

The Culture of Teaching and Beginning Teacher Development

By Amy Gratch

Introduction

Previous research in the area of teacher socialization has reflected the critical role of socialization experiences and teacher relationships in the retention of teachers and in the on-going development of quality teachers (Hargreaves, 1995; Bullough & Baughman, 1993; Kagan 1992; Staton & Hunt, 1992; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). In this article, I present the stories of three beginning teachers, stories told throughout the first year of teaching, focusing on what each teacher describes as the most important events and experiences. These stories are part of a larger study of beginning teacher socialization which aims at answering two big questions: What does it mean to be a teacher? And, how does a teacher become a teacher? Analysis of the three narratives selected for this paper explores these questions and provides useful insight for teacher educators in terms of improving the socialization experiences of beginning teachers. Examining the commonalities and differences in the three teachers' experiences increases understanding about how internal and external forces impact the self-concept of teachers and the choices made about teaching practice. Demands for increasing both the supply and quality of new teachers reinforces the need for this type of research.

Amy Gratch is an assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina Aiken, Aiken, South Carolina.

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Teacher socialization literature generally explores the process through which an individual becomes a part of the society of teachers. Both the functionalist and the interpretive approach to research in the area of teacher socialization emphasize external influences on teacher development. The critical paradigm emphasizes transformation, challenging the status quo, and allows space for teacher agency in the socialization process. This move reflects a general tendency seen in critical educational studies. As Michael Apple states, “In our rush toward poststructuralism, we may have forgotten how very powerful the structural dynamics are in which we participate” (Apple, 1995, p. 121). The power of external influences is thus de-emphasized in this more recent body of literature. As Zeichner and Gore (1990) point out, “researchers need to pay attention to both uniqueness and commonality in the socialization of teachers” (p. 27). This requires recognizing the influence of external forces and also looking beneath these forces and listening to teachers’ life histories in order to understand the socialization experiences of individual teachers.

This project reinforces and expands on the work of Zeichner and Gore. In addition, the analysis presented here calls teacher educators back to the need to “pay attention” to both internal and external forces in the experiences of beginning teachers. Recent emphasis on developing reflective practice in teacher education has had some positive impact on teacher development. At the same time, this focus has distracted teacher educators from the need to prepare teachers to negotiate the political terrain of teaching. Neo-Conservative reforms related to teacher accountability and standardized testing create an increasing need to develop preservice programs that prepare beginning teachers for the complex cultures of teaching.

Hargreaves’ (1995) emphasizes that relations with colleagues are critical factors in the socialization and development of teachers. These relations are commonly called “cultures of teaching.” According to Hargreaves:

The form of teacher cultures consists of the patterns of relationship among members of these cultures. It is through the forms of the teacher culture that the contents of these cultures are realized, reproduced, and redefined. (p. 85)

This article presents analysis of three beginning teacher’s stories and the complex relationships between the cultural form existing in their schools; responses to mandated education practices and development of self-concept.

Methods

In order to understand the socialization experiences of the beginning teachers, I used a qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 1988) in the constructivist-interpretive tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Several elements of the research design increase the trustworthiness of the findings presented. First, multiple methods of data collection were used in order to understand the focus of inquiry from multiple perspectives. Triangulation of the data involved analysis of interviews,

observations and documents. Second, I built an “audit trail” so that others can better understand the process that led to the outcomes I describe. This trail includes the original interview transcripts and documents, my field notes, and the large charts of unitized data used throughout the analysis process. Finally, member checks were used throughout the process. Participants have provided feedback about findings from the on-going analysis.

The original sample consisted of 38 “teachers” at three stages of their careers (12 preservice education majors during a practicum course; 16 teaching interns during their final semester of undergraduate studies; and 10 first year teachers). All participants were enrolled in a course with me during the fall of 1998. I collected data from August 1998 through June 1999 from four sources: group discussions in class meetings; document analysis; observations; and interviews. The selection of participants for observations and interviews was determined during the course of the study as categories emerged from other data sources. A participant was selected for interviews and observation when one or more potential category was a major theme in her personal narrative. I utilized the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in order to guide the study and the direction of analysis.

