Navigating stress in public education: A personal reflection and narrative study of my closest relationships in teaching

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By  Stephen I. Smith

Entitled
NAVIGATING TEACHER STRESS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: A PERSONAL REFLECTION AND NARRATIVE STUDY OF MY CLOSEST RELATIONSHIPS IN TEACHING

For the degree of  Master of Science in Education

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Approved by:  Janet Alsup  7/19/2016

Head of the Departmental Graduate Program  Date
NAVIGATING TEACHER STRESS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION: A PERSONAL REFLECTION AND
NARRATIVE STUDY OF MY CLOSEST RELATIONSHIPS IN TEACHING

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

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by

Stephen I. Smith

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“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” – Aristotle

For my daughter, Avery Katherine Smith, whose influence she may never fully know.

You are my baby girl. I will do all I can to show you the joy of imagination, teach you the value of knowledge, and give you the means to pursue your passions, just as so many have done for me.
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“Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.”

– Robert Collier

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ABSTRACT


This study originally intended to explore the various effects of burnout – defined by the researcher as the steady decline of joy and increase of stress associated with teaching – on secondary school teachers. Using narrative inquiry, the researcher’s story and that of three other male eighth grade junior high school teachers close to him shaped the core of the study. Students the researcher taught in a first year undergraduate course exploring teaching as a career were also surveyed to look for any possible link between preservice teacher enthusiasm and the harsh realities of teaching. A question addressed was if preservice teachers were prepared enough. What emerged became less about the effects of burnout and more about the unique exploration of the joys and stresses associated with teaching among the researcher and three educators close to him at a time when the current critical eye on education has led to diminished numbers in teacher education programs, including the undergraduate program of the surveyed preservice teachers in which the researcher was an instructor.

Narrative inquiry allowed the teachers to recall their experiences in education and provide a framework for study. Teachers were initially surveyed and then
subsequently interviewed. Follow up interviews took place after the researcher compiled the opening interviews. Preservice teachers completed a one-time voluntary survey at the conclusion of their teacher preparation course taught by the researcher. Common threads emerged among the stories, and while all have followed their own paths, the lived experience of their joys and stresses highlight the reality of teaching and at times mirror the hopes and fears of preservice teachers. Some of the more challenging components of teaching, such as classroom management and excess hours spent working outside of the classroom, as described by the teachers interviewed were not as concerning to the preservice teachers surveyed. Underestimation of such challenges by either preservice teachers or their teacher education instructors could be a contributing cause of teacher attrition, and further research in this area is needed to draw more concrete conclusions. This narrative study serves as a teaching guide through experience and commentary on the realities of teaching junior high school in a diverse school corporation located near a major university in Indiana.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Educational Passions

Passion was a word used frequently by the practicing teachers and preservice teachers in this study. It is one of the necessary and critical tools needed to succeed in education. Day (2004) wrote “passion is associated with enthusiasm, caring, commitment, and hope, which are themselves key characteristics of teaching” (p. 12). On the whole, I have always considered myself a very passionate person, especially with respect to education. My passions have taken me down varied paths in education. The same can be said for the passions of the three educators interviewed for this study, just as the preservice teachers who will one day follow in our footsteps believe their passions will take them on varied journeys.

I left Gibson Junior High School\(^1\) after my eighth year of teaching to pursue a master’s degree at Purdue University, seeking to serve education in a new way. My role in education changed, but my passion for it, much like the three teachers interviewed, has not diminished. One interviewed educator left teaching after 12 years at Gibson in the Grant School Corporation, but has continued on in the field of education as a vice principal and athletic director, and most recently, a building principal in a much more

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\(^1\) Gibson is a pseudonym, as are any other references to secondary schools or school corporations in this study.
rural setting than Gibson. A second teacher still hopes to teach until he retires, having already completed 14 years of teaching in the GSC. A third teacher spent 39 years within the GSC before retiring but still closely follows the shifts and trends of the educational landscape through his connection to former colleagues, student teachers, and the teacher’s union. Despite the struggles and demands on education, we all have persevered in the field, in our own way passionately committed to education and our students.

For the preservice teachers in this study, they have been driven toward teaching through a perceived passion which they were able to explore further during their initial classroom field experience in the undergraduate course that I taught. Most chose to continue the pursuit of teaching, wanting to make a difference in the lives of students, either by teaching for a lifetime or finding other ways to contribute to education, such as administration. Others discovered that teaching was not their passion and planned different pursuits in search of their calling.

From both a personal and professional perspective this study became a passion project for me. I have lived the experiential passion of pursuing and loving my secondary school teaching career, largely as an eighth grade English teacher at Gibson. Twice, however, I took a leave of absence from that position and pursued other interests to examine if a greater passion existed elsewhere. Stress and anxiety from the pressures of teaching sparked my decision to take time off after my first two years. During that initial leave I quickly discovered how much teaching meant to me, and I returned the following school year, renewed and energized. The second and final leave was not a result of
questioning my passion for teaching, but rather questioning if I was best serving
education by teaching junior high school English. I had loved my three opportunities to
mentor student teachers along with mentoring various early field experience
undergraduate students. An opportunity arose that allowed me to supervise and
instruct these students in higher education while I pursued my master’s degree in
curriculum and instruction full time. It was one I felt I could not pass up.

Over two semesters I served as a university supervisor, observing and mentoring
student teachers in the field. My primary role and greatest joy as a graduate assistant,
however, came from five semesters teaching EDCI 101, a course in which preservice
teachers had the opportunity to gain their first field experience in the classroom. At
times my passion for these assistantships captured my attention so intently, that I
struggled to focus on my own thesis writing prior to and after formulating a true
research question. Writing about my educational experiences did not seem as beneficial
to my students as teaching and mentoring them did. But born from this distraction came
a strong desire to explore how much my experiences in education have shaped me and
how those experiences could help other educators.

The initial research question that drove this study was: Why do teachers suffer
burnout, and how do they deal with it? I sought to understand the impact of burnout –
initially defined in this study as the steady decline of joy and increase of stress
associated with teaching – on secondary school teachers. Burnout is also “Recognized as
a prolonged exposure to emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, often
accompanied by insufficient recovery, resulting in previously committed teachers
disengaging from their work” (Steinhardt, Smith Jaggers, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011, p. 420).

Stress plays a key role in teacher burnout. It is reported that 20 to 25 percent of teachers frequently experience stress in their daily teaching (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013, p. 12). Kipps-Vaughn defined teacher stress as “Negative, unpleasant emotions, such as tension, anger, or depression as a result of some aspect of their work” (p. 12) and further noted that absenteeism, turnover, and early retirement are results of stress, all of which negatively impact the school environment and students’ ability to learn.

I wanted to explore how the various stresses placed on educators affected their teaching desire and effectiveness. Were they experiencing burnout? Was it burnout that led Mr. Connors\(^2\) to pursue administration and leave teaching? What drives Mr. King to continue classroom teaching? How did Mr. Smith\(^3\) survive 39 years, particularly the final few, as more and more pressures mounted from outside of the classroom? As an instructor of preservice educators, I also wanted to explore any connection to these experiences and the perceived joys and stresses of the job from the perspective of those not yet teaching in their own classrooms, and in some cases not fully committed to the field of education. Were these students being misguided with respect to the realities of teaching? And if so, is that a possible cause of high attrition of teachers within the first five years on the job?

Enrollment in teacher education programs is already down, many believe due to the increased external demands on teachers. Through my close relationship with the

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\(^2\) Pseudonyms are used for all educators who participated or were named by participants in the study.

\(^3\) Mr. Smith is the lone exception to pseudonyms, having given permission to use his true name due to his retirement and relationship with the researcher.
three teachers interviewed and as an instructor of preservice educators, I wove my own story into their narratives. As I developed the questions I wanted to ask in my interviews and surveys, it became clear my initial research question had morphed into something that went beyond what causes burnout. The question that emerged more closely resembled: Are teachers prepared to teach, and what causes attrition? Change is often the case in inquiry based studies, as “Narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). My research constantly evolved, and it eventually became an educational narrative that showed how much you have to dedicate to this profession to make it count; a narrative of the consequences of that dedication; a narrative that realized passion, while required, will not be enough; a narrative that showed the balance of joys and struggles; and ultimately a narrative about survival.

Years of experience separate all participants in this narrative, but the understanding of the need for passion in this currently polarizing profession binds us. I was left to wonder, does that passion slowly leave us through years of the grind that is teaching? For some it does. My ultimate hope is that for most, it does not. From my own personal experience, my passion to teach in a junior high school classroom was replaced by another educational passion – the opportunity to teach and mentor preservice teachers in higher education. I have attempted to weave a narrative exploring the realities of teaching in the hope that it might serve as an alternative to the litany of
how-to teaching guides. This is intended to function both as a research study on
teaching and as a narrative guide for those who believe teaching is truly their passion.

1.2 Why Narrative Inquiry?

I have always loved stories - both fiction and nonfiction. I feel at my best when I
read, write, teach, or tell stories. Through the qualitative research of narrative inquiry, I
felt I could best utilize my passion for story and incorporate that passion into a study
that offers insight into the variety of educational experiences of practicing and
preservice teachers. Dewey (1938) stated that examining experience – how present
experience interrelates to past and future experiences through interaction and
continuity – is the key to education. In order to best examine the wealth of experiences
of the educators involved in this study, narrative inquiry was key to making meaning of
the stories.

My own narrative experience forms the central component of this study, but the
many lived experiences of the other participants allowed for the development of a
connected overall narrative. Throughout the study, it is important to remember that
both practicing and preservice teachers are, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe,
“living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as
they reflect upon life and explain themselves” (p. 4). While using narrative inquiry, I was
faced with the So what? and Who cares? questions, left to wonder if this personal
passion of mine was relevant to the interests of others in education. Could this inquiry
study make a difference? I have attempted to bring out the value of my own life experiences and those of the teachers I interviewed.

As a former English teacher and lifelong lover of literature, it only seemed natural on a personal level to use narrative inquiry as the primary research method. However, there were myriad professional reasons as well. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), drawing upon their own influence of Dewey, wrote that experience, both lived and told, forms the essence of narrative inquiry. As education and educational studies consist of experiences, they believe in the value of studying those experiences narratively as a way of understanding and making meaning of experience. They further stated that “Narrative inquiry always has a purpose, though purpose may shift, and always has a focus, though focus may blur and move” (p. 115). As this study evolved, so did the initial research question and in part the study’s overall purpose and focus, shifting away from entirely focusing on teacher burnout and instead on examining my own lived experiences as connected to the practicing and preservice teachers in this study in an attempt to better understand how to improve teacher education.

Through storytelling, we live others’ experiences; it is through experience that teachers gain a better understanding of their students and their own philosophies toward teaching. All practicing teachers and preservice teachers used for this study had stories to tell based on their experiences – be they many or few. Without those stories, these teachers would only be numbers in a statistical formula, another part of the assembly line mentality that is crippling public education. I used some statistical information in the study, based primarily on the surveys of preservice teachers as there
is immense value in quantifiable data, but my focus was on the value of the true nature of these stories, the ever changing narrative written as each teacher experienced or recalled another joyful or stressful moment in education. I used a variety of field texts associated with narrative inquiry, most notably autobiographical writing and teacher stories as constructed from field notes and interviews.

Narrative inquiry is not without critique, as even its proponents realize. As a narrative researcher, I am collecting stories of others, and it is a powerful responsibility to accurately relate those stories as I attempt to draw meaning from each one. Barone (1995) recognized the inherent suspicion in educational storytelling, particularly in telling another person’s story, due to the embedded power relationships and concerns with the researcher’s ability to accurately and honestly retell the stories. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) noted that “Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability” (p. 7). The absence of these criteria can draw scrutiny. While heavy proponents of narrative inquiry, they respect its critics and go on to point out concerns with this research method and wrote: “Falsehood may be substituted for meaning and narrative truth by using the same criteria that give rise to significance, value, and intention. Not only may one ‘fake the data’ and write a fiction but one may also use the data to tell a deception as easily as a truth” (p. 10).

As a result of these concerns, it is essential to maintain accuracy and not succumb to any such desire to create, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described, a “Hollywood plot” through narrative smoothing. I am acutely aware that my own
questions addressed to the teachers could influence such a path if I had become too focused on a directed plot for this narrative. However, just as my research question evolved over time, so did this study’s plot; it only truly began to write itself as I examined each story. While I had a goal in mind which might have influenced the direction of my questioning – both initial interview questions and follow up questions – these stories are true as described by the teachers, observed in my own experiences, and at times collectively shared with them through our own interactions.

I focused on the practicing teachers’ experiences with the joys and stresses of teaching throughout their careers. Through the undergraduate course I taught, I observed preservice teacher passion and expectation for the profession, attempting to capture a glimpse of their hopes and fears through semester long discussion, careful reading of their work, and end of the year surveys. Through a narrative approach, I sought to tell the stories of the practicing teachers and explore the expectations of preservice teachers, intertwining my own lived experiences as a public school teacher and university teacher educator. I was the bridge between these gaps of experience. My relationship with and connection to the participants in this study was a critical component. I needed to relate my own story, lived before and during this study. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote that narrative inquiry is strongly autobiographical, but also understood the collaborative process involved in narrative inquiry when they stated, “We see ourselves in the middle of a nested set of stories – ours and theirs” (p. 63).
My story as an educator has demonstrated my many identities, as have the stories of the other teachers interviewed. As defined by Gee (2000), identity exists any time we can be identified as a “kind of person” (p. 99). I entered my secondary teaching career an optimist and for a brief time left it as a disillusioned soul. I once viewed myself as a career secondary school teacher prior to my pursuit of a newfound passion of university level work with preservice teachers. I have been viewed through many identities in education, including – teacher, coach, colleague, mentor, supervisor, and instructor. As an educator, I have attempted to understand myself within the scope of each identity, many of which overlapped. Alsup (2006) stated the importance of identity development, most notably of understanding what types of discourse support professional identity development in teacher preparation courses. As an instructor in preservice education, I felt my own educational narrative and these many identities lent themselves well to the courses I taught.

I sought to incorporate my stories as they related to the scope of this study and interacted with the other teachers I interviewed. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stated, “When one engages in narrative inquiry, the process becomes even more complex...The two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (p. 4-5). My stories not only often related to those of the other teachers, but I had direct knowledge of experiences recounted by them. I was very much a part of the process.

By examining my own personal struggle with the joys and stresses of teaching and that of three other educators whose own experiences have uniquely directed them,
I felt I would be able to construct a narrative that highlighted the impact of the pressures of the teaching profession. As a preservice teaching instructor, I could also reflect on the course I taught and my own teaching methods and consider whether or not these future educators had been given adequate initial preparation to pursue teaching. For decades, teachers – those who serve education more closely than anyone else – have been ignored in the process of educational reform. Pappas and Tucker-Raymond (2011) wrote that teachers are left out and rendered voiceless in educational policymaking. I used narrative inquiry to explore stories of teaching and provide an avenue for the teacher voice that is too often silenced and ignored. My connection to those stories unified them, but these stories belong to all of us.

1.3 Past Research and Current Trends

The field of education, public education more distinctly, has come under heavy fire in recent years. Pressures have mounted on classroom public educators, often from those who wish to privatize the American education system, turning a system that has long been regarded as a basic public right into a for-profit enterprise. A push to achieve at a higher level on standardized tests, evaluations that now determine pay, classroom management concerns, devaluing teachers as professionals, competition instead of collaboration, attacks on teacher unions, and a bevy of other stresses have contributed to a nationwide decline in university teacher education enrollment and increase in teacher attrition. Once revered, teachers are no longer highly valued.
Teachers experience mounting stress as a result of these pressures. Finding qualified educators who are willing to withstand the attack on public education has never been a greater challenge. Some recent studies indicate that national fears of a teacher shortage should be unfounded, and have reported an increase in the number of new teachers entering the workforce (Aragon, 2016; Ingersoll, Merrill & Stuckey, 2014). However, many school officials have claimed otherwise, and the same studies have recognized this. Since 2015, seven states, including Indiana, have founded task forces to address teacher shortages (Aragon, 2016). Educator fears are given merit when examining declining enrollment in teacher education programs over the past five years. Aragon (2016) included U.S. Department of Education data that showed since teacher education enrollment was first reported in 2008-2009 at 719,081 students, the number had drastically declined to 465,536 in 2013-2014, a drop of 35 percent. At Purdue University where I have been a graduate teaching assistant, numbers have steadily dropped in teacher education programs as evidenced by offering fewer sections of education courses with fewer students in each section.

As a result of declining enrollment, The Indiana Department of Education founded The Blue Ribbon Commission in 2015 to address teacher shortages and other educational issues (IDOE, 2016). Using the same U.S. Department of Education report as Aragon, the Blue Ribbon Commission reported a 50 percent decline in enrollment in Indiana teacher education programs from 2009 to 2013. Between 2012 and 2013, an eye-opening 31 percent of the decline occurred, reducing the number of enrollees from 13,029 to 8,991. Since enrollment in teacher education peaked in 2008, Indiana’s three
major teacher universities – Ball State University, Indiana University, and Purdue University – have all recently addressed significant concerns with teacher shortages. Teacher licensure, as would be expected, saw similar drops in Indiana. But the drop in teacher licensure would indicate that alternative teacher education programs were not responsible for the decline in university teacher education enrollment, as those teachers would also sought licensure. The sharp decline in teacher enrollment has put higher education on alert, seeking new ways to entice future teachers into the field.

It has been suggested that teacher preparation is insufficient in providing preservice teachers with all of the necessary skill and knowledge to be successful; some of that knowledge must can only gained in the field (Ingersoll, 2012). Proper preparation is essential, however, as those who are adequately prepared are more likely to continue teaching. Dewey (1938) wrote that in order for preparation to be truly effective, the student must remain in the present and avoid future projections in order to get everything possible out of the present experience. Ingersoll, Merrill, & May (2014) discovered pedagogical preparation is one of the most effective factors in teacher retention. Their findings indicate knowing how to teach is more important than knowing what to teach, refuting critics of the necessity of pedagogical instruction to teacher qualifications. It is important to have quality teachers in education, and pedagogical training is one of the keys to establishing that quality. “Those with more training in teaching methods and pedagogy – especially practice teaching, observation of other classroom teaching and feedback on their own teaching – were far less likely to leave teaching after their first year on the job” (Ingersoll, et al., 2014, p. 1).
Failure to fully prepare preservice teachers through pedagogical instruction can be a factor in burnout. Teachers, particularly those within their first few years of teaching, can experience emotional exhaustion – the most common cause of burnout – as a result of expending all their energy on teaching (Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007, p. 918). The intense pressure of teaching can cause increased stress levels. Stress will occur in teachers when they feel threatened by the weight of demands and lack appropriate coping resources to handle those threatening demands (Steinhardt et al., 2011). Fives et al. (2007) wrote student teacher vulnerability to burnout could be due to a lack of coping skills (p. 918). Other past studies have indicated preservice teachers, whether they are in early field experiences or student teaching, have the potential to experience burnout (Fimian & Blanton, 1987; Gold & Michael, 1985). Burnout could also lead to depression, as Steinhardt et al. (2011) wrote, “Emotional exhaustion is the central component that makes burnout ‘real’ to the teacher and serves as the emotional vector translating feelings of stress into depression” (p. 426).

Teacher attrition can be attributed in part to increased stress levels and the possibility of burnout among student teachers and teachers within the first few years of teaching. While field experiences and the student teaching component are essential in teacher preparation courses, those experiences are not enough to keep teachers from leaving or experiencing burnout. Teachers must have valid classroom instruction to draw connections between the field experiences and classroom theory and be as fully prepared as possible to face the increasing demands of teaching.
School corporations struggle to retain teachers. Over the past two decades, first year teachers leaving the field has increased by one-third (Ingersoll, 2012). Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014) noted that 45.3 percent of first year teachers left due to “dissatisfaction with any of a variety of school and working conditions, including salaries, classroom resources, student misbehavior, accountability, opportunities for development, input into decision making, and school leadership” (p. 25-26). Even more teachers left after just five years in the profession as past and current research supported. Ingersoll & Smith (2003) surmised 40 to 50 percent of teachers leave within five years and Perda (2013) reasserted this with a more concrete number, concluding 41 percent will leave in that five year window. Kopkowski (2008) wrote that The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future indicated a 50 percent increase in teachers leaving the field over the past 15 years. The statistics are sobering; teachers are not being retained and new teachers are not flooding the market to replace them.

There is no absence of possibilities as to why teachers leave. Are other professions experiencing similar retention issues? Research indicates no; Ingersoll (2012) reported teachers show “relatively high turnover compared to many other occupations and professions, such as lawyers, engineers, architects, professors, pharmacists and nurses” (p. 49). This data would also suggest then that it is likely not a generational issue. Are university teacher preparation programs truly insufficiently preparing future teachers? Or is it simply that the nonteaching requirements placed on educators have become so arduous, that is no longer worth the intense time commitment, and no amount of instruction can prepare new teachers for this reality? Emphasis on
standardized testing has required more teaching to the test and less classroom
instructional freedom. Teacher pay has always been on the low end of the professional
pay scale; now merit pay has threatened quality pay even more. Teachers cannot just
focus primarily on their classroom teaching anymore. Now more than ever, these
outside stressors place a greater demand on the profession while the very respect given
to the profession of teaching has faced scrutiny.

Those who would want the public to believe the American education system is
broken are primarily those who seek to demean public education and take financial or
political advantage of its privatization. A former assistant secretary of education in the
George H. W. Bush administration, Diane Ravitch changed course and became one of
the leading critics of the reform movement. She has been sharply critical of President
George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind and President Barack Obama’s Race to the Top
initiatives, both of which relied too much on standardized testing and were influenced
far too heavily by power players in the effort privatize education. Ravitch (2011) wrote
that the material taught in today’s classrooms and seen on standardized tests is far
more challenging than anything an average student encountered decades ago. While
she did not decry the material as too challenging, she indicated using old methods to
evaluate these students and their teachers was far too subjective. She added, “Every
time I hear elected officials or pundits complain about test scores, I want to ask them to
take the same tests and publish their scores. I don’t expect that any of them would
accept the challenge” (p. 44).
This reform movement is more a “corporate reform” movement interested in transforming public education into an entrepreneurial sector, according to Ravitch (2011, p. 19), who identifies major power players in this business model as the massive Gates Foundation, American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), Better Education for Kids, National Council on Teacher Quality, Teach for America, and even the U.S. Department of Education to a name a few. These organizations have created a “false crisis narrative to privatize” public education (Ravitch, 2011, p. 9).

The false narrative has led to an easy acceptance of numbers that are not accurate. Both Waiting for “Superman” director Davis Guggenheim as well as former chancellor of Washington, D.C. public schools, Michelle Rhee misinterpreted numbers from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the only authoritative measure of academic performance over time (Ravitch, 2011). They incorrectly reference numbers that indicate students are woefully undereducated and cannot read, when in fact numbers show a continued increase in achievement (Ravitch, 2011).

Public education has wrongly taken the blame for a great number of issues, most notably a lack of global competitiveness. Bracey (2003) pointed out that in 1957 when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, education was attacked for lacking nationally in science and mathematics, yet it was not lauded when we landed a man on the moon in 1969. Since the National Commission on Education published A Nation at Risk in 1983, public education has faced even greater scrutiny. Bracey’s 2003 reflection on A Nation at Risk 20 years after its publication also noted the recession of the 1980s as an example when education wrongfully took the fall but was not recognized when the economy
soared to number one in the world in 1993. “The National Commission tightly yoked the nation’s global competitiveness to how well our 13-year-olds bubbled in test answer sheets. The theory was, to be kind, without merit” (Bracey, 2003, p. 617).

Bracey’s scathing attack on the report also noted that it included misleading and potentially fabricated information. The report was done to push forward a political agenda. It is now over 30 years since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, but what Bracey wrote about it and the intentions of those who seek to cripple public education still rings true:

> Alas, nothing else is new and, indeed, we must recognize that good news about public schools serves no one’s reform agenda— even if it does make teachers, students, parents, and administrators feel a little better. Conservatives want vouchers and tuition tax credits; liberals want more resources for schools; free marketers want to privatize the schools and make money; fundamentalists want to teach religion and not worry about the First Amendment; Catholic schools want to stanch their student hemorrhage; home schooling advocates want just that; and various groups no doubt just want to be with ‘their own kind.’ All groups believe that they will improve their chances of getting what they want if they pummel the publics. (2003, p. 621)

The scrutiny facing public education is causing an identity crisis among those who have a passion for the profession. Faced with a desire to help young people but feeling unable to do so, teachers are either quitting the profession early or turning away from it before they even start. University teacher education has attempted to develop teacher identities in early education courses through traditional exploratory papers such as an educational autobiography or educational philosophy. These papers explore past educational experiences by preservice teachers and how those experiences have helped them identify with existing teacher philosophies. Alsup (2006) suggested these types of
assignments are not enough, that a transformative discourse must occur for the
individual attempts at professional identity to truly have value: “Making such
experiences explicit in the form of narratives, metaphors, and philosophy statements,
for example, and then critically analyzing one’s developing personal pedagogy, is
essential to professional identity formation and the making of a good teacher” (p. 7).

A balance of theory and practice is attempted in these teacher education courses,
but something, perhaps a better understanding of identity, must be missing as
preservice educators either do not stick with the program or leave teaching within a few
short years of joining the profession. Understanding both personal identity and
professional identity and we navigate among our own identities is critical to successful
teaching. Gee (1989) wrote “a Discourse4 is a sort of ‘identity kit,’ which comes
complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often
write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (p. 7). He continued
by adding that since Discourses are not bodies of knowledge, they cannot be taught.
Gee recognized being a teacher as a Discourse. Therefore it is not possible to teach one
how to be a teacher, but rather it is possible to teach the body of knowledge that makes
up teaching (Gee, 1989, p. 7). Using this philosophy in university teacher education
would allow preservice teachers an opportunity to take the knowledge gained about
teaching and discover how to be a teacher through their own experiences. Gee
recognized the near impossibility of such a task when he wrote that middle class
Discourses are the cornerstone of education, and while they can be faked, it is not

4 Gee (2000) capitalizes his usage of Discourses, defining them as ways of being “certain kinds of people.”
possible to overtly teach them. Students who resist the superficialities of such
Discourses would do so from the bottom of society (p. 11). Gee further added:

We can pause, also, to remark on the paradox that even though Discourses
cannot be overtly taught, and cannot readily be mastered late in the game, the
University wants teachers to overtly teach and wants students to demonstrate
mastery. Teachers of Discourses take on an impossible job, allow themselves to
be evaluated on how well they do it, and accept fairly low status all the while for
doing it. (p. 12)

The stark reality is that teaching is incredibly challenging and demanding,
perhaps more so than preservice educators realize. Teacher educators are working hard
to help them come to terms with these realities; it is after all part of the job of a teacher
educator to ensure that the teachers sent into the workforce are as best prepared as
possible. No single course or experience can adequately prepare a preservice teacher
for the extremely diverse profession of teaching. It is the hope, however, that a rigorous
education program will put teachers in the best position to succeed once in the field. At
that point, the responsibility falls on both teacher and corporation to provide further
training to help retain teachers.

