Failing Gym is Like Failing Lunch or Recess: Two Beginning Teachers’ Struggle for Legitimacy

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It is generally recognized that the first year of teaching is a critical time in the professional life of a teacher. It is a major life change from the role of student to teacher and working adult, from one who is guided and directed and stimulated to one who guides, directs, and stimulates (McDonald & Elias, 1983, p. 14). The neophyte teacher becomes part of the profession Ryan once described as the “‘ranks of the chalk-soiled, ink stained, over-challenged, undersupported, memo-ridden, privacy riddled, patience-worn, school fatigued, lovers of children and ideas’” (1970, p. vi). Unlike other occupations, beginning teachers assume responsibilities similar to those who have been teaching for 20 years (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Little, 1987; Locke, 1984; Lortie, 1975). Many new teachers describe the transition as a period of great anxiety (Huberman, 1985; McDonald & Elias, 1983) and experience reality shock (Veenman, 1984). Weinstein (1988) described reality shock, formed during teacher training, as the collapse of the new teacher’s missionary ideals by the harsh and crude reality of everyday classroom life. The ordeal, Weinstein argued, stems from “unrealistic expectations and the difficulty of teaching in general” (p. 31).

Problems of beginning teachers have been attributed to the lack of adequate professional preparation (Borko, 1986), the situational conditions of the school environment (Little, 1987), and the personal characteristics of the new teacher (Jordell, 1987; Ryan, 1980). Veenman (1984) suggested they have to do with teaching a group of students, with teaching as a profession, and with the influence of the profession on the individual.

Bolam (1987, p. 747) noted that while there has been a steady stream of research on beginning teachers since World War II, recent researchers in the United States have tended to ignore the issue. McDonald and Elias (1983) conducted a National Institute of Education review of the literature on problems of beginning teachers. Despite glaring weaknesses in the studies reviewed, they found “remarkable homogeneity in the conclusions which were drawn [from these studies]” (p. 8). Beginning teachers reported their first year of teaching as “a period of great anxiety and fear, even trauma. . . . They felt unprepared to manage classes and worried greatly about ‘controlling’ them” (p. 4) because “they did not know what to do to master such fundamental teaching tasks as managing, planning, and organizing” (p. 15).

With a few exceptions, research on beginning teachers has been almost nonexistent in physical education (Freedman, 1985; Housner & Griffey, 1985).
Housner and Griffey (1985) studied the decision-making processes of experienced and beginning physical educators as they planned and taught two lessons. The findings indicated differences in the management and instructional strategies used by the two groups of teachers. Experienced teachers made more decisions on strategies for implementing instructional activities than did inexperienced teachers. During the lesson, the experienced teachers focused more on individual students while the inexperienced teachers focused on the class as a group. The "beginners" in the study, however, were undergraduate students in a teacher preparation program. Freedman (1985) followed several graduates of a teacher preparation program during their first year of teaching to determine the degree to which their teaching reflected the goals of the program from which they came. No effort was made to determine the expectations these new teachers had for their first year of teaching and whether they or others perceived the transition to be successful.

**Purpose of the Study**

How well do the findings from the classroom research generalize to beginning physical education teachers? Does the nature of the subject matter expertise of physical education teachers have an impact on the transition to a teaching career in any unique ways? The major purpose of the study was to describe the lives of two beginning physical education teachers hired as the physical education specialists in two suburban elementary schools. The following research questions framed the focus of the data collection procedures:

1. What are the features of educational situations that beginning physical education teachers experience as successful and problematic, and why?
2. What is the nature of the relationships between the 1st-year teachers and their administrators, students, peers, and parents?
3. How similar are the beginning teachers’ behaviors and concerns to those of effective veteran physical educators?
4. What are the similarities and differences between their experiences and those of beginning teachers reported in the classroom literature?

**Procedures**

**Subjects and Setting**

The two subjects in this study were part of a larger study of expert elementary physical education specialists. Both were recent graduates of the same teacher preparation program where each had received a Promising Teacher Award. Following graduation, both were hired in local suburban elementary schools. (See first two articles by Siedentop and others in this monograph.)

Mike and Kelley were the only physical education specialists in their schools and were responsible for the physical education program for all students (K–6). Mike had seven classes a day, with half an hour for lunch and a half-hour planning period adjoining the lunch period. Students were mostly from middle and low middle income families. Mike had an average of 25 students in his classes, which met twice a week for 40-minute periods. His equipment budget allowed for at least one ball per three students. He had the full complement of gymnastics equipment and a full-size elementary gymnasium separate from the lunch room.
Mike was one of two new teachers at the school that year. The other teacher came from a secondary school in the same district. There were three male teachers in the building: Mike, the new teacher from the secondary school, and the principal.

Kelley was in a rented school from an adjacent school district. All 12 teachers including the principal were new to the building and new as a staff. Kelley was given $30,000 to purchase all the equipment for the physical education program. She was one of nine females and three males, one of whom was the principal. Kelley was one of five new teachers in her school, and most of the teachers had 5 or fewer years of experience. Kelley taught four 40-minute classes a day and scheduled her lunch and planning periods around those lessons. Although not full time, Kelley said it "just means I come a little later and leave a little earlier basically every day." Observations indicated that she spent as much time as other teachers at the school during the year.