As categories emerged, my analysis shifted and I began to focus more fully on 6 participants, 3 interns and 3 beginning teachers. The stories being told by these 6 participants continued to touch on the themes emerging from the broader study. Once I selected these 6 participants, I used their stories to refine categories of inquiry through analysis of multiple data sources. The analysis presented in this paper involves the exploration of relationships and patterns across categories among the three beginning teachers.

Beginning teachers in the study participated in weekly 3-hour class meetings during which the first hour was spent sharing experiences (“critical incidents”) among peers from the past week and generating alternative responses to the challenges described. Each of the three participants selected for this paper was interviewed for the first time in September and again in January and then in June. The initial interview guide included two broad questions: What does it mean to be a teacher? How do teachers become teachers? Further interview questions were developed through an on-going recursive process. Each of these teachers was also observed on two occasions for 1-hour each.

Outcomes

Dana, Alice, and Carol each spent the first year of teaching in South Carolina public schools. All three taught at rural schools in which the students come primarily from working class homes. Constructing and analyzing their stories through a critical lens, captures the individual nature of the socialization experience, and illustrates opportunities for agency. This analysis also exemplifies important

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commonalties, which reinforce the deep influence of external forces (structure) in each teacher's development throughout the first year. (Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper in place of Proper Names.)

Focusing on narratives of critical incidents identified by each of the teachers, four themes emerged from the data. First, education reform policy (The South Carolina Accountability Act, PL 94-142, ADEPT: The South Carolina program for Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating the Performance of Teachers) was central to each narrative. Second, the culture of the school, in terms of relationships with colleagues and administrators, is important in descriptions of critical incidents. Third, all 3 stories refer specifically to changes in conception of self as teacher. The fourth theme identified in the beginning teacher narratives is the relationship between teacher and students. The three stories in this paper emphasize the relationships between images of self and responses to both legislation and school culture. The relationship between these factors and responses to student needs is made explicit only in Carol's narrative.

As mentioned above, recent educational literature has emphasized teacher's life history and individual agency over school context (structure) in terms of influence on teacher development. While we must be cautious not to overestimate the power of context to both enable and limit teacher development and teacher self-concept (Bullough & Baughman, 1993), the analysis presented in this paper illustrates three examples in which context has profound impact on teacher development. The impact is seen in teaching practice as well as in changed expectations for self as teacher.

Excerpts from the stories of Dana, Alice, and Carol are presented below to provide an overview of the relationship among the four themes in each teacher's experience. Through these excerpts the reader will recognize that for these teachers, teaching climate is a critical factor in responding to legislative pressures as well as in development of self-concept. The success of each teacher in terms of meeting the needs of students, is influenced by the success of the teacher in responding to the external forces mentioned above as well as the ability of the teacher to reflect on internal beliefs and expectations for self as teacher. These influences, however, are revealed through analysis but not clearly expressed in the first two narratives.

Dana: Riding the Rollercoaster

Initial Self-concept: Dana Is a Teacher

Dana Cliff spent her first year of teaching at Redding Elementary School, a rural South Carolina public school. Dana began the year in a fourth grade classroom but was moved to second grade early in the school year. Shortly after moving to South Carolina from New Mexico, Dana was hired by school district administrators to teach at Redding. The school's principal, Mr. Birmingham, was not involved in her hiring. When Dana begins her first year of teaching, she is hopeful and confident

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about her potential as a teacher. *I have always wanted to share knowledge with anyone who would listen. Teaching is sharing my knowledge and experiences and I know I am a teacher wherever I go* (September 1999). Throughout the year, when I asked Dana to talk about the critical events experienced in her teaching, she talked almost exclusively about her relationship with her principal, and her disillusionment with teaching.

