

LEARNING TO TEACH: FIRST YEAR TEACHER EXPERIENCES

A comparative study of first year teachers in the classroom

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF TABLES	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
ABSTRACT	6
INTRODUCTION	7
METHOD	10
RESULTS	14
DISCUSSION	26
REFERENCES	30
APPENDIX A	31
APPENDIX B	36
APPENDIX C	43

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
1.	Characteristics of the 1978 sample of beginning teachers (Lake 1978) and the present sample of beginning teachers.	14
2.	Percentage of teacher time allocated to class, group, and individual teaching activities.	15
3.	Percentage of teacher time spent interacting, non-interacting or supervising groups or the whole class.	15
4.	Percentage of time spent in task related and non-task related activities by the 10 pupils observed.	16
5.	Number of teacher comments on pupil behaviour per 100 intervals.	17
6.	Percentage of pupils assigned to reading materials of an appropriate level of difficulty.	18
7.	Frequency of evaluation of individual pupils in Reading and Mathematics.	18
8.	Frequency of use of a variety of Reading activities in the beginning teachers' programmes.	19
9.	Frequency of use of teaching aids by beginning teachers.	20
10.	Percentage of beginning teachers providing various study aids and subject materials	21
11.	Percentage of beginning teachers who felt equipped to deal with selected classroom difficulties.	22
12.	Percent of perceived level of preparedness for teaching each curriculum subject by beginning teachers.	23
13.	Percentage of teachers citing particular difficulties in their first year of teaching, and percentage of teachers suggesting particular improvements to College training.	24

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ABSTRACT

Beginning teachers are under increasing pressure to perform in their first year of school. How competent are they to teach after their teacher training and has this level of competency changed over the past twenty years? Twenty first year teachers were selected to participate in a two phase study involving questionnaires and interviews in the first phase, and classroom observations in the second. Of the twenty teachers who participated in Phase 1, ten completed Phase 2 of the study. The teachers were graduates from the Christchurch College of Education and in their first year of teaching in 1998. The results of the present study revealed that the level of competency of beginning teachers in Christchurch in 1998 was much the same as that of the beginning teachers studied by Lake in 1978. There were however, a number of differences between the two samples with respect to the beginning teachers' perceptions of how well prepared they were for their first year of teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The present teacher training programme at the Christchurch College of Education is designed to provide the basis from which beginning teachers can begin their teaching careers. The programme is designed so that beginning teachers receive the basic knowledge which teachers need, with the remaining information to be learnt 'on the job.' The College Charter states its teaching and learning goal as "enabling learners to develop the professional competencies and personal qualities befitting high quality graduates," (Christchurch College of Education Charter, 1997, p.5). The particular skills and knowledge that must be mastered in order to reach this 'high quality' are not detailed and are often a source of controversy. For example, College graduates themselves sometimes claim that there are important gaps in the training which they have received.

Principals' perspectives of how beginning teachers are performing were surveyed by Cameron and Grundoff (1993). They found that Principals expected the school to provide some professional development for first year teachers but that in the pre-service area there was a need to "strengthen the development of effective professional skills including a sound knowledge of curriculum, planning, assessment and evaluation skills, and communicating with parents" (Cameron and Grundoff, 1993, p.8).

The perceptions of College of Education graduates have been studied by several groups of investigators (Lake, 1978; Renwick & Vize, 1993; Lang, 1996). Over a 20 year period, beginning teachers have consistently reported that they are not receiving enough training in the areas of assessment, curriculum knowledge, classroom management, time management, and planning.

Margery Renwick and June Vize (1993) carried out a longitudinal study over four years from the beginning of pre-service training to the first year in the class interviewing a number of College of Education students. (The sample numbers vary from year to year and includes teachers undertaking 2, 3, and 4 years of training). The study examined the process of teacher education as it unfolded over time for those involved in it.

Questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, group interviews, and some College records and documents were used to gather information from student teachers at Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch Colleges of Education. The student and first year teachers frequently claimed that they experienced inadequate content in curriculum courses, idealistic classroom management preparation by the College, lack of awareness of parents' expectations, and wasted time or poor College organisation. The study recognised the need for the shaping of first year teachers by the school to teach to specific competencies or age levels, but also suggested that these were serious deficiencies in the first year teacher's overall knowledge.

Lang's (1996) study was carried out over two years and involved 71 students and 20 first year teachers. Her study used questionnaires to collect information from the teachers about the aspects of teaching for which they felt their programme of teacher education at Waikato had prepared them well or prepared them poorly. Lang's respondents identified difficulties in long term planning, integrating planning across curriculum areas, and time management as serious difficulties for first year teachers. Coverage of the curriculum was addressed in the first year of training, but not to a level that the teachers felt they could easily teach across the subjects and to differing age levels confidently. Also mentioned was a lack of intellectually stimulating content within the course for diploma students.

