



The First-Year Ride

You have just finished your first year of teaching and someone has asked you to choose a word or two that captures your experience. What would you select?

How about roller coaster? That's the term that 40 novice teachers from Monroe County, Alabama, chose after reflecting on their first year. Roller coaster was the perfect metaphor for the multiple emotional ups-and-downs they experienced in their year of firsts. Those firsts included teaching young students sight words; celebrating students' achievements on the state test; struggling with legal mandates; dealing with difficult parents; and last, but hardly least, reading and filling out all those written reports! What a ride the year had been.

Yet, this roller-coaster effect is not unique to these southern teachers. Rather, it is so typical for beginning teachers that a route of the first-year roller-coaster ride has been mapped out in the Phases of First Year Teaching Model (Moir 1999) as shown on page 9. According to Moir, Executive Director of the New Teacher Center, University of California at Santa Cruz, new teachers characteristically progress through distinct emotional phases: anticipation, survival,

disillusionment, rejuvenation, reflection, and anticipation again.

Though the Alabama teachers concurred that they had experienced the attitudes and emotions of each phase during the year, not all experienced each phase at the same time. Reflecting back on your year, can you relate to these phases at one time or another?

Don't worry if you didn't totally rejuvenate in the spring or end the year on a high level of anticipation. You won't be a perfect teacher the first year! Honing your craft as a teacher is a five-to-seven-year learning and developmental process (Berliner 2002; Steffy et al. 2000)!

Learning is lifelong, and experience teaches as no book or lecture can. Thus, reflecting on the first year is essential to developing as a teacher. For this purpose, we posed six questions at the year's end to the Monroe County teachers. As you read the questions and responses, see for yourself what your responses would be.

Is teaching what you thought it would be?

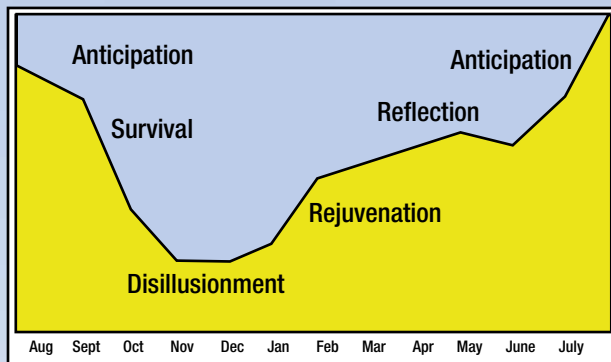
"YES!"

"I love it!"

Seeing a child's face light up and changing students' lives were the most rewarding aspects of teaching for these teachers. However, their expectations and reality differed. Where reality hit: mountains of paperwork and the challenge to motivate and manage classroom behavior.

Associate Professor Irene McIntosh and Assistant Professor Brooks Steele, both from the University of South Alabama, along with KDP Executive Director Michael P. Wolfe, share new-teacher insights from their work with beginning educators involved in a school-wide induction program. Irene and Brooks belong to the Omicron Zeta Chapter.

Phases of First-Year Teaching



Original Source: University of California, Santa Cruz, New Teacher Project; Elen Moir, Director.

What was the best part of the year for you?

"(Those moments) when students catch on and understand what I'm teaching."

"The success of one child is incredible!"

The overwhelming response to this question was student achievement, coupled with the recognition by these beginners that they were instrumental in that progress. Knowing they were effective brought them excitement.

What was the hardest part of the year?

"Paperwork!"

"Staying on top of things and covering all the materials in preparation for testing."

Juggling myriad responsibilities was the overall difficulty these new teachers faced. Individual challenges cited included: keeping up with paperwork; maintaining order in professional materials and teaching; managing disruptive students; witnessing students' learning struggles; and implementing effective teaching strategies.

What was an example of a success?

"Being able to read!"

"Having my students benchmark the reading tests."

Students reading at grade level was the mark of success mentioned most frequently by teachers. Some cited students' positive actions and demonstrations of self-discipline as examples of classroom success: "I am successful when students respond positively and respectfully," and "when my students work as a team."

What was your greatest challenge throughout the year?

"Staying on top of discipline problems."

"Staying on task, keeping on schedule."

Most new teachers mentioned discipline as their greatest challenge—a common concern among beginning teachers wherever they teach! Dealing with paperwork and staying on schedule also were big challenges, as they are even for veteran teachers.

In what ways were the monthly meetings helpful?

"I don't feel so alone in what I'm going through!"

These new teachers valued tips they received on various topics, including handling difficult classroom situations, stress management, engaging students, and remaining calm when students become disruptive. However, the most meaningful and powerful aspect of the meetings was simply the chance to interact with other new teachers and experience mutual support. They valued learning what other teachers did. This inherent camaraderie boosted their confidence and professional growth.

Regular opportunities for reflection enabled these beginners to highlight successful, as well as difficult, first-year events which gave them insight leading to avenues of change. In addition, veteran teachers and administrators became aware of new ways to support future new teachers. As a result, changes for next year are being planned—in curriculum, classroom and time management, and instruction. With plans in hand, these new teachers positively anticipate next year.

References & Resources

- Berliner, D. 2002. In *The best beginning teacher experience: A framework for professional development*, ed. S. Kortman and C. Honaker, ix. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- Moir, E. 1990. *Phases of first-year teaching*. Santa Cruz: New Teacher Center. Available at: www.newteachercenter.org/article_2.php.
- Steffy, B. E., M. P. Wolfe, S. H. Pasch, and B. J. Enz, eds. 2000. *Life cycle of the career teacher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press and Kappa Delta Pi.
- U.S. Department of Education. 1998. *Toward better teaching: Professional development*. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement.