

- JOHN MERROW “Making the Grade, the adventures of rookie teachers in New York City. In 2000, teaching fellows made \$31,500 a year. Today’s teaching fellows earn \$42,512.
- Here’s part two of “Making the Grade.”
- JIM LEHRER Finally tonight, our second report on four new teachers in New York City's public school system. Special education correspondent John Merrow visited them again last month.
- JOHN MERROW Unable to find enough qualified teachers for its worst public schools, New York City set up a crash program -- one month of training for these 350 men and women. Called teaching fellows, they're earning \$31,500 a year and getting free tuition toward a master's degree in return for a two-year commitment.
- TEACHER Take three minutes to go into those groups.
- JOHN MERROW Ten of the teaching fellows were assigned here, PS-25 in this Bedford-Styvesant section of Brooklyn. It's a kindergarten through eighth-grade school with 750 students.
- DANA GOLDBERG That's two p's in a row, pumpkin pie.
- JOHN MERROW Among the four were Dayna Goldberg, who earned a journalism degree in college; Scott Smith, once a lawyer for a mortgage bank; Renee Cason, a former Americorps volunteer; and Jack Nastasi, a recent college graduate with a degree in finance. By mid September, all four rookies were feeling a growing sense of mastery and control.
- JACK NASTASI (teaching) So where would the 2 go? It would go on the back of the row.
- JACK NASTASI I feel completely comfortable walking in there now everyday. I'm sure my lesson plans aren't 100 percent great yet, but I'm learning and I'm trying my best. I think I'm doing all right.
- JOHN MERROW I've been watching you working with the math or the manipulatives, you seem more relaxed.
- RENEE CASON As I'm getting used to them, it was really good and they understood the concept which I was like, yes! I don't want to re-teach this and they understood it because I think they can work with their hands and figure it out. It was really challenging, I thought. I was happy about it.
- SCOTT SMITH Those are your eight regions.

- SCOTT SMITH I'm feeling better today than I did last week. So it really changes from day to day. It varies a lot. You know, things happen. And sometimes good things happen; sometimes not so good things happen.
- DAYNA GOLDBERG Okay. So we're having a lunchroom competition. Whoever behaves the best in the whole lunchroom wins the competition.
- DAYNA GOLDBERG My kids are fine. I think I'm in control of my classroom. And in my classroom, it's wonderful. Close my door, it's our own little world.
- JOHN MERROW New teachers never know when the principal might come into the classroom to watch them teach. On this day in early October, Leroy Johnson, principal of PS-25 paid a visit to each of our teaching fellows.
- RENEE CASON I'm not threatened by the principal coming in. I mean, hopefully he's going to help me. Anything he says is going to be criticism that can help me become a better teacher.
- LEROY JOHNSON I think that she's shown some growth. The classroom climate was certainly a lot more calmer. She didn't seem to be like having to get order.
- SCOTT SMITH The brief and stirring speech Lincoln gave on that day became known as the Gettysburg Address.
- JOHN MERROW Will you get together with Mr. Smith?
- LEROY JOHNSON Yes, I will.
- JOHN MERROW What will you say to him?
- LEROY JOHNSON I'll say you're on the money. You're heading in the right direction. I will tell him that I'm impressed with his ability... with the content of his social studies, but now I want to begin to plan with him on how to do cooperative learning in the classroom so kids can be more involved and more engaged in the lesson. He has to gain confidence in the students' ability to do the work. And many times teachers find they talk and talk throughout their period and they feel more in control.
- SCOTT SMITH That's a good point. I think that it's important to interact with the students and to get their thoughts and maybe there was a little bit too much one-way teaching.
- DAYNA GOLDBERG What's an "A" word you want to use?

- JOHN MERROW You sat in on Dayna Goldberg's second-grade class. What are your observations?
- LEROY JOHNSON Well, the students were engaged in an activity; they had to write the letter A, capital A, and a small letter A, and then they had a box where they had to write a sentence. So she's right on target with her work in that regard. I want to make sure that she assists the students individually more because they're just so young -- to begin to make sure each student feels a sense of accomplishment in writing their letters as well as their sentences. So they'll feel like, wow, we did it. You build on those successes each day.
- JACK NASTASI It all has something to do with something but I'm looking for something...
- LEROY JOHNSON I'm impressed with his students actually. They're very eager as in all the classes we observed today. The students are very eager to respond and give an answer. Right or wrong, they just answer. That's good for a teacher. That shows that the teacher is doing something right.
- JACK NASTASI The right idea but I'm looking for one word. Louise? Excuse me? Well, it could be a couple of different ones. It depends on how....
- STUDENT Like what?
- JACK NASTASI I'm trying to make this as simple as possible.
- LEROY JOHNSON He got a little stuck in doing the vocabulary. Normally what we ask teachers to do is list the vocabulary words, the definitions and the sentences. He didn't have definitions so when it came to the word "intensity," he sort of was like inventing a meaning on the spot.
- JACK NASTASI Yeah, I was having a problem with that. You know why? Because beforehand on the word meanings I look up the words in the dictionary. Intensity and magnitude have almost the same meanings. Sometimes it's hard to articulate myself in kiddie language. The thing going in my mind is that I don't want him to say I'm doing a bad job.
- JOHN MERROW Jack and the other teaching fellows are idealistic. They know that PS-25 is a bad school and they're determined to change the reality. They weren't worried about the school's image but visitors were coming from the office of the district superintendent.
- DAYNA GOLDBERG We had professional development last Thursday. And we were supposed to be doing professional development: develop professionally. And instead the whole afternoon was spent in our classrooms. This is supposed to be here. That's supposed to be here. They're coming tomorrow. Come on,

come on, come on. I'm just like, well, do you care what's going on in my classroom or do you care how it looks?