Data Collection

A series of methodological techniques was used for collecting data that addressed the research questions posed at the outset of the paper.

Interviews. Four interviews were conducted with each teacher: one 10 working days into the school year, one in March, and two in early June. Two of the interviews were conducted individually (September and March), one as a pair (June), and one as part of a larger group of elementary physical education teachers (June). These interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Only data pertaining to the specific research questions posed here will be addressed. Both Mike and Kelley were invited to address a group of physical education student teachers on two different occasions (November and January) to describe their lives as beginning teachers and to give advice to these new teachers on making successful transitions to their teaching careers. Both sessions were audiotaped and the data were transcribed.

Observations. First, 30 systematic observations of the teachers’ lessons were conducted throughout the year with an intensive look at the first four lessons each in September for a first and a fifth grade class. Only the data necessary to address the questions posed here will be used. A further paper will look at the activity patterns and task structures used in 1st-year teachers’ physical education classes.

Other Data Sources. The teachers were asked to make at least one entry a week in a log about incidents they felt were significant in their lives as teachers. Mike consistently wrote in his log but Kelley did not give much attention to this. An inductive analysis technique was used to categorize the experiences described in Mike’s log entries. Bibliographic data were available from two summary forms completed by each teacher, as were data from an interview with each principal and a copy of the principals’ evaluations of their teaching.

Data Analysis Procedures

Several steps were followed to analyze the data from the various sources:

1. Interviews and log entries were read to identify experiences the teachers perceived as successful and problematic during their first year of teaching. These were then compared to those generated from the classroom litera-
ture on 1st-year teachers. The transcripts of two presentations the beginning teachers made to the student teachers were read in order to generate what they considered important for student teachers to know for a successful transition to a teaching career.

2. The logs were read and each entry was coded as positive (a positive interaction with a parent at open house), negative (lack of support for the dress code from parents), or problematic (a concern that the teacher felt could be improved upon in the future, such as grading of a mainstreamed student in a criterion referenced system). The log was reread for substance and each incident was categorized as an instructional issue (familiarity with course of study), interpersonal issue (interaction with parents, colleagues, or students), and organizational issues (classroom management or discipline), and the frequency of each category was noted.

3. The nature of the similarities and differences in perceptions and teaching strategies between novice and veteran teachers was ascertained from the group interview (with the other veteran teachers), the individual interviews with the beginning teachers, and the observation records from the beginning of the year, using the Siedentop and Fink (1987) observation system.

Results

The data are drawn from several sources and the results are compiled and presented by research question. They will be discussed later in the paper.

Perceived Successful and Problematic Educational Experiences

The interviews and Mike’s log entries were the main sources of data for this question. In the second interview each teacher was asked to respond to incidents in his or her teaching and interactions with students, teachers, parents, and the administration that were perceived to be particularly successful or problematic. Both teachers reported a number of successful and problematic experiences during their first year of teaching. Mike made 53 entries in his log, an average of 4 per month, but as many as 8 entries in March and May. An inductive analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of three categories of significant incidents. The categories were organizational and administration situations, interpersonal situations, and instructional situations. No such data are available for Kelley, as she did not keep the log.

Successful Experiences of Beginning Teachers. From an organizational standpoint, Mike and Kelley were very pleased with the way the year began. Students learned their rules, routines, and expectations quickly. Time was spent teaching basic routines and students were reinforced for compliance (see article by Fink & Siedentop). One routine Mike taught to each of his classes was a standard warm-up. The students had to self-manage the series of exercises, and 3 weeks into the year Mike commented that “all the warm-ups are below 10 minutes and all classes are getting more instruction time. I’m teaching more and enjoying it more.” “It saves an enormous amount of time in transitions to keep those set routines.”

Kelley felt very confident about starting the school year: “I have not had a major problem with the students.” She felt the time and effort taken to teach the rules and routines paid off for her, and with the students’ attention on her
as the teacher she could "go on smoothly into other activities." Kelley was very positive about how she established expectations for her students; the fifth graders soon stopped asking her if they could play games during physical education. Teaching these behaviors was important for both Kelley and Mike. Kelley taught the rules and expectations initially because, she said, "That is what I was taught to do. . . . and I understand deeply all the reasons that we were taught to do that now. . . . I think anyone who walks into my classroom is shocked that these kids, when I say 'freeze', they freeze. It is not just in the classroom; even in the cafeteria if they are real loud, and I will say 'freeze', they all stop and look at me."

Mike also established a reputation during the school year for his managerial abilities. At the spring outdoor education camp, one of the classroom teachers asked him to get the children's attention as it was time to go and eat. She had seen him get the students organized before and was impressed with the positive way the students responded to him. In describing the incident, Mike recalled, "I yelled 'freeze!' and they all stopped and put the balls down. They lined up and we were gone [to eat]. It is an unusual sense of power that you have that they don't have [other teachers]."

