good communication skills, she would enjoy teaching. However, after beginning her career, she quickly realized communication skills were not enough for her to enjoy teaching.

In this study, age was also found as a personal characteristic that might influence MAT teachers. For example, Cindy was the only "older" participant and she was also the only that wanted to continue teaching. Such a conclusion agreed with other researchers' findings (McCarra, 2003; Walker, 1996).

When compared with other studies that investigated the retention rate of teachers from AC and TC programs, there were inconsistencies (Guyton, Fox, & Sisk, 1991; Legler, 2002; Stoddart, 1992), but this study's findings provided insight to explain the inconsistencies. In Guyton, Fox, and Sisk's study (1991), teachers from AC programs had a higher retention rate than teachers of TC programs, but in Legler (2002) and Stoddart's

(1992) studies, the results they reported were opposite. In fact, they reported teachers of AC programs had a higher turnover rate than teachers of TC programs. However, none provided an explanation for the different findings. The current study explained the situation in several ways, such as challenges the MAT teachers faced, their perception of their training, school environment, their relationship with administrators, etc. In addition, another reasonable explanation could be offered from the current study concerning the differences in AC programs. If their studies involved two different AC programs, the variety of coursework, supervision, student teaching requirements, etc might affect their retention rate.

Ruckle's (2000) described three types of candidates that were more likely to be attracted to AC programs. These three categories were (a) second-career seekers, (b) recent college graduates that decided to become teachers, and (c) new graduates that completed part of the teacher education program. The present study agreed with these findings and provided a more detailed analysis regarding the difference(s). Among all six MAT teachers, only the second career seeker had strong content knowledge; likewise, she wanted to stay in teaching. Moreover, if an instructor taught the same subject he/she had as an undergraduate, his/her content knowledge was superior when compared to instructors teaching subjects different from their major.

In addition, five had "real world" experiences, either in teaching or something else, as explained in Legler's study (2002). The findings of the present study suggested that alternate route teachers were more likely to have higher levels of academic competence than teachers of TC, as other researchers' concluded (Haberman, 2006).

Conclusion

Overall, my data was drawn from multiple sources of evidence and provided empirical evidence to resolve my problem statement as elucidated for this study. The evidence suggested that beginning teachers of AC programs faced similar challenges as beginning teachers of TC programs. The challenges were caused by several factors, such as school environment, student related factors, the type of support they received, training program, individual characteristics, etc. (McCarra, 2003; Riley, 2004; Veenman, 1984). Teachers who were employed at a school district with supportive administrators, colleagues, and other support systems (e.g., mentoring) tended to face less challenges.

In addition, this study was able to draw some new findings that previous studies had not mentioned. The accountability issue was first listed as one of the challenges that beginning teachers faced in McCarra's study (2003). However, it did not provide any explanation or details due to the limitation of research methodology. Participants in the current study revealed their negative perceptions of NCLB, and the accountability factor had created great stress for teachers, as well as creating tension between some teachers and their unsupportive administrators. One participant decided to quit the teaching profession because she was held accountable for all her students' academic performance.

This study reported that all participants supported MAT programs as the best choice for second career seekers wishing to gain teacher licensure. It also revealed that the type of alternative route training program had a certain level of impact on how beginning MAT teachers perceived challenges, and how they planned for their teaching career. The type of program was also tightly linked to MAT teachers' perception of

challenges. As mentioned earlier, the MAT program for this study appeared to have the potential for providing effective teachers, but there was still room for improvement. In addition, the fact that the MAT program allowed teachers to be licensed in more than one content area had both a positive and negative impact on beginning MAT teachers. In terms of positive influence, teachers could seek positions in more than one subject, whereas in terms of negativity, MAT teachers were not required to take more content area courses for extra licensure. In other words, if one MAT teacher candidate wanted to be licensed in more than one area, that individual needed to take more content area courses.

However, an MAT program is just one type of AC program. Thus, graduates from other programs might perceive their training differently than participants of this particular MAT program. For example, the amount of pre-classroom training and supervision (length of internship) an alternate route teacher received also affected how they perceived challenges. In this study, MAT teachers stated they needed more practical, dimension types of courses to provide them with more supervision opportunities. In addition, if student teaching was available, it would help alleviate some of the challenges they would encounter as beginning teachers. The findings suggested that MAT programs needed to offer more practical courses, as well as providing student teaching opportunities.

