

A COMPILATION OF KEY POINTS FROM TEACHER INTERVIEWS

The following is a “deduplicated” summary of the content from interviews with six teachers who withdrew from the program prior to the end of the first class. When more than one teacher made the same point, it is included here only once. This describes the range of experience for this group of teachers. Throughout, “R” is used as an abbreviation for “respondent”.

Where spoke with R

- cafeteria downstairs, seated at cafeteria table, a few other people in cafeteria but not nearby
- phone interview, R difficult to reach
- phone interview, R no longer in Chicago area. R retired and has not taught since the year R enrolled in this program.
- room in school like a part-time nurse’s station, no interruptions or others nearby
- kindergarten classroom near main office in R’s school, no others present
- 1st or 2nd grade classroom at R’s school, no others present

Where R heard about program

- “here in school,” there was some sort of notice; not sure if heard during a meeting with principal or during a grade-level meeting; just heard there was a program if anyone was interested
- regional math coach—person for school region who comes several times a year to check whether teachers are implementing the curriculum appropriately
- during staff meeting, another faculty member who likely heard of program directly from program staff; faculty member presented the program and people reacted positively to the idea of the program
- entering program was not a choice; R was told by principal that R had been chosen as part of a group to participate; R says jokingly that R received an “order” to attend
- R heard about program during a meeting for 6th-8th grade teachers; a general notice was given at the meeting that stated that anybody interested should enroll.
- at R’s current school, all new teachers go to a nearby University “to see how curriculum is done.” R learned about the program from this connection.

How R signed up for program

- given a stack of papers to fill out, had to write a paragraph about why wanted to participate/why interested; not a difficult process but unclear why the program needed so much information, but you have to do that for any college course nowadays.
- R recalls there being “connectors” from a nearby University; they connected R and other teachers to the math program

What interested R in program

- program was going to find fun ways to teach you to teach math and would connect math with science and other content areas; R wanted to have the experience because R was “really bad at math” and wanted to “throw myself out there;” math is R’s weakest point and R wanted to improve own math skills and get ideas for use in the classroom and for connecting math to other subject areas
- the word “connections” interested R because R took a program 10 years ago called “connectors” that R enjoyed very much; so R thought this would be a continuation of that, but it wasn’t
- R wanted to connect and study with other people and thought it would be interesting; R expected the program to be a chance to “study” with other people and the program met these expectations
- R wanted to learn new instructional methods for math and ways of engaging the students
- R thought the program would help R be a better teacher; R had taken previous “connector” courses and expected this course to be similar in its format and goals
- R had never taught math before and wanted help because R felt anxious; Also, several teachers from R’s school signed up together

Program met R’s expectations

- it did, though R only attended between 3-5 classes; the program did not fall short of R’s expectations at all
- did not meet expectations at all; program was much more theoretical (versus “connectors” program, which was very practical concerning the methods of teaching). This course was geared toward students with a stronger knowledge of both reading and math than R’s students. R expected strategies to bridge the gap between skill levels of R’s students, but the course assumed a baseline level of skill that R’s students did not have. The course assumptions did not fit the population R was teaching. The materials they were supposed to be using included things the children had to read and some of this R’s kids simply didn’t read. Others were struggling readers.
- R found the program very effective, as it allowed R to observe how different people learn and solve problems; however, R had no expectations for the program and did not know what R was getting into. Program also emphasized new ways of teaching math more quickly and logically.
- R thought the program would be about methods to use in the classroom, different strategies for teaching, and new ways of teaching math, but the first class meeting seemed to be an evaluation of teachers’ abilities. R felt as though they were being tested on things R did not know and R felt very overwhelmed by the level at which material was presented. R only received a syllabus on the first day of class, but had assumed that the program would be like the connectors programs, with which R felt comfortable.
- R suggested the program did meet expectations regarding being able to “study” with other teachers. R was especially happy with the facilitators who were very supportive of the teachers and helped with any problems teachers had. Presenters also made the material easy to understand.