As new graduates become teachers, the support they had at the university level
no longer exists in any official capacity. The school systems in which these new teachers
are now employed take over the role. Ingersoll (2012) reported that 91 percent of
teachers in 2008 participated in some type of teacher induction program as opposed to
just 50 percent in 1990. These programs can include pairing new teachers with veteran
teachers and assisting in more professional development. Ingersoll (2012) wrote of the
importance of such programs given that the over 200,000 first year teachers were now the largest group of teachers. He added:

Schools must provide an environment where novices can learn how to teach, survive, and succeed as teachers. These programs aim to improve the performance and retention of new hires and to enhance the skills and prevent the loss of new teachers with the ultimate goal of improving student growth and learning. (p. 47)

As a result of changes in teacher licensure, including evaluations and merit pay, teachers are required to pursue many more professional growth opportunities for successful license renewal, often after just two years of teaching. A support program would help newer teachers learn how to fulfill these obligations. Otherwise, these stresses alone could lead to teacher attrition. If a teacher is not fully prepared, no joys will be able to outweigh the stresses. Balancing the joys and the stresses is not easy.

Attacks on the profession have not made it any simpler. Rather than revering teachers, they have been cast as the villains in the educational landscape, the ones responsible for the downfall of education. New teachers must be prepared not only to face the challenges of classroom teaching, but also the outside attacks. Teacher preparation courses can help achieve this in connection with strong induction programs for newly hired teachers.

The stress surrounding standardized testing and merit pay, specifically the link between the two with test results impacting pay, has only served to increase teacher apprehension. Ravitch (2011) wrote that merit pay has failed time and again as it does not motivate teachers, causes resentment and dissention, and does not foster
collaboration. Kincheloe (2003) wrote the following about the potential true intent of standards-based education:

Even when leaders make grand pronouncements about setting tough new standards, such declarations are rarely accompanied by tangible resources to implement them. This is justified by free market references to the failure of the public space and the elevation of the private realm of business as the proper locale for educational endeavor. In this right-wing ideological context one might argue that standards reforms are set up to fail. In the wake of such failure it will be much easier to justify corporate-run, for-profit schools. (p. 6)

The idea that a single test can determine teacher value and pay can foster significant occupational doubt in practicing or preservice teachers, and with good reason as the motives behind standardized testing are political and financial. At times, this added stress can even serve to isolate teachers more than ever to their classroom, discouraging them from sharing materials with colleagues in an environment that has become increasingly competitive rather than collaborative. This isolation can be especially troubling for newcomers to teaching (Ingersoll, 2012).

No single solution exists to turn around the perception that schools are failing, just as no single solution exists to generate excitement and commitment in the profession. There are issues within the educational system, but it is not broken. Attacks on the profession do nothing to improve teacher performance or by association student learning. If the current attacks on the profession are nothing more than a clever repurposing of old arguments, the profession will once again survive this onslaught from outside forces. However, if it is more that, if it is a concentrated effort to monetize the educational system and change public schools forever, survival simply will not be enough. Student performance will continue to suffer as quality teachers become
increasingly disenchanted with the profession. Teachers and those that support them must stand up and fight with more strength than ever before. Otherwise, what it means to be a teaching professional will never be the same.

1.4 Purpose and Rationale

For the purpose of studying the effects of stress on teachers, I sought to interview teachers I knew personally and had witnessed in action as educators, primarily while teaching together in the Grant School Corporation at Gibson Junior High School, considered to be an urban inner city school due to the corporation’s high free and reduced lunch rate and ethnic diversity. The interviewed teachers and I experienced daily stresses at Gibson while teaching. I did not intend it at the time, but the three teachers I interviewed were the three with which I had the greatest bond during my tenure as a public school teacher there. In an effort to draw connections between these interviews, I also surveyed students in the EDCI 101 undergraduate course I taught. The course gave preservice teachers their initial opportunity to explore teaching as a career through theory as taught in the classroom and practice as experienced in visits to area schools. I taught the course six times while a graduate teaching assistant; the three 2015 and 2016 spring sections participated in a semester-end voluntary survey about their attitudes toward teaching.

The practicing teachers interviewed for this study completed initial surveys in February 2015. Opening interviews were conducted in spring of 2015; follow up

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5 See Appendix C for the Preserve Teacher Survey referenced throughout this section.
interviews were conducted at various times throughout 2015 and 2016. The follow up
interviews were especially valuable after I had interviewed all three teachers and had an
opportunity to explore their responses. The importance of my continued interaction
with the teachers is highlighted by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who wrote: “Narrative
methodologies often require further discussion with participants, such that data is
collected until the final document is completed” (p. 7). This held quite true in my study. I
was able to personalize follow up questions a great deal, seeking further connections
between similar experiences and deeper explanations of significant moments in their
careers. At the same time, I wanted each teacher’s story to have a personal touch, a
truth, an individuality. Interviews took place in a variety of formats: emails, text
messages, phone calls, and face-to-face conversations.

The bulk of used material took place in either the initial or follow up sessions,
but as I needed further clarification, I did not hesitate to reach out to them again. I felt
my close relationship with each teacher was not only central to my own experience as
an educator, but would lead to more intimate and detailed accounts. I was seeking
honesty – the stories had to ring true. I felt I could achieve this honesty given my close
connection to these teachers. The interconnected aspect of my own lived experiences
while teaching with these other educators helped greatly. The result was an opportunity
to interview three of my colleagues – Mr. Connors, Mr. King, and Mr. Smith, all who
taught with me at Gibson at some point in their careers. Each had their own unique
experiences; I attempted to share those experiences while at the same time
incorporating my own thoughts based on shared or similar experiences.
Mr. Connors was a journalism major first, but found his passion for education through coaching, eventually gravitating toward teaching as a path to administration. His enjoyment of literature and writing led him to teach English. He began his teaching career in the GSC in 2002 fresh out of college. Upon obtaining his master’s degree in administration in 2012, he left the GSC and has served in administrative roles at two different junior high schools in rural areas. His love of working with the tougher kids served him well as a coach and teacher, and continues to do so now as a principal. In a year and a half, Mr. Connors will celebrate his 40th birthday, and administration has helped him provide for his wife and young son. Our friendship began when I started teaching English at Gibson; we not only spent time together through department meetings and conversations about teaching English, we spent time together outside of school. Chapter 2 details Mr. Connors’s transition from teacher to administrator and my interactions with him in those roles.

Mr. King also initially majored in journalism, but his girlfriend — now wife — saw the teacher within him and sparked his passion for education. Her encouragement spurred his decision to switch majors, and his love of history led him to pursue social studies education. From the moment he began teaching in his early 20s to now in his late 30s, his enthusiasm has never wavered. In 2003 he began his teaching career in the GSC, and has taught eighth grade U.S. history at Gibson since 2009. His own unique brand of teaching has made him incredibly popular with his students, but the intense dedication to his job requires a time commitment few teachers could handle. He gets his students actively involved in many projects outside of the classroom, seeking to help
them recognize the connection between social studies and civic service. With two young boys and a wife who teaches nearly two hours away from their home, there is added pressure. Mr. King and I have been best friends since the eighth grade and also had the unique opportunity to teach eighth grade together on the same team\footnote{The four core subjects of English, math, science, and social studies shared the same students for the entire year at Gibson. All four teachers were grouped in the same hallway as were student lockers. Benefits of teaming included reduced discipline issues, collaborative opportunities, and a stronger connection to students and colleagues.} for several years. We have followed different paths, but still share a passion for the field of education. Chapter 3 tells the story of how Mr. King found his passion and continues to be fueled by it.

Mr. Smith had a lifelong passion for education and history, knowing at a young age he wanted to teach. His first teaching job in 1975 became his last, spending 39 years in the GSC, primarily as an eighth grade U.S. history teacher. He was active in the local teachers association and believed strongly in collective bargaining. Some of his greatest memories come from his mentorship of over 20 student teachers throughout his career. Upon his retirement in 2014 at the age of 61, he was satisfied with his decision, feeling he left at the top of his craft. Despite a long held desire to teach at least 40 years, he knew the growing outside influences on teaching might have eventually led to his burnout had he not retired when he did. The last thing he wanted was not to be remembered fondly by the students he spent a lifetime trying to reach. I was a student of Mr. Smith’s on two different occasions – eighth grade U.S. history and summer U.S.
government my senior year of high school. The depth of our bond is explained in greater
detail in Chapter 4, which explores Mr. Smith’s longstanding passion for teaching.

In Chapter 5 I delve deeper into my own story. As the son of a teacher, I was
always surrounded by education; it was only natural that I eventually gravitated toward
a career in teaching. My career has taken several different turns, but each experience
made me a stronger individual and helped me understand the type of positive impact I
wanted to have on the field education. Some of my story is highlighted throughout the
previous chapters as my relationship with each teacher brought about certain
connections. Chapter 5 draws more connections and details my unique experiences as I
chronicle my educational path.

The rationale behind interviewing three teachers close to me that had worked
together in the same corporation is more than mere convenience. In a quantitative
study, large randomized variety is often essential, but here, the purpose is to delve
deeply into the experiences of each educator. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stated
“narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as method is
its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and
meaningful ways” (p. 10). This small interview group helped me achieve this goal. By
minimizing the number of educators, focusing on those closest to me, and using a single
school as a base point, I was able to intertwine these narratives and draw connections
and conclusions. There was no intended desire to focus on male teachers, but the three
teachers and I all happen to be male. While noteworthy, it is not explored in great detail
by this study. The thought process was an effort to isolate what teaching is like through
my own lens and those closest to me based largely on our experiences at a supportive and diverse junior high school and how those experiences have impacted our lives.

Those who look at the Grant School Corporation from an outsider’s perspective would find it difficult to believe its classification as an urban inner city school corporation. The high school, junior high, intermediate, and all elementary schools are well maintained. Student attendance is high. The community shows pride in the school. But as a landlocked corporation surrounded by other corporations in the county enjoying the bounty of higher income housing developments, the GSC has seen its numbers change dramatically in the past ten years. Statistics from the Indiana Department of Education (2016) showed increases in low income students along with minority students while a vast majority of the teachers – 97 percent – remain white. For the 2013-2014 school year the GSC’s free and reduced lunch rate had increased to 70.2 percent from 50.7 percent in 2005-2006, nearly a 20 percent rise in less than 10 years. By comparison, the national average was 48.1 percent according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Most of the newer neighborhoods exist outside of the GSC’s school boundaries. As a result, fewer high income families have children that attend GSC schools. Along with a rise in free and reduced lunch services, the GSC has seen a steady rise in the number of minority students, which at 49.6 percent, came within fractions of a percentage point of half the corporation population during the 2015-2016 school year. Just ten years ago the percentage of minority students sat at 31.7. Due in part to low
family income, many of these students face challenges at home that make learning at school a low priority.

Beers (2009) observed many low-income schools similar to Gibson, often in even larger urban settings. While at times she was disheartened at the scripted nature some of these schools adhere to, choosing almost militaristic structure over authentic experiences, she was also encouraged by the teachers that opposed such practices and sought to “offer those students, all students, rich, exciting, and powerful educational experiences. I find those teachers in cities and towns across the nation, and know that they are changing the lives of the students they teach” (p. 3-4). When low-income students receive an education based on low expectations and a belief that “those kids” are not teachable, Beers (2009) noted it was resulting in “an education of America’s poor that cannot be seen as anything more than a segregation by intellectual rigor, something every bit as shameful and harmful as segregation by color” (p. 3).

In my own experience at Gibson, I witnessed some teachers and even some administrators fall victim to the belief that certain students were unreachable academically. These educators, thankfully, were few and far between in my time at Gibson, as it is a school that believes very strongly in giving all students the opportunity to succeed. As teachers it is unlikely we can reach every student, but the wholesale dismissal of an entire group of students is fundamentally flawed. The educators in this study have demonstrated it is possible to reach students that come from more disadvantaged segments of the population.
Still, the growing changes in the GSC along with the sweeping attempts at educational reform have created significant challenges for the corporation’s teachers and administrators attempting to positively influence its diverse student population. The three teachers interviewed in this study and I witnessed firsthand these changes along with the legislative attempts at restructuring public education during our time in Gibson.

Chapter 6 examines preservice teacher attitudes toward classroom teaching. The results of the 46 EDCI 101 students surveyed are explored in detail. Their attitudes about a potential career in the field are primarily positive, not at all unexpected from students in an initial teacher preparation course. However, they do express many concerns, primarily with standardized testing. This draws a connection to the stresses of those practicing teachers interviewed. Only 11 males took part in the survey, a reflection of the still female dominated field of education; 76 percent of the teaching workforce was female as reported by Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014). This is noteworthy primarily since the three interviewed practicing educators and I are all male, but a majority of the preservice teacher surveys are from female respondents. This study does not attempt to look at gender differences in teaching attitudes. After taking a look at the preservice teachers’ attitudes toward education at the conclusion of their EDCI 101 course, the practicing teachers interviewed in previous chapters offer their thoughts and experiences regarding teacher education programs and their value in teacher preparation.

Chapter 7 draws conclusions from the previous chapters about the impact of stress on teaching based on the practicing teacher interviews and preservice teacher
surveys. The stressful nature of teaching and potential changes to teacher education programs are discussed at length. The interviewed practicing teachers and I give teaching advice to preservice teachers. Implications for further research are also considered.

The result is a study that takes the lived experiences of four teachers and attempts to place a value on these collective experiences regarding how to successfully navigate teacher stress in public schools. My connection to these teachers and experience teaching first year education majors allowed for connections between teacher stories and preservice teacher expectations. As a whole the study explores in depth a number of joys and stresses experienced throughout four different careers in education, three of which were still ongoing in some form – Mr. Connors’s as an administrator, Mr. King’s as a classroom teacher, and mine in teacher preparation as a graduate assistant. From this exploration, a broad picture has been constructed that brings to light missing aspects of teacher education programs, potential problems and solutions regarding teacher retention, and sound advice for those planning a teaching career.
CHAPTER 2.  REACHING TOUGH KIDS: MR. CONNORS

2.1 Long Hours

Mr. Connors and I formed a friendship out of being colleagues. We are not the closest of friends, but we have certainly relied on each other over the years, especially when we both taught eighth grade English at Gibson Junior High School. Mr. Connors spent 12 years teaching English before he moved into administrative roles in other corporations. In my eight years as a secondary school teacher, there was no other English teacher with which I bonded so closely. Very few days would go by when one of us would not visit the other’s room during our prep time to talk about the rewards and struggles of the day. Being the only male English teachers on staff in the seventh and eighth grade building furthered our bond. We decompressed from the stresses of teaching by talking about sports, playing Rock Band with our other friends and colleagues, golfing, or having a few drinks.

In my second year of teaching, I transferred to the high school after winter break, and it was Mr. Connors who left his reading position in the building to take over my classroom for the remainder of the year. One of the first assignments he had the students complete were letters addressed to me. I still have them. Their words wishing me well or expressing sadness at my leaving eventually served to motivate my return to
that grade level. Mr. Connors’s thoughtfulness at having my former students write those letters has always meant a great deal to me. When I returned to Gibson a year and a half later and we become English colleagues, our friendship grew.

As an English education major, Mr. Connors knew late hours of grading writing assignments were in his future, and at times we both half-jokingly lamented our decisions to teach English. A love for literature fueled both of our decisions to teach, and Mr. Connors noted Fahrenheit 451 and All Quiet on the Western Front as particular influences for him. “I didn’t care for the grammar all that much,” he joked. “Certain novels got me interested in English and I enjoyed writing.” His sophomore year English teacher, Mrs. Springs, served as another source of inspiration as she recognized him for his efforts. “I started having more success in that particular class and began to like math less,” he said. “I got involved with the school paper, and that also got me interested.”

While his initial focus was on journalism and he worked at the school newspaper in college, coaching served as the ultimate springboard into education. “My high school English teachers were big influences on me,” Mr. Connors recalls. “I gravitated toward them, but I also enjoyed coaching. I got involved with coaching when I was in college and that steered me toward teaching; they went hand in hand.” Taking on the extracurricular responsibilities of a coach meant longer hours than a typical educator. “As a coach, I had many late nights with games,” he added.

The contracted school day for teachers at Gibson was seven and a half hours. For Mr. Connors, a 10 hour day was typical. This did not include daily hours spent at home grading numerous papers and assignments as an eighth grade English teacher or long
nights coaching football in the fall and track in the spring. Teaching went far beyond his five classes, department meetings, and contractually obligated time. “I taught five classes and had a PLC.” My prep was needed because it gave me an opportunity to get work done and decompress,” he said. “I still took work home with me every night, and stayed late two to three nights a week.”

Mr. Connors understood and embraced the challenges of classroom teaching, but it was not where he envisioned his career in education would begin and end. The pursuit of a master’s degree in administration was something he planned from the outset of becoming a teacher. “I wanted to be in charge, I felt like I was a good leader, and it suited my personality,” Mr. Connors said of his plans to move to administration. He recently completed his first year as middle school principal after spending two years in a separate school corporation as an athletic director and assistant principal, and he has enjoyed his new roles. “Administrators can influence more people. I might have less direct contact with kids, but my influence can sometimes be greater indirectly.”

2.2 Joys

There have been a number of joys as both a classroom teacher and administrator for Mr. Connors. He has taken the lessons learned from teaching and applied them to the influence he now holds as a building principal. Many of his joys have revolved around working with students who seem to be a little rough around the edges.

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7 Professional Learning Community: In this case, PLC was designated time during the school day for the English staff to meet and plan lessons and units, work on student improvement data, prepare for standardized testing, or work on other school-related activities as determined by the administration.
and therefore more challenging to reach. Whether it has been in the classroom as a
teacher, on the field as a coach, or as an administrator, he has found plenty of rewards
in attempting to help these students.

There are certain realizations you come to in education. One of them is you can’t
save them at all, but I love working with the ‘tough’ kids and forming a good
relationship with them. You’re able to get them to a certain place or certain level;
that’s rewarding. Some people say you’ll never get this kid to do this, and you
prove some of those negative people wrong. That has always been a joy for me.

In 10 years as an assistant high school football coach at GSC’s lone high school,
Roosevelt, and seven years coaching junior high track at Gibson, Mr. Connors was also
able to reach students positively. I know firsthand the challenges of coaching and
teaching, much the same as Mr. Connors. I coached during each of the eight years I
taught secondary school and continued coaching as a full time graduate student. Most
of that time was as a varsity boys tennis coach, spending over 12 years coaching at the
varsity level. I also wanted to be involved at the junior high, so I also coached junior high
tennis and basketball for several years. We both saw the rewards of working with
students we saw on a regular basis in the building. Coaching at the high school is viewed
as more prestigious, but as junior high teachers, there was great value in those coaching
positions. The added responsibilities took their toll on our lives outside of teaching, but
through a passion about both teaching and coaching, we shared a collective joy in the
extra efforts and saw many benefits, as Mr. Connors noted:

Good teaching is good coaching and vice versa. Coaching gives you a little bit
more confidence, especially when you are first starting; knowing you can work
with some kids and do some things gave me some credibility with them. The
junior high kids would see me on Friday nights at the football game and I’d hear
kids calling my name. I didn’t hate that to be honest.
As a coach, Mr. Connors was able to further help some of the more difficult students. Many students at Roosevelt or Gibson would struggle to find the motivation to succeed in the classroom if athletics were not there to give them a reason to keep up their grades. In my coaching experience, a 7th grade girls basketball player stands out in particular. Sierra, a low-income minority student, was being raised by her grandmother. Sierra sometimes struggled academically, and her grandmother’s sole focus was on Sierra maintaining A’s and B’s in her classes. A C in one of her classes led the grandmother to place the blame on her time spent with basketball. Sierra begged me to find a way to convince her grandmother how important basketball was. Along with my other coach, we spoke with Sierra’s grandmother about the value of letting her stay on the team in regard to her academic performance. To help further, we set up a study area for her during practice. She would show us her completed work before beginning practice. It worked out extremely well. Sierra improved her grade and eventually went on to play college basketball. Mr. Connors has had similar experiences; we both recognized the importance of a positive bond in order to keep our athletes motivated in the classroom.

I always think it’s all about the relationship with the kids. You give the kids another reason to come to school or practice because you’re going to be there for them making their life a little better. The kids with struggles were always a unique challenge. It’s so much about the relationship to me and being positive because everybody has a breaking point with so many negatives. What I always tried to do as a coach was be there for them as a person and a positive.
As Mr. Connors has settled into the transition of being an administrator, he has used the lessons learned from teaching and coaching to continue an attempt at that positive influence, especially with the tougher students.

I know that if you’re going to ask a rough kid to do anything, especially to do anything with a level of compliance, you have to build up to it. You have to warm the grill so to speak. You have to earn some trust and build that relationship. It starts on the first day of school with learning their name and talking to them. Every interaction can’t be a negative. If it is, you’ll just get negativity.

Our conversations about successful experiences with challenging students led Mr. Connors to discuss a specific student this year with which he formed a bond. Her negative actions, particularly toward other students, immediately led to frequent office visits at the start of the school year. She was put on a point sheet, which meant she had to earn a set number of points from her teachers throughout the day in order to avoid punishment and show that she maintained acceptable behavior.

I’ve been working with this girl every day all year; she is a chronic bully. She has times when she is just awful. But now if she has a bad day she’s like, ‘I’ve disappointed you. I’ve failed you.’ She’s an eighth grader, so I worry about her. It does bring me great joy that’s she’s made a lot of progress, but it’s about getting that kid the resiliency that they go do it on their own. I worry about kids like that. There are great joys and great pains because changing a person is very difficult.

Developing and maintaining positive relationships with his students has remained a source of joy for Mr. Connors. However, now as a building principal, he has found new joys within the demands of administration, including hiring new staff and finding ways to use funds to benefit the students. These are aspects of administration that he did not anticipate enjoying so much.
I really like the hiring process, being able to go through and hire someone you think is going to be good for kids. The HR part is really cool. I also like setting up a program or system to address a specific need in our building. I find that rewarding where we can get something set up to help a kid or group of kids. One of the things we are doing right now with some gifted money is we are focusing some of our professional development time on ways to benefit kids. We are having really cool conversations with ways to use that money.

Mr. Connors has taken his passion for his students and carried it in to his new administrative duties; his students now include the entire building instead of a single classroom. The increase in pay has allowed his wife to focus on raising their young boy, but the time demand on him has created additional stress.

2.3 Stresses

Not surprisingly, the long hours both as a teacher and administrator have led to many stressful experiences for Mr. Connors. When he started as a teacher, the amount of extra time it took was more than he imagined. “Teaching was probably more stressful than I anticipated. Most jobs you go to, you leave at the door. With all of education, you take it home. You’re taking work home all the time. I didn’t realize that right away.”

At times when the stresses mounted, Mr. Connors and his colleagues engaged in some less than ideal ways of expressing frustration. “I found I frequently talked about the students with my colleagues,” he admitted. I have been one of those colleagues, and I have discussed this behavior with my EDCI 101 preservice teachers. It is certainly not going to be in any best practice books as a way to manage the stress, but I can attest to the ease at which frustration with students boiled over into venting sessions.

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8 HR = Human Resources
especially during PLC time when we should have been focused on other tasks geared toward helping these and other students. Despite our best efforts to stay on track, dissatisfaction with a student sometimes boiled over into aggravation, and one of us would feel it was a benefit to let those emotions out in the private environment of our meeting. Mr. Connors has continued to see it at the administrative level, too, most recently in his role as building principal at New Haven Middle School.

We were talking about this in a school improvement meeting. One teacher said, ‘This kid isn’t doing this, this, and this,’ and I reminded the teacher that you’re talking about a 12 year old who doesn’t do what her parents say. When you look at home life and the expectations are blank, it’s not good. Sometimes those success stories are hard because of the circumstances that surround the kid.

Many of my EDCI 101 preservice teachers witnessed the same behavior from their host teachers when visiting classrooms; they were especially surprised when their host teachers would vent to them directly in front of students. While it was disconcerting to hear some teachers did this, it was not all that surprising from my own experiences. Even the most well-intentioned teachers can lose out to their exasperations over student behavior. My preservice teacher aversion to exhibiting this behavior themselves when they had their own classrooms was an optimistic sign.

Trying to channel frustrations into more positive actions was quite often easier said than done, but was certainly possible. Gibson had a teaming structure most of my time there as a teacher. Our team would often try and brainstorm ways to reach out to that student, discussing any strategies that at least one of us had found to be successful. During the PLC time when I worked with Mr. Connors and the other eighth grade English staff, we would discuss general strategies since we did not share any of our students.
Even so, it was not uncommon to see our colleagues come to these meetings with disgruntled looks. Often they brought other work as well, attempting to grade papers, adjust a lesson, or fill out a discipline referral. Mr. Connors, ever the administrator, was the one who typically tried to keep the focus on our expected tasks. Multitasking was a necessity for just about every teacher. It often seemed to be the only way to manage the daily stresses associated with teaching, even if we knew our primary focus should be on the specific PLC task for that day. The myriad tasks required of teachers are often unknown to those looking into classrooms from the outside, according to Mr. Connors.

The stress level of teaching is extremely high because there is constant work to be done, always papers to grade, always students bent out of shape for some reason. Most professions have no idea the stress that educators are under. Nor does the general public or politicians have the understanding of what actually occurs in schools. The public sometimes holds this idea that educators need to be perfect.

Mr. Connors can distinctly recall a challenging encounter with a student while teaching and subsequent attempt at discipline that briefly led him to contemplate quitting on the spot. “I was threatened by the student,” he said. “I didn’t feel the administration backed me up. The lack of administrative support didn’t happen often, but when it did it was frustrating.” Now as the administrator in similar situations, he always attempts to back up his teachers. “I definitely try to make sure the staff feels supported, especially with discipline issues,” he added. “I felt like I was someone who rarely referred someone; I tried to handle it myself. Certain teachers refer everything and that’s no good.”
Mr. Connors generally experienced strong support from the administrative team, but it is a fear that administrators will not side with teachers. Mr. Connors and I once had to break up a fight between two female students, and it took both of our efforts to restrain the girl who, in a wild rage, would not stop going after the other student. She was still holding a clump of the girl’s hair while resisting our efforts to restrain her. In those moments instinct takes over. To protect the other student, we both had to physically restrain the other, much larger girl against a wall while she did her best to wrest free from us. While we did what felt we had to do in order to stop further violence, we could not help but wonder afterward if the administration would stand by us and our handling of the situation. In this case, they did. Thanks to video cameras in the hallway, it was not difficult to see that we had little other choice but to react the way we did in order to prevent any more harm coming to either student. Still, this is another added stress that many preservice teachers do not consider when entering the field.