Although the current study did not provide any evidence to explain whether teachers from AC programs could be as effective as teachers from TC programs, the study results revealed that the type of training AC programs provided was a key factor

that played an important role regarding teachers' challenges. Such a conclusion clarified the argument between supporters and opponents of the alternate route (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). Specifically, supporters of AC programs tended to select a much higher program standard to be part of studies; on the other hand, opponents of AC programs would choose a program with less training requirements for participants in the study. As a result, these differences could be attributed to different findings. In addition, the inconsistency between teacher candidates' undergraduate major, certification subject area, and current teaching major might explain some of the challenges MAT teachers perceived.

MAT teachers' personal characteristics and life experience influenced their teaching philosophy, but not enough to draw any conclusions regarding teaching effectiveness. However, the older, second career seekers that possessed long term working experience were more likely to have stronger content knowledge if they happened to teach the same subject. In other words, MAT teachers possessed stronger content knowledge when compared to their TC program counterparts, if their subject was the same or highly related to their undergraduate major and/or job experience. However, the data provided evidence to prove that AC programs were not the panacea for teacher shortage, unless their graduates were satisfied with their teaching career. The alternative route was established as a solution for teacher shortage. Such a solution could not last if teachers did not stay in the teaching profession.

Apparently, a qualitative method made a unique contribution to the findings of this study. Only qualitative design would allow me to address my assumptions by using

various interpretive paradigms, with a purpose to understand MAT teachers' perception of challenges, the training they received, and their future career plans (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). For example, a qualitative study allowed me the opportunity to listen to Alex---the special education teacher--- talk about how little support he received from his colleagues---regular education classroom teachers.

In addition, the case study method provided the chance to gain a detailed data description of each participant I interviewed, as well as the setting of each case within contextual conditions that I observed (Yin, 2003). For instance, while Elan described her lack of parental support, I observed the argument between her and the parent, as well as the letter the parent wrote her. Access to this multiple data helped me grasp her situation, and the challenges she faced.

If a qualitative method had not been used for this study, it is doubtful that the researcher would have had such rich data with which to answer the research questions. Without the qualitative method, I would be unable to draw certain conclusion and results from the findings.

Limitation

Although the data was rich enough to support my hypothesis while allowing me to draw conclusions to answer my research questions, there were three limitations. First, the MAT teachers were selected for the purpose of convenience; thus, the effectiveness was not as strong as it would have been if they were randomly selected with larger sample. Second, there were only six participants, and they were all Caucasians, middle class, with ages ranging from 20s to 40s---not a heterogeneous sample. I have no basis to

generalize the results based on such a limited sample to all alternate route teachers. Third, my study only lasted five months and there was a need to hear more stories from MAT teachers, as well as observing them interact with people like administrators, colleagues, and parents.

Implication and Future Research

Research Implication

The results of this study clearly demonstrated that MAT teachers' training was highly related to the challenge(s) they perceived. Moreover, how their perceptions of these challenges influenced their decision to remain teachers was studied extensively in this study. Several research aspects were needed to expand an understanding of different AC programs, as well as their ability at preparing their graduates for facing challenges (Qu & Becker, 2003; Sandlin, Young & Karge, 1993).

An investigation of AC teachers' perceptions regarding their various challenges, while examining the AC teacher training program, could be profitable research; that is, the career plans of AC programs are used as a reference for future exploration. Do teachers with various demographic backgrounds (e.g., life, job experiences, and/or educational background) that graduated from the same alternate route programs, perceive their training differently or similarly, and in what way (Ruckle, 2000)? In addition, does each specific AC program have differing viewpoints, or do the programs scattered across America share the same challenges (Bucher, 1992)? Further studies are needed to investigate samples of graduates from other AC programs with more varied demographic

backgrounds, such as minority students, older second career seekers, etc (Luekens et al, 2004).

Another area that caught researchers' attention was the teaching effectiveness of AC teachers. This is especially important for the instructional effectiveness of teachers that graduated from different alternate route programs, such as the MAT program. Since there were various types of AC programs, they all varied in amount of course work, student teaching requirements, admissions criteria, etc, and thus, teachers' effectiveness might be different. Thus, there is a great need to explore and research this area more in depth, as previous findings imply very different statements of alternate route teachers' performance (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Feistrizzer & Chester, 2000).

