

THE ALABAMA FIRST YEAR TEACHER: A DOCUMENTARY LOOK

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As a result of recommendations from groups of teachers, administrators, lay persons, education specialists from colleges and universities and personnel from the Alabama State Department of Education (ASDE), the Alabama State Board of Education (ASBE) adopted a series of resolutions on January 25, 1972, designed to improve the overall effectiveness of education in Alabama. One component of the resolutions stipulated that the ASDE in cooperation with local school systems, teacher training institutions, and professional organizations embark upon a plan to improve the transition of Alabama First Year Teachers (AFYT) from the college campus into the classroom. One part of the resolution adopted by the ASBE on January 25, 1972, reads as follows:

As a part of the competency-based concept of teacher preparation, establish the first year of teaching as an extended internship to serve as part of the introduction of the individual to the teaching profession with the teacher training institutions, the local school districts, and the State Department of Education assuming appropriate responsibilities for the internship.

In moving to implement the spirit of the resolutions, Dr. LeRoy Brown, State Superintendent of Education, appointed the First Year Task Force Committee which was charged with the responsibility of developing specific guidelines. The focus of the guidelines was on implementation of the First Year Teacher Pilot Project (FYTPP) as one means of following through on the resolutions passed by the ASBE. It was during these discussions that the need for this study first emerged. There was not an adequate data base to be used as a point of departure for these moves.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The major purpose of the study was to establish base-line data on the AFYT prior to the implementation of the FYTPP during 1973-74. Specifically, the study was designed to identify the professional concerns of first year teachers in Alabama and to examine the relationship between the concerns and selected independent variables. The study focused upon personal and system demographic data and perceptions of AFYT relative to their preparation program and experiences during their first year of teaching. Particular emphasis was placed upon the teaching-learning environment in which the AFYT operated with special attention given to supervisory and supportive services available to assist in the transitions from pre-service training to classroom teaching.

Instrumentation and Data Source

The variables of interest, including the professional concerns of AFYT were identified by means of a four page opinionnaire, hereinafter referred to as the First Year Teacher Educational Assessment (FYTEA) which went

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through several developmental revisions. Personal and demographic data were supplied by ASDE from information obtained on the Institute Record. The Institute Record is the official list of teachers, principals, supervisors, and superintendents which is submitted annually to the ASDE by each local school board.

Sample and Data Gathering

The ASDE secured a list of AFYT during March, 1973, from each school system in Alabama. The opinionnaire was mailed to 1,921 identified AFYT in May, 1973, from the ASDE in Montgomery, Alabama. The State Superintendent of Education sent an explanatory letter with the opinionnaire requesting the assistance of each AFYT in completing and returning the opinionnaire. Each teacher was assured that anonymity of responses would be maintained. Thirteen hundred and fifty-three AFYT responded to the FYTEA. Seventy percent of the opinionnaires were returned to the ASDE. A total of 993 opinionnaires were matched with data from the ASDE Institute Record. These matched data, plus data placed on the FYTEA, provided information to determine analysis procedures on the FYTEA. However, only 890 respondents met the full criteria for regression analysis due to inconsistencies regarding prior teaching experience, length of service in the system or excessive blanks in FYTEA.

DATA ANALYSIS

The FYTEA data were submitted to SPSS Subprogram FACTOR for principal component analysis with iterations and rotations according to VARIMAX criterion. The thirteen factors identified through the principal component analysis are presented in Table 1. All items loading on each factor were studied carefully before assigning a name to a specific factor. The highest loading item in each factor was considered a key or tracer item for that factor.

TABLE 1

VARIABLES IDENTIFIED THROUGH VARIMAX PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ANALYSIS

1. Teacher and Pupil Interaction (TEAPUP).
2. Inservice Program (INSERV).
3. Professional Orientation (PROFESS).
4. Teacher and Principal Communication (TEAPRIN).
5. Educational Process (EDPROC).
6. Materials and Supplies (MATSUP).
7. Collegial Interaction (COLINT).
8. Communication with Central Office Staff (COMCOS).
9. Teacher Evaluation (TEAEVAL).
10. Adequacy of Teacher Preparation Program (TEAPREP).
11. Time Utilization (TIME).
12. Voice in Curriculum Development (VOICE).
13. Salary Procedure (SALARY).

