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Exploring the needs and perceptions of first-year Latter-Day Saints (LDS) daily seminary teachers

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EXPLORING THE NEEDS AND PERCEPTIONS OF FIRST-YEAR LATTER-DAY SAINTS
(LDS) DAILY SEMINARY TEACHERS

By

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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative study that explores the needs and perceptions of a small sample of first-year, Latter-day Saints, daily seminary teachers in the Portland and The Dalles areas in Oregon. Using semi-structured personal interviews as the main research design at the beginning and the conclusion of a semester and teacher journal entries throughout the semester, the researcher examines their experience. By understanding their needs and perceptions, the best available training could be offered to new teachers.

The findings suggest that these teachers desire to grow spiritually and become effective teachers by keeping students on the right track. Teachers felt overwhelmed by the call to teach seminary. Consistent with much of the existing literature, the analysis of the data showed the participants identified other teachers as a vital resource to navigate their first year. They need training and practice on how to plan daily lessons effectively, the best teaching methods for engaging teenagers early in the morning, and the opportunity to experience classroom observations and receive feedback. Future research may consider how induction programs nurture learning communities amongst seminary teachers and/or how multi-levels of support with a unified vision can be made available to new teachers.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God, my family and all seminary teachers everywhere who have served, who are currently serving and who will yet be called to teach the youth.

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CHAPTER 1

Problem Statement

Introduction

Every year educational and religious organizations welcome through their doors first-year teachers. Each individual first-year teacher comes with a set of life experiences, strengths, weaknesses, needs, desires and expectations (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Wlodkowski, 2008). They hope to make a difference in the lives of young people.

New teachers can be found in public and private schools, some are first-year teachers in Christian private schools. They can also be found throughout church educational systems. This particular investigation will focus on first-year Latter-day Saints (LDS) daily seminary teachers.

Daily seminary teachers are adult men or women appointed from among the faithful active members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church). Church stake leaders choose, and appoint these individuals to serve as religious educators of LDS youth attending high school. This is a non-paid position, and although no stipulated period of service is required, it is expected that a seminary teacher will serve for at least a year and ideally for four years.

The seminary curriculum is a four year experience where the gospel of Jesus Christ is taught and discussed from the scriptures. The curriculum for each year includes the following:

Year one: The Old Testament

Year two: The New Testament

Year three: The Book of Mormon

Year four: Doctrine and Covenants and Church History

Students spend an entire school year studying one book of scripture. By the time the student graduates, he or she will have completed the study of all four books. The objective of this seminary program is to help the youth understand and rely on the teachings and atonement of Jesus Christ, finding applications for their lives that will help them become disciples of Christ.

It is expected that seminary teachers prepare and teach students a daily gospel lesson when high school is in session. Seminary classes are taught before or after high school classes at a nearby Church building.

Daily seminary teachers come from all walks of life. They include professionals, technicians, housewives, college students and others. Some of the seminary teachers have had previous professional teaching experience. First-year daily seminary teachers are called and set apart by their stake priesthood leaders before they begin serving.

The researcher of this study is a professional Seminaries and Institutes of Religion (S&I) administrator and coordinator of daily seminary teachers. Every year he faces challenges and opportunities to teach and train first-year LDS daily seminary teachers. Even though there are some in-service materials to assist these first-year teachers, there is sparse research to examine the magnitude of their desires, needs and perceptions. This study will seek to better understand their needs and perceptions to eventually provide the best available training.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore the needs and perceptions of first-year Latter-day Saints (LDS) daily seminary teachers. Using personal interviews at the beginning and the conclusion of a semester and teacher journal entries throughout the semester, the researcher determined the needs, issues, concerns, and challenges of a small sample of daily seminary teachers as they progressed through a semester of seminary classes. The objective of the investigation was to gain greater insight into the needs and issues faced by adults who are appointed to teach youth for the first time in order to provide training to serve them better.

Research Questions

Given the purpose and research design identified in the problem statement, this investigation endeavored to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the general characteristics or patterns associated with this sample of first-year LDS daily seminary teachers?
- 2) What do first-year LDS daily seminary teachers identify as desires and needs at the beginning of the year?
- 3) What specific assistance do the participants identify as would have benefited their teaching experience at the conclusion of the first semester?
- 4) What are the perceptions of the participants about the induction and training programs offered to them?

Key Terms

Active Member: Someone who strives to follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ and also attends and participates in regular church meetings.

Calling: It is the appointment to an assignment of responsibility given by a church leader to a member of the church who may elect to accept it voluntarily.

Church Educational System (CES): It is the umbrella for all educational programs in the Church. It provides world-wide education through higher education institutions, secondary schools and religious instruction in the seminary and institute programs for the LDS Church.

Daily Seminary: Classes of religious instruction for youth ages 14-18 held before or after school hours each day school is in session. The recommended class length is 50 minutes. These classes are typically taught by a stake-called teacher.

Daily Seminary Teachers: They are members of the church appointed as teachers by local church leadership.

In-service: Monthly teacher improvement training for seminary teachers, usually one to two hours in length.

Local Priesthood Leader: Men who hold the priesthood at the local level (ward and stake) and have presiding responsibilities over the Church programs.

LDS Church: It is an abbreviated title for the official name of “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”, commonly called the “Mormon Church” or “Mormons.”

LDS: An acronym referred to those persons who are members of “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” –commonly called “Mormons.”

Seminary: It is a four year religious educational program for LDS high school students ages 14-18 years old. It is open to teenagers of all faiths. Three types of seminary programs are currently available for non-school credit. They are: released-time, daily seminary and home-study. Classes are taught by both full-time instructors and stake-called teachers. There are approximately 375,000 seminary students worldwide (*Seminaries and institutes of religion annual report for 2012, 2012*).

S&I: An acronym for the religious educational arm of the LDS Church known formally as “Seminaries & Institutes of Religion” that provides world-wide instruction for seminary age youth (ages 14-18) and young adults (ages 18-30). The S&I name change occurred in 2008 to distinguish it from BYU and other church-owned schools.

S&I Coordinator: A full-time S&I employee preferably with a master’s degree that observes, trains, teaches and administers religious instruction to stake-called teachers in a geographical S&I Area.

Stake: A regional administrative geographical unit of the Church formed by a group of wards, commonly about five to seven wards. It is presided over by a Stake President. The word “stake” is not a term found in the New Testament, but is taken from Old Testament tent imagery in which the “tent,” or church, is held up by supporting stakes.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS): The LDS Church defines itself as the latter day version of Jesus Christ’s New Testament Church. The Church headquarters is located

in Salt Lake City, Utah, and reports a worldwide membership of over 14 million (see www.lds.org for more information).

Limitations and Delimitations

An important delimitation of this study was that the researcher concentrated solely on the needs and perceptions of first-year daily seminary teachers' experience. Veteran daily seminary teachers, release-time teachers and home-study teachers were not included in this study. Additionally, first-year full time seminary teachers were not included in this research; these are teachers with university degrees and who have been hired to teach professionally for S&I after having undergone a trial period as a volunteer teacher, and a screening and induction program.

This study was also delimited to a small sample of seminary teachers in Portland, Oregon and nearby cities under the professional administrative stewardship of the researcher and other S&I Coordinators. Furthermore, the study was circumscribed in time from the beginning of to the end of a first semester in the 2011-2012 school year.

The research design chosen by the researcher was personal interviews. Personal interviews are effective research tools at getting detailed information from the participants, but one of its limitations is the difficulty to generalize the findings to the larger population of daily seminary teachers.

The researcher strived to write or present the findings of this investigation from an emic perspective; in other words, the researcher attempted to describe the experience of the participants of this study as they see it and interpret themselves. This was a challenge because it is difficult to disregard the values and personal perspectives held by the researcher; however, the

researcher did his best to be professional and faithful in the narration of the story presented by the participants.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Every year thousands of new teachers graduate from schools of education around the country. These first-year teachers come with all kinds of ideas about teaching and learning, plans for their classrooms, concerns and fears about a new environment, and hopes of translating that into an effective practice. School districts around the country seek to transition these new teachers from the role of student to that of teacher as smoothly as possible.

Induction programs have been put into place to ease in this transition since the 1980s, and mentoring has been a crucial part of this process. Mentoring was mandated in 30 states as of 1996, and had been implemented in some form in 47 states by 2003 (Marable & Raimondi, 2007). These induction programs are needed to deal with two commanding concerns: bringing new teachers up to the skill-level of their more experienced colleagues quickly, and retaining them in the profession (Andrews & Quinn, 2005). Because there is an emphasis in teacher accountability highlighted by the demands of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004), the new teachers must immediately be able to complete their assignments with skill so that their students can fair well in nationally recognized assessments of student achievement. In a study by Evans-Andris, Kyle and Carini (2006), it was found that nationally, more than 30% of new teachers leave the classroom within five years; however the study did not specify if that included private schools or public schools only. The most commonly cited reason for leaving the teaching profession was lack of support (Andrews & Quinn, 2005). Other studies have identified as many as 50% of new teachers leaving their careers in their first five years (Plunkett & Dyson, 2011; T. Smith &

Ingersoll, 2004). In fact, 9% of new teachers do not complete their first-year, and 14 % leave after their first year for a variety of reasons (Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007). The likelihood of new teachers leaving their careers is greater than those for more experienced teachers (Burke & Regional Educational Laboratory at Education, 2010). Teacher attrition, retirements and increased enrollment have converged to create a greater demand for teachers (Parker, Ndoeye, & Imig, 2009). The concerns of teacher preparedness and retention can be resolved in great degree by using successful mentoring programs that nurture and build skills of the beginning teachers (Evans-Andris et al., 2006) by helping new teachers improve their teaching effectiveness, and reducing the intensity of the transition into teaching (Wong & Wong, 2009).

This literature review will examine the perceptions of new teachers regarding their needs and wants during their first years of teaching, the need of providing a broader perspective of the educational community to beginning teachers, and consider the suggestions offered to improve induction programs for beginning teachers in public schools and private Christian schools.

Perceptions of New Teachers about their Needs and Wants

Seeking to understand the experience of new teachers takes time and effort. Shulman (2004) studied new teachers to understand their “intellectual biography” (Shulman, 2004, p. 200). For most first-year teachers, the day-to-day challenges of teaching can be overwhelming. Skills in classroom instruction, student discipline, relating to school administrators and parents, keeping up with paper work, and improving student achievement are all things that take time to acquire, and must be done while the novice teacher is also trying to adapt to a new school environment (Evans-Andris et al., 2006; Marable & Raimondi, 2007).

Studies have determined the needs and wants of beginning teachers so that adequate help

can be given. In a study conducted by Andrews and Quinn (2005) which involved 182 first-year teachers in a large school district, first-year teachers were asked if there was a difference in the perceived level of help received between those first-year teachers who had mentors and those who did not. These teachers were required to answer a questionnaire reflecting the needs of beginning teachers in the following areas: help with instruction and curriculum; personal/emotional support; assistance finding resources, supplies and materials; orientation about the school district and the school policies; help with classroom management and discipline; and finally ideas about how to deal with parents (Andrews & Quinn, 2005). The results clearly showed that novices with mentors felt more support, especially in areas concerning orientation to school policies and procedures, and personal/emotional support. However, they did feel that they lacked the needed support in curriculum planning, development of lessons and teacher observations which mattered most to them (Andrews & Quinn, 2005; Graff, 2011).

Marable and Raimondi (2007) asked 326 veteran teachers in New York State to report memories and feelings about their first-year experiences. They shared what factors had been most helpful in their professional development, and where they could have received better support. Again, having a mentor was the most significant kind of help, though the teachers also suggested that networking with colleagues would have been very valuable. They wished they had had “time to meet, talk, team-teach, network, collaborate, complete paperwork, or just ‘bounce ideas around’” (Marable & Raimondi, 2007, p. 33). They also desired additional training in classroom management, curriculum ideas, instructional techniques, and help with special education students. Many of these teachers felt alone and unsupported. The participants suggested the importance of providing more peer support. Those teachers without mentors sought assistance from any other person willing to help including relatives, neighbors, and classroom aids. The need for personal

interaction and guidance is a consistent finding throughout the literature (Barth, 2006; Evans-Andris et al., 2006; Findlay, 2006; Fletcher & Barrett, 2004; Marable & Raimondi, 2007).