This study has several methodological implications that can strengthen future research in the area. It would be informative to conduct quantitative studies, such as surveying large samples of AC program graduates that teach at different school settings and compare the data. In addition, more research needs to be conducted by questioning the principals of teachers that graduated from alternate route programs. These principals would be asked to reveal their perceptions of alternate route teachers' challenges, and their pre-service training and teaching effectiveness. Another type of study might involve other teachers' perceptions regarding teachers that graduated from AC programs, or their students' testing scores. If data could be collected from AC teachers' principals, colleagues, and students' scores, a multi-faceted comparison could be made.

Overall, one urgent and critical issue is how to alleviate beginning MAT teachers' challenges by provide better pre-service training, as well as increasing teachers retention

rate. This proposal needs to expand to other alternate route programs, which would make the alternative route programs not just a “quick fix” for teacher shortage, but a long term and reliable, highly qualified, alternate supplier of talented teachers.

Practical Implication

The present study suggested that a well designed MAT program, which provides appropriate pre-service training for teacher certification, can be used as a method to attract and recruit more teachers into the teaching profession. This is an important message for educators to acknowledge since most second career seekers perceive the alternative route as their best choice for receiving teaching training and gaining teacher licensure. The present study revealed that the teacher shortage phenomenon can be lessened greatly if alternative route teachers would stay in the teaching profession (Hawley, 1990). Thus, it is essential for alternate route teacher candidates to feel prepared for handling any challenges they might encounter.

It is important for AC programs to increase training quality based on addressing challenges teachers face on a daily basis. For instance, one reason for a teacher’s lack of preparation was that MAT teachers lacked student teaching experience. Thus, if MAT programs offer student teaching opportunities, it might decrease beginning MAT teachers’ challenges while increasing their teaching preparation.

In addition, this study sheds light on the relationship between alternative route programs and how they should help their teacher candidates acquire a high level of job satisfaction; likewise, how the programs could aid in keeping their teachers to stay within

the teaching profession. It lends empirical support to suggest what AC programs should do to shape their training requirements. For example, AC program might want to offer student teaching opportunities to their teacher candidates. Specifically, this study raised another important issue regarding the culture difference.

Cultural issues were mentioned by several MAT teachers, yet none addressed how their cultural competency would assist them in working with their culturally diverse students. Statistics showed there was an imbalance between student enrollment and their teachers regarding ethnicity, and the gap is growing (Sleeter, 2001). Specifically, 50 of the largest 99 school districts had more than a 50% minority student enrollment, whereas the majority of teachers were White (Bell, 2000). Ironically, most White pre-service teachers who anticipated working with children with different cultural backgrounds had very little experience or knowledge with different cultures. For instance, Schultz (1996) revealed white pre-service teachers had stereotyped beliefs about their minority students, and believed their students brought attitudes to school that interfered with education (Schultz, 1996).

Apparently, a cultural gap exists among predominantly white teachers and minority students. In addition, predominantly White teacher training institutions tend to respond slowly regarding this phenomenon, at least in terms of teacher preparation (Sleeter, 2001). There were two types of multicultural training for pre-service white teachers: community-based cultural immersion programs, and multicultural education course work. Community-based immersion programs require teacher candidates to physically reside in communities that are culturally different from their own as part of the

teaching training. Overall, teachers who experienced a community-based immersion program were more likely to bring culturally relevant knowledge to their classroom, with the program having a positive impact on their teaching attitudes toward minority students. For teacher training programs requiring teacher candidates to complete multicultural coursework, their students tended to be more aware of race, culture, and discrimination issues in their teaching environment (Sleeetr, 2001).

The current study illustrated the potential cultural gap between teachers and students, which could create communication barriers between teachers and parents. Thus, there is a need for the MAT program to provide multicultural training with the purpose of helping teachers increase their cultural sensitivity.

This particular study has important implications for anyone interested in investigating MAT teachers' content knowledge and licensure in various subjects. The results suggested that if MAT teachers' undergraduate major was the same or strongly related to their teaching licensure, they were more likely to possess strong content knowledge, and achieved a higher level of satisfaction regarding their teaching career. As a result, this is an important message for alternate route program directors when advising their teacher candidates concerning licensure content. If teacher candidates were encouraged to be licensed in the subject they were familiar with, the transition from student to teacher would be less stressful. In addition, if a teacher candidate seeks licensure in more than one subject, the MAT advisor or director should be cognizant concerning the individual's content knowledge expertise, prior to deciding how many content courses the individual should complete for licensure. With the impact of NCLB,

teachers are held accountable for their students' academic performance, and once teachers possess strong content knowledge, they would be less likely to worry about accountability issues.