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The differences in concern among AFYT were categorized according to the following independent variables or dimensions:

1. Size of college or university where AFYT received degree (College).
2. Size of school system where AFYT taught (Syscode).
3. Type of assignment (Assign).
4. Amount of supervisory responsibility exercised (SuperRespon).
5. Sex by Race (SexRace).
6. Age of first year teacher (age).
7. Area where AFYT resided during major portion of life (res).
8. Reason for selecting education as a career (Select).
9. Pre-intentions toward making teaching a career (Pre-IntentT).
10. Post-intentions toward making teaching a career (Post-IntentN).
11. Plans for next school term (Plans).
12. Number of persons AFYT supports financially (Support).
13. Marital status of AFYT (Marital).
14. AFYT in Auburn University FYTPP consortium area, or an AFYT in the University of Alabama in Birmingham consortium area, or an AFYT teaching elsewhere in the state (Pop).

An analysis of variance was performed on the factored variables to determine which dimensions of independent variables significantly affected the relationship existing in the dependent variable. The 0.05 level of significance was selected as the critical value in the interpretation of findings for each of the hypothesis postulated. Where significant F values were found in the analysis of variance, Duncan's New Multiple Range Test was applied to the dimension to more clearly identify where the differences existed.

A summary of probabilities of significant ($p < 0.05$) independent variables (dimensions or subgroups) within each of the 13 factors follows in Table 2. The total number of significant independent variables (dimensions) in the model of each dependent variable (factor) is presented in the "row total" column. This total may be determined by counting all probabilities listed on the horizontal line following the factor abbreviation (i.e., TEAPUP has eight). The number of significant occurrences within factors for each independent variable may be determined by counting all probabilities shown in the vertical columns (i.e., College has seven). A total of 64 significant probabilities are reported in Table 2 with actual probabilities listed.

Demographic and Personal Characteristics

The study reveals the typical first-year teacher in Alabama was a white married female between the ages of 22 and 34 with no one dependent upon her for support. She graduated from a college or university with an enrollment in excess of 5,000 students. She taught in a medium size school system and worked independently with little contact with other staff personnel. She had resided in Alabama for the major portion of her life and selected education as a career because of her interest in the area. After having taught the first year, she stated that she wished to make education a career and indicated a desire to return to the same school where she had taught. Distribution of the sample by AFYT teaching assignments, size of college or university attended and size of school system taught in are included in Table 3.

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TABLE 2

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT PROBABILITIES OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES WITHIN FACTOR 01 THROUGH FACTOR 13

FACTOR	Dim. 1 College	Dim. 2 Syscode	Dim. 3 Assign	Dim. 4 SuperRespon	Dim. 5 SexRace	Dim. 6 Age	Dim. 7 Res	Dim. 8 Select	Dim. 9 Pre- IntentT	Dim. 10 Post- IntentN	Dim. 11 Plans	Dim. 12 Support	Dim. 13 Marital	Dim. 14 Prop	ROW TOTAL
TEAPUP-1	0.0001		0.0001	0.0184	0.0001	0.0446	0.0325		0.0001	0.0001					8
INSERV-2	0.0410	0.0373												0.0167	3
PROFESS-3	0.0090		0.0002		0.0017	0.0094		0.0079	0.0001	0.0001					7
TEAPRN-4	0.0010	0.0001		0.0060	0.0006	0.0037				0.0001	0.0003				7
EDPROC-5	0.0039	0.0001			0.0001					0.0284					4
MATSUP-6	0.0375	0.0029	0.0002	0.0026							0.0012				5
COLINT-7					Z VALUE ON REGRESSION ANALYSIS WAS NOT SIGNIFICANT										0
COMCOS-8		0.0006	0.0084	0.0011											3
TEALVAL-9				0.0138	0.0438		0.0109			0.0028					4
TPREP-10		0.0145	0.0294			0.0028			0.0001	0.0057			0.0264		6
TIME-11			0.0001	0.0253					0.0004	0.0001	0.0075				5
VOICE-12		0.0004		0.0134					0.0157	0.0134					4
SALARY-13	0.0019	0.0012	0.0001	0.0029	0.0336	0.0003		0.0040		0.0001					8
COLUMN TOTAL	7	8	7	8	6	5	2	2	5	9	3	0	1	1	64 TOTAL