Several interpersonal experiences were a source of satisfaction to the new teachers. Their relationships with students, parents, and other teachers were a frequent source of discussion during the interviews and accounted for 40% of Mike's log entries. Both mentioned that it was a nice feeling to know the children liked them. The children liked to meet Kelley outside the classroom setting; "Every once in a while I go to recess and they get so excited if I do this." She recalled several incidents when the students wanted to behave because they liked her and her class. She mentioned that she did not want to betray that trust, and so one of the things that would most upset her was overhearing students say to each other that this activity or lesson was boring. She wanted the students to feel they could discuss anything with her and that it was up to her to establish that relationship.

Mike recalled several incidences with the students when he felt he was establishing the kind of relationship that was most appropriate between teachers and students. When asked to provide examples of this relationship, Mike said, "They stop by and tell me something. [They] come and visit me in my office or really work hard in class. Some of the girls really hated me at the beginning of the year and now they come by with a smile to see or chat with me with a joke. That is nice. They finally, I think, saw me as fair." His ideal relationship with students is to have a lighter atmosphere in the classroom, with time to joke with the kids and time to teach in a way that does not require him to continuously prompt the students about his expectations.

The beginning teachers were successful with their instruction. For both, the concern with student learning was never far from their thoughts. When asked to share incidents from the first half of the school year that made them feel they were being particularly effective, both talked about student learning. Mike said, "I give written tests and when I see they understand what the skills are. . . . Students show me positive attitude. . . . When somebody does a give and go in a game and tells their teammate what to do, it is great." Kelley was pleased: "The students can tell me the critical elements when we close and that excites me. Even more, when they work in partners and I hear them telling each other, that makes me feel good . . . those things make me feel real successful." Mike
felt positive about his increased success in matching activities to the students’ abilities, and he felt successful on several occasions when his new activities matched the students’ abilities and maintained high on-task behavior during the lesson.

Kelley felt her strength as a teacher was communicating clear objectives and instructions to the students. She was particularly pleased that her main goal of the year, to set expectations and a framework for learning, had been achieved and that the students would be able to proceed at a faster pace the following year because of this successful base.

Both spoke highly of the support their principals provided them at the beginning of the year. Mike said his principal “has done just about anything I asked. Anytime I have knocked on his door, I know he is busy [but he said] ‘No, it is no problem, sit down, let’s talk’.” Mike felt that the principal “is really on top of it. He knows safety procedures, if you are achieving your objectives, if you are teaching. He wants you to teach. You can’t get away with throwing out the ball as you might in other schools. Parents might be happy but this administrator will not and I like that . . . he really cares about P.E.” Kelley felt the principal was the most helpful person to her as a new teacher. “He makes you have a lot of respect for your peers,” and later she said, “If I had any concerns, I could go directly to him and discuss anything with him and never feel intimidated and tell him things I was not happy with or didn’t like. He would settle me down or help me solve the problem.” The principal provided her with support in dealing with parents and ensured that she and all the “specials” were regarded as part of the staff. Experiences in dealing with their new organizational responsibilities, interpersonal skills with the principal, and meeting instructional goals were the main sources of success for Mike and Kelley during their first year of teaching.

Concerns of Beginning Teachers. Thirteen problem areas were reported by the new teachers throughout the year. Four problems concerned organization and management issues, four concerned instructional issues, and five were of an interpersonal nature. Management of the students and general discipline was not reported as a significant problem for either teacher. Their management concerns tended to focus on getting everything done within the specified time, as distinct from not being able to get things done because of student disruptions, a problem continually reported in the classroom literature (Veenman, 1984). Extra duties outside the classroom, excessive paperwork, and a low tolerance for disorganization contributed to the physical exhaustion these teachers reported during the first several months on the job. Mike described the first part of the school year as “grueling. . . . I find it grueling when I can’t teach, spending my time managing rather than teaching.” Kelley described the first month of teaching as “overwhelming.” There were many things she wanted to do but was unsure if she could fit them all in.

Beginning to teach was even more difficult for Mike, as he was assigned an extra duty before and after school. The crosswalk patrol caused a great deal of frustration in the first 2 weeks. He received no guidelines on how to run the patrol, yet felt he had so much responsibility for the safety of all the children in the school. It was mentioned in his log entries more times than any other in the first half of the year. “The safety patrol is a routine finally. They are performing with less supervision and so some of the pressure is off. They operated with
no adult supervision last year and expected the same this year. . . . It was a huge adjustment for them. . . . This has been a lot of work. I had to have routines established, chain of command, competency tests, established posts, rules of conduct (signing in and out, raincoats, equipment use, etc.), and a demerit system (documented in case of parental backlash). As in the gym, this will pay off in the future."

A few days later, Mike wrote in his log, "Being in charge of safety patrol has put me in the added role of disciplinarian. The patrol not only cross [the students] but they also enforce school rules about lining up, pushing, fighting, etc. When there are rule violations, they warn, and if it doesn’t stop they inform me or send the student to me. This means I have to decide right and wrong when the truth isn’t evident, punish the guilty, follow up and keep records. . . . However, behavior problems away from school . . . have been directed to me. Bus drivers have attempted to lay the obligation on me. I have refused and the principal has backed me up." Later in the semester the sixth grade teachers started to use the safety patrol as punishment. Mike wrote, "If they [students] violate one of their class rules, then the student is suspended from the patrol for a week. . . . It causes me to be short staffed, to have to reschedule and to do extra work. I’ve had to be very forceful and insist that while I will support them in disciplining, this is not an option. They [the teachers] don’t want to hold detentions because it takes up their time.

