

## **Chapter 4 – Results**

### **Student Teacher #6 – “Becky”**

#### **Background**

Becky is another student teacher with an atypical background. At the time of her student teaching experience, she had already earned a Bachelor’s Degree in molecular biology, with a minor in chemistry, and was finishing a Master’s Degree in that discipline. She had also done scientific research, as an undergraduate as well as a graduate student, in the field of virology. Therefore, she had extensive knowledge of biology, the field in which she was seeking teacher certification, but primarily at the cellular level or below.

#### **School Environment**

Another unusual aspect of Becky’s situation was the fact that she was actually hired by her host school the semester before her student teaching. She had been provisionally hired to teach in a special science program within her host school. She therefore started teaching her own classes the day after school started in the fall semester. When the time came for her student teaching, she took on additional classes in her host school outside of the special program. She had great respect for the special science program and the other teachers in it, and was treated like a colleague from the start.

While she acknowledged that her host school was very different from the high school that she attended, Becky nonetheless thought it was generally a good place to teach. She noted that the school had a very diverse student population, which she saw as a definite positive. She knew of no real problems or hostility at the school, aside from a few problems involving individual teachers.

While Becky was generally impressed with her students and colleagues at her host school, there were two aspects of the school she did not like. First, she thought that the laboratory facilities at her host school were inadequate for teaching biology. Many rooms lacked laboratory benches, forcing students to perform experiments at their desks. She felt that because of the inferior equipment, the general biology laboratory activities fell short of the state-mandated 40% of class time. Even the laboratory equipment for the special science program, while better than the general biology equipment – and even in some cases better than the equipment at the University – was not up to her standards. Although students in her host school received basic training in using computers, there were no computer facilities in the biology laboratories. Becky was hopeful that the school would deliver on their promise to give the biology program computers, so that she and her students could take advantage of biology resources on the Internet.

Becky was also dissatisfied with the administration at her host school. She estimated the recent teacher turnover rate at her host school at 40%, and laid responsibility solely at the feet of administration. In one incident during Becky's time there, administrators told the teachers to erase the tardy notices from their attendance records, in an attempt to make the school look better to the district authorities. She accused the principal of the school of "talking out of both sides of her mouth" and not listening to the concerns of faculty. The host school was also embroiled in controversy over the special science program, with some members of the community accusing the program of elitism. In Becky's view, the administration had done a poor job of defusing the situation.

### **Working with Students that Are Motivated...**

Becky found most of her students, especially the ones in her Advanced Placement (AP) courses, to be highly intelligent and motivated to succeed. Having such a motivated group of students made it much easier for Becky to "ease in" to her teaching, and she found it very rewarding when she could get the students excited about learning.

Getting students interested in the material in the AP classes was easy, due to the elective nature of the class. Becky was very gratified that her students were getting so much out of the classes:

I think... you know, having them come up and tell you that you're doing a good job is the best... best reward, I think. You know at the end of the year, having them all hug you or tell you how much fun they had or whatever: that's... that's the kind of stuff that's really neat. And having...like a lot of kids told me that they're... you know, they're gonna take Biology II AP because they had me this year or whatever, so I think that by far is the best positive.

Becky was particularly impressed by the energy that her students put into preparing for the Advanced Placement tests. She devoted six weeks of class time to the review, and decided to make the review student-driven. She was pleasantly surprised that students stayed on-task most of the time, and were so energetic about pursuing topics that were not part of the school's curriculum, but would be on the test. The students were even more industrious than Becky thought she would have been:

So, um, just the fact that they were able to kind of take responsibility for their own learning and... Even the kids who weren't taking the AP were responsible enough to go ahead and take the physiology tests and work through 'em and e-mail me the quizzes and stuff like that, y'know? And to me that's... that's pretty impressive... I don't know if I would have done that in high school.