The Lake study differs from the others in that it gathered data not only through interview and questionnaire, but also through observation in the classroom (Lake, 1978). Lake chose 18 first year teachers to observe in management, assessment, and organisation. The study lasted one year and involved observations, interviews, and questionnaires carried out at the beginning of the year in the first term and then at the end in the final term in order to measure developments in teacher competency over the year. She found that her sample of students had difficulties in class management, identifying and meeting the learning needs of individual children, providing adequate extension activities and aids, teaching in all curriculum areas, and group teaching and management.

A recent critique of New Zealand teacher preparation programmes claimed that knowledge requirements for teachers, especially in Maths, Science, and Language was weak, reducing the teacher's ability to provide quality teaching across the curriculum (Irwin, 1998, p. 80).

The present study examines areas of difficulty mentioned by teachers and selected aspects of teaching in the classroom that were repeatedly mentioned by previous researchers as being problematic. One of the aims of the present study was to identify areas of difficulty arising from gaps that might exist in pre-service primary teacher training. It also looked to see if there are any new difficulties facing beginning teachers. Thirdly, the present study sought to compare the perceptions and classroom skills of beginning teachers against those described by Lake (1978) some 20 years ago. Finally, this study aimed to find out how well graduates from the Christchurch College of Education felt that their training had prepared them for their first year as classroom teachers.

METHOD

Participants

Approval for this study was obtained from The University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and informed consent was obtained from each of the teachers and their school Principals (Appendix A).

Phase 1 sample. At the beginning of the 1998 school year, 34 beginning teachers were appointed to permanent or long term relieving positions in primary schools within the greater Christchurch area. Beginning teachers were selected for this study by initially contacting all permanently employed teachers known to be in their first year of teaching.

When this did not generate a sample of 20 consents, long term relieving teachers in their first year of teaching were selected at random and approached one at a time until a total sample of 22 teachers had been recruited. These teachers were located in 18 schools.

The Principals of these 22 teachers were then approached one at a time. They were informed of the purpose of the study and the procedures which would be involved, and invited to participate. Twenty of the twenty-two teachers who were approached agreed to participate in Phase 1 of the study.

Phase 2 sample Following completion of their interviews each teacher was informed of the Phase 2 procedures and invited to take part in this second phase. The Phase 2 sample was a subsample of the 20 Phase 1 teachers. In the present study twenty teachers completed interviews and questionnaires and, of these, 10 participated in the classroom observation phase. In the Lake (1978) study, all of the 18 teachers agreed to take part in the classroom observation phase. The 10 teachers who did not participate declined on the grounds that they lacked the time (5 cases), or because the school principal declined permission (3 cases), or because the teachers were uninterested in continuing (2 cases).

Ten pupils were drawn from the classes of each of the ten Phase 2 teachers. Pupils with known emotional or learning disabilities, and those taken by another teacher were excluded. The ten children consisted of five boys, and five girls with a range of differing abilities in Maths and Reading.

Two additional children were selected as fill-ins should any of the above children be absent during an observation period. These fill in children were only ever used on one occasion.

Instruments

Interview. The purpose of the interview was to find out the participants' views on (a) the areas of teaching for which they felt prepared and not so well prepared, (b) to record the teaching procedures which the teachers were using for Reading and Maths (and the origins of these), (c) to discover the management strategies they used in their classroom, and (d) to identify any difficulties experienced during the year. Participants were also asked "If you were designing the College Programme, what things would you spend more time on?" The interview schedule is reproduced in Appendix B.

Questionnaire. The questionnaire collected information on (a) qualifications and length of training, (b) how well equipped the teachers felt that they were in dealing with common first year difficulties, (c) the resources being used in the classroom, and (d) the practice and extension activities which they were providing in their Reading programme. The questionnaire was similar to but not identical with that used by Lake (1978). This Questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix C.

Direct observations. In order to measure the effectiveness of the teachers classroom management strategies, the ten children previously chosen by the teacher were observed during Maths and Reading. The coding schedules used were the same as those used by Lake (1978). The coding categories were as follows:

1. Teacher location and activity. Twelve codes were used to record the teacher's location and activity when working with the class. The location of the teacher was recorded using four of these codes: (a) working with the class, (b) working with a group, (c) working with an individual, or (d) disengaged from the class.

2. Pupil behaviour. Pupil behaviour was coded as on-task or off-task. Seven types of on-task behaviour were distinguished. These were: appropriate attending, responding or indicating a desire to respond, waiting appropriately on a set activity, working on another activity, appropriate waiting, appropriate getting ready and tidying up, and appropriate movement. Inappropriate behaviour was recorded as either inappropriate talking, inappropriate movement or activity, or doing nothing. The pupil's behaviour was recorded as appropriate or inappropriate according to the classroom rules which appeared to be operating at the time. If both appropriate and inappropriate behaviours occurred within a 10 second interval it was the pupil behaviour which predominated during the interval which was recorded.