Now as an administrator himself, a multitude of new stresses have emerged for Mr. Connors; he now sees problems through a completely different lens as works closely with both staff and students. While he tries to be a positive influence, it is often easier said than done. Evaluations are one part of administration that has added a significant amount of stress to Mr. Connors and at times hinder his attempts at positive interaction with teachers.

Trying to pinpoint a teacher’s weakness can be difficult. We are trying to guide a teacher to improvement. When the teacher is resistant to improvement or doesn’t see the need for improvement, it can be stressful. Getting them to take
ownership of what you’re trying to tell them and getting them to do something about it is difficult. Also, I’ve found if I need to do evaluations, if I have 10 or 20 minutes I better get out there. If you think you’ll do it later, your time has been consumed by other things.

Mr. Connors is tasked with enforcing new state mandates as they go into effect. Some of the new laws and mandates have added an increased amount of stress. Added paperwork and less funding take away from some of the positive changes Mr. Connors has attempted to make. A new bullying law and the recent loss of two teachers are two such stresses created as a result of new state regulations, putting an increased amount of undesirable work in front of the young administrator.

It’s common sense that we don’t want people bullied in school. But recently they put it into law and you have to do all of these steps. It makes the paperwork nearly impossible. You can’t keep putting things on the plate and expect it just to get done. They ask us to do more and then they’re defunding us. We lost two teachers from last year to this year who would do remediation with kids. Now only I have a part time instructional coach. Instead of two people doing this job, I have half of a person. Some of the teachers are complaining, saying it wasn’t as good as last year, but the state has been flat with our money for the last six or seven years. We cut a couple of positions to keep us financially solvent. We absorb positions now. It’s what we have to do.

The hours are longer, and the surprises are greater. At times Mr. Connors feels like he only deals with the negative side of education, which makes effectively managing his stress all the more imperative. “As an administrator, I get everyone’s complaints,” Mr. Connors said. “I constantly have to redirect students and teachers; I am constantly put in stressful situations with angry students, parents, and teachers. There are so many more surprises, but I think I handle the stressful situations well.”
2.4 The Administrative Door

Mr. Connors was also faced with an increasing stress level during the time he worked to complete his master’s in administration while still teaching in the classroom. Still, this had been his plan from the outset, to teach five to fifteen years, and then move on administration. I watched firsthand as he balanced his classroom focus with administrative intern duties at Gibson. I even helped him with some of his research and work as he transitioned from seeing education though the eyes of a teacher to seeing it through an administrative lens. “I see things more holistically now, but the move to administration was about what I expected,” he said, despite not being able to land a job in the same community. “I had hoped to stay, but the competition to get your foot in the door was very intense.” In order to get that first foot in the administrative door, he had to move roughly two hours north to a much smaller, more rural school district.

Imperial Junior-Senior High School was housed in the same building as the elementary school. It was vastly different from his experiences as a student and a teacher. Mr. Connors’s new responsibilities as an assistant principal and athletic director included a wider age range – sixth through twelfth grade – but a much smaller population – just over 400 students total were enrolled in those grades when he became an administrator as opposed to over 1,000 students alone at Gibson between seventh and eighth grade alone as indicated by the Department of Education. “As athletic director and vice principal I was the enforcer,” he said. “I missed being able to joke around with the kids. I didn’t tell good jokes, but I liked to joke around and have fun, and I wasn’t able to do that in my role as an athletic director and vice principal.”
Within his role as the enforcer, Mr. Connors saw a drastic change from the sometimes rowdy atmosphere of Gibson. It provided quite a change of scenery for him, along with its share of benefits despite being tasked with handling much of the discipline. He found a great deal of joy working in a smaller school setting. I was able to witness some of those benefits firsthand during a visit to Imperial in Mr. Connors’s first year there. It was a short and casual visit; I was in the area to observe a student teacher as I was working as a university supervisor my first year in graduate school, and he had extended an offer for me to drop by and talk the next time I was nearby. It was eye-opening. Through university supervision of student teachers I had gained new experiences in schools other than my own, but this school’s size was far smaller than any I had encountered. The small size led to a much quieter building than I was used to. As I waited for Mr. Connors to finish a meeting with the principal, I was awed by the silence in the office. There were no unruly students. There was no unending ring of the phone. It was pleasant and felt quite stress free. Behind the closed door of his meeting, however, I soon learned that my stress-free impression was not entirely accurate.

When Mr. Connors emerged from what was an impromptu administrative meeting, he greeted me with a somewhat deep breath and said he would fill me on that situation later. He provided me with a tour of the building, which was equally as quiet as the office, even when he looked into some of the classrooms. Class was in session, and I was grateful for the opportunity to briefly observe a math class. The teacher was presenting a lesson in front of the classroom, and the students were attentively following along. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, and I sensed a significant lack of
tension. I asked Mr. Connors about the difference between Imperial and Gibson, and he was quick to point out his initial amazement at students frequently smiling, listening to directions, and “saying thank you and meaning it.” One way I was able to witness these positive occurrences was during the junior high lunch period Mr. Connors supervised. “A lot of what administrators do is supervision,” he said. Students politely sat in their seats and chatted relatively quietly. The contrast between the noise and chaos of lunch at Gibson versus the subdued atmosphere at Imperial was immediately obvious. Several came up to Mr. Connors to say hello. “Refreshing” was how he described the student behavior.

But even this small rural school was not without its more potentially severe incidents. The impromptu meeting focused on the discovery that a student had a gun his car. He was “a good kid by all accounts” according to Mr. Connors. It seemed unlikely that the student had any intention to do any harm with the firearm. However, other students reported that he had a gun in his vehicle, and a potentially dangerous issue had to be addressed. Given the seriousness of the offense, he was arrested and would later be expelled as a result of the felony charges brought against him. “Administration is very demanding,” Mr. Connors would express afterward. “Administration is that quote on Pawn Stars: ‘You never know what is going to come through that door.’”

The severity of that incident is a relatively isolated one in Mr. Connors’s three years as an administrator in two small, rural schools. He spent two years at Imperial before accepting a job as the building principal at New Haven Middle School. However, plenty of daily stresses add to the demands on Mr. Connors.
The challenge I have right now is coming into a building which I think was somewhat dysfunctional when I got here and making it into a functional building. Changing the culture of a building is very difficult. Starting from the kids’ experience from the time they walk in the door to the time they leave, you look at everything they do.

Mr. Connors had a set goal of becoming an administrator from the time he entered teaching. Twelve years later he had achieved that goal, but had happiness come with the new title? “It’s very different. I’ve been fairly happier. It’s like being a CEO. Everything is my responsibility. As a teacher, you could close the door and have your space. Administrators are on call all the time.”
CHAPTER 3.  BRANDED HIGH OCTANE: MR. KING

3.1  A Full Throttle Calling

Mr. King and I have known each other most of our lives. Teaching became yet another way we were connected. We were on the same little league football team; went to the same elementary school; and at some point, probably the eighth grade Washington D. C. field trip, we became best friends. To this day, we still are. We shared a passion for journalism in high school, participated in student government, started out at the Ball State University to pursue journalism, and I was the best man at his wedding. While our lives have taken us in different directions, the depth of our friendship has survived through love of teaching, music, literature, history, drinks, and trust in each other. One of my greatest joys in teaching came from working alongside Mr. King – quite literally – as our classrooms were next door to each other for the final four years I taught at Gibson Junior High School. While I moved on from Gibson, he has persevered, teaching for 14 years now with no end in sight.

To say we were competitive would be an understatement. We competed to sell advertising on the high school newspaper, wrote competing viewpoints on sports topics for the paper, served as president and vice president of the senior class in high school, had epic one on one basketball games in his driveway, and would even battle tooth and
nail over a match in Super Tennis on the Super Nintendo. But there was no competition when it came to teaching in the Grant School Corporation, the school system of our childhood. We both loved teaching at the junior high school level, but Mr. King lived it – he still does. While he found his teaching path through social studies and I found mine in English, it was apparent to me very early on that I was nowhere near the educator he was. He is one of the most passionate, dedicated, and inspirational teachers I have observed. Mr. King teaches full throttle.

If there was one teacher that influenced Mr. King’s full throttle teaching style the most growing up, it was our high school journalism advisor, Mr. Lambert, someone Mr. King had for British Literature his senior year as well. Mr. Lambert also had a great influence on me, largely due to his passion and dedication. While he initially inspired us toward careers in journalism, we both eventually looked to him as a teaching inspiration.

“Mr. Lambert was the one teacher I wanted to emulate,” Mr. King said. “He was honest, full of energy, and had more knowledge than I could possibly quantify. I felt like if I could be half as good as he was, then I would be a pretty good teacher.”

Whereas Mr. Lambert influenced his style, it was Mr. King’s high school sweetheart and future wife that propelled him toward a career in education. Mr. King and I were studying journalism our freshmen year at Ball State, and she was at Indiana University studying special education. Eventually, his desire to be closer to her and trust in her judgment led him to transfer to IU and switch his major to social studies education.
At first I didn’t have motivations to become a teacher. It was actually my girlfriend, now my wife, who thought I should change my major from journalism to teaching. She saw something in me she thought would make for a great teacher. I think she thought students would be able to learn from me in a different way because I’m not a traditional teacher; I have a unique brand. Fifteen years later I’m still not sure exactly what she saw, but I feel like I was meant to be a teacher.

A lifelong love of all things history led Mr. King further down his teaching path. From a past desire to join the military to pouring through a variety of books on history, Mr. King found it a natural fit. “Throughout junior high and high school, I read countless books about early U.S. history, the Vietnam War, Scottish Independence, music history – Elvis, Beatles, Doors, Stevie Ray Vaughan – and many others,” he said. “Simply put, I love history, especially early U.S. history up to Lincoln and the Civil War.”

Like me, Mr. King returned to our hometown school corporation and was as an eighth grade student teacher at Gibson. He was eventually hired as a full time practicing teacher in various middle grades, but his first job after graduation proved to be an intense challenge. After a December graduation and a heart set on teaching locally, it was difficult to land his first job in the middle of the school year. The result was an eye-opening experience as the teacher for Harvest Alternative School, and it tested him beyond anything he could have imagined. These teenage students had been expelled from the traditional school environment and were placed in Mr. King’s class at a local recreational center. Mr. King taught all subjects, but most lessons tended to be more nontraditional. It was a constant struggle to accomplish anything academically with students who faced far more difficult challenges outside of the classroom. I will always remember Mr. King telling me how his life was threatened by a student who literally
lifted him up against the wall over a dispute about the potential theft of that student’s money. I never knew how he managed it at Harvest and avoided running away from the teaching profession.

I taught alternative school for two years. It definitely changed my perspective, not on teaching, but on the ‘baggage’ students bring with them to school. Many teachers do not take into account what challenges, obstacles, and abuses students go through outside of school. Some students are getting pregnant, abusing drugs, being abused at home, taking care of brothers or sisters, and so many more scenarios. Then teachers wonder: ‘Why doesn’t Brittany want to learn?’ ‘Why is Johnny always asleep?’ Perhaps it has very little to nothing to do with teaching and learning at all. I think I have an ability to empathize with students because I’ve seen it and have a better understanding of the totality of being a young person, the good, bad, and awfully sad.

We were both several years into our teaching careers before the educational stars aligned and brought us together at Gibson. I had returned for my second stint there, and Mr. King was coming over from his job teaching sixth grade geography at the corporation’s intermediate school, which had recently shifted to a fifth and sixth grade building. That shift combined with the opportunity to teach eighth grade social studies, which focused on his primary historical passion – early U.S. history through the Civil War – led Mr. King to the same teaching team as me. We were both excited for the opportunity to work together, and I was finally able to experience firsthand the type of dedication Mr. King put in to his job. One of his first tasks was to acclimate to his new subject, and he turned to Mr. Smith for guidance. “He was helpful in guiding me through the content of the eighth grade curriculum. He is extremely knowledgeable on U.S. history, and I would go to him when I had content questions that were confusing or to make connections with other parts of U.S. history.”
As we both began teaching Mr. King and I joked that we would compete as teachers just as we had competed in nearly everything else. However, it was quickly no contest when it came to teaching junior high students. I would often struggle to get in my room by the contractually obligated 7:55 a.m., but Mr. King was routinely there by 6:00 a.m., his favorite music blasting as he filled his chalkboard and SMART Board with the day’s lesson plan, objectives, quote of the day, and reminders. It was rare that I would beat him to school, either by my arriving early or his arriving late. I have never been much of a morning person; I would stay after school and grade papers and plan lessons until well after darkness set, but I could not handle the early hours. Mr. King handled both. It always blew me away that he could consistently maintain the schedule he did and still have the energy to greet each class every day with a vociferous “Good morning/afternoon Gibson Junior High School!” At the same time, he was juggling the challenges of being a father and husband.

Much the same as Mr. Connors, Mr. King puts at least 10 hours a day into his job, takes work home every night, and stays late every night because as he put it, “there is no other alternative.” He spends seven days a week committed to teaching, going far beyond the contracted hours required of a teacher.

To say I spend eight hours at school is laughable. I arrive to school 90 minutes early, at the expense of my two sons who must get up at 5:30 a.m., so I can do my teacher preparations, and stay at least two hours after school because I sponsor four different clubs. I am completely consumed by teaching and its various components. I spend somewhere between 14-16 hours actually inside the classroom but outside of contracted hours. I come in for two hours on Saturday and two to three hours on Sunday planning the week. To include grading, which I do at my son’s karate practice and other son’s guitar practice, I’d
say I spend somewhere in the 20 hour range per week outside of my contracted hours.

3.2 Joys

These long hours would not be worth it if there were not an abundance of joys in teaching. With the high school and junior high sharing the same campus area, it is not uncommon for former students to stop in at Gibson after school hours to say hello. Former students visiting the teachers on our team was commonplace, but with Mr. King it has been a daily occurrence. Despite his busy schedule and commitment to his current students, he has always found time for his former ones. It is one of the many examples of the positive impact he makes with his students. It is a rewarding aspect of his career “when students come back and talk about how much they enjoyed my class or how much they learned,” he said.

Many of the joys of teaching simply are not witnessed in the classroom. The discovery moments when a student learns something new are always rewarding, but often it has been the moments outside of the classroom experience that make the struggles worth it for Mr. King.

When the public at large such as local newspapers or civic organizations commend you or your school for your efforts in teaching the youth, it’s rewarding. Or when parents contact me saying their son or daughter talks about the class all the time or when other teachers recognize your hard work and dedication. It’s not about me; I don’t do it for rewards. But hearing, seeing, reading that what you are doing is worthwhile and appreciated motivates you to keep going.

His popularity as a teacher has helped him encourage his students to participate in several civically rewarding projects. I have witnessed and been awed by Mr. King
spearheading efforts to raise thousands of dollars in funds and supplies for those in need. His service to others has reached far beyond the borders of our community. From raising funds for tornado victims in Illinois to driving a truck loaded with supplies down to Hurricane Katrina victims in Louisiana to raising $5,000 for suffering children in Haiti, he has made an impact on so many lives. “I’m able to meet some incredible young people that are making amazing contributions to our world and create lasting friendships with some outstanding people,” Mr. King said.

One of Mr. King’s most outstanding accomplishments as an educator came recently through another of his service projects. On July 2, 2014 outside of the local civic theater, he and his youngest son had a dream to commemorate President Abraham Lincoln’s visit to the community during his “Whistle Stop Tour.” The tour took place on Lincoln’s way to Washington, D.C. for the presidential inauguration. Mr. King didn’t imagine that dream could be achieved, but with the help of others, the plaque was dedicated just over one year later on October 28, 2015. It took the help of the community, his colleagues, and most importantly his students to make Mr. King’s dream of locally honoring one of his heroes a reality.

My admiration for Lincoln has only grown stronger as I have been able to teach the chaos, division, and ultimately the war that was fought to end the institution of slavery. Lincoln defines what America is about. From abject poverty to the presidency, and then to be murdered for his courage and vision that America can only endure if we end slavery and come back together, united, is just an incredible story.

The class project to honor a part of Lincoln’s story encompassed six months over two school years. It required city approval, contact with the National Archives in
Washington D.C., communication with Indiana’s historical society, and nearly $4,000 in funds raised by his students in part through class donation challenges and selling candy during lunch. Mr. King and his students’ efforts were rewarded with a dedication ceremony at the plaque’s location as well as local and regional recognition from several news outlets. The true rewards, however, were in what his students learned along with the lasting impact the plaque will have on the community for generations to come.

What better legacy can you leave than something that will exist far beyond our lifetime? I think it showed to students that school is far more than just tests and quizzes. I think the city learned that teenagers do care and they do see the world outside the lenses of self-gratification and Instagram. I believe that project to be one of the greatest achievements of my life. I have done many incredible civic activities with my students, but the Lincoln plaque was a really special achievement. I don’t think my students will ever forget it either. We brought school and community together in a way that is powerful and meaningful. I’m really proud of that.

Mr. King finds a special joy in making connections with his students, even outside the confines of his classroom. Some teachers struggle with the prospect that they are always on the job, not only with grading, but also through the perception of others. For Mr. King, it is simply another extension of his job. It is difficult for teachers to balance having a social life outside of school with the knowledge that at anytime we could bump into students or their parents.

In the age of social media, parents and students often try tracking us down to be friends on Facebook. Mr. King avoids Facebook, preferring Twitter, citing it as a more formal way to stay connected with his students. He uses it for a combination of school updates and select snippets of his family life. The first two years I taught, neither Mr.
King nor I had any type of social media account, but as Facebook and Twitter exploded, I slowly gravitated toward the use of social media as a coaching and teaching tool to keep students and parents updated, and to maintain a separate account for my personal life. I have consistently warned my preservice education students never to assume that what is posted online will remain private. If it has been posted in cyberspace, it can be accessed and viewed. I have paid close attention to what I post and made a point never to friend any of my current students, players, or parents. By in large, however, social media has had a positive impact for Mr. King and me as a way to maintain a school related connection to students.

Twitter is a great way to reach students outside of the classroom. I find the platform – limited responses, pictures, video, and link retweets – to be an outstanding way to reach students beyond the walls of my classroom. I like how I can connect with current and former students on many levels – clubs, sports, my classroom, the Washington D.C. trip, parents... as well as stay connected with what is happening in my school and around the world. I really feel like it has been an additional component to ‘sell’ the Mr. King brand. I believe teachers need to embrace these possibilities with technology as a way to develop relationships with students.

Mr. King took over chaperoning the eighth grade spring break field trip to Washington, D.C. when Mr. Smith, the trip’s founder, retired. Instead of enjoying a week off each year, Mr. King prefers to spend the first three days of his break navigating Gibson students through the nation’s capital. It was yet another task he undertook on behalf of the students. His most recent trip included over 40 students, a record for Gibson.

When Mr. Smith retired, he trusted me to take over the Washington, D.C. trip he established. What an amazing opportunity for students to travel to Washington,
D.C. and experience what we learn in eighth grade – George Washington’s home, the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, etcetera. I am honored to continue that opportunity for Gibson students.

Despite the abundance of intended interactions with his students, unintended face-to-face interactions with students outside of school are also prevalent. Initially a point of stress for Mr. King and me, the more these occurred, we discovered how rewarding the exchanges were. They became less about worrying that the student was invading our personal lives and more about connecting with them beyond the classroom, if even just for a few minutes. Sometimes these exchanges would be as simple as a former student smiling and saying hello as a drive thru attendant at a fast food restaurant while she was finishing high school. Other times it was asking an employee for help at the local department store who happened to be a former struggling student that is now preparing for college. I can still fondly recall many of those moments, and it has been great to catch up with former students, no matter where. It is rewarding to see how they have matured and found themselves. I have encountered so many who were excited to be preparing for college after struggling academically or getting frequently suspended. I remember waiting in line at the grocery store and chatting with a former class clown I taught who was now working full time and also serving as a volunteer firefighter because he enjoys helping people. I was confidently greeted by a former student who rarely spoke while in school because of a speech issue. When those students have taken the time to share their successes, it has given me the sense I made a difference for them. Mr. King echoes the same feelings. “To be honest, I actually enjoy
that part of being a teacher,” he said. “It is a responsibility I take very seriously and
brings a sense of pride that you helped impact the life of a young person.”

Student reactions to seeing a teacher in public can be quite amusing. Mr. King
and I have had several conversations about the humor in seeing our students’ apparent
surprise in learning that teachers go to the mall, could possibly eat fast food, or hang
out downtown. They seem to think we spend our entire lives only within the confines of
school. And in an unintended way, those students are right, since no matter where we
go, we are always a teacher; school expands so much further than the physical walls
surrounding it.

Certainly I feel like I’m always on the job. Wherever you go, you’re still Mr. or
Mrs. Teacher. The Mr. King brand is me. My passions outside of the classroom
are incorporated daily. My students see in me an authenticity. I don’t become
somebody else just because I’m a teacher. They see who I truly am. I think, for
many students, that level of openness and honesty is what attracts them to my
classroom and learning with me. I think there is a genuine respect because my
students see me as who I am. I can use my interests as teachable moments with
my students. If they see me driving one of my classic cars around town, it is
another opportunity to connect with them.

His ability to connect with students has led to several of the school’s more
challenging youth being placed in his class. Whether the administration has placed them
there from the outset or moved them to his room later in the year in the hopes that Mr.
King can turn that student around, he embraces the challenge. The opportunity to make
a positive difference in a student’s life is never taken for granted by Mr. King.

One of my greatest challenges and accomplishments was a student, Miah. She
wasn’t making good choices; she was constantly getting in school suspension for
fighting, insubordination, and a host of other really unpleasant scenarios. She
was intentionally put on my team because the administration knows that I can
form relationships with students like Miah. It wasn’t easy and we had our
difficulties at first. I genuinely wanted her to succeed, and I told her I’m going to
get you to care about school because I care about you. Over time, she came to
understand that. My hope is that she will see that she can make better choices,
become a better person, and become a better student. I have high hopes for her
in high school and know if she can take the successes from this year and
continue becoming a better person, she has an extraordinary future ahead of her.
I’m really proud of her and am thankful I was able to reach her.

The final week of school was winding down for the 2015-2016 school year. Miah
had made it all the way through an entire year for the first time as a middle school or
junior high school student. The previous year at Gibson, she was expelled before the
end of December. Miah surprised Mr. King before the school year ended with a heartfelt
letter, thanking him for all he did for her. The full page typed letter read in part:

Mr. King you are honestly the reason I lasted this whole year with no fights. You’re always telling me I can use my leadership in a good way and how you’re proud of me for changing so much. It makes me feel good to know that I have someone who cares and is actually proud of me for trying and doesn’t want me going down the wrong path again. You put me on the right path and I’m grateful for that. I don’t know where I would be at now if I didn’t have you by my side.

Mr. King referred to Miah as the “hardest student” of his career. Over time the
two bonded, and she wants to come back and visit Mr. King when she is at the high
school. It is her intent to be successful and show Mr. King that she is not letting him
down. After a particularly difficult year, her letter made all the difference for Mr. King.

“As rough as everything has gotten, this letter is what I needed as I leave this school
year,” he said. “My students have always centered and refocused me.” Letters like these
serve as a testament to the positive impact teachers can have on students like Miah and
why teaching will always be worth it.
3.3 Stresses

Mr. King has spent fourteen years in education, and that time spent in and out of the classroom dedicated to his students combined with his full throttle teaching style has taken its toll on Mr. King. “I’m currently experiencing the total domestic and career vortex that his teaching,” he said. “Trying to balance being Mr. King, Dad, husband, son, and myself is frustrating. It’s a daunting task and most often, being Mr. King trumps them all.”

His complete dedication to the profession has been a great benefit to his students, but the sacrifices he has made along the way on other aspects of his life reminded me of one of my initial preservice experiences in a junior high school teacher’s classroom. She was only within the first two or three years of her teaching career, her passion and energy very much like that displayed by Mr. King. The difference in her young career, however, was that she was not yet married, and was purposefully attempting to avoid a relationship in order to maintain her focus on teaching. It showed just how challenging true dedication to teaching can be. For her it required putting her personal life on hold. She referred to her students as “my kids,” something I have been known to do on occasion myself, much to the initial confusion of my wife. The message sent by my host teacher during this experience was that the commitment teaching required did not allow her the time for a social life or a serious relationship. Mr. King had already crossed that relationship threshold, and was well on the way to marriage and a family when he became a teacher. Perhaps it is the fact that his wife is also a
teacher and understands the demands that has allowed their sometimes rocky relationship to survive.

To be honest, teaching has created some real challenges with my domestic life. My wife teaches in a school that is 70 miles away and is a track coach. She and I don’t see very much of each other and that can create some real challenges. I have two sons who are active inside and outside of school. It is hard to juggle all the components of my life given the commitment teaching requires. I would say teaching creates stress, tension at times, and martial challenges.

As Mr. King previously noted, he frequently grades while sitting at practices for his young sons’ passions – one who loves karate, and the other who loves guitar. Finding free time is few and far between, and it is not easy to unwind when there is always so much to do.

Exercise has been one way to decompress from my career and domestic stresses. There are a handful of teachers at my school who do the same. I think stress levels are high in teachers because they have to balance teaching, family, grading, clubs, sports, coaching, domestic necessities, marriage, and everything else. I’m not sure there’s another profession in the world where you interact with so many people, so closely, on a daily basis. Teachers will answer over 100 questions every day. Imagine that. Teaching requires a level of social interaction that, by its very nature, is extremely stressful, even to the most organized. The idea of a ‘chill teacher’ is something I have never seen. They may seem cool and composed on the outside, but I can guarantee that on the inside they are as stressed as the next person who outwardly looks like a total train-wreck disaster.