The Marable and Raimondi (2007) study highlights the fact that, although beginning teachers may have prior training in teaching methods and practices, the realities of the actual classroom and the relentless grind of the daily routine was overwhelming (Evans-Andris et al., 2006). Many challenging situations, including classroom discipline problems and interactions with hostile parents, cannot be learned in a university classroom setting, and yet these are the situations that will cause new teachers to doubt their career choice.

Evans-Andris et al. (2006) reported that the state of Kentucky provides new teachers with support teams to guide and assist them. Each new teacher is assigned to a trained three-member team including a faculty member from a school of education, a principal and a mentor. The mentor works directly with the beginning teacher throughout the school year, and the team meets together three times a year. The study conducted 55 year-end interviews of new teachers being mentored. The teachers reported that the reality of the demands of their school setting exceeded their expectations. These teachers sought emotional support and teaching assistance. Here again, instructional assistance for lesson planning and presentation was a key need identified by the teachers in this study. The aforementioned concerns were also identified, and they agreed that observation of and collaborative work with more experienced teachers would be of great help. Without establishing a network of colleagues, many new teachers felt isolated and lonely. Therefore, most successful induction programs are those which foster collaboration, reflection, collegiality, openness and trust with other teachers (Baker-Doyle, 2012).

A Broader Perspective of the Educational Community

The research has consistently shown that new teachers need help within a larger context of mentoring. They need to be introduced to the vision of the school, its aims, values and beliefs (Achinsteins, 2006; Gilles, Wilson, & Elias, 2010; Villani, 2002; Wynn et al., 2007). They also benefit from a supportive school administration and from opportunities to network with their peers.

Achinsteins (2006) research focused on helping beginning teachers navigate in the larger organizational and political environment of a school. Using a case study approach over the course of a school year, he interviewed mentors and those they guided. These conversations highlighted the need for mentors to know how to train beginning teachers in the skill of self-advocacy. They also needed to help the novices find their way through the district and school organizational paradigms. The author concluded that looking at mentoring as merely a one-on-one exchange does not address the “interplay between individuals, their political negotiations in response to organizational demands, and the local and the macro policy environments that influences teachers’ and mentors’ work” (Achinsteins, 2006, p. 134). New teachers need many members of the school community collaborating together to support them (Villani, 2002).

In response to the idea that there is a larger context of relationships required for a new teacher, some researchers have proposed the development of a community of inquiry, meaning a forum to allow reflective interaction about educational practices (Taranto, 2011; Young, Bullough, Draper, Smith, & Erickson, 2005). When administrators and teachers alike enjoy a sense of support and belonging, but can also feel secure enough with each other to give and receive constructive criticism, everyone benefits. Other researchers have also made a similar call to pay attention to the broader concept of professional learning communities (Baker-Doyle, 2012; Gilles et al., 2010; He & Cooper, 2011; Taranto, 2011; Wynn et al., 2007).

The goals of a community of inquiry are centered on teacher growth by constant conversations that challenge beliefs and welcome new ones. Consequently, training teachers who are able to approach their work thoughtfully cannot truly be accomplished in only one academic year. Furthermore, it will require constant feedback between the beginning teacher and the mentor to solidify both practical skills and theoretical ideas (Young et al., 2005). This is more of a goal than a reality in some schools. For instance, in a study of 52 first-year teachers, very few participants reported working together with building or district-level administrators to solve school problems (Whitsett, Roberson, Julian, & Beckham, 2007).

Administrators play a vital role in the schools. The administrators exercise great influence in the nature of the mentoring program at their schools, and new teachers look to them for support and guidance (Marable & Raimondi, 2007). A lack of support by school administrators is a significant complaint of beginning teachers at the end of their first year (Marable & Raimondi, 2007). Cross (2011) examined the role of principal in the retention of new teachers, a major finding in this study is that new teachers “often view their principals as too busy to interact with them, offer feedback or be of substantial support” (p. 39). Therefore, these new teachers see themselves less than a priority to the schools. On the other hand, school administrators who strive to create supportive professional learning communities foster greater job satisfaction among new teachers. They also invite them to participate more fully in the overall workings of the school, thus helping the beginning teacher feel as though they are a vital part of a network (Wynn et al., 2007). A good induction program cannot make up for an unhealthy school environment that values competition over collaboration, or that places beginning teachers with mismatched mentors and teaching loads (Young et al., 2005). Furthermore, beginning teachers want more opportunities for professional development and networking with other teachers (Evans-Andris et al., 2006).

Suggestions for Improving Mentoring Programs

Induction is the process of training and assisting new teachers to understand the culture and policies of a given school and to provide them with effective teaching practices that improve student learning. Induction may include orientations, workshops, monthly in-services, seminars, online training and mentoring. “Mentoring is the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in school” (T. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 683).

Induction and mentoring programs varied according to factors such as purpose, context, people served, time, intensity of these programs (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993). Thus, there are as many different induction and mentoring programs as there are schools. Villani (2002) sustains that induction needs to be focused around a vision of good teaching for new and veteran teachers.

The literature consistently suggests some key elements to improve the quality of mentoring. Good mentoring begins with a personal relationship between the mentor and the mentee (Hansman, 2002; Kaiser & National Center for Education, 2011; Maxwell, 2008). It is recommended by Smith and Evans (2008) that a mentor has successful teaching experience in the same subject and grade level as the new teacher; mentors also need to be trained for the performance of their duties; and mentoring programs are to be based on collaboration, reflection, and shared inquiry.

Andrews and Quinn (2005) have found that beginning teachers feel unsupported when there is a mentor mismatch, whether that is because of the mentor teaching at a different grade level or subject. A mentor with the same grade level was the most helpful (Parker et al., 2009). Furthermore, Marable and Raimondi (2007) indicated that beginning teachers felt less support when their mentors were not certified in the same area. These beginning teachers went on to

suggest that they would like mentors placed within the same building, and with the same teaching schedule and breaks to facilitate meetings while not teaching. Arnold- Rodgers, Arnett, and Harris (2008) suggest that having common planning time would allow mentors and beginning teachers vital opportunities to discuss curriculum and instructional issues.

According to Fletcher and Barrett (2004), mentors train new teachers to improve teaching practices. Hence, mentors need to be exemplars of excellence in teaching (Evans-Andris et al., 2006). However, studies by Arnold-Rogers et al. (2008) and Findlay (2006) both show that mentors are typically called to this capacity with minimum training in this role. Among the suggestions given by the former group were the following recommendations for mentors: first, those called to be mentors should be teachers who are willing to mentor others, second, mentors need extra training in their duties and responsibilities, third, mentors should be given opportunities to communicate and reflect on successful and unsuccessful mentoring strategies with other mentors, and fourth, mentors need some type of compensation whether it is release time, stipends or some other form of compensation (T. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Villani, 2002). Andrews and Quinn (2005) suggest two more areas of focus: helping plan lessons and units with their beginning teachers, and mutual classroom observations with feedback afterwards. Further, Sterrett and Imig (2011) suggest that new teachers need to be trained by their mentors on the basics of administrative issues besides curriculum planning and classroom management. Also, new teachers need to use technology as another source for information and nurturing relationships.

Mentors can help new teachers by being positive about teaching, providing emotional support, offering information about the daily operations of the school, introducing students and their families, visiting classroom and providing feedback, collaborating and reflecting, encouraging new teachers to set and meet their own goals, focusing on frequently use and effective teaching

practices (Baker-Doyle, 2012; Stanulis, Little, & Wibbens, 2012; Sterrett & Imig, 2011; Villani, 2002).

As the mentors are trained, they should take time to reflect on the importance of their work and the outcomes desired. The mentors should also explore alternatives in methodology to accomplish their mentoring (Young et al., 2005). Mentors must look beyond what happens in the classroom. They need to see the big picture of the multi-level organizational context in which the classroom operates (Villani, 2002; Williams, 2011).

Achinstein (2006) raises questions about whether or not the mentors should indicate if the system in use is functional or in need of change. Marable and Raimondi (2007) recommended that mentors maintain visibility and contact in order to offer continuing support to the beginning teachers. The objective is to have mentoring programs that focus on developing a professional identity in beginning teachers through collective learning with peers and the application of that learning process in the classroom (T. Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Wynn et al., 2007). Surveys by Fletcher and Barrett (2004) and Andrews and Quinn (2005) also found that mentors help integrate a beginning teacher into the culture of the school through providing collaborations with other teachers, classroom observations, and basic introductions to site and district faculty. When new teachers are given opportunities to contribute their expertise in developing curriculum with other teachers, they feel part of a caring educational community (Findlay, 2006; Gilles et al., 2010; Goodnough, 2006; Youngs, 2007). This trust and networking helps novice teachers overcome feelings of isolation. Additionally, many new teachers rely on those colleagues that work near them or with whom they share a classroom (E. R. Smith & Evans, 2008).

Private Christian Schools

Private Christian schools strive for quality education both academically and spiritually (Baker, 1979). The spiritual formation of students is “paramount, even over academics” (Finn, Swezey, & Warren, 2010, p. 9). Christian education is concerned with things that are eternal and helps in “preparation for a calling and not just a career” (Garber, 2007, p. 89), but a worldview of life (Garber, 2007).

Christian education makes an important contribution because they have freedom to go to places where public schools cannot (Gaebelein, 2009). In this the Christian educator is vital. Christian school teachers are expected to educate students “for a life of responsive discipleship to Jesus Christ” (Van Brummelen, 2009, p. 4). These Christian teachers need to model, while yet imperfectly, what it means to be a lifelong disciple of Christ “ever growing, ever learning, ever becoming – that is perhaps the greatest lesson one can teach” (Galindo, 1998, p. 75). Carrying out the mission and purpose of Christian education rests largely on the shoulders of teachers in Christian schools (Bimler, 1984; Coll, 2009). Teachers in Christian schools view their work as a spiritual ministry, not just a job, and thus their motivations are spiritually based (Brown, 2002). It is Christ working through them (Bimler, 1984; Drexler, 2011; Johnson, 2002; Swertfager, 1984).

Christian education challenges students to learn and understand God, others, their physical environment and invites them to change, to commit, and to walk the path of service. For this to happen, the Holy Spirit must be in the classroom aiding teacher and students for learning to be successful (Van Brummelen, 2009). Christians need each other in community to flourish and grow (Drexler, 2011).

New Teachers at Private Christian Schools

Christian schools face similar problems of new teachers leaving the profession as do their public school counterparts. Administrators in private Christian schools must be proactive in their induction methods to provide supervision and support (Brown, 2002). These new teachers in Christian schools also come with excitement, fears, doubts, and questions. “These are the ones who people in Teacher Education might admit are ‘marginally prepared and scared to death’” (Zillman, 2009, p. 4). They have strong desires for acceptance, security and assurance.

Barz (1998) suspects that new teachers in Lutheran schools may often feel less appreciation and support than their counterparts in public schools. He calls for a more deliberate approach of helping new teachers in their first year. There is a deficit in the literature regarding the experiences of new teachers in private Christian schools as a whole.

The first year of teaching can be an exhilarating, hard, and exhausting time for new teachers (Moulds, 1999; Versemann, 1993). Common first-year experiences includes feeling overworked, under-supported and generally inadequate for the job (Barz, 1998). New teachers need more than theoretical training in such things as lesson planning, classroom management and the art of teaching (Drexler, 2011).

A new teacher reflecting upon her first-year experience, mentioned that having a mentor was her greatest support and that the training she most needed were lesson planning and class observations (Swertfager, 1984). While the most helpful resources are fellow teachers, particularly veteran teachers, principals and administrators are the key to providing a nurturing environment for new teachers (Schulz & Kieschnick, 1991).