Becky felt that student motivation is so important because students need to be active participants in the learning process. She believed that the rapport between students and teachers should go beyond students merely listening and behaving well. Becky strove to stimulate that active participation every day in the classroom. As often as possible, she

would try to solicit information from students, and she found that students often knew more than they thought at first about many topics in biology, either from previous classes or popular culture. By uncovering the students' prior knowledge, Becky was able to help students see the connections between the elementary information they already had and the advanced material of the class. She reported that students were frequently "genuinely surprised at how things really work" in biology. She received praise from her colleagues at her ability to get students participating in class.

Despite the generally high level of motivation for her students, Becky has encountered a few challenges, particularly with students turning in work late, or not at all. She was concerned that due to her inexperience, she did not set up a good system for student accountability early on in the semester. As a result, she had to struggle constantly to get some students to turn in work on time. She was even willing to give full credit if some assignments were turned in late, but such clemency rarely worked. A number of these students were failing because they did not turn in work at all, a situation that greatly frustrated Becky:

It's really kind of depressing. I mean, I had a kid that left me a note on Wednesday... saying that, um, he was worried he was going to fail and was there any project or anything that he could do to make it so he wouldn't fail. And I (laughs) I was just like, "You could have turned in all that work that we had all semester long." I mean, there was just nothing. So, it's kind of disappointing.

Becky found a definite connection between student procrastination and a negative attitude towards biology. She discovered that there were some students who were "flat-out not interested in" biology, and would not do what was required to succeed, no matter how hard she tried to pique their interest. Even changing instructors did not improve the attitudes of these students.

She felt that the best piece of advice that she had gotten on keeping students engaged was to solicit the topics that students wanted to hear about, and try to include those topics as much as possible. Two-way communication was essential, with students providing topics and the instructor being open to suggestions. She found it difficult to enact this strategy in her AP Biology classes, however, because of the rigid and densely-packed curriculum of the AP program:

Yeah, the AP... I just don't know if there's anything we can do about that.  
(laughs) They have to know this, this, and this, and if they don't, then they're not gonna do well on the AP, so...

Becky was of two minds on the issue of standard curricula. On the one hand, she thought that they provided a good framework to allow teachers to set goals. However, they can also be too restrictive, and prevent instructors from going beyond the “basics” and taking the class where the students want it to go. She has tried to structure her curriculum as much as possible to accommodate both the students' needs and desires, and noted that she and her colleagues would be working on this as a department in the future.

Because her students were so highly motivated, Becky reported very few problems with classroom management and discipline. She was concerned that since she started teaching the day after the semester started, she was not able to lay the foundations for classroom management on day one. She felt a great need to establish strict rules for behavior from the start, with the idea that those rules could be relaxed later if the emergent classroom culture allowed. She was glad to not have been placed in the position of the typical student teacher, having to adapt to someone else's discipline standards, and dealing with students that know the student teacher is only temporary. She was the first and final authority, at least with her classes in the special science program, and she felt that this fact, combined with the high levels of student motivation, made her first teaching experience go much more smoothly. She had nonetheless heard stories

about other instructors' problems, and was concerned about what she might encounter when she got students that were not so eager to learn:

I haven't had anyone be... like, antagonistic towards me or anything like that, so I don't know necessarily how I'd handle that if I had a student like that.

Becky was very rewarded when she saw students do well, or at least improve, on tests and other evaluations. She would occasionally give oral make-up exams for some of her students, and found them to be especially helpful to students that had problems with English or written communication in general. In fact, she expressed a preference for talking with students about what they know as a method of assessment over multiple-choice and written tests. Ideally she would like to do away with tests and grades altogether, and judge for herself how well students know what they are supposed to know. However, she realized that this is not an easy alternative, and would likely not satisfy parents and administrators.

