An Analysis of Teachers’ Fears for the First Day of School

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Abstract
This qualitative study focused on fears about the first day of school as expressed by three groups of educators: inexperienced teachers enrolled in an alternative certification program, paraprofessionals with classroom experience, and junior/senior education majors anticipating field experience. Participant groups answered the open-ended question, “What is your biggest fear for the first day of school?” Three dominant thematic categories emerged. The first and most frequent category, Perception-of-Self, described fears related to academic competency, personal self-control, and peer-student acceptance. Unique to this category was the fear of inappropriate or violent behavior. The second category, Perception-of-World, spoke to issues of classroom control and responsibility. The third category, Fear—at—the-Student, addressed emotional and physical safety of the student. This study provides various insights useful for teacher candidate preparation.

Research suggests that a teacher’s sense of efficacy, specifically the ability to handle situation-specific expectations, is a contributing factor to the quality of the teacher’s performance in the classroom (Bandura, 1997; Campbell, 1996). Teachers’ expectations influence their choice of educational activities, the amount of effort they expend, and the extent of their persistence in the face of obstacles (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bandura, 1977; Young, 1995). Despite the pivotal impact of self-efficacy on teaching, the emotional reaction of teachers to their work has been largely unexplored (Nias, 1996). The very nature of teaching is “highly charged with the feeling aroused by and directed towards not just people but values and ideals” (Nias, 1996, p.293). These feelings are “intimately connected” to the teacher’s sense of efficacy and self worth and often are dependent upon the approval of others. Collectively these emotions influence the entire educational community. Joram and Gabriele (1998) trace this emotional influence to long-standing “personal experiences and cultural beliefs” through which the pre-service teacher interprets their teaching performance.

In many respects, the antithesis of efficacy is fear. The fear of under-preparation, lack of essential knowledge, relationships with parents and colleagues, time management, and gaps in pedagogical skills are documented sources of anxiety for the novice teacher (McCann &
Johannesen, 2004). Drawing from a sample of pre-service educators in Southwest Texas, Wilson, Ireton, and Wood (1997) sited ten dominant fears: assignment and mentor apprehension, parental confrontation, time utilization, racial xenophobia, teaching expectations, evaluations, acceptance, inadequate preparation, violence, and classroom management. Gee (2001) questioned 24 pre-service teachers and 36 postgraduate teachers about what they feared most in their first year of teaching. Gee found that issues of classroom management and meeting state curriculum standards were their biggest fears.

Current research has not specifically addressed the first year fears of the alternatively certified teacher. Nougaret, Scruggs, and Mastrioperi (2005) suggested that nontraditional licensed teachers when asked to self-evaluate were “unaware of their own relative deficiencies”(p.255). Research has found that although this group of teachers had degrees in the field in which they were teaching, many were not able to explain fundamental concepts to students (Rubino, Soltys, Wright, & Young, 1994). The ratings of first year teachers who were traditionally certified were substantially higher in planning and preparation, management of student behavior, and instructional skills than the emergency/alternatively certified teacher. Teachers with a low sense of efficacy (i.e. high performance fear factor) tend to avoid activities that they perceive to be beyond their abilities. In contrast, teachers with a strong sense of efficacy (i.e. low performance fear factor) believe that they are capable of having a positive effect on student performance (Ashton, & Webb, 1986; Campbell, 1996).

Paraprofessionals have numerous roles and levels of responsibility as they provide instructional support within the school, community, and job sites for students with disabilities (Carroll, 2001). In a study conducted by French (2003), paraprofessionals reported that they had limited, or no, pre-training before entering the classroom. Many reported concern about fulfilling their responsibility to support the curriculum and adaptations designed by the special (French, 2003). The paraprofessional as an instructional assistant has created a situation which may result in lower levels of teacher involvement, less qualified teaching interventions for the most complex learning needs, and inadvertent detrimental effects such as over-dependency and interference with peer interaction (French, 2003; Giangreco, Yuan, McKezie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005). Research has shown that paraprofessionals who have adequate support in areas of education, planning, and collaboration have demonstrated improvement in self-confidence and consequently are more effective in their support of students (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2003).

