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# Experiences of Early Career Teachers and Their Influences on Teacher Retention

Rachael Harms

George Fox University, rharms05@georgefox.edu

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EXPERIENCES OF EARLY CAREER TEACHERS AND THEIR  
INFLUENCES ON TEACHER RETENTION

by

RACHAEL HARMS

FACULTY RESEARCH COMMITTEE:

Chair: Ginny Birky, PhD

Members: Karen Buchanan, EdD and Susanna Steeg, PhD

Presented to

the College of Education, George Fox University

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partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in the Educational  
Foundations and Leadership Department.

This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:

4/12/16      Ginny Birky      Committee Chair  
Date      Ginny Birky, PhD      Professor of Education

4/5/16      Karen Buchanan  
Date      Karen Buchanan, EdD      Professor of Education

4.5.16      Susanna Steeg  
Date      Susanna Steeg, PhD      Associate Professor of Education

## **ABSTRACT**

Nationwide, the attrition rate for beginning teachers is near 50%. As a result, school districts are counting the costs and paying attention to teacher retention in new ways. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of ten early career teachers and four of their mentors to discover how those experiences influenced their decision to remain in the teaching profession. Data was collected through personal interviews with early career teachers and their mentors from one large Oregon school district. Several important findings emerged which have relevance for school leaders, school district leaders, mentoring and induction program coordinators, and the state legislature. The data analysis revealed strong relationships were the main theme and foundation upon which all strategies for teacher retention were based. Participants articulated the influence of the school principal had a significant impact on a teacher's decision to remain in a specific school and in the teaching profession. Participants experienced robust systems of support within their school district, which positively impacted their sense of value to the district. The data indicated the district's full-bodied and systematic program of mentoring and induction provided essential support for their early career teachers. Recommendations include the need for state legislatures to make stable funds for comprehensive full-release mentoring and induction programs a priority.

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This research would not have been possible without the early career teachers and mentors who took part in my research study. I am honored that you were willing to give me a glimpse into your experiences. Thank you for the learning that you shared with me and with those who will read this dissertation research.

Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to God. When I began this journey I made a commitment to maintain daily time with my Savior. He has been faithful to give me the time and energy to continue writing and learning while building my relationship with Him. I pray that I will honor Him in all that I say and do.

## DEDICATION

This research study is dedicated to my lifelong friend, Professor Christine St. John Tokonitz. We met in grade school, grew up together, began our doctoral programs together and had planned to finish them together. Unfortunately, cancer swiftly took her just as we were beginning our dissertation journey.

Chris, I miss you greatly, and dedicate this study to your memory.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Mention that you teach in a dual language, Title I, inner city school, and you are likely to see eyebrows raise, heads wag, and tongues cluck. After all, there has to be easier, more gratifying work. Yet in one school district in the state of Oregon, many beginning teachers start their careers in just such placements, and most of them thrive, despite a large research base that claims they may not make it through the turbulent first few years (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Grissmer & Kirby, 1987; Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014; Johnson et al., 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) reported on a five-year study that followed 155,600 early career teachers who started teaching in 2007-2008. They found that about three quarters of the teachers studied stayed in the teaching profession. However, those who took part in a comprehensive mentoring and induction program stayed at a rate 16% higher than those who did not receive mentoring. With many researchers finding attrition rates for new teachers near 50% (Ingersoll, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2000; New Teacher Center, 2012), mentoring and induction may be beneficial to keep more early career teachers teaching.

With the literature indicating such positive results for school districts who have mentoring and induction programs, I began to wonder why one large school district in Oregon was beating the odds and retaining 98% of beginning teachers, even when teachers are placed in some of the most challenging assignments. So I set out to discover what I could learn about early career teachers' experiences during the first few years of teaching in this district. I wanted to know what caused these teachers to stay in the profession and what their perception of their early teaching years was because I felt this might provide insight into ways that districts might be

able to keep promising young educators in the teaching profession. This collective case study examined the experiences of ten early career teachers and some of their mentors in the district under study.

## **Background**

My career began in 1991 in the district being studied. During my tenure I have been a music teacher, choral director, classroom teacher, instructional coach, program assistant, and department and building administrator. For seven years I coordinated professional development for all district employees, and this year moved into an elementary principal position where I supervise three early career teachers. As a principal, retaining new teachers has become an even greater priority for me because of the challenge of finding high quality candidates in this competitive hiring environment. When I hire an excellent teacher, I want to be sure s/he will continue to teach.

In 1991 beginning teachers in the school district under study received one half day of orientation prior to the beginning of the school year. Buddy mentor teachers were paid a monthly stipend to assist first-year teachers and meet with them weekly for a minimum of one hour. They were instructed to help their mentee learn how to navigate their school's culture and assist with classroom management issues. Each beginning teacher was provided two full days of substitute coverage for their class and their mentor's class in order to collaboratively plan lessons or attend professional development together. Buddy mentor teachers turned in monthly meeting logs to verify their minimum required hours had been met.

Although the buddy mentor program had been in place for nearly a decade, the teacher retention rate for beginning teachers completing their first five years remained steady at about 55% (District Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, July, 2014). Beginning teachers,

fresh out of a brief student teaching experience, were placed in some of the most difficult assignments, with multiple classes to prepare for, fewer resources available to them, and students with high needs. Additionally, beginning teachers were often asked to take on more duties (participation on committees, running programs such as book giveaways, coaching school clubs or athletic teams, etc.) than their seasoned veteran teacher colleagues. Beginning teachers were burning out at an alarming rate. Compounding the problem, the district was hiring large numbers of bilingual teachers from out of state who often failed to put down roots in the community and, consequently, returned to their home state or country within three years (District Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, July, 2014).

Exit interviews from the buddy mentor participating teachers yielded some interesting information. It became apparent that many mentor teachers were not doing much mentoring. Half of all mentor teachers did not reach out to their beginning teachers more than once a month. Substitute coverage for beginning teachers was sometimes inappropriately used for activities such as snow skiing, shopping, and playing golf. Mentor teacher logs were not a reliable indicator of what was actually taking place in the mentor/beginning teacher relationship, and beginning teachers were not feeling the level of support they received was helpful. In short, very little transformation of teaching took place as a direct result of participation in the buddy mentor program (District Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, July, 2014). This is consistent with what the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future found in their research on teacher turnover (2007). They reported that a buddy mentor system has a negligible effect on teacher retention.

With the lack of positive results, the buddy mentor program in this district was altered each year in minor ways in attempts to improve it. For example, signatures of mentees were

added to the accountability logs. Still there were few stories of teacher improvement coming from the program and it was eventually disbanded. In 2007, with a new superintendent at the helm and some solid research guiding the way, the Mentor Program Coordinator for the district was tasked with recreating the mentor program using a more structured format built on a research-based successful model. The current mentor program was developed around the New Teacher Center's model, has been in existence for eight years under consistent leadership, and is widely recognized as a successful example of induction.

Due to the needs of students and the licenses and endorsements held by beginning teachers, many of the district's beginning teachers are placed in high impact schools that have significant numbers of second language learners, high family mobility, and students in moderate to severe poverty. A focus on closing the achievement gap, especially for second language learners, has prompted the hiring of highly qualified teachers trained to provide bilingual and dual language instruction along with language development. During the 2014-2015 school year, 63% of beginning elementary teachers and 44% of beginning secondary teachers were placed in these high impact schools. There is anticipation of increasing the need for bilingual, dual language, and special education teachers at all levels, thus increasing the need for new teachers and for mentoring in those areas (District Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, August, 2015).

Under the new model, the district under study has expanded and strengthened the mentor program for novice and beginning teachers by making participation mandatory for their first two years, and offering a third year of support for those who desire it. The program provides the following to beginning teachers:



- Dedicated time for teacher induction and preparation for their new role in the district;
- A beginning teacher network across the district which builds support, commitment, and leadership in a safe learning community;
- 90 hours per year of individual support from their mentor during the first two years of teaching, and continued support into their third year;
- A close look at their district's vision and strategic plan goals, along with their personal role and responsibility in increasing student achievement;
- Opportunities to observe master teachers in demonstration classrooms (learning labs) with feedback and debriefing with their mentors;
- Movement from a focus on management of the classroom to a focus on instruction and assessment;
- Placement during their induction years that is appropriate to their beginning skills as teachers (as much as is possible); and
- Increased communication with site administrators, district administrators, university faculty, and other key stakeholders.

As a result of these efforts, the district is seeing many first and second-year teachers who perform at the level of veteran teachers, as measured by comparing teacher evaluations and student assessment data (District Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, August, 2015). Being aware of these positive outcomes, I wondered what the contributing factors were for these results. What can we learn from beginning teachers about their early experiences in this district? What would they tell us about the required mentoring program? Could the consistent structures, elevated levels of support, and high quality professional development be a negative or positive factor in their early experiences? In addition, what can we learn from their full-time mentors?

## **Statement of the Problem**

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find and retain effective teachers. Over the past 30 years, retention rates for early career teachers have fallen steadily (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Oregon will need to hire approximately 15,563 teachers by the year 2020. Yet in 2014-2015 Oregon preparation programs recommended only 1,308 teachers for initial licensure (Mary Cadez, Chalkboard Project, personal communication, December 1, 2015). These statistics prompted me to choose to investigate new teachers' experiences in a district that has had a very high retention rate for their early career teachers.

As an administrator in the district, I was particularly interested in the retention rates of new teachers I hired. I have been extremely selective when it came to hiring because I knew my district made a large financial investment in each new teacher, and I wanted only the best for my students. Losing a good teacher was disruptive to my students, other staff, and to the school community in general. When we lost a teacher, we lost their institutional knowledge that was built up over time, as well as the professional relationships they had established. If I could discover why early career teachers persisted in our district, perhaps this information would help us to do even better in our overall retention rates. In employment interviews I have conducted, some beginning teachers stated they were applying in the district being studied because of the excellent reputation of the mentor program. It was assumed by many district administrators that the mentor program was the reason the district's retention rates had increased from 57% in 2007, to 98% in 2015 (District Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, July, 2015). However, I wanted to find out if that assumption was correct and specifically why these beginning teachers stayed and what their experiences during their first few years of teaching were like.

Although I found much research on why teachers leave, I found much less about why they stay. The purpose of this research study was to explore the dynamics of early career teacher retention with a sample of educators from one large Oregon school district. I did not intend to address the retention of veteran teachers who were new to the district, only early career teachers who had participated in the district mentor program as beginning teachers. I used personal interviews as part of a collective case study to investigate the reasons why most novice or beginning teachers in the district remained in the profession when national averages indicate that nearly half of all beginning teachers leave the teaching profession within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2012). This study also explored the types of supports teachers identified as key to this decision to stay. The research was especially important given the high attrition rates of new teachers and the pending retirement of a significant number of Oregon educators in the near future.

### **Frameworks for New Teacher Mentoring and Induction**

The word induction is used here to describe the formal act or process of placing someone in a new job or position (Merriam Webster, 2015). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2014) describes the components of comprehensive induction as: high quality mentoring, common planning time, collaboration with colleagues, ongoing professional development, participation in an external network of teachers, and standards-based evaluation. Some school districts have induction programs for all new teachers as they begin their career in teaching and others do not. Prior to 1980 Florida was the only state with a mandated program for beginning teacher induction (Feiman-Newmer, 1999). Today, 27 states support beginning teacher induction in some form (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). According to the New Teacher Center (2012), there are a variety of models for teacher induction in school districts across the

country. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities reports a surge in beginning teacher mentoring and induction programs, with more than 80% of beginning teachers in the US taking part in some kind of program in 2006 (compared to 40% in 1990). Though many states are now mandating and funding mentoring and induction programs, this does not mean there is consistency across districts and states. In some districts, teacher induction may be an orientation for beginning teachers or teachers new to the district. Other districts may use the buddy mentor approach, where a veteran teacher mentors a beginning teacher. Often, the mentor is a site-based teacher or instructional coach who provides resources, emotional support, and guidance. A comprehensive program of mentoring and induction might involve full-release mentors dedicated to providing support to beginning teachers, and ongoing professional development tailored to the needs of beginning teachers. Additionally, funding is often competitive, inadequate, and unstable, leading to even more disparity across programs.

Districts may provide professional development to address perceived or real pre-service gaps or ensure that beginning teachers are trained on district curriculum and instructional initiatives. With the recent emphasis on teacher evaluation reform, many districts measure the growth of their beginning teachers against their progress towards mastery of the district's identified teaching standards. Administrators are then tasked with carefully monitoring the beginning teacher's growth through frequent classroom observations and formal evaluations measured against the district's evaluation rubric.