The funny thing is when I came here (to South Carolina from New Mexico), I was absolutely confident that I would be a good teacher.... And in two weeks I went from being 'I can do this', 'This is wonderful', 'This is what I want to do' to 'I am not doing anything right'. (June 1999)

External Challenges from Administration and Legislation

Dana was placed in a fourth grade classroom at the beginning of the year. On the tenth day of classes, Dana was moved to a second grade class: *There was a law passed in South Carolina (lowering the student to teacher ratio in the primary grades) and they were badly over the numbers in second grade. He (Mr. Birmingham) waited until the last minute...and he told me the day before that I was being moved to second (grade) and I moved all my things the following day and I had no help.* That week, the PTA held the annual Open House during which parents/guardians are invited to the school to meet their children's' teachers. The teacher typically talks about the curriculum and the goals for the year. By this time the teachers are expected to know their students in order to talk knowledgeably with individual parents/guardians. Not surprisingly, Dana was unprepared: *My new parents wanted to talk about their children when I only had them one day. I don't even have their names straight. I could not tell them anything about their children. I had a very barren room, because I didn't have work that I could set up. And I had prepared for fourth grade.... I came off looking very inexperienced and looking foolish.* Dana described her frustration and embarrassment and explained that while reduction in class size is an appropriate goal to improve education, the mechanism for achieving this goal is *unfair for beginning teachers, always stuck with the hard positions* (October 1998).

Dana's input in our first-year teacher class shifted over the course of the first two months of school until her input focused almost exclusively on Mr. Birmingham's intense criticism. The beginning teachers were preparing for their initial teaching evaluation (required by recent state adoption of ADEPT: Assisting, Developing and Evaluating Performance in Teaching). Experienced teachers in Dana's school told Dana that she had to prepare for her observations, that the principal's evaluation has dramatic impact on the future of each beginning teacher. Recommendation for a renewed annual contract in the school system is based on the first year teacher's successful completion of the evaluation process, indicating the demonstration of the ADEPT performance dimensions. Dana admitted that she had no idea why her principal was so critical of her and she dreaded the initial evaluation. She responded

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to the pressures of ADEPT, which were reinforced by her colleagues at Redding, in a decision to practice the lesson with her students prior to the principal's formal observation. Despite the stated objective of the ADEPT assessment process, Dana had no expectation that the assessment by the principal could help her grow in her teaching.

External Forces and Loss of Self as Teacher

Dana saw her potential to grow as a teacher through interactions with colleagues. When she asked other teachers about using the Cunningham Method to teach reading, they told her simply to use the manual. When she recognized her uneasiness in working with African American students at Redding, Dana approached her mentor to ask for suggestions. When Dana's mentor suggested that Dana *can't help being racist*, Dana became too embarrassed to ask her colleagues for help. She explains that she hadn't taken time to study the teaching manuals and other resources and when she asked other teachers for help it always came back to the fact that Dana simply was not prepared to teach. Over time, feeling increasingly isolated and lacking support from colleagues of administrators, Dana's confidence in her ability to be a teacher eroded. She began to question every aspect of her teaching practice and spoke less and less frequently of the qualities she originally felt she brought to her work.

Dana's had little confidence by the time Mr. Birmingham observed her teaching for her final ADEPT evaluation. Mr. Birmingham was 15 minutes late and stayed for only 5 or 10 minutes. During the "observation," he sat at the back of the room and balanced his checkbook. His evaluation of the lesson indicated simply that there was "no concept" in the lesson. Dana acknowledges that, during the lesson, she was emotionally distraught and had a difficult time concentrating. Still, she is sure that his evaluation is entirely inaccurate. In fact, Dana admits that, again, she had taught the same lesson previously so that her students would be "gleaming." Dana's response to the combined pressure of her relationship with Mr. Birmingham and the importance of ADEPT evaluations, resulted in teaching without concern for student learning.

Loss of a Teacher

Several weeks after school has ended, Dana Cliff sits across from me at my dining room table and tells me that she is not sure if she will ever teach again. When I ask her to come up with a metaphor for teaching, she says, without hesitation, *Teaching is a roller coaster. I knew it was gonna be exciting this year, but I totally underestimated the fear and the huge ups and downs. There may be other people along for the ride, but you are totally alone and never in control of where the car goes. I ended up at the final destination like everybody, but when I got off, I was wobbly and sick*"(June 1999).