3. Teacher attention to pupils' behaviour. If the teacher gave verbal attention to appropriate or inappropriate behaviour of an individual, group, or the whole class it was coded and recorded. If the attention was directed to one of the 10 target pupils this was also noted.

Reading and Maths Assessments In order to measure the suitability of the instructional reading material that had been assigned by the teacher, running records were taken of each of the ten target pupils reading the last piece of reading material which they had read (excluding any currently being read).

A suitable passage was taken from this material and the child asked to read it. Other skills such as comprehension, story recall, vocabulary and reading for meaning, were also recorded. Attempts to reproduce Lake's (1978) procedures for recording the accuracy of written work in Maths proved not to be possible owing to a lack of maths work which could be assessed in this way.

Checklists Checklists were used to record the provision of resources/displays, the frequency of marking of children's work, and assessment and evaluation procedures. Checklists on the provision of resources contained the following entries: spelling charts/aids, four or more Maths games/independent resources available, current study materials/topics visible, graded independent reading material available, letter shapes or numbers charts provided.

Procedures

Phase 1 Interviews were undertaken by the researcher. Questionnaires were completed by each participant individually following the interview. Interviews were undertaken over the period late March to early August. Most interviews were completed at the classroom of the teacher after school hours. Each interview lasted about an hour.

Phase 2 Of those teachers who agreed to take part in the Phase 2 observations, eight were observed in August and, after a break of eight weeks, two more in October. The classroom observations for each teacher were carried out during a single day, beginning at 9a.m. and ending at 3.30p.m. Before beginning, the ten children selected had a description of them written down for reference e.g. clothes they were wearing, hair colour, etc. They were then watched for at least half an hour before the observer began her observations.

An interval recording procedure was used. Observations were made every 20 seconds over the Maths and Reading sessions until their completion. Each child was observed in turn. The first ten seconds were used to locate the pupil and the next ten to observe that pupil's behaviour. Following recording the next pupil was then located.

A minimum of 30 minutes observation was taken for each of the teachers, except two where the period lasted less than this. Ten second periods were indicated by a small beep in an earphone or flash on a device with ten second timing. Recordings were only taken after the recorder had been in the class for at least three-quarters of an hour so that the children were familiar with her being there.

Following the Maths and Reading observations the running records were collected and checklists completed for accuracy of work and resources provided in the class. These were completed in between observation periods also, if possible.

The running records were taken one after the other and required the pupils to read, answer questions regarding comprehension and discuss the story read. These sessions lasted at least 10 minutes for each child.

RESULTS

The results presented in this section were taken from responses to the questionnaire, interviews, data from Lakes second visit in the third term in 1978, and direct observations of the teachers in the present study and those in Lake's (1978) study. Where possible, the two sets of results are shown and a comparison made.

From Table 1 it can be seen that there were three main differences between the two samples. Compared to Lake's (1978) sample the Phase 2 sample in the present study was half the size, the majority had received four rather than three years of training and a higher proportion (40% rather than 15%) were teaching at the year 5 and 6 levels.

Table 1.

Characteristics of the 1978 sample of beginning teachers (Lake 1978) and the present sample of beginning teachers.

		1978 study	1998 study	
		(N = 18)	Phase 1	Phase 2
			(N = 20)	(N = 10)
Gender	F	--	16	8
	M	--	4	2
Age	18 - 29	--	17	9
	30 - 39	--	2	1
	40 - 49	--	1	--
Length of training (Yr)	1	1	--	--
	2	4	5	2
	3	13	3	--
	4	--	12	8
Class level	Yr 1 - 2	9	7	4
	Yr 3 - 4	6	8	2
	Yr 5 - 6	3	5	4

Table 2 shows the ways in which the Phase 2 sample allocated their time across a Reading and Maths session. As can be seen from the table there were few differences between the time allocation observed during the two studies.

The teachers in the present study spent slightly less time on average, in whole class teaching and engaged in activities which brought schoolwork to a halt slightly more often than the teachers in the 1978 sample.

Table 2.

Percentage of teacher time allocated to class, group, and individual teaching activities

	% of intervals			
	1978 study (N = 18)		1998 study (N = 10)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
With whole class	20	0 - 53	15	5 - 26
With groups	46	11 - 84	46	24 - 74
With individuals	27	9 - 55	25	3 - 49
Not with pupils	5	0 - 16	7	1 - 14
Bringing classwork to a halt	2	0 - 10	5	0 - 13

The percentage of time which the teachers' spent interacting, not interacting or supervising groups or the class is shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Percentage of teacher time spent interacting, non-interacting, or supervising groups or the whole class.

	% of intervals			
	1978 study (N = 18)		1998 study (N = 10)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Interacting	76	47 - 94	86	74 - 94
Non - interacting	17	2 - 35	12	6 - 16
Supervising	7	0 - 19	2	0 - 4

As can be seen from Table 3 the teachers in the present sample spent a greater proportion of their time interacting with pupils than was the case with the teacher studied by Lake (1978).