In teacher development, induction is a unique stage as it is a time of transition from preparation to practice and sets the stage for ongoing professional development. According to Darling-Hammond (2005), a transformative induction process should be a cooperative endeavor between schools and universities based on rigorous teaching standards. In my review of the

literature, I found no common definition of or framework for a program of teacher induction, although there are teacher development frameworks with shared threads that are used in teacher induction programs in order to improve new teacher instruction. The New Teacher Center from Santa Cruz, California is a national non-profit organization aimed at improving the effectiveness of beginning teachers, and a commonly used resource for mentoring in education. Their comprehensive mentoring and induction program is described in chapter two of this study.

The overarching goal of a comprehensive induction program is to develop and support early career teachers so they are effective and have a smooth transition into the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Most comprehensive induction programs include a framework against which teacher growth and development is measured. Some common frameworks for teacher development include: the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013), the Danielson Framework for Teaching (2013), the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Rubric (2013), the Marshall Teacher Evaluation Rubric (2014), the Chicago GOLDEN program (2007), and the California Continuum of Teaching Practice (2014). Each of the frameworks correlates to the InTASC standards and are designed to improve teacher effectiveness. They each describe core knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors demonstrated by effective teachers, yet are different in the way they are organized. Any of these frameworks can be used within a program of teacher induction because they outline the knowledge, performance, and dispositions that new teachers need in order to teach in ways that support learning for all students. School districts choose a framework based on what elements they believe are important, but nearly all frameworks are connected to InTASC standards.

### **The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Standards.**

The framework has ten separate standards divided into four domains: the learner and learning, content knowledge, instructional practice, and professional responsibility. The InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013) are presented by the Council of Chief State School Officers and are intended to outline what teachers should know and be able to do in order to prepare all students for college and career. The standards apply to all subject areas and all grade levels. Originally released in 1992 and geared for beginning teachers, the standards were updated in 2010 to be used for all teachers, not just beginning teachers (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). The updated standards were revised with a focus on the learner, specifically with regard to differentiation. Another key difference between the old and new versions of the standards is the emphasis on the use of assessment data to improve instruction and support learner success. There is also new consideration of the context of learning and how the learning environment is changing rapidly in response to advances in technology. Lastly, our more diverse range of learners is addressed in the revised standards: those who are culturally and linguistically diverse, as well as those who need specialized education to access their learning. As of 2010, 38 states used the InTASC Standards as the basis for their professional teaching standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013).

**The Danielson Framework for Teaching.** This framework also has four domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. The essentials of teaching are further divided into 22 components with 76 smaller elements within the Danielson Framework. The Danielson Framework for Teaching (2013) is a constructivist-based set of components of instruction and is aligned to the InTASC

standards. The framework is intended to be a foundation for professional conversations among educators as they work to increase the effectiveness of their practice. First published in 1996 to address the need for a Praxis exam-scoring rubric for licensure of new teachers, it was revised in 2007 and expanded to include educators who may not be classroom teachers. In 2011 it was revised once again and a video library with over 23,000 analyzed lessons was added to assist with inter-rater reliability. In 2013 minor revisions were made to align the language of the rubric to the Common Core State Standards (Danielson, 2013).

**The Marzano Teacher Evaluation Rubric.** This framework contains four domains (classroom strategies and behaviors, planning and preparing, reflecting on teaching, and collegiality and professionalism) and 60 elements of effective teaching. The Marzano Rubric (2013) is based on nearly five decades of research on effective teaching and learning practices. It was created specifically to encourage continuous teacher growth: it ascertains the direct cause and effect relationship between teaching practices and student achievement, it helps teachers and leaders make informed decisions to generate the greatest benefits for students, and is tested for inter-rater reliability in accuracy and fairness. The process begins with identification of an area of teaching that needs improvement. The rubric is utilized to provide specific feedback on focused skills and behaviors. Teacher growth toward mastery of that standard is measured along the rubric until proficiency is achieved. The goal of using the rubric is to maintain steady and measurable increases in student achievement (Marzano, 2013).

**The Marshall Teacher Evaluation Rubrics.** This framework is organized around six domains, each with ten elements of effective teaching: planning and preparation for learning; classroom management; delivery of instruction; monitoring, assessment, and follow up; family and community outreach; and professional responsibilities. Kim Marshall's Teacher Evaluation

Rubrics (2014) are designed for use throughout the school year by both teachers and their evaluators. Teachers are tasked with completing a self-evaluation and meeting with their supervisor to see if there is agreement between them regarding the self-evaluation. The evaluator completes at least ten quick visits to each teacher's classroom during the course of the school year. Each visit is followed up with a face-to-face meeting between the observed teacher and the evaluator where the observation is discussed and next steps are identified and agreed upon. A color-coded chart is available to track the progress of all teaching staff and to inform professional development planning based on the instructional needs of teachers (Marshall, 2014).

**The Chicago Guidance, Orientation, Leadership, Development, Empowering New Teachers Program (GOLDEN).** This comprehensive two-year induction program features an online induction community with a network of teaching resources geared to the beginning teacher. New teachers attend workshops on the topics of accommodations and modifications, behavior management, classroom management, community and culture, policies and procedures of the school district, data driven instruction, differentiated instruction, and learning centers. The early career teachers are evaluated using the Illinois Professional Teaching Standards, which include: content knowledge, human development and learning, diversity, planning for instruction, learning environment, instructional delivery, communication, assessment, collaborative relationships, reflection and professional growth, and professional conduct (Chicago Public Schools, 2007).

**The California Continuum of Teaching Practice.** This framework, used by the New Teacher Center, has six domains (engaging and supporting all students in learning, creating and maintaining effective environments for student learning, understanding and organizing subject matter for student learning, planning instruction and designing learning experiences for all



students, assessing student learning, and developing as a professional educator) with 38 elements. The California Continuum of Teaching Practice (2014) is a tool for goal-setting, self-reflection, and inquiry into practice. It is intended for use as both an evaluation tool and a peer mentor tool. Designed for use over time, not stand-alone observations, it promotes collegial conversations about teaching and learning using the five levels of teacher development associated with each standard (emerging, exploring, applying, integrating, and innovating). Originally produced in the early 1990s, it was revised in 2009, and again in 2014. Each standard is described in a narrative portrayal of accomplished teaching. This is followed by the elements of effective teaching contained in that domain, and illustrated with reflective questions to encourage teachers to explore their professional practice (California Continuum of Teaching Practice, 2014).

The frameworks mentioned above illustrate a variety of models school districts may use to mentor new teaching staff. The induction model in the district studied most closely aligns with elements from the InTASC Standards and The New Teacher Center. The conditions for success are carefully considered and followed in the program model. The model is systematic and purposeful and provides the framework for an entire system of induction with the ultimate goal of increased teacher performance and growth, leading to increased student performance and growth. A rigorous screening process is used to hire only the best available mentors, who then receive extensive training. Their training enables them to provide job-embedded professional development to each beginning teacher based on their real needs and district curriculum.

The mentor program in the district that was studied is geared for teachers new to the profession, not veteran teachers new to the district. These early career teachers are served by 22 full-release mentors, meaning these mentor teachers have no classrooms of their own, but work

solely to support beginning teachers assigned to their caseload. Ideally, each mentor is assigned 15 beginning teachers, as recommended by the New Teacher Center (2008). The number of full release mentors fluctuates each year based on the number of newly hired beginning teachers. Although based on the framework of the New Teacher Center, the district's mentor program has transformed over the past eight years to fit the needs of this district's beginning teachers.

### **Research Questions**

Because early teaching experiences may be influenced by a mentoring model such as the frameworks described above, including the district under study, my research will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What experiences contribute to early career teachers' commitment to remain in the teaching profession?
2. What do early career teachers say about their experiences in a comprehensive mentoring and induction program?

The district under study has high retention rates for their beginning and early career teachers, and I wondered why. As a result, I pursued this research to explore with beginning teachers what they perceived to be contributing factors to their decision to stay in the profession. I wanted to know what new teachers' early experiences were like and how they might affect their decision to stay or leave. I also wanted to know if the district's high retention rate for beginning and early career teachers was due to the mentor program, other reasons, or a combination of factors. However, as stated in chapter three, I made every effort to have an open mind and understand whatever the data presented. I personally transcribed the interviews exactly as stated to be sure the voice of the participant was heard, not my own positive or negative feelings or inferences. I was also cautious about how I analyzed and later presented my findings, being

careful not to assign my own perspectives to the outcomes of the data. In other words, I worked continually at managing my subjectivity. Peshkin (1988) sums it up well:

By monitoring myself, I can create an illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject are intertwined. I do not thereby exorcise my subjectivity. I do, rather, enable myself to manage it – to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome – as I progress through collecting, analyzing, and writing up my data. (p. 20)

In other words, although I cannot rid myself of my own subjectivity, I can choose to acknowledge it and be aware of it and how it impacts my research. I can also, therefore, choose to manage it.

### **Key Terms**

The following terms are used throughout this study and are important to identify and define in order to have a complete understanding of this research:

Beginning Teacher – A teacher who is within their first three years of teaching.

Early Career Teacher – A teacher with four to eight years of teaching experience.

Mentor Program – A program designed in the district under study for novice and beginning teachers during their first three years in the profession. Beginning teachers are matched with a master teacher at their grade level or in their content area and have the opportunity to receive coaching in classroom management and lesson design, and see model lessons taught by their district mentor. ([http://www.schooldistrict/sites/default/files/schooldistrict/mentor-program-faqs\\_0.pdf](http://www.schooldistrict/sites/default/files/schooldistrict/mentor-program-faqs_0.pdf)).

Focus Status Schools – Schools which are in the bottom 15% of high poverty schools and have faced challenges with closing the achievement gap and getting all students to achieve at high levels (<https://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/demonstrating-meet-flex-definitions.pdf>).

Full-Release Mentor – A veteran teacher highly trained as a mentor to beginning teachers and who is released from teaching duties to work directly with beginning teachers (<http://www.newteachercenter.org/multimedia/full-release-mentoring-principal-andrea-carroll>).

Mentor – An experienced and trusted advisor (<http://www.newteachercenter.org/mentors>).

New Teacher Induction – A highly structured and intensive training series for novice teachers (<http://www.newteachercenter.org/induction-leaders>).

Novice Teacher – A teacher who is brand new to the teaching profession, has never had his or her own classroom, and holds a valid teaching license.

Priority Status Schools – schools which represent the bottom 5% of high poverty schools in the state and have been identified as most in need of assistance in turning around student achievement and growth (<https://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/demonstrating-meet-flex-definitions.pdf>).

Title I – Any school in the district being studied with 70% or more of students living in poverty is eligible to receive additional federal funds to assist in addressing some of the challenges faced in teaching students of poverty. (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>).

Veteran Teacher – A teacher with six or more years of teaching experience.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

In order to keep this research project manageable, I chose to focus only on teachers in their sixth through eighth year of teaching, and their mentors, in one large Oregon school district. I selected ten early career teachers, and four beginning teacher mentors, purposively recruited to

obtain the broadest range of experiences possible within the participant pool. All early career teachers had gone through the district's mentoring/induction program.

This research primarily used semi-structured personal interviews to gain data from participants. There were four possible limitations to address: (a) the pre-existing professional relationships between the participants and the researcher, (b) the possibility that participants may not have felt comfortable speaking frankly about their experiences as new teachers in the district, (c) the possibility that some participants could have experienced changes in employment status or location during the study, and (d) the findings do not generalize to the entire population.

Although I do not have close relationships with the majority of our beginning teachers, some knew me professionally due to my prior role within the Professional Development department. Most of them would not know me by sight, but might have recognized my name, as they have likely seen it on department communications. In order to limit the chance of bias due to pre-existing relationships, I eliminated from the participant pool any teacher that I already had a personal or professional relationship with, including any teacher from my own school. Even though I am now a building administrator, it is possible that some may have perceived me as district administration and hesitated to share honestly about their experiences. I reminded participants that anything they shared would be strictly anonymous. Although unlikely, some participants could have moved to another district, resigned, or been terminated during the research study. If this had occurred during the course of the research study, I would have selected an alternate participant to interview. Lastly, a limitation of the qualitative study was that the findings do not generalize to the entire population on either a state or national level. This is chiefly due to the fact data were collected from a non-probability sample. Nonetheless,

the knowledge generated by this qualitative research project is significant in its own right as insights gained may be transferrable or applied to other early career teachers' experiences.