Kelley had to order the entire school’s equipment budgeted for physical education before school and it arrived just the day before school began. At the end of the year she had to pack the equipment and have it moved to the new building. Kelley felt spring was the toughest part of the year physically and mentally: "I felt a lot of pressure starting school but toward the end [the spring] there was so much going on. . . . I had a lot of stresses and it sounds like I am complaining, and I am not, but it was by far the absolute most difficult time. . . . a lot more organizational pressure."

The instructional concerns Kelley spoke of were the lack of familiarity with the course of study. A major concern for Mike was greater individualization of instruction by matching class activities more closely to student competencies. Mike noted that smaller class sizes would be the best thing for improving his program, as he would be able to provide more time on task and better individual attention to students, and consequently more skill learning would occur. Kelley wished she "knew the curriculum better."

Both teachers were highly critical of the kind of inservice opportunities available to them in their respective school districts. The orientation programs at the start of the school year were described by and large as irrelevant for a physical educator. Kelley spoke for both when she commented that "going there [teacher preparation program] I felt I had all my real questions about physical education . . . answered [already]." She summarized the general school orientation for the seven new teachers at her school as follows: "We did a lot of general things through the curriculum but very little of it pertains to me. My being a special area, it just did not pertain . . . The main thing I learned at the meeting that I have to do is be able to show that I am following the curriculum in any way that I can."

Mike was very disappointed with the quality and quantity of inservice opportunities at his school district: "The regular teachers had all these gifted speakers
they can go to and get professional points and knowledge. All kinds of courses they can take advantage of, and yet nothing for us [in the school district]. Some of it right after school, some on a Saturday or a couple of evenings. It is much easier to attend and get the information, especially the lectures and short seminars. Such a variety. With the permission of his principal, he set up an inservice session on adapted physical education for some of the physical education teachers in the district, but the day before the workshop he was told by central office administrators that they could not attend nondistrict scheduled sessions on their professional day. Mike described the situation as follows: "The principal [at the visiting school] was ready, the physical education teacher was ready, three of us were going to go. He [superintendent] said all the special areas and other people would fragment."

Kelley tried to set up an inservice. "I talked to my principal about it to get somebody from the university, and that is like going through a sea of red tape." Though critical of the inservice opportunities, both felt such programs were crucial to their professional development. Otherwise, Mike said, "it is like intellectual isolation."

Establishing relationships with parents and colleagues were the areas in which both teachers had problems. Mike and Kelley were bothered by what they perceived as the low status of their subject matter. Mike's disappointment and frustration with the lack of respect from parents and teachers for him and his subject matter emerged consistently in his logs and in discussions throughout the year. He felt the principal was the only professional in the school who seemed to care about what he was teaching and how effectively he taught: "I also believe they look at a gym teacher differently and I don't think they have the same respect . . . that I can get my grades in because don't I just have to assign them grades."

The students were not accustomed to expectations for learning in the gymnasium, and it was difficult to establish and maintain high standards and a positive atmosphere. Mike did this, he felt, in spite of rather than with the support of some key people such as colleagues, students, and parents.

A number of incidents were perceived by Mike to demonstrate lack of respect for him as a teacher. On several occasions, teachers failed to communicate with him about a student's medical problems. In these situations Mike initiated discussions with a teacher to discover the child had been taken off medication or that the medication had been changed. Mike felt he should have been told about this without having to initiate the discussion. "Not getting the information on students where I see them share the information with other teachers . . . LD or emotional problems and children who were diagnosed as hyperactive, I was never told."

"I don't resent it deeply, but in a way they don't take me as a professional when they don't take a lot of effort to help me." On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being most respected, Mike felt that he would score a 4 as a respected educator with his colleagues but would score higher as a disciplinarian, "due to the fact that I take away a lot of the problems for them. I get more respect for my discipline."

Kelley got on very well with the staff at her school. She felt so good about it that she had a staff party at her home in November. Kelley ate lunch with the rest of the staff in the staff lounge. "I feel really comfortable and confident around everyone . . . lunch is everyone together and I felt really good. It is an escape and . . . we laugh. It is so positive." Mike spent only three lunch periods in the staff room all year. He said he preferred eating lunch in his office, and that
way he could stay out of the political scene. "I don't want to have to take sides," he said. Mike liked the quiet time in the office and it was a chance to read. On that day there was an issue of *JOPERD* and two elementary textbooks on his desk. In January Mike wrote, "You walk in to get a cup of coffee in the teachers' lounge or you sit down to eat lunch and there is no real point of interest to get to know you. They have all been together years and years ... They look at the gym teacher, as they put it, 'differently than they would a real teacher'. I have heard that. So there is isolation."