Observations of teacher interaction revealed that little time was taken in the supervision of the class or groups. This primarily due to well grounded routines and class 'buddy' systems that reduced the need for teacher supervision.

From Table 4 it can be seen that the level of on-task behaviour achieved by the teachers in the present sample differed little from the level achieved by the teachers studied by Lake (1978). The slight increase achieved by the teachers in the present sample may reflect nothing more than the fact that the Phase 2 teachers were teaching children who were, on average, somewhat older than the children observed in the 1978 study.

Table 4.

Percentage of time spent in task related and non-task related activities by the 10 pupils observed.

	% of intervals			
	1978 study (N = 18)		1998 study (N = 10)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Task related	79	67 - 91	82	74 - 89
Non-task related	21	9 - 34	18	11 - 26
Task related				
Waiting	5	1 - 11	3	0 - 10
Movement, preparation & tidying	7	5 - 13	10	7 - 21

The frequency with which the teachers attended to and commented on appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is shown in Table 5. Here again there were few differences between the classroom performance of the two samples of teachers. Although the Phase 2 teachers in the present study made fewer (positive) comments about appropriate behaviour this may simply have been because the Phase 2 teachers were teaching somewhat older children than were the teachers in the Lake study. The ratio of positive to negative teacher remarks was, however, quite different. Whereas the Lake teachers were observed to make positive comments more than 50% of the time, the teachers in the present study fell well below this with only 35% of their comments observed as positive.

Table 5.

Number of teacher comments on pupil behaviour per 100 intervals.

	Per 100 intervals			
	1978 study (N = 18)		1998 study (N = 10)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Comments about appropriate behaviour (T1)	3.5	0.3 - 13.0	2.0	0.0 - 7.3
Comments about inappropriate behaviour (T2)	3.1	0.0 - 11.0	3.7	0.0 - 7.0
		%		%
T1 as a % of all comments	54.0	15.6 - 100.	35.0	0.0 - 84

Note. 100 intervals = 33 minutes and 20 seconds

Table 6 was constructed using data taken from the running records of the ten children from each observed teacher's class. The level of difficulty of the material assigned to each child was assessed according to whether the child achieved an error rate of less than 5% (too easy), between 5 and 10% (about right), or greater than 10% (too difficult).

The results from Table 6 show that beginning teachers are still having difficulty in getting the level of reading material the children should be reading at the right level with less than half of the children on material that is about right. The reading data also suggests that there may have been a major shift in the type of assignment error being made.

In 1978, 35% of the Lake teachers had children on reading material which was too easy. In the present study this number has risen to 54%.

Table 6.

Percentage of pupils assigned to reading materials of an appropriate level of difficulty.

	% pupils assigned to reading materials of appropriate difficulty			
	1978 study (N = 180)		1998 study (N = 100)	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Too Easy	35	0 - 70	54	10 - 90
About right	43	20 - 70	41	10 - 70
Too difficult	22	0 - 40	5	0 - 20

The frequency with which the teachers evaluated pupil progress in Reading and Maths was determined by the examining the pupils' books and by asking teachers the frequency with which they checked these and recorded errors. Assessment was considered to be regular if a check was made on a day to day basis, occasional if it was intermittently carried out, and rarely if it was hardly ever done. As can be seen from Table 7 some 60% of the Phase 2 teachers appeared to be making regular checks and assessments of pupil reading - compared with only 11 percent in the 1978 study. Maths, on the other hand, was being checked less frequently by the teachers in the present study compared to 20 years ago.

Table 7.

Frequency of evaluation of progress of individual pupils in Reading and Mathematics.

	% teachers evaluating pupils' progress					
	1978 study (N = 18)			1998 study (N = 10)		
	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely
Reading	11	44	44	60	30	10
Mathematics	28	50	22	20	40	40

Table 8 summarises the teachers responses to the questionnaire item regarding activities and aids. The teachers in the present study reported daily rather than a few times a week use of recreational reading, written exercises, following written instructions, shared texts, oral reporting or retelling, reading games, and other.

The teachers' responses suggested a greater emphasis on all reading activities except creative activities involving art and craft, dramatisation or mime, and combined written and shared activities.

The 'Other' activities being used were affected by the choices given in the two studies' questionnaires. Lake's study recorded SRA as the main 'other' option, whereas in the present study teacher specified 'other' activities included: big books, poems, music, listening post, bookselling (book reviews), library research, and so on.

Table 8.

Frequency of use of a variety of Reading activities in the beginning teachers' programmes.