New teachers of Christian schools need orientation to the teaching profession and to the particular work of a private Christian education environment (Harvey & Dowson, 2003). Help

with basic administrative issues is recommended (Moulds, 1999).

Assistance with lesson preparation (Swertfager, 1984; Verseemann, 1993), providing class observation time and feedback (Brown, 2002; Drexler, 2011; Moulds, 1999; Schulz & Kieschnick, 1991) are the kind of help most frequently requested.

Induction and Mentoring at Private Christian Schools

Drexler (2011) stated that induction programs are far and few in Christian schools. He asserts that veteran and new teachers can create “vibrant professional learning communities” (p. 3), if given the opportunities.

Administrators of private Christian schools need to cultivate caring relationships with all teachers to foster a feeling of community. Ideally, new teachers can see they are members of a team who work together to meet one another’s needs (Gangel, 2002). Administrators of new teachers need to be “ministers for good by nourishing subordinates, providing gentle oversight, and being examples of effective Christian educators” (Brown, 2002, p. 4).

Since new teachers are adults, the principles of andragogy need to be considered. This means that administrators and mentors need to remember that teachers, as adults, need to know why they are learning something and how it will affect them; they want their contributions from life experiences to be acknowledged; they tend to be hands-on learners, and they want and need to apply new knowledge immediately (Knowles et al., 2005). These adult teachers are capable agents and can create their own vision of a positive first year through God’s help (Johnson, 2002).

The supervision of new teachers requires commitment and time and needs to be a priority. The goal of supervision must be “the growth of teachers and their instructional abilities so that student learning is enhanced ...the target of their evaluation must be improvement, not judgment”

(Brown, 2002, p. 17). This supervision may include mentoring of new teachers by a veteran teacher, two cycles of three classroom visits and conference, one each semester; and occasional one-hour interventions by a supervisor or mentor as needed. Effective administrators can orchestrate the strengths of all teachers to support the whole.

Caring for new teachers means “stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s. When we care we consider the other’s point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us” (Noddings, 2003, p. 24). Meeting the needs of the teachers is the important thing (Harvey & Dowson, 2003; Looney, 2008). It is important to focus on the needs of the teachers when planning induction and mentoring programs. “Many new teachers ‘don’t know what they don’t know’ as they start their careers” (Drexler, 2011, p. 20).

One antidote for an environment of isolation and competition in which many new teachers are found can be the establishment of professional learning communities which focus is on learning (Drexler, 2011). What helps teachers most are multiple level of support. Orientations, mentoring, peer coaching, caring and supportive administrators, personal reflection and listening, monthly in-services, gatherings for new teachers only, listening, observation and feedback, and collaboration (Brown, 2002; Drexler, 2011; Gangel, 2002; Looney, 2008; Moulds, 1999; Schulz & Kieschnick, 1991; Strike & Soltis, 2009; Swertfager, 1984).

Conclusions

Mentoring is an effective induction practice for new teachers because it leads to the improvement of teacher retention and aids in the professional growth of novice teachers. Mentoring has the potential to do good (Kaiser & National Center for Education, 2011). The key is the relationship established between mentor and mentee (Corbell, Reiman, & Nietfeld, 2008).

Beginning teachers need most help in the areas of curriculum development, lesson planning, classroom management and teacher observations. They also need the emotional support of networking with their colleagues.

There are gaps in the research regarding studies in the areas of most critical needs of beginning teachers. First, help is needed to determine what constitutes effective classroom observations and the vital reflections that need to come afterwards (Andrews & Quinn, 2005). Second, there were no studies to determine what effective collaboration on lesson planning might look like for a mentor and novice (Jian, Odell, & Schwille, 2008). Finally, discussions about helping new teachers with classroom management only identified the need, but did little to solve the problem. Future studies could also analyze how to incorporate others, besides the mentor, in the induction of beginning teachers, how to network and foster collaborative work, and how to train mentors effectively. Induction needs to take a holistic approach with varied methods of training new teachers (Villani, 2002; Williams, 2011).

CHAPTER 3

Methods

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research study was to explore the needs and perceptions of first-year LDS daily seminary teachers in Portland, Oregon and nearby cities. Specifically this was a qualitative study that utilized in-depth personal interviews with first-year seminary teachers, and journal entries provided by the teachers throughout a semester of teaching. Then the researcher gathered and analyzed the data and looked for patterns.

In pursuing this purpose, this study endeavored to answer the following four research questions:

- 1) What are the general characteristics or patterns associated with this sample of first-year LDS daily seminary teachers?
- 2) What do first-year LDS daily seminary teachers identify as desires and needs at the beginning of the year?
- 3) What specific assistance do the participants identify as would have benefited their teaching experience at the conclusion of the first semester?
- 4) What are the perceptions of the participants about the induction and training programs offered to them?

In order to fulfill the purpose of this research effort and answer the research questions, the researcher established research protocols. This chapter describes the researcher's

investigative plan including: the setting of the investigation, research design and sampling strategy, research ethics, data collection and analytical procedures, role of the researcher, and potential contributions of the research.

Setting

The researcher conducted his study within three LDS stakes. Two of these stakes were in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area including: Portland and Gresham stakes. The other stake was in The Dalles in the Columbia River Gorge area. The Portland and The Dalles stakes were under the professional supervision of the researcher. The Gresham stake was under the supervision of another S&I coordinator.

At the time of the study, the Portland stake served 76 daily seminary students with nine daily seminary teachers; five of whom were first-year daily seminary teachers. The Gresham stake served 47 daily seminary students with four daily seminary teachers, two of whom were first-year teachers. The Dalles stake served 64 daily seminary students and eight daily seminary teachers, two of whom were first-year daily seminary teachers.

The participants of this study all taught the Old Testament seminary curriculum. All classes were conducted early in the morning each day public school was in session at the corresponding high school.

Research Design and Sampling Strategy

The researcher proposed a qualitative study which employed a research design which included in-depth personal interviews with guided questions conducted in a semi-structured

format with a purposive sample of nine LDS daily seminary teachers. Also, the participants provided answers to prompts via e-mail throughout their first semester of teaching. The interviews were conducted with each teacher individually in a private location at the choice of the participant and lasted between 8 and 28 minutes each. Each participant was interviewed two times. The first round of personal interviews were conducted in August 2011, before the school semester began, and the second round of personal interviews took place toward the end of the first semester in January 2012.

At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire that provided simple demographic and background information about the sample. These questionnaires helped provide context information about the research study (see Appendix A).

The interviews included a limited number of open-ended guide questions posed to every respondent. Each interview was audio recorded, and later transcribed under the supervision of the researcher. All data, recordings, transcripts and teaching journal answers, along with signed letters of consent (see Appendix B), were secured in a locked file and will be destroyed three years after the completion of the dissertation.

These interview guide questions and the teaching journal prompts were created by the researcher. The objective of these questions was to elicit responses from the participants in a conversational style that helped the researcher explore and answer the research questions of this investigation.

All interviews were conducted at the beginning (see Appendix C) and towards the end of the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year (see Appendix D). The teaching journal prompts

were sent periodically via e-mail throughout their first semester of teaching of this same school year (see Appendix E). No further data were collected beyond that time. The data were analyzed by the researcher. The units of analysis in this study were individual LDS daily seminary teachers. Nine participants were selected to participate in this study and were first-year teachers in the 2011-2012 school year.

These first-year teachers were selected and appointed to serve in this capacity by their local priesthood leaders. The researcher did not have a role in the selection process, but did have access to them for the purpose of this investigation after they were appointed as daily seminary teachers.

Targeting Portland, Oregon and nearby cities was an important delimitation of this investigation since these are the geographical areas of professional responsibility for the researcher and other S&I Coordinators. The researcher had access to the participants in this region.

The researcher chose a sample of LDS daily seminary teachers using a purposive sample. This category of sampling sometimes is called judgmental sampling. Purposive sampling are used by researchers, especially when the researchers select units of analysis that represent a specific population based on his/her own judgment or expertise of the population and the nature of the study research (Berg, 2009). Even though purpose sampling has the limitation of not being able to generalize the findings, the researcher deemed it appropriate given the purpose of the investigation to gain greater insight of the needs and issues of first-year LDS daily seminary teachers. Furthermore, the intention of the researcher was not to generalize the findings to a larger population, but to explore issues and perceptions of these first-year teachers.

Research Ethics

All George Fox University and S&I Education Research Committee guidelines and policies for research ethics were followed throughout this investigation. The researcher obtained informed consent from all the participants for the personal interviews of this study. Also, the researcher established procedures to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. For instance, no individual names of the participants was used in the collecting and reporting of the data.

Prior to the collection of the data, the participants were asked to read and sign a letter of consent (See Appendix B). The letter of consent identified and explained the nature and the purpose of the study. It also informed the participants that participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they may decline or opt out at any time during the course of the study. After these letters of consent were signed by the participants, they were stored in a locked file cabinet separated from the data from the interviews.

The personal in-depth interviews were audio recorded. All audio, transcripts of the recordings and teaching journal answers were stored in a locked file cabinet accessed only to the researcher. All information gathered from the in-depth personal interviews and teaching journal were collected and analyzed in a professional confidential fashion and no participant was identified. The researcher ensured confidentiality by not disclosing the names of the participants. All the letters of consent, the audio recordings and transcripts will be personally destroyed three years after completion of the dissertation.

These ethical safeguards were adopted to ensure the safety and rights of research participants. The participants of this research study had the satisfaction of playing an important role in educational research to further discussions to best assist first-year seminary teachers.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedures

The data sources of this study were personal in-depth semi-structure interviews LDS daily seminary teachers at the beginning and towards the end of the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year. The guide questions in these interviews were designed to explore and gain insights about the needs and perceptions of these seminary teachers, and to determine the specific assistance participants identified as would have benefited their teaching experience at the conclusion of their first semester.

There were seven guide questions to begin the study and seven different guide questions at its conclusion. The researcher attempted to ask the guide questions in a rather conversational study and was open to probe subjects not included in the guide questions when necessary. In addition to the guide questions, three teaching journal prompts were given to the participants at different times during the semester.

Personal interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The recordings and the transcriptions were the basis for the analysis of these data. The researcher worked from the data in order to identify themes, and patterns in the perceptions and views of the respondents.

In addition to the interviews, the researcher sent writing prompts via email to the teachers during the course of the semester. These questions and prompts helped the teachers reflect upon

their experiences in the induction process. Their responses were then collected and analyzed along with the interview responses.

The researcher's strategy for analyzing the data was aligned with appropriate processes for analyzing qualitative data given the nature of this research study. For instance, the researcher utilized coding processes to analyze the data. Open coding, axial coding and selective coding served as the processes to organize and interpret the data obtained from the personal interviews including information from the field notes and field journals. As part of open coding the researcher identified all key ideas and patterns; then, in axial coding the researcher looked for emerging categories of similar topics, and finally in selective coding, the researcher looked for relationships, connections and meanings between answers and experiences.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is a graduate student in the Educational Foundations and Leadership Department at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. He was also the sole investigator of this study which is an essential component for his Doctor of Education academic degree. Therefore, the researcher had a vested interest in the successful completion of the research investigation.

The researcher is a full-time S&I employee that oversees the teaching and training for seminaries and institutes in Portland, Oregon and nearby communities, both rural and metropolitan. Professionally, the researcher was interested in exploring the issues faced by new daily seminary teachers so that early and effective support and training can be offered to new first year daily seminary teachers.

The researcher strived to produce objective and scholarly work despite this relationship of trainer/trainee with some of the participants. It was the role of this researcher to present this research project in an honest and ethical manner to all participants.

The researcher was solely responsible for data collection, coding and analyzing the findings. Recommendations were offered regarding the findings for future research endeavors and practical applications.

Potential Contributions of the Research

This research has the potential to provide insights that may lead to improve induction programs within the global organization of Seminaries & Institutes. By so doing, it may increase the retention rate of new teachers and empower them with teaching skills that enable them to match their professional peers in effective teaching strategies. This, in turn, will benefit the students taught because they are receiving a higher grade of religious education. Their experience will be more positive, and the principles learned are more likely to be internalized and applied throughout their lives.