This qualitative study addressed fears about the first day of school as expressed by inexperienced teachers enrolled in an alternative certification program, paraprofessionals with classroom experience, and junior/senior education majors anticipating field experience. The pre-service teachers, alternatively certification seeking teachers, and paraprofessionals in this study had one commonality: no participant had ever fully accepted responsibility for the educational experience of a classroom of students. It is from their perspective that this study sought to create an overall thematic picture of the underlying fear of educators as they anticipate their educational placement for the new school year.

**Experimental Procedure**

**Rationale for Qualitative Methodology**

This study progresses from a constructivist viewpoint drawing on the connection of experience with concept formation and environmental impact (Flick, 2004). For this reason, the researchers
chose to use an instrumental case study design to focus on the issues raised by the participants’ expressions of fear to create a picture of the participants’ perceptions of the circumstances at the time of the research (Creswell, 1998; Merkens, 2004). This study also incorporated aspects of qualitative methodology from phenomenology and grounded theory, where emerging themes are discussed from the perspective of the participants and then compared to existing field literature (Creswell, 1998). Data collection involved the purposeful sampling of three separate groups within one bounded system as they anticipated the first day of school.

Participants

To form a theoretical, purposeful sampling, participants were sought from three different roles within the East Texas educational community. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling draws out the most information rich participants in the area of concern (Creswell, 1998; Merkens, 2004). The participants were 59 paraprofessionals engaged in an in-service workshop, 37 teachers in a pre-service training in the university-based alternative certification program prior to their first day of work, and 91 junior or senior undergraduate education majors anticipating field experience.

Data Analysis

Data Collection. The research question originated as an in-service activity that inquired into different traits and personality variables such as “why did you choose the teaching profession.” The final question of the session asked the participants to describe their biggest fear for the first day of school, record this fear, and turn it in to the instructor anonymously.

Coding the Responses. Transcribed statements ranged from one to three sentences. In the open coding phase of this study, the researchers, using the constant comparison method, created categorical aggregations that sought out the “issue-relevant meaning” of these statements, established patterns, and looked for correspondence between categories (Creswell, 1998). A statement became representational of a thematic category when two of three coders agreed. A second, axial coding, further sub-divided the thematic categories. The researchers identified thematic categories and resulting sub themes and addressed these themes for interconnection.

Standards of Quality and Verification

Internal validity. Post-hoc consensus between the first three members of the research team resolved data coding discrepancies. The research design used participants with slightly different roles in the education community: paraprofessional, alternatively certified educator, and junior/senior education majors anticipating field experience. This form of data triangulation created diverse data sources to explore the same phenomena (Arskey & Knight, 1999).

External validity. In a qualitative study, the researcher returns to the field literature to enrich the development of the emerging themes (Creswell, 1998). As the concerns of pre-service teachers and paraprofessionals thematically emerge, each fear was an occasion to return to the literature where the researchers compared and contrasted the expression of fear to the pre-existing field literature.

Analysis

Thematic Results

Three themes captured 158 of the 183 responses. Collectively, those themes converge at a point that is best represented as “The fear of being unequal to the task ahead.” The research team
identified the dominant thematic categories under this central theme: Perception-of-Self (n = 105), Perception-of-the World (n = 45), and Fear-for-the-Student (n = 18). A fourth category, Nonspecific Responses or Incidental Concerns (n = 25), reflected two extremities of response: no fear at all, and generalized nonspecific anxiety.

**Category One: Perception-of-Self**

Perception-of-Self described 105 of the 183 responses. Under this category emerged the following sub-themes: Personal Self-Control under Stress (n = 16), Classroom Academic Competency (n = 52), Competency Issues outside the Classroom (n = 26), and Social Acceptance by Peers and Students (n = 11) (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception-of-Self (n = 105)</th>
<th>Participant Category</th>
<th>Number Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Control Under Stress</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clamming up, stage fright</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversleeping</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loosing Glasses</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate behavior</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically harming student</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Para-professional</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic competency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not feeling prepared or</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organized, overwhelmed</td>
<td>Alternative Certification</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling/assignments</td>
<td>Para-professional</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor career choice</td>
<td>Alternative certification</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental disapproval</td>
<td>Alternative certification</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of student respect</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being mistaken for a student</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of coworker respect</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being liked or fitting in</td>
<td>Para-professional</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal Self Control under Stress \((n = 16)\)