	% teachers who reported using this activity					
	1978 study (N = 18)			1998 study (N = 20)		
	Few times			Few times		
	a			a		
Recreational Reading	67	33	--	95	5	--
Instructional Reading						
With teacher	--	--	--	60	40	--
With a peer	--	--	--	35	60	5
Silent reading	--	--	--	85	10	5
Written exercises	33	67	--	50	50	--
Creative activities involving art & craft	22	78	--	5	95	--
Combined written & shared activities	28	72	--	20	80	--
Following written instructions	11	83	6	30	70	--
Shared texts	33	61	6	45	55	--
Oral reporting or retelling	22	72	6	50	50	--
Dramatisation or mime	6	94	--	--	95	5
Reading games	11	73	16	45	45	10
Other	11	17	72	60	40	--

The resources used in Reading were also supplemented by various other class resources and teaching aids used by the teacher. The teachers' responses to the question about various types of teaching aids are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9.

Frequency of use of teaching aids by beginning teachers.

	% of teachers who reported using this teaching aid					
	1978 study (N = 18)			1998 study (N = 20)		
	Daily	Few times a week/term	Never	Daily	Few times a week/term	Never
Children's books obtained from libraries	76	24	---	60	40	---
Pre-recorded material	---	100	---	30	70	---
Videos, filmstrips, & slides	---	60	20	---	90	10
Broadcasts to schools, media news	---	76	24	15	75	10
Computer presented materials	---	---	---	25	65	10
Overhead projections	---	94	6	15	50	35
Class trips beyond the school grounds	---	78	22	---	100	---
Invited speakers	---	50	50	---	80	20
Wall charts/displays	---	---	---	45	55	---
Outside organisations	---	---	---	10	90	---
Other	---	---	---	10	85	5

As can be seen from Table 9, changes in the use of teaching aids largely reflects changes in technology over the past 20 years. The increases recorded highlight the availability of resources such as computers, video recorders and players, photocopiers and overhead projectors to the teachers in the present study.

Table 10.

Percentage of beginning teachers providing various study aids and subject materials

	% teachers providing aids and materials	
	1978 study (N = 18)	1998 study (N = 10)
Library, science corners	84	90
Spelling references	67	80
Topic materials	72	100
Maths games	39	80
Graded independent Reading materials	44	60
Display of letter shapes and numbers	56	60

Observations of teacher displays related to class activities and topics were made in order to record what the teachers were providing. Here again it was found that the teachers in the present study were making greater use of spelling references, topic materials, maths games, and graded independent Reading materials.

Opportunity was given in the questionnaire for the teachers to assess how well equipped they felt that they were to deal with selected classroom difficulties. The responses to this question are summarised in Table 11. Compared to the 1978 teachers, slightly more of the present teachers felt adequately equipped to teach and to identify learning needs, and slightly fewer felt adequately equipped with respect to the organisation of instructional groups and classroom control. A lack of knowledge of Language content is suggested by the decrease in the number of teachers feeling equipped to deal with it.

Table 11.

Percentage of beginning teachers who felt equipped to deal with selected classroom difficulties.

	% of teachers					
	1978 study (N = 18)			1998 study (N = 20)		
	Well equipped	Adequately equipped	Poorly equipped	Well equipped	Adequately equipped	Poorly equipped
Identifying the learning needs of individual children	--	83	17	25	70	5
Understanding the personal needs of individual children	6	89	5	15	75	10
Meeting the learning needs of individual children	--	95	5	15	75	10
Assessing children's learning	--	--	--	15	80	5
Planning the class programme	33	62	5	20	70	10
Class management and control	50	45	5	20	65	15
Organisation of instructional groups	11	83	6	25	55	20
Knowledge of subject						
Reading	44	44	12	25	70	5
Mathematics	17	69	14	15	75	10
Language	22	64	14	15	65	20
Arousing children's interest and curiosity	6	84	10	30	65	5
Knowledge of the content of the NZ curriculum documents for						
Language	--	--	--	20	75	5
Mathematics	--	--	--	45	55	--
Science	--	--	--	20	60	20
Technology	--	--	--	5	25	70
Keeping registers and departmental records	29	59	12	--	--	--

Within the interview teachers were asked to respond with a rating to the level of preparedness they felt they had achieved in their first year of teaching. The results from this question are summarised in Table 12 and suggest a distinct lack of confidence and ability to cope with the teaching of Technology. Only 20 percent of the teachers felt even adequately prepared to teach the Technology curriculum. In all the other subject areas (except Maori) at least three quarters of the teachers in the sample felt that they were adequately or very well prepared to teach them in the classroom. When questioned at the conclusion of the interview as to the level of overall preparedness for teaching that they felt they had achieved the majority of the teachers (90%) recorded adequate to very well prepared as their response. The one teacher who felt their training was inadequate was on a shortened course and felt more training would have been of benefit.

Table 12.

Percent of perceived level of preparedness for teaching each curriculum subject by beginning teachers in 1998.