Parents were supportive during the first year, though both Kelley and Mike felt too few of them believed physical education was very important. Both had problems persuading parents to support the dress rule for physical education. In December Mike wrote in his log, "The parent of a first grade student barged into an ongoing class and became very obnoxious. She demanded to talk and would not leave even though I curtly told her I would have a break in 15 minutes. I did my best to keep the kids active and deal with her while she informed me that my rules were stupid [required tennis shoes] and her daughter hates my class. ... In a nutshell, "snowboots should be fine for gym, I ain't sending no tennyshoes and my kid's afraid of you, you got too many rules" [Mike's quote from the parent]. I want to protect my job and I realize that an alienated parent can do a lot of damage behind my back. I did, however, insist that the principal put this incident on record." "They don't seem to care, some of them."

Having expectations for student learning also was met with resistance by parents. Mike wrote, "There has been a lot of flack from the parents of students who earned a U—unsatisfactory—for the third 6 weeks of the year. 'Failing gym is like failing lunch or recess' one parent told me." In a later interview Mike recalled the incident and the hostility: "'Can't he throw the ball?' [asked the parent]. I said I was not teaching throwing the ball those 6 weeks ... I was teaching a group game and he was not responsive to other children in group activities. They [parents] were not very responsive.'"

Both Kelley and Mike recognized the importance of parental support and one of Kelley's goals for her second year was to develop a better strategy for communicating with parents. Kelley disliked having to phone parents to make a complaint about their child and avoided it as much as possible, even though she had stipulated it as a consequence for violating the rules in gym. Next year her intention is to communicate in a more positive way by developing a physical education newsletter. She has asked several other physical educators about how to approach this. Mike felt parental involvement in special events like the track and field meet would help to communicate what he was trying to achieve in the program. For both it was an area in which they felt uncomfortable.

In summary, the new teachers were most successful organizing and managing the start of their first school year, in setting their expectations for learning and gaining the support and respect of their principals, and for Kelley, her colleagues as well. Little came as a surprise to them during the year, as they felt well prepared for their first year of teaching. The greatest concern was gaining respect for themselves as professionals and for their subject matter with students, parents, and colleagues. Other concerns dealt with finding ways to individualize the curriculum, improve the quality of inservice for physical education at the district level, and manage a myriad of nonteaching duties.
How Did Beginning Teachers Relate to Students, Staff, Administration, and Parents?

The major sources of data for this question came from the interviews in March and June, Mike’s log, and the interviews with their principals. Relationships with students were most important to Kelley and Mike. In the bibliographic questionnaire they were asked to describe the single best feature of teaching physical education. Kelley wrote, “the students are quite receptive to me and are always excited about being here,” and Mike wrote that it was “interaction with the students.” Both principals were very impressed with their teacher/student relationships: “Her rapport with students was very good . . . the students enjoyed the activities: they enjoy going to the gym” (interview with Kelley’s principal in June). Mike’s principal was very pleased with his work with the children. In his November evaluation he wrote that Mike “consistently demonstrated both in and out of the classroom a sincere caring relationship with children. Classroom structure allows much control while maintaining this relationship.” In March he wrote, “Your students approach this class seriously. It is obvious that they are here to learn. Your approach to your students has a great deal to do with this. Strong students are being challenged and weaker students are being supported and gently moved to develop. Nice.”

In neither case did these beginning teachers have any significant problems coping with student behavior. The resistance they commented on was from students having a difficult time coming to terms with the explicit and high expectations for learning in the gymnasium. Overcoming that resistance was a major source of satisfaction for both of them but it didn’t come without a struggle. Mike wrote in his log, “I’m teaching pick and roll for basketball. . . . They [sixth graders] want to play. I want the class to be fun but I have an obligation to take the sixth grade beyond basic skills and into strategy. They are fighting me. . . . I’m employing all the personality, management, positives, jokes, etc., but it is a struggle. They don’t perceive P.E. as a subject. Instead it is expected to be recess. I know that the new sixth graders will have different expectations and be a step in my direction. It’s working for delayed gratification for sure.” Kelley described her interactions with the students as “positive most of the time and fun most of the time.” Later in the year she described the tension between developing a positive relationship with the students and a learning atmosphere in her classroom. She said, “The kids know they are not going to come in and play a game. They are coming in to learn and it is very important for them to understand that and not expect it when they come.”

Relations between the new teachers and their principals were excellent. The teachers felt supported in their teaching and nonteaching responsibilities. The evaluation Kelley received from her principal was the best he had written for a beginning teacher: “I am very impressed with her high skills, her physical education skills. . . . She has a practical approach and was very well prepared to teach in the first year.” Mike’s principal said Mike was “extremely well prepared to step on the job the first day . . . . He was on a higher plane than most other physical education teachers I have dealt with.” Both Kelley and Mike commented on the importance of this support and sought their principals’ guidance on several issues. Relationships with parents were good for the most part. The teachers felt
least comfortable with this group, however. They felt the parents did not care enough about what happened to their children during their physical education experience. This bothered them both. They used the few parent teacher conferences they had to get their expectations across. Without some kind of frequent means of communication, however, they felt unable to get the respect for the subject matter it deserved. Mike and Kelley both used a spring track and field meet to get the parents involved in understanding their programs and felt some success from their efforts. Both felt parents must become advocates for their subject matter, as they have for other areas such as services for special populations and acquiring computers in schools.