Maintaining an outward perception of composure has likely never been more challenging at a time when teachers’ classrooms have been invaded by more watchful eyes than ever. Parents can check on student grades through online grading tools such as Power School. Standardized testing companies by in large motivate curriculum decisions and influence teacher pay. Evaluations are constant, also determining teacher quality and pay, which as Mr. Connors noted puts administrators under constant stress
to accurately complete evaluations in a timely fashion. Mr. King believes that

evaluations give him “a clear indication how they view my teaching pedagogy.” In a
career based on helping others, Mr. King and all teachers are under microscope, and he
echoes Mr. Connors’ belief that those outside of the profession just do not know how
demanding it is. Mr. King added:

Listen, teaching is, by definition, a service job. We provide a service called
education. Most of my family and friends are teachers. Everybody who does it
knows what you’re getting and what you’re not. The state will dictate what you
teach, and especially in Indiana, we are in a bitter fight between standardized
testing and academic freedom. All of this is frustrating. The general public looks
at teaching with piercing eyes. I’d be willing to say that the general public
doesn’t have a true understanding of the time commitments that teaching
requires...because they think we have summers off, breaks, and they don’t
understand how much planning and preparation good teaching requires.

New teachers entering the field can often suffer from some of the same
misconceptions of teaching. Quality educators like Mr. King and others welcome these
preservice teachers into their classrooms in an effort to positively guide and mentor
them. However, not every preservice teacher is placed with a teacher as passionate as
Mr. King. Due in part to poor field experiences, a handful of preservice teachers I have
taught decided not to pursue teaching as a career any further. Some made the decision
because they didn’t realize just how much teaching required. Other preservice teachers
in my classes have moved forward with their education degree under the belief that
their passion would outweigh any challenges. Mr. King, however, has continued to see
all manner of teachers in his building succumb to the pressures of the job.

I think what I see is more being overwhelmed by the various responsibilities that
teaching requires. What I see are teachers, regardless of experience, who are
completely consumed by the tasks, both foreseen and unforeseen, that become
absolutes in this profession. I don’t see teachers who don’t care, but rather
teachers who didn’t realize that teaching required so much of them, and they
just cannot commit, juggle, balance all that teaching entails. This profession isn’t
a ‘clock in, clock out’ kind of career.

The total length of a teacher’s career has plummeted. Frequent new additions
make it hard to establish bonds with colleagues and consistency within a building. Mr.
King and I have had many conversations about the teachers that have left careers at
Gibson just within the hallway we once shared together as peers. Between the two of us
in the past ten years in that hallway of four classrooms, we have witnessed five science
teachers, four English teachers (including myself), two social studies teachers, and one
special education teacher leave Gibson.

“Teaching is unique and contains so many components, both in and out of the
classroom; it is hard to fix to make it easier on educators,” Mr. King said. “There are
certainly fixes I’d like to see: less standardization, higher teacher compensation for
highly effective teachers, among others, but they don’t necessarily prevent burnout.”

3.4 Passion Still Fuels His Career

With the increasing stress and time commitment, the ultimate question has to
be why would Mr. King continue teaching? He entered the field on the belief that he
would teach until he retired. Is that feasible? Every day he plugs away, often spending
over half of his day dedicated to his students, leaving little time for his wife and two
sons, let alone friendships and personal time. And while his enthusiasm stays constant,
he sometimes cannot help but feel nervous about the future.
Different students mean different challenges. There have been moments where I wondered if I quit right there on the spot what would I do? There have been moments where I wondered how long can I do this profession? Longevity in teaching is certainly something that makes me nervous. The stresses of teaching don’t lend themselves too well to 40-45 years of service.

Where will Mr. King’s passion to keep going come from? A look to his in class Rock & Roll Hall of Fame provides over 100 answers in the form of student photographs from 14 years of teaching. This student reward for being an outstanding citizen in his classroom and beyond has been a staple of his since his first years teaching sixth and seventh grade geography at the corporation’s other junior high school. When Armstrong converted to a fifth and sixth grade intermediate school, Mr. King made a difficult decision to leave his colleagues at Armstrong and transfer to Gibson. The concept of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and each student photo found new space in his classroom at Gibson. New inductees were soon to follow. The initial inductees were not forgotten to him, nor were his experiences at Armstrong, which helped him grow into the educator he is today. Every day as Mr. King’s current students walk into his class and pick up their journals, they see these rock star students, examples of the best to come before them, and inspirations for their own efforts. It is students like those on that wall, and the ones that will eventually earn their own induction, that keep Mr. King going.

It’s pretty wild to look at those pictures. Many of my students look at it with a sense of awe and admiration. When I look at them, I smile as awesome memories come over me. Sometimes I wonder where they are and what they are doing. Some of those students are in their mid to late 20’s. I have no doubt that they are rocking the world with their awesomeness.
Administrative evaluations and standardized test scores have helped validate Mr. King’s efforts in his classroom. When merit based pay based on standardized test results were being implemented and a near failing grading was awarded to Gibson from the state, Mr. King was approached by the local paper to help educate the public on the process. Throughout that school year, he put his brand of teaching out to the public, opening his classroom door through each article that explored not only Mr. King’s teaching style, but whether or not his efforts were proving successful as evidenced by his students’ scores and the evaluations of his administrators. Some around Gibson feared that the newspaper was only looking for more negative press about the school, but Mr. King helped show Gibson’s potential in the classroom.

It was interesting. I wasn’t afraid of it, but I certainly felt that I was representing my colleagues and every teacher in the world. I was putting myself into a situation without knowing how it would end. I didn’t know if we would receive a passing grade from the state, but I believed in my colleagues and the practices we had implemented to raise our score. In the end, I was right and that made me very proud of my school.

Mr. King’s passion for teaching is unmistakable. During Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductions ceremonies, he roars so loud and gets the student desk drum roll rising and falling so rhythmically, it reverberates into neighboring classrooms. Whenever it rattled my wall, I would just smile, and so would my students, because they knew what it meant – someone had earned a special honor next door. It is yet another example of the fire that sparks his students to do things other teachers might think impossible.

My students are engaged and excited by my teaching. I have a passion for it. I’m not going to give up in spite of the difficulties. It goes back to a basic philosophy about teaching – it’s a lifestyle. You have to love it and stay committed to it. I
cannot imagine not doing this job. I hope that I can continue working with the
team I have around me and/or find similar passionate people with the same
teaching philosophy. I cannot even truly understand how my teaching affects my
students’ lives and their future, but it still excites the hell out of me every single
day. I hope I am able to stay as motivated and passionate as I currently am. At
some point, I know I will physically slow down, and I wonder how that will affect
my teaching ability. Part of my brand relies on me being the high octane teacher
that I am. My energy and passion for teaching are directly related to the
successes I have had.

In the lifestyle of teaching, the stresses do not end, they just change; the long
hours rarely shorten; students always present discipline issues; standardized tests
infuriate. Mr. King and others like him continue to evolve, finding ways to energize
students and go full throttle in the face of these challenges. He knows it might be hard
to fuel himself until retirement, but he is not going to stop just because it is difficult.
Trends indicate teachers will not last or they will move on to other roles within the
school system, such as administration. Mr. King is not the trend, however, and he hopes
over time that his career leaves a positive, lasting legacy.

I don’t think I can even comprehend the kind of footprint that I’ve left by some
of the projects I have undertaken. When I leave this earth, I hope people will say
that I took every opportunity to make the world a better place and to show
students that learning and school are far more than just tests, quizzes and
homework. I hope people will look at my body of work and believe my
endeavors were worthwhile.

As his best friend, I have no doubts that he will keep going at high speed. I look
forward to watching the continued progression of his career and hearing about his
successes and struggles. I know there are so many more to come. He is only fourteen
years in and has not slowed down yet.
CHAPTER 4.  ON HIS OWN TERMS: MR. SMITH

4.1  Eyes on the Prize

If it were not for Mr. Smith, I would never have discovered my passion for all things education. I had the pleasure of teaching in the same building with Mr. Smith at Gibson Junior High School for six years. Yet what he taught me has gone far beyond the walls of the classroom. I have learned that the fight to be a better educator must extend past those walls into the legislative halls of politicians, in collective bargaining meetings for fair contracts, or on picket lines fighting for a just cause. I thank him for my love of history and the process of the United States government. Mr. Smith’s passion for tennis led me to emulate greats like John McEnroe, Steffi Graff, Andre Agassi, and Martina Navratilova on the tennis court. The 1989 film, *Glory*, holds a special meaning to me because of Mr. Smith. To say it was an honor to follow in his footsteps and become a teacher would be a gross understatement. Twice, I was able to sit in his classroom as a student and learn from him, observing his teaching style as both an eighth grade U.S. history student and as one of his summer U.S. government students before my senior year in high school. I did not fully realize it at the time, but my lessons went beyond the curriculum; I was learning how to teach. When I say that I owe Mr. Smith my life, I mean

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9 *Glory* is a movie about the Civil War and the Union’s first all-black volunteer company.
it. As my father,\textsuperscript{10} he has been there from the beginning – teaching, guiding, and loving me as his youngest son.

I always got a kick out of calling my dad “Mr. Smith” during class. I could yell out “Dad” three times in a row and he would never acknowledge me, but one “Mr. Smith” and he would look in my direction and answer, usually with some creative quip. I do not know exactly what it was that caused him to always react; maybe it was the strangeness of hearing his own son say it, but it gave me a special amusement and always caught his attention when I felt I needed it. My brother, Chris, had a similar experience when he had our father six years before me. When I asked my recently-retired father to take part in this research, he was happy to help, even if I did have to good-naturedly harass him a few times just as I used to in the classroom. As one of my greatest influences, it was a special joy to dig deeper into his past inspirations and experiences as a 39 year educator and see what could be learned.

Teaching was Mr. Smith’s calling; he was centrally focused on a career in education from a very young age. Between three brothers, they fit distinct stereotypical molds. One brother was viewed as the rock star, another was the athlete, and my father was the academic. “I have always said that I was born to be a teacher,” he noted.

“When other kids wanted to play Cops and Robbers or Cowboys and Indians, I wanted to play school.” This singular desire to teach pushed Mr. Smith to achieve.

I had my eyes on the prize of a teaching certificate from the moment I learned I needed one to teach. And I wanted my journey to be the best it could be. Until I

\textsuperscript{10} Mr. Smith will be referred to as the researcher’s father periodically from this point forward. In order to maintain consistency, however, the researcher will also continue to refer to his father as Mr. Smith.
got a B+ in Civil War & Reconstruction my last semester of college, I maintained a 4.0 in my major and graduated magna cum laude. I wanted to be the candidate a school corporation looked at and said: ‘We want this guy!’ I found out later that’s exactly what happened.

Growing up with a love for history, Mr. Smith was significantly influenced by his social studies educators for their teaching style, recognition of his ability, and passion for justice. Many of his past teachers quickly came to mind. He can still recall Mr. Hatcher from junior high school bucking the stereotype of a coach first social studies teacher and the way he described Aztec ritual sacrifice. His high school Asian studies teacher, Mr. Rayburn, recognized his love of history and nominated him to attend a conference in Cincinnati. In college, it was “Dr. Bailey for the way he taught American history like Socrates,” Mr. Smith said. “He was a true educator in that he drew learning out of us rather than trying to fill us with what he knew. That’s what it truly means to educate!”

Three high school social studies teachers had a lasting impact on Mr. Smith’s education in a way they likely never intended. Mr. Smith looked forward to all three of their classes, but arrived at school one day to learn all three were gone without an explanation. He later discovered the teachers were fired for wearing black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War.

They never said a word about it during class, nor did they try to influence our opinions in any way. The result was that we lost stellar educators whose replacements paled by comparison. I was profoundly influenced by their professionalism and willingness to stand for what they believed to be right. I resolved then that I would do what I could to honor their commitment to their deeply-held convictions. I found the venue for that resolution in collective bargaining, though I didn’t know anything about it at the time.
It was several years down the road before Mr. Smith had the chance to honor those three high school teachers fired for their silent protest. He found his vehicle to do so thanks to Mr. Maxwell, his mentor teacher in his first few years of teaching. He helped instill in Mr. Smith the importance of classroom discipline and lesson planning, but it was his support of teacher rights through the teacher’s union that had the largest impact.

He taught me the value of teachers working in concert with other teachers to improve working conditions. We went on strike six weeks in to my first year of teaching. It was life-changing. We weren’t taught how to fight for our rights as teachers in any methods class. Pounding the pavement over the course of those six days brought us all together and earned us the respect we deserved from the administration. It taught me that it’s not just about the classroom and accepting whatever you get. It’s about professionalism and the realization that teachers have the right to determine their working conditions. I never regretted my decision to join the teachers association and held various offices from building representative to local president and bargaining chairperson to state standing committee member and national convention delegate. It was in this capacity that I was able to finally honor the sacrifice of those high school teachers by procuring and defending teachers’ rights over the arbitrary whims of a school board.

Mr. Smith’s active participation in the collective bargaining process between corporation teachers and administrators served as great source of pride for him over the years. He sought to give teachers a say in their profession, believing that

Nothing was ever given out of the goodness of politicians’ or administrators’ hearts. Our working conditions are students’ learning conditions. As a member and later as spokesperson of the bargaining team, I worked hard to ensure that the rights we had gained over the years were not diminished by legislation and the administration. We are colleagues, not competitors. We share our ideas. We collaborate. Anyone who is in it for themselves quickly learns a classroom can be a lonely place.
Prior to these experiences that catapulted Mr. Smith into active participation in his teacher’s union, his focus was more single-minded on being an outstanding classroom history teacher. He earned his chance to do so in the Grant School Corporation in 1975, and despite the strike his first year, he never looked back, staying in the same corporation for 39 years, teaching primarily eighth grade U.S. history, but also seventh grade geography, ninth grade French, and senior U.S. government. He had little time to prepare for his first year and had no idea a strike was imminent. A late retirement opened up the door for Mr. Smith, and the GSC realized he was the one they wanted to fill those shoes. Thanks in large part to his dedication in school and the influences of his past teachers, he was prepared to make the most of his opportunity.

My love of history propelled me to a career as a teacher. My experiences with great teachers bolstered my conviction. My experiences with not-so-great teachers probably propelled me more. I knew that history could be so much more than the dry recitation of facts, and I wanted to instill in students a love and appreciation for their past and the knowledge that history is people, people with all their strengths and weaknesses.

Plenty of changes occurred throughout 39 years of teaching, including in technology, but Mr. Smith’s routine to start his day rarely changed. Where it was once mimeograph machines, overhead projectors, and filmstrip projectors Mr. Smith had to be sure were ready for use, it became computers, DVDs, YouTube clips, and SMART Boards. He typically arrived to school at least an hour early to make sure he was ready for the day. This included ensuring whatever technology would be needed was in working order, sorting the appropriate number of handouts and materials by class, helping out in the teacher’s lounge with coffee or other tasks, and waiting for the
students to be released down the hall for the start of the day. Upon entering the hallway, Mr. Smith and his colleagues would welcome the students and monitor behavior. It was always a full schedule before the first class even started and Mr. Smith dialed in for the day. As teachers in previous chapters have noted, the concept of an eight hour workday does not exist for most teachers, and my father was no exception, spending anywhere from two to three hours a day outside of the seven and a half hour day stipulated in the teacher contract.

I never viewed it as a clock in and clock out kind of a job, but that (first class) was when the laser-focus set in. For the rest of the day, save for lunch and prep periods, I was focused on the day’s lessons. That’s not to say that there weren’t especially ‘teachable moments’ during the course of the day or occasional disciplinary issues; disciplinary issues were minimal I found when you started on time and showed enthusiasm for the lesson and genuine caring for students. At day’s end, I set up for the next day and started all over again. The hours spent working on lessons at home, grading papers, and the like, were hours usually happily spent.

My father taught me twice, first in the accelerated eighth grade U.S. history course, and then again the summer prior to my senior year for U.S. government. He had also taught my brother in the same eighth grade U.S. history class several years before. His experiences teaching both of us are ones he remembers fondly.

I had my misgivings at first, but since I taught the challenge class in which you were both enrolled, I decided to make the best of it. It turned out to be a blessing. How many fathers can say they not only took their child to work one day but interacted with them on a daily basis? Those were some of my best memories of teaching.

Mr. Smith was never late for any of his classes and almost never missed for being sick, not for summer government, not during the school year, not for his entire career. He amassed hundreds of unused sick days. I can still remember him walking out the
door during the summer he taught me in senior government, asking if I would make it to
class. I always did, but just barely. Looking back on those mornings now as an
experienced classroom teacher, it is amazing the parallels between those summers as a
high school student and my future efforts as a teacher to get to school on time for the
day. I always figured mornings would eventually get easier as I got older, but despite my
passion for teaching, they never did. Mr. King and Mr. Smith always had me beat when
it came to their early rise dedication to teaching.

4.2 Joys

Mr. Smith took the memories of teaching his sons and many other joyful ones
into retirement after a 39 year career in education. His teaching was recognized in many
ways, including being a finalist for a prestigious local teacher of the year award and
earning an honorary degree from the local community college upon his retirement.
Completing his master’s degree while in the early years of his teaching career serves as
a source of pride for him. I can attest to the challenge of such a task. I chose to pursue
my graduate degree full time after several stressful years attempting to piece together
master’s coursework while teaching were not especially fruitful. Mr. Smith’s singular
moments of recognition hold special significance for him, but it was the less formal joys
that held the most meaning. Over the course of his career, it was nearly impossible to
pinpoint only one.

There were so many rewarding aspects of my teaching career...the opportunity
to teach both my sons, to have every day be a new day with different goals and
objectives and aspirations, to have the opportunity to do what I loved and get paid for it, to have students tell me how much they liked my class – either at the time or years later...when a former student returned and said that my teaching had led him to pursue a teaching degree, when a student teacher credited me for the caliber of his teaching once he got a teaching job, when the parent of a student who had been one of my students, too, told me they had told their son or daughter they were going to enjoy my class. Things like that meant more to me than any formal evaluation of my teaching.

Plenty of my childhood memories confirm my father’s dedication. I can remember as a young elementary school student waiting up into the later evening for him to return from supervising high school concessions at athletic events or attending late night meetings bargaining for better contracts. I would often sit with him on the couch, his legs cupped around me so I was in the “bird’s nest” as we watched TV and he graded tests and other assignments from class. I wandered around Room 305 and was awed by the books, posters, bulletin boards recognizing student achievement, and the sheer knowledge wrapped up in his classroom environment. It was impossible not to sense the dedication and joy in my father’s teaching. My father recalled that as a child I would often tell him he didn’t go to work, he went to school. Even though I was too young to fully appreciate it at the time, it was always clear he cared for his students.

The students' attitudes toward me and the class mattered the most to me. Students would tell me how much they'd enjoyed the class that day and that always made me feel good. I thought I did a good job teaching the curriculum as well as preparing my students in the transition from junior high school to high school.

Mr. Smith not only enjoyed teaching, but cared deeply about it. He was dedicated to it more than just as a classroom teacher. There was his aforementioned activity in the teacher’s union, role as supervisor for concessions during the high
school’s basketball and football seasons, and organization of an eighth grade spring
break trip to Washington, D.C. He chaperoned this trip for 22 years before passing the
torch on to Mr. King.

The DC trip was a big part of my teaching career for over 20 years. Because I
taught U.S. history, it was part and parcel of my curriculum. Touring the Capitol,
visiting Mount Vernon, honoring our veterans and former leaders at the many
memorials, made the textbook come alive for the students fortunate enough to
go on the trip; they loved it.

The Washington, D.C. field trip was one of my father’s teaching legacies. In some
ways, the trip represents the maturation in how I viewed him. First, as a fifth grader on
the inaugural trip, I was a son, in need of his love and terrified to fly despite being
energized by the prospect of visiting the nation’s capital and so many historic landmarks.
Second, as an eighth grader on the trip with my friends, I was a student, experiencing
my father’s passion through his desire as our teacher to show the trip’s educational
value to us. Finally, as a colleague, together chaperoning a group of over 20 students—
some I now taught as well—witnessing their excitement in the way I once experienced it,
and considering what ways I could make the trip meaningful and significant for them. I
had always appreciated the value of each individual trip, but never before considered
the totality of all three experiences and how they reflected the progression of my
identities with my father.

No torch passed has been more significant to my father, however, than that of
the dozens of educational torches ignited by him through his work with student
teachers. It was not initially something he considered when he began teaching. When
his principal first asked him to do so several years into his career, he worried that he
was not “old enough or wise enough for the undertaking.” Throughout the course of his
career, he mentored over 20 student teachers. Mr. Smith accepted these hopeful
teachers-in-training into his classroom and guided them through some of the most
challenging months of their careers.

He indicated his own student teaching experience at Ball State was “trial by fire.”
Mr. Smith did his student teaching in the spring and his supervising teacher was the
baseball coach. My father quickly learned his supervising teacher spent more time on
the baseball field than in the classroom when he had a student teacher. “I saw very little
of him once he turned the classes over to me. I took that experience and used it later
when I was given the opportunity to have student teachers of my own and was available
for them if and when they needed me but also gave them enough room to learn on their
own as well,” he said. As a testament to his success with student teachers, one of his
first student teachers still teaches in the GSC, and is now the Roosevelt High School
social studies department chair; others have moved on to other school corporations
throughout the country, staying in contact and continuing to seek his mentorship.

I found that I did have something to share. I learned right along with them and I
like to think they helped keep my teaching fresh and new as I provided them
with the tools and skills to start their professional lives. I guess that’s what they
call life-long learning? Knowing I shepherded so many student teachers on their
paths to a teaching career and to have them acknowledge and appreciate my
influence on their teaching is most rewarding. Knowing that they are ‘out there’
makes me feel better in retirement.

One of Mr. Smith’s greatest student teachers almost never have the chance to
work with him. Mr. Smith was nearing retirement, but still had several years left before
he was ready to do so. He had previously worked with Gene during an early university
field experience opportunity for the student. They both enjoyed working together
during this experience, and Gene requested to be placed with Mr. Smith when it came
time for student teaching several semesters later. It appeared things were in position
for this to happen, but Gibson’s principal decided to place Gene with another social
studies teacher in the building. According to Mr. Smith, this was done in order to make
that teacher’s administrative job shadowing easier. However, Mr. Smith fought the
decision, seeking to honor Gene’s wishes to student teach with him. It became one of
his most rewarding experiences with a student teacher. Gene is now flourishing as a
teacher and was inspired by Mr. Smith to lead his own tour of Washington, D.C. with his
students.

I basically said this was important to me and that if things weren’t changed, I
wouldn’t take another student teacher ever. He was one of my best. He had a
great rapport with the students while at the same time commanding their
respect. He pointed out things about my teaching style and sense of humor that I
didn’t really think about myself. He’s now teaching in his home state of New
Jersey at a school with a large minority population and doing an excellent job. He
will take his first group of students to Washington D.C. in the summer of 2016.

Through the joys of teaching and helping others, Mr. Smith was always able to
overcome any stresses that might have attempted to derail a feeling of productivity, be
it over the course of a day or his entire career. “I tried to remember the good times, and
to always believe that tomorrow was a new beginning,” he said. “There were the
situations that caused stress, but there were always other situations that made it all
worthwhile. Humor was always an antidote to a bad day, too, as my students and my
colleagues can tell you.”
4.3 Stresses

Humor could not always overcome the multitude of stresses Mr. Smith faced throughout his long career as a public school teacher and union representative fighting for teacher rights and what would best serve students in the classroom. As easy as it was to recall some of his greatest joys, a long list of stresses also accumulated throughout that career. He summed up his frustration with the stresses that not only affected his teaching, but all teachers by noting that “high stress levels in teachers are the result of our own high standards and expectations for ourselves as well as the demands placed on us by building administrators, local school boards, state legislatures, and the federal government. We no more than meet those demands and they change.”

Most of Mr. Smith’s greatest frustrations came from those making demands outside of public education, trying to insert their influence and often demeaning the profession while refusing to recognize it as one. Mr. Smith echoed a familiar challenge from teachers to those who would believe teaching is not a profession; he stated they should “try it for a day, a week, a semester, or even an entire year,” and they would then see how underpaid and underappreciated teachers are.

Disrespect of the profession was something Mr. Smith took very personally while teaching. “When you take away a teacher’s right to bargain other than salary and fringe benefits, it’s personal,” he said. “When you evaluate teachers based on meaningless test scores and make them jump through meaningless data collection hoops, it’s personal.”

Mr. Smith has faced this fight much of his career while teaching and bargaining for his colleagues, noting that “public perception of teachers has suffered since the
orchestrated attacks on public education began in earnest in the 1980s.” The National Education Association, local and state teacher associations, and prominent public figures such as Diane Ravitch have worked hard at countering the efforts to diminish the work of teachers.

The political frustrations center on the duplicitous legislative efforts at both the state and federal levels over the years to undermine public education and public educators’ unions disguised – not very well – as honest attempts to improve learning. Also the proliferation of private vouchers and charters at the expense of taxpayers and public schools and the separation of church and state, the re-segregation of schools, the equating of learning to a business. These make my blood boil. Kids are not kumquats. And we don’t get to pick our kids the way a grocer picks his kumquats.

Mr. Smith experienced three of his high school teachers lose their jobs over a silent protest, went on strike in his first year of teaching, and dealt with other ramifications of the political influences of teaching throughout his career. “I learned very early that every educational decision was a political decision and that you’re either at the table or on the menu.” Later in his career when these stresses ever seemed to be too much, a quote from Kylene Beers, public education advocate and former president of the National Council of Teachers of English, served as his mantra:

This is what I like the most about public schools—everyone is welcome. Unlike assembly lines that discard materials that can’t guarantee a predetermined uniform result, public schools don’t discard any child. Children can come hungry or filthy; they can speak English or Spanish or Vietnamese or Hmong; they can be athletic or clumsy, artistic or musical; they can be black or white, Latino or Asian; they can be gay or straight, rich or poor; Muslim or Jewish or Christian or Hindu or atheist. They can know a lot or a little. In public schools, teachers take students as they are, respect all as they are, and promise to teach all, as they are. It might be the plaque on the Statue of Liberty that says, ‘Give me your tired,
your poor/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,’ but it’s public schools that live that message daily.\textsuperscript{11}

The school day stresses often associated with being a teacher were minor for Mr. Smith. He dealt with fairly small amounts of stress from his students regarding discipline. He collaborated well with his colleagues. He generally had very positive relationships with the building administrators – even if they sometimes battled outside of school during collective bargaining. If any stress stood out the most in this area for Mr. Smith, it was with the students that he was unable to reach – be it for a day or especially throughout the course of an entire school year. Due in part to struggles as children in low income families, many students led lives outside of the classroom that were far more challenging than any history lesson Mr. Smith ever tried to teach them.

With students the stress centered on the few I could not reach, whose lives were too complicated for me to fully understand why they didn’t pay attention or do their homework or behave appropriately. In my Beaver Cleaver\textsuperscript{12} upbringing, it was difficult to realize that for some of my students, success or failure didn’t hinge on an A or an F in U.S. History, but rather on surviving the hours between the end of school in the afternoon and the beginning of school the next day. I would tell these students that every day was a new day and a new beginning. With some of them, there were a lot of new beginnings.