### **... and Host Teachers that Aren't**

Because of her unorthodox situation, Becky did not have the usual arrangement for a host teacher. Instead, during her official time of student teaching, she took the place of two of her colleagues, in addition to her regular teaching duties. Thus she had known and worked with her "host teachers" the whole school year. As a result, Becky got the impression that her host teachers did not feel as if they needed to give her as much help and guidance as they would a "typical" student teacher.

Becky characterized one of her host teachers ("Anne") as "a good teacher who is burnt out." Anne had made the decision that she was going to quit at the end of the semester, and seemed to Becky to be "mentally checked out" and "coasted" to the end. For example, Anne decided to not do any laboratory activities in her biology classes, to

decrease her workload. She would frequently leave school early during the three weeks that Becky was student teacher for her class, without giving Becky very much guidance or even notice. In one incident, Anne expected Becky to use a computer simulation in class, without showing Becky how to use it. Becky had to learn about the program “on the fly,” which left her feeling adrift:

And when I was student teaching her class, I kind of just felt like I didn't know what I was doing, which is a really – I don't like that... that feeling at all. I mean... um... I never would have done the computer labs on my own, if it had been up to me, you know what I mean?

In another incident, Becky had compiled all of the student grades that she had assigned during her time as student teacher, and wanted to incorporate them into Anne's overall grade book for the six weeks period. Anne procrastinated on her end, and left Becky in a situation where she had to fill out grade sheets with incomplete information. Students were panicking, trying to turn in copies of their previous work at the last minute, which Becky obviously could not grade in time. Becky wound up turning in the incomplete grade sheets and leaving it to Anne to sort out later. The students wound up very upset, and Becky was distressed as well:

I felt like it made life way more stressful than it should have been. And the kids were mad at me because she wasn't there and I was having to turn all these grades in.

The students were possibly able to sense Anne's apathy, because they responded to Becky much more positively than they did to Anne. The students frequently told Becky that they preferred her, and that they would be “super-depressed” when she had to return the class to Anne. The normal confusion and stress of switching between host teacher and student teacher was exacerbated by Anne's apathy and the students' preference for Becky. At one point during her student teaching, Becky actually turned the

class back over to Anne for a week, so that she could work on finishing her Master's report. In an odd reversal of roles, the students seemed to "tune out" their regular teacher during this time:

...they would come up to me and they were feeling like I had just left them floundering, basically. Um, they didn't like their host – they didn't like my cooperating teacher. They bombed her tests, partly because I think they weren't... they weren't taking her seriously, you know?

Becky did gain some benefit from her time working with Anne. Becky discovered that her technique of giving oral re-tests did not work as well for Anne's General Biology class as it did for Becky's AP Biology class, and so Becky eventually adopted Anne's method of having students submit test corrections. Becky felt that Anne was a very good lecturer, and had a great rapport with students, at least at the start. Becky tried to incorporate some of the more fun elements from Anne's lectures into her own.

She's helped me, I think, loosen up more, although I was never really uptight. I'm always up to have fun with my kids, but she's make that even more so.

Becky's other host teacher, Beth, was of even less help than Anne. She was not even supposed to be Becky's host teacher. Beth was absent for most of the semester because of health problems, and Becky essentially took complete charge of her class. The head of the Biology Department at Becky's host school also had concerns about the quality of Beth's teaching, and Becky suspected that those concerns also drove the decision to give Becky complete control of the class. In fact, the Honors Biology class that Beth was supposed to teach had been suffering from severely declining enrollment, and students had to be actively recruited into the class. Becky got the impression that Beth was acquiring a very bad reputation among students:



From what I've heard... she doesn't have the content knowledge and... for some reason the kids just don't... Again, they tell me that she's a nice person; they just don't like her as a teacher. They aren't shy about telling their friends whether or not the class is worth taking.

Once Beth returned from her medical leave, Becky turned the class back over to her, without having ever seen Beth teach. It was, in Becky's words, a "real weird situation." Once she returned to being teacher of record, Beth seemed to be content to just ride the semester out. Her lackadaisical attitude – for example, she would allow students to do whatever they wished during laboratory periods and even have a pizza party – made things very difficult for Becky and the other teachers that wanted to get serious work done.