The principles discovered could also apply to other organizations that have first-year teachers like public and private schools. It could definitely increase the literature available to the Church about this topic because currently little research has been conducted with regards to induction programs.

Although this body of research is based on a very small sample, this could start a discussion amongst stake-holders in the S&I organization. Whether it is curriculum writers,

stake coordinators, or local ecclesiastical leaders, there is input here that can be generally applied to benefit the experience of first-year teachers and, by transitivity, their students.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Introduction

This research study endeavored to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the general characteristics or patterns associated with this sample of first-year LDS daily seminary teachers?
- 2) What do first-year LDS daily seminary teachers identify as desires and needs at the beginning of the year?
- 3) What specific assistance do the participants identify as would have benefited their teaching experience at the conclusion of the first semester?
- 4) What are the perceptions of the participants about the induction and training programs offered to them?

This chapter presents the major findings that emerged from the analysis of the data. The researcher took particular effort to be faithful to the voice and experience of the participants in this sample. The data were analyzed in accordance with established research protocols.

As stated in the previous chapter, a total of nine LDS daily seminary teachers participated in this study. Each one of them was interviewed twice. The first round of interviews took place in August 2011 prior to the start of the school year. The second round of interviews took place in January 2012 towards the end of the first semester. Teachers also provided information

throughout the semester by responding to e-mail questions about their perceptions of the trainings they were receiving.

Research Question #1

What are the general characteristics or patterns that associate with this sample of first-year LDS daily seminary teachers?

The researcher chose a sample of nine LDS daily seminary teachers using a sample of convenience. All were selected on the basis that they were first-year teachers in the 2011-2012 school year.

All of these teachers were selected and appointed to serve in this capacity by their local ecclesiastical leaders. The researcher had access to them after they were appointed as daily seminary teachers.

These are some general characteristics associated with this sample of first-year LDS seminary teachers:

Gender.

Gender in the sample was fairly evenly balanced. Four were male teachers and five were female teachers.

Age.

In the sample, the oldest teacher was a 72 years old male, and the youngest teacher in the sample was a 28 years old male. The oldest female teacher was 55 years old and the youngest female teacher was 32 years old. The gap between the oldest and youngest teacher in the sample was 44 years. The sample age average was 43.7 years old.

Ethnicity.

Eight teachers identified themselves as White; among these eight teachers, one identified himself as both White and Asian. One teacher identified herself as a Pacific Islander.

Geographical Location.

These teachers were primarily selected from the greater Portland metro area which included Portland, Happy Valley, Gresham, and the The Dalles. There was also one teacher from White Salmon, WA.

Educational Experience.

The four male teachers had college degrees: two of them had doctoral degrees (Business and Chiropractic), and two had Bachelor degrees. On the other hand, one female teacher had an Associate General Studies degree, three had some college, but did not finish their undergraduate degrees, and the last had not attended any college courses.

Prior Professional Teaching Experience.

None of these teachers had had prior professional teaching experience. However, most of them had non-professional and/or volunteer teaching experience.

Prior Experience with Seminary.

Four of these teachers had graduated from seminary in their youth, and three attended seminary as youth but did not graduate from seminary. They were consequently familiar with the general workings of seminary, at least from the perspective of a student. Two of the teachers had not had any prior experience with seminary, either as a student or as a teacher.

The following Table 1 summarizes the information presented. It represents the sample's basic demographics.

Table 1. Sample's Basic Demographics

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Location	Education	Professional Teaching	Seminary Graduate
Male	28	White	Gresham, OR	BA	No	Yes
Female	48	White	The Dalles, OR	Some college	No	Yes
Male	40	White	Portland, OR	Doctorate	No	No *
Female	44	Pacific Islander	Portland, OR	HS diploma	No	Yes
Female	32	White	Portland, OR	Associates degree	No	No *
Female	43	White	Portland, OR	Some college	No	No *
Female	55	White	Happy Valley, OR	Some college	No	No
Male	72	White	White Salmon, WA	Doctorate	No	No
Male	32	White/Asian	Gresham, OR	BA	No	Yes

* Not a seminary graduate; did attend some seminary as a youth.

Research Question #2

What do first-year LDS daily seminary teachers identify as desires and needs at the beginning of the year?

The researcher conducted the first round of interviews with each of the nine sample participants in August 2011. The interviewees discussed their desires and needs as incoming seminary teachers, including what they hoped to accomplish and what concerns they had entering the classroom.

The experience of LDS daily seminary teachers needs to be understood within the context of their faith in God. The teachers in this sample had served in their congregations in different administrative, educational or service positions before. Each one of them believed and felt that they had been called and commissioned by God through their ecclesiastical leaders to teach seminary.

One of the teachers explained, “You have to have faith that you can do it with the help of the Lord, and have in mind that you are running the Lord’s errand.” The spiritual nature of this work invited a partnership between God and the teacher. These teachers believed that as they strived to learn their duties, divine assistance would come. “I need to live the gospel. I need to obey the commandments in order for me to have the Spirit to guide me.” They believed it would take faith, prayer, study and following the promptings of the Holy Ghost to do the “Lord’s errand.” The general consensus was that “you have let Heavenly Father do His work.”

These teachers felt inadequate and unprepared to teach seminary when they considered their own abilities and experience. Some of the descriptors used to portray their emotions included “scary”, “fear”, “dread”, “frightening”, “very daunting”, “very terrifying.” One teacher

explained the emotions of first-year seminary teachers: “They’re so very human and very nervous, and willing to obey whatever the Lord wants them to do, even if it’s very, very difficult for them.”

Because of the belief that they had been called of God and they were doing the Lord’s errand, these teachers had desires and needs that were somewhat unique from those of teachers in the general or secular population. They tended to be focused on spiritual preparation of themselves and placed reliance on God and their faith above the acquisition of teaching skills. One of the teachers shared the following experience:

My concern is always that I’m not skilled enough, and I know that I always think, “I can’t do this.” As I was running one day, and I was thinking that to myself, “I can’t do this, I can’t do this” ...a thought came to me, it was like, “You’re right, you can’t ...but I CAN. I just need you to show up for me.” So I was like, “Okay, I can do that. I can study the lesson and I can show up.”

This trust that somehow God would work through them to do a difficult thing seemed to be a motivator and a dispeller of fears.

Desires of these daily seminary teachers.

The analysis of the data identified the following categories of desires at the beginning of the school year. They show a unique perspective because of the religious element in their assignment.

To grow spiritually.

These seminary teachers hoped for personal spiritual growth and look forward to the effort their new calling required. They wanted and anticipated an increased measure of the Holy Ghost in their lives:

Hopefully, in class, the Spirit will be there. And if it is there in class, afterwards ...the Spirit stays with you for a while. And, so to have the Spirit with you that much more in my life is probably the most exciting thing. And, then to see that help students make changes in their lives, help them gain testimonies; I'm excited to see those changes.

They looked forward to studying the lesson materials and learn more about the gospel for themselves. One teacher said:

I think I'm most excited about being able to, not necessarily teach, but the fact that I will learn. I think that's the thing that I'm most excited about. The ability, maybe because it's going to force me to learn the things that I haven't necessarily taken the time to learn. That's what I'm excited about.

As another teacher considered what she was excited about, she said, "I will be learning more. My perspective in the scriptures will be deepened. Climbing up from one step in the primary step to more ...I am excited about that. I am excited about that."

A teacher who hoped to learn much more about the Old Testament this year admitted, "That's the book I've shied away from the most. I think the gospel part I have a good understanding of, but not necessarily how it fits in the Old Testament."

All nine teachers in this sample were very excited to have to make time to study and learn from the scriptures. “I love that it forces me to study” one teacher said. Another teacher recognized she would now need to make personal study a priority in her life:

I’m really excited to get myself into the scriptures and have study time – which is so easy to sometimes, put on the back burner. So this will require me to sit daily, and to study.

This opportunity to daily immerse themselves in the scriptures was a source of anticipation and joy for each one of these teachers. They hoped to become “very knowledgeable about the Old Testament” and in the process strengthen their own testimonies.

To become effective teachers.

These nine teachers desired to evolve into effective teachers who touched the lives of their students and in this process, touch their own lives as well. All of these teachers hoped to see their students progress spiritually. They wanted to see students increase their testimonies of God and His love for them. This general sentiment was summarized by the words of one teacher in the following way:

I hope I’m the kind of teacher that, you know, are learning from and that they get something out of it so that by the end of the year they feel closer to the Savior than they did when they came in.

These teachers desired that their students would learn principles that would help them in their daily lives. One teacher hoped her students would come to believe they are children of God and come to understand and rely on the atonement of Jesus Christ. She explained it like this:

My ultimate goal is to get every single one of those personalities to literally get the concept that they are a child of the divine, and that because of that – because of that one fact, they get the atonement ...I think that's a concept that our teenagers lack so greatly ...There is nothing you can do – so, accept the gift of the atonement and let it change your life, but you can't just pretend you don't want it or say I'm not good enough for anything. If they can get that one concept then I've been successful.

Another teacher voiced a concern about the challenge of teaching teenagers very early in the morning, and she hoped that, among all that took place in her classroom, students would be able to take away at least one thing that would help them in their daily lives:

It's early in the morning, they are tired, and they're not going to take away everything that I teach them or that the Spirit teaches them, (probably more accurate), they're not going to take all of that away from every single class, but I'm hoping that they will be able to grasp one thing every day that they can use in their lives.

These teachers hoped to be instruments in the hands of God to bring about miracles in the lives of the young people. They looked forward “seeing the Spirit in action and watching miracles that have occurred, and to know that the Lord allowed me to be part of it.” They felt that such an effort would make teaching a “thrilling” teaching experience.

To keep students on the right track.

All nine teachers desired to see their students increase their commitment to live the gospel, grow in their testimonies and enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost in their lives:

I hope that the classroom setting is such that we can all feel the Spirit. That's my goal because, if they can feel the Spirit, that's what will keep them on the right track. They can pick up their scriptures any time and they can read, but if they don't feel the Spirit and they don't have a testimony, it gets them nowhere.

To help keep their students on the right track, the teachers wanted them to feel and recognize the influence of the Holy Ghost. "I want them to recognize that the Holy Ghost is committed to helping them, He's their companion," said one teacher, "He is blessing them whether they even know it or not."

Another teacher explained why she felt it was vital for her was to help students feel the Holy Ghost in her classroom: "If I can do that, I would feel like I will have done what the Lord wants me to do, to help them feel the Spirit."

Another teacher wrestled with finding the balance between preparing the lesson and leaving enough flexibility in the lesson plan for the Holy Ghost to direct him. He expressed his concern in this way:

I need to put in the time and prepare the lessons, follow curriculum, allow room for the Spirit to guide and direct. But I'd like for there to be something there that the Spirit can guide and direct me to. "Remember that talk, go! This would supplement your lesson so well." I need to have that background ready, but I also

need to be worthy of the Spirit's directions, that I can present the lesson for the children, or even just the one child who needs me to say something.

These teachers hoped and desired to inspire their students and have all of them complete the course study for the year:

I hope to be able to make it all the way to the end of the year, and survive, and take all those children with me through that year. Not only gain a better understanding of the Old Testament itself, but hopefully help inspire them to want to have an understanding of the Old Testament. I think that's the goal ...and hopefully inspire myself, too.

One teacher believed that having good class discussions would help inspire the students to ask questions and participate:

I'm excited to be able to be in the classroom where I can create an environment where they can learn. Having one person like not argue, but be like, "is this right?" and have the conversations, and have those discussion and have it be much more, like engaged, rather than just teaching. So that totally excites me.

These teachers hope to be instruments in the lives of their students in some key ways. They wanted their students to feel loved:

I hope to be the kind of seminary teacher that you could get the kids in a classroom interview [to] say ... "You walked in the room and you knew she loved you and because she loved you so greatly, you just couldn't deny that Christ

didn't love me." That would be the absolute best, because then you'd know you taught with the Spirit ever day.