	% of how well teachers felt prepared		
	Very well	Adequately	Poorly
Reading	25	65	10
Mathematics	10	65	25
Science	25	55	20
Technology	--	20	80
Maori	10	50	40
Language	15	65	20
Music	20	60	20
Art	20	65	15
Social Studies	30	60	10
Physical Education	35	60	5
Health	20	65	15
Overall	30	60	10

At the conclusion of the Questionnaire the beginning teachers were invited to write down which problems that had caused them difficulty during the year and any suggestions which they wished to make about improving the quality of their preservice training

Table 13.

Percentage of teachers citing particular difficulties in their first year of teaching, and percentage of teachers suggesting particular improvements to College training.

	% teachers (N= 20)
Difficulties:	
Time management	70
School and class administration	45
Planning	35
Curriculum knowledge	35
Behaviour Management	30
Assessment	25
Suggested Improvements:	
Longer/more sections	80
Increase exposure to in school teaching and planning	70
Increase training in relevant planning and assessment across curriculum	55
More training in school and general administration	35
Make Reading, Maths, and Language compulsory subjects and cover all	35
Decrease amount of microteaching	35
Increase choices of subjects that can be taken in the third year of training	50

Much of what was written was with regard to teacher organisation, management, planning and knowledge of curriculum subjects with comments such as “It would be nice to have more time actually being the teacher than pretending to be her,” “I have no life!” (ever since she started teaching), and “they didn’t give us enough background to teach this at College.” One teacher justified her claim for more section time as an opportunity to “figure out what I should use or what actually works in the classroom.” Both classroom management and behaviour management, were big issues, along with that of having enough opportunity in practical sessions to be able to put what was taught at College into practice and see it work.

Emphasis placed on producing assessment, planning, and evaluation for 'ghost' classes was seen as pointless if the plans were not carried out on children so they could see if they would actually work. This, along with microteaching was consistently mentioned. Teachers could not see the point of teaching two or three children to see if their lesson would be feasible when "a class has more than 2 or 3 kids in it! It's not realistic, and a waste of time and effort that could be spent doing something else more relevant." The final point consistently made was the lack of options that can be taken in the final year. Teachers expressed a need for Compulsory Maths and Reading to cover all curriculum levels, and courses without repetition of what they had already learnt in their first two years of training.

DISCUSSION

Overall there were surprisingly few differences between the classroom performance of the present teachers and those observed by Lake 20 years ago. The coding of pupil and teacher behaviour was carried out by the primary researcher each time so as to maintain consistency in the recording. An inter-observer agreement of 89% was achieved when the coding procedures were trialled with the primary researcher and another recorder coding behaviours. The secondary recorder was given training and two practices to adjust to the categories used in the coding of observations, by the primary researcher. Codes and methods of observation were replicated from Lake's study (1978). Lake did not carry out this or any other reliability testing.

The grouping of ten teachers used within Phase 2 of the project does not represent the whole sample and the results of the present study must therefore be treated with caution when compared to the results from the 18 teachers in Lake's study (1978). The time at which the study was undertaken could also have affected the results although this effect is probably slight given that both were undertaken during the second half of the first year. Despite these differences, conclusions can still be drawn with respect to the overall effects of teacher training and development.

Curriculum knowledge was one area in which first year teachers still felt poorly equipped. This was reflected in the teachers' perceptions of their competency in planning class programmes and content, and to the preparedness levels selected in the questionnaire. Reading, Maths, Language, and Maori all received low preparedness ratings, with the lowest rating of all given to Technology (which 80 percent of teachers felt poorly equipped to deal with). The reason the teachers mainly gave for these ratings was the lack of depth in the course content in their training programmes. Limited choices of subject options taken in their last year may also have contributed to this and was often mentioned by the teachers in regard to background information which they felt that they needed.

This lack of confidence required the teachers to gain considerable subject knowledge while teaching in their first year and added a number of additional challenges to a year which was already experienced by most of the beginning teachers as challenging enough.

Whilst being unsatisfied with their preparation for teaching in some curriculum areas, the teachers' perceptions of their ability to evaluate, identify, and meet the needs of their pupils and use curriculum documents in Reading, Maths, and Language, were mostly given adequate or good preparedness ratings.

Despite the teachers' self-perceived levels of knowledge and ability in assessment and evaluation, classroom observations suggested that the present teachers were no better at identifying individual children's learning needs than the graduates of 20 years ago.

Only 40% of the children taught by the present sample of teachers had been placed on reading material of an appropriate level of difficulty - a figure closely similar to the results observed by Lake (1978). The only difference was that teachers are now assigning material that is too easy rather than too difficult.

Pupils are now not struggling with material that is too hard and frustrating to read, but are reading material that is too easy, below their developmental needs, and could become boring. With the amount of evaluation of pupil progress in Reading recorded by the beginning teachers, an increase from the figures recorded in 1978, it would be expected that the assignment of reading material of the right level would have recorded higher numbers due to increased monitoring of their pupils' progress.