**Similarities and Differences Between Novice and Veteran Physical Education Teachers**

This research question focused on the similarities and differences between how novice and veteran physical educators do and think about their work. Aspects of this question are addressed in other papers in this monograph (see Stroot & Morton article on planning, and Fink & Siedentop article on how physical education teachers start the school year). The major source of data in the present study was the group interview with the novice, intermediate, and veteran teachers. The veteran teachers were compared to the novices. Comments from earlier interviews with the novices were used to clarify and elaborate their viewpoints.

All these elementary teachers were more alike than they were different. The veterans and novices spoke consistently about skill learning as the major objective of their programs. Bobbie, one of the veteran teachers, said the goal of her program was “skill development” and wanted her program “viewed as an integral part of the curriculum.” Another veteran teacher agreed that her goal was skill learning and “it [P.E.] is an educational process and we need time and facilities to achieve our goal.” Both Mike and Kelley had skill learning as the major goals of their programs. Mike wanted “students [to] leave [the lesson] being able to tell their parents what they had learned that day.” Kelley wanted “the kids to know they learned something when they left.”

There were obvious similarities in how the novices and veterans started the school year (see Fink & Siedentop article). They taught many of the same rules, routines, and expectations and used similar instructional strategies to develop classwide “established structures” (Soar & Soar, 1979). Such similarities were surprising, given the 15-to-20-year gap in the experience levels of the two groups.

There were differences between the groups, however, in the content of the physical education programs offered, the status of physical education in the school, and the extension of the program to noninstructional school time. The more experienced teachers had more content knowledge and used it to match activities to the various skill levels of student ability. In contrast, the novice teachers adhered rigidly to the established course of study. Kelley was very plan dependent (see Stroot & Morton article), saying, “I don’t know how I would have gotten by without it [course of study] as a 1st-year teacher.” Mike was more independent of plans but still limited in the number of activities he could develop to attain his objectives. The lack of detail in Mike’s course of study forced him to rely on his own resources for class activities. In his log he wrote of this problem: “It
is a real task to get good low organized games . . . I need high activity in a limited space . . . someone should travel and gather The Greatest High Activity Low Organized With Real Skill Objective . . . Games."

A second difference was the status of the program in the school. The novice teachers felt somewhat inadequate promoting their program to parents, colleagues, and the community in general. In the first year they had no consistent pattern of communication with parents except the grade. In other incidents, communication was about a problem student not attaining the specified objectives of the course. Mike wanted to improve this in his second year with more frequent and extensive assessment and give parents more accurate information about their child’s progress. Kelley mentioned improved communications with parents as a major goal for Year 2: ‘‘I want next year to improve public relations with parents. One thing I will do [is] a show after gymnastics [unit].’’

In contrast, the veteran teachers frequently used special events and culminating activities to highlight the skills students learned in their programs. They used school newsletters or developed their own sports bulletins to let parents know about the physical education program (see article by Jones et al.). In interviews with the veteran teachers’ principals, each mentioned the prestige and respect these teachers received from colleagues and how they had developed the support of parents for their physical education programs. One veteran teacher noted some parents would be insulted if they were not asked to assist at a special school sports event, even though their children had long left elementary school. The novice teachers found parents to be neutral or nonsupportive toward their program, yet both teachers recognized them as a valuable resource in building a quality program in their school.

A third major difference between the novices and veteran teachers was in the extent to which the veterans used nonscheduled class time to contribute to the overall goals of the physical education program. The veterans organized a variety of early morning, lunch, and after school programs to provide opportunities, beyond the one or two 40-minute class periods a week, to participate in physical activities. Neither of the two 1st-year teachers scheduled these activities, as they seemed overwhelmed with the myriad of teaching and nonteaching tasks required of them (see article by Jones et al.). The seeming efficiency of the veteran teachers in doing all of what the novices did and more is best described in terms of the ‘‘automaticity’’ (ability to perform a skill with speed and accuracy while carrying out other functions) of their work (Bloom, 1986, p. 70; Siedentop & Eldar article in this monograph).

Comparing Beginning P.E. Teachers With Other Beginning Teachers

This research question focused on the similarities and differences in perceived problems between beginning physical education teachers and beginning elementary and secondary teachers. The data from the current study were compared to those reported in the classroom literature on beginning teachers (Bolam, 1987; Johnson & Ryan, 1980; Veenman, 1984; Weinstein, 1988; Williams, Eiserman, & Lynch, 1985) to ascertain the differences between both groups in their transition to teaching. A number of similarities and differences were noted and the findings are presented below.
Veenman (1984) analyzed the results of 83 studies in a review of the literature on perceived problems of beginning teachers. He concluded that "the eight most frequently perceived problems were [in rank order] classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students' work, relationships with parents, organization of classwork, insufficient materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students" (p. 160). Several studies before and since have supported these findings (e.g., Huberman, 1985; Johnson & Ryan, 1980; Weinstein, 1988).