Summary of Attitudes

The responses of AFYT, as a group, indicate the teachers felt more positive toward factors concerning Professional Orientation, Teacher and Pupil Interactions, while the AFYT felt least positive regarding factors concerning Voice in Curriculum Development, Communication with Central Office Staff, Inservice Program and Time Utilization.

The impact of the AFYT responses, as revealed in the various factors (dependent variables) in the ANOVA analysis, indicate that Teacher and Pupil Interaction, Salary Procedures, Professional Orientation, Teacher and Principal Communication, and Adequacy of Teacher Preparation Programs are of greatest value in determining the significant probabilities which occur in the 14 dimensions.

The impact of the AFYT responses according to the various dimensions (independent variables) in the ANOVA analyses, reveal that intentions of making teaching a career after having taught a year, the size of system where the AFYT taught, the amount of supervisory responsibility the AFYT was permitted to exercise, the size of college or university from which the degree was obtained, and the type of assignment were influential in determining the greatest number of significant occurrences within the factor structure.

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TABLE 3

DISTRIBUTION OF ALABAMA FIRST YEAR
TEACHERS (AFYT) on SELECTED
DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

SIZE OF SCHOOL SYSTEM WHERE EMPLOYED

Large County System	166
Large City System	145
Medium County System	427
Medium City System	211
Small City System	34
School Systems Not Reporting	11

TEACHING ASSIGNMENT

Elementary Teaching--self contained 424

Secondary Teaching

Reading	26
English and Language Arts	74
Fine Arts and Music	43
Foreign Languages	5
Math	64
Physical Training	51
Science	45
Social Studies	49
Vocational Education	52

Exceptional Teaching

Educably Mentally Retarded - Elementary	73
Educably Mentally Retarded - Jr. High	31
Educably Mentally Retarded - Sr. High	6
Other Exceptional Learning Areas	24

Librarian 9

Others (unidentified) 17

SIZE OF GRADUATING COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

Very Large	256
Large	206
Medium	256
Small	94
Others and Out-Of-State	149

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Selected items were taken from each of the 13 factors to present the following composite view of AFYT perceptions as recorded toward the end of their first year in an Alabama public school classroom.

Almost one-half of the AFYT respondents indicated they had difficulty with underachieving students in their classes. Approximately the same number of respondents indicated there were too many students in their classes. Two out of five AFYT found they were unable to handle the personal educational problems of their students in a satisfactory manner. A substantial majority of AFYT respondents indicated they had been able to reach most of their students and had provided meaningful, relevant learning experiences for the students.

The AFYT respondents indicated considerable confusion regarding the school's inservice program which in their opinion, did not improve their professional skills. One-third of the respondents indicated they had difficulty obtaining information about the inservice program and they had to depend upon the "grapevine" for information. Slightly more than one-half, however, felt the inservice program was based on sound theory and practice.

A substantial majority of respondents indicated they felt a planned program of inservice and a year of internship were steps toward greater professionalism. Nine out of ten indicated they felt teacher education and certification should be joint responsibilities of institutions of higher education, the ASDE, local education associations and professional organizations. Four out of five indicated they would have entered teaching for a career, even if the year of internship had been a requirement for obtaining certification to teach.