Dana says that she remembers only terror from her first year, her roller coaster

ride. She explains that her first year of teaching let her get off at the end, but she does not plan to take another ride. Dana has decided to move from the area and leave the teaching profession. I remind Dana that her vision of teaching, in August, had been all about sharing knowledge with others and she looks across my dining room table. Dana opens her mouth to respond, but then pauses and turns off the tape recorder. I see the tears in her eyes.

Alice: Getting Married

I think teaching is like marriage. You can be with someone and know them inside and out. But until you are actually committed and living with that person and knowing everything about that person you can think you know them so well, but when you are married to him, the least little thing will get on your nerves. And it is like teaching. You can prepare yourself for it until you are actually in there doing it yourself. You have no clue what it is about. I mean my student internship was such, it went from not knowing anything to internships to actually being there by myself and doing it. And that's like dating, engagement, marriage.... You walk in and your husband has dirty underwear lying everywhere. (June 1999)

Maintaining Self Concept

Alice Green spent her first year teaching in a third grade class at Dale Elementary School in rural South Carolina. Alice explains to me that she has never been married because when she takes those vows, *divorce will never be an option*. And, despite a tense first year, Alice tells me that she is looking forward to the second year of teaching. She takes her commitment to teaching seriously and divorce is not an option.

Through her first year experience, Alice says that her idea about what it means to be a teacher has changed: *(Teaching is) not all this whole deal. I used to think it was. I used to think it was everything, relationship with Principal, your relationship with co-workers, relationship with your kids, but now to me it is teaching, just being there for the children and everything for them*. Initially, Alice's perception of herself came as a surprise to me. Her interviews have consisted almost entirely of experiences revolving around Alice's difficult relationship with her Principal. Her story emphasizes the power struggle with her principal. Throughout the struggle Alice maintains a strong self-concept which she describes in terms of outsmarting her principal and the system (school mandates). Her comments about the importance of "being there" for her students begins to make sense when I recognize that her response to the principal's authority was her claim of authority over students in her classroom.

Dale School: The Culture of Teaching

Teachers at Dale Elementary School arrived at their first faculty meeting to find stacks of teacher's manuals along with students test scores arranged for each class.

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The manuals, along with overheads and other support materials were sorted for each teacher. In addition to the stacks of teaching resources, the test scores from the preceding year were displayed with each teacher's name clearly printed at the top of each list.

The stack had the teacher's name with her test scores printed out beside it. So every teacher saw every other teacher's test scores.... I said that was the most horrible thing you could do to a teacher. It should be between the teacher, the administrators and the guidance counselor. (August 1999)

Throughout the first several months of school, standardized test (PACT) scores and the Accountability Act were the central focus of Alice's concerns. In class she talked about problems with students and about problems with her principal. But the central concern in each problem was how the situation would impact her students' test scores.

When Alice began teaching at Dale, she believed her principal, Mrs. Cole, would do anything for her. It did not take long, however, for that to change. When I ask Alice about the most important event or experience of the first year of teaching, she immediately begins to describe the general climate for teachers at Dale and the evolution of her relationship with Mrs. Cole.

It started out great, I mean it was wonderful. If there was anything I wanted, in the beginning, I got it, and then something changed. I started hanging out with people who didn't like and I think that was what the change was. It's real cliquish there. It's like you have your group and I think that is what (Mrs. Cole) didn't like.... She (Mrs. Cole) called me into her office one time and told me that the people I was associating with was not very good and that I needed to look out for myself. And (she said) I need to make sure who I talked to and what I needed to do to look out for who my friends are. And she hated those teachers. I did not heed her warnings and that led to more troublesome words between the two of us.

Alice believes that her choice of friends at Dale was threatening to Mrs. Cole. Alice suggests in one interview that she be expected to *kiss (Mrs. Cole's) butt*. While Alice expresses a sense of pride in the fact that she does not do what Mrs. Cole suggests, continuing to hang out with the "clique," Alice also admits that Mrs. Cole's opinion of her is important.