In designing this study, there were also three delimitations identified: (a) The participant pool in the study was drawn mostly from Title I schools where the majority of the district's beginning teachers were placed, thus limiting the range of participant experiences. The district being studied had a fast-growing population of students in poverty and students who spoke a language other than English at home. As a result, many of our newest teachers, who held endorsements such as English as a Second Language (ESOL), were placed in Title I schools. Experiences of new teachers working in schools with mostly middle class families were likely to be different than the experiences of new teachers working with students of poverty. I sought out teachers from Title I schools as well as non-Title I schools. (b) I chose to use a small sample size of ten early career teacher participants and four mentors. I did this to allow a deeper look into the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the participants while still keeping the research manageable, similar to processes described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), and Yin (2015) where the researcher draws out stories and experiences. This is why I sought the broadest possible range of experiences within the selected participants. (c) I interviewed participants from only one Oregon school district. This district had an unusually high number of early career teachers remain in the profession, thus creating an optimal environment for case study research to study retention factors for early career teachers. By keeping the research limited to the selected school district, I was able to focus deeply and gain greater insight into why their rates of beginning teacher retention were high.

## **Summary**

Finding and retaining effective teachers is becoming increasingly difficult and retention rates for beginning teachers have been falling (The New Teacher Project, 2014). From 1998 to 2008, annual teacher attrition rose by 41 percent, and as of 2014 nearly one third of teachers leave the profession within their first three years (Headdon, 2014).

Ingersoll (2012) found that no single component determines whether a teacher stays or leaves the teaching profession. Focusing in specifically on this district's new teachers, I wanted to find out what enticed early career teachers to stay, what early career teachers identified as most valuable to them, what combination of supports held the most appeal to them, and what impact their participation in the mentor program had on their teaching career. For this reason, I chose to investigate the retention of early career teachers in this district with consistently high retention rates for their early career teachers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the dynamics of teacher retention with a small number of early career teachers. With a sample of educators from one large Oregon school district, personal interviews were used to investigate the reasons why most novice or early career teachers in the district remained in the profession when researchers estimate 40% to 50% of all beginning teachers leave the teaching profession within the first five years (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Grissmer & Kirby, 1987; Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014; Johnson et al., 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This study also explored the types of supports identified by early career teachers.

Since the mid-1980s the significant expansion of the teaching workforce has been accompanied by increased turnover among beginning teachers. Despite spending four to six years obtaining degrees and endorsements to become teachers, or taking a one-year Master of Arts in Teaching program after completing a bachelor's degree, nearly half of all beginning teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Grissmer & Kirby, 1987; Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson et al., 2004). Teacher retention rates in the literature vary greatly from one researcher to the next, but most agree that beginning teachers leave at high rates. The Chicago Consortium on School Research (CCSR, 2007) found that many schools serving low-income minority students turn over half their staff every three years, deepening the gap between poor and wealthy students' access to experienced teachers. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2007) states the result is that "students are too often left with a passing parade of inexperienced teachers who leave before they become accomplished educators" (p. 4).



The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015) found a correlation between the level of support and training provided to new teachers and the increased likelihood of their leaving after the first year. In a 2012 study of teacher attrition conducted by The New Teacher Project, nearly one third of highly effective teachers left within two years, and almost half left within five years. While teacher attrition due to retirement is expected, teacher attrition due to other factors is often problematic. The Chalkboard Project (2013) states that Oregon will need to hire approximately 15,500 teachers between 2012 and 2020, encouraging school districts to recruit and hire excellent teachers and provide the necessary supports to retain them in schools.

Teaching in United States' schools is changing rapidly. The economic recession of recent years has caused potential teachers to look at other career options, as positions have not seemed as secure and attractive as in the past. Pension and accountability standards have brought negative media to the face of teaching (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2015). Teachers of color are entering the profession at twice the rate of white teachers, however in 2009, teachers of color left the teaching profession at a rate 24% higher than white teachers (May & Ingersoll, 2011). Ingersoll (2012) indicated that today's teachers are younger and much less experienced than those of a generation ago. In 1990, seventeen percent of teachers in the United States had five or fewer years of teaching experience. In 2010 that figure had grown to more than one quarter of all U.S. teachers. In the 2011-2012 school year, 45% of all public school teachers in the United States had been teaching less than ten years (Ingersoll, Merrill & Stuckey, 2014). A young workforce means that additional attention should be directed toward the support young teachers need as they join the workforce (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014).

While the percentage of teachers leaving the profession is high, some leave for a time and later choose to go back. Grissmer and Kirby (1987) reported that 40 to 60 percent of teachers

who leave the profession are likely to return. More recent research from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (Odden, 2014) showed that about 13 percent of the American workforce either moves or leaves the teaching profession each year. Additionally, their research estimates that more than one million teachers transition into, between, or out of schools annually. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) reported that among early career teachers, more female than male teachers taught for at least five years, and of the females that left, 64% planned to return to teaching compared to 44% of males. Ingersoll (2012) found that many men who leave teaching do so to pursue higher paying careers to better support their families, while women are more likely to take breaks from teaching to raise families.

The review of the literature used for this research study was designed to explore topics related to factors for teacher retention and to provide the reader with the knowledge base upon which this study was built. This review of the literature explores the causes and consequences of teacher attrition, examining practices that may have caused early career teachers to leave the profession. Next, the literature review examines the causes and consequences of teacher retention. Specific strategies for early career teacher retention are identified and explained.

### **Teacher Attrition: Causes and Consequences**

The recent slowing of the economic recession and the resulting economic rebound has encouraged more teachers to return to the profession (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Reforms such as smaller class sizes, expansions in special education, and the need for more math and science teachers have all contributed to the recent influx of beginning teachers. However, the phenomenon that has created most vacancies in the teaching ranks in America is teacher turnover (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007).

Teachers leave for a variety of reasons, such as poor teacher preparation (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014), poor working conditions or a challenging placement (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007), lack of professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2012), feeling unappreciated (The New Teacher Project, 2012), and/or low salary (The New Teacher Project, 2014). Late hiring can create situations where teachers are not placed for success (Liu, 2006). Research from New York City Public Schools indicates that lack of support from administrators, isolation from colleagues, and poor professional development all play a significant role in teacher attrition (Marinell, 2013). The New Teacher Project identifies lack of appreciation for high-performing teachers as the leading cause of teacher attrition (2012). In other words, there are many known reasons why teachers leave. Perhaps this knowledge will help curb excessive teacher attrition.

**Poor teacher preparation.** U.S Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated, “Too many future teachers graduate from prep programs unprepared for success in the classroom” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p.1). Cochran-Smith et al. (2012) in their critique of teacher preparation programs found that many such programs failed to adequately prepare pre-service teachers prior to their first in-service experience. A controversial report released by the National Council on Teacher Quality (2015) found that of the 1,668 teacher preparation programs in the United States, only 26 elementary and 81 secondary programs were found to be consistently strong when they were compared by using standards which included selection criteria. The criteria included academic content, classroom management, lesson planning, assessment and data, equity, student teaching, instructional design, learning outcomes, evidence of effectiveness, and rigor. The programs at the top of the rankings featured coursework and clinical practice that create graduates better prepared to handle classroom responsibilities. In other words, pre-service

teachers need high quality coursework and extended clinical practice in order to be adequately prepared beginning teachers.

**Poor working conditions.** Working conditions, such as a safe, pleasant and supportive work environment, a manageable workload, and adequate compensation play a critical role in influencing teachers' decisions about remaining in the profession. In Linda Darling-Hammond's (2003) study on teacher attrition, she found that excellent working conditions can improve teacher effectiveness, enhance commitment to their school, and promote job satisfaction, ultimately helping them determine to stay in the profession. Working conditions are strongly associated with teacher commitment to teaching (Marzano, 2003).

In American schools today teachers are required to do more than ever before. Despite their encounters with increasingly complex and demanding circumstances in the course of their work, teachers must prepare their students to reach unprecedented levels of achievement. In fact, 40 percent of respondents to a 2007 survey of over 600 teachers by Public Agenda and The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality felt the pressure to increase student achievement was even more troubling than poor compensation. Knowing that teachers who perceive their working conditions and/or salary as meager are more likely to leave the profession; this creates a perfect storm for teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; DuFour, 2015; Gardner, 2010; Rochkind, 2008).

**Lack of professional development.** The growth curve for new teachers is steep, and almost all new teachers struggle in one way or another. Typically they wrestle with classroom management, student behavior, and learning the curriculum. Teachers need to be provided with targeted support and real-world training, but program fidelity is difficult with a constant stream of new teachers to train (Headdon, 2014). A comprehensive mentoring and induction program is

the most effective system of professional development for new teachers (Ingersoll, 2012). Professional learning that is in response to teacher need is essential. Poorly designed professional learning fails to honor teachers as professionals who do emotionally complicated knowledge work (Knight, 2013). These authors all point to the need for responsive, relevant, and systematic professional development for teachers.

In their study on the hiring practices of new teachers, Liu and Johnson (2006) found that the majority of teachers surveyed were hired less than one month before school started, and 33% were hired after the school year had already begun, causing them to miss out on critical professional development offered prior to the start of the school year. Whenever new teachers are hired there is a need for high quality professional development and ongoing job-embedded training.

**Lack of support from administrators.** Schools are all about relationships. In her study of why beginning teachers leave, Headdon (2014) found that the primary motivation for their exodus was a lack of administrative and professional support. The New Teacher Project found in their 2012 study that outstanding teachers often leave due to neglect from their administrators. Prather-Jones (2011) also found that having a sufficient level of support was a major factor influencing teachers' career decisions. In the 2013 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 76 percent of secondary teachers and 81 percent of elementary teachers said they would rather work at a school where administrators strongly support them than at a school that paid significantly higher salaries. More effective teachers cited poor support from the principal as a reason for leaving a school, while less effective teachers cited student behavior (Rice, 2014). From their research into teacher retention, Sass, Seal, and Martin (2011) concluded that in order for administrators to retain teachers they must procure resources and materials, and provide

opportunities for professional growth. Administrators must recognize teachers as professionals and involve them in planning for their ongoing professional growth. Teachers want administrators to be present, positive, and actively engaged in the school (Hughes, 2012), yet the New Teacher Center (2012) found in their research on beginning teacher attrition that too few principals spend time in classrooms or support teachers in their dealings with parents. In other words, teachers need the support of their principals.

School leadership matters. According to Mid-continental Research for Education and Learning (Waters & Cameron, 2007), school leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors that impact student achievement. Yet school leaders are frequently asked to take on complicated and unmanageable workloads, leading to 75 percent of principals reporting that their job has become too complex for them to be effective (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013). These findings are especially troubling in light of research demonstrating a strong relationship between a principal's self-efficacy and his or her effectiveness (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2010). DuFour (2015) tells us that principals are now required to spend more time in classrooms evaluating teachers; however, the effort to improve teaching through supervision will only be effective if principals have the time and expertise to provide meaningful feedback to teachers, and DuFour maintains that there is no evidence these conditions exist.

The New Teacher Project published research that identifies *negligent retention* as the problem that needs to be solved, stating that in the United States the real teacher retention crisis is “not only a failure to retain enough teachers, but a failure to retain the right teachers” (2012, p. 4). Their research examines both high-performing teachers and low-performing teachers and compares their rates of retention and attrition. They found that most schools retained the highest

and lowest performing teachers at nearly identical rates. The researchers determined three causes for this phenomenon: (a) Principals make too little effort to retain high-performing teachers or remove low-performing teachers, (b) Poor school cultures and working conditions drive away great teachers, and (c) Policies give principals and district leaders few incentives to change their ways (The New Teacher Project, 2012).

The consequences of negligent teacher retention are that school turnaround is nearly impossible and the teaching profession is degraded. The New Teacher Center recommends changing practices to encourage *smart retention*: to improve retention, not blindly increase it. Smart retention requires making retention of the highest-performing teachers a top priority, and strengthening the teaching profession through higher expectations for all teachers.

Principals must make smarter, more deliberate decisions about the teachers they hire, develop, and retain, and district leaders need to support principals as they do this work. Great teachers do not leave schools due to high expectations, but they often leave schools that are not serious about good teaching (M. Cadez, personal communication, May, 2014). Additionally, principals need to stop being indifferent to low-performing teachers. “Tolerating poor performance keeps ineffective teachers in the classroom indefinitely and sends a devastating message to outstanding teachers. Most importantly, it hurts the reputation of the entire profession, allowing it to be defined by mediocrity rather than excellence” (The New Teacher Project, 2012).

Novices need a well-integrated support system within their schools, which includes the time and attention of their principals. Building a career path for classroom teachers can increase the attractiveness of teaching and create the workplace new teachers want and need – a supportive work environment and opportunities for growth and experience (Johnson, 2002).

**Isolation from colleagues.** Decades ago researchers concluded that one of the major obstacles for school improvement in the United States was the long-standing tradition of teacher isolation. In 1971 psychologist Seymour Sarason reported that since teachers rarely have contact with one another they are psychologically alone even though they work in a building full of other teachers. Lortie (1975) described how the isolation of classroom teachers prevents them from developing and sharing knowledge of their craft. More recently, Fulton (2005) concluded that the most persistent barrier to great learning is isolated teaching in stand-alone classrooms. A study comparing the United States education system to others from around the world found that American teachers in traditional public education settings are largely isolated from their colleagues (Mehta, 2013). Participation in common planning time or collaboration time built into the teaching day with teachers in similar grade levels or content areas has a strong correlation to increasing teacher retention among beginning teachers (Ingersoll, 2012). These studies illustrate the importance of teacher collaboration and the reduction of teacher isolation in order to build resilience in teachers.