After talking with her fellow student teachers Becky concluded that many if not most of them had had experiences with their host teachers that were useless at best, detrimental at worst. She questioned the apparent strategy employed by her University supervising professor of making the placement of student teachers in diverse, challenging school environments a top priority. Becky believed that the emphasis should have been on placing student teachers with talented host teachers that wanted to be good mentors:

I think a lot of people missed out because they were placed in a school that was diverse, but they had a crappy student teacher – er, cooperating teacher.

All in all, despite the problems with her host teachers, Becky had what she characterized as a "good experience" as a student teacher. In many ways she felt as if she had a distinctly better experience than many members of her cohort:

I mean, the cooperating teachers could have been better, but it wasn't a big disaster by any means. I mean, I didn't leave saying, "God, I never want to

teach again.” Which was, I think, the response of some of my other fellow student teachers; so it certainly could have been worse.

### **Getting Useful Input and Feedback**

Although she felt that her host teachers could have been much better mentors to her, she was grateful to have gotten useful feedback from two sources: the University teaching assistant who evaluated her, and the head of the biology department at her host school. The graduate student teaching assistant, himself a teacher of some years, was able to offer Becky helpful tips on making her class run more smoothly. For example, he suggested that she create a rotating student helper position, to assist her in organizing daily activities. He also suggested that she keep a file of written class materials, so that students who missed a day of class could quickly retrieve the assignments they missed. The file system worked so well that other instructors would send their students into Becky’s class to get materials.

The graduate student also observed Becky’s class and provided Becky with feedback on her performance. Becky was leery of this evaluation process at first; she professed concern that an evaluator might not be able to make a fair assessment of a teacher based on a handful of observations, and that the sheer presence of an evaluator would create a skewed situation in the classroom. However, in the end she felt that her evaluator was fair, and gave nothing but constructive criticism. He gave Becky solid advice about areas of potential improvement, such as a self-professed problem that Becky had with bringing closure to topics. He also provided a great deal of positive feedback, which boosted Becky’s morale:

And it was also mostly positive, which really helped. I mean, this semester was really, really hard, and for him to have... for him to come in and give me, you know, positive comments and feedback about what I was doing helped tremendously.

The greatest source of advice and feedback to Becky during her student teaching was a man she dubbed her “mentor teacher.” He was not Becky’s host teacher in the usual sense, as she never took over his class, but he did observe her classes and provide critique. He was a former District Teacher of the year, and the head of the Biology Department at Becky’s host school, so Becky greatly valued his input. He provided her with many of the materials for her Honors Biology class, and they had many collegial conversations about teaching. She wished that she could have observed him more often in the classroom, but the crushing time constraints she found herself under prevented this. She greatly looked forward to working with her mentor over the summer on curriculum development, and as a full colleague the following fall.

### **Developing Essential Skills**

Becky felt strongly that her unusual situation of teaching a single class of her own from the beginning of the semester helped her to develop as a teacher more than a traditional teaching assignment would have. She felt that she was able to “ease into” teaching and establish a solid foundation for her future teaching assignments. She confessed that she would have felt much more nervous about the prospect of preparing for a full-time teaching career if the limited exposure of a student teacher was all that she had under her belt.

Becky admitted that the semester had been a very difficult one because of all the things she had to do. In addition to teaching one class as instructor of record on top of student teaching, she was also working to complete her Master’s thesis. She considered it the most stressful semester of her entire academic career. Even working long hours as a graduate student laboratory assistant could not compare, because she was being pulled in so many different directions:

I worked in the lab usually 60 to 70 hours a week, and it still was not as stressful as dealing with this semester... I think it was just the combination of things I had to do. In the lab I just had to be in the lab, and... here I have to do like umpteen bazillion different things and keep them all straight and... you know. And being responsible for a class of kids is a stressful thing in itself.