The present study revealed that, compared with beginning teachers of TC programs, beginning teachers of AC programs experienced challenges that could prevent them from remaining in the teaching profession. In order to alleviate these challenges, school environments and training programs need to provide more supportive systems and more effective training.

From a school aspect, supportive administrators and colleagues could help beginning MAT teachers feel less stress. This support can be varied, such as school districts providing mentoring for newly hired teachers, or colleagues sharing teaching materials, etc. In addition, many beginning teachers' reported a distinct lack of support or respect from administrators; thus, administrative support is crucial for beginning teachers (Selzer, 2000). From the aspect of alternative route training programs, specific training needs to be provided to teacher candidates in order to prepare effective teachers, including student teaching, and making available a teaching internship before graduation. Furthermore, more content area courses need to be made available to teacher candidates.

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APPENDIX A
CONSENT LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS

April 21, 2006

Li-Ching Hung
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
Mississippi State University
Mail Stop 9705
Mississippi State, MS 39762

Dear Superintendent,

I am a doctoral student at Mississippi State University and major in Curriculum & Instruction. I would like permission to conduct research in your school district as part of the research for my dissertation requirements. Dr. Jianzhong Xu is my advisor and will be supervising my work through the study.

The purpose of this study is to understand the challenge faced by beginning MAT teachers who graduated from the MAT program of Mississippi State University. I will be interviewing and observing 2 to 3 times as well as collecting examples of lesson plans. This case study, looking into the challenge that beginning MAT teachers faced, will be helpful in improving the MAT program. The names of the teacher, individual school, and school districts will be confidential, and pseudonyms will be used.

In order for me to begin my research, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at MSU requires that a letter be written granting me permission to conduct this research in your school system. The letter of permission must be on school district letterhead. For your information, I have attached a draft of the letter that includes all of the information required by IRB.

If you need further information, I will be glad to meet with you to discuss this research in greater detail. I can be reached at (662) 324-7113, and Dr. Xu can be reached at (662) 325-2186. I will also be glad to share the results of this study with you. Thank you for allowing me to conduct this research within your school district.

Sincerely,

Li-Ching Hung

DRAFT letter for Superintendent

(District Letterhead)

Li-Ching Hung has my permission to conduct her research study in the _____ School District. I understand she will work with beginning MAT teachers who graduated from the MAT program of Mississippi State University and will not interrupt classroom instruction time.

(signature of superintendent or designee)

APPENDIX B
CONSENT LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

April 21, 2006

Li-Ching Hung
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
Mississippi State University
Mail Stop 9705
Mississippi State, MS 39762

Dear Principal,

I am a doctoral student at Mississippi State University and major in Curriculum & Instruction. I would like permission to conduct research in your school district as part of the research for my dissertation requirements. Dr. Jianzhong Xu is my advisor and will be supervising my work through the study.

The purpose of this study is to understand the challenge faced by beginning MAT teachers who graduated from the MAT program of Mississippi State University. I will be interviewing and observing 2 to 3 times as well as collecting examples of lesson plans. This case study, looking into the challenge that beginning MAT teachers faced, will be helpful in improving the MAT program. The names of the teacher, individual school, and school districts will be confidential, and pseudonyms will be used.

In order for me to begin my research, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at MSU requires that a letter be written granting me permission to conduct this research in your school system. The letter of permission must be on school district letterhead. For your information, I have attached a draft of the letter that includes all of the information required by IRB.

If you need further information, I will be glad to meet with you to discuss this research in greater detail. I can be reached at (662) 324-7113, and Dr. Xu can be reached at (662) 325-2186. I will also be glad to share the results of this study with you. Thank you for allowing me to conduct this research within your school district.

Sincerely,

Li-Ching Hung

DRAFT letter for Principal

(School Letterhead)

Li-Ching Hung has the school board and my permission to conduct her research study in _____(School). I understand she will work with beginning MAT teachers who graduated from the MAT program of Mississippi State University and will not interrupt classroom instruction time.