**Lack of appreciation.** Teachers work hard to differentiate instruction for a variety of learners, align their instruction with curricular goals, and make adequate yearly progress with students of widely different abilities and learning styles (Headdon, 2014). However, “The public has gotten the message that public school teaching – especially urban teaching – is a broadly failed profession” (Goldstein, 2014, p. 6). This quote illustrates the scrutiny of the public school teacher and the importance of building up teachers to be recognized as true professionals.

Another educator made a similar comment:

They continue to be besieged by hostile attacks while the unprecedented successes of our public schools are being largely ignored. With a nod to



Winston Churchill, it could be said that never have so many been asked to do so much with so little – and been appreciated by so few! (Eaker, as quoted in DuFour, 2015, p. xx)

Most teachers do not believe the people they work for care about them or their efforts to improve (Headdon, 2014). It is no wonder that so many new teachers leave when circumstances are difficult and appreciation is low.

Schools struggle to maintain standards for high quality teaching while constantly engaging in the recruitment of new highly qualified teachers and the retention of those new hires and veteran teachers (Gayton, 2008). The cost of recruiting, replacing, and training teachers who left the profession averaged over \$10,000 per teacher annually in 2007, draining districts of dollars that could be better spent on teacher retention, or on teaching and learning (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007).

The cost is more than just financial, however. Novice teachers may strain budgets, disrupt school cultures, and depress student achievement. High annual turnover rates compromise the ability of school districts to provide skilled teachers to all students. They also have a negative impact on all students, not only the students whose teachers have left (McGee, 2013; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Research by Stanford University economist Eric Hanushek (2010) shows that an ineffective teacher can cost a student as much as six months of learning every year. Schools with the largest numbers of poor students experience the highest rates of teacher turnover, often twice as high as other schools (Alliance For Excellent Education, 2014), meaning these already disadvantaged students are even more likely to lose academic ground due to teacher turnover. These examples illustrate the importance of keeping effective teachers in place so students do not lose academic momentum.

A negative consequence of high levels of beginning teacher attrition is the loss of new teachers before they are fully able to develop their skills. A number of studies have documented that teachers' effectiveness – as measured by gains in their students' test scores – increases significantly with each year of experience for the first several years in teaching (Henry, Fortner & Bastian, 2012; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2006; The New Teacher Project, 2012).

### **Teacher Retention: Causes and Consequences**

Recruitment of new teachers for schools with concentrations of poor, low-performing students often involves aggressive recruitment campaigns outside of the local school district; however, there are potential benefits from local recruiting and training (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005). Recruiting locally allows teachers to work close to their families and other support systems, increasing the odds that they will stay (Boyd et al., 2009). It is not surprising to learn that teachers are more likely to stay in an area where they have roots.

Grissmer and Kirby (1987) state that educational research, programs, and policies should focus on retaining beginning teachers through the first few “turbulent” years of teaching in order to diminish the risk of attrition early on in teachers' careers. The need for retention of excellent teachers is even more vital for teachers in positions that are often hard to fill, such as special education, bilingual, or secondary math and science. Special education teachers leave at much higher rates than general education teachers (May & Ingersoll, 2011), creating an even greater need for incoming special education teachers.

Some researchers have documented the role of resilience in retention. The interaction between stressors and protective factors are primary forces in the resilience process. It also stimulates responses to help counteract negative effects of stress. High-quality mentoring and induction programs for novice teachers foster resilience and support teacher retention (Doney,

2013). School leaders who invest in ongoing teacher training, support, and development for beginning teachers experience lower novice teacher attrition rates (Clark, 2012).

In a study of teacher retention and student achievement, researchers found that more effective teachers tend to stay, while less effective teachers are more likely to leave in their first year (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009). This is in conflict with the research of the New Teacher Project (2012), which found that many teachers who leave are high-performing teachers, while many low-performing teachers persist in the profession. Their research found retention to be important, but specifically retaining the best teachers is even more important. The New Teacher Project recommends that principals show appreciation to their high performing teachers, remove low-performing teachers, and improve working conditions for all teachers.

**Collegial support.** To be successful in the teaching profession, teachers need to build connections with a community of colleagues who will continue to provide professional support and guidance even after the years of formal mentoring have ended. Teachers who have access to common planning time with other teachers in the same subject or grade level, and who have regularly scheduled collaboration time with other teachers are less likely to leave the teaching profession than teachers who do not have these accesses to colleagues structured into their day (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Barnett, Fuller, and Williams (2007) found that support from colleagues is second only to support from administrators in a teacher's decision to stay in teaching or stay in a specific school.

**Instructional coaching.** Gawande (2011) describes the need for coaching in the medical field, as well as in sports. He makes the case for coaching in anything in which we want to do better, including teaching. The National Center on Education and the Economy (Tucker, 2014)

recommends districts develop career ladders for teachers and school leaders, offer compensation that will attract and keep top talent, give teachers more time to collaborate, and develop methods of peer accountability. Instructional coaching is one option for teachers. Instructional coaches are onsite professional developers who work collaboratively with teachers to incorporate research-based instructional methods into their teaching. Showers (1985) concluded that coached teachers practice new strategies more frequently and develop greater skills than uncoached teachers, use new strategies more appropriately, exhibit greater long-term retention of knowledge about a skill, are more likely to teach new strategies to their students, and demonstrate their thinking more clearly with regard to the purposes and uses of the strategies. Each of these factors has the possibility of increasing teacher retention.

Teachers need sufficient support to help with the implementation of new practices. They need a deep knowledge of high impact instructional strategies that have a significant, positive impact on students' behavior, attitudes, engagement, and learning (Knight, 2013). Good coaches know how to break performance down into its critical individual components and assist teachers in translating professional learning into professional practice. Coaching improves teacher attitudes, teacher practices, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. Teachers who are coached are more likely to use new teaching practices and use them with a higher degree of quality than teachers who are not coached, resulting in teachers who are more likely to stay in the profession (Knight, 2013).

**Mentoring.** There are a variety of approaches to mentoring in the educational setting. Some teachers receive online mentoring through web-based communities (Bernard, 2011). A buddy mentor system pairs a veteran teacher with a new teacher, but does not necessarily provide training for the mentor or release time for them to collaborate. Other mentoring or induction

programs address a new teacher experience more holistically. For instance, the New Teacher Center's model moves beyond the buddy system to create effective mentoring and produce excellent teaching through a rigorous program of mentor preparation (Moir, 2005).

Mentoring is non-linear and complex work (Waterman & He, 2011). An excellent mentor program includes face-to-face mentoring time, reduced preparation/course load for beginning teachers, job-embedded professional development, and supportive communication with supervisors. The greater the number of support measures that are in place, the lower the rate of teacher attrition and the higher the rate of student achievement on standardized tests (Alliance For Excellent Education, 2014).

In her research on motivating teachers to stay in the field, Hollabaugh (2012) concluded that strong teacher mentoring and induction programs have a positive impact on beginning teacher retention. Perry and Hayes (2011) determined that properly implemented mentoring and induction programs have the potential to increase the probability that new teachers will make long-term commitments to the teaching profession and become better teachers. However, recruiting exemplary mentor teachers is often difficult because they are already in great demand, and thus stretched thin (Marker, Mitchall, & Lassiter, 2013). These studies indicate that mentors are vital to retention of beginning teachers, and acknowledge that hiring mentors can be a challenge.

Schwille and Dynak (2000) emphasize the importance of developing strategies for building relationships with new teachers. The mentor-mentee relationship is a foundational component of a comprehensive mentoring and induction program. Mentors and new teachers need protected, regularly scheduled times to meet and nurture their relationship. Additionally, early career teachers need time with their mentors to ask questions, problem-solve, and be

reflective on their practice (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Mentors must also have empathy toward new teachers, and understand of the needs of new teachers (Davis, 2014).

Demands for beginning teachers are great. They need help differentiating instruction for a wide range of students, and are still learning how to align their instruction with curricular goals (Glazerman, 2010). Good support in their early years of teaching increases the likelihood that beginning teachers will stay the course.

**Induction Programs.** Few teachers receive what the Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) calls a comprehensive induction package: a reduced number of class/course preparations, a highly trained mentor in the same field, professional development tailored to the needs of beginning teachers, strong communication with administrators, and time for planning and collaboration with other teachers. Such a package could increase the retention of new teachers, according to researchers who have investigated the specific components of induction that correlate with beginning teacher retention (Cohen, 2005; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

Strong induction programs can help retain teachers and improve their instruction (MetLife Foundation, 2013). In a thorough review of existing empirical studies that evaluated the effects of induction, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) found that induction has a positive effect on beginning teacher retention rates. Further, they discovered that the rates of retention were higher with longer and more intensive induction programs. This is consistent with the findings presented by the New Teacher Center in their Program Theory of Action, outlining a framework for comprehensive mentoring and induction for all beginning teachers (New Teacher Center, 2012). The experiences of beginning teachers in their first few years on the job determines not only if they will persist in the profession, but also how they will perform as veteran teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Therefore, strong mentoring and induction programs are essential.

Ingersoll (2012) found that the more comprehensive an induction program was, the better the retention rates of beginning teachers were. The number of supports beginning teachers received, as well as the strength and relevance of those supports, had an impact on the retention rate for teachers. When a teacher received multiple supports from their induction program it greatly increased retention rates (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004), with frequent collaboration and planning time with a mentor the most valued components. While teachers who received mentoring had higher rates of retention than those who did not receive mentoring, those teachers who received mentoring and comprehensive induction had the highest retention rates of any group of beginning teachers with nearly twice as many staying in the profession (Ingersoll, 2011). Darling-Hammond (2012) highlighted the importance of systematic, intense mentoring for all beginning teachers, especially in their first year, which helped teachers move from merely surviving to actually thriving. These studies demonstrate that induction has a positive effect on beginning teacher retention.

Harry Wong (2005) challenges principals and teacher leaders to invest in beginning teachers by creating a culture where experienced teachers take the daily dilemmas of beginning teachers seriously and are willing to help them develop instructional strategies, model effective teaching, and talk about student work and student challenges. He maintains this sustained, school-based professional development creates the supportive environment that new teachers need in order to thrive, requiring a structured system of induction to be in place for all beginning teachers. Wong describes five commonalities found in successful induction programs: effective classroom management procedures and routines, effective instructional practices, sensitivity to and understanding of the school community, lifelong learning and professional growth, and unity and teamwork among the entire learning community. He also makes a distinction between

mentoring and induction: “Induction brings order and vision to a very valuable process. Mentoring does not. Mentoring benefits the individual. Induction benefits the group by bringing people together (p. 77).” In other words, induction creates a culture of family in a district.

Schmoker (1996) explains mentoring as being concerned with supporting an individual teacher whereas induction is a group process that organizes the expertise of educators. He goes on to describe mentoring as caring for individuals, while induction cares for the group. He asserts that when mentoring is paired with induction the result is a high level of student achievement. Many researchers agree that a systematic mentoring and induction program can help beginning teachers transition into teaching, improve teacher effectiveness, and increase the retention rate of effective educators (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Johnson, 2002; Schmoker, 1996; Wong, 2005).

The New Teacher Center has been working with beginning teacher induction programs for 27 years in hundreds of school districts. Their commitment is to provide a pathway to increased student learning by accelerating new teacher effectiveness. Their research and experience indicates that a comprehensive and systemic approach to teacher induction is essential (New Teacher Center, 2012). Although it is important to recognize the importance of many elements of a program of beginning teacher induction, induction programs based on just one or two components cannot guarantee significant impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning. In fact, Richard Ingersoll’s national study (2012) finds that no single component influences new teachers’ decisions to remain in the teaching profession, nor does it impact their perceived success. In other words, a comprehensive induction program is more effective than offering only isolated components of induction.



*Program impact on students.* In his 2010 study on the effects of comprehensive induction programs, Glazerman found that the ultimate beneficiary of such programs was the student in the beginning teacher's classroom. Students taught by teachers who have received high quality comprehensive induction support for at least two years demonstrated significantly higher learning gains than those who had new teachers that did not have the benefit of comprehensive induction. Focused, comprehensive induction, which follows a framework such as Chicago's GOLDEN program, creates the opportunity for beginning teachers to improve rapidly, sometimes surpassing their veteran colleagues, as measured by student achievement data. 2011 survey data from the work in Chicago Public Schools demonstrated that after 2 years of beginning teacher induction, 99% of participants agreed that mentoring had improved their teaching practice (<http://www.newteachercenter.org/impact/practice>). Survey data gathered from beginning teachers in the district being studied supported this trend, with 96% of the teachers participating in the mentor program agreeing that time spent with their mentor was a worthwhile investment (Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, August, 2015). Successful teachers are more likely to stay in the teaching profession, thereby increasing teacher retention rates (Hanushek, 2011). Strong induction programs can advance the careers of experienced teachers who are trained as mentors, and can also encourage new teacher leadership (New Teacher Center, 2012).