To understand the students.

These seminary teachers wanted to understand their students, and worried that they may not be able to relate to teens comfortably or discern what the students needed:

I may never know exactly what they need, but hopefully whatever I say is covering that. Hopefully I'll have that insight into those that are struggling or those that need something more – be able to notice the ones that aren't included.

Another teacher expressed concern about what to do if he had to discipline these young people while still trying to connect with them:

For a while there, I was concerned about my ability to [teach] this age group. I'm more comfortable with young adults and adults and working with them. I also had some concerns about not just connecting with the students, but what if I need to discipline them? Things like that.

Another teacher expressed concern about a special needs student that would be coming to his seminary class:

We have one student ...who is evidently, very disruptive. I haven't had that student in class before, so I don't know what I am going to be facing, and so I want to be prepared so that I am not caught off balance and react in a way that would be negative. I want to be able to think this thing through and pray for

guidance and have help from the Spirit to know how to reach that one student, and how to allow others to work with him as they work in teams.

This teacher felt it important to have “personal prayer and pleading with the Lord ...to give me insight, and inspiration as to reach those kids today, and what needs they may have that morning.”

Needs expressed by seminary teachers.

The following section explains the needs as expressed by the seminary teachers. These were things they hoped their coordinators could do or provide for them in order to facilitate the aforementioned desires.

To be understood with regards to how overwhelmed new teachers felt.

The primary need expressed by all the teachers in the sample was that their coordinators would understand how overwhelming the call to teach seminary felt. They were overwhelmed by the sheer volume of time involved in being a seminary teacher. Teaching seminary was going to require significant daily preparation time while they still had to fulfill their other personal, professional and family commitments. One teacher expressed it this way:

I anticipate I'm probably going to be staying up late to study, and getting up early to go ...working all day in between. I'm guessing there are going to be times where it's literally just like “get me through ...today!” And then you know you

have to spend the weekends getting ready, too. It's a huge commitment ...you can't ever walk in there not prepared, and so that means every single night.

These teachers had served in other assignments in the LDS Church, but they felt that this was different. "I don't think I've ever had a calling that will have quite this much demand." It requires a greater commitment of time to prepare a daily lesson. Teaching seminary also requires juggling time and energy with other responsibilities:

Another concern that I have is my ability to juggle all of the things that are happening in my life right now: with full-time work, with a two-year-old, with twins on the way, as well as other church responsibilities. I like to have some leisure at some point, too, so those are in the process of getting worked out and figured out.

The teachers were overwhelmed by the mental focus required to teach seminary because this commitment would need to be a part of their daily lives, rather than something that required their attention once or twice a week for a few hours:

I think that's the thing that's worried me the most [is] it is a large commitment. It's something that will have to be part of my life. It's not, "Oh I'm a seminary teacher – I'll worry about it Sunday morning." I don't think there's a two hour period of time each day that you're going to study. It's something that I'm going to have to think about all the time.

They had feelings of inadequacy with regards to their teaching assignment. They were not sure if they knew the scriptures well enough despite years of personal study. One teacher felt overwhelmed, saying, "It's difficult to understand all the information that's in there. It's difficult

to know exactly where everything is, and find things ...that part is scary. I think the kids probably know more than I do.”

Furthermore, they were concerned that seminary was a different kind of teaching from what they had experience before. Most of them had taught in church settings of one sort or another. They had taught people from a variety of age groups. However, because seminary is taught every day and parallels more of a high school classroom feeling, this felt overwhelming. Said one teacher, it’s “the fear of teaching every day, you know vs. once a month, or every week.”

Even though some of these teachers had sent their children to seminary or had people close to them who had taught seminary before, the experience of teaching it was new to them personally. One teacher described the calling “a mystery, because it’s always been somebody else’s calling.” Because it is so different to be in the position instead of only hearing about it, the teachers found the prospect of seminary “scary”. However, they remained positive. One teacher said, “I’m hopeful, and I’m blessed to have been asked to do it. I feel like I’ll grow a lot from it. I’m looking forward to it.”

Added to these concerns came the weight of the responsibility and importance of teaching the gospel to the youth. They did not feel this was a trivial assignment, and its perceived importance added pressure to their work load:

I will see [the youth] more than anyone will see them. I will know things that nobody else gets to know, and that responsibility, that mantle is really big! And so, just living up to that I think is very terrifying, for lack of a better word. Yeah, it’s very daunting – creating that safe place and environment.

Regarding the time that seminary teachers spend with the youth, a teacher commented: “That responsibility of it is huge. I mean I’ll spend probably more time with them than some of their parents will. Some of their parents don’t get a whole hour every single day with them.”

These teachers sensed they were going to play an important role in the lives of the youth of the church. They felt that what they taught and how they taught was going to make a difference, and that was scary to them.

To train how to plan lessons effectively.

All nine teachers in this sample wanted to know about how to plan their daily lessons effectively. The teachers wanted to know what they should do in order to prepare a lesson, given their personal lives’ time constrains to prepare a different lesson each day and their daily allotted time of 50 minutes for class time. They pondered the benefits of preparing a week at a time, or a day at a time, wondering which would be most efficient.

One teacher expressed a concern that he might actually over-prepare, fearing “I won’t leave room for the Spirit. I definitely don’t want to under prepare. Finding that balance ...I think training on that will be helpful.”

Another teacher expressed her concerns regarding the amount of detail to include in her lesson plans:

It seems like it will take days, not just hours to [plan] — if I do every detail. Do I do every detail on a lesson plan? Do you just put the basic outline on the lesson

plan? And how far ahead do you plan because things obviously happen that then your lesson plan is all messed up.

These seminary teachers wanted to know how to structure a written lesson plan in order to organize their teaching time. One asked: “How do I know how much to cover each day?”

The process of selecting which materials to cover from the manuals confused them:

I would like to understand better how to formulate a lesson. We have the book, but it's not a lesson plan, it's just suggestions. So how do I take and narrow down all that information into a 50 minute class? ...I understand some of that's just going to be “learn as you go”.

One of the teachers summarized her experience by saying, “We were just given all this material, and it's like a ton ...I didn't know where to start, so I was like – I'm just going to read the Bible because at the end of the day it's about the Bible.” She went on to realize that such was not the most logical course of study, but still did not know where or how to begin.

This new teacher answered her own question instead of asking a supervisor. She wished she could have received a specific example of a lesson plan. She wanted someone to tell her, “You're going to use [this] in the first week, and here is an example that you're going to use in the second week; we want you to alter it, obviously to your own specification – but here's kind of what it looks like.”

The teachers wondered how to make sure they touched on everything they needed to within a given lesson plan while in the classroom teaching. They recognized the possibility of getting distracted or of simply forgetting to discuss a key point. They wanted tips for keeping themselves organized during lesson delivery.

To explain the best teaching methods for engaging the students.

All nine teachers in this sample wanted to know how to choose and use various teaching methods and techniques. Teachers were most interested in specific teaching methods that invited the presence of the Holy Ghost into the classroom. They asked, “What kind of technique should we have? What are the best techniques in how to get the students involved the most?” These teachers were keenly aware they were going to be teaching teenagers early in the mornings each day:

They’re tired, it’s early in the morning, so they’re going to be tired, they don’t have a lot of life experience living the principles of the gospel. So how do I help involve the students and, help them know it’s not just “show up and listen”, but to be there and participate and, “I’ll get something out of it, because I put something into it.”

Another teacher was looking for the teaching methods that yielded meaningful results, not just any teaching ideas:

I always like to get ideas of how to present. I am not particularly interested in techniques that are catchy or cute or clever, I like to see ideas of how you can get the kids involved in a meaningful way.

Another teacher asked specifically for the methods that work best to teach scripture mastery:

How do you make scripture mastery work for them? What works best? What have other teachers found that works best in learning them? I mean I don’t want to keep re-inventing the wheel, and if there are experienced teachers who have found

this was the most successful for us, for learning scripture mastery, I'd rather do that instead of trying ten different things first, that don't work.

To provide an opportunity to observe a seminary class before teaching.

Four of the teachers wanted opportunities to observe other seminary classrooms before they began teaching. "I wish I could spend six months just watching other teachers, and see how they do it." They hoped to observe the details and structure of running a seminary class and the "how tos of teaching." Another teacher expressed the wish that ecclesiastical leaders had extended the calling to her earlier. "I wish that the stake had made the call soon enough that I could have visited an actual seminary class before we start, so that I can see what happens, and see how that goes."

The teachers felt that observing a seminary class before they started teaching their own classes would have provided some basic answers to some common questions they had, especially for the seminary teachers that did not attend seminary as youth. One teacher explained, "I didn't understand how we would do the opening. Do you have a devotional—what constitutes that? How much actual time is devoted to teaching?"

In summary, these new teachers felt they had received a call from God to teach young people. As they contemplated their calling, they desired to grow spiritually, to become effective teachers, to keep students in the right track, and to understand their students. They needed their coordinators to understand how overwhelmed they felt by this calling to teach seminary, and they wanted training on how to plan lesson effectively and training on the best methods to

engage sleepy and tired teenagers early in the morning; they also wanted an opportunity to observe a seminary class before they began teaching.

Research Question #3

What specific assistance do the participants identify as would have benefited their teaching experience at the conclusion of the first semester?

More opportunities to observe teaching and be observed to receive feedback.

Eight out of the nine teachers wanted more opportunities to observe teaching and be observed to receive feedback. They also wanted more peer interaction with other teachers.

Watching others teach helped clarify the vision of what seminary could be:

I think the best thing I did was watch another class, visit another class. That was really an ‘Ah ha’ moment, to see a teacher that had been teaching for awhile ...I don’t know that it was anything specific. I think just watching her class and seeing how she did scripture mastery, ideas about how she ran her classroom, just things like that. That helped me just to watch her class. It helped me get ideas. I watched how she ran her classroom; the structure of the class. It helped me to understand.

This teacher made her first class observation visit in the month of December, four months after she started teaching seminary. When asked if she thought it would have helped her more to do those visits earlier in the school year, she replied, “Yes, it would have helped me earlier.”

Furthermore, receiving feedback from their coordinator helped another teacher identify her strengths and weaknesses:

I wish [the coordinator] could visit my class more often, maybe, because to me, that helped a lot ...It had not even occurred to me that the students hadn't even opened their scriptures until three-quarters or half way through the lesson. And it's like, "Oh wow, I didn't even realize that." Because that's not my goal. My goal is to get them into the scriptures right away, but you lose track of time and ... you need an outsider that can step in and say, "By the way, did you notice ...?"

Another teacher said that when her coordinator came to observe her class and gave her some feedback on how to ask more effective questions, it "has helped a lot". Another teacher expressed the benefits of feedback thus:

I loved when we, when I got to go visit another class. Even doing that more would be helpful. But asking for substitutes is one of the hardest things for me. I would do it more just on my own, but then I would have to call and ask for a sub ...so I'm like, I hate asking subs; I always feel guilty.

This teacher went and observed a class, but was also observed in her classroom by another teacher. She said that she "definitely got more out of being the observer."

More peer interaction with other seminary teachers.

The teachers wanted a chance to talk more to other experienced seminary teachers:

Teachers are good resources, but if you don't have that relationship with them, it's hard to call ...I ran into my old seminary teacher and I ran into someone who is in charge of ...the Aloha seminary, and ...I'm going to them with questions: "Okay – how do I deal with this and how do I confront this, how do I do this stuff?"

Another teacher really enjoyed the monthly in-services; however, she said, "I wish we spent more time talking to the other teachers about how you do this? What works for you? – kind of thing."

One teacher wished she had had more contact with her own stake supervisor, especially at the beginning of the school year:

I was expecting so much more. Like when school started, I was expecting much more day-to-day interaction with [stake supervisor] in the beginning. It didn't happen and part of it's just because she's so stretched ...So when people would stop in and be like "How are things going?" two minutes before your class starts, you can't say "this is a disaster!" But you're not going to say that in front of your seminary kids. It's all falling apart and you're like, "it's just fine." ...I would have loved to have had, "We expect - A, B, C, D, E..." I'm such an ABC girl that that would have helped me.