R knew other people from school doing program

- 4 other teachers from R's school attended, of whom R was closer to 2. The participation of those 2 made R more enthusiastic about program, but R did not know until began attending who would be in program for sure; R liked knowing others beforehand for the group work portions of course
- One other teacher from R's school attended course. R talks to other teacher but never discussed the course and never heard from the attendee that there was a classroom evaluation. Each teacher decided independently to join and presence of other teacher did not affect R's decision at all.
- R says ~5 people from R's school attended
- R says 2-3 other people from R's school attended, but R never spoke with the others about the program. R is unsure how the others were recruited for the program, but the other teachers were much more experienced than R, who was a first year teacher teaching "everything" at the time, but it was so early in the year that R did not yet know other teachers well. The other teachers seemed excited to learn new teaching techniques but shared R's concern with the amount of time required for the course. The other teachers apparently did not feel well prepared for the curriculum either.
- R enrolled completely independently but found out after dropping out that another teacher from R's school had enrolled. Had R known of other teacher's presence, R might have stayed longer. The other teacher later said R should have stayed and that he could have helped R with the challenging course materials. The other teacher said the course did eventually teach different ways of teaching math in the classroom and said he would have helped R had R remained in the program
- About 5 teachers from R's school participated. R really liked being part of a group and would have been somewhat scared going alone. R implies participation was linked to other teachers, though R would probably have attended anyway. The group of teachers all decided to sign up together. After R dropped, the other teachers still discussed the program with R, but not in detail. The others seemed to be enjoying it, though R did not hear the substance of what they were learning. It sounded like fun.

Changed Dynamics among other teachers from same school

- R got to know other participants a bit better but did not continue to discuss course with them when R dropped, dynamics between teachers were unchanged
- R responds affirmatively that the program allowed R to know others at R's school better. Teachers discussed homework together and would often present things they learned in class the next day. Teachers who could not attend were not upset because they were slated to participate the next year.
- R says the program did not change dynamics between teachers. Teachers in the program did not discuss it with those who were not and those not in the program did not ask for information. R really enjoyed being part of a group because they could talk to one another about what worked with different ages and other similar things. The course was easier and better because of the others at the same school participating. R became closer to the other participants, and they got to know one another better from the program.

Meeting teachers from other schools

- R did not get to know anyone from other schools during course
- R says there were no introductions on the first day, that the program just began right away with the material.
- Originally teachers talked mainly to others from the same school, but they started to talk to others after a while. R did not stay in touch with any of the people from other schools met through the program.
- R said did interact with teachers from other schools to some extent.
- R did not interact with teachers from other schools.

Class schedule/Time demands

- Classes met on Tuesday but were possibly going to be moved to Saturday, pending a vote of students. R would *not* have attended if classes moved to Saturday because weekends are precious to R – “leave my weekends alone”. R says this is the case for most teachers
- R was tired at the end of school day and did not want to spend the additional effort of going to class if the class gave nothing R could use immediately. The course gave a lot of credit hours, but R’s principal does not care about credit hours – principal wanted course to benefit the students, not be about teacher’s own career development.
- Class met once a week “downtown” or near DePaul. R did not give an opinion of meeting times or locations
- R had concern (shared with other teachers from R’s school) that the program was too time-consuming. R recalls meeting 2 days a week, right after work in a “busy area” where there was lots of traffic. It was on the DePaul campus which was not convenient. R says a location closer to R’s school would be better than a different time of day for meeting

Homework

- Not too hard or too much, “just like average”. However, at first, “you haven’t done homework in a while, so you’re like, ‘Aahhhh!’ but it was fine”. Similar amount and difficulty level of homework from other courses R has taken
- The main thing R remembers other teachers from R’s school discussing is homework. When other teachers asked about the program, they often asked about the extent and difficulty of the homework. R said the presenters made sure everyone could understand the homework. Later on, R said homework was somewhat challenging but on par with what R was teaching in the classroom, so not beyond what could be reasonably expected. They were given 2-3 problems to work on, but it was enjoyable, “like sitting down with a good book”.
- Other teachers from R’s school were surprised by the level of the course materials, as it was not material they were familiar with (algebra and geometry) though R thought this was typical 8th grade material. R found the homework and the reading challenging because R was very busy with other things. The work was both time-consuming and challenging. R isn’t sure if R’s trouble with the work was simply a reflection of R’s lack of extra time. R says other teachers

from R's school found the work challenging as well, but teachers from other schools seemed engaged and did not express concern with the workload.

- R says some of the material was too advanced for R's students. The course itself was at the right level for R – challenging but not too hard. R says it's similar to the master's level courses R is currently enrolled in. R thought the time commitment was reasonable.