In the first-year teaching class, Alice described the humiliation she experienced when Mrs. Cole walked into her room and began criticizing her teaching practice in front of one of the Teaching Assistants. Alice was angry when Mrs. Cole reprimanded her for spending too much time on Daily Oral lessons required at the beginning of each day. She explained that she could not see how the lessons could help improve test scores if students did not receive feedback on their work. She suggested that Mrs. Cole's criticism was the result of her feelings of inferiority. Alice said, *no one ever stood up to her (Mrs. Cole) before*. Alice determines that she is doing the right thing in her class and chooses to ignore Mrs. Cole's suggestions.

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In March, Alice interviewed for a position in outside sales, ready to leave teaching altogether. This action was precipitated by a run-in with Mrs. Cole.

It was right after the incident that we had where we were without water. We had to go to the middle school to use the bathroom. It got rumored that I said a bunch of stuff (to the media), that I did not say, and (Mrs. Cole) called me into her office and laid me out, I mean chewed me out from head to toe and all in-between. Told me that I was a first-year teacher and all it would take for her to do is to make one phone call to the district office and tell them that I was a fresh teacher and that she did not need me anymore. And so I cried like a baby. Just sat there and said, 'OK, OK.' And she brought up the time that she told me that I was associating with the wrong people. And told me that I was not heeding her previous warning and that bothered her. (June 1999)

Mrs. Cole held Alice responsible for news coverage that led to embarrassment for the district. From that point on, Alice says that she made it a point to *keep (her) mouth shut, stay in (her) room, not trust anyone, and to never jump back at (Mrs. Cole)*. When I asked Alice why it was so important for her to maintain a less volatile relationship with Mrs. Cole, she explained that she was afraid of losing her job. She went on to say that she did not need Mrs. Cole for support in her teaching. Alice said that this did not matter because, following Mrs. Cole's criticism related to the morning work, she never really considered going to Mrs. Cole about anything related to instruction or students' needs.

Self Concept and Meeting Students' Needs?

Alice explains that she begins the year wanting to give her students a chance to start fresh. In order to do this, Alice does not look at student test scores. She mentions that she does not really need that information anyhow, as she could tell on the first day of school how each child will do academically:

You can look at them and I did not have to match a name with a face; I could look at them once and tell which were going to be my low, middle and high kids. It's just weird; I feel psychic on that. (June 1999)

Alice believes this practice has to do with really knowing her students and disagrees when I suggest that we cannot know our students based on external characteristics. Alice makes decisions about referring students for testing and special education based on her ability to assess students' abilities "psychically." She explains how ridiculous and arduous the referral process (one consequence of PL 94-142) is for teachers. One component in the student referral process in South Carolina is ten days of documentation on behavior relevant to that referral. This evidence is significant throughout the remainder of the process, first in determining whether or not to proceed and then in deciding the appropriate action to take to help that student. Alice explains that because she knows which students need resource help and should not be in the regular classroom, she is able to create the necessary information

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to include as documentation evidence. *I just went through and did it (documented observations) all in two days. Because I knew those kids, inside and out and I did not have to watch them for 10 days. I just went through and made up dates and that stuff* (June 1999).

By June, Alice expressed enthusiasm about returning to school in the fall. When I asked what had changed, she explained:

I know the curriculum. I know I do a good job teaching and being involved with my students. Just being involved and being aware of your kids' needs. For me, that is what teaching is all about.... I think next year it (a more homey feeling) will be there because I went in and I made friends and there's friends I've made, my friendships with them will last forever, I can call them anytime day of night and they will be there. (June 1999)

Alice sees herself as a good teacher who places the needs of students first. I pose questions to encourage Alice to consider more critically the impact of her teaching practice on student learning. She continues, however, to see her responses to both the culture of the school and legislated requirements as separate from her teaching practice.

Carol: Learning to Walk

If you are not a caring person, a special person, a person that is willing to change, I feel like you won't be a very good teacher. It took me a while to get to that point because of the experiences I have had, the little talks I had with different teachers, from my Principal, my Assistant Principal, I really feel good about myself. (June 1999)

Clayton Elementary: School Culture and Self Concept

Carol was hired to teach a 2nd and 3rd grade combination class at Clayton Elementary School. While this is certainly not the ideal situation for a beginning teacher, Carol was fortunate to be at a school with a supportive and caring climate.