Through long hours on the job, Mr. Smith worked hard at being a successful teacher, making each of those new beginnings count for his students and for himself. At one point in his career, he juggled teaching seventh grade geography, eighth grade U.S. history, and ninth grade French across two different buildings during the school day. In

\textsuperscript{11} Quoted by Mr. Smith, first printed in “The Genteel Un-teaching of America’s Poor,” NCTE, March 2009.
\textsuperscript{12} Leave It to Beaver was a 1950s and 60s era TV sitcom that centered around the idyllic and wholesome family life of Beaver Cleaver, his older brother Wally, and his parents June and Ward. It was a far cry from the struggles of today’s youth.
all classes, he strived to craft the perfect lesson, handle nearly all disciplinary issues himself, and make a positive impact on his students, regardless of his own stress level.

Stress is an important component in success. If you are a truly dedicated teacher, I think the stress level is greater. Perhaps not as it relates to job security, but as it relates to your students’ success in class and in life. When I was honing a new lesson, I would usually have to spend hours at home perfecting it. A teacher doesn’t just clock in and clock out and leave the job behind at the end of the day. We probably worry more about our students’ success and happiness and future than anyone other than parents.

One of the greatest struggles with a teacher’s desire to make a difference in student lives is the inability to foster change. Many of the changes being proposed have left teachers out of the process or marginalized their efforts. As Mr. Smith stated, “Why should teachers buy into an idea they had no part in coming up with.” Mr. Smith sees hope in the unending efforts of those invested in the success of public education such as the NEA, Diane Ravitch, and Kylene Beers. The demands on teachers will always be great without the undue influence of those disassociated with the true demands on the profession.

Teaching would be less stressful if teachers were truly seen as the professionals they are and their input was sought and valued as much as billionaires and politicians and conservative think tanks. We are expected to continually do more with less, to burn the candle at both ends until we are burnt out. I think the public may finally be coming to their senses and realizing that they have been having the wool pulled over their faces by wolves in sheep’s clothing.

4.4 Feet First? Not Quite

On June 1, 2014, Mr. Smith ended a teaching career that spanned 39 years across five decades, all in the Grant School Corporation. The roots of that career took hold at an early age with his singular vision of becoming a teacher. “I never strayed from
that goal nor regretted my decision,” Mr. Smith said. “Mark Twain said: ‘It is noble to
teach yourself, but still nobler to teach others.’ He also said: ‘The two most important
days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.’ I always
believed I was born to be a teacher.”

In an era where nearly half of all teachers leave teaching within the first five
years of their career, Mr. Smith’s longevity, while once the standard, is becoming the
exception. Yet even his career ended slightly before he planned. His primary reasons for
retiring early were health issues and upcoming changes in the teachers’ pension fund
that would have cost him thousands of dollars over the course of his retirement if he did
not retire when he did. The excess hoops with which teachers had to jump through
along with mounting frustration over standardized testing and treatment of veteran
teachers added to his diminished desire to continue on with a career that had been his
passion.

The joy of teaching was being sapped in order to teach to the test...senior
teachers were no longer valued like we were in the past. Administrators, when
we bargained, barely concealed the fact that they thought they could get two or
three adequate new teachers for the price of an ‘old’ one. The fact that teachers
who did not retire before a certain date faced losing a substantial portion of
their retirement was the final straw for me.

The steady drain of these outside factors had eventually taken its toll on Mr.
Smith, leaving him a measure of relief in calling it a career. Even so, despite some of the
joy being lost, his commitment to his students never wavered. He had the opportunity
to say goodbye before the many strains became too much and extinguished the
remaining joy from his teaching.
I was determined not to be one of those teachers who stayed in the classroom long after the desire to be there had expired. I had some of those teachers. I knew colleagues like that. Not me. I enjoyed hearing students tell me how much they’d enjoyed the day’s lesson, former students who came back and told me how much they’d enjoyed my class. I wasn’t going to be one of those teachers who was not remembered fondly by his students. Lucky for me, I was able to walk away on my own terms with the wherewithal to retire comfortably, thanks to collective bargaining I might add.

Two years into his retirement Mr. Smith has had the opportunity to travel, leaving behind the early morning alarm clock life of a hard working teacher. He has begun vacationing in Gulf Shores, Alabama; visited family in his hometown of Pierre, South Dakota; and entered retirement with a surprise trip from me to head out East to watch the US Open tennis tournament in New York, explore Philadelphia, and experience Gettysburg all for the first time. He no longer has to worry about the stresses of the job. There are no more papers to grade or lessons to plan, no more battles with students, legislators, or administrators. Even so, it was a career he had pursued in earnest for a young age, and as such the positive memories will always remain with him.

I probably think about teaching in some capacity every day. I see Facebook posts from former colleagues about TGIF and vacations and the like. I miss it most every day in some capacity as well. There are times of the year when I would have been teaching certain lessons; I remember how much I enjoyed that. The spring break D.C. trip has been particularly missed, too. I also miss the daily interaction with colleagues and students; I also miss the professional association activism and the interaction with those folks.

I had left Gibson for full time graduate coursework the year before my father retired, and there is a small part of me that regrets not being there in his final year. My educational path had taken me in a different direction, however, and the support and guidance of my father is one of the reasons I could feel comfortable with my decision. I
remember coming back on that final day of the year and celebrating my father’s retirement along with that of several other teachers. Congratulatory handshakes and hugs mixed with tears at the sadness of saying goodbye.

I taught for 39 years and I can honestly say I loved almost every minute of it. Like a tennis champion, I wanted to leave at the top of my game before my desire and commitment to my craft waned. I think I achieved that goal. The time felt right to retire, to move on. There are times I still miss it, and I’m sure I always will, but I have no regrets. I once thought I’d have to be carried feet first from my classroom. Turns out I left alive and satisfied with my decision.
CHAPTER 5. PROGRESSIVE PASSIONS: MY EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY

5.1 Teaching Was Always There

5.1.1 A Passionate Beginning

Telling my own story was more of a challenge than I ever anticipated. Determining which moments in my educational experience were most relevant to this study was not easy. Was it possible to be too personal about my experiences? How much value did I place on some of my most significant memories in relation to the goals of this study? I have become quite comfortable talking about my experiences, even the most troubling ones, but attaching any measure of significance seemed a monumental task. These moments have mattered to me, but can they serve to help others? It was not until I began to retell the stories of the other teachers interviewed and wove my own story through theirs that a clearer picture came in to view of the significance of my own experience with teaching.

Due to my father’s long and rewarding career as a teacher, the thought that I might enjoy teaching was always in the back of my mind, even though it was not the first passion I pursued. I loved school from a young age, and found joy in a wide range of subjects and topics, which made identifying a career path somewhat difficult. However, when others hated writing assignments, I thrived on them. This led me to journalism
and a different set of goals and expectations. Somewhere along the way I realized that those goals were not as meaningful as I once thought, and I searched for a greater purpose. I remember thinking about my love of school and how I would joke with my father, saying he went to school, not work. I started to wonder if perhaps the classroom was where I was meant to be. I realized I did not need to pursue a separate career path from my father to have my own identity— I could leave my own mark within the same profession. My father and my best friend were both history teachers, however, so I turned to my love of literature and writing rather than my love of history because I felt it would help allow me to create my own path. Also, coaching was an interest of mine, and I did not like the thought of being stereotyped as one of the social studies teachers who only pursued teaching as an avenue to coaching. Somewhat strangely enough, I cannot recall the specific moment I turned to teaching or chose English over social studies. All I remember is that once I made the decision, it always felt like the right one. My passion for teaching had always been there; it just took time for me to recognize it.

Similar to Mr. Connors, coaching gave me my first opportunity to impact education. In 2001, three years in to college and several English related majors later, I was considering a transfer from Ball State. Returning to my hometown and attending college nearby was not my ideal choice, but a phone call from my assistant tennis coach in high school— now the head coach— led me back. He was looking for someone to coach the junior high tennis program and in time take over at the high school. He thought perhaps I had graduated and thought of me due to my continued volunteer involvement with the team even after heading to college. Regardless of my career path,
coaching was something that excited me, and that phone call sealed my decision to transfer. Within a year, I was an English education major. Within two years I had taken over as the varsity boys tennis coach at Roosevelt High School, my alma matter, and was ready to student teach there as well.

I was fortunate enough to student teach in the Grant School Corporation prior to being hired there. Initially, I believed I would be placed with Mrs. Compliment, an English teacher at the high school and the varsity volleyball coach which seemed a natural fit. I did not want to be viewed as a “coach first” teacher, and I felt that her mentorship would help me best navigate through the stereotypes associated with being both a coach and a teacher, especially since I was coaching before my teaching career had begun. Purdue had other thoughts, not wanting to place me in the same school I attended. While I disagreed, we reached a compromise, and I was assigned to teach at Gibson. Since I had attended the other junior high, any potential conflict of interest was largely avoided. At first I was disappointed with the decision, but I quickly discovered eighth grade English was the perfect fit for me.

My cooperating teacher at Gibson, Mrs. Bennett, was demanding – of me and her students. Her ability to effectively manage her classroom and handle discipline was amazing. She had developed this look that would freeze disruptive students. I will never forget it. Her organization while teaching three different progressing levels of eighth grade classes – general education, challenge, and excel – was equally impressive. She was a veteran teacher and well-liked by her colleagues and students. I immediately learned the importance of having high expectations for student behavior, and that those
expectations did not require sacrificing fun with the students. While she had her set ways, she was always very flexible, and allowed me the freedom to develop my own teaching identity and create my own materials. Once she had seen me teach for about a week, she felt comfortable leaving me alone with the students for longer stretches of time, and I appreciated her trust. It allowed me to feel more like the teacher for those students. Even though she would leave the classroom, she was always nearby and available if I ran into any problems. Through my experience with Mrs. Bennett I learned the high level of commitment it took to be prepared for class every day.

Despite my aversion to mornings, my excitement helped motivate me to arrive an hour early each day during my ten week student teaching experience. In the evening I rarely went to bed before 11 p.m. I was easily spending 16 hours each school day on my planning, grading, and teaching. I did not want to let Mrs. Bennett or my students down. I can still vividly recall arriving to school one day less than adequately prepared to begin a poetry unit. I was sloppy in my preparation, and I knew it. Mrs. Bennett had trusted me to prepare for this unit on my own. After seeing the subpar results with the first two classes, Mrs. Bennett sat down with me during our prep period and helped me rework the unit, while at the same time letting me know I had not performed up to her expectations. I learned firsthand how virtually impossible it was to give anything less than your best and still have a successful day.

I would not have been a high caliber teacher had it not been for Mrs. Bennett and her dedication to me. The lessons I learned from her were the most impactful of my entire experience as an English education major. When she told me I was perhaps her
best student teacher in over 20 years, I had all the confidence I needed to succeed as a classroom teacher. I never understood how my father tolerated junior high school students until I taught them myself. I had fallen in love with teaching eighth graders and hoped an opportunity would arise that allowed me to continue doing so after I completed my student teaching.

Fortunately, a retirement by one of the other English teachers opened up that door for me. After a successful student teaching experience at Gibson, I interviewed there over the summer and was offered a job teaching eighth grade English. Dr. Perkins, then the principal at Gibson, told me I was by far the strongest candidate. I was the one they wanted, much the same as my father had been when he started his career.

In August of 2004, I had my own classroom and was prepared to greet my first set of students. I tackled my first year of teaching with enthusiasm and passion. I spent hours in my classroom that summer getting my room prepared. The feeling of pride in having a room to call my own has been one of the most significant memories in my teaching career. When the year began, I felt connected to my students; they responded well to my mixture of humor and ability to enforce appropriate expectations. I was creative with writing projects and reading novels and had freedom to develop an appropriate curriculum for my students. It was exciting to start a career that felt right for me.

Since I was teaching the same grade level at the same school where I student taught, I had a number of units and connected lessons already planned out. I was constantly modifying them, but the core material remained. It was a tremendous help to
already have relevant material. One was the research paper, which became a passion project of mine over the course of my teaching career at Gibson. I was able to get my students energized about writing by giving them a strong foundational structure yet allowing them the freedom to explore their own interests. It was one of the most rewarding units I taught, and I believed very strongly that I was making a difference with my students. Teaching the same grade level in the same school where I student taught gave me a greater feeling of preparation. Not every first year teacher will have this good fortune, but every first year teacher should still be able to effectively incorporate strategies and concepts learned from student teaching. I believe preservice education can help emphasize this. The lesson might be slightly different in another grade, but the type of project or activity could still be modified to work well with the new group of students. Despite my increased level of preparation, I still spent well over 10 hours per day committed to the individual needs of this new group of students.

I have nothing but positive memories about my first year of teaching, but there was nothing incredibly unique about that first year. I taught on a team with a veteran group of teachers who helped provide me with guidance and support. These teachers were more set in their ways, but never discouraged me from trying new things. My students enjoyed my still developing teaching style. I was happy, loved the colleagues I worked with, enjoyed the interaction I had with my students, was able to balance coaching with teaching, and found time to have a social life. I was confident and pleased at the thought that I was going to teach until I retired. I had passion and felt I was
making a difference with my students. It was exciting to finally share the experiences of teaching with my father and Mr. King.

5.1.2 Panic and Regret

During my second year of teaching in 2005, there was tension among staff as rumors of a corporation-wide budget crisis began more valid. There was added anxiety as a reduction in force was a possible solution to the crisis. The hope was that enough teachers would retire in order to eliminate the need to let teachers go, but if enough teachers did not retire or the corporation did not figure out the budget issue in another way, the most inexperienced teachers on staff would lose jobs. I was stunned and disheartened that the job I loved so much and had only just begun could so easily be ripped away from me, especially when I knew I was performing at a high level.

Much like my father, I have been a staunch supporter of the teacher’s union and was a member while a public school teacher. I lobbied and protested, often with my father, on multiple occasions, especially when party politics threatened to hinder public education. As a young teacher, however, I came to believe our local teachers association did not provide the same amount of support with regard to job security as it did for more veteran teachers. Against my father’s advice, I chose to speak out against the possible layoffs of young teachers, writing a guest column for the local newspaper. Despite knowing I might face backlash, I wrote about my dissatisfaction with the unequal treatment of young teachers and suggested years of service should not be the sole component that determines a teacher’s value. I was not going to lose a job I loved
without a fight. I received support when the column was printed; one teacher even laminated and placed the article in my mailbox with an encouraging note.

It was another note I received the following day that marked one of the most painful moments of my teaching career. As I arrived to school that morning and checked my teacher mailbox, I found a brief handwritten note with a threatening tone. I did not keep the note, but I still remember its intent and how it made me feel. The anonymous author suggested I watch my back and reconsider attacking the union, as I would one day be a veteran teacher in need of protection. This rogue teacher did not represent the union’s stance on my comments; I knew that, but it still left me feeling unsettled and extremely disappointed at the rift these potential layoffs had created between teachers. The last thing I wanted was for any quality teacher to lose a valued job; it was my first true experience with the near impossibility of measuring a teacher’s performance. To this day it still hurts when I think about pulling that note from my mailbox. That note in part triggered a transfer to the high school at midyear of my second year of teaching.

Not long after the column was published, our building principal, Dr. Perkins, reached out to me. We met and had a very open and honest discussion about the situation regarding the potential reduction in force. He informed me that given my status as one of the newest teachers in the English department, my job would be in danger if the corporation had to let staff go. He brought to my attention a midyear opening at the high school for an English position, and strongly suggested that I consider it, given I was already coaching at the high school. He insisted he did not want to lose me at Gibson, but would rather have me retained elsewhere in the corporation if the
alternative were losing my job altogether. He felt my job would be more secure at the high school since I was a varsity coach. He cautioned me that my job might still end up being safe at Gibson, but if I wanted to pursue the opening at Roosevelt, he would understand. While I had fallen in love with teaching eighth grade since I student taught, in the back of my mind I always wondered if the high school was the right situation for me. That small measure of curiosity combined with a heavy dose of fear was all I needed to interview for the high school position, which I accepted when offered.

It was a decision I almost immediately regretted. Once the initial high of starting fresh and avoiding a possible layoff subsided, I realized I had made a serious mistake. I was quickly overwhelmed and felt my classroom and curricular freedom stifled. At Gibson I only had to prepare for eighth grade English, which I taught five times a day. At Roosevelt I was tasked with teaching two sections of college prep freshman English, two sections of college prep sophomore English, and two sections of occupational tech prep sophomore English.\(^13\) I had just two weeks over the winter break to prepare for all of these classes. If I had more time to prepare, the situation might have been different, but I never felt comfortable at the high school. I often felt unprepared which led to a great deal of stress. I was used to creating my own materials, but the English department, like other departments, was far more stringent in regard to our teaching freedom given that each teacher administered the same final exam. I felt suffocated and handcuffed. I needed space to create more freely. Neither Roosevelt High School nor the English

\(^{13}\) The college prep classes are designed for most students at Roosevelt with the intent of pursuing an undergraduate degree. The occupational tech prep classes are for students who do not plan to go to college, struggle academically, and/or have mild learning disabilities.
department was at fault for this; it was just not the right environment for me. With three different subjects to prepare for, I fell into the unfortunate habit of just using what other teachers already had in place. I was miserable, stressed, tired, and missed my students at Gibson. My occasional battle with seasonal affective disorder intensified. I did not want to admit this or any of my teaching struggles to anyone. I did not want to appear to be failing. I lost the joy of teaching, and it was crippling me in ways I did not believe were possible. Not even two months in to my new position, I had a nervous breakdown and was granted an indefinite medical leave from teaching. It was a remarkable turnaround from the positive energy I felt just a few short months ago. I was in the midst of the lowest point of my life.

I cannot remember the exact day it happened during that semester, but I remember sitting on my bed one morning, unable to move or finish getting ready for school. I was completely frozen. Despite being an adult, I did what I have always done when I needed advice—I called my mother. I was in a panic, barely able to breathe, let alone speak as I tried to explain what was happening through my tears of frustration, fear, and confusion. She helped calm me down and gave me enough strength to make it to school to notify them in person that I had to deal with a recent emergency and could not teach that day. I set up a quick lesson plan for a substitute. I remember talking to one of the secretaries and barely hanging on. To this day, I am unsure how many people ever discovered the extent of what happened to me, both that day and the days to come when I did not return.

14 Nervous breakdowns are periods of mental illness highlighted by severe depression, stress, and anxiety.
The goal of my leave was intended to be rejuvenating and allow me to get the necessary help to better handle the stress and anxiety that pushed me to this point. It did not work, in large part to my inability to accept what had happened. I generally just told my therapist what I thought she wanted to hear, rather than truly opening up. But even I did not have a firm realization as to why I succumbed so intensely to the pressure. Eventually I started missing appointments until I was no longer going. Each day I felt guilty about not being in the classroom. I felt intense anxiety anytime I considered setting a date for my return. I was ashamed of myself for letting pressure get to me. I felt weak and fraudulent. I had no idea how I would ever face the school or my classroom again. I wished I had stayed at Gibson and taken my chances with the layoffs.

5.1.3 Renewed Enthusiasm and New Passions

I was granted a leave of absence for the following school year as well and moved to Indianapolis in an attempt to recharge and refocus my priorities. It was halfway through that leave, sometime in December 2006, when I realized how much I missed teaching. I talked about teaching more frequently with my friends and my girlfriend at the time. When I moved, it was necessary resign as the varsity boys tennis coach, and I missed coaching a great deal as well. I had been pursuing other career options and considered working toward a master’s degree, but nothing seemed very satisfying. I wanted to get back to the joys I experienced as an English teacher at Gibson and tennis coach at Roosevelt. My girlfriend sensed this and finally asked if I missed teaching; it was easy to recognize that I did. I explored teaching jobs within Indianapolis and
surrounding suburbs, but none of them seemed as appealing as returning home, hopefully to Gibson. It was where I was meant to be; I did not need any more time to realize that.

I sent an email to Dr. Perkins, who was now the assistant superintendent of Grant School Corporation. He put me in touch with Gibson’s new principal, Mr. Mach, who was previously an assistant principal there. Since I had been granted a leave of absence, I was guaranteed a position in the GSC if I chose to return. There was no guarantee where that position would be, although it was likely Roosevelt. I was determined not to return to the high school. I missed teaching primarily because I missed the atmosphere at Gibson. I knew that I could thrive as a teacher once again if I was back with that age group. Mr. Mach informed me that an eighth grade English teacher would be leaving at the end of the year to pursue her doctorate. I knew I wasn’t guaranteed the position, but I was excited for the opportunity to interview, and confident I would prove the best candidate once again. When I interviewed, I had to convince Mr. Mach that Gibson was truly where I wanted to be. With my renewed enthusiasm and experience away from Gibson, there was no doubt in my mind that I would interview well and be back where I felt I belonged. I was right. Mr. Mach offered me the position; I had the second chance I so desperately desired.

During my second year back at Gibson Mr. Mach stopped by room regarding another matter. He told me I was doing a great job and offhandedly mentioned to me he had doubts about me returning there to teach, but that I had dismissed those doubts with my performance; he was glad I had returned. I always suspected his apprehension
about my return to Gibson, and this confirmed it. While I was not looking for any affirmation of my decision, it felt good to know he recognized my efforts in the classroom and was happy to have me back.

As part of a resolution to the budget crisis, the two junior high schools in the GSC were repurposed. Armstrong had become a fifth and sixth grade intermediate school and Gibson, which had previously contained grades 6-8, would only have the seventh and eighth grades. As a result of this change, my father had moved over to Gibson to continue teaching eighth grade U.S. history, and I was excited about the opportunity to teach together in the same building. Even though we never taught in the same hallway and did not see each other as often as we both would have preferred, I made a point to stop by his room frequently, usually before the start of the school day. My teaching career had been reborn, and I was rejuvenated and ready to face any challenge at Gibson. I was already coaching again, as both the junior high school tennis coach and varsity girls tennis coach. In a few short years, I regained the varsity boys tennis position when the head coach — my former assistant — resigned to spend more time with his family. My initial departure and subsequent breakdown while at the high school were in my rearview mirror. An incredible second chance was available to me; the reset button had been pressed, and I wanted to make the most of it. It was an incredibly positive time; the six years I spent back at Gibson are largely remembered fondly.

I loved the team I worked with, especially when we hired a strong science teacher, Mrs. Carver, after two years of changes. Our math teacher, Mrs. Calhoun, who had taken part in my return interview process, was not only an excellent teacher, but
had outstanding classroom management skills. I also taught with two skilled special education teachers as part of our co-teaching in inclusion classrooms.\textsuperscript{15} I now taught 3 sections of general academic English and two sections of inclusion English, which required some modifications. In two years, the first special education teacher I worked with transferred to the high school and we hired Mrs. Johnson, who brought her passion and enthusiasm to our team. After my second year at Gibson, my best friend, Mr. King, transferred from Armstrong and joined our team as the social studies teacher. Our classrooms were right next to each other. Our team now consisted of vibrant and energetic teachers in their mid 20s. We all got along well, and it showed in our collaboration across the curriculum and in our student interactions. I now taught with my best friend and my father was just a few hallways away. We had an administrative staff led by Mr. Mach that was supportive of our efforts, especially on our team. He was not afraid to place some of the school’s most challenging students with our team, and we welcomed the opportunity to reach these students. Some of my greatest joys came from our successful efforts with students who might not otherwise have experienced success.

5.2 Joys

It is easy to echo the sentiments of the previous educators in this study – that our interactions with the students offer the greatest rewards. While easy to say, it is

\textsuperscript{15} This teacher co-taught with math and English in inclusion classes that included a high percentage of students with learning disabilities and/or were underperforming on standardized testing.
also true. Through teaching, coaching, and mentoring preservice and student teachers, I was able to experience the gamut of these relationships. I fed off my positive interaction with students, and learned how to effectively handle some of the more challenging ones. It was a great thrill to see students find enjoyment with literature or writing after initially walking into my classroom with a negative attitude about English class. I also thrived when interacting with visiting EDCI 101 students or the three student teachers I mentored, helping guide them as they learned how to impact our students positively.

Ultimately, it was how our academic team bonded that made the greatest difference in our ability to reach our students. There is a long list of joyful memories with my students, some which have already been mentioned throughout this study. Sometimes simple acts, such as helping students open a locker or making a new student feel welcomed added joy to the day. Other times it was through thoughtful notes from students at the end of the school year or developing a stronger bond with a student through a negative experience or catching up with former students when they came back to visit. It was incredibly rewarding to feel as if I had made a difference in students’ lives.

Mishandling situations with students will happen while teaching. There were plenty of times when I let my frustration with a student or entire class affect me to the point of raising my voice. Over time I learned to handle situations without yelling or trying to “make an example” of a student. I finally stopped taking outbursts and poor behavior personally. As a result, I was able to calmly deal with discipline issues. This limited confrontations with a misbehaving student in front of the entire class and helped me develop more positive relationships. It was early in my second year back when I
finally turned that corner for good. I had a particularly heated confrontation with a student, Hector, who was refusing to meet expectations regarding behavior. He was talking and disrupting other students instead of working on his research paper. I had already tried several strategies for getting him on track – from warning him several times to isolating him from other students. Overall, he was a bright and capable student, and generally one of my favorites to interact with, but the social aspect of school was more important to him than schoolwork. He did not handle confrontation well, not from his peers or his teachers, and I tried to be sensitive to that when working with him. In this case, however, I became so frustrated with Hector’s repeated behavior issues that I leaned over his desk into his personal space and confronted him. Hector was not one to back down from a challenge and insisted I not “get in his face.” What would have normally been a small issue, escalated quickly as neither of us was going to give in to the other. It led to his removal from the classroom and a rare trip to the office and discipline referral from me.

I had made a huge mistake by confronting Hector in this manner and I knew it. Instead of just moving on or blaming him entirely for the situation, I reflected on the incident. I made a point to try and make things right. The next day as Hector was entering the class I quietly pulled him aside in the hallway and had a brief discussion with him. I first apologized for handling the situation the way I did. Second, I asked him a series of yes or no questions, hoping to eliminate any further confrontation. The conversation went something like this: Do you understand that you did not meet my expectations in class? Yes. Am I generally an unreasonable teacher? No. Do you think we
can try a little harder to stay on task in the future and respect me? Yes. Do you hate me?

No. So can we still get along? Yes. In only a few minutes, Hector and I had reestablished our bond. We both had smiles on our faces as we entered class. I believe Hector was already largely over the incident before I spoke with him, but I could sense tension lifted from his shoulders. For me, it was particularly cathartic; I had dwelled on the incident since it occurred. It felt good to come to a positive resolution. I knew that if I had handled it that way the day before, the situation would have never blown up. Hector and I got along extremely well for the rest of the school year. We still had minor issues from time to time, but we both had a better understanding of each other. I continued to use the yes and no approach to handling discipline, and I had much greater success when dealing with student concerns.