JOHN MERROW

Dayna Goldberg wasn't the only teaching fellow who spent a lot of time preparing for the outsiders.

RENEE CASON

Why would you put on a show and have people think that these kids are so great, they write so well. No, they don't. Why don't we work on just plain work that's made some real effort, you know, they really tried hard. Maybe it's not perfect. But, hey, that's the best they could do right now -- not to say that's all we expect from them but that's the best they could do right now?

SCOTT SMITH

In my opinion there was an excessive preoccupation with the bulletin boards.

RENEE CASON

You can't make any mistakes on the bulletin board. Everything has to be perfect, which is really nuts to me. But I'll go with that because that's what they want here.

JOHN MERROW

We actually saw teachers making the changes themselves.

RENEE CASON

Yeah. That's actually the truth. That's how it works. The way it's corrected here is the kids... They probably don't know, that -- wow I wrote it so perfectly. No you didn't. But somebody mysteriously came around, changed it for you and made it look good for the people.

DAYNA GOLDBERG

Friday is when everybody came. And they came into my classroom and my kids were sitting quietly. We were doing a lesson. Everything looked fine but they didn't even look at the kids. They looked at... they walked around the room and looked at my bulletin boards. Are we here for bulletin boards or are we here for the kids?

JOHN MERROW

Veteran principal Leroy Johnson has a different perspective on visitors.

LEROY JOHNSON

They're really here to help us to get done what we do in school, so they're not outsiders, per se. These people are really here to help; they're not here as an aha, I got you; they're here really to help us.

SCOTT SMITH

Many people including myself before I started teaching may have had the impression that teachers are completely in charge of the classroom and what goes on there. Maybe in an ideal world, that might happen. But in the real world, we have constraints.

- JOHN MERROW Scott Smith and the others romanticized teaching when they started. That's fading.
- RENEE CASON There's a lot that needs to be changed here. There's a lot in terms of we don't have science textbooks right now for the fourth graders and they take a fourth-grade science test this year.
- DAYNA GOLDBERG Well, people have 9 to 5 jobs. They go in at 9, they go home at 5. That's it. They leave their work at work. I come here. I'm here at between 7:15 and 7:30. Last night I left at 6:30. And I go home and I was up until 10 or 11 doing lesson plans. It's a job from 7 to 11.
- RENEE CASON This is a tough job. This is tough. You've got to deal with administration. You've got to deal with the fact that there's no books. You've got to deal with all these little rules they have around here. It's like which one of us is going to leave?
- JOHN MERROW The unexpected is very much a part of a teacher's life, as another teaching fellow fifth grade teacher Janice Wright discovered.
- JANICE WRIGHT I really don't want to talk about the incident that much. There was a fight between two students and I was trying to intervene and do what was right for my class and for the students to prevent from others from getting hurt.
- DAYNA GOLDBERG I respect her immensely because to come in the next day, I don't know if I would do that. I mean, she was punched in the face. I would be hysterical. I would at least take the next day off.
- JANICE WRIGHT I really have come to love the kids in my class. And I think there has been a lot of changes, people coming in and out of their lives teaching. I just didn't want to see that happen to them. So there was really no reason for me to quit over the incident.
- RENEE CASON To me that's disrespect. That means that the kids don't seem to care about themselves. They want to hurt their teacher who comes here trying to teach them everyday. I mean, you know, that's off the wall. If somebody did that to me, I would just have to leave.
- JOHN MERROW Do you feel like a hero because you did that?
- JANICE WRIGHT No. I just put it behind me frankly.
- JOHN MERROW You said you wondered who's next. It sounds a little bit like "Survivor."

- RENEE CASON And it is. I'm like I hope I survive. I hope I survive, because you don't know. You come in here everyday. You know, I'm like, yes, I'm ready. Then something could happen to you and you would be like why am I here?
- SCOTT SMITH Many people, if they were going to leave, they probably would have done so by now.
- DAYNA GOLDBERG I have my good days and my bad days. I'm not going anywhere. This is my job, and this is what I'm going to do.
- JACK NASTASI I'll tell you one thing, I'm not going to be the loser. So if you keep coming around for two years until they tell me I can't be here anymore, I'll be here. And I'll guarantee you that most of us aren't going anywhere.
- JOHN MERROW We will be back.
- JACK NASTASI And I'll be here waiting.
- JIM LEHRER Yes indeed we'll be back. John Merrow will, in fact, return periodically to New York Public School Number 25 during this school year, and will update us on the progress of these four teachers.
- JOHN MERROW Next week we'll podcast part three of "Making the Grade." We hope you'll join us.