There also appears to have been a marked decrease in the frequency of evaluation in Maths. The high percentage of teachers who rarely evaluated their pupils' progress indicates a serious lack of attention to the monitoring of children's work in maths. This figure represents the frequency of the marking of work and assessments only, but may reflect the lack of adequate preparation for evaluation reported by 25 percent of the teachers interviewed. In other respects it is surprising, in that a considerable number of teachers rated their preparation to teach Maths so highly elsewhere in the questionnaire and interview. A change in the emphasis that is placed on monitoring of children's work may be one explanation for this decrease in frequency of evaluation, but one would consider that as the demand for more assessment and

evaluation in the classroom increases, an increase in the importance of monitoring would also occur.

Class management and control is fundamental in ensuring that class routines and procedures are followed and therefore learning time is maximised. Results from this study show that there has been a decrease in the teachers' perceived competency in this area from 1978. This corresponds with the response to difficulties experienced in the classroom in the interview where 30 percent of the teachers identified behaviour management.

The pressure placed on first year teachers to get their classroom up and running at the beginning of the year requires them to be able to manage and control their class in order for this to become routine and for them to be able to have time to teach. Without well developed class management skills, the amount of time spent teaching is considerably reduced by the need for attention to pupil behaviour rather than learning.

Planning of the class programme was another area in which the teachers reported feeling less equipped compared to twenty years ago. Of the teachers asked, thirty-five percent mentioned this as being a difficulty as it required knowledge of all of the curriculum areas and also of the school routines. This may be a reflection of the need mentioned earlier, for some of the teacher training to be carried out by the schools, since every school implements the NZ curriculum in a slightly different way. A lack of knowledge of the curriculum, however, increases the amount of professional development required of teachers during their early years as teachers.

The length of the training received by the present teachers appears to have been unrelated to the experiences reported by the teachers except in one case. Teachers with older children seemed to report more behaviour difficulties while those with younger children talked about the need to know how to meet children's needs and assess them. The type of difficulty varied but highlights the importance of the multi-faceted training that is required in order for beginning teachers to be prepared to teach at any level and with children of any age, during their first year of teaching.

Observations of what the teachers were doing and what they said when asked how well prepared they were did not always match up. For example, when the teachers were asked

to rate their ability to assess and meet childrens learning needs, only 8 percent felt poorly equipped. Yet the results from observations of their assignment of material for Reading show that out of 100 children, only 40 percent were assigned material at the right level of difficulty.

The teacher training received by first year teachers in 1998 proved to still have some gaps in it despite twenty years of development. Although not all aspects of teaching can be taught on section or in a lecture room, it would seem that what is being taught is still insufficient to meet first year teacher's needs in planning, organisation and management.

Little change occurred from Lake's study (1978) apart from a small change in emphasis on some subjects, and the development of new difficulties as the primary teaching environment has changed. Key areas of planning for class programmes, adequate knowledge of all curriculum subjects, and class and time management are factors that have influenced the teachers in this study the most and are therefore of primary importance in the modification of training to meet first year teacher needs.

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APPENDIX A

Approval from University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and consent forms



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Christchurch New Zealand
Telephone: 03-366 7001
Fax: 03-364 2999

8 May 1998

Ms Trish Shearer
C/o John Church
Department of Education
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Ms Shearer

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "**Learning to teach: First year teacher experiences**" has been considered and approved.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J A Cockle".

J A Cockle (Miss)
Secretary



Education Department

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SCHOOL CONSENT FORM

LEARNING TO TEACH: FIRST YEAR TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

I/We have read and understood the description of the above-named project and agree to allow the teacher chosen from this school to participate in the study. I/We also consent to the publication of the results of the project with the understanding that no individual teacher or school will be identified in any report of the research.

Signed

Date



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TEACHER INTERVIEW AND QUESTIONNAIRE CONSENT FORM

LEARNING TO TEACH: FIRST YEAR TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. I agree to participate in the first phase of this project by completing an interview and questionnaire , and I consent to the publication of the results of the project with the understanding that my anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed

Date



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CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CONSENT FORM

LEARNING TO TEACH: FIRST YEAR TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. I agree to participate in the second phase of this project by being observed in the classroom, and I consent to the publication of the results of the project with the understanding that my anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed

Date.....

APPENDIX B

Interview Schedule



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Christchurch New Zealand
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LEARNING TO TEACH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What level are you teaching this year? Yr 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

- 2 (a) What class level did you specialise in at college? Yr 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

- 2 (b) Is this the level you wanted to teach? Yes/No

3. How many children are there in your class?

- 4 (a) Which College did you go to?

- 4 (b) Which course did you complete?

5. How are you teaching Reading?
 - P1. Are the children grouped - if not how are they organised?
 - P2. If so, how did you assign the children to their groups?
 - P3. How many groups do you have?
 - P4. How much time do you spend with each group?
 - P5. How did you decide what teaching procedures you would use?
 - P6. How do you assess the children to ensure that they are at the appropriate reading level?
 - P7. How does this differ from what you were taught at College?
 - P8. Did you get enough practice in taking running records of reading at College to be able to use this skill ?
 - P9. Do you have any children with special needs? How do you address these special needs?