The people, the staff, they were there for me and helped me out.... It continued throughout my school year. Anything I needed as far as lesson plan ideas, they wanted to share their lesson plans. If I wanted to have different ideas on how to teach a lesson they were there for me. As far as any advice, as far as discipline in the classroom, I had several teachers come in and help me with that. What they did in their classroom that was very positive for the children. (June 1999)

The collaborative culture of teaching was reinforced through support from the school principal, Mr. Knight:

We had (PTA) Open House. He (Mr. Knight) told me, 'I know you can do this.... I could not believe that he was there for me, sitting in the back of the classroom. Any questions I could not answer, he was there to answer them for me. I was surprised. After Open House, he said, 'I told you that you could do it.' I was just amazed that

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I was able to stand there and answer those questions like that. It was hard, I was nervous at first and everything worked out for the best. (October 1998)

Carol describes a sense of confidence, which she gains through this on-going support.

Given this supportive environment, it is not surprising that Carol's metaphor for teaching describes an image of progress. Carol says that *teaching is learning to walk, taking your first step*. She explains that *when you learn to walk, you fall. Then you get up and try again. It is all right if you fail at first, you just don't give up. Try again and again and it gets better. And, it's OK to use something to pull yourself up and help you take the step* (June 1999).

Carol struggled during the first part of the school year, trying to teach both 2nd and 3rd grade curricula in one classroom. Her narrative reveals a shift in her teaching and her feelings about teaching following the holiday break. Carol explains that she decided over the holidays that she could not continue to teach unless she changed her *attitude*. She says that until that point she had a *big head, and did not take advantage of the experience and expertise* of her colleagues. She also says that she realized that what she wanted most was for her students to have a *good year*. She came back from break asking questions, dedicated to learning about her students, and willing to take risks in terms of instructional approaches to teaching the curriculum. Up until that point, Carol had created double lesson plans for each day.

Ifelt with me being more positive I saw a difference in my students. We started doing different activities that motivated them to want to learn.... When I started teaching science together they loved it, they were working and learning together. I started the science and then I started with South Carolina history.... It became a whole class instead of two separate classes.... When I started to do that stuff, pulling things together, and notice the difference in my class that just made me want to work harder. I saw my kids more into the lessons, willing to help each other, willing to work in groups. When I saw all this going on in my class, my whole attitude changed, I got more energy, became more positive, and my kids are enjoying this and I can do more to make it a better year even though it was like in the middle part. Overall, the year ended really well. (June 1999)

Having determined the value of revising her instructional approach in her combination class, Carol sought help from the assistant principal, Mrs. Gold. Mrs. Gold and Carol worked to combine the curriculum standards for grades 2 and 3 so that both levels would be prepared for testing. When Carol *knocked on Mrs. Gold's office door, with the South Carolina Standards in her arms, Mrs. Gold looked up and said, 'I was waiting.'*

Carol becomes increasingly willing to take risks in order to meet the needs of her students. She recognizes that she must take the time to learn everything she can about her students and then be willing to try whatever she thinks might enhance learning in her classroom. When two non-English speaking students join Carol's class in February, the growth experienced through her work with Mrs. Gold, allow

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her to meet the needs of these students along with the needs of the rest of the students in her class. Carol's commitment to recognize the individual needs of students and to try alternative teaching strategies to meet these needs along with her positive attitude help Carol turn this teaching challenge into a success.