*Program design.* The design of the New Teacher Center Induction Program outlines essential elements for program success: capable instructional mentors, effective principals, multiple support structures for beginning teachers, and ongoing program evaluation. In mentoring and induction programs with full-release mentors, it is also recommended that strong program leadership be in place to guide the work of the mentor team.

Mentoring beginning teachers is multifaceted and challenging work; it requires a specific set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Wong, 2005). To become effective mentors, teachers who consider a career move to mentoring need extensive and focused preparation, ongoing job-embedded professional development, a safe place to learn and reflect on the complexities of accelerating new teacher's practice, and opportunities to engage in formative assessment to advance their own effectiveness (New Teacher Center, 2012).

The influence of the principal on a beginning teacher is critical. Therefore, effective comprehensive induction programs focus on building the capacity of principals and other site leaders to create circumstances where beginning teachers flourish. Principals need support to effectively use standards-based supervision and evaluation practices in order to provide meaningful feedback to beginning teachers (Heffner, 2009). School districts need to provide observation practice and calibration training to assist principals in learning to coach and evaluate their teachers, using tools such as Marzano's framework, which encompasses a growth model for principals to use as a guide for giving specific feedback on focused skills and behaviors. Robust programs require leaders with a vision extending well beyond the beginning teacher's first few years of practice. Comprehensive induction programs focus on building the capacity of principals in order to create environments where beginning teachers thrive. When principals have support in utilizing standards-based supervision and evaluation practices and provide meaningful feedback, teachers become even stronger (New Teacher Center, 2012).

Beginning teachers also need specialized supports beyond the principal and mentor. Comprehensive induction programs include systematic protocols that assist mentors and beginning teachers collect and analyze data regarding both their professional practice and student learning. The data collected are used to create formative assessments and make course

corrections to improve student learning. Also important to the growth of beginning teachers is a community of practice facilitated by mentors and guided by professional teaching standards, Common Core State Standards, differentiated instructional methods, academic literacy, innovative use of technology, and instructional priorities aligned with the school district.

Program evaluation involves frequent and systematic collection of both implementation data and impact data to improve the program and provide a pathway to continuous improvement. Examples of possible data include: stakeholder surveys, program document analysis, teacher satisfaction surveys, teacher effectiveness data, teacher retention data, focus group feedback, and interviews designed to improve the program.

*Conditions for success.* Teacher induction is a complex process that requires coordinated work at all levels in a school district, but also can have an enormous impact on new teachers and student achievement. The American Institute for Research (2015) published a *Brief* highlighting ten conditions likely to affect successful implementation of a comprehensive mentoring and induction program. Their recommendations include: a strong and supportive instructional leader, evidence-based instruction aligned with program goals, positive instructional community climate and culture, instructional staff committed to improved instruction and student outcomes, professional collaboration around sharing and improving instruction, an expectation to participate in professional learning, data-driven decision making, experienced teachers who will serve as mentors, release time for beginning teachers and mentors to work together, and organizational leadership. By ensuring that each of these conditions for success is met, a program will be able to move toward implementing a successful mentoring and induction program.

Since each educational setting is different, it can be challenging to reach a single definition for beginning teacher induction; however, it is important to have common language around the crucial components of a comprehensive beginning teacher induction program. Program standards can be utilized to guide program development, as well as to assess program effectiveness. Guidance from a systematic induction program framework can help define the necessary components for programs to successfully support the growth of beginning teachers and the students they teach.

*Investment in school district human capital.* Villar and Strong (2007) completed a cost analysis of a medium-sized California school district with a comprehensive mentoring and induction program. After all direct and indirect expenses were determined, the district saw a return of \$1.66 (adjusted for inflation) for every dollar invested in the program in the first three years. Benefits included savings due to increased teacher retention, increased teacher effectiveness, and time savings for principals who spent less time monitoring new teachers. Student achievement grew at a faster rate with mentored teachers than with those teachers who were not mentored. In five years' time the school districts recovered more than twice their investment.

An investment in teacher quality needs to start at the earliest stages of a teacher's career and continue throughout their professional lifetime (Darling-Hammond, 2012). Screening, selection, and recruitment processes must be solid because the teachers hired today will determine the success of the next generation of students. Therefore, a teacher induction program that focuses on new teacher support and classroom practice is the single most important ingredient in improving student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2005). When the induction process is systematic and sustained, it has the best results with new teachers (Hiebert, Gallimore,

& Stigler, 2002). A comprehensive induction program has the potential to move the skill level of a beginning teacher to that of a fourth-year teacher in a single year and can result in a higher rate of retention than new teachers who only receive mentors (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). This research indicates that while mentoring is important for new teachers, a systematic program of mentoring and induction is crucial for new teachers to realize their potential.

Induction programs are most effective when they have clearly articulated goals, administrative supervision, long-term objectives, networks that can provide a structure for nurturing collaboration, demonstration classes where teachers can observe and be observed, portfolio assessments to gauge pedagogical knowledge and skills, and effective mentoring (Wong, 2005). With these features in place, research demonstrates that comprehensive induction can cut attrition rates by 50% as well as decrease the overall costs of teacher recruitment and retention (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005).

**Other methods for increasing teacher retention.** “A great unfinished task in U.S. education is to create conditions to better support new teachers” (Darling-Hammond & Barnett, 2006, p. 18). In their article about keeping highly qualified teachers in schools, Darling-Hammond and Barnett (2006) outline a series of steps that could be undertaken by the federal government to increase teacher retention. Their call to action includes launching a program of scholarships and forgivable loans. Both scholarships and loans would have special incentives for teachers with expertise in high-needs fields such as secondary math and science or special education, or “grow your own” programs in urban and rural areas. They also indicate the need for school districts to provide for beginning teachers: a manageable initial teaching assignment, full-release mentors, an evaluation rubric that tracks improvement over time (such as those outlined on pages 9-13 of this document), fair pay, and good working conditions. Darling-

Hammond and Barnett task schools with providing solid leadership, time for high-quality professional development, and teacher empowerment.

*Effective teacher preparation.* There is a substantial body of research suggesting that well-prepared teachers have the largest impact on student learning (Barry, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Gitomer, 2007; Headdon, 2014; Ingersoll, 2012; Marzano, 2003; Schmoker, 2006). Goldhaber (2013) studied the relationship between teacher training programs and student achievement by reviewing student achievement results of state math and reading assessments. He found that the impact of the top-performing teacher preparation programs as compared to the bottom performing teacher preparation programs had an impact on student achievement that was considerably greater than the impact of poverty. Darling-Hammond (2005) makes a compelling case for teacher preparation programs to include a clear connection to both practice and theory so that teachers enter the workforce with both content knowledge and relevant teaching experience.

**Improved working conditions.** Marzano (2003) identifies several working conditions known to increase teacher retention, including a safe and orderly school environment, collaborative working relationships with colleagues, and high quality leadership. Susan Moore Johnson (2002) outlines several other working conditions to improve teacher retention. She recommends an integrated professional culture, a place where professional educators work together to increase student achievement. This may include learning labs, professional learning communities, or participation in professional development together, as long as the culture is one of positive professionalism. Researchers have identified many factors that positively affect teacher retention including competitive and fair salary and benefits, collegial support, a safe and orderly environment, and teacher support from administration (Borman & Dowling, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Greiner & Smith, 2006; Johnson, 2002; Marzano, 2003). Ingersoll,

Merrill, and Stuckey (2014) found that beginning teachers crave an inclusive culture. They contend that helping beginning teachers learn effective classroom management, providing opportunities for professional development, valuing teacher input in school decision making, and providing effective leadership are all working conditions related to higher rates of teacher retention. In short, beginning teachers need to know they are not alone and that they have a network of support available to them when they need it.

**Effective teachers.** The most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher (Marzano, 2013). The Center for Public Education (Gulamhussein, 2013) outlines the need for high-quality, job-embedded professional development as the best way to create effective teachers. Professional development can no longer be about “exposing teachers to a concept or providing basic knowledge about a teaching methodology. Instead, professional development in an era of accountability requires a change in a teacher’s practice that leads to increases in student learning.” (p. 6). Effective teachers have the ability to increase student achievement by up to ten percentile points compared to less effective teachers (Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006). It can take up to five years for a teacher to become fully proficient and be able to maximize student achievement (Claycomb & Hawley, 2000). When teachers experience success, they are more likely to stay in the teaching profession (TNTP, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

There is a large volume of research about why teachers, and specifically beginning teachers in their first five years, leave the teaching profession. There is a much smaller body of research identifying why they stay. The most vulnerable students are often the ones who experience the highest rates of teacher attrition. Comprehensive mentoring and induction programs have been found to increase the likelihood that beginning teachers will stay in the

profession through their often challenging first few years. There is great variety in the different types of mentoring and induction programs available in different districts. Some programs offer very little structure, such as an optional check-in support from a veteran buddy teacher, while others offer much more structure, such as required and systematic supports from highly trained full-release mentors. No matter what type of mentoring program a school district uses, the need for high quality, comprehensive induction programs is evident.

This chapter highlighted the literature related to teacher retention, teacher attrition, and teacher mentoring and induction programs. The next chapter describes the methodology for this research study, which examined what motivates early career teachers to stay in the teaching profession.



### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

As the national teacher shortage continues to grow, it is important that school districts hire and retain excellent teachers. The purpose of this collective case study research was to examine the retention experiences of early career teachers. I used a purposive sample of eight participants from a large school district in Oregon that has experienced success retaining early career teachers. Through my research I discovered what experiences participants identified as contributing to their decision to remain in the teaching profession, and what early career teachers said about their experiences in a comprehensive mentoring and induction program.

At one time, the district under study had a difficult time recruiting and hiring high quality teachers. Once hired, the district did not want to lose them. After establishing a high-quality mentoring and induction program, this district saw teacher retention rates steadily climb. In this study I wanted to find out why these early career teachers chose to stay in the profession, and why they chose to stay with this school district.

Using collective case study research, I interviewed ten early career teachers who had completed at least two years in the mentor program and six to eight years of teaching. I asked them what experiences they could identify as important in their decision to remain in the teaching profession and what their experiences were like in the mentoring program. I also interviewed four beginning teacher mentors with at least five years of mentoring experience. I asked about their perceptions of why early career teachers in the district under study remained in teaching, and explored the mentor-mentee relationship. In case study research, the researcher studies a case within the real life context or setting (Creswell, 2013), in this instance the

experiences of early career teachers who had participated in a mentoring and induction program within an Oregon school district.

Case study research is one of several forms of social science research. Other types include: experiments, surveys, histories, and archival analyses such as economic or statistical modeling (Stake, 1995). According to Yin (2014), case studies can be used to explain, describe, or explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur. Case study research is the preferred method for understanding complex social phenomena when: (a) the main research questions are *how*, *what*, or *why* questions that also require an extensive and in-depth description of a social phenomenon, (b) the researcher has little or no control over the events, and (c) the focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon. Although my research study focused on *what* and *why*, there was more emphasis on finding out why our beginning teachers were staying in the teaching profession. Additionally, the study took place in a real-world context.

Case studies focus on how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their world, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose of conducting a case study is to understand how people make sense of their experiences (Merriam, 2009), and to build a systematic and detailed profile of a person, group, or organization (Creswell, 2013). The researcher integrates information provided by the various data sources to assemble a detailed profile of the case. A case study can have one case or multiple cases as it seeks to understand larger phenomena through intensive study of one specific instance, or a narrow collection of instances (Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

Stake (1995) and Yin (2014) both characterize three main types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. An intrinsic case study is used to learn about a unique phenomenon

and although it is conducted to learn more about a specific individual, group, event, or organization, it is not focused on generating theoretical understandings. The instrumental case study uses a particular case to gain a broader appreciation of an issue or phenomenon.

Instrumental case studies are conducted to gain a better understanding of a theoretical question, for theory building, or for creating initial theoretical understandings. The collective case study involves studying multiple cases at the same time to generate an even broader appreciation of a particular issue; it is designed with more concern for representation. Collective case studies are designed to examine, extend, or refine existing theoretical models, and help researchers make important modifications in theories by identifying phenomena that need conceptualization or refinement in existing conceptualization (Creswell, 2013). In my study, I carefully selected a small number of cases, allowing comparisons to be made across them, therefore I conducted a collective case study.