Despite the extreme difficulty, Becky was glad of the opportunity to have a class all to herself. She felt that she was able to develop her skills as a teacher in an authentic situation. At the end of the school year, she was very confident in her decision to become a teacher because of her full year of experience teaching one class.

The most persistent piece of advice that Becky received about teaching was to “get organized.” However, she had little in the way of advisors or role models in this regard, since by their own admission, her host teachers and mentor were not very well organized people. Over the summer, they were planning to meet to find ways to “organize each other.” In the meantime, Becky engaged in a constant, ongoing struggle to develop her organizational skills, a process fraught with trial and error. To her chagrin, she was unable to get her lesson plans done as far in advance as she would have liked, and many times she did not know exactly what she was going to do on a given day. She also had difficulty developing a system for recording grades and keeping track of attendance.

The organizational experience that Becky was able to get teaching just one class was invaluable to her. This was one of many instances where Becky was grateful for her unusual situation. She was already working many hours to develop lesson plans for one class; she could not imagine the stress of creating lesson plans for a full load of classes. She did not feel that she could have gotten the same chance to develop her lesson plans and organizational skills from a traditional student teaching experience:

I think having a full year's worth of, you know, lesson plans and grading and all that kind of stuff to take care of, all the administrative crap to do is really important. Um, because that's a big part of teaching, that you don't really get the full experience of in student teaching I don't think. Um, some probably do, but most don't, because they don't have to.

Becky also felt that she needed to develop the ability to establish a rapport with her students. To Becky, the ability to communicate on the students' level is one of the most important skills a teacher can have. A teacher must strive to get across what she is trying to teach by encouraging students to be receptive. To accomplish this, Becky believed that a teacher must have empathy for her students, and must always demonstrate that empathy. In Becky's opinion, caring for students included the willingness to find out students' needs and desires, and take those needs and desires into account when preparing class material. She proposed that if students can tell that a teacher cares about them and takes the time to relate to them, they may be more open to learning. She admitted, however, that caring might not be enough, conceding that it is "necessary, but not sufficient."

Once again, Becky felt that she benefited from being in charge of a small class from the beginning of the school year. She was able to get to know her students much more thoroughly than she would have during a brief traditional student teaching assignment. She discovered that a great many of her students were experiencing stress from matters unrelated to their school work, and she was able to take these stresses into account and be flexible with the students. Having the time and opportunity to build a relationship with her students was very important to Becky's success.

Becky felt that a good knowledge base is another important segment of a teacher's repertoire. She felt very comfortable talking with her students about cellular and molecular biology, since she was immersed in that subject matter during her undergraduate and graduate studies. Becky believed that teachers should not even

attempt to hide their lack of knowledge when a student asks them a question they cannot answer, but rather confess their ignorance and promise to help the student find the answer. She recognized that even a newly minted teacher such as herself with an advanced degree could still be unaware of some aspects of the current state of scientific knowledge:

Or say, “I don’t know if we know the answer to that question. You know, I know there’s research being done on it, and there’s a lot of stuff that we just don’t know.” And you know, I think that’s an acceptable answer, um, if you then go find out, and see if you really do know the answer, because, I mean, it’s been two years since I’ve been in graduate school, and I’m sure a lot has changed since then.

In Becky’s opinion, an effective teacher must have a thorough knowledge base, or at least be able to access information when needed. She commented that a great many of the teachers at her host school, including teachers in the biology program, still seemed to not know very much about what they were teaching. She believed that this lack of knowledge was evident to many of the students, who would stay away from a class “in droves” if a teacher developed a reputation for poor command of the subject matter. Becky saw no excuse for a teacher to be unable to answer a student’s question, because information is so readily accessible.