Two-thirds of AFYT indicated they did not receive the most desirable teaching assignments. The responses showed that the AFYT received neither the most nor the least desirable teaching assignment. Over one-half of the AFYT indicated their school system failed to provide initial orientation and subsequent follow-up provisions to bridge the transition from college classroom to public school teaching. However, a substantial proportion of AFYT indicated they received strong support from fellow teachers during the first year of teaching.

More than one-half of the AFYT indicated they had not received a sufficient variety of textbooks, materials and supplies appropriate to the needs of their pupils. Two out of five indicated the procedures for obtaining classroom supplies and equipment were not relatively simple.

Almost one-half of the AFYT indicated a lack of understanding regarding the desired goals of the school system as stated by the administration or school boards. More than one-third of the AFYT felt they had little or no voice in curriculum development.

Three out of four respondents indicated that they felt free to discuss teaching problems with their principal. One out of three, however, indicated they did not communicate with their principal regarding their problems. More

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than one-half of the AFYT did not understand how they were evaluated by their principal. Two-thirds of the teachers disagreed (1/3) or did not know (1/3) whether or not the Superintendent of Schools in their system had an adequate information base to make decisions regarding their future employment. Two out of five indicated they had not been adequately involved in the evaluation of their teaching effectiveness. They further stated that whatever procedures were utilized had not been helpful in improving their teaching performance.

Responses of AFYT regarding adequacy of the teacher preparation program at the beginning of the year produced the following results. Approximately one out of five indicated their confidence diminished during the first year. Three out of five indicated the concepts taught in their preparation courses were not consistent with real life situations they encountered in the classroom. Furthermore, more than one-half of the teachers indicated they were not given adequate assistance by their college or university in making the transition from the preparation program into classroom teaching.

More than one-half of the teachers found themselves unprepared for the time requirement of their new job. Better than one-half found they had to spend too many after-school hours on school work. They became too bogged down with administrative paperwork and found too little time during the school day for planning teaching experiences.

The vast majority of AFYT indicated satisfaction with the way salary matters were handled locally. However, virtually the same majority felt the compensation for their services was inadequate.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The conclusions of this study are presented in a global nature. They are not seen as being exhaustive, but illustrative of the types of concerns which may be extracted from the data without getting into rather minute degrees of specificity which are possible with these data. The data were considered in a collective manner with an effort made to draw across the information to develop generalizable conclusions which might provide a sense of direction to all agencies involved in the improvement of the educational process in Alabama.

1. The first year teacher in Alabama as profiled by the several personal and demographic variables are rather homogeneous. The limited participation of males, particular minority group males, and non-native Alabamians in the beginning teaching group in the State are two areas which may need close attention. Additionally, the finding that only 12 percent of the AFYT were Black provides a basis for some concern when compared to the total Black teaching force in Alabama.

2. The need of the AFYT for transitional support from pre-service preparation to inservice performance as documented in the review of literature and reflected by the SBE in their significant 1972 resolutions has been substantiated in this study. Concerns reflected by AFYT relative to key processes such as orientation, in-service development, principal and teacher communication, and evaluation of performance among others illustrate most directly the felt needs for such assistance.

3. The size of institution from which the AFYT received his degree appears to be a significant variable with respect to the concerns reflected in their attitudinal responses. The data deserves consideration, particularly when the question of supply and demand in relation to job market is studied. The less positive responses from AFYT who attended the larger institutions indicate that quantity output may not necessarily be directly related to perceived quality of preparation.

4. Size of school system seems to be an especially significant variable with respect to concerns and attitudes reflected by the AFYT relative to the transitional experience. Smaller systems seem to be able to humanize the process to an extent which as yet does not seem to be reflected in the larger school systems.

5. Concerns expressed by AFYT relative to the availability of and adequacy of instructional materials appropriate to the needs of their pupils provide the basis for the conclusion that this crucial support area was in need of further support at the time of this study. The more recent actions by the Alabama Legislature in funding an instructional supplies program on a per pupil basis may possibly have partially shored up needs in this area.