### **Setting**

The school district I studied anticipated 35% of its current teaching force would be eligible to retire within the next five years (Human Resources Director, personal communication, July 2015). Statewide, Oregon was projected to replace about one third of the current teacher workforce by 2020 (Chalkboard Project, 2013). Since nearly half of all beginning teachers leave the profession within their first five years, school districts are under pressure to recruit and hire excellent teachers and provide the necessary supports to retain them (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2015). The district studied hired over 400 new teachers for the 2015-2016 school year and needed to ensure they could prepare and retain those teachers.

In addition, the district was in the fifth year of a clinical teacher residency program in partnership with two local universities. In the clinical model, teacher candidates (student

teachers) were placed in dyads or triads with highly trained clinical teachers for one full school year. Successful candidates were interviewed “on the job” and given consideration for open positions within the district, allowing them to move seamlessly into the mentor program, where high levels of support continued. This model produced some of the district’s most highly skilled teachers (Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, August, 2014). The pipeline of beginning teachers fed directly into the mentor program, and gave teacher candidates from the residency program a taste of what teaching in the district would be like. The district hired about half of the teacher candidates trained each year in this program, signing on all but those who wished to live and teach elsewhere, or those who were not successful in completion of the program (Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, August, 2015). Since many of the teacher candidates attended college in Oregon but planned to return to their home state, the district was not able to hire all of them.

The district studied had 67 schools (44 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, eight high schools, and four charter schools). In October 2015, there were 41,464 students in the district: 19,684 in kindergarten through fifth grades; 9,365 in grades six through eight; and 12,415 in high school. These students were served by 2,307 teachers, 2,123 classified staff members, 104 principals, and 50 other district supervisors (<http://www.school.district.k12.or.us/about/statistics>).

The student population of this district was diverse: 19% of students were English Language Learners, 16% received special education services, 7% received talented and gifted services, and nearly 60% lived in poverty. 49% of the students were White, 40% were Hispanic, 5% identified as Multi-Ethnic, 2% were Asian, 2% were Pacific Islanders, 1% were African

American, and 1% were Native American Indian. 1% may seem small, but represented approximately 415 students (<http://www.school.district.k12.or.us/about/statistics>).

During the 2015-2016 school year this district employed 440 beginning teachers who were in the first three years of their teaching career. 310 of those teachers were in their first two years, where participation in the mentor program was required. The other 130 teachers were in year three of their career and had chosen to remain in the program in order to have access to their mentors. In fact, only one third-year teacher opted not to participate in the optional third-year mentoring program in the 2015-2016 school year.

In this same school year the mentor program had 21 full-release mentors and two part-time mentors: ten elementary mentors, eight secondary mentors, two mentors for beginning teachers placed in self-contained special education programs, one music mentor, one part-time physical education mentor, and one part-time counselor mentor. 36% of the mentor team was made up of culturally or linguistically diverse personnel in order to support the diverse teaching staff and student body. Interestingly, more than one third (seven) of the full-release mentor staff were beginning teachers who participated in the mentor program and had been trained to be mentors themselves. Several former teachers who had been trained as mentors went on to become clinical demonstration teachers, instructional coaches, program assistants, or took other district leadership positions (Mentor Coordinator, personal communication, August, 2015).

### **Research Design**

This research study was designed to collect data through personal interviews with eight early career teachers who had persevered in teaching for six to eight years, four experienced beginning teacher mentors, and two additional early career teachers who had been through the mentoring program themselves and were just beginning their work as beginning teacher mentors.

I used the transcribed interviews as well as my research notes to craft profiles of each beginning teacher and to look for themes in the data.

Part of my decision to conduct a collective case study was in recognition of my own investment in the professional development of teachers. The methodology also reflected my preferred style of drawing on the expertise of others. In this study, I wanted to combine my desire to bring out the best of those I worked with and the passion and enthusiasm of our beginning teachers. As stated in chapter one, however, I worked to manage my subjectivity.

### **Participants and Data Collection**

In order to obtain a broad variety of participant experiences but keep the study manageable, I used a purposive sample to recruit ten early career teacher participants and six teacher mentors, four veteran mentors and two in their first year as mentors. Two of the teacher mentors had themselves been mentored for three years in the mentoring and induction program prior to becoming mentors. If I had randomly selected participants, I could potentially have encountered a limited range of experiences. By purposively recruiting I was able to ensure a much wider range of experiences, which provided more data about early career teachers' experiences. The mentor coordinator, who directly oversees the mentor program for the district, knew each of the teachers and their journeys and made recommendations so I could obtain a wide range of experiences within the pool of participants. Creswell (2013) maintains that in collective case studies, participants should be selected who can best inform the research questions. A collective case study involves one issue, in this case retention of early career teachers, but the researcher selects a variety of cases to illustrate the issue (Creswell).

The mentor coordinator met with me to go over the entire spreadsheet of early career teachers who had completed two or three years in the mentor program and had taught a total of

six to eight years in the district. From that list we selected six elementary teachers and six secondary teachers. To provide balance in my study, I selected four teachers who by our definition had experienced struggles in their early teaching years (such as conflicts with co-workers or problems with classroom management), as well as four teachers who had experienced a smooth early teaching experience. This allowed me to find out why early career teachers persevered in both ideal situations and difficult situations.

When selecting mentors to interview, I focused on those with at least five years of mentoring experience. I also wanted to represent all school levels (elementary, middle, and high). When I met with the selected mentors, they suggested that I also include two new mentors who had been through the mentoring and induction program as early teachers, and then had become mentors in the 2015-2016 academic year. This presented the opportunity to include the unique perspective of participants who had experienced mentoring as a mentee and as a mentor. I did not select mentors that had mentored the specific early career teachers I interviewed because I needed to preserve participant anonymity, and mentor participants were selected after I had interviewed early career teacher participants.

The term *data saturation* is generally used to refer to the process of gathering and analyzing data to the point where no new insights are being observed. The concept of data saturation is important because it addresses whether a study is based on an adequate sample to demonstrate content validity (Francis et al., 2010). At a certain point in my data collection, I realized I had reached data saturation because I was hearing repeated themes with no new information emerging. However, if new concepts had continued to emerge after interviewing all selected participants, I would have continued to select and interview participants until I had reached the data saturation point.

One of my goals was to partner with teachers to tell their story. I invited teachers to participate by sending an introductory email with a very brief overview of the research study and an invitation to meet with me to learn more. Prior to the first interview with each participant I had an initial visit where I shared my “Letter of Consent” document (see Appendix A) and provided an opportunity for the participant to ask questions about the process. If they agreed to be interviewed, we set a suitable time. I then interviewed each participant, asked them my interview questions (see Appendix B and Appendix C), recorded their responses on a digital audio recorder, and later transcribed the interviews.

**Interviews.** I utilized audio recordings for the interviews and kept notes about my research in an electronic journal. I listened closely to each beginning teacher’s experiences, perceptions of their work and workplace, and the stories they shared. I watched carefully for repetition within the participant’s shared experiences in my search for themes. My journal notes included information such as the setting, participants, time of observation or interview, notes about the behavior of the participants, personal perspectives or experiences of the participants, and theoretical notes. Immediately after each interview I reflected on the interview by noting observations related to logistics (e.g., distractions in the setting or interruptions of the interview), the interviewee (e.g., was tired or seemed stressed), and insights for improving my research process (e.g., adjust the audio level on the digital recorder).

I interviewed a total of fourteen participants, assigning each a pseudonym. The participants included ten early career teachers in their sixth, seventh, or eighth year teaching, and four mentors with five or more years of mentoring experience (see Table 1). Two of the early career teachers were also new mentors (in their first year of mentoring), so they fit into both categories.



Table 1. Participant Chart.

	Years of Experience	Level and Subject/Specialty	Quote
Chandler	13 years teaching, 6 years mentoring.	Elementary mentor.	"Start with the relationship piece. Figure out strengths and build on those."
Estelle	Teacher for 53 years, first year mentor.	Elementary mentor.	"My mentor was the one person I felt I could be completely honest with about my teaching."
Gunther	6 years as an instructional assistant, teacher for 52 years, first year mentor.	Elementary mentor.	"What has made me want to stay in teaching the most is the people."
Monica	17 years teaching, 7 years mentoring.	Middle school and high school mentor.	"Take them where they're at; go where they want to go."
Phoebe	7 years teaching, 3 years mentoring.	Special Education/Secondary mentor.	"I think we need to recognize how important it is to validate beginning teachers."
Rachel	20 years teaching, 3 years mentoring.	High school mentor.	"If you've had this vision of being an inspirational teacher with perfect lessons, that's an ideal one of us can live up to. Every now and then we knock it out of the park, but most of the time we slog through doing the best we can, crossing our fingers and hoping for more of those wonderful moments!"
Carol	6th year teacher.	High school world languages.	"I've always loved being in this district. I think it's a wonderful place to be and I'm happy that I got hired."
Emily	6th year teacher.	Elementary/clinical demonstration teacher.	"I feel like a veteran teacher with all these skills and tricks up my sleeve that I wouldn't have had if I'd just kind of been left alone."
Felicity	6th year teacher.	Bilingual elementary teacher.	"All those little things that they just magically have the answers for, and they can connect you with people and so that was really helpful for me."
Janice	5th year teacher.	Middle school mathematics.	"I feel like the mentoring program was on-the-job training, and for me, I hadn't had that, I don't know if I would have stuck it out."
Joey	6th year teacher.	Middle school mathematics.	"Teaching is the hardest thing I have ever done, and I have done some really hard jobs."
Judy	6th year teacher.	Elementary teacher.	"If it wasn't for the mentor program I don't know what teachers would do. I just don't."
Ross	7th year teacher.	Middle school English Language Development.	"Maybe I'm more satisfied than some teachers in teaching because I've been in another profession and I know what that can be like."
Susan	6th year teacher.	Elementary teacher.	"I think that if I did not have the mentor program those first three years I would probably still be pretty lost in the district stuff."

Judy, Emily, Susan, and Felicity were all elementary level early career teachers. Joey, Ross, Janice, and Carol were all secondary level early career teachers. Chandler, Monica, Phoebe, and Rachel were mentors. Gunther and Estelle were mentors, but were also early career teachers who had been through the district's mentoring and induction program and have completed at least five years of teaching prior to becoming mentors during the 2015-2016 academic year.

I spent an average of one hour with each participant, meeting them in various locations: at a coffee shop, in their classroom after school, or, in the case of the mentors, in their office or my office. I started each interview with a general question about their background, which helped frame their experiences. I also asked it with the intention of making them more comfortable talking to me and being recorded. I then asked them the interview questions (Appendices B or C), recording their responses by using a digital voice recorder. After each interview I made notes in my field journal about the interview, downloaded the digital file onto my laptop, and then personally transcribed the interview exactly as it was on the recording. The transcribed interviews resulted in nearly 250 pages of raw interview data and six pages of researcher reflections.

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2005), interviews by nature cannot be one-sided. As the interviewer I was able to set the stage, select the setting, control the script, and initiate the questions to fit my research. Each interviewee also had power that was influential on the outcome of the interview in that they could control what they chose to say. As the interviewer, I possessed the information about the study, and the interviewee owned the knowledge and experience needed for the study. As the interviews progressed, power shifted back and forth. In order to gain access to the interviewee's experiences, I tried to build a sense of rapport and

mutual trust in the interview. I had the privilege and responsibility of interpreting and reporting what the interviewee really meant (Kvale, 2006). Additionally, when interviewing beginning teacher mentors, I was able to gain even more insight into the responses of the beginning teachers by asking questions related to responses the early career teachers had given. This practice helped reduce experiences of power problems because it uncovered the interviewer's awareness of how the knowledge was created, which is also referred to as reflexivity (Hammarstrom & Alex, 2007).

The phenomenological approach to interviewing focuses on participant experiences and the meanings they derive from those experiences (Seidman, 2014). Because phenomenology examines people's experiences, I used some of the interview techniques associated with phenomenology. My participants had remained in the teaching field, so during my interview with them I wanted to learn more about their experiences as beginning teachers. I believe their experiences gave me insight into why they stayed in the profession.

The interview with early career teachers began with their identification of specific supports that led them to persevere in the teaching profession. Then we explored a time when they may have experienced frustration, yet chose to remain in teaching. Lastly, we explored the dynamics of their mentoring and induction experience.

**Interview questions.** I used personal interviews with early career teachers as the primary data collection technique, personal interviews with beginning teacher mentors as a second source, and my research notes as my third source. Participants were asked to answer seven interview questions. I used the questions below to explore my topic during the course of one 60-minute interview with each beginning teacher participant:

1. Describe the supports you received as a beginning teacher. What supports do you wish you had received, but did not?
2. What supports have led you to stay in the teaching profession to this point? Stay in this district?
3. Tell me about a time you wanted to leave the profession or this district, and what made you stay.
4. How has being mentored affected your work?
5. Describe your relationship with your mentor.
6. How has participation in the mentoring and induction program impacted your decision to remain in the teaching profession?
7. Where do you see yourself in your career in the future?