### **Reflections on Preservice Education**

Generally speaking, Becky did not find her preservice education classes useful, for a number of reasons. For example, Becky did not find the work in her preservice classes to be particularly challenging. Like many of her fellows, she dismissed the classwork as mere “busywork,” and the subject matter as trivial and mostly “common sense.” She did not consider her education courses as even “on the same plane” as her science courses.

While she prepared diligently for her science content courses, she never felt the need to prepare for her education classes:

Um, in education it just seemed so... (sighs) like you could read the book and know everything you learned in your education classes within an hour. Whereas in science classes, I would actually get something out of going to class or if I skipped a class of whatever, reading the book. But you had to read the book – you couldn't walk into a test in science and take it... take it completely blind, without having some kind of preparation for it. Um, in education there weren't even any real tests or anything, (laughs) I mean, your test was how well you did in the classroom, obviously, but I don't think that that was one of the things that was even really stressed in the classes, so I dunno...

Becky never experienced the same levels of cognitive dissonance or intellectual challenge that she experienced in her science content courses. She never felt that she had to employ higher order thinking processes, such as analysis and synthesis, with the material in her education classes, characterizing it as “take it in and spit it back out kind of stuff.” Becky found herself motivated by challenge, and so was very unenthusiastic about her education classes:

Um, and I think it's that feeling that, for most of the people in our science class, we were extremely frustrated, because we had been through... You know, most of the people in there have been through... the past two years were generally pretty tough, I think, and, for me, I don't do well in classes that aren't challenging. I tend to blow them off, and that happened in my education classes. I had no interest in doing any of that kind of stuff (laughs) because it was just so boring and easy, and it just seemed silly, y'know?

Although she did not find her education courses intellectually challenging, she did find many of them work-intensive, adding to an already busy schedule. She felt that she was putting far more time into her education classes than into her science content courses, yet getting far less that she could use out of them. Becky could not understand why she had to invest so much time and energy in something that gave her so little in return:

I mean, if I had spent as much time studying for my science classes as I had doing busywork for my education classes, I would have had a 4.0, but... I dunno what... their preoccupation is with all that... stuff you have to do, but... oh well... I guess it's because they feel the need to give you a grade, which I don't like either, so... (laughs)

When she began her teaching assignments, the time crunch Becky's education classes become even more acute. She felt that having to devote so much time to the "busywork" of her education classes took away from her opportunities to learn from her student teaching. Finally, she made the decision to put her students first, and let her own classwork go by the wayside if need be:

I mean I had to blow off some of my education classes, some of the assignments and things like that, because, you know, when I'm given a choice between preparing for class or turning in a two page report on some BS, I've gotta prepare for class. I mean, to me that's not an option.

Another complaint that Becky leveled about her education courses was what she saw as an excessive degree of repetition in subject matter. She felt that she and her fellow students were never able to get into a topic in depth, because they kept returning to the same shallow topics over and over. In many instances, the coverage was so superficial, Becky made the analogy to "stuff that comes like out of Dateline NBC." Some topics would be covered in multiple courses, but never in any depth:



...a lot of 'em covered the exact same issues that we had covered, you know, in at least one other class, if not two classes. Like all this gender bias and – gender bias was a big thing.

Becky felt that her education classes were much too concerned with theory, and not concerned enough with practical applications for the science classroom. As a result, much of what was said in class was, in Becky's words, "in one ear and out the other." Becky was bewildered by the paucity of practical applications:

And it seems to me like it would be very easy for them to come up with ideas to just take the theory and apply it and give us practical stuff using this theory, you know?

It seemed to Becky that the education courses she took were too "generic," and largely unconcerned with the specific challenges and issues of science teaching. She guessed that the strategy was for the education classes to give students information applicable to teaching any subject, and that the students were supposed to pick up ideas for teaching their specific subject from their host teachers. Becky noted, however, that many host teachers did not hold up their end of this bargain. She often felt that she had to pull "stuff out of thin air" for her teaching, with very little guidance or preparation from her preservice classes. She did pick up a few ideas she could use, from her fellow student teachers and from the graduate student teaching assistant, but most of what she saw in her education courses was too general to be useful.