Nine pre-service teachers expressed their biggest fear as one of performance. According to one participant, “I have the biggest fear of not being prepared and students not responding.” Several students stated that they had concerns with “clamming up in front of the class and not being able to teach”; another statement was “drawing a blank and not remembering anything - leading to brain block.” As stated by one pre-service teacher, their biggest fear was “forgetting what they had been taught.”

Two statements made by pre-service teachers identified personal fears related to inadvertent, inappropriate behavior within the classroom. For example, “falling and flashing the class” or “forgetting my underpants.” One pre-service teacher stated that she/he hoped they would “Not kill a student the first day due to lack of respect.” A paraprofessional feared that under stress she/he would react to disrespect by “hitting a student.”

Classroom Academic Competency \((n = 52)\)

Pre-service teachers feared they would not be able to “develop a good lesson plan that the kids would enjoy” or “accomplish goals related to the students.” Pre-service teachers also expressed concern about their competency levels in organizational skills. These fears manifested in statements such as “not being organized,” “unprepared,” and “not having materials suited for children” or specifically, “not having materials that will interest the class” or “the answer to a question.”

Alternative certification seeking teachers also expressed fears of inadequate “preparedness” in their expression of fears. For example, the fear of “letting the kids down and not integrating enough creativity into the class to keep attention,” the fear that “kids won’t understand what (I’m) teaching,” and the fear that they would not be “good at teaching.” Alternative certification seeking teachers were also concerned that they would “not (know) an answer ... at ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal) meetings” or be able to “apply all the information that that I have learned.”

Paraprofessionals centered their concern on personal competency levels as they assumed the role of academic support. They focused their fear of the first day of the new school year on “knowing how to do my duties and get the kids off the bus at the same time,” “adjusting to a new teacher and expectations and what kind of class we will have, and behavioral issues,” and “not knowing if I am in the right class.” Paraprofessionals also expressed fear of “having a substitute for the whole day and me having more responsibility with the kids” and “not being able to comfort new students and make them feel like they belong.”

Competency Issues Outside Classroom \((n = 26)\)

The third theme of Perception-of -Self related to fears centered on issues outside the classroom. Reflective of their role, paraprofessionals mostly feared the nature of their assignments and the variables in duty assignments. The job description of a paraprofessional varies substantially as does the need for extra school duties (cafeteria, hall, study hall), and the discretion of the general or special education teacher to whom they have been assigned. Some comments expressed a fear of “getting kids back into a routine,” “being able to successfully deal with all the changes that are taking place on my campus,” and “knowing how to do my morning duties and getting kids off the bus at the same time.” These statements reflected a concern for completing their required tasks, “completing lesson plans”, and communication with other workers on campus.
Alternatively certification seeking teachers expressed a fear of collaboration with parents. These fears related to confrontational situations such as “dealing with parents” and “parents staying to long and (therefore, I) have problems.” These participant teachers also reflected a concern about making “another” poor career choice. Several of the comments reflected concerns such as “getting tired of teaching all day” and “never finding a career to stick with” or a “concern for choice of career” expressed an uncertainty in their ability to be successful in their new position.

**Social Acceptance (n = 11)**

The fourth property in Perception-of -Self concerns social acceptance. Eight pre-service teachers stated that lack of student respect was their biggest fear. Coupling of this statement with concerns about classroom management did not occur; therefore, the independent raters placed this fear with social acceptance. For example, pre-service teachers commented that their biggest fear on the first day of school was that the “students don’t respect me,” and “the class won’t like me.” In the same manner, first day teachers in their early twenties feared that both the students and the faculty would mistake them for a student. The concern over lack of acceptance and respect by both students and peers was consistent with studies that examined the contrast between first year teachers’ perceived and real expectations (Wilson & Ireton, 1997, Young, 1995).