Once I completed the early career teacher interviews, I conducted interviews with mentors (see Appendix C) to get their perspectives on why the early career teachers they had mentored persisted in the teaching profession. The purpose of the mentor interviews was to gain deeper insight into the responses of the early career teachers, although no specific early career teacher responses were shared with the mentors.

In my qualitative research study I wanted to obtain deep insight into teacher retention experiences from early career teachers themselves. The reason I chose to use personal interviews and my research notes and observations as data collection techniques is because it is important to draw from more than one source when conducting research in order to obtain the most accurate information possible. A single method will not adequately shed light on a phenomenon, so using multiple methods can help facilitate deeper understanding (Yin, 2015).

Interview-based qualitative research requires an interaction between the data gatherer and the participant, just as quantitative research requires an interaction between a data-gathering instrument and the participant. However, one significant difference between qualitative and quantitative approaches is that “in in-depth interviewing we recognize and affirm the role of the instrument, the human interviewer” (Seidman, 2013, p. 26). The human interviewer, unlike a survey instrument, is “a marvelously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact and understanding” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 107). It is important to recognize the interaction between the interviewer and the participant is part of the process of making meaning, and will minimize any distortion that may occur. This requires the researcher remain neutral and approach both the interview and the data collected with an open mind.

There are techniques that can be used to increase credibility in qualitative research. Patton (1990) describes credibility as less about the sample size than on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the use of triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources in an investigation to produce understanding. Triangulation in qualitative research allows for an account that is rich, robust, comprehensive, and well developed, as using multiple methods can help facilitate deeper understanding (Stake, 1995). Thus, it is possible to be confident in the validity of a well-constructed qualitative research project.

According to Creswell, interviews are conducted one-on-one with the research participant and require that the researcher be an excellent listener. The researcher respectfully asks questions and follow-up questions or probes in order to reconstruct specific events or experiences. Seidman (2012) describes the purpose of in-depth interviewing as understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning people make of those experiences.

## **Analysis of the Data**

Creswell (2013) describes a case study as having two primary tasks. The first is to explore a real-life bounded system “...over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p. 97). The second task of a case study is to report a case description and case themes. For the purposes of my study this meant examining the experiences of early career teachers through in-depth interviews with the teachers and their mentors, and then looking for themes in the data.

Each participant interview with both early career teachers and mentors was audio-recorded using a digital recording device and then immediately uploaded to my laptop and backed up on my secure server. I also kept careful notes of the sessions, writing down what I observed, as well as my impressions and perceptions of the participants. Following the interviews, I completed a verbatim transcription of the digitally recorded interviews. Using my notes throughout the interview process, I considered emerging theoretical concepts on an ongoing basis. The audio transcriptions and research notes became the basis for the data analysis. As soon as data collection commenced, I began analyzing the data and attempted to identify themes (shared experiences and perceptions) and patterns (connections between identified themes).

I analyzed the transcribed interviews conducted with beginning teachers, as well as with mentors. Once I completed my teacher interviews and follow-up interviews with mentors, I used all of my data sources to craft profiles of the beginning teachers and look for common themes. “Researchers must ask themselves what they have learned from doing the interviews, studying the transcripts, marking and labeling them, crafting profiles, and organizing categories of excerpts” (Seidman, 2012, p. 130).

During the analysis of the interviews it was important that I examine the interview from several perspectives. For example, I deliberately thought about the context of each participant as I did an initial reading of each transcript. Were they new to teaching during the recession? Were they a second career teacher? Were they teaching in a culturally and linguistically diverse school? Did they have access to a mentor? Were they placed in the academic level they had trained for? By thoughtfully reading through the lenses of their experiences, I believe it gave me a greater appreciation and understanding for their responses.

Until I had the interviews conducted and transcribed, it was difficult to anticipate the themes that might emerge. After conducting and then personally transcribing the interviews, I studied, reduced, and analyzed the text. First, I used the technique of close reading to mark the transcribed text. Close reading is reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep understanding (Boyles, 2013). The next step was to create profiles of individual participants, then categorize passages and look for thematic connections within and among them. “By crafting a profile in the participant’s own words, the interviewer allows those words to reflect the person’s consciousness” (Seidman, 2014, p. 122). Crafting a profile was a multi-step sifting process. I read the transcript for each participant interview, marked passages of interest, labeled them, and then sorted the material according to the assigned labels. Then I re-read the thematically organized material again, searching for the most compelling information to use for the profiles.

In addition to crafting participant profiles, I also organized excerpts from the interview transcripts into twelve categories (supports, challenges, working conditions, administrators, professional development, financial incentives, classroom management, community, feeling valued, students, pivotal moments, and workload). This provided thematically organized

interviews to work from and allowed me to look for common threads and patterns among the excerpts within the categories. It also allowed me to look for connections between categories that eventually became themes. I classified or coded the data through the process of noting what was interesting, labeling those items, and filing them systematically (Dey, 2003). Although I used a computer to assist me in transcribing, organizing, and sorting my data, I did not use coding software. Instead, I used my own electronic sorting and filing techniques, as well as paper copies of transcriptions as needed.

To organize and search for themes and patterns I used a conventional three-step qualitative coding process: Initial coding, focused coding, and thematic coding (Stake, 1995; Dey, 2003; Seidman, 2012; Creswell, 2013). By using coding to compare to the participant profiles I created, I was able to produce a more robust picture of what my participants' experiences were. Initial coding is the process of organizing research data into categories. In my study, I grouped my participant's responses to my interview questions into generic categories based on their responses. Initial coding is the preliminary reading of transcripts and field notes in order to identify key ideas or patterns (Creswell, 2013). During initial coding I kept labels tentative and identified experiences and perceptions that appeared in the data. After the categories were established, I further sorted the data using colored highlighters. During the initial coding stage, I highlighted the transcribed interviews looking for key words or phrases about why early career teachers stayed in the teaching profession. The description of the emergent themes (described in chapter 4) tells the story of what the data revealed within my qualitative data analysis, including a description of the experiences of early career teachers as described by their mentors and themselves, and how their experiences helped them persist in the teaching profession.



Focused coding is the refining of the initial coding schemes with the resultant emergence of themes (Creswell, 2013). Focused coding involved refinement through collapsing the data into categories of similar experiences and perceptions. Once the interview responses were generally categorized, I used focused coding to reduce the categories into similar themed groups, looking for relationships and/or patterns in participant responses within each grouping. The relationships and patterns that I found during focused coding became the major theme and categories of my study. Finally, thematic coding seeks to identify the patterns that exist between identified themes (Creswell, 2013). During this stage of the analytical process I focused on answering my two research questions. Lastly, I reviewed the entire collection of data in order to consider their potential theoretical contributions.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am a graduate student attempting to complete a doctoral degree through research investigation, so I have a vested interest in the successful completion of this research study. In my school district, I was a participant in an early version of the buddy mentor program in 1991, and was on a committee to improve the program in the mid-1990s. I am also a building administrator in the district being studied and have worked closely with the recruiting department (focusing on both recruitment and retention of teachers) within human resources. In addition, I worked in the same department as the mentor program coordinator, and was thus able to observe the program develop over the past eight years, although I was never directly involved in supervision of the mentor program. The district recruiting office, the mentor program, and the Professional Development office were located within Human Resources, and coordinators collaborated on projects frequently. My prior role within the Professional Development office had a strong emphasis on teacher retention. I planned and carried out professional development

in response to teacher needs, oversaw federal funds used for staff development, and chaired committees that provided funds for tuition reimbursement to teachers. Now, as a school principal, I hire and support teachers so we can maintain a strong teaching staff and create an optimal learning environment for our students.

Although I am interested in the work that happens in the mentor program, I am not directly involved in the program coordination or administration since I have my own school to administer. Despite being invested in the district and with the mentoring program, I worked carefully with the data to analyze it with an open mind, and consistently sought multiple perspectives to consider all aspects of what the data indicated. As Peshkin points out, “One’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed” (1988, p.17); however, I monitored myself, managing my subjectivity as I progressed through collecting, analyzing, and reporting on my data.

I worked closely with our district’s executive administration as my proposal was taking shape and received approval for my research proposal. The district superintendent, the director of Human Resources, and the mentor program coordinator gave their full support to the project and worked with me regularly in the course of my current position in the district. I received a letter of permission to conduct my research from the district (see Appendix D). Additionally, I had already established good working relationships with many beginning teachers, which helped make it easier to recruit participants. They knew me well enough to be comfortable with me, but not so well that it impeded the research.

### **Research Ethics**

It is not possible to completely eliminate bias, but I worked to remain aware of my own subjectivity during the course of this study. Although I used a purposively recruited pool of

participants, the current mentor coordinator ultimately determined which beginning teachers I invited to participate in the research study. During the course of the research, I stuck to the data received and did not manipulate it to reflect my own beliefs or assumptions. While conducting the interviews, I remained as neutral as possible in my body posture, voice, and mannerisms, approaching each interview with an open attitude so as not to influence the responses of participants. All interviews were transcribed exactly as stated, retaining the essence of the participant's voice. "The interviewer must come to the transcript prepared to let the interview breathe and speak for itself" (Seidman, 2014, p. 120).

I obtained informed consent from each participant by having him or her complete and sign the consent form (see Appendix A). I also obtained permission from the school district to conduct my research (see Appendix D), and then applied to George Fox University's Institutional Review Board for permission to conduct my research (see Appendix E).

Once my interviews were transcribed, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. With over 600 teachers who have been through the mentoring and induction program and have completed six to eight years of teaching, it was easier to keep participant identity confidential than if there was a small pool from which to select my participants. I followed generally-accepted practices to preserve the anonymity of the participants. I did not discuss interview information with anyone else and presented my findings in a way that ensured individuals could not be identified, using pseudonyms for each participant and omitting any details that could easily identify a specific participant. My recordings and transcripts were secured in a locked cabinet within a locked room in my home office, and the transcripts were backed up on a secure server to which only I have access. After three years I will destroy all audio recordings. Transcripts of the interviews will be kept, but they have no participant identification on them.

## **Timeline**

The following was my timeline for completion of this study:

- November/December, 2015 – Proposal meeting and acceptance from committee. Approval from the George Fox University Institutional Review Board and from the School District being studied.
- December, 2015 – Established participant pool, selected candidates, and invited them to participate in the study using an email invitation. Obtained signed informed consent documents for each participant.
- December, 2015/January, 2016 – Conducted one interview with each participant and transcribed all interviews.
- January, 2016 – Coded and analyzed the data and looked for repeating and emerging themes. Created profiles of each participant.
- February/March, 2016 – Completed chapters four and five and submitted them to the committee for consideration.
- April, 2016 – Oral defense.

## **Potential Contributions to the Field**

In this collective case study, I am using what has been learned through my research to assist the program coordinator for the mentor program in program refinement. A variety of factors impact teacher retention rates: the national teacher shortage, high levels of teacher accountability in our public schools, aggressive recruiting by districts, and high numbers of teachers choosing to leave the profession early in their careers. Additionally, the cost of recruiting and training new teachers can be significant. I am hopeful that my research can

contribute to the knowledge base on teacher retention by outlining effective practices for increasing the retention rate of beginning teachers in my district.

Identifying reasons for teacher retention will arm school districts with effective practices. It may also provide administrators with direction regarding professional development for newer teachers. My district is benefitting in that we can continue to do what we do well. For example, since we now assume that high retention rates are at least in part due to the mentoring and induction program, district leadership can identify effective program components from my study, which will inform district practice. With the legislature watching the progress of the mentoring and induction program in the district, I hope these compelling narratives can be used to convince the legislature to commit to continued funding for the program. Based on the data, I can also advocate for the practice of requiring comprehensive mentoring and induction programs instead of buddy mentor programs. Lastly, it is my desire that anyone reading the results of my study will see the dedication of beginning teachers to their profession, and that their commitment will be recognized and celebrated.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

*When you feel that people notice your work and you're valued for that, you want to continue putting in that hard work, and you want to continue with that building and with that community and with those families. I think where we fail is when teachers don't feel like they're valued for their time and effort. And not just for their lesson plans or their test scores or some of those things, where for a beginning teacher those are probably going to be a struggle. When we're not valuing a person's dedication and their time and efforts and the impact they're having on some of the things that don't show up in a test, that's when we start losing people. – Chandler, mentor.*

The above quote from a beginning teacher mentor highlights the importance of relationships for beginning teachers, which was a theme I heard repeatedly in this research study. I pursued this research study in order to identify and document experiences that contribute to the retention of early career teachers in one large Oregon school district. Over the course of three weeks, I interviewed eight early career teachers with six to eight years of teaching experience and four mentors with at least five years of mentoring experience. In addition, I interviewed two teachers with six to eight years of teaching experience who had completed the mentor program and then became mentors. Each of these fourteen participants was selected and interviewed based on purposive sampling methods designed to ensure a variety of teaching experiences, as explained in chapter three. The mentor coordinator and two lead mentors (one elementary and one secondary) made recommendations to help me obtain a wide range of experiences within the pool of participants.