Becky had as low an opinion of the teachers of her preservice classes as she did of the classes themselves. She was amazed that professors who were supposed to be helping her learn to be organized modeled such poor organizational skills themselves. At least one of her professors seemed to have a poor grasp of the subject matter for the class. She felt that the poor quality of her education professors was "inexcusable," and professed great confusion at the paradox of education professors that were such poor educators:

I would not hold up any of... any of my education teachers as being an example of a good teacher. And I've been through a lot of teachers. [T]hey fell far short of being really good, memorable professors, which is... which I don't understand at all. I mean, these people are education majors, and must have their doctorate in some sort of education field, I would imagine.

Becky did not have a high opinion of her preservice education classes in general, but she did find some aspects useful. Both the textbook and the professor for her classroom management course provided her with helpful advice. She felt that the professor was one of the few high quality and authentic education professors she had, and displayed her years of actual classroom experience in the sound advice she gave. Although the general good nature and high level of motivation in her students precluded her actually having to apply most of what she learned about classroom management, she was glad to have the information for her future career. She did complain, however, that most of the hypothetical situations presented in her classroom management class were too extreme to be very useful for overcoming the daily obstacles many teachers face:

We mainly talked more about really severe cases, though, like a kid's threatening me with a knife, or something like that, you know? Um, which is obviously kind of unlikely. Um, I mean, yeah, it's good to be prepared, but still... Like, for instance, if someone were to tell me to shut up, or to call me a name or something, I wouldn't really know how to deal with that. That's the kind of stuff that I could see happening, 'cause I would just be like, "Oh, God, what am I supposed to do now?"

In Becky's view, the biggest saving grace of her preservice classes was the opportunity for extensive interactions with her fellow student teachers. She could share demonstrations and lesson plans with members of her cohort, and although some students

had a tendency to monopolize classroom discussion, she found the discussions very valuable. She wished that her instructors had made more effort to facilitate and control extensive sharing and discussion sessions. Many times she would be frustrated when this fruitful “sharing mode” would be cut short by the need to deal with the repetitive busywork (colorfully described by Becky as “some crap we already knew”) that cluttered her education courses. Becky felt that these discussions were the biggest – and almost the only – reason to feel positive about her education classes:

On a scale of 1 to 10, I’d say like a 2. Well, the only reason it gets a 2 is because I think that I got... I did get some valuable information from the fellow student teachers. But in general I feel like I got... pretty much nothing from my education classes that’s going to help me in teaching.

Instead of being merely critical, Becky offered suggestions for improving the certification process. She advocated eliminating or combining a majority of the education curriculum, or at least spreading the classes out more over a prospective teacher’s academic career. Having education classes earlier would have two benefits according to Becky: not only would the crucial climactic student teaching semester be free of distracting classes, but prospective teachers could get an idea about whether or not they wanted to pursue a teaching career earlier in their schooling. Becky believed that student teachers would benefit greatly from doing their student teaching for fewer classes, but over the whole school year, to give them the same opportunities for learning and reflection that she had in her “unusual” situation. She also proposed that prospective teachers should observe and work in a wider variety of schools and grade levels, since that would increase the possibility of observing many instances of quality teaching:

...because I know a lot of people had just too... you know, they just observed the fall semester, and so they’re student teaching this semester, so they were basically just seeing two teachers. And I don’t really think that’s enough, because, you know a quarter of those people had horrible

teachers in one or the other, and some of them probably had horrible teachers in both.

Becky felt that she gained far more benefit from her year of actual classroom teaching than she did from any and all of her education courses. She stated that if she had to do her certification over again, she would have gotten into an alternate certification program. Her summative opinion of her education classes was telling in its terseness:

I'm trying to think of an example of where it was helpful, and I'm having a hard time, if that gives you any idea.