This same teacher went on to say that she would have liked specific feedback from her stake supervisor:

Okay – what did you work on today? What did you work on this week? Okay – where did you excel and where are you stuck? If you start getting stuck in the

same place, here are some ideas. So that would have – I would have loved that, or at least it would have helped me.

More training on administrative issues.

Seven teachers wanted more training on administrative concerns. They needed to know the logistics of how to run a seminary classroom and how to relate to leaders:

Do I need a syllabus? Should I be contacting the parents with any type of irregularity or the student's leaders ...do I do anything with them? What do I do for the students that aren't coming to class? Should I be contacting them; or is that not my concern?

This teacher suggested that the lesson manual itself could contain a section addressing these concerns: "how to set up a class, what materials I could provide or should provide, and how to prepare for the very first class of the year. Maybe, how to check up on things."

Another teacher was frustrated because she did not have a clear knowledge of the policies or rules in seminary:

Parents will ask me a question, and I'll be like, "I have no idea what the rules are." "Can we skip Monday because we come on Sunday night?" I'm thinking probably not, but I don't know ...But a lot of times I'll do something and then it will be like, "Yeah, you're not allowed to do that ...oh, sorry, I didn't know."

They wanted to know how to incorporate scripture mastery effectively. "I didn't know how to really deal with scripture mastery. And I haven't seen anybody really do that. I've never seen that modeled." They also wanted some basic classroom management techniques:

I was having a discussion with another first year teacher this morning who is kind of struggling. He says, “Ever since we got back from Christmas break, I can’t get anything from my students.” And I thought, “Whoah, that’s kind of the opposite.” Not that my students weren’t working with me or contributing before, but since then, it’s been amazing the change that I’ve seen. I attribute that to a seating chart. Someone mentioned it in the past ...you know kind of toward the beginning—“Oh, you know, big believer of seating charts”—and then moved on. Ok. Well, tell me *why*, what I could avoid ...I really wish I would have known that beforehand. Because knowing to separate the talkers, to separate the sleepers, to cluster the students together in groups or zones. [My coordinator] uses zones, so that’s the same term I use, zones. In each zone there’s a zone leader, and they’re in charge of the group work and things like that. “Hey, wake up! C’mon! Hey, do you have your scriptures?” Things like that, that kind of a thing. World of difference!

More training on how to create lesson plans with effective teaching methods.

Six out of the nine teachers wanted more instruction on how to create lesson plans. One teacher described the ideal training process:

I would have loved to have “Okay, you’re a brand new teacher – we’re going to have you prepare a lesson, we’re going show you what a lesson is supposed to look like. Now we want you to go home and prepare a lesson, then meet with this person whether that’s an older person or something, that’s an older seminary teacher, or institute, just someone who knows what they’re doing.” Or even come

back as a group and say “okay so now that you’ve prepared this lesson and given it, these are what we think you are excellent on. These are your weaknesses and here are some ideas to strengthen them. It seems like grabbing attention is a challenge for you. Here’s how you can grab – here’s seven things you can do to grab attention” kind of thing. That would have been, that would have made it so much more helpful.

Another teacher offered this suggestion for lesson plan training that involved a more one-on-one approach:

I think it would be nicer to have somebody actually sit down and maybe work up a lesson or two ...It would be nice have somebody, maybe a couple of people give examples of, “Okay, this is how I lay out a lesson.” And you could see a couple of different forms of lessons, then, I think, it would have been easier.

Furthermore, these seminary teachers wanted to know which methods to use for different types of information in the lesson:

I love all the handouts that you guys have sent us, those are helpful, but again, just more “hows.” That’s the only area I really, really struggle in. I know the material. I know what I want them to learn. I know what I want them to leave with, just not sure how I want to feed it to them.

A teacher resource manual that met their needs.

All the teachers were grateful for the curriculum materials available to them. One of the teachers felt the curriculum was “inspired and brilliant.” However, five out of the nine teachers

felt the Old Testament Teacher Resource Manual needed some work on teaching teachers how to teach. These five teachers wanted more object lessons and more options for ways to teach. Two teachers felt the historical context of the scriptural content was not clear in the teacher manual. Another complained of the disparity between the teacher manual and the student manual: “It didn’t make it clear what we need to teach.” This teacher didn’t feel the curriculum materials were helping her that much with her needs. She said that the teacher resource manual was “too vague” and devoted more content to the principles and not how to teach them. She even suggested, regarding the teacher resource guide and the student manual, that “maybe if they could put the two books together for the teacher that gives the history overview, but choose from these principles that you think are applicable to your students.” She requested, “Please be specific about what I’m supposed to do.”

Another teacher thought that, for the most part, the curriculum was excellent, but had the same opinion as the previous teacher regarding the teacher resource manual:

In order to find out culturally what’s going on or sometimes even historically what’s going on you have to go to other sources, and I don’t have a strong enough base in the gospel to really trust those other sources ...I wish the curriculum provided, “Here’s an overview of what’s going on the world ...in that time.”

Another teacher said that the manual needed to give more suggestions about how to teach with variety:

I don’t feel like it gives you enough different ways to present it, in a way that’s interesting for them, you know. Just ask this question, then ask this question, you know, you can only ask so many questions, even if they’re good questions.

There's got to be more hands-on, more readiness. And for me, that's the part I struggle with; it's not the part that comes naturally to me. If I see someone else's idea, I'm like, "Oh! That's a great idea! I can apply it." I can even tweak it sometimes to meet the needs of my kids, but it's just those ideas ...there's not enough of those.

These teachers felt that the manual amply covered what to teach, but did not give the teachers enough ideas about how to teach:

Whether it's worksheets, or ideas for group activities, or ideas for moving them physically, reasons to come up to the board, the manual is pretty much focused on questions. You need some of that, but you need something else. But it does a great job of giving you the gospel principles, and giving you the other scriptures that you can tie into it. I always know what I want ...the message I want them to leave with; I always have that from the manual.

More access and more options to other types of training.

One teacher wanted access to a variety of training options that would go beyond the monthly in-services offered in their stakes, at least initially while she gained confidence. "I would love to be able to ...go to all those other things, and edify myself, but then when I'm ready ...I can pull back and not attend those." She explained that, as a new teacher, she was not even aware of all the training options available to her:

I would love to have something that says "Here are some resources that will help or not. But here are some places that you can go that you can trust." I think that

church curriculum is super awesome, but there are ways that people use the church curriculum and stay within the church curriculum that's also awesome that helps bring those students together, and knowing that – 'cause you guys use them, and you guys have all the tools and letting us in on that would be so incredible. It would be an incredible thing to make our tool box so much bigger, and then we don't feel like we're failing so much.

Online training resources.

One teacher said that the online resources found in the S&I website should be brought to the attention of teachers:

It's something that should be touted a little bit more. "Hey you guys, if you have questions about something, here on the website, go to this address, click here, click here, and there's a list of trainings. Maybe one of these titles meets your needs and you can go watch it, and through the Spirit you can get your answer.

Through the training you can get your answer, maybe through the Spirit.

Trainers need to offer online training that is specific and focused.

One of the teachers described her frustration as she navigated through the S&I website because of the sheer volume of information on the site:

I felt like I was given all this information and all these resources and then told "good luck to you." It became way harder than it probably needed to be. Like I would go online and si.lds.org now has so many resources, but that numerous amount of resources makes it impossible to figure out what you should focus on.

And so you're kind of taking a shot in the dark hoping what you're watching is helpful ...that the link you're clicking on is what you need.

More reading materials that give vision.

Teachers were given some transcripts of relevant educational discourses to read before they began teaching that introduced them to the objective and vision and mission of S&I. The sharing of these articles was discontinued during the school year. One teacher felt that the articles helped him not to “totally stumble and fall” because they aided his understanding of the overall objective. In fact, he would have preferred that the study of the articles continue throughout the year:

There are dozens, if not hundreds of talks that you can just download the text or read online. Most of them will have an audio file. You can put it on your iPod and listen to it as you drive to work. And then go home and mark up and highlight the parts that you want to focus on. I really missed that ...those talks, I believe, will help me focus ...Okay, I shouldn't be teaching like this. It would definitely put up some kind of rails down the path so I don't careen off here or there in my teaching style, or whatever.

Another teacher expressed what she liked about these reading assignments at the beginning of the year:

I really like that you did the “read this thing and respond to me”, because it got me thinking – “oh what do I expect?” – And some of them I had to read a couple times. There was one that was really long and it's like, “I have to go and think

about that and pray about that and have it come clear, and it was like really helpful in solidifying what my boundaries were.

In summary, these new teachers felt they would have benefited from more opportunities to observe teaching and be observed to receive feedback. In general, they wanted more peer interaction with other seminary teachers. They also would have appreciated more training on administrative issues and on how to create lesson plans with effective teaching methods. This was in part because they felt the teacher manual was inadequate in providing suggestions about how to teach. They welcomed more access and more options to other types of training, online training resources, and more reading materials that give vision.

Research Question #4

What are the perceptions of the participants about the induction and training programs offered to them?

As new seminary teachers are called by their ecclesiastical leaders, they are directed to meet with their coordinator and stake supervisor to receive training. The first contact with their coordinator or stake supervisor is an orientation to their new calling. This orientation allows for them to meet face-to-face with their training leaders and receive a welcome to the team of seminary teachers in the stake. They discuss the S&I objectives and expectations. They also receive basic contact information and a class roster of their classes, along with the curriculum materials for the year.

There are different kinds of training opportunities for these seminary teachers. There are the summer in-service sessions, the monthly in-service trainings throughout the year, and one or two large gatherings for an Area Teacher Conference with teachers from Western Oregon and Vancouver, WA. These teachers are also given reading materials with key messages about the purpose of religious education. They are introduced to the S&I website, si.lds.org, and they are given a brief introduction to this online training site. Teachers know they may contact their stake supervisor and coordinator at any time to receive help. Also, as part of their training, teachers are invited to go and observe a class in the month of November or December.

Table 2 summarizes the training opportunities available to new seminary teachers.

Table 2. Training Opportunities

Before the School Year Begins	During the School Year
Orientation	Monthly teacher trainings
Reading of key articles	One-on-one interaction with their stake supervisor and coordinator
Summer teacher training	Observation and feedback
Online resources and training opportunities	Area teacher conference

Throughout the first semester of the 2011-2012 school year, the teachers from this sample were asked to reply to some questions via e-mail. They were asked about their perceptions of the training programs offered to them. These data became a teaching journal that was later analyzed by the researcher.

“I don't know what I would do without these trainings.”

Trainings in S&I were part of the process to help teachers become effective teachers and helped them to be confident about their abilities to do it:

In-service is good; the one-on-one interactions are good, I don't know – they've all been quite helpful. I guess the one-on-one shows if I'm putting any of the things into practice, and helps me focus on those things I've been learning, and my doing them. So ...they're all part of the process.

The nine teachers appreciated and found these trainings very helpful, and displayed a willingness to put into practice what they had learned at in-services very quickly. They liked the “chance to be with other seminary teachers and hear about their experiences ...[They felt] like the face-to-face meetings are the most worthwhile.”

Another seminary teacher went on to say the following:

I don't know what I would do without these trainings. Our ...training helped me with the idea of using games ...[or] letting the students finding the answers on their own, ways on how to invite the spirit and many other methods and ideas

One of the biggest helps I received from the email communications is [that] I stay connected with my leaders. I'm indeed thankful for all the resources and especially great leaders ...who helped us with our stewardship.

A teacher remarked, “I've enjoyed them, they've been greatThey've addressed very real issues for me. They've helped me see not only the kind of seminary teacher I want to be, but the type of teacher I need to be, so I have enjoyed those a lot.”

Upon receiving help regarding scripture mastery during a monthly in-service, one teacher responded, “I really needed that.” Another teacher learned something that decided to implement right away:

The in-service was very helpful to me! I really appreciated comments by the other teachers and what they have done in their classes. The information about scripture mastery was very good. I used some of that information as well as the whiteboards in my class today. I feel that I know what I am to teach but not always how to go about it. The reminder of how important scripture mastery is was needed. I have not done a lot in that area but started today to change that.