Transportation

- Transportation was not a problem because R had a car and parking was easy. However, when R got into a car accident, transportation became a major issue because R would have had to take 2 buses to attend
- Teachers were expected to be at DePaul at 3:30 when school only ends at 2:45, which doesn't allow much time for travel. Could organize program at clusters of schools in nearby areas and have classes there or rotate from school to school to cut down on travel time
- R says the program took place in very busy area with lots of traffic. Although parking was made available to participants, it was still inconvenient. R would have preferred to have the course nearer to R's school, which would have been more central for most participants

Memories of class

- Given two books, did activities while in class, given homework, "like a real class"
- R remembered that presenters wanted feedback about *how* children derived their answers to problems, step by step. R enjoyed learning new approaches to teaching, as R was a longtime teacher and approaches change over time. The opportunity to learn new methods was very positive. R appreciated Dr. Radner's sense of humor.
- R remembers working in groups to solve problems which was enjoyable. Later on, R states R does not enjoy group work and would have appreciated more teaching for independent learners as well
- R remembers learning Microsoft Excel and really enjoying this. R liked that things learned in the program were directly applicable to the classroom. Each session began with a bit of debriefing on how the techniques worked in the classroom, such as what worked and what didn't. The technology aspect of the course is the most essential component, most beneficial.

Materials from class

- R received a game, a packet of worksheets to cut out and a bag of beans/manipulatives for use in class. Used them right away because the facilitator came to check, but would have used the materials anyway. Does not use them anymore because R no longer teaches math
- R really liked that things learned in course were immediately applicable. R could not remember specifics but remembered receiving materials from the course.
- R no longer teaches math so does not use materials anymore. The math curriculum at R's school was changed the year after the program, so R thinks similar techniques were then part of the curriculum, so R probably used those

techniques. R remembers surveys for the students that were very helpful because they showed R where students were going wrong in their work. R received a math path sheet and a math or algebra connection sheet as well as a textbook with readings.

- R did *not* like the surveys for students. R's students hated doing them and R didn't think students' answers were helpful or truthful. Also the surveys took a lot of time, almost an hour each time. R remembers receiving counter beans, graphic organizers and manipulatives. R still uses these materials. R's teaching is still affected, in that R learned to always make students explain what they've done even when it is simple. R also learned it is helpful for students to see multiple ways to solve problems and to learn different strategies. Also, R believes that the course made R more comfortable with math, which has helped R show students that math is not scary. In addition, students see that it is not a big deal to make a mistake.

Teacher/Class time

- R liked the teacher, he went over everything and explained it very thoroughly, including the homework. Teacher gave opportunities for class discussion so students could share new ways to solve problems. Course included lots of group work, which R views as positive.
- R found the classes boring in their own right, in addition to the fact that they were not geared to help R's particular students. Also, sitting for 3 hours after a hard day at work is a lot to ask of teachers.
- Facilitators were very supportive of teachers and always addressed teachers' problems. Presenters did a great job of making the program easy to understand
- R found the teachers very informed and passionate yet still found class somewhat boring. R does not enjoy group work and found there was too much of this, as well as too much homework.
- R says the teacher is probably great in the classroom, though R felt no connection with him
- R says there was a good mix of teachers in the class. The instructor was more like a facilitator because everyone worked as a group. R *really* liked the teacher a lot. He made the class fun and something to look forward to. He had lots of good examples and stories from his own experience.

Facilitator/Observer/Coordinator

- Although we asked about the facilitator, several respondents talked about this project person as the "evaluator". One of those who used this term was very enthusiastic about this person, another was favorable but less strongly so and the third was quite unhappy although it wasn't clear she was remembering the correct person. A fourth did not seem aware that the facilitator role was part of the program.
- Person who observed R in the classroom was great. This facilitator gave ideas for what to change and add to teaching, R did not feel undermined by her presence. Person simply observed while R taught and gave suggestions afterward, and person helped students but not in a way that was intrusive. R thinks the program is

essential as a complete package – course with observer/coordinator visits to classroom

- R did not recall a facilitator/observer coming to R's classroom and denied knowledge that this was part of the course. R bristled at the suggestion of a classroom follow-up and was hostile to the idea of somebody coming into the classroom to observe. When asked if it wouldn't be useful to have somebody from the program see the problems with the skill levels of R's kids, R was not sure and said was never told that would be part of the program.
- R remembers the coordinator coming to classroom. R said it is important for a teacher to be in control of the classroom, but this was not a problem with the coordinator at all. The hand-off between the two was handled well and the presence of the other person was beneficial because it allowed both teachers to attend to students who needed assistance. The material presented by the facilitator was slightly harder than what R presented but was still on the same level. R thinks facilitator/observer is an essential component of the program.
- R is not fond of being observed. R referred to the facilitator as an evaluator. R is unsure whether R remembers the exact person, but does remember someone coming to check in. R is used to being observed because of being in TFA, but R says the facilitator did not come when she was supposed to and didn't schedule visits, so R never received feedback. R remembers getting a few tips from the observer, but they didn't seem that helpful because nothing was communicated very clearly. R thinks the person who came into the classroom was there to watch, not to help. At first, R assumed the facilitator would help, but she never did. R wasn't sure if observer was "out to get you or what."
- R says it was helpful to have this person come because it induces teachers to implement what they're learning right away. Otherwise it would take longer because people are busy and might not prioritize incorporating new strategies into teaching. R did not feel undermined by this person's presence. The facilitator was helpful because that person helped out in the classroom and provided reassurance that R implemented techniques properly.