The two beginning teachers in this study cited four of these issues—motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students, and relationships with parents—as problems in their first year. With respect to motivating students, Mike wrote in his log, "I'm teaching the pick and roll for basketball and the 6th graders do not want to learn . . . It's a pre Jnr. High 'I'm too cool to do this' . . . I'm employing all the personality, management, positives, jokes, etc., but it's a struggle." His students were coping with expectations for learning in the gym that previously did not exist. The principal had described the previous teacher as one of the "throw out the ball" group of physical educators. Parents and students alike were learning to adjust to the new standards. Kelley held high expectations for her students also, and wanted them to be excited about physical education classes. She was frustrated with students who were not as excited as she was. She felt she had overcome the problem by the end of the year: "They know now they are not going to come and play a game. They are coming in to learn and it is very important for them to learn that."

Both Mike and Kelley reported that class size and lack of allocated class time did not allow them to provide quality instruction to individual students. Mike felt that class size was the major hindrance to improving his teaching. He said, "I need to greatly refine my skills and individualize . . . I began to see how effective I was when I knew the students." "More one on one . . . that will make a lot of difference."

Finding valid and reliable means of assessing student progress was a serious concern for Kelley and Mike. Kelley said of the system she had at her school, "Our evaluation is a one, two, three . . . that doesn't tell the parents anything. As far as I am concerned, it is the worst. It is so subjective it bothers me. I hate it." Mike described the first year as a needs assessment. His students would make more rapid progress next year because he would know precisely what their strengths and weaknesses were. "Keeping extensive files on students . . . computerized would be the best [to improve my teaching]." Mike took assessment seriously. He failed three second grade students in the third 6-week grading period because he would know precisely what their strengths and weaknesses were. "Keeping extensive files on students . . . computerized would be the best [to improve my teaching]." Mike took assessment seriously. He failed three second grade students in the third 6-week grading period because they had not achieved his objectives. Parents complained, and one parent considered failing physical education analogous to failing lunch or recess.

Neither Mike nor Kelley felt comfortable communicating with parents. Four of six entries Mike made in his log about parents were negative. For example, "There are so many students who bring notes from their parents stating they are not able to participate . . . parents support their children's hypochondria so these children fall behind in fitness and skill. This is why some students can't even do one correct push-up or sit-up after 8 weeks. It is frustrating . . . it seems they learn that exercise is a 'health risk' from their parents." Kelley felt intimidated by parents and hoped next year she would do a better job of communicating with them. "Some of the parents don't see P.E. as being that important . . . I have
not had that much communication with parents and have been generally inti-
dated to follow up on things.

In the review of literature for this study, only one study was found that
looked at physical education teachers as a separate group. Veenman (1984, p. 153)
cited a German study of beginning physical education teachers and regular elemen-
tary and secondary teachers and reported, "In a study by Frech & Reichwein
(1977) 12% of the beginning gymnasium teachers reported problems with class
discipline, whereas in the study by Lagana (1970) 83% of the elementary and
secondary teachers experienced problems."

Three major differences (predictability, classroom control, and a struggle
for legitimacy) contrast the findings reported in the classroom literature on the
perceived problems of beginning teachers. Neither Kelley nor Mike expressed
surprise about the responsibilities and expectations of their new position. They
reported themselves prepared for their new experiences. Reality shock, a term
frequently reported in the literature to describe the unrealistic expectations of new
teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; Veenman, 1984; Weinstein, 1988), was not an
issue for these teachers. Kelley's description of her first 7 months of teaching
was as follows: "The first month I was so uptight and I was not real sure what
was expected of me by my principal and what I expected of myself.... It has
been so even keel after that. I have not had ups and downs." The only thing
that was different for her was, in her words, "There are actually days when you
say you are not going to be able to teach anything today, so I am not going to
worry about it. I never thought I'd get to that point." Mike felt that everything
he thought would happen has happened. The only surprise for him was the con-
sistent high expectations his fellow teachers had for student behavior and student
learning throughout the year.

Classroom discipline was not mentioned by Mike or Kelley as a concern.
Both were very pleased with the start of the school year and felt the rules, rou-
tines, and expectations they taught and practiced had resulted in high rates of
on-task behavior and few discipline problems during the year. This was in sharp
contrast to the findings in the classroom literature wherein classroom discipline
was by far the most serious and most frequent problem reported by beginning
teachers (Featherstone, 1988; Veenman, 1984). Only two of Mike's log entries
concerned class discipline. They were made on consecutive days and were about
the same child whom Mike had to physically remove from his class, and the next
day remove from the regular teacher's class. In a meeting later, it was discovered
that the child had not received his medication. This was the only situation in which
Mike or Kelley felt the rules and routines they had established for their students
were inadequate to address student misbehavior.