- P1. Class, Grouped, Individual, Other _____

- P2. Number of groups

- P3. Basis of grouping _____

P4. Time spent with each group _____

P5. Teaching procedures used _____

P6. Reading assessment _____

P7. How differs from College _____

P8. College Preparation:

a) Running Records

More than enough

Enough

None

b) Teaching Reading

very well
prepared

reasonably
well prepared

adequately
prepared

poorly
prepared

badly
prepared

Score :

1

2

3

4

5

P9. Special needs children Needs addressed _____

6. How are you teaching Maths?
- P1. Are the children grouped? If not how are they organised?
 - P2. If so, how did you assign them to their groups?
 - P3. How much time do you spend with each group?
 - P4. How do you assess where the children are in terms of maths learning levels and what methods do you use to check that this is accurate?
 - P5. How effective have you found this method of assessment?
 - P6. How does this differ from what you were taught at College?
 - P7. What proportion of the class do you feel are working on maths exercises that are at an appropriate level of difficulty? Why?
 - P8. How do you cater for individual learning , and special, needs in your teaching of maths?
 - P9. How well prepared do you feel you were by your pre-service training for teaching maths?

P1. Class, Grouped, Individual, Other _____

How organised _____

P2. How assigned to groups _____

P3. Time spent with each group _____

P4. Maths assessment _____

P5. Effectiveness of assessment _____

P6. How differs from College _____

P7. Appropriate level of difficulty % Why _____

P8. How caters for needs:

Learning _____

Special _____

P9. College Preparation:

	very well prepared	reasonably well prepared	adequately prepared	poorly prepared	badly prepared
Score :	1	2	3	4	5

7. I'd like to know how well prepared you felt you were, at the beginning of the year in each of the following subjects:

	very well prepared 1	reasonably well prepared 2	adequately prepared 3	poorly prepared 4	badly prepared 5
Reading		<input type="checkbox"/>		Music	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mathematics		<input type="checkbox"/>		Art	<input type="checkbox"/>
Science		<input type="checkbox"/>		Social Studies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technology		<input type="checkbox"/>		Physical Education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Maori		<input type="checkbox"/>		Health	<input type="checkbox"/>
Language		<input type="checkbox"/>			

8. What management difficulties (if any) do you consider you have?

9 (a) How do you handle persistent misbehaviour, inattention, non-compliance in the classroom?

9 (b) Did you learn how to do this at College? If not, where?

From College Yes/No

Formal Academic Scheme Yes/No _____

School wide Discipline Plan Yes/No

Classroom Discipline Plan (e.g. time out) Yes/No

10. What time do you start school each day? a.m

What time do you finish? p.m

What is the length of your working week? hrs

11. How well prepared do you think you were to enter teaching this year?

	very well prepared	reasonably well prepared	adequately prepared	poorly prepared	badly prepared
Score :	1	2	3	4	5

12. Have you experienced any difficulties during the year? What are they?

13. If you were designing the College programme, what things would you spend more time on?

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire

3. Below are some of the issues which teachers in their first year of teaching often report as sources of difficulty. How do you feel your training equipped you to deal with each of these issues?

Score :	very well equipped 1	reasonably well equipped 2	adequately equipped 3	poorly equipped 4	badly equipped 5
3.1	Identifying the <u>learning</u> needs of individual children				<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2	Understanding the <u>personal</u> needs of individual children				<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3	Meeting the learning needs of individual children				<input type="checkbox"/>
3.4	Assessing children's learning				<input type="checkbox"/>
3.5	Planning the class programme				<input type="checkbox"/>
3.6	Class management and control				<input type="checkbox"/>
3.7	Organisation of instructional groups - eg. Reading groups, etc.				<input type="checkbox"/>
3.8	Knowledge of subject areas being taught:				<input type="checkbox"/>
				Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>
				Mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/>
				Language	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.9	Arousing the children's interest and curiosity				<input type="checkbox"/>
3.10	Knowledge of the content of the NZ curriculum documents for:				
				Language	<input type="checkbox"/>
				Mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/>
				Science	<input type="checkbox"/>
				Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. How often, on average, are you including the following items in your teaching programme?

Scores: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
 Daily Few times Few times Few times Rarely Never Not
 a week a term a year Available

- 4.1 Children's books obtained from libraries
- 4.2 Pre-recorded material, such as tapes, etc.
- 4.3 Videos, filmstrips
- 4.4 Computer presented materials (eg CD-Rom materials)
- 4.5 Overhead projector displays
- 4.6 News media (eg. newspapers, broadcasts)
- 4.7 Class trips beyond school grounds
- 4.8 Speakers you have invited into your room
- 4.9 Resources available in the local community
- 4.10 Wall charts, displays
- 4.11 Outside organisations
- 4.12 Resource kits for particular subjects
(which subjects? _____)