**Relationship to field literature**

A teachers’ sense of efficacy and their inexperience affects their surroundings and their judgment (Campbell, 1996). Thematically, fears of academic unpreparedness aligned with the field literature. Novice teachers’ fear that their academic background is flawed and therefore they do not to have the competency levels needed to instruct the class (Wilson, Ireton, & Elmer 1997). Wilson (1997) stated prospective teachers’ feared multiple level and differential assignments, no time for course preparation, and not being able to meet expectations for the job.

Shepard & Brown (2003) conducted research on the personal confidence level and the ability to teach for teachers alternatively certified discovering that for this population confidence and ability were directly influenced by pedagogical skill level. Even though a degree in a particular field might prepare someone to perform professionally, it did not guarantee that the person would able to teach the subject matter. Our respondents seeking alternative certification expressed the fear of lack of academic competency. Expressions of concern from the alternatively certified teachers about the possibility of making another career mistake were unique to this study.

Most paraprofessionals are responsible for some degree of academic instruction and emotional support of students with disabilities in either the resource classroom setting or the included classroom. Supervising teachers have the responsibility to provide practical information and an overview of academic duties and responsibilities to new paraprofessionals in a timely manner (Carroll, 2001). Paraprofessionals interviewed expressed a fear of not being able to teach subject matter for which they had no formal academic preparation. In addition to teaching subject matter, these paraprofessionals perceived their job responsibility to include keeping “students with disabilities from bothering general education classroom teachers and creating all modifications and adaptations for the child”.

Of heightened concern to the research team were statements made by pre-service teachers and a paraprofessional reflecting their fear that, under stress, they would harm a student or inadvertently act in a sexually inappropriate manner. Even if these statements (forgetting to wear underwear, accidentally flashing the class, or hitting a student) reflected the fear of inadvertent
inappropriate acts or were meant to be random statements of bravado, the respondents were aware of their professional surrounding and the public nature of their response. These response categories were unprecedented in field literature.

Category Two
Perception-of-the World

Perception-of-the World contained 45 of the 187 responses. This theme spoke to various facets of classroom control (n = 45) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Issues of Classroom Control and Safety (n = 45)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Participant Category</th>
<th>Number of Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alternative certification</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Para-professional</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncontrollable kids</td>
<td>Alternative certification</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Para-professional</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/student aggression</td>
<td>Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence from students</td>
<td>Alternative certification</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>911 activities</td>
<td>Paraprofessional</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Issues of Classroom Control

Eight pre-service teachers expressed their biggest fear as having “students out of control.” This perspective dominated statements such as “no control, children having no respect for me” or “no respect from the children because they know it’s your first day.” One pre-service teacher was concerned about implementing the basics of classroom control and expressed “How do I instill classroom management?” as her biggest fear. Others expressed fears such as “no respect from students,” a general fear of “classroom management,” or “children going crazy.”

Two paraprofessionals and one new alternatively certified teacher were most afraid of uncontrollable kids. This perspective differs from overall classroom management; it is more in the nature of outburst control or fear of general classroom anarchy. Comments that spoke to this fear were “afraid that I will get Dennis the Menace the first day” and “psychotically violent student.”

Paraprofessionals often assume the supervisory and escort role for students with outburst behavior tendencies. Students who need intense behavior monitoring might also have acting out behaviors. This fear is best expressed by the paraprofessional who stated, “My biggest fear is that I child I work one on one with will harm himself or mostly another student.”
Three alternative certification teachers expressed personal fear, specifically, “I am afraid of being physically harmed at school.” The comment of an alternative certification-seeking teacher stating their biggest fear was that of “a reoccurrence of 911 activities in their school” addresses a fear of physical harm both for and from the student body.

*Relationship to field literature*

According to Truong (1998), principals, evaluating the competencies of new teachers, rated classroom management as the lowest competency. Discipline was the most frequently cited deficiency of the new teacher. Teachers whose classrooms were less structured than normally expected regardless received over all lower ratings from the building principals. Research has demonstrated that effective classroom instruction in teacher education programs can alter students’ disparaging views about classroom management (Sokal, Smith & Mowat, 2003).