For one of the teachers, the monthly in-services were a time of renewal. “I went into the training *very* frustrated and sleep deprived. I walked away feeling refreshed. It was very worthwhile to me.”

One teacher expressed great appreciation for these monthly in-services because she felt so supported by her leaders. Another teacher said, “Thank you for all the training. Without it I would not be able to fulfill this calling.”

Perceptions about monthly in-service sessions.

Teachers gave substantial feedback regarding monthly in-service sessions and how they could be made more effective in the future:

I would love more time of just sharing from other teachers what is working in their classrooms as far as scripture mastery or devotionals or participation ...do they use worksheets or small groups or research and teach the class methods ... what works best for other classrooms to get the students involved in the learning

process. Where do they get their ideas? Online, other teachers, their own imagination?

Furthermore, this same teacher would have liked more time at in-service modeling how to prepare a lesson:

I would love some ideas on the mechanics or system or process to go through in planning a lessonI spend so much time each night and I'm not getting the sleep I should, that's not a complaint I love the work I do, but I have to wonder if others have an easier or more efficient way to plan.

Another teacher would have liked to receive “more training on inviting those students who just don't want to participate.” The teachers were often concerned about student involvement and how to engage those students were more inclined to sleep or sit silently through class:

How do I bring it to life? I can reach the girls easy but I look over at the boys and they are hanging on for dear life. How can I teach them in such a way that it comes to life and gets them active? I can't act out everything.

However, this teacher was not looking for a long list of general ideas. She explained, “I would have rather had one great idea that I could use the next day than three that confuse me.”

A different teacher felt that some of the in-service time was wasted on administrative matters that could have been handled as effectively through some other means of communication:

I felt that while important, the time spent on the administrative side of the work took away some of the momentum built up by the devotional. Then shifting back into the spiritual portion of our training required a little more inertia. A possible

solution [might] be to take anything that could be done, and do it up front, *before* the devotional. For those that can't, for whatever reason, be done up front, provide some insight to the principle behind why CES does "this" or "that" procedure, etc. Finally, if it's still too much, just save some of the business stuff for later, or tackle it over email.

Perceptions about observing others teachers.

Observing other teachers was highlighted by eight out of nine teachers as the most worthwhile training activity. While considering all the training offered to him, one teacher voiced the sentiments of the others when he said, “[What] I would tout as the most helpful obviously are the observations.”

A different teacher who was unable to observe a class live, but who had watched video recorded seminary classes said, “So far the tape and DVD you sent me have helped the most. I really learned a lot by watching and listening to other seminary instructors.”

Perceptions about being observed as a teacher.

Before classes began, only one teacher asserted the desire to have others visit his class and provide feedback. “What I’m anxious to receive feedback on, however, is in-class observation by [my coordinator]. That’s what I’m most eager to know.” However, at the end of the first semester, eight of the nine teachers wanted to be observed and receive feedback. One teacher went on to say about receiving class visits, “more of that would be helpful.” Another teacher was asked by his coordinator, “What do you need help with? What do you want me to

look at specifically?” The help he received afterwards from his coordinator proved to be a “huge pay-off” in his classroom. “All the feedback I received after being observed was 100% applicable and I really would hope for more of that with first-year teachers.”

Some teachers felt that having someone observe their class helped them identify ways to improve their teaching. One teacher said, “When [the coordinator] came last time and sat through a lesson and pointed things out, I think that was a good thing. Having somebody’s input so that you know what is going on is always nice.” Only one teacher said that being observed in the classroom added stress. When someone came to see her, it made her feel nervous and she “spent twice as much time getting ready.”

Perceptions on online resources.

Online resources are a huge thing for me, mostly because I’m preparing in the evenings ...The first place I go after the manual is online, and check to see [if] there is a power point or a video or a talk or something that I can relate it to.

This teacher uses the videos and power points found in the S&I site additional teacher resources “on a regular basis.” Another teacher also used the online resources regularly:

I don’t necessarily use everything in class; however, I look at everything on the S&I website for the topic I am teaching. I don’t always open the additional articles; however, power points and videos are important in my learning.

One of the teachers offered some specific feedback about the online training found on the S&I website:

The design and the colors were very Web 2.0. What does that mean? It was a distraction ...there’s a certain kind of look and feel, how to click and where to

click ...that people are just used to. They kind of go on autopilot when they navigate ...it shouldn't take me out of the training and become a distraction: "Okay, now wait. Last time I clicked here to play a video, and now I'm clicking here to play a video. I can't even adjust the volume. So, it's playing, and I have to adjust the volume on my computer, not in the window. So now my attention's over here. What did he just say? Oh, I can't go back. I have to finish the slide and then go back and watch the whole slide from the beginning." It was a distraction.

Perceptions about one-on-one communications.

The training that is most helpful for me is just the one-on-one interaction with [my coordinator and stake supervisor] where I ask my specific questions and receive counsel and advice. It is very helpful to have leaders who are so open and willing to help.

Teachers appreciated email and phone communications and suggestions they received from the office of their coordinator. "Anytime I needed something, [my coordinator] was always available. She called me back quickly and that was extremely helpful."

One of the teachers offered his detailed analysis about all the trainings and his insights were extensive. He was asked to evaluate all of the trainings he had received in terms of which were most helpful. He responded in this way:

1. Personal training and inspiration/revelation from the Holy Ghost. As I have turned to Him in my time of need, when sincerely looking for ways to

present doctrines and principles in an effective and engaging way, those private tutorials and strokes of ideas have been the best.

2. [Bringing] some of my questions and struggles to [my coordinator and the other teacher that teaches in the same building and the former seminary teacher from last year.] With their experience, objective views and inspired counsel, I have been able to adapt my approach when facing issues, however small they might have been. In these cases, though, it still has been a one-on-one private conversation between myself and the person from whom I sought advice.

3. Specialized in-service trainings, augmented and supplemented by listening to or reading the CES-related talks upon which those trainings were based. Had I not been in an environment with other teachers all focused on the same task, the Spirit would not have taught and prepared me.

If I were to choose a final answer ...I would say the following: A composite of group study (in-service) combined with private advice-seeking interviews, and finally personal prayer has formed a foundation upon which communication with the Holy Ghost has been a regular occurrence.

In summary, the overall perception of these new teachers about their induction and training program was very positive. They are grateful for monthly and online trainings and found them very helpful. The most worthwhile training to them was going and observing other

teachers. These new teachers identified other teachers as one of their best resources for growth, whether through communicating with them one-on one or at in-service gatherings.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Introduction

This study originated from a desire of the researcher to understand the experience of first-year, Latter-day Saints, stake-called teachers so that effective training could be provided for them. By understanding their desires, needs and perceptions about the induction provided to these teachers, the researcher hoped to learn how to better provide early and effective training. This study is important because each year there are thousands of new seminary teachers around the world who are called to teach religion to the youth in the LDS church, and they are in need of support and training. There is a lack of research about understanding the experience of first-year stake-called teachers. This study is just one brick in the wall of knowledge that needs to be built to provide the best available training. The researcher hopes that other studies will follow this.

This investigation addressed the following four research questions:

- 1) What are the general characteristics or patterns associated with this sample of first-year LDS daily seminary teachers?
- 2) What do first-year LDS daily seminary teachers identify as desires and needs at the beginning of the year?
- 3) What specific assistance do the participants identify as would have benefited their teaching experience at the conclusion of the first semester?
- 4) What are the perceptions of the participants about the induction and training programs offered to them?

A purposive sample of nine teachers was interviewed before and after their first semester of teaching seminary. They also answered questions throughout this first semester about their perception of the training they were receiving. This research shared some light to the local, regional and global understanding of how to help stake-called daily seminary teachers.

Summary and Conclusions

Research Question #1 - Considerations

What are the general characteristics or patterns that associate with this sample of first-year LDS daily seminary teachers?

This sample of teachers was fairly evenly balanced with four male teachers and five female teachers. There was a wide gap of 44 years between the oldest and youngest teacher with a sample age average of 43.7 years old. This sample was ethnically mostly White. When it came to formal education, most teachers had attended higher education. Two teachers had doctorate degrees while one teacher had never attended college. Most of these teachers were familiar with seminary as student themselves or by having their own children attend seminary.

All these teachers had a positive perception about the purpose of seminary. They all recognized that being called to teach seminary was very different experience as being a seminary student or by just having children in the seminary program.

Teachers who did not attend seminary as youth tended to ask more questions about the logistics of class. *What is the actual time for teaching? What is a devotional in seminary? What are some of the discipline problems that come up?* These teachers would especially benefit from

observing an actual seminary class. Observing a live seminary class would be best; however, watching a DVD of some seminary classes would also be beneficial.

People called to train these teachers need to understand and be trained in andragogical principles of working with adults learners. Adults desire to learn and be successful, and they desire to be known and understood as individuals. Also, adults desire to engage in purposeful teaching and learning experiences. Finally, adults welcome the opportunity to associate with one another and learn together (Knowles et al., 2005). If trainers of adult learners keep these principles in mind they can assist the new teachers in becoming more self-reliant.

Research Question #2 - Considerations

What do first-year LDS daily seminary teachers identify as desires and needs at the beginning of the year?

Each one of the teachers felt they had been called of God through their ecclesiastical leaders to teach seminary. Because of this belief they found strength to “get over the scary part” of teaching teenagers religion classes each day early in the morning. It is important for trainers of these teachers to focus on building spiritual preparation. These teachers were excited to study the scriptures and strengthen their own testimonies. As adult learners, these teachers were willing to learn, apply, and act on principles of effective teaching. They were eager to pay the price to become effective teachers. Their training experience can be improved from the “learn as we go” mode to a “learn as we observe, learn as we listen, learn as we plan, learn as we share, learn as we teach, learn as we practice, learn as we learn” model.

All of these teachers desired to become effective teachers who loved, inspired and touched the lives of their students. They hoped their students would come to Christ, enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost and guide their lives by gospel principles. For these teachers, becoming instruments in the hands of God made it a “thrilling” teaching experience.

These teachers felt fear about their calling when they considered the amount of time and energy it would require to prepare daily lessons while still juggling all other personal, family and work commitments. They felt overwhelmed by the weight of the responsibility and importance of teaching the gospel to the youth. They knew they were going to have an impact on the youth, and it worried them that their impact would fall short of what was needed. When they considered their own capacities, it worried them they would not connect, understand teenagers and discern student needs. They worried that they did not know the scriptures well enough to answer their questions and help them with what they needed. Faith that God works through them was a motivator and a dispeller of fears.

All nine teachers reported the need for more support on how to plan daily lessons. This finding is consistent with other findings throughout the literature regarding the importance of training on curriculum planning for new teachers (Andrews & Quinn, 2005; Drexler, 2011; Evans-Andris et al., 2006; Graff, 2011; Swertfager, 1984; Versemann, 1993). Finding the balance between under-preparing and over-preparing was a key identified need. The teachers wanted their trainers to help them explore ways to find the balance they need as they plan and teach daily lessons.

All nine teachers desired to know different teaching methods and techniques that would best engage teenagers early in the morning, and all wished to observe the structure of a classroom. They felt these would best instruct them on how to teach effectively.

Research Question #3 - Considerations

What specific assistance do the participants identify as would have benefited their teaching experience at the conclusion of the first semester?

The importance of nurturing relationships with other teachers was a key and consistent finding. These teachers identified fellow seminary teachers as a vital resource for them to navigate through their first year. Therefore, more peer interaction with experienced teachers was identified as something that would have benefited them. This finding is also supported in the literature where new teachers in other educational settings expressed the desire to network with other teachers by collaborating and exchanging ideas with their peers to discuss curriculum and other instructional ideas (Evans-Andris et al., 2006; Findlay, 2006; Fletcher & Barrett, 2004; Marable & Raimondi, 2007).