6. The limited number of AFYT (N=8) who planned to return to full-time graduate study, as reflected in this study, is a comforting finding in light of the already noticeable career pattern apparently generated by the tightened employment market of remaining in school through the master's degree before gaining actual teaching experience. Apparently, the professionally committed AFYT, surveyed in this study, was not looking for a graduate school escape route as has been feared by some.

7. The analyses of the attitudinal responses relative to the transitional concerns of orientation and in-service education across school systems according to size and the FYTPP consortium groups allows the conclusion that systems differ significantly in the perceived adequacy of their efforts in these two areas. Consideration should be given therefore to the provision and support services and resources by the State Department of Education and Institutions of Higher Education to the local education agencies in the state on a needs assessment basis which recognizes these varying abilities across systems.

8. The AFYT responses toward making teaching a career after having taught a year was the single most influential dimension as determined by the number of significant occurrences within the factor structure. The dimensions pre-intentions toward making teaching a career was a significant discriminant on five of the attitudinal factors: (1) Teacher and Pupil Interaction, (2) Professional Orientation, (3) Adequacy of Teacher Preparation Programs, (4) Time Utilization and (5) Voice in Curriculum Development. The dimension post-intentions toward making teaching a career was a significant discriminant on the above five factors plus four additional attitudinal factors: Teacher and Principal Communication, Educational Process, Teacher Evaluation and Salary Procedures.

The changes from pre to post-intentions reflect a strengthening in professional commitment over the period of their first year of teaching. Based

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upon an analysis of pre-intentions and post-intentions, the experiences encountered during the first year discriminated very significantly. According to the data in this study, the influence of the first year of teaching appears to have an impact on the AFYT for which teacher preparation institutions have no substitute.

The responses of the AFYT also indicate their support for the action of the State Board of Education in implementing the AFYT pilot programs. Thus they show a high degree of professional concern. Additionally, the apparent importance of professional intentions as reflected in these data reinforces the significance which would be placed upon admission and retention procedures in preparation programs which tend to guard against the presence of uncommitted teachers in Alabama classrooms.

9. Attitudinal responses of AFYT to the factors which addressed the adequacy of preparation provide a basis for the conclusion that much remains to be done in pre-service preparation effort through improved field-based experiences which focus directly upon such key concepts as the disadvantaged learner, classroom management, discipline, and individualization of instruction. The feelings reflected by a number of AFYT that their education programs had not prepared them for the "reality of the classroom as they found it" must be considered by those who strive for excellence in teacher preparation. The presence of these attitudes from a group of professionally committed AFYT reinforces the need for study of an extended internship approach with meaningful continuing professional support as a part of the transition process into the profession of teaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cooperative efforts should be made to provide coordinated support services by ASDE, teacher preparation institution and local school systems which would become an integral part of the system's ongoing inservice program.

2. The State Board of Education and the Alabama State Department of Education should continue efforts to support the preparation and credentialing procedures which include extended internships as a significant part of the entrance procedures into the teaching profession.

3. The Alabama State Department of Education should continue efforts to find ways to utilize its management information systems to generate more adequate retrieval information for answers to pertinent questions about the educational process.

4. Ways of capitalizing on the highly professional commitment of AFYT as reflected by these data should be considered. Particular attention should be given to admission and retention aspects of the preparation program. Realistic laboratory experiences which would assist the prospective first year teacher in making a decision regarding his remaining in a teacher preparation program should be provided.

5. A correlational study of teacher performance should be made to determine the relationship between AFYT attitudes and their respective teaching performance. For example, it would be valuable to find out if the

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teachers who reflect the most favorable attitudes were the best teachers, worst teachers, or neither.

6. The Alabama State Department of Education should utilize the Institute Record for longitudinal follow-up studies to determine which AFT remain in teaching and to determine if time and experiences significantly alter their perceptions.

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