Two other fond memories of my teaching experience came from some of the positive notes and cards I received from students at the end of the school year. One student, Melissa, was very quiet and always on task. She had excellent grades in all her subjects and never complained. That year I had been given permission to teach The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins and it was hugely successful with my students. The movie was not yet out, but hype surrounding the possibility had sparked more interest in the novel among our students. Melissa’s card furthered confirmed the benefit of teaching the novel. Melissa was not as excited as most students about reading the novel. She had tried reading the book earlier in the year due to its popularity, but did not like it and stopped reading only a few chapters into the novel. However, when we studied it and read it in class, she fell in love with the novel and
went on to read the next two books in the trilogy. She thanked me for showing her a
new way to read and experience novels.

Perhaps my fondest memory comes from a thank you note given to me by a
student that had been deemed unreachable by other teachers, particularly another
English teacher. I was approached by one of the assistant principals regarding moving
Selena to my English class, and I agreed. Selena was transferred to my first period class
following winter break. I had been told she was confrontational and outright mean. She
walked in to my class with a slight chip on her shoulder, but seemed far from
unreachable. I did not expect it would happen so quickly. I spoke to her briefly after our
first class together and told her that she had a fresh start with me. I was not concerned
with any of her past behavior, and that if she wanted to show she was capable of
succeeding, I would help her every step of the way. Selena had a friend in the class, and
I also credit her positive influence for making a large impact on Selena’s behavior.

It took some time, but within a few short weeks, Selena’s walls came down, and
she became one of my most enjoyable students. She participated, did excellent work,
asked questions, and was a positive influence on the students around her. I distinctly
remember a project she did with a Ray Bradbury short story, “There Will Come Soft
Rains.” I asked students to visually represent a key moment from the story by drawing a
picture and explaining its importance. Selena thrived on both aspects of the assignment,
creating a detailed image and also writing a strong explanation of the moment’s
significance. I made a special point to let her know how impressed I was with her work
after I had graded and returned it.
I believe being in my first period class helped get her day off on the right foot, as her discipline issues in other classes fell off as well. She went from failing the previous semester under the other teacher to earning an A in my class. At the end of the year, she gave me a note that said I was the only teacher who actually believed in her and gave her a chance. She wrote that she looked forward to my class each day and that I changed her attitude about school. All she had wanted was to feel like one teacher was on her side. When I was teaching, I kept her note and others in my desk. I often pulled them out after particularly trying days. I read hers more than any other; it brought me great joy to know I helped change a student’s perspective on school and teachers.

I also remember fondly our collective efforts as an English department in what became my final year of teaching. When the previous year’s standardized test scores were released, our eighth grade English department had the lowest scores in the school. It was not an ideal way to start the school year. We did not know exactly how we had failed our students, but according to the state test, we had not done adequately taught a large number of them. Mr. Connors, the other teachers, and I worked incredibly hard to bring those scores up. We tracked student achievement on practice tests, refocused our objectives, identified key standards to teach, and pinpointed students who were on the cusp of passing. We would not know the results until the following school year, and by that time I had left Gibson to pursue my master’s degree full time. When learned of the extreme improvement of our scores, helping raising our school’s overall grade from a C to an A, I was pleased to know our efforts paid off.
Coaching also brought a great deal of joy to my teaching experience. I have particularly fond memories of coaching the same group of girls in basketball their seventh and eighth grade years. I discussed my success with Sierra in Chapter 2, and the joy of seeing her grow not only as a basketball player, but as an improved student now capable of earning a chance to continue playing in college. The interactions I had with my classroom students who also played the sports I coached brought added joy to the experience. I felt an extra connection to them, and it was rewarding to work with them on multiple levels. Aside from coaching and sponsoring various sports and clubs, my fellow team teachers and I would try to attend games, concerts, and dances as a way to establish that extra connection. I believe this extra dedication to our students was always a reason why we had fewer discipline issues than other teachers in our building. It added a substantial amount of time to our already full school plate, but knowing it kept us from a greater number of discipline concerns made the extra time worth it.

As a varsity tennis coach for over 12 years, I have had many experiences that mirrored my classroom joys and struggles. Two students, both brothers, invited me to be a guest to an end of the year academic honors banquet as the educator who had the greatest influence on them – the youngest brother calling me the most positive person he knew when I was his guest of honor. I have stayed in contact with a great number of my athletes, and feel honored to call them friends now that they are adults. I have even hired two former players as assistant coaches. My favorite coaching success story, however, is the impact I had on one of the first athletes I coached.
Cory was a naturally gifted tennis player. However, he was also a troublemaker. He enjoyed getting off task during practice and stirring up negativity. His poor behavior was not isolated to the tennis court as I learned from his teachers. After a sophomore season as a varsity player, he failed to earn a spot on varsity as a junior in 2004. Two freshmen and an improved sophomore had squeezed him out of the lineup. Cory felt entitled to his previous position, despite not working to improve in the offseason. As the season progressed and the new players had success, he realized he had little chance of earning meaningful varsity time. He looked to stir the pot and create problems as a way of lashing out. He badgered his teammates, complained about the coaches, and was generally miserable to be around. He had previously been suspended for a week, and he and his parents had to sign a zero tolerance policy with me in order for him to return. After an outburst at an away match shortly after his return, I removed him from the team for good. Cory and his father fought the decision, but I stood firm and my athletic director supported me. We all had a sit down meeting and I told Cory that he was welcome to rejoin the team the following year, and that if he wanted to play varsity again, he was going to have to work hard to earn it. That was the extent of my message to him. I hoped I would, but did not expect to see him again for his senior year.

During the offseason, however, I started to hear that he was putting in extra effort indoors over the winter, playing in tournaments, and committing to a successful return. It became clear that I would be seeing more of Cory for his senior season. I anticipated dealing with the same problems. When the season began, however, he displayed a positive attitude and worked as hard as anyone on the team. He even began
organizing team outings to movies or to play ping pong. His teammates elected him one of the two team captains. Some of his past behaviors manifested from time to time, but it was clear Cory had made an effort to change his attitude. It paid off and he earned a spot in the singles lineup, helping our team win the conference tournament.

Had the story ended there, I would have felt great about Cory’s turnaround. I was even more pleased when I ran into him over the summer of 2015, some ten years removed from his high school tennis experience. He told me I was the first adult to ever give him tough love, and that he needed it more than he ever realized at the time. He hugged me and thanked me for sticking with him. He was enjoying a successful career and was a team leader for his coworkers. He credited my handling of his behavior as a tennis player for helping him get there. I will never forget that conversation.

Just as I used to tell my father that he did not go to work, he went to school, I loved to tell my friends the same thing about my life as a teacher and coach; it never felt like work. Making an impact on student lives has been the most rewarding aspect of being a teacher. Those who brand teachers as anything other than professionals because we have extended breaks or because they believe the adage that implies teachers cannot do anything else, are incapable of understanding the value of our interaction with students. Our time off is earned. The ability to recharge is a bonus, not a motivating factor to teach. A good deal of that time we are grading papers and preparing future lessons; I cannot recall a spring break or winter break when I was not grading poetry projects, research papers, or essays. We thrive on our connection to our students and our colleagues. When that connection is severed, there is an emptiness. I
still cherish my experiences with students and colleagues. Plenty of stresses exist in
teaching, but those positive moments with students have affirmed we are making a
difference and kept us motivated.

5.3 Stresses

There were many stressful situations in eight years teaching in public schools. I
encountered several students at Gibson that faced difficult challenges. It was especially
stressful when I felt inadequately equipped to help a student with issues outside of the
classroom. When it seemed external challenges were negatively impacting performance
in the classroom, offering support and understanding was often all I could do.

When I approached Billy, one of my most engaged and committed students, as
to why he had stopped turning in homework or participating regularly, I found out he
had recently lived in a car with his mother for three months after they were evicted
from their apartment. I was stunned to learn this, as he did not fit my stereotype of the
type of student who would suffer through something like that. They eventually got back
on their feet, but I always remember him as the student that opened my eyes to the
possibility that anyone in my classroom could have serious struggles.

In my first year of teaching, one student, Marcus, slept nearly every day in school.
When I dug deeper into his story, I came to learn that his father had left the family years
ago and his mother was frequently out all night. Marcus often worked late at a fast food
restaurant to help support the family, primarily his younger brother, ensuring he was
fed and on time for school every day. This student could not prioritize school given the
outside demands of his life, but he made certain his brother was ready for the day. I would get a few weeks of effort each semester, but I knew he had no interest in school. I understood his situation, but was frustrated with my inability to consistently reach this student academically. Several years later I was rewarded when I had his brother, James, in class. His brother had some academic struggles due to a learning disability, but he worked hard and was positive about school. I am certain his older brother played a significant role in helping James succeed.

Overall, there were few stresses related to my students, aside from the frustrations and feelings of helplessness regarding issues outside of my control as a teacher. Establishing reasonable expectations and developing positive relationships with students made the classroom environment not only manageable, but fun. It was the long hours of commitment outside of the classroom that had a regular tendency to wear on me. I enjoyed creating and modifying lessons and units, but it was a 24 hour job to stay on top of those plans and keep grades updated.

Managing between 100-150 students each year as an English teacher led to a significant number of nights and weekends grading. Many times these were extended writing assignments. I preferred to grade at school, so I often stayed until I was finished with my daily grading goal. Other times I returned after completing other commitments. If I had a match or game to coach that evening, the nights were even longer. There were times I was in the building well after midnight working on grades or lessons. Any time spent away from my teaching duties left me feeling incredibly guilty — there was always something to do. My girlfriend at the time, while initially supportive, did not fully
understand the time commitment teaching and coaching required of me. Our relationship deteriorated in part because of the long hours I needed to commit to my craft. She supported and encouraged our move back to my hometown, but was not prepared for the time commitment required of a teacher. My job never left me; I was never off the clock. If I wanted to have much of a life outside of teaching, I knew my students would suffer; I did not want that. When I let myself relax for an evening, the work only piled higher the next day. Understanding how to manage these commitments became easier each year, but the amount of work never diminished.

I tried my best to follow the advice of Mr. Lambert, my high school journalism advisor, who advised spending at least an hour daily and several hours each weekend on grading. This helped him stay on top of grading without being overwhelmed by an enormous pile of papers on any one day. I tried my best to be effective using this strategy, but I had many months where the piles of papers seemed to rise like skyscrapers across the landscape of my desk. I discovered over the course of my career that not everything has to be graded and certain assignments can be graded differently. The key with grading, I felt, came from reviewing the assignments with the students instead of just passing back papers and moving on. Too often we grade assignments because we feel we have to, but provide no tangible feedback to the students about that assignment. It was not always easy to review assignments given the time crunch I felt due to meeting standards and objectives, but I found it far more effective once I had a grasp of which assignments held the most value in reviewing. The goal is for the students to learn, not just receive a grade. In order to learn, they needed to reflect on
their efforts, and I needed to reflect on what worked or did not work about my teaching style. It was a daunting task to accomplish with administrators pressing us to teach test preparation strategies and be sure to include a bevy of standards into the curriculum before the standardized test in the spring. Regardless, I attempted to provide quality feedback and allowed my students to turn in corrected assignments for an improved grade.

Standardized testing and the accompanying pressures placed on us by the administration are definitely key reasons why I chose to leave Gibson after eight years and pursue a master’s degree full time at Purdue University. While our efforts my final year there paid off in improved student performance, it was still disheartening to feel as if we were called out for failing. In my heart, I know we did not fail those students. We always worked incredibly hard at helping our students succeed. We only failed to show that a test biased toward white middle class students indicated our students' success. I am proud that we increased our student performance, but disappointed that in order to do so we had to sacrifice curriculum and teach directly to the test. What turned out to be my final year of teaching was filled with a large number of stressors, almost all of which were attached to standardized testing.

Teacher evaluations and merit pay did not concern me that much. I felt confident in my teaching ability and believed my scores would reflect that. Other teachers stressed a great deal over these added components to the job. Evaluations had been ongoing since I began teaching. The added stress that those evaluations could determine my pay and perceived quality as an educator was minor. While evaluations
are largely subjective, I trusted my administrators’ attempts at objectivity and knew I would rate highly. I did not approve of merit pay, but I understood the concept. The GSC had made a strong effort to keep the process as fair as possible, minimizing the impact standardized test results had on pay and maximizing the observations and evaluations of the administration. Some stress was associated with knowing the administrators could stop in at anytime and evaluate me, but that had always been the case. I had no secrets in my classroom and made every attempt to make each day valuable for my students.

Most stress resulted from feeling like valuable instruction was being squeezed in order to focus on teaching to the test. The freedom I once loved about having my own classroom was greatly diminished; that freedom was one of the reasons I loved teaching at Gibson. I loved collaborating with my colleagues, but also loved knowing that we could teach the same material in our own way. Our teaching was becoming more regulated, and it was frustrating. I did not want to lose my identity as a teacher. My style did not necessarily fit the style of the other teachers in the department. Mr. Connors and I both taught similar classes, and our teaching style was similar, but I differed from the other three teachers in what they valued and how they chose to teach.

In many ways we were becoming circus animals required to jump through hoops to gain approval. My final year at Gibson exacerbated this feeling. There was an endless amount of documentation. We had to chart students’ practice test scores and identify students that were on the borderline of success, hoping that by pushing them over the top, it would boost our scores. On the surface it was to benefit our students, but it
honestly made us feel like we were just trying to make the data look better. I wondered how much impact we were really having on student learning. We were teaching our students successful test strategies, but how much of what they learned would quickly be forgotten once the test was completed?

Our department had to fill out forms for the administration showing the work we accomplished during our meetings. We spent more and more time on paperwork and less time on addressing curricular issues that would make a difference for our students. We spent time and energy on bringing in an outside group and developing a new strategy for learning one year, then dumped it the following year. At one point we were ready to stick with the state standards, but then it was on to the Common Core. Just as we had restructured everything for the Common Core, we were told to hold off on making a complete transition just yet. As a result we had to make sure our material covered both standards until we knew which direction we would head. It was more time spent on paperwork and less time developing enriching activities for our students. I felt disconnected from my students, especially during that final year. The joy I felt at coming to school every day had greatly diminished.

This renewed focus on time with our department teachers resulted from the Gibson administration’s decision to disband the team format in which my colleagues and I thrived. It made the final year that much more frustrating. I viewed it as the final straw in my decision to leave. Our principal indicated that we were the only team that truly utilized the team format. I was separated from the group of teachers I had come to care so much about, most notably my best friend, Mr. King. We no longer shared
students, and the students that roamed our hallway were not all our own. This was detrimental to my teaching style; team teaching was one of the reasons I flourished in the junior high school format so much. Our collaborative efforts made a difference, and it was disappointing to have teaming taken away. It resulted in more frequent discipline issues. Hallway behavior was worse because we no longer knew nearly every student that frequented our hallway. Classroom discipline was more challenging to manage because we did not have a unified team with a core set of expectations. It only served to add to our frustration with all of the hoops we had to jump through.

Toward the end of the school year I was approached by the university supervisor for my third and final student teacher. Miss Bates was well aware of my current level of frustration, and she asked if I had master’s degree. When I told her I was slowly piecing it together by taking one or two classes a year, she said Purdue needed more English education majors in graduate school and that I should consider pursuing my master’s degree full time. Miss Bates and I had taken some graduate classes together and grown to know each other better during her observations of my student teacher. I thrived as a mentor to student teachers and enjoyed each interaction with the EDCI 101 first year preservice teachers. I had already begun to wonder how I could pursue this newfound passion of working with future teachers. Miss Bates added fuel to this curiosity. Perhaps teaching at the university level was where my passions would take me. By the middle of that summer, despite some apprehension at saying goodbye to my colleagues and a career I loved, I knew the right choice was to leave Gibson once again and find a new way to serve education.
5.4 A New Way to Serve Education

I mentored three student teachers and hosted numerous EDCI 101 preservice teachers in the eight years I taught at Gibson. These positive experiences with higher education sparked a new passion in me. I found great joy in working with future teachers; I gave them valuable field experience in my classroom and advised them on the realities of teaching. It became one of the most joyful parts of my career, especially in the last few years I taught. I learned many lessons from them along the way as well. One preservice teacher taught an incredible poetry lesson about imagery that I continued to use. Not every first year education major had been as willing to teach a class as him. One of my preservice teachers had learned about my love for wolves and bought me a book on them as a parting gift. My most outstanding student teacher, Miss Frantz, was so unbelievable, I asked her to leave behind copies of her work because I wanted to find ways to incorporate her material into my own lessons. She had passion and an amazing work ethic, and it has been a great pleasure to follow the development of her career.

I felt I had a particular ability to reach these future teachers and inspire their teaching, and they expressed sincere gratitude for my willingness to work with them. I realized how positive these experiences were for me as well. Talking about teaching with these young adults brought me great joy. As I began to consider pursuing my master’s degree full time, I wondered what it would be like to be a teacher educator.

I spoke with Dr. Jones, a past instructor of mine at Purdue who was now in charge of university supervisors for student teachers, and inquired about any graduate
assistantships that might be available to help me offset the cost of my education. I had no idea what I was getting into, but I thought if I could obtain one or two assistantships and secure financial aid, I might be able to attend full time. Dr. Jones was able to offer me a position as a university supervisor, further moving me along this new educational path.

Later that summer, I obtained another assistantship teaching the very EDCI 101 students I spent years mentoring in my classroom at Gibson. It was another example of the extreme good fortune I have experienced. Mrs. Powell, the assistant to the curriculum and instruction department head, recalled seeing my resume when I submitted it for the university supervisor position. The course coordinator of EDCI 101, Dr. Brand, needed another instructor, and Mrs. Powell recalled the strength of my resume and suggested me as a good fit. I had secured two assistantships that would serve as springboards for the rest of my graduate student experience. I could not have asked for a more perfect scenario, and I was excited to begin this new journey working in teacher education.

I maintained an assistantship as a university supervisor in English education my first two semesters in graduate school, mentoring and advising eight student teachers in the process. It was a natural fit for me with my classroom teaching experience and time spent mentoring three student teachers of my own. I enjoyed each visit to their cooperating teacher’s rooms, gaining exposure to a wide range of classrooms across Indiana as I observed their teaching. My student teachers taught a wide range of grades, from seventh grade through seniors in high school. In collaboration with their
cooperating teachers, I helped guide them as they discovered how to use their passions
to best serve their students.

Each one of my eight student teachers successfully completed the program, enjoying their varied experiences across the secondary landscape of middle, junior high, and high school. This was the ultimate preservice teaching experience, the culmination of all their coursework and prior classroom experiences. It is the cornerstone of teacher education at the university level, and I was their main connection to the university during their student teaching. I wanted to do all I could to help them succeed. From my own personal experience in teacher education, no prior course or field experience has been as important as student teaching. While the ten week experience is relatively short, it provides a true opportunity for the student teacher to understand the level of commitment necessary to succeed and thrive as a teacher. One is teaching in his hometown and loving it, another landed a job at Gibson, and others are teaching throughout Indiana. I took the responsibility of university supervision very seriously. It has been encouraging to keep in touch with these teachers, knowing that they are now thriving in their own classrooms.

My most enjoyable assistantships while in graduate school were the ones spent as a classroom instructor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Over five semesters I taught six sections of EDCI 101, a first year course exploring teaching as a career. I taught a wide range of education majors, from elementary to secondary education. For one semester I taught EDCI 301, a course that focused on literacy
instruction in the students’ core subjects. I taught physical education and social studies education majors, helping them understand the value of reading within their subject.

As an English education major both in my undergraduate and graduate coursework, teaching reading strategies in EDCI 301 was a good fit for me, but the content was definitely more advanced than EDCI 101. I taught EDCI 301 during the spring of 2015, my second year as a graduate student. This six week course was taken immediately before student teaching; each class was four hours long. I worked with a fantastic group of students, and we made the most of each class. I only taught the course once, but it was a truly memorable experience. The students were energized about student teaching, and I tried to use that enthusiasm within the dynamics of our class.

While public school teachers often dread evaluations from their administrators, I have always looked forward to the student evaluations at the end of each semester in which I was a graduate teaching assistant. In EDCI 301, 10 of the 13 students completed evaluations, and all 10 rated me a five out of five. I was especially pleased to read comments stating I was “one of the best TAs I have had while in the school of education” or that it was a “fantastic course in which the teacher clearly explains the goals, then makes sure he hits them. I learned more from this than the other two seminars by far. Please increase his role and decrease others.” I related these anonymous comments in the evaluations to the cards and notes my Gibson students had often given me at the end of the school year. I might not have known which university students made these comments, but they validated my efforts far more than any evaluation by an
administrator or course coordinator could. I already knew I was doing well in EDCI 101, and I wanted to repeat that success in EDCI 301. Teaching a six week course and covering material far more advanced and out of my comfort range than EDCI 101 presented a fun challenge for me. It was rewarding to know I made a difference with these students.

My greatest opportunity to make a difference as an instructor was during my five semesters teaching six sections of EDCI 101 from the fall of 2013 to spring of 2016. Throughout this time, I taught over 100 students that were considering pursuing a career in education. Approximately half of my students were elementary or special education majors and the other half was spread out among various secondary education majors — math, science, social studies, English, technology, family and consumer sciences, physical education, and art. A few students were still undecided on their career path. It was my job to help them navigate through their initial classroom field experiences and explore what it means to teach. I sought to transition their thinking from student to teacher. My eight years of teaching experience at Gibson helped tremendously. Student comments on evaluations confirmed the value of relating my experiences through responses such as “he uses his experiences to give students a real sense of what their classrooms will be like” and “giving us personal accounts of his teaching career helped us gain a better understanding of what it is actually like to be a teacher, rather than just reading about it through the textbook.” One of the most meaningful comments I read came from a student in my spring 2014 class. In many ways,
I believe it summed up the feelings of a majority of my students as well as what I had hoped to achieve through my teaching:

I feel like I was very lucky to have Stephen Smith as my instructor. He provided us with real and valuable information and he always had a positive attitude. I managed to make it to every class, which is rare for me, because he made me want to attend class. I appreciate the real way he acts; there are too many instructors that allow power to get to their head and don’t treat students in a fair manner. Stephen treated us all as actual people and really helped me understand what my educational philosophy is. I can honestly say he helped me decide that teaching is right for me.

I did not seek the accolades from my students, but I believe they helped show the value of experiences in education. With my teaching experience, I had a significant comfort level teaching the class. I had no problem with straying from the curriculum when class discussion led us in a different direction. I was grateful to the course coordinator, Dr. Brand, for supporting my adaptations to the curriculum she had established. She felt as long as what we talked about provided important details about the realities of teaching for my students, it was not time lost. We used the textbook and their field experiences as springboards for discussion. We talked about different educational philosophies and how they can be practically incorporated into the classroom. I did not hesitate to warn them of the time commitment required or the intense stresses associated with teaching. If these students truly had a passion for teaching others, those stresses would not matter. I never tried to “weed out” any poor teachers, but as first year education majors I wanted them to have a true grasp of the magnitude of their position as teacher. It was very important to me they had strong pedagogical concepts before moving on to more advanced courses.
Teaching came naturally to me, whether it was with my eighth grade students at Gibson or future teachers at Purdue. I wanted to spark passion within my students, and I hope that most of the students I impacted in EDCI 101 have gone on or will go on to be fantastic teachers. I put a great deal of effort into my instruction of EDCI 101.

The spring of 2016 would be my final semester teaching the course as I prepared for graduation. The previous semester, I struggled while teaching. I still did an effective job, but I knew it was not my best effort. Other events in my life kept me from committing myself to the course as effectively as usual. Over the course of that semester, my fiancé and I both dealt with some recurring health issues. We later celebrated our wedding and also found out we were expecting our first child—a daughter. It was a whirlwind semester on a personal level. I struggled to balance my personal life with my professional one. Past experience and the support of my wife helped me find the stability I needed to survive the semester.

Still, I was not happy with my subpar performance, so I resolved to make this last section of EDCI 101 my best effort yet. Thanks to an engaged and bright group of first year teaching majors, it was; their end of the semester evaluations confirmed as much. They wrote I was “by far the best teacher I’ve had this whole year.” My students said I was “passionate and helpful, always doing what is best for us” and that it was “my favorite class of the year, and I was strongly inspired by my instructor, Mr. Smith!” After the previous semester’s let down, knowing I successfully made a difference with my final group of students is a memory I will always take with me.
A few of my first sections of EDCI 101 completed student teaching during the spring of 2016 and had rewarding experiences. One actually ended up student teaching math at Roosevelt High School for a friend of mine, Mr. Gannon. During the semester I taught this student, my friend served as part of a regular guest panel of teachers that visited my EDCI 101 class and gave advice about teaching. My friend extended an invitation to my students to visit his classroom anytime. Jerrod took him up on the offer, they formed a bond, and he was able to be placed with Mr. Gannon when the time came to student teach.

Knowing our theoretical discussions and exploration of my own teaching experiences were not all encompassing, I felt the panel could be a valuable learning experience for my students. I brought in elementary and secondary teachers and administrators to talk about their experiences in education. It was always one of the most rewarding aspects of the semester for my students, many of whom indicated as much in their evaluations, taking time to indicate they “loved the teacher panel” and “greatly appreciated when he brought in other teachers from various schools. It was awesome to be able to talk with them about some of the struggles they have been through as well as the successes they have had.” I wanted to provide my students with every opportunity possible to truly explore teaching as a career. While I loved my time at Gibson, especially my students, I cannot overstate how valued I felt by these preservice teachers. I was able to relate to them in a very real and powerful way. The strong evaluations I received each semester helped validate my efforts.
I loved my time teaching at Gibson, and when I returned in 2007 after my one year leave of absence, I had no intention of ever leaving again. My time off not only gave me the time needed to heal, but I found myself feeling empty without teaching. I discovered just how much I missed my classroom. While on leave I lived in Indianapolis, worked in the health insurance field, made good money, and was being pursued for a job that would lead to a significant salary increase. Financially this was great, but I knew it would not bring me the personal satisfaction I had been seeking in a career since I first made the decision in college to switch my major to English education.

In many ways Gibson provided me with that satisfaction. If I had stayed, I know it would have continued to be an overall positive experience. The stresses of the job, particularly with standardized testing and the resulting reorganization of our school’s internal structure, impacted my decision to walk away from a career in public education. The departure of our widely respected building principal also greatly affected my decision. This time, however, I was able to leave on my own terms with a clear goal in mind. I was not under emotional duress or dissatisfied with my job to the point I could not imagine being in front of the classroom. I could have taught happily there for the rest of my career had I not realized a greater passion within the field of education.