(signature of Principal or designee)

APPENDIX C
CONSENT LETTER TO TEACHERS

April 21, 2006

Li-Ching Hung
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
Mississippi State University
Mail Stop 9705
Mississippi State, MS 39762

Dear Teacher,

I am a doctoral student at Mississippi State University and major in Curriculum & Instruction. I am conducting a research study to gather information on the challenge that beginning MAT teachers face. Dr. Jianzhong Xu is my advisor and will be supervising my work through the study. The purpose of this study is to understand the challenges faced by beginning MAT teachers who graduated from the MAT program of Mississippi State University no longer than three years.

Participation in this research project is optional and you may refuse to participate or you withdraw from the study at any time. There is no cost for you to participate in the study, and there are no adverse effects. If you agree to participate in the study, you can refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Only Dr. Xu and I will have access to the information I collect in this study, and we will treat all of the information as confidential. You will not be identified in the data from this study and pseudonyms will be used for your name and for your school. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may discontinue your involvement at any time.

If you should have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact Li-Ching Hung, researcher, at (662)324-7113 or by e-mail at lh210@msstate.edu. In addition, Dr. Xu can be reached at (662) 325-2186. For more information about human participation in research, please feel free to contact Jonathan Miller at (662) 325-0994.

Please indicate your willingness to be in this service project study by signing your name on the attached "Teacher Consent Form" and mail it back to me.

Sincerely,

Li-Ching Hung
Researcher
Mississippi State University

Teacher Consent Form

Title of Study: Understanding The Challenges Faced by Beginning MAT Teachers

Study Site: East Webster High School, Choctaw county Weir High School, Looreville High School, West point High School, Tate County High School, and Lowndes County High School

Name of Researcher(s) & University affiliation: Li-Ching Hung & Mississippi State University

What is the purpose of this research project? To understand the challenges faced by beginning MAT teachers

How will the research be conducted?

The number of participants is expected to be 6 beginning teachers who graduated from the MAT program at Mississippi State University. The researcher will conduct 2 to 3 interviews with each participant. The first interview will be a structured interview lasting about one hour, in which the researcher will ask participants to answer questions that have been formulated in an interview guide. The other interview(s) will be an unstructured interview lasting about 45 minutes, in which the researcher will ask participants a series of questions related to what was observed in the classrooms. Observations and relevant documents will be collected.

Are there any risks or discomforts to me because of my participation? NO

Does participation in this research provide any benefits to others or myself?

The participants will help the researcher to understand the first year of teaching after graduating from the MAT program of Mississippi State University. We have conducted a number of studies with first year teachers and your participation will be a great help for us.

Will this information be kept confidential? Yes

Please note that these records will be held by a state entity and therefore are subject to disclosure if required by law.

Who do I contact with research questions? If you should have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Li-Ching Hung at 662-324-7113. For additional information regarding your rights as a research subject, please feel free to contact the MSU Regulatory Compliance Office at 662-325-5220.

What if I do not want to participate?

Please understand that your **participation is voluntary**, your **refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss** of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you **may discontinue your participation** at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date _____

Investigator Signature

Date _____

APPENDIX D

INSTRUCTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



June 26, 2006

Li Ching Hung
C&I
Mailstop 9705

RE: IRB Study #06-135: Understanding The Challenges Faced by Beginning MAT Teachers

Dear Ms. Hung:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via expedited review for a period of 6/13/2006 through 5/15/2007 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.110 #7. Please note the expiration date for approval of this project is 5/15/2007. If additional time is needed to complete the project, you will need to submit a Continuing Review Request form 30 days prior to the date of expiration. Any modifications made to this project must be submitted for approval prior to implementation. Forms for both Continuing Review and Modifications are located on our website at <http://www.msstate.edu/dept/compliance>.

Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. Please note that the IRB reserves the right, at anytime, to observe you and any associated researchers as they conduct the project and audit research records associated with this project.

Please refer to your docket number (#06-135) when contacting our office regarding this project.

We wish you the very best of luck in your research and look forward to working with you again. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at jmiller@research.msstate.edu or by phone at 662-325-5220.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan E. Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

Jonathan E. Miller
IRB Administrator

cc: Jianzhong Xu

Office of Regulatory Compliance

P. O. Box 6223 • 8A Morgan Street • Mailstop 9563 • Mississippi State, MS 39762 • (662) 325-3294 • FAX (662) 325-8776