The fear by the educator for personal safety while preventing classroom violence is not unprecedented (Murdick & Gartin, 1993; Wilson, & Ireton, 1997; Weinstein, 1998). Children who display deficits in learning and acceptable social behavior have a higher level of frustration, school failure, and even retaliatory violence (Murdick & Gartin).

**Category Three**

**Fear-for-the Student**

Fear-for-the-Student contained 18 of the 183 responses. Two themes emerged: Student’s Emotional / Academic Well-Being and the Parent-Student Relationship (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Student Well Being (n = 18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Participant Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional/Academic</td>
<td>Alternative certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Para-professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Student Relationship</td>
<td>Pre-service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Para-professional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Student Well Being (n = 18)*

Paraprofessionals work one on one with children within the classroom and 13 of the paraprofessionals in our participant group were concerned most about the student’s welfare on the first day of school. Examples of fear statements to this effect were, “seeing all the new faces and reassuring them that they will be all right” and” not being able to comfort a new student and make them feel like they belong.” Paraprofessionals, also described their biggest fear as a concern for the academic success of the students. They expressed these fears as a “concern about at-risk students being able to pass TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills)” and “not accomplishing goals relating to the students.” One alternative certification teacher also directly addressed concern about the welfare of students academically and emotionally stating a hope “that they will enjoy what I am teaching and make friends.”
Paraprofessionals were fearful for the well-being of children in the home. They expressed their biggest fear as “parents are losing their parenting skills and that teachers have to replace them” or “parents being abusive to their children.”

**Relationship to field literature**

Teachers and paraprofessionals have the responsibility by law to report suspicions of child abuse and consequently fear parental retaliation and displeasure (Wilson & Ireton, 1997). Giangreco & Doyle (2002) stated that paraprofessionals specifically have a concern for student well-being and their ability to support the student in and outside the classroom. This involvement of paraprofessionals in the every day academic planning of students correlates with higher student achievement.

**Category Four**

**Incidental Concerns**

Incidental concerns contained 25 of the 183 responses. These responses formed two incidental categories because participants specified either experiencing a non-specific all pervasive fear in general or expressed a no fear statement. Whether the participants in the later category actually had no fear or had no inclination to answer the question will remain unanswered (see Table 4).

![Table 4](image)

**Incidental Concerns (n = 25)**

Statements made by all three groups expressed non-specific fears such as “getting it all right” or “fear of failure” or the “fear of the unknown.” One comment made by a paraprofessional stated the biggest fear is “having a heart attack from having so much fun on the first day.” Individuals who did not express a fear for the first day made comments such as “I'm fearless and not afraid of anything, “I am ready to seize the future” and “I do not have a fear of the first day of school.”

**Relationship to field literature**

Individuals that have a high sense of efficacy have reduced fears in the areas of classroom management and promotion of academic success of students (Ashton & Webb, 1996). However, in a study of 140 teachers Campbell (1996) concluded, “The possibility that youthful enthusiasm
or idealism would produce higher levels of teacher efficacy than experience, age, or post-baccalaureate education, must also be rejected” (p. 10). In fact, the antithesis of this statement was valid; as teachers accrued more experience, their efficacy and confidence increased.

**Discussion**

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**Figure 1:** Dominant First Day Fears of Pre-Service Teachers, Paraprofessionals, and Alternative Certification Teachers.

**Dominant Fears**

The dominant fear category for the first day of school was Perception-of-Self (N = 105). Within this category the large majority of respondents (n = 52) feared that they would be overwhelmed with the responsibility of their new teaching assignment, feeling disorganized and incompetent. In the category of Perception-of-the World, 38 respondents voiced their biggest fear as the inability to control the behavior of a classroom of students. Ninety of the 183 participants in this study expressed the fear of incompetence on the job. Interestingly, 12 of the participants, all paraprofessionals, feared their level of competency might affect the academic or emotional well-being of the students.