Ultimately, it was the joy I experienced in working with future teachers that truly prompted my decision to leave the colleagues and students I loved at Gibson. Education is my ultimate passion; teaching in the GSC at Gibson gave me an amazing avenue to pursue that passion. I was lucky to have been rehired there after my initial leave of absence, spending six more incredible years with students whose lives changed me as
much as I hope I changed theirs. In the end I felt I could further my passion for education and make a greater mark by influencing future educators. In the three years I spent as a graduate assistant, I believe I did that, and hope to continue doing so in my future educational endeavors.
CHAPTER 6. PREPARING FOR THE UNKNOWN: PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

6.1 Preservice Teacher Expectations

At the conclusion of three of the six EDCI 101 sections I taught, 46 preservice teachers participated in a voluntary survey\(^{16}\) about their current attitudes toward education and teaching. The goal of this survey was to bring greater relevance to my own educational story and the stories told by the teachers interviewed. I sought to explore any correlations to the educational attitudes of practicing teachers and the expectations of preservice teachers.

As noted in Chapter 5 the course provided students their first field experiences in classrooms and served as an introduction into the field of teaching. It provided them the opportunity to answer questions such as: What makes a good teacher? Why do I want to teach? What does it mean to teach? The students varied from elementary education to various secondary education subjects to undecided majors considering pursuing education. Despite varying degrees of enthusiasm about teaching at the conclusion of the course, many of their motivations were similar to those of the three teachers I interviewed for this study.

My father was the only one of us practicing teachers who sought out education

\(^{16}\) See Appendix A for the full Preserve Teacher Survey results referenced throughout Chapter 6.
as his first major. By comparison, only 18 of the 46 preservice teachers indicated

teaching was their first major. Throughout each semester teaching EDCI 101, the other

instructors and I would meet for discussion with our course coordinator. Frequently,

these meetings would turn to our enrollment decline. After seeing the results of my

study, it led me to wonder just how drastic the decline would be if such a large number

of students were not turning to teacher education from other majors. Due to low

student enrollment, there were times that some of us would either not teach as many

sections as had been planned or wind up not teaching the following semester at all. It

was a stressful situation in which to be, especially for me since I was not officially one of

Dr. Brand’s Curriculum Studies students. I unfortunately lost out on teaching the course

in the fall of 2014 as a result of these factors. It was frustrating to feel like the most

qualified instructor since I had relevant teaching experience, yet be passed over for an

assistantship. However, it simply was a reflection of the state of teacher education.

I was reminded of my surprise when I found out a college classmate of mine

never pursued teaching. Roger graduated with his degree in English education, but

when I ran into him two years after graduation, he told me he decided to pursue a

career in law enforcement instead. I never considered Roger the strongest teacher

candidate, but it still stunned me. I knew some teachers left the field, but not to give it a

shot—no interviews even—was eye-opening. In EDCI 301, the six week literacy course I

taught immediately prior to the student teaching experience, one of those students did

not even make it through student teaching due to overstress. This time, with a wealth of

teaching experience under my belt, and a clearer sense of what makes a strong teacher,
I was not surprised. She seemed apprehensive about teaching during the six weeks I taught her. Seven of the participants (15 percent) in the EDCI 101 preservice teacher survey indicated they were leaving the education program all together. This was just the first field experience course for these students, still years away from student teaching.

Only 15 percent of 39 students surveyed who indicated they were still pursuing education indicated they would teach no more than five years. Twenty one (54 percent) of those 39 students fully expected to teach until they retired, and seven other students indicated a desire to leave the classroom but remain in education as administrators. In total, 72 percent of preservice teachers surveyed believed they would be in education their entire career. “I plan to teach for my entire career,” one student stated. “There is nothing else I want to do, and I do not think I would enjoy having another position in the field of education.” Another added that “I want to have a career that is rewarding and know my work is not meaningless.” In looking at the 11 male participants, only three indicated they would teach until they retired. While my students represent only a fraction of the teacher education majors at Purdue and throughout the nation, there is a significant disparity between the national averages that indicate 41 percent of teachers leave before their fifth year (Perda, 2013). It begs the question – will these preservice teachers change their minds later in the program?

Many of the students indicated that teaching was their passion, calling, and something they would love. Of the 32 responses that reflected positively on teaching, 20 students replied with such answers. “I want to live doing what I love; teaching is my passion, and I want to spend my whole career changing lives,” one student replied.
Another student stated, “Teaching is my passion, and there is nothing else I would rather do.” This positive outlook has fueled many of the teachers I came across in the teacher education program at Purdue. They expect the positive experiences in teaching will outweigh any of the negative ones.

Preservice education courses at the university level often underscore the daunting challenges of teaching, such as the commitment of hours outside of the classroom, the constant pressures within the building, the external critiques of parents and politicians, and impact on a person’s self worth. I have been fortunate to teach at a university that does its best to recognize these challenges through the curriculum. However, it has been frustrating to see that those teaching initial education courses are graduate students who are not experienced in the classroom. How can a preservice teacher get a full grasp of what a career in education is going to be like when those teaching them in front of the classroom have had no classroom experience of their own? Field experiences in local schools help alleviate this issue slightly, but without a strong course instructor to facilitate discussions and understand their reflections on the experience, I wonder to what extent the power of those field experiences gets lost.

Overwhelmingly, and not surprisingly, preservice teachers believe that helping students will bring them the greatest joy. This stayed in line with the main stated goal in the text used for EDCI 101, which is to make a difference in student learning (Hall, Quinn, & Gollnick, 2014). I tried to guide most of their journal writing toward reflection on the students they observed and helped teach. Of the 52 various responses to Question 2: What do you expect to be the most rewarding aspect of your teaching career? A total of
43 indicated helping students in some way would be the most rewarding aspect of teaching, such as seeing the “students have the light bulb moment” or “helping children grow academically and becoming more confident.” By in large, the concept of helping students was general in nature. Few of those surveyed expounded much further on what they would do to help students, but it was clear making a difference with students was central to their motivations for teaching.

Standardized testing is the greatest stress facing future teachers according to the survey. No stress factor listed on the survey rated higher, averaging a 4 out of 5 stress level. “I’m most worried about standardized testing because if the students don’t do well, it reflects poorly on me as the teacher,” one student commented. Standardized testing was also one of the most commonly addressed stresses by the practicing teachers. Merit pay that is in part based on standardized testing was the second highest stressor among preservice teachers, rating 3.65 out of 5. The next closest stress factor was a 3.34 out of 5 for lack of quality pay, which could again be tied to the stresses associated with testing and merit pay.

The only other two stress factors that rated above a 3 were classroom management (3.21) and dealing with the administrators (3.15). It was somewhat surprising that preservice teachers were not as concerned about classroom management. The American Psychology Association (2006) reported that classroom management was one of the top challenges for new teachers. Chang (2013) wrote that “In the existing literature, student misbehavior is considered as the top source of teacher stress and teacher burnout” (p. 815). In my survey the stress factor of 3.21 rated
slightly high, but I would not name it as a significant concern for the preservice teachers. A total of 108 comments were made addressing their greatest fears regarding stresses as a teacher, and only 15 could be considered related to classroom management. These responses either mentioned classroom management specifically or fears of dealing with difficult or apathetic students. A total of 23 comments mentioned concerns about not being good enough or failing students. While not directly specific to classroom management, these fears could reflect on a teacher’s ability to control the classroom. Some preservice teacher stresses were that “apathetic students would be very demoralizing” and “I fear I will not be the teacher I want to be.” Still, few classroom management comments or concerns were specifically addressed, and could not be identified as a primary concern of preservice teachers. By contrast, educators such as Mr. Connors, now a building principal, stressed his concern that new teachers are not prepared enough to handle classroom management.

6.2 The Value of Preservice Teacher Education

Higher education has not been immune to the attacks on teachers. Teacher education programs have come under fire by those who feel teaching is not truly a profession and therefore does not require the specialized training of these programs. The attempted privatization of public schools has further fueled the belief that anyone can teach. Organizations like Teach for America undermine the value of teacher education programs, even if the teachers entering TFA have good intentions. If the stories told throughout this study are any indication, there is no doubt at the skill
required to teach effectively, skills in part that are gained from teacher preparation
courses like EDCI 101.

As a graduate teaching instructor of first year teacher education majors, I
witnessed the power of experience and development of identity. In each of the six
semesters I taught the course, I tried to help my students begin the transition of viewing
themselves as teachers, both through their field experience, in our classroom
discussions, and through assignments such as an educational autobiography and
educational philosophy. Alsup (2006) expressed concerns with these assignments being
far too abstract, and noted they lose value if “They do not exhibit characteristics of
transformative discourse or evidence of critical interrogation and reflection” (p. 166).
My recollection of my own educational philosophy is similar to Alsup, who felt that what
she produced was good even if she did not entirely know what it meant. I wrote mine
some 15 years ago, but I certainly still recall feeling pride and a sense of
accomplishment, even a positive energy. However, what did my words mean exactly?
The paper was far too abstract, and I cannot recall using it to help me understand how
to apply these beliefs into my own classroom experience.

When I prepared my students to write the educational philosophy paper in EDCI
101, I attempted to help them focus on more than just abstract theory we discussed in
the text, but on their own ideas and how they could utilize their knowledge of these
theories in practical ways during their field experiences. Rather than let the paper’s
impact be forgotten among the litany of other unused assignments, I believe an
educational philosophy should be a living document that transforms as preservice
teachers grow and gain new experiences on the quest for their teacher identity. This type of identity transition can be a difficult one for preservice teachers as they attempt to distinguish between who they are in their personal and professional lives. Alsup (2006) wrote “a certain amount of identity confusion and tension is expected” in this shift (p. 60). She wrote that teacher educators can help develop a teacher’s identity through “borderland discourses,” describing this as “discourse in which there is evidence of integration or negotiation of personal and professional selves” (p. xiii). Borderland discourse would allow preservice teachers to better understand connections between university instruction and field experience (p. 71).

Through our classroom instruction and their field experiences in local schools, my students were able to examine school through the lens of a teacher for the first time. These experiences either reinforced their instinct to pursue teaching or they left them searching for other passions and a new identity. Week by week these students came to understand more about their own educational identity and gained a newfound respect for teachers through the experience. Bringing professional identity discussion to preservice education courses would be one way of ending the quick exits of young teachers from the profession (Alsup, 2006, p. 7). Alsup further added, “Reaching the in-between ground, the place of becoming, the space ambiguity and reflection, is the goal – this is the space with which we want our preservice teachers to experiment” (p. 9).

Among the three practicing teachers interviewed for this study and myself, we attended the three most prominent teacher education universities in Indiana – Ball State University, Indiana University, and Purdue University. As part of their teacher
preparation programs, each one of us took value either from the courses offered, the experiences gained through time spent in schools, or both. None of us have any doubt that teacher education is critical to moving the profession forward, but we each believe changes need to be made in order for teacher education to make the most significant impact on its students. “Better training would help teachers adapt to the school environment,” Mr. Connors said. “Classroom management is the first thing. Tactics like getting the class started, some of the basics. If you don’t get classroom management down, it’s hard to make headway.”

Our own personal experiences at three different universities in Indiana provided each of us with different beliefs regarding their value. Mr. King saw no gains from his classroom instruction at Indiana University. “Honestly, I can’t credit any of my university classes with any of the successes or failures I’ve had as a teacher,” he said. “I don’t want to discredit Indiana University or the education department, but I just can’t think of any tangible asset I gained.” My father, Mr. Smith, had a different view on his coursework at Ball State:

Where others had large classes with teaching assistants, mine were the size of high school advanced placement classes with full professors. I believe my education major served me well in that it taught me how to teach not just what to teach. Methods classes and field experiences were invaluable. Ball State is renowned as a top-notch teachers college and its reputation is well-deserved. It is not enough just knowing your subject matter. You must also know how to convey it to students. I believe Ball State gave me that ability.

During my time at Purdue University, both as an undergraduate and graduate student, I gained a number of valuable experiences. Some of my specific methods courses in English were extremely valuable, and I credit many of my teachers for helping
me explore my own teaching style and develop the skills I needed to succeed as a teacher. It was not until these content specific courses that I recall gaining any valid knowledge. While I believe my coursework had value in helping me progress as a teacher, the field experiences were the cornerstone of my development, especially prior to my content area courses. Mr. King and Mr. Smith both had similar views. Mr. King stated:

Field experience is a must. Not just sitting watching a teacher teach but actually going through the process of teaching. I found my student teaching to be a profound experience. I learned so much about the realities of teaching. The stresses, successes, frustrations and achievements are all a part of what I learned. It had a real impact on who I became as a teacher. The more field experience the better.

Mr. Smith added:

I remember well the practice teaching we were able to do with bright students in American history learning about the Constitution and other lessons. My student teaching took place right across the street from our married student housing, which was convenient in that we were expecting our first child during that time. My students were mostly the sons and daughters of academics at the university and they challenged me to do my best every day, especially the seniors who were only one semester from graduation.

Each semester I taught EDCI 101, I told my students that they would likely not remember me, but they would remember their field experiences. I think I started saying this because I had no recollection of any of my initial teacher education instructors. I recalled being assigned an educational autobiography and educational philosophy paper, but remembered little of their actual content. I have no doubt the papers helped me progress as a preservice teacher, but it was through the field experiences and journals in which I reflected on the experiences that I learned the most. When I taught EDCI 101, I
felt like the classroom texts and instruction had value, but only as supplements to the field experiences themselves and subsequent discussion. This is why it was especially disheartening to learn that so many of the teaching assistants had little to no experience in elementary or secondary classrooms. Mr. King had similar experiences at Indiana University and stressed the need for more qualified classroom instructors introducing preservice teachers to the field of education.

They need to hear from actual teachers who can give them advice and support. Classroom instruction needs to include teachers, administrators and the professors teaching and talking about teaching philosophy. Students need to be better prepared for the realities of teaching and not just the idea of becoming a teacher. So many teachers come into the profession mentally unprepared for the task and that is a direct result of a lack of education on the part of their university. Teaching is complicated and has so many variables. Universities need to do a much better job of teaching students what it is to be a teacher and preparing them for the variables so that when they occur, they are better equipped to handle them.

Mr. King’s strong opinion and the comments of my EDCI 101 students helped validate my efforts to include an educator guest panel during my course and also talk about my own teaching experiences. Learning from those with classroom experience has to be an essential component of teacher education. In looking at Mr. Smith’s positive experience with classroom instruction at Ball State, the presence of qualified educators made a significant impact for him. The teacher knowledge of instructors could be a significant difference in teacher education programs. While field experiences were crucial to all of us, strong classroom instruction is critical to furthering understanding.

Mr. Smith elaborated by stating:

I gained invaluable lessons on classroom instruction in my teacher preparation classes. Not only was what was taught valuable, but so was the manner in which
it was taught by the professors. They modeled and practiced what they taught. We were given ample opportunity to work together and practice teaching and learn from one another as well as from our instructors.

It would be difficult to quantify the value of classroom instruction versus field experience, as both are important to teacher education. “Being taught how to teach and having the opportunity to experience it in the field were both necessary components of forging a good basis for teaching,” Mr. Smith stated about his own personal experience. Field experiences give preservice teachers the most practical opportunities to learn how to teach, regardless of the quality of their classroom education. Mr. King strongly believes that in order for teacher preparation to improve, stronger classroom instruction at the university level is needed.

You need both, but we need to do a much better job in the classroom instruction component. It is essential to study teaching pedagogy but it must be done in a way that benefits students and not just as a class requirement in order to do field experience. When you go into welding for instance, they send you out there to experience it and scaffold your understanding so that you can actually successfully do the task. With education, I think universities talk about what education is and what learning is but don’t do a good enough job with pedagogy, lesson planning, talking to teachers, and actually trying it out. I strongly believe classroom instruction is the missing component in the education programs throughout the country.

There are those that feel teachers do not even need to be professionally prepared in order to teach. Organizations like Teach for America give college graduates from any field a five week crash course on teaching before sending them into some of the most challenging classrooms in the nation. The idea that anyone can teach fuels alternative models to obtaining teacher licensure, diminishing the value of a degree in education. Mr. Connors, as many others have done, challenges the notion that anyone
can teach. “Try it for awhile; it is very demanding,” he said. “There is nothing truly like it.”

These often politically motivated efforts to undermine the profession of teaching continue to gain ground, but evidence shows the value of teacher education programs.

Teachers like Mr. Smith offer no shortage of opinions on those who would grant teaching credentials to graduates without proper training. “Attempts to give anyone with a degree the right to teach are woefully misguided, short-sighted, and to be honest, politically motivated to demean public education. I have known many people who knew their subject but couldn’t teach their way out of a paper bag!”
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Conclusions

Teaching is a process. There can never be a definitive how-to guide for teachers, and this study was never intended to serve as such. This study, however, reveals how the thoughts and attitudes of practicing teachers coincide with the thoughts and attitudes of preservice teachers. It helps better understand the process of teaching from the developing perspective of first year education majors to the experienced eye of veteran teachers. These conclusions about teaching have been drawn from my own stories, the stories of the three teachers interviewed, and the beliefs of preservice teachers in a first year education course. The expected joys and stresses of teaching are reasonably understood by the preservice teachers, but the magnitude of the impact of the stresses is underestimated. Preservice teachers expect that the joys of working with students will largely counteract the weight of the myriad stresses. This study looked at the process from initial teacher education perspectives and the point of view of teachers with over 10 years of experience. While nothing conclusive can be drawn from this narrative study, there are plenty of noteworthy observations to explore.

Teaching is complicated. All students require unique attention and no teacher educates those students in the same fashion. It is a highly individualized profession,
from those who teach to those who are taught. Standardized testing is one of the most stressful aspects of being a teacher as evidenced by the frustrations of practicing teachers and the fears of preservice teachers. External forces continue to pressure the field of education through increased scrutiny on the profession; standardized testing is part of the pressure. By undermining public education, politically motivated legislation seeks to privatize education for profit and handcuff teacher freedom and effectiveness in the classroom. Among preservice and practicing teachers, stress associated with colleagues, administrators, and students is viewed as relatively minor when compared to standardized testing and its potential impact on pay. The greatest stress associated with students for both preservice and practicing teachers is the fear of failing students that seem unreachable. Preservice teachers also expressed some concern with classroom management.

Teaching is never ending. Bells might signify the beginning and end of the school day and classroom instruction, but as the students filter in and out, the teacher’s job is far from finished. There are lessons to plan, papers to grade, handouts to copy, meetings to attend, and a number of other responsibilities that cannot be completed within the contracted teaching hours. The amount of work can overload teachers, and preservice teachers might not be prepared for that amount of work. Teachers are always on the clock, yet preservice teachers feel less concerned about the public perception of teaching as compared to practicing teachers. This might underscore their lack of understanding of the external pressures associated with the profession and the toll it can take on teachers. Teacher autonomy has been greatly diminished.
Teaching is compelling. Passionate people teach and teach well. Passion and knowledge create successful teachers. Despite a growing list of stresses associated with teaching, one constant joy remains – helping students succeed in the classroom and in life. This desire drives preservice and practicing teachers alike. Preservice teachers and practicing teachers have been inspired by a number of factors, notably past experiences with their own teachers. From seeing a child truly understand complicated material to offering a shoulder to lean on in difficult times, teachers find significant value in making a difference in the lives of their students. Fostering positive relationships with students continues to motivate veteran teachers and inspire preservice teachers. Making a difference is not relegated only to classroom teaching. Coaching, sponsoring clubs, supervising events, and being available to students outside the hours of class are important components of the profession. Good teachers can leave the classroom in order to find more personally effective ways to positively impact education, such as university teacher education or administration. When the goal is helping students, a lasting impact will be made.

The preservice teacher is optimistic. The students in my EDCI 101 courses were hopeful ones, believing strongly they could make a difference with their future students. These preservice teachers intend to teach far longer than statistics show they will. Through their coursework and field experiences they explore their identity as teacher, transitioning from a student view to a teacher view. As preservice teachers gain a better understanding of how their own personality suits a particular teaching style, they confidently begin this transition.
Teacher education is challenging. Helping preservice teachers experience the numerous highs and lows of teaching is a daunting task, but an important one to developing quality teachers. Teacher education fosters identity exploration through the educational autobiography and philosophy papers along with reflection through journals and classroom discussion, but it might not be enough. There is no way to guarantee that each preservice teacher will have equally rewarding field experiences. More qualified instructors in initial teacher education courses can help bridge any field experience gaps through quality instruction and open discussion among the class. Teacher educators, whether full faculty in advanced courses or graduate assistants in initial education courses need more recent and relevant classroom experience. The individual nature of teaching makes it almost impossible to quantify the best way to teach teachers. Each student is different and the philosophy of each teacher is unique. But teachers can be prepared to tackle these challenges with proper instruction from qualified instructors.

Teacher attrition is troubling, both in teacher education and with practicing teachers. When does the optimism of a preservice teacher give ground to the realism of practicing teachers? Somewhere along the path to becoming a teacher, teachers lose the passion they once believed they had. The responsibility cannot be placed solely on poor teachers. This responsibility has to be shared by teacher education programs and the hiring school corporations as well. Future teachers can be matched well with school systems that support a similar pedagogy. They can be supported by the university beyond their degree through collaborative support among the university and hiring school corporations. A stronger collaboration among universities and school
corporations where their teacher graduates are placed would serve as a tremendous support system, and add to the current induction programs most school corporations already have. Through this support they can be better equipped to handle the pressures of standardized testing, merit pay, administrative evaluations, classroom management, and the immense time commitment to the job. The more prepared teachers are entering their first years of teaching, the more likely they would be to remain in the field of education and increase student performance, bringing greater relevancy to teacher education programs.

7.2 Implications for Further Research

My belief was that I would find dramatic differences in the lives of veteran teachers and the expectations of preservice teachers. I did not find that. Nuanced differences existed and were explored, but there was no groundbreaking connection or discord discovered. Even so, these stories serve no purpose if they cannot be used to help better the instructional lives of our educators, and thus the students they teach. The experiences detailed in this study are only footnotes to the larger stories of each educator, whether they are preservice teachers just starting out, veteran teachers with a breadth of knowledge, or administrators who now view education from a different perspective. It stands to reason that more research and more stories are needed to further examine how teachers can successfully navigate through the stressful waters of the vast ocean that is American public education. While this study detailed experiences of several practicing educators and has indirectly provided ways for preservice teachers
to embrace the challenges of a career in teaching, further related studies would prove beneficial.

Further research should be done on preservice teacher understanding of the time commitment required of teachers outside the contracted hours. Another ignored area of stress was teacher interaction with parents. These were areas the preservice teacher survey did not specifically address. However, the immense time commitment was brought up frequently by the practicing teachers. Some students expressed concern with it when given freedom to do so in more open ended questions on the survey. One such comment was fear of “too much work without enough pay.” Apprehension to talking with parents was also a common topic of conversation during EDCI 101 class discussion.

Changes should be made to the way higher education prepares student teachers. If hiring more qualified instructors is not a financial option in the beginning education course offerings, other options need to be explored. The guest panel featured in my EDCI 101 class was incredibly successful; this should be explored as a potential required component of the course to ensure an opportunity to interact with practicing teachers and administrators. Often times during early field experiences, preservice teachers do not get the chance to talk with their host teachers and ask important questions. When class is in session there simply is not enough time. Options would include having this panel include those host teachers or other willing educators in a one-time evening lab for all teacher education students or establishing a group of educators willing and able to take time off during the day to visit with these classes.
An extended study following the progression of teacher education majors from their first year in the program through their fifth year in teaching would be valuable in understanding the changing thought process of a young teacher and how to best retain quality educators. These new teachers would teach in a variety of locations and give a broader range of experiences. A narrative study that examined their paths throughout teacher education programs across the state of Indiana and into a teaching career would provide more relevant data and assist in any needed changes made to university teacher education programs.

Studying what draws students from other majors to teaching should also be examined further. Of the 46 preservice teachers who participated in the survey, 61% of them started in other fields before pursuing education. Do they switch majors because they think teaching will be easy? Were they always drawn to teaching, but explored other possible career paths first? Are these students more likely to leave the profession than those who first majored in education?

The stories of teachers are valuable, and any research on teacher education should include the ever changing narratives of the many practicing teachers who have inspired their students year after year. While these qualitative studies will always prove valuable, I also strongly believe that quantitative data on teacher attitudes regarding the various joys and stresses of teaching would be instrumental to better understanding teacher attrition. This research would involve a greater number of research subjects and give more validity to the data obtained. Some of those teachers could be randomly selected to provide more qualitative data through interviews and observations.
Any further research – be it qualitative, quantitative, or mixed – has value and will continue to shed light on teacher shortages across the country. Teaching is a significant and rewarding career. In order to produce the best teacher candidates possible, teacher education programs must attract and retain quality future teachers through improved curriculum and continued field experiences. Educators who enter the field must be soundly prepared to serve the students who will one day make their marks on the world. Continued research can help ensure that reforms made to education include teacher voices and are beneficial for both teacher and student.

7.3 Final Advice to Future Educators

The optimistic nature of the first year education majors in EDCI 101 is refreshing. They should have this optimism. In my final semester teaching EDCI 101 in the spring of 2016, I had my students compile a list of teaching tips\textsuperscript{17} as noted during their field experiences and from their own personal experience. The goal was to create a list of relevant and valuable tips each student can take with them on the journey to becoming a teacher. I asked the three teachers interviewed to do the same by directing specific advice to teacher education majors, in part summing up the indirect advice they have already given throughout the chapters of this study. Mr. Smith provided advice and guidance to many preservice teachers and over 20 student teachers during his 39 year career. Some of his key advice included:

\textsuperscript{17} These teaching tips can be viewed in full in Appendix E.
First of all, be sure it is what you want to do with your life. You can’t just love math or science or history, you have to love kids. They will know in a minute if you’re just going through the motions. You also have to be prepared to spend countless hours doing things you don’t necessarily enjoy, like grading papers and sitting through meetings. Don’t make assumptions that it is an easy job with summers off or is your avenue to coaching. Teaching is the hardest job you’ll ever love. Good teachers stay in the profession for years. The best teachers stay in it for life. If you can truly say you were born to teach, you’ll make it.

Teachers must be prepared for the drawbacks of teaching – the long hours, an inability to reach all students, frustrations with standardized testing, and increased on the job scrutiny are just a sample of the challenging realities of teaching. Failure to address these concerns with preservice teachers only delays the inevitable departure of those would-be-teachers who cannot handle the added commitments. It is better for teacher education majors to leave the program than it is for them to graduate unequipped to handle the challenges and leave the profession within five years.