Both new teachers differed in their classroom management from the new
teachers reported in the classroom literature. They held high expectations for
student behavior from the start of the year. Unlike other beginning teachers who
became more authoritarian as the year progressed, Kelley and Mike taught and
reinforced consistently appropriate student behavior from the start and relaxed
those routines with students who demonstrated appropriate self-management skills.
When asked what they needed to do to improve their teaching in their second
year, classroom discipline was not mentioned. Their concerns focused more on
increasing student learning during the limited time allotted for physical educa-
tion by providing challenging activities and quality instruction.
While regular beginning teachers struggled to establish and maintain control of their students (attain legitimacy within the classroom), the new physical education teachers in this study seemed to be constantly trying to establish legitimacy for their subject matter outside the classroom, with parents and colleagues in particular. Mike wanted his "place within the school as a physical educator" and wanted his subject matter "to be judged on par with other subjects in the school." The word "gym," as used by colleagues and students to describe physical education lessons, bothered Kelley: "I have the teachers use 'physical education' now, and all the kids, because it has a more important sound." Both Mike and Kelley felt that too few people cared about what students learned during their physical education classes. The implications of these findings and those from the three other research questions will be discussed below.

Discussion and Implications

This study described the lives of two beginning physical education teachers and compared them to effective veteran physical education teachers and other beginning teachers reported in the classroom literature. Both teachers had a busy, exhausting, and at times grueling, first year of teaching. They were not unlike many beginning teachers before them in that respect. Their first year, however, was a very successful and satisfying transition to the teaching profession. This conclusion is based on self-report data (log, interviews, questionnaires), the evaluations and comments of their principals, and analyses of their teaching (see article by Fink & Siedentop).

These teachers felt successful starting the year with rules and routines for student behavior and establishing high but realistic expectations for student learning. They wanted students to be "busy, happy, and good" (Placek, 1983) but also to learn to be physically active motor persons with positive approach tendencies to physical activity. Like other beginning teachers reported in the literature, Mike and Kelley were often overwhelmed by the myriad of tasks to be completed each day, as they served over 200 elementary students weekly. They worried about many of the things new teachers worry about. They were concerned about students liking them, about motivating the students to reach their potential, about communicating goals of their program to parents and explaining their child's progress.

Several issues emerged from the data that deserve comment. A number of the findings suggested that the transition of these new teachers to the teaching profession was different in some important ways from the earlier research findings. The nature of the subject matter seemed to have a unique impact on this transition, at least as compared to what is known about "regular" beginning teachers.

In contrast to other new teachers, Mike and Kelley were very successful in establishing and maintaining strong managerial control in their classes at the start of the school year. They did this as effectively, if not as efficiently, as physical education teachers with 15 to 20 years more experience. There were no surprises, no reality shock (Weinstein, 1988) for these neophytes. Their concerns were focused on instructional issues rather than classroom discipline. They attributed much of their success to the quality of their teacher preparation program and to the commitment they gave to their education. This finding is a positive change from the less than complimentary comments on professional preparation from
graduates in follow-up studies by Adams (1982), Katz, Raths, Mohanty, Kurachi, and Irving (1981), and others. The data in the present study are some indication, however small, that a systematically planned, theoretically driven, and research based teacher preparation can have a positive impact on the values, skills, and knowledges of 1st-year physical education teachers. At the very least, the findings suggest that further studies of beginning teachers are warranted.

The data suggest these new teachers worked to establish themselves as credible professionals with their students. In addition they struggled outside the classroom with parents, colleagues, and students for the legitimacy of their subject matter. They survived in spite of rather than because of the professional development opportunities available to them. None of the inservice opportunities provided by the school or the school district were perceived by either teacher as useful to their professional growth. In the fourth month of the school year, Mike was already talking about his "professional isolation."

Two paradoxes emerged. The struggle for the legitimacy of their subject matter was overshadowed by the collegial respect (legitimacy) both teachers received for their managerial rather than instructional abilities. Mike's principal said most teachers judge new colleagues more by how they manage the children than by what they teach. Mike was rewarded with the respect of his colleagues for his role as a disciplinarian. His principal suggested his reputation came in part from getting kids back to the classroom teacher on time, having the children calm on their return to the classroom, and managing the behavior of small and large groups of students in noninstructional settings. Kelley said she surprised the other teachers with her ability to gain and maintain student attention in a variety of school situations. Their colleagues judged success by the well-behaved children in the gymnasium, while the new teachers looked to improving the skill and fitness levels of their students.

The second major paradox was both teachers' struggle for something their colleagues in most cases neither understood nor supported. It had to do with the teachers' overriding concern for student learning, while outside the classroom the teachers fought to have this goal be recognized by parents, colleagues, and students as worth the struggle. These paradoxes may be unique to these two teachers, but the implications of the findings are important to warrant further study. Do these paradoxes exist in larger groups of beginning physical education teachers? What are the implications for how we train preservice teachers?

Thirty percent of new teachers never make it to the fifth year of teaching (Rosenholtz, 1987). Even among those who remain, a painful induction year can leave enduring scars. We have neglected our beginning teachers, and unless we know what realities they face on the job in their first few years, we cannot hope to provide the preservice or inservice preparation to support successful transitions to teaching. The lack of research on the lives of beginning physical educators is analogous to the dearth of research on teacher education in the early 1980s. Perhaps this article will be the catalyst for a more intensive look at this group of professionals.