**Pre-service Teachers**

In order of concern pre-service teachers predominantly feared lack of classroom management skills (n = 28) followed closely by a fear of being overwhelmed with the academic responsibility (n = 25). First day performance anxiety concerned 12 of our pre-service respondents. On a more general note, 10 pre-service teachers feared lack of respect from students and peers. Three pre-service teachers expressed a fear of participating (deliberately? inadvertently?) in inappropriate behaviors. Pre-service teachers did not fear violence from students; rather they feared they might lose control and harm a student.

**Alternative Certification Seeking Teachers**

The dominant first day fear for new teachers who had taken the alternative certification pathway was the same as the pre-service teachers. Both feared being overwhelmed academically
on their first day of school. Fear of inadequate classroom management ability (n = 6) and the fear of having made a poor career move (n = 6) were tied for second place. Five respondents stated that uncontrollable students and the fear of being physically attacked was their biggest fear. Four respondents were concerned that they would meet with parental disapproval because of their inexperience.

**Paraprofessionals**

The paraprofessional returning to the classroom predominantly feared environmental factors (n = 16) such as duty rosters, which students they would have, and what kind of teacher would be supervising their activities. The second biggest fear of the paraprofessional (n = 13) was again the fear of being overwhelmed academically. Paraprofessionals, however, cross categorically reflected a fear of violent actions (n = 9): students attacking each other, parents abusing the children, uncontrollable students, a 911 threat from a student, and last but not least losing self-control and hitting a student. Thirteen paraprofessionals expressed their primary concern for the academic and emotional well being of the students on the first day of school. If one combines a fear for student academic and social well-being with the fear for the personal safety of the students, the dominant fear for the first day of school for paraprofessionals (n = 22) centered on the student welfare rather than on their personal concerns.

**A Snapshot of the First Day of School**

According to our survey, on the first day of school in East Texas 42% of the new teachers were worried about loosing control of the classroom; 37% of the alternatively certified teachers feared they were not academically prepared; and 45% of the paraprofessionals were worried about the nature of their responsibility. The overall fear index for the first day of schools indicated that of the 183 participants in our study:

- 42% were concerned about academic performance ability
- 32% were concerned about student control
- 9% were concerned with student well-being
- 7% were fearless
- 5% had a fear of the unknown
- 3% worried about a poor career choice
- 2% were possibly a safety threat to the students.

**Conclusion**

The top fears expressed by all three groups held some commonalities such as classroom control, management and academic competency, but in each category there were separate concerns that were only held by that group. With introduction of multiple methods of attaining teacher certification this study highlights areas of concern with the level of preparation available through alternative certification programs, the growing challenges and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, and the extent of pre-service training offered to student teachers. Examination of the biggest fear for the first school day provided insight into these challenges.

The thematic category, Personal Control under Stress, was unprecedented in field literature. . District policies, Education Code of Ethics for Teacher Certification and each state’s Educational Code specifying ethical conduct standards for teachers; standards established to protect students from physical, emotional abuse and sexual conduct that constitutes indecency. Although there is no
research currently available on teachers who react violently or inappropriately under stress, there have been incidences of physical aggression during disciplinary actions reported in the national news (News 11, Atlanta, 2005). This thematic category contained four comments, three from pre-service teachers and one from a paraprofessional that were categorized as inappropriate/illegal behaviors. As researchers, we question the motivation behind the public disclosure of the fear of forgetting your underwear, flashing the class, or hitting a student. Nevertheless, these comments speak to the necessity of developing a more stringent screening procedure for potential educators.

The study as a whole was bound in a particular time in history and geographical location. Because this grouping of individuals was a unique occurrence, returning to the identical group to validate finding by participant reaction would not be possible. Yet this study serves to enrich the literature base on the concerns of the beginning teacher and paraprofessional while it highlights several unique and important issues.

We are left with some valuable questions. Are individuals entering the teaching field unprepared for the realities of the assignment? Are we addressing violence in our schools in our preparatory programs for pre-service teachers? Do our pre-service teachers have a general lack of concern about the effects of their competence on the emotional and academic well being of the students? These areas warrant further and more intense study. It is anticipated that the voice of these participants and the questions raised in this study will provide educational stakeholders in administration, counseling, and higher education with a perspective that can be used to better prepare teacher candidates for the realities of their prospective educational assignment.
References