Teachers must be able to maintain the passion that brought them into the field in the first place. Having a strong understanding of the true nature of teaching will help new teachers enthusiastically tackle any obstacles put before them. Mr. King emphasized the importance of passion in his own advice to preservice teachers as they seek to establish their classroom identity.

Teaching is a passion; you have to love it! You have to embrace every component of teaching. It is hard, you won’t become rich, and you’ll feel unappreciated. Your students will not love you immediately. You have to work really hard to sell your brand, and you have to prepare. Teaching requires a level of commitment that, if you don’t have it, you will struggle.

All teachers touted the need to “find a mentor and take advice,” as Mr. King noted. Mr. Connors added that it was important to “watch someone you view as a
master teacher and learn lessons from them and adapt what they do to fit your style.”

Most schools provide a mentor as part of first year teaching support; it was a required
part of my initial practitioner’s license in Indiana. However, the teachers in this study
also emphasized the value of seeking out help from a variety of teachers, not just an
assigned mentor.

Ultimately, it is about student success. “It is never about you; it’s about the
students,” Mr. King said. “You are the vehicle to their understanding.” At times that will
require going the extra distance, such as getting involved in student activities as Mr.
Connors noted. He also added the importance of not taking things personally, especially
with discipline, in part echoing Mr. King’s advice of putting the students first. “Kids want
to make it personal and it’s never personal. You have to get them to understand the
behavior is what you’re disciplining.”

Teachers have a difficult job, and finding escape from those challenges can be
equally complicated. Teaching is not a clock in and clock out profession, and parents and
students will not see you in public and identify you as anything other than a teacher.
Teaching is a very public profession, and if preservice teachers expect to stay in the
profession long, they must accept this reality, as advised by Mr. King.

Teaching is a lifestyle. There are many careers where your go to your job and
then you go back to your normal life. Teaching is not that career. You are always
Mr. or Mrs. someone. Students see you outside of school the same way they see
you in school. You cannot shed your job. At a restaurant, movie, date night with
your spouse, or hanging with friends, students and parents see you as a teacher.
Sometimes that can become quite overwhelming, but again you must embrace it.
The advice I left my final section of EDCI 101 at Purdue is where I leave this study. As I compiled the teaching tips suggested by my preservice teachers, I incorporated my own tips into the document I would give them on the final day of class. I wanted to remind them of several things, such as ways to handle student discipline issues, how to grade effectively, organizational techniques, positive ways of communicating with parents, using technology, and how to best help students. Most importantly, I wanted to leave them with a positive feeling, a final helpful note as they continued pursuing their passion for teaching. When looking back on these tips, two stood out as I considered their relevance to this study. I have combined them as my own final piece of advice.

Treat your students with respect and understanding. They are emotional human beings, just like you! Be a shining example every single day you teach. Wow your students with your passion for the material you are teaching them. Your awesomeness will inspire their awesomeness! Be yourself, but always the best of yourself. You can be the rock your students steady themselves against when the waves of their chaotic young lives seem a little too much.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


Appendix A  Preservice Teacher Survey Results

Preservice Teacher Survey

Voluntary Survey: Please consider completing this brief survey of your current attitudes toward education and teaching. The survey is entirely optional and is completely confidential and anonymous. No names are recorded. If you do not wish to answer a question, you may leave it blank, but the more you complete, the more beneficial it will be to the researcher. The survey will be a great help in understanding the present mindset of preservice educators.

Burnout: Physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.

Teacher Burnout: The steady decline of joy and increase of stress related to teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Create a Pseudonym (Not Your Real Name)</th>
<th>46 Student Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Males = 11, Females = 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>All 18-21 years old; exceptions = 22, 24, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Elem Ed (17), Science Ed (8), Various Non Ed (2), Math Ed (2), Undecided (3), Special Ed (3), Art Ed (3), Ed Studies (2), Social Studies Ed (2), English Ed (2), FACS, Tech Ed,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was Teaching Your First Major?</td>
<td>Yes = 18, No = 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Long Do You Plan to Teach in the Classroom?</td>
<td>Teach 1-5 Years = 6, Teach 5-15 Years = 6, Teach 15-25 Years = 6, Teach Until Retire = 21, Not Teach at All = 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Plan Upon Leaving Classroom Teaching</td>
<td>Become an Administrator = 7, Pursue an Advanced Degree = 9, Leave Field of Education Completely = 9, Retire as a Classroom Teacher = 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check any that apply: 1 = Least Stressed 5 = Most Stressed
As a future teacher, these aspects of education give me reason to stress:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My Students = Mean 2.93</td>
<td>1(5), 2(9), 3(16), 4(10), 5(3) = 126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management = Mean 3.21</td>
<td>1(1), 2(6), 3(16), 4(17), 5(1) = 138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague Collaboration = Mean 2.52</td>
<td>1(6), 2(18), 3(13), 4(5), 5(2) = 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with Administrators = Mean 3.15</td>
<td>1(3), 2(11), 3(10), 4(14), 5(5) = 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Testing = Mean 4.00</td>
<td>1(1), 2(3), 3(5), 4(20), 5(14) = 172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merit-Based Pay = Mean 3.65</td>
<td>1(3), 2(6), 3(6), 4(16), 5(12) = 157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Quality Pay = Mean 3.34</td>
<td>1(4), 2(5), 3(12), 4(16), 5(6) = 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Perception of Teachers = Mean 2.36</td>
<td>1(11), 2(13), 3(15), 4(3), 5(2) = 104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions: Please respond to the following questions as completely as possible.

1. Please explain in detail why you plan to teach for the duration you indicated and why you may or may not move on from teaching.

   **Positive Comments = 32**
   - Gain Exp then Admin = 8
   - Love it / Enjoy it = 14
   - Passion = 3
   - Meant to Teach = 3
   - Help w/ other Career = 4

   **Negative Comments = 9**
   - Fear of Burnout = 1
   - Not Good for My Family = 3
   - Changes in Ed Worry Me = 1
   - Change Majors = 2
   - No Passion = 2

   **Neutral = 8**
   - Unsure = 3
   - Do More than Just Teach = 1
   - See if Like it = 2
   - Become Parent = 2

2. What do you expect to be the most rewarding aspect of your teaching career?

   - Help Students Learn = 43
   - Love the Environment = 1
   - Role Model = 1
   - Experience w/ Diff People = 1
   - N/A = 3
   - Lesson Planning = 2
   - Improve School/Test Scores = 1

3. Once in the classroom, explain what would most likely lead you to leave the classroom and seek another career? (You may choose from listed stresses or include something new)

   - Boring/Repetitive = 2
   - Testing/Freedom = 8
   - Bureaucracy = 1
   - Not Satisfying = 3
   - Student Apathy = 1
   - Merit Pay = 4
   - None = 2
   - Not Good at It = 2
   - Wrong Choice = 1
   - Not Helping Students = 2
   - Better Job = 4
   - Admin = 6
   - Perception = 3
   - Family = 4
   - Stress = 1
   - Time = 1
   - Pay = 9
   - Classroom Management = 3
   - Parents = 4
   - Tough Kids = 3

4. Describe in further detail any fears or concerns you have about teaching.

   - Failing my Students = 7
   - Offending Others = 1
   - Won’t Be Good Enough = 8
   - Organization = 1
   - Testing = 3
   - Preparation = 1
   - Competitive = 1
   - Early Rise = 1
   - Student Apathy = 2
   - Emergencies = 2
   - Merit Pay = 2
   - Policy = 1
   - Work Not Equal to Pay = 6
   - Not Well Liked = 4
   - Classroom Mgt = 1
   - Get too Angry = 1
   - Tie in Other Subjects = 1
   - Students = 1

5. Describe your primary motivation(s) for becoming a teacher.

   - Make a Difference = 4
   - Parents = 1
   - Loved Education = 1
   - Past Teachers = 2
   - Help Students = 21
   - Love Children = 8
   - Peer Tutoring = 1
   - Improve (Subject) Knowledge = 4
   - No Motivation Anymore = 1
Rewarding = 1    Stop Bullying = 2    Make Me Happy = 1    Help
Struggling Students = 1    Teach Others to Love Something They Didn’t = 1

**Key Comments:**

**Stresses:**
Apathetic students would be very demoralizing.
I’m most worried about standardized testing because if the students don’t do well, it reflects poorly on the teacher.
I fear I will not be the teacher I want to be and won’t be a role model to my students.
Too much work without enough pay

**Joys:**
Seeing a student actually understand a concept that they had been working really hard on will be very rewarding.
I want to live doing what I love. Teaching is my passion and I want to spend my whole career changing lives.
The most rewarding aspect is seeing the face of a child whose life you’ve changed.
I want to be able to make a connection and impact with my kids to the point where they still visit me in later years after I have taught them.
I plan to teach for my entire career. There is nothing else I want to do, and I do not think I would enjoy having another position in the field of education.
I want to have a career that is rewarding and know my work is not meaningless.
I want this to be my career; I can see myself doing this for the rest of my life.
I want to make a difference in children’s lives by helping them grow academically and becoming more confident in school.
My primary motivation is the kids. I want to do this for the students.
I’m interested in increasing positive attitudes about learning, raising graduation and standardized test scores across the country.
Teaching is my passion and there is nothing else I would rather do.
Initial Questionnaire of Practicing Teachers

This questionnaire will provide the researcher basic demographic information to better understand your current status as a classroom teacher and your level of burnout. Interviews will be scheduled later at your convenience. All responses will remain confidential.

**Burnout:** Physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress.
**Teacher Burnout:** The steady decline of joy and increase of stress related to teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Currently Teaching</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Where Taught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Years Taught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject(s) Taught</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years Taught Each Subject</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Level(s)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year Started Teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year Left Teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Planned to Teach in the Classroom</th>
<th>Teach 1-5 Years</th>
<th>Teach 5-15 Years</th>
<th>Teach Until I Retire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan upon Leaving Classroom Teaching</td>
<td>Become an Administrator</td>
<td>Pursue an Advanced Degree</td>
<td>Leave Field of Education Completely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retire as a Classroom Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Burnout after Leaving Or Current Level if Still Teaching in the Classroom</th>
<th>LOW</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>HIGH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix C  Practicing Teacher Opening Interview Questions

Opening Interview Questions

Researcher Note: The following is a list of questions asked during the opening interviews with the three practicing teachers. These initial questions were answered in a variety of ways by the teachers, including email, text, phone, and face-to-face conversation.

Burnout & Stress:

1. How would you characterize burnout; do you have a different definition? Do you see a lot of teachers experience it?
2. Describe your level of stress regarding your: students/colleagues/administration/standards/state/public perception/merit based pay/parents when you were a classroom teacher.
3. What ways did you deal with your own level of stress/burnout when you were teaching?
4. Did you ever feel like you weren’t a teacher? Or were you always on the job? How did that contribute to your stress level?
5. How do you think the stress level of a teacher compares to other jobs? Is it just something you have to learn to manage?
6. Why do you think stress levels are high in teachers? How do you think the stress level compares to other professions?
7. What would make teaching easier on educators? How can burnout be prevented?
8. You left your classroom career to move into administration, how has that been different for you? Do you find it more rewarding, less rewarding? Do you still ever feel burnout?
9. Did the move to administration happen sooner than you expected or did you make the transition on pace with your expectations?

Influences:

1. Who were some of your major teaching influences and why?
2. Other than individuals, what were some of your primary motivations for becoming a teacher?
Teaching Experience:

1. Tell me what a typical day of teaching was like for you.
2. How many hours did you spend a day on your job as a teacher?
3. How often did you take work home with you?
4. How often did you stay late?
5. Did you find the time you spent outside of class diminish over the years of teaching? What would you attribute that to?
6. How many kids did you typically teach per class and overall? How much prep time did you get?
7. In a given week, how much time outside of the contracted hours did you spend on your job?

Rewards and Frustrations:

1. What were some of the most rewarding aspect of your teaching career?
2. Are there any other rewarding moments you want to talk about?
3. What were the most frustrating? Other frustrations?
4. How do the rewards and frustrations differ now as an administrator?
5. What made your journey into teaching significant?
6. Is teaching truly a profession?
7. What do you say to others who suggest teaching is not a profession?
8. Can you think of and expound upon any specific moments that made you want to quit right there on the spot?
9. What pressures got to you the most about teaching?
10. How much self-worth did you feel as a teacher? How much did you feel valued by your peers/administrators/students/parents?
11. How much did this approval from others matter to you?

Individual Questions Specific to the Teacher

1. What is a typical day like for you now as an administrator?
2. Do you have more daily surprises as an administrator or when you taught?
3. Talk about why you wanted to leave teaching and become an administrator?
4. How has that self-worth changed now that you’re in administration?
5. Are you happier in administration than you were as a teacher?
6. What most caused you to leave the teaching profession?
7. You retired before you planned to do so. Describe your reasons why.
Appendix D  Practicing Teacher Follow up Interview Questions

Follow Up Interview Questions

Researcher Note: The following questions were prepared prior to each follow up interview. Other questions often developed as the researcher engaged with each teacher through various formats such as: email, text, phone, and face-to-face conversations.

Mr. Connors Follow Up Interview Questions

1. What advice do you have for preservice teachers who are currently in college planning a career education?

2. You mentioned better training would help preservice teachers adapt to the teaching environment. From your experience, explain further what type of training you think might better help them.

3. Describe your decision to become a teacher. Was it your first passion/major, or was it something else?

4. You said you gravitated toward your English teachers as influences. Can you explain further?

5. Was it just these teachers that led you to English or something about the major in general you really liked?

6. An administrator’s thoughts on the teacher evaluation process?

7. You completed your master’s in administration while still teaching. What was that like?

8. Was teaching more or less stressful than you had anticipated? How does administration compare?

9. In your experience, what are the greatest joys of being in education?

10. In your experience, what are the greatest stresses of being in education? Specific stresses that really get to you?

11. Do you ever feel like the stress outweighs the joy? When it’s this stressful, why still do it?

12. How do state mandates and requirements add to the stressful nature of education?

13. In your career have you ever seen schools address the stresses placed on educators and try to help them cope?

14. You said you loved working with tough kids. Describe success stories you had with them in teaching and admin.

15. Would you say you work with tough kids more now as an admin? How is it different than when you taught?

16. What sports did you coach while teaching?

17. How did coaching impact your teaching career?
18. If you weren’t an educator, what would you be doing?

19. How happy have you been now as an administrator? Do you feel happier in this role than the classroom?

**Mr. King Follow Up Interview Questions:**

1. Why did you pursue social studies when you decided to major in education?

2. Why did you listen to your then-girlfriend-now-wife when she encouraged you to pursue teaching?

3. How did alternative school change your perceptions on teaching? How long did you do it? Was it teaching?

4. Talk about your passion for Abraham Lincoln. Was it always there or did it develop after you began teaching?

5. How are projects like the Lincoln Plaque beneficial to both you and your students?

6. When was it dedicated? How long did the process take?

7. Would you describe that as one of your greatest joys thus far as an educator?

8. How does the Rock N Hall of Fame impact your students? What’s it like to look at it and see the faces from the beginning of your career to now?

9. What advice do you have for preservice teachers who are currently in college planning a career education?

10. What year(s) was it you were followed by the Journal & Courier regarding educational changes?

11. Describe that experience as a teacher. I’m sure it lent itself to all sort of emotions knowing that you and your classroom was “put out there” to the public.

12. Talk about the Lafayette to Lafayette project for Katrina and others. What got you so inspired to do that and involve others? How impressed are you with the students’ efforts each time?

13. What are the four different clubs you sponsor? Why take the extra time for them?

14. Can you go into further detail the impact teaching has had on your domestic and/or social life?

15. How do you incorporate yourself and your outside interests into your teaching?

16. What are you greatest hopes as you move forward with your teaching career?

17. How is each year different for you?

18. Why keep doing it in the face of so many challenges each year?

19. How do you know you’re doing a successful job as a teacher?
Mr. Smith Follow Up Interview Questions:

1. What’s your take on the current educational climate in Indiana? Is it ground zero for this field?

2. You previously mentioned collective bargaining as an avenue for you to honor three of your past high school teachers. Please describe the collective bargaining process. How did you fight for teacher rights through this?

3. Why was it so important to fight for your fellow teachers? Why not just focus on you?

4. Talk about the strike your first year of teaching? How did that impact you?

5. What did the Washington, D.C. trip mean to you? Why/how did you get it going?

6. What advice do you have for preservice teachers who are in the process of pursuing a career in education?

7. You describe your work with your student teachers as probably the most rewarding aspect of your career. Did you ever think about the possibility of having student teachers when you first started teaching?

8. Discuss one or two of your experiences with your student teachers to further illustrate your passion for working with them. What were some specifically rewarding memories of working with them?

9. You mentioned one student teacher coming back and telling you he was the caliber of teacher he was because of you. Can you expand further if you didn’t happen to in the above question?

10. A former student of yours came back and said he pursued teaching because of you. Can you describe that further. What was that student like? Did it surprise you? How did it make you feel?

11. You mention teaching your own sons as a particular joy in your teaching career. (As your son, it was one of my greatest experiences - twice, along with working in the same building as you). Can you talk further about the experience of teaching your two sons and what it meant to you?

12. If you would, talk about your thoughts on your son’s decision to pursue a teaching career, and then discuss his subsequent decision to step away from secondary school to pursue a different path, yet still in the field of education.

Preservice Education Questions Addressed to All Three Teachers

1. How valuable was your university education major in helping you become a teacher?

2. Is the education major really necessary anymore or can anyone do it so long as they have a degree in the field they choose to teach?

3. Describe the value of a university teacher education based on:
   1) Classroom Instruction
   2) Field Experiences

4. Which one is more valuable – classroom instruction or the field experience component?

5. Any specific memories/lessons learned from your teacher preparation?
Teaching Tips: Observations and Experiences

Spring 2016

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

- Aristotle
The following tips are suggestions only, based on the observations and experiences of you, your instructor, and your fellow classmates. These tips might fit your teaching style, they might not. Perhaps they will provide guidance in the years to come. My personal tips and suggestions are in black and gold.

Classroom Management

- **Clip Up, Clip Down Chart**: Reward students by allowing them to clip up; if they misbehave they have to clip down. This motivates students to do well.

- **A call and response can help students transition from one subject to the next.** One example is: Teacher – “Chicka Chicka” and Student – “Boom Boom.” It gets the students’ attention and settles them down.

- **Uphold the rules and expectations in the classroom.** As a teacher, students will behave and pay attention in the classroom if you enforce expectations throughout the entire school year.

- **When the year starts, establish the rules and expectations of your classroom; make sure to enforce them so that the students are certain you mean them.**

- **If a student needs to be disciplined, do not make a scene or example of them in front of the class.** Make sure to remove the student from the situation and discipline accordingly.

- **Other students will know you are disciplining another student if you ask them to leave the room.** You do not need to call them out in front of the class or yell to set an example. Be the mature person and stay calm, even if the student is getting under your skin.

- **Structure can prevent chaos to seemingly small parts of the day, so having exercises to get students to line up is important.** Ways to implement this include calling one table at a time, “all those wearing red first,” alphabetically, or by birthday.

Discussions

- **Open discussions can bring in completely new perspectives than what is typically seen in books and popular media.**

- **Don’t be afraid to talk about a topic that might be controversial.** Make it clear to your students that these are opinion based and set down some rules on how students can interact with each other, but talking about something that might be controversial can help generate your students’ interest and teach them how to back up their opinions with actual evidence.

- **Have a “morning meeting” with the whole class.** This would be an unstructured time for the students to share something about themselves to the class, solve a riddle together, or just have a fun class discussion to start the day.
Flexibility

- Be flexible. Things may not work in one of your periods, so you must be able to change a lesson to better suit a class. Being flexible allows you to address the needs of your students.
- Be prepared to relocate rooms or grades. It’s relatively common for new teachers to move from grade level to grade level to fill open positions, especially if they have multiple endorsements/specializations.

Grading

- Return assignments in a timely fashion and review that work in class to help students learn your grading style, understand their mistakes, and see the value in the work they completed.
- Be consistent with how you grade your tests/quizzes. All students should be getting or losing the same amount of points for what they put on the test. Anyone who grades your work should mirror your consistency.

Lesson Planning

- In the first few years, don’t feel the need to “reinvent the wheel” when it comes to lesson plans. Over the course of time, you will develop your own set of materials to create fresh, inventive lessons that are unique to you and your style of teaching.
- Have emergency lessons prepared for unexpected absences or delays. Make it accessible and easy to find for a colleague, administrator, or substitute. These are life savers!
- Switch up your materials from time to time. Some teachers tend to keep the same lessons for 30 years because that is what they are comfortable with. This is a disadvantage to your students. Society and technology are constantly changing, so should your plans and materials.
- Use a variety of teaching methods to keep students engaged. If all you do is lecture, the students may not be getting anything out of the lessons.
- Don’t be afraid to ask your students for advice on lessons. You can learn a lot from them.
- Try to have meaningful backup activities to do in case there is extra time left after a lesson. Free time can quickly turn into chaos.
- Don’t give work that only serves to fill up time in class. If an assignment doesn’t have a clear purpose, it’s mostly likely not worth using class time on.
- Switch it up every once in a while. Start the day off with reading or spelling instead of math.
- Routine makes class stagnant. Add new types of assignments or even change how the lesson is taught. Do skits, PowerPoints, draw, etc.
Organization

- Don’t show up to class unprepared. Your increased stress level will make you irritable with your students and ruins the class atmosphere. It is unprofessional and discourages you from teaching to the best of your ability.

- Keep your classroom neat and organized. Students can be very unorganized and messy, so it is important as a teacher to keep your work organized.

- Don’t lose a student’s work due to a cluttered room.

- The more organized you are, the less time you waste before, during, and after school!

- Have extra supplies such as pencils for students that may not have them. Some students may have trouble with getting school supplies. There is no sense in having a student do nothing or distracting class because that student doesn’t have a pencil or paper.

Parent Communication

- Make a good first impression with parents. It can help the year go smoother. Parents don’t take it lightly when teachers call home or send a note only to inform them that their child is misbehaving or struggling.

- Remember parents are a support system for the student.

- Send home positive student referrals to the parents.

- It will be easy to tell yourself, “I don’t have time for this,” but trust me; regular positive parent communication will prevent problems that would take even more time. Social media, letters, notes, phone calls, emails, or a class webpage are all ways to stay connected with parents.

- Parents are one of our greatest resources for aiding students. Parents can facilitate extra work or exercises at home, such as pointing out spelling words, or making sure they are reading a bit more than they normally would.

- Parents can give us advice on a subject a student may be struggling with or any other difficulties learning.

“We will be known forever by the tracks we leave.” – Dakota Proverb

Seeking Help

- Don’t hesitate to seek help from others.

- Seek help from the principal, counselors, colleagues, and other staff for issues with disruptive students, difficult students, those a bit behind, or with any other problem. It doesn’t mean you’ll be perceived as someone who can’t handle your classroom.
• If your school doesn’t assign you a mentor teacher when you start, immediately seek one out. You need someone in the building you can rely on as your go to confidant and resource.

• The first few years are your busiest producing materials, so colleagues and the technology around you are your best friends.

• If you ever feel overwhelmed from teaching, talk to someone. They’ve felt the same way, believe me. It’s a tough job, but we are all in this together.

• Without using your resources, you could become overwhelmed trying to do it all yourself.

Separating Teaching from Personal Life

• Try not to take things personally.

• Don’t spend excess hours after school grading and planning lessons. It’s ok to have a life.

• You come first. Take care of yourself so you don’t burn out your first few years of teaching. To avoid this problem, set a limit for yourself. For example, grade five papers before classes and five papers after classes.

• You will always be viewed as a teacher by your students and parents, whether it’s during the school day or not. Take pride in that; you can still enjoy your personal life and conduct yourself professionally in public.

“Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.”

– Robert Collier

Supporting Your Students – Part I

• Take the time to get to know your students, and not just the ones that stand out as the best; take time to get to know all of them. Learn about their interests, their families, and other things that bring you insight into who they are. This also allows you to connect with them on another level that isn’t purely academic.

• Realize that what is going on outside of your classroom in a student’s life affects him or her inside the classroom. They are affected by adult decisions like moving, separation, divorce, even shift changes at a parent’s job.

• Always remember to be encouraging to your students. Encouragement they receive from you may not be present at home. Encouragement will lead them to more success than you would think.

• All kids want is people to believe in them.
• Make connections with your students. They don’t care what you know until they know that you care.

• Treat your students with respect and understanding. They are emotional human beings, just like you!

• By going the extra mile as a teacher and becoming more of a friend versus a teacher, students might feel more dedicated to their work and reach their full potential as a student.

• It is important to treat all students fairly in every situation.

• Make an effort to interact with the students.

• If you have something to discuss about a student with someone, wait for a time when you can discuss the matter in private. Information could be heard by other students, especially information they do not need to know.

• Don’t compare one student to another based on academic performance. You may not know the whole story behind the behavior differences. Treat all students as though they are the same, but make necessary adjustments for those who may need some extra help.

• Do not tell other staff that your students are not smart.

• Never let a negative comment about a student come out of your body. It is natural to have opinions about people. But when it comes to your students, stay positive. Being positive about their mistakes can make all the difference in their attitude about your class and education in general.

Supporting Your Students – Part II

• Through kindness, a level of trust, and openness of the classroom, you and your students can cooperate.

• Greet your classroom as a whole, or individually each morning. A personal interaction such as a handshake before the students enter the classroom can show that you respect and care about them.

• Give students leadership positions within the classroom, recognizing trust in their work ethic.

• Make students feel safe and secure in your classroom by communicating with them.

Technology

• Integrate technology. Tools like computers help you teach them basic skills such as researching.

• Technology in the classroom is a given in this day and age. New technology is always exciting, but even SMART Boards are getting replaced. Use the technology as a resource, and not as the teacher. It’s you that will energize your students over the long term, not a piece of technology.
• Don’t let the students automatically use their phones on every assignment. They’re not really thinking about the assignment. They are just looking up the answers and copying them, and not storing the information into their memories.

• Keep an eye on what students are doing when using technology. Be sure to model how to appropriately use any technology you use in the classroom. Sometimes we take for granted what students know and understand, and some could feel embarrassed to ask questions.

Wow Factor

• Be a shining example every single day you teach. Wow your students with your passion for the material you are teaching them. Your awesomeness will inspire their awesomeness! Be yourself, but always the best of yourself. You can be the rock your students steady themselves against when the waves of their chaotic young lives seem a little too much.

“*It is noble to teach yourself, but still nobler to teach others.*” – Mark Twain
“I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious.” – Albert Einstein

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“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For while knowledge defines all we currently know and understand, imagination points to all we might yet discover and create.” – Albert Einstein

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“Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.” – Albert Einstein