Prior to the first semester, four of the teachers wanted opportunities to observe other seminary classrooms before they began teaching; however, after one semester of teaching, eight out of nine teachers wanted more opportunities to observe veteran teachers and be observed. During the semester of teaching almost all teachers discovered the value of classroom observations and feedback. Classroom observation was the kind of help most frequently requested and a consistent finding throughout the literature (Brown, 2002; Drexler, 2011; Evans-Andris et al., 2006; Moulds, 1999; Schulz & Kieschnick, 1991). Visiting and observing other

teachers helped new teachers understand better what they were supposed to do and gave them ideas for their own classrooms. Armed with these new ideas, they felt empowered and more confident. These observations provided a higher a level of comprehension about their work.

Teachers wanted more help with administrative matters: how to organize a class, the rules, classroom management, scripture mastery, what was or was not within policy. This was in keeping with findings by Sterret and Imig (2011) and Moulds (1999) who identified that new teachers need training on basic administrative issues.

The teachers also wanted more training on how to create lesson plans by modeling, practicing, offering feedback and doing it again. Specific help with the how to teach, not just what to teach, was identified repeatedly as a need. The teachers also wanted more access to training and online trainings, more reading materials that helped to expand vision. Motivating their students to be active learners is what drove these teachers to learn more about effective methods and techniques.

Research Question #4 - Considerations

What are the perceptions of the participants about the induction and training programs offered to them?

These seminary teachers appreciated and found helpful all the trainings available to them. They felt supported in their duties. It is noteworthy to emphasize that if administrators do not support new teachers, these teachers see themselves as less than a priority to their leaders (Cross, 2011).

Each training component is part of the whole process. Development of induction programs needs to be done with the vision of the kind of teacher they need to be. Teachers recognized that these trainings offered good reminders and were a time of renewal for them. Villani (2002) maintained that induction needs to be focused around a vision of good teaching for new and veteran teachers.

The most helpful trainings were the face-to-face trainings as class observations, opportunities to interact with other teachers, monthly in-service meetings, and one-on-one conversation with the coordinators. This result accords with research findings to the effect that most successful induction programs are those which foster collaboration, reflection, collegiality, openness and trust with other teachers (Baker-Doyle, 2012; Barth, 2006; Evans-Andris et al., 2006). Experienced teachers are good resources to new teachers. More can be done to create opportunities for new and veterans teachers to interact and share.

When new teachers were given the opportunity to contribute their expertise in developing curriculum with other teachers, they felt part of a caring educational community (Findlay, 2006; Gilles et al., 2010; Goodnough, 2006). As adult learners, they desired to apply immediately what they were taught.

Implications

There is a tradition of volunteerism and service in the LDS Church highlighted by the absence of a salaried ministry at the congregational level (Oaks, 2012). Everyone is expected to help and do their part. Service to others without public recognition and other rewards is taught. Members of the LDS Church trust that priesthood leaders prayerfully seek inspiration to extend

callings to serve where God would have them serve. It is this belief that spurs daily seminary teachers to serve in this capacity at great personal sacrifice. Daily seminary teachers may not have education degrees, but they have enormous faith. Ultimately, it is this trust in God, the willingness to act proactively to overcome being outside of their comfort zone, that helps them rise above their fears. The odd experience is that it is one of the hardest things they have done, and yet they love it because it yields great personal growth and satisfaction to see their students make positive changes.

The researcher found great value in observing and listening to these daily seminary teachers' experiences. Seeking to understand their point of view and identify the cultural patterns and meanings important to the participants required attentive listening. Listening to the excitement and fears of the teachers created a bond between the teachers and coordinators that was vital to nurturing relationships of trust.

Daily seminary teachers are teachers and students at the same time. They want to learn and succeed. They are an ideal group of students. The challenges of each teacher are unique to each class and each teacher. There is no one size-fits-all answer for every teacher. Some teachers discovered that one of the challenges was themselves. Getting rid of preconceived ideas about the students, the class, or other such mental blocks. This was not easy. They went to the Lord in prayer and figured things out. The new pattern they had to learn was teaching by the Spirit while remaining focused on the students, not themselves. They had to become a different kind of teacher. The better the needs of new teachers are understood, the better the training can be.

Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

The following are practical suggestions to best assist first-year seminary teachers for early and effective support and training. They are organized depending upon which role in the induction program a given person may be.

For the global organization of Seminaries and Institutes (S&I) the researcher recommends implementing the following changes or practices:

- Make expectations clear from the onset what the “big picture” of this work so that new teachers are not struggling to define their ultimate purpose.
- Create and/or strengthen the multiple levels of support offered to the teachers.
- Train coordinators in principles and practices of andragogy (adult learning).
- Generate resources for the holistic learner, understanding that the teachers are learners as are their students. Be sure to include training that appeals to multiple intelligences.
- Establish inductions that include mentoring and peer coaching opportunities by former seminary teachers or current, more experienced teachers in the program.
- Make sure that administrators are present at in-services and readily available to both local seminary support staff and the teachers themselves.
- Provide examples of what a seminary class looks like. Model effective teaching suited for sleepy and tired teenagers early in the morning where varied methods and techniques are displayed.
- Create a *Teacher Resource Manual* that offers multiple ideas about how to teach a concept or principle.

- Create a user-friendly “New Teacher Center” website where new teachers can go to learn how to prepare lesson plans with a variety of templates or planning strategies.

For the S&I coordinators at the stake level, the researcher recommends the following:

- Take a personal, not just professional interest on the teachers. Get to know each individual teacher and learn his/her unique needs, concerns, desires and gifts. Use that to tailor training messages at monthly in-services or class observations to their needs. Ask questions and listen carefully to answers.
- Make regular contact with each teacher in your jurisdiction, even if only “touching base.” The effect of this contact creates a feeling of camaraderie and support that is vital in building trust and confidence in the teachers. Teachers must know that they are not alone.
- Ensure that each teacher is visited at least twice per semester by someone who can offer him/her meaningful feedback; ensure that each teacher is able to visit an experienced teacher’s classroom at least twice a semester in order to learn from observations. This will require helping them make substitute teacher arrangements.
- Engage each teacher in some kind of reflection/discussion about his/her experience. This can be done through interviews, in group forum settings, through emails, in journals, or by any other means that works most appropriately for each individual.
- Provide information about in-service and training opportunities offered outside of your immediate jurisdiction, but that are available to all interested seminary teachers. Help them distinguish between mandatory and optional learning settings, and encourage them to adapt their attendance as needed.

- Early on, provide training in the most common basic skills needed: lesson-planning, time management, asking effective questions.
- Help teachers understand the policies, expectations and boundaries surrounding their role as teacher (as compared to as an ecclesiastical leader, or other youth leaders).
- Help the teachers prioritize the various materials they receive as instruction so they know what to address first. Help them put “first things first” by helping them know which things should be covered first, and which things require the most concentrated study.
- Help new teachers to take the information and suggestions for teaching found in the *Teacher Resource Manual* and turn it into a 50 minute lesson.
- Train new teachers to adapt lessons for students with learning disabilities or special needs.

For ecclesiastical leaders who oversee S&I locally, the researcher recommends the following practices:

- When searching for new seminary teachers consider the sacrifice of time and commitment that would be asked of these individuals and their families.
- Make an effort to call the new seminary teachers prior to the close of the school year preceding their appointment so that they have an opportunity to observe classes and be trained properly.
- Where possible, leave seminary teachers in place for a four-year teaching cycle so as to maintain stability for the students and to allow the teacher to grow in experience and skills over time.

There is a deficit in the literature regarding the experience of new teachers in private Christian schools as a whole. This is an even more acute need when it comes to understanding the experience of first-year Latter-day Saints daily seminary teachers. Therefore, there is a need in future research for multi-year longitudinal studies about the experience of seminary teachers, with follow-up interviews and focus group discussions to improve the training for these teachers. Also, since technology is and will continue to play a greater role in the training of new teachers, empirical studies about the impact of technology on the training of new teachers are needed.

Any further studies need to deepen the understanding about what constitutes effective classroom observations and the reflections and follow-up that need to come afterwards. Furthermore, there is an open field to research the ability of new seminary teachers to plan instruction and/or what multi-levels of training look like in S&I.

The ultimate goal of any research in this area is to help students have a better experience in seminary. To accomplish this, trainers need to keep asking and pondering the question: “How can we create a culture of improvement and growth, of cooperation and learning?”

Summary

The findings of this study support the conclusions of research on new teachers in public and private Christian schools. The supervision of new teachers requires a commitment of time that needs to be a priority. Induction programs for new seminary teachers may need to consider nurturing learning communities for all seminary teachers where multi-levels of support and training focused on effective teaching and learning are especially available to new teachers. New

teachers are an important element of the teaching faculty and striving to assist and guide them is a worthy effort that will pay dividends in the learning and growth of students.

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APPENDIX A*Questionnaire*

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF.

1. Gender:

- a) Male
- b) Female

2. Age: _____

3. Ethnic background:

- c) White
- d) Black (African-American)
- e) Asian
- f) Pacific Islander
- g) Native American
- h) Hispanic (Latino)
- i) Other _____

4. Where do you teach seminary? _____

5. What time does class starts? _____

6. What is your job/professional title? _____

7. Have you ever taught seminary before? _____ How long ago? _____

8. What grade (s) will you be teaching? _____

9. Have you taught five days a week before in any kind of setting? _____

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Dear Participant,

My name is Edgardo A. Gubelin, and I am a student in the Educational Foundations and Leadership Department at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am conducting research as part of my doctorate dissertation on needs and perceptions of first-year Latter-day Saint daily seminary teachers. I will conduct interviews with the participants of this research for about thirty minutes at the beginning of the semester, and then again towards the end of the first semester.

The results of this study will be used for completion of my dissertation and may be used to inform the Seminaries and Institutes of Religion department of the Church about how to give early and effective support to newly appointed daily seminary teachers. The findings of this study will be also shared with the Educational Foundations and Leadership Department at George Fox University.

Though the data and the analysis of the data will be presented in aggregate and disaggregate form, individuals will not be identified. The questions that will be asked in the personal interview do not ask any information that is sensitive or personally obtrusive. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not to participate is yours and will not affect your appointment or access to training and help in any way.

All completed audio recordings of the interviews, transcripts of the interviews and this signed consent form will be locked in separate, secure locations for a period of no less than three years. I will be the only individual who will have access to these materials. Before the three year period ends, I will personally destroy all the materials.

I thank you for your time in considering this project. If you choose to participate, please be aware that you are making a contribution to furthering research.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at 503-329-5570. If you have any further questions regarding this research, please contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Scot Headley at 503-544-2836.

If you understand the use of this research and agree to participate, please sign below.

Participant Signature _____

Researcher Signature _____

APPENDIX C*Personal Interview Guide Questions (BEFORE)*

- 1) What are some of the questions or concerns you have regarding this new calling?
- 2) What are you most excited about?
- 3) What are some areas of training you would like some help and hope to receive before you start teaching?
- 4) What are some things you want to make sure you do before you start teaching?
- 5) What do you think it will take to teach seminary every day?
- 6) What are some goals you hope to accomplish this year?
- 7) What kind of seminary teacher you hope to be at the end of this first year?

APPENDIX D*Personal Interview Guide Questions (AFTER)*

- 1) What do you think were some of your greatest challenges?
- 2) To what degree is the approved curriculum meeting your pedagogical needs? Probe:
Explain
- 3) What are some of the specific assistance you wished you had received more training on?
- 4) What are some ongoing issues/needs you are facing in your calling?
- 5) What should S&I be doing to support its first year daily seminary teachers?
- 6) Do you think the trainings available are helping you become the seminary teacher you wanted to be?
- 7) What helpful counsel would you share to a first year seminary teacher to become successful?

APPENDIX E*Teaching Journal Prompts*

1. What kind of trainings are proving to be most helpful for your teaching experience?
2. What kind of trainings are proving to be not as helpful?
3. What thoughts do you have about the specific trainings, such as the monthly in-services and class observations?