At first I had negative feelings...but then once I got one of the little boys, and he came in and knew no English. I realized that I had to work with him and he had to learn also.... And then a couple of weeks ago, I got another Hispanic student and he did not know English at all. I just put those two kids together and basically they learned from each other because they both were there to try to learn and also mainly to learn English.... They (the school district) had someone to come in one time a week and sometimes two times a week and I would just tell her to write the Spanish word so that I could have both languages right beside each other and everyday I would just grab that object and ask, 'what is this?' and he used to tell me in Spanish and I said, 'no, tell me in English.' And he just caught on so fast because he saw me working hard with him and caring about him and being there for him. (June 1999)

This episode encompasses the lessons Carol has learned in her first year of teaching and illustrates so much of what Carol describes as essential to her teaching. When Carol tries to view the situation through a positive lens, she remembers her primary responsibility to meeting the needs of her students. She asks questions, taking advantage of collegial support in order to develop and implement appropriate instructional strategies. Carol also takes risks, trying new strategies to meet these students' needs.

I just need to prepare myself, and have a positive outlook on everything and realizing that I can do this and I can be there for my students.... I plan to stay in the classroom, each year I want to better myself. I want to become a more effective teacher; I want to be there for my students. I want to be able to give them what they need in order to provide them for society and I think that I will be a very, very good teacher. From friends and the faculty and working at a good school that will help me become a better teacher. (June 1999)

What Do These Stories Tell?

These three beginning teachers' responses to legislated mandates vary widely and are influenced by both the culture of teaching, generally, and the relationship with the principal, in particular. For Dana, education reform pressures and the school culture have a powerful negative impact on her self-concept. Dana's response to the required evaluation of beginning teachers illustrates her insecure relationship with her Principal and her focus on following the letter of the law without consideration of implications for teaching and learning. Dana does not find opportunities for critical agency and her actions therefore serve to reproduce the power structure in the school.

Alice's story is one of resistance. One example of her resistance is the circumvention of the mandated steps in referring a student for Special Education

services. While she believes she is considering student needs, Alice's actions do not seem to redefine school culture or improve teaching practice. Instead her actions reinforce the tension between the administration and the teachers and serve to de-emphasize the importance of the students in that school.

Accountability pressures overwhelm Carol early in the year, but colleagues and administrators encouraging her to become a successful teacher surround her. When she revisits her expectations for herself as a teacher and recommits to helping students, the legislated curriculum and standardized testing become tools which can be supplemental to a broad teaching and learning program. For Carol, the culture of teaching in her school provides support for handling the pressures of school reforms. This support seems to provide space for Carol to reflect on and develop both her self-concept and her teaching practice.

Intersection of Four Themes

The three stories presented above illustrate a complex relationship between the culture of teaching, responses to legislation, teacher's self-concept, and meeting the needs of students. In Dana's school she is isolated, does not find support to help her prepare to teach the new curriculum standards or the support and guidance expected from a mentor in the ADEPT program. For Dana, the new standards and pressures related to testing are shadowed by her overwhelming concern about her principal's power to destroy her career. Dana works in a culture of isolation in which she loses sight of her original teaching goals.

Alice, on the other hand, finds herself in a culture of balkanization in which the "clique" of teachers stands in opposition to the Principal. While Alice's story suggests some fear about the power of her Principal to impact her future, the culture of the school helps her maintain the appearance of confidence. Alice is proud of the fact that she does not do what her Principal suggests. This demonstration of rebellion, however, does not appear to be connected to concerns for what is best for her students. Alice's focus of concern is challenging authority rather than providing learning opportunities for students.

Carol benefits from a supportive school community. For Carol, pressures from ADEPT and the Accountability Act are negotiated with the help of colleagues and administrators and create opportunities through which she becomes an effective teacher. When she recognizes that she is not happy in her work, Carol turns to the support available and finds avenues through which to improve her teaching. The school culture helps Carol respond to external pressures in ways, which will benefit her students as well as her self-concept.

Dana's daily conflict with her Principal reflects the overall isolation she experiences during her first year and centers around ADEPT requirements mandated by the state. The pressure from these external forces impedes Dana's ability to take responsibility for either her student's learning or her own self-concept. Alice's yearlong battle with Mrs. Cole reinforces her focus on and commitment to holding

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her ground. While Alice describes her pride in standing up to authority (Mrs. Cole and reform mandates), she has learned to shut the door to her room in order to maintain control of her students. The climate in her school impacts Alice's perspective decreasing her concern for the success of individual students. Relationships with colleagues, administrators and students are important in Carol's development. But these relationships are made valuable through their positive impact on Carol's self-concept and on her ability to be a more effective teacher. The culture of teaching at Clayton encourages growth and a forward-looking concept of self as teacher. In addition, this atmosphere helps Carol respond to accountability pressures and find mechanisms for using external factors to help meet the needs of her students.