Why R dropped course

- Financial. R got into a car accident and had to pay for the car. R says the course was pay-as-you-go, and R forgot how much it would cost. [It was the interviewer's understanding that tuition was paid – when asked about this, R added being unsure whether R would have continued attending with a scholarship because the loss of R's car made transportation an issue.] R might have continued going if R had not had issues with car, but would not have continued going no matter what given the status of R's car. Definitely not interested in continuing if courses were on Saturdays. R thought the program was a good idea, and R liked the teacher as well as what they were learning. Thus, R would have continued if hadn't had "own little personal problems."
- Course was not set up to address the needs of R's students, so it was not useful to R. R saw the course as having no value for R's situation. R's students were starting much more basic than some average or theoretical kids of same age. R's students had a range of issues, so R could not isolate math. Transportation and

logistics were factors, but the main issue was the lack of fit with R's students needs, particularly the fundamental lack of reading ability.

- R dropped course because of health problems. R had high blood pressure and was instructed by doctor to take it easy, meaning to cut back on activities across the board. R hesitated to discuss this further.
- R was very stressed out and very busy at the time as a result of taking certification classes. When R had to add another certification course, R decided to drop the program. R was almost a full-time student, in addition to being a teacher. R simply didn't have the time and energy for the program. R was also doing an after-school hour and had a long commute to and from home. R says that "in the end, there were more reasons not to do it than to do it."
- R felt very lost with the material presented and felt alone in this feeling. The material was too difficult, but R didn't think anyone else had this trouble. R was not a math teacher and felt the level on which the class was operating was far more advanced than R anticipated.
- R was studying for National Boards and the work overlapped with the course. R couldn't keep up with all the work because it was simply too much. The boards were so much work that they took up all R's time.

When Might R Enroll in Course Again/Motivation for Others

- R would enroll if R were going to teach math again. At R's school, teachers do not know from year to year what grade and/or subject they will be teaching ahead of time and teachers do not have a choice.
- R said they should emphasize the course gives new ideas and to be clear that workload was manageable. R is retired so would not personally enroll in course again, but would recommend it to others. Thought program also generated excitement among students because teachers sometimes told students that they too were in a class and shared what they learned with the students.
- If R had nothing else to do, R might have finished the program, but only because of a sense of obligation – out of a desire to keep the commitment. R asks what the benefits of the course were [to the teacher], specifically asking if there was a math endorsement at the end. With a math endorsement, the course might be worthwhile
- R would enroll in a Medill or Sesame program because these are known as having an excellent reputation for helping teachers by providing them with an incremental process of learning advanced math.

Anything to improve program

- No suggestions, program was fine
- If course gave supporting skills for students they need to learn math, such as basic reading, in addition to materials that would work across a varied set of skills within classrooms and in large classes. Program would need to focus on ISAT "strands in math" at the algebra strand and at students' reading scores, then gear the course to strategies for teaching those children. Focus on the "Everyday Math" curriculum. Make classes more interesting. Align course so it matches up with when teachers are teaching algebra rather than having it begin with the

beginning of the school year. Could organize course at clusters of schools near one another to cut down on travel time and to better tailor program to needs of students

- R wishes there were more classes like that. R liked the ways teachings were integrated with the curriculum, which facilitated the learning process. It also generated excitement with R's students. R found it very helpful that students had to explain in words, step by step what they did. R also found things to bring into the classroom from the program.
- R says making the program shorter would help. It is not entirely clear whether R means the hours of meeting time or the duration of the course over time, but R says that teachers are more likely to enroll in a course that takes less time because it's more convenient. R says less homework/reading would help, as well as less group work.
- R suggests giving a more detailed description of what the course is about beforehand, discussing the larger goals of the program and listing prerequisites. R thinks that some college algebra training should be a prerequisite for the course because R believes it was overwhelming because of R's lack of this training.
- In place of student surveys, R suggests having a group discussion and/or discussion in small groups to hear what kids were actually thinking.