Shifting the focus of analysis from external pressures to more internal forces provides further understanding of influences on meeting needs of students. For Carol, the supportive community in which she works seems to allow her to place emphasis on self-reflection and personal growth. For Carol, the teacher she is becoming places the needs of students at the center of instruction. External pressures do not distract from, but provide experiences for, critical reflection and teacher growth. For Dana, the first year of teaching challenges her preconceived notions of what it means to be a teacher. Negative evaluations by her Principal override all self-confidence. The Principal's harsh criticism and his unwillingness to provide guidance even when asked overwhelm Dana. She becomes unable to reflect critically on her teaching practice, convinced that she simply cannot teach. Development of a positive self-concept is impossible for Dana who is unable to think about knowing her students and implementing the curriculum.

Like Dana, the negative climate in Alice's school influences her self-concept and her practice of critical reflection. Alice's narrative reveals a complex interaction between responses to external forces and changing internal practices. While Alice and some of her colleagues do challenge required practices, Mrs. Cole does not permit teacher voice in discourse regarding school practices. She thus maintains power. Alice finds that shutting her door allows her to experience a sense of power through controlling her students. Alice reflects, not on teaching practice and student learning, but on her ability to subvert school policy. When describing her sense of self, Alice focuses on her relationship with her Principal. It is clear in these stories that the culture in which each beginning teacher works is closely related to development of self-concept. The importance of meeting the needs of students is related to the complex intersection of internal and external forces in each teacher's experience.

Implications

The relationships among the themes identified in this study are complex. Further research is needed to better understand these relationships. The information provided through analysis of these three narratives, however, does reveal ways in which teacher preparation programs can better prepare teachers for early socializa-

tion experiences. Through developing the skills and attitudes needed to take advantage of socialization opportunities, highly qualified beginning teachers are more likely to continue to develop professionally and to remain in teaching. These teachers' stories suggest that while there may be opportunities for agency within the structure of schools, beginning teachers must develop skills in order to take advantage of these agentic moments. Teacher education programs must assist in this development of skills.

Teacher education programs need to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to develop relationships with school personnel in which there are opportunities to discuss teaching practice. Developing such relationships requires more in-depth participation in school setting throughout teacher preparation. Field experiences that allow pre-service teachers to meet with grade level teams would provide better understanding of collaborative teacher practices. In addition, preservice teachers will benefit from examination of legislation related to education and schools; hearing from practicing teachers and others about the actual impact of these mandates; and, participating in critical discussions with teachers, parents, and peers about teaching practice in light of these regulations. Teacher preparation programs must be structured to provide opportunities to develop skills, which support positive socialization during the initial years of teaching.

Educational legislation related to accountability pressures is an increasingly loud voice and powerful force in schools. Beginning teachers need to understand their rights and responsibilities and have the communication skills necessary to negotiate this "high-stakes" terrain. Examining these stories suggests teacher educators consider the following points:

- u Teacher education must address more directly the internal question, "Who do I want to be as a teacher?" and the external questions, "What do I need to know?" (beyond teaching methods and curriculum content).
- u Beginning teachers need to continually examine and reconstruct their images of which they want to be as teachers. Teacher education must include opportunities to develop the skills needed for this practice.
- u Various external forces have created school climates that limit space and support for reflective practice. Teachers, therefore, must enter the profession with a personal commitment to this practice.
- u Being a teacher requires the ability to negotiate the political terrain of schools. Beginning teachers need to develop the skills and gain the knowledge needed to communicate with colleagues and administrators and evaluate and respond to external pressures.
- u Further critical discussion about the impact of the culture of teaching and external pressures in this age of accountability is needed. In particular,

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these external factors must be examined both in terms of their impact on the internal evolution of a teacher's self-concept and on the development of effective teaching practices.

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