During this research study, I collected data through personal interviews, field notes, and researcher reflections on the interview process. Personal interviews were the main source of information, while field notes and researcher reflections provided further insight into the data analysis. Transcripts of the interview data were read multiple times for main topics and emergent themes. Initial readings provided 27 different topics in the data. After I further analyzed the data, I combined topics to form five secondary themes and 19 third level themes. I found another 23 words that became descriptors of my level three themes. These themes can be found in Figure 1 of this study.

This chapter presents the findings of my research through the insights of the participants and addresses the following research questions:

1. What experiences contribute to early career teachers' commitment to remain in the teaching profession?
2. What do early career teachers say about their experiences in a comprehensive mentoring and induction program?

In the rest of this chapter I present the major findings of my study and conclude with a summary of the thematic claims that emerged from the research.

### **Emergent Themes**

The first step I took in analyzing my data was to create a chart of challenges and supports identified by interview participants, as well as some quotes or significant findings (see Appendix F). While Appendix F is too small to read in this document, it helps show the process I used to analyze my data. I then listed the pseudonym of each participant, their role (mentor or teacher), background information, supports identified, challenges identified, interesting quotes, and what they indicated for future career plans. This helped me become familiar with my data in a broad

sense and assisted me in getting accustomed to the selected pseudonyms. I then looked at the supports and challenges columns and attempted to find commonalities between the various words and phrases.

Next, I listed all of my repeated or prevalent categories on a white board (see Appendix G). In what was a very organic process, I drew arrows, collapsed categories, and moved them around in ways to make sense of the data. It was then that I realized all categories correlated to relationships. To put it simply, the answers to my research questions all centered on relationships – with self, with colleagues, with administrators, with district systems/programs, and with the mentoring and induction program in which the early career teachers had participated. Participants both explicitly and implicitly referred to relationships throughout all interviews. Even though I deliberately followed up with questions to encourage them to go to new areas, participants' comments continued to center on relationships in some way.

After settling on the one main and overarching theme of relationships, I organized the secondary themes and then sorted a third level of themes that helped describe the secondary themes. Once the main theme and secondary themes were solidified, I went back through the data repeatedly, analyzing it to look for additional words that described the themes and verified the ones I had already identified. I created spreadsheets to help me organize my thinking as I continued my data analysis (see Appendix H). While not comprehensive, these spreadsheets illustrate part of my process to make sense of my data.

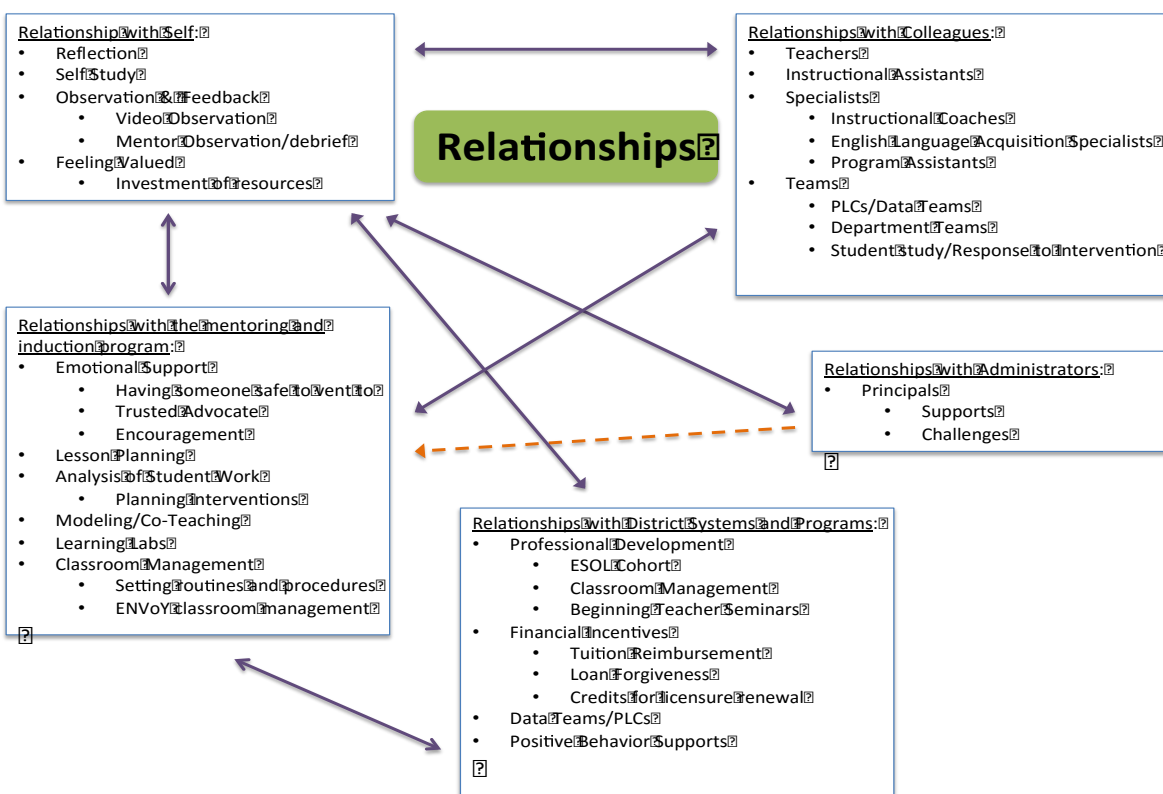
The five secondary themes that emerged from the data were relationship with self, relationships with colleagues, relationships with administrators, relationships with district processes and systems, and relationships with the district's mentoring and induction program.



For the purpose of this study, I will briefly describe each secondary theme as it relates to my main theme of relationships.

In order to further make sense of my data, I created a graphic to visually organize it and define each theme. Figure 1 shows the graphic to illustrate the types of relationships that emerged from the data. These types of relationships became my secondary themes. Each secondary theme is connected to the main theme of relationships. Although each theme can stand alone, there is some cross-over between the themes. For example, under the secondary theme “Relationship with Self” the third level theme of “feeling valued” due to the investment of resources could also be placed under the secondary theme “Relationships with District Systems and Programs,” as that is where those resources originated. I attempted to place them under the secondary theme to which they seemed most connected in the data.

Figure 1. Graphic Representation of Themes.



Within *Figure 1* I placed the main theme, relationships, at the center of the graphic. Surrounding that I placed boxes with headings of the secondary themes (relationship with self, relationships with colleagues, relationships with administrators, relationships with district systems and programs, and relationships with the mentoring and induction program). In each box for secondary themes I sorted the level three themes and further broke down elements of these themes into groups. I added arrows to demonstrate the interrelation of the themes. For example, relationship with self and relationships with colleagues could go both ways (one influenced the other), as indicated by the solid arrows. Principals could share information with mentors, however mentors were not allowed to share information with principals, so the dashed arrow indicates that information flowed only one direction.

**Relationship with *self*.** In this context relationship with self is the ability to be reflective as a teacher in order to grow. It involves the capacity to examine one's own work and learn from it; to look within. Third-level themes within relationship with self include: reflection (on professional practice), self-study, observation, and feedback (from a mentor, instructional coach, or principal), and feeling valued (due to investment of resources).

**Relationships with *colleagues*.** These relationships include the people that teachers work with in the course of their day. They include the third level themes of: fellow teachers, instructional assistants, specialists (instructional coaches, English language acquisition specialists, program assistants), teams (PLCs/data teams, department teams, student study teams, Response to Intervention teams), office staff, custodial crew, and anyone else they interacted with on a daily basis at work.

**Relationships with *administrators*.** Administrators differ from colleagues in that they are in a supervisory role. Administrators include principals, assistant principals, program

coordinators, and superintendents. The third level themes here included supports and challenges that administrators brought to early career teachers.

**Relationships with district *systems and programs*.** This represents the various supports and benefits teachers identified as important in the interviews, including items such as tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness, as well as professional development offerings that helped teachers work on specific skills as new teachers. Third level themes in this box included: professional development (ESOL classes, classroom management training, and beginning teacher seminars), financial incentives (tuition reimbursement, loan forgiveness, credits for licensure renewal), Data Teams and PLCs, and Positive Behavior Supports.

**Relationships with the *mentoring and induction program*.** Each participant identified this relationship in the interviews as if it was the scaffold that supports all the other relationships. This includes the mentor assigned to work with the teacher for three years, as well as the systematic program of induction support for all early career teachers. The induction program is actually a district program and could have fit into the secondary theme above, but because it was cited by every early career teacher, I am treating it as a separate secondary theme. Third level themes identified in this box include: emotional support (having someone safe with whom to vent, a trusted advocate, and encouragement), lesson planning, analysis of student work (including planning interventions), modeling and co-teaching, learning labs, and classroom management training (setting routines and procedures, and ENVoY training).

### **Description of Themes**

In the following sections of this chapter, I will unpack the main theme of *relationships* by describing the secondary themes of self, colleagues, administrators, district systems and processes, and the mentoring and induction program. These sections will further describe the

way I conceptualized these secondary themes and what I learned about relationships as I analyzed my data.

**Relationship with self.** *“I felt so alone walking into a school that was different than what I had known before, and that whole year was a struggle. I went home crying every night and said, “If this is what teaching is, I don’t want to do this!”” - Janice*

Participants who were early career teachers consistently talked about how much they learned about themselves in their first few years of teaching. Janice began her first year of teaching in February in a temporary position and did not have the benefit of a mentor until the next fall. Colleagues and her administrator let her know they were available if she needed anything, but she was so overwhelmed she could not identify what she needed, so she did the best she could on her own. “I forced myself to get up every day and go to school because I knew that this was just temporary...and I’m not a quitter, but it took everything I had to get through that year.”

Judy described a significant challenge she faced in her first few years as a classroom teacher. She was trying to balance her life as she had a two-year-old and a newborn when she began teaching, and then had her third child shortly thereafter. Evenings were filled with grading and planning, and she felt torn between work and family. As she acquired more experience, it became easier to manage both work and family. For Judy, teaching continued to be a source of stress because of the grading, planning, prepping, and spending personal money to purchase teaching materials and classroom supplies. “Part of my stress was that I never really stopped thinking about planning and researching and figuring out the lessons.” She described making a conscious effort to just be with her family when she went home. “I’m finding ways to

leave a little bit more here and take a little bit less home, and do a lot after my kids go to bed so I can focus on them when I am home.”

Gunther voiced challenges similar to Judy’s. He described how he attempted to do everything perfectly, which led to stress and burnout. “In my first year teaching I was completely overwhelmed with the sheer volume of tasks that fell on me.” He went on to explain, “I was trying to do everything and do it all perfectly. I had to figure out how to balance.” As a more experienced teacher, he now realizes “there are things I just won’t get to and that’s okay, whereas my first few years I tried to do everything.”

Teacher participants recognized they put a lot of pressure on themselves. “If you’ve had this vision of being an inspirational teacher with perfect lessons, that’s an ideal none of us can live up to.” Rachel described the turmoil that many new teachers face when they realize teaching is harder than they anticipated, and how it changes their expectations of themselves as teachers. “Every now and then we knock it out of the park, but most of the time we slog through doing our best, crossing our fingers, and hoping for more of those wonderful moments!”

Monica, a veteran mentor, talked about the excitement of early career teachers, “They know what they want to have happen in the classroom, but they don’t know how to get there.” Teachers deepen their work through reflective conversations and connecting their specific actions with results in the classroom. When teachers make time to take a hard look at their professional practice, they can identify changes that need to be made. “It’s really about the core of who they are as a teacher and what they are going to do for their students.”

Judy shared about how challenging it was the first time she saw herself on video. “Having someone video tape you is tough, but knowing that person is not going to judge you and she’s only doing it to help you makes it easier.” It was difficult, and she had a hard time finding

the courage to watch her video. “Watching myself the first time was brutal. It was just so hard, but I needed to see myself teaching.” She went on to describe how she dreaded watching herself and was worried about not being good enough. Once she did so and realized how much she was learning about herself and her teaching, she began to embrace the process to help her improve her professional practice. “Watching yourself on video definitely requires a shift in thinking. You have to be willing to face your fears, take your weaknesses head on, and have the courage to do it over and over again.” Once she had gone through the process a few times, “It really wasn’t all that bad. Or maybe I’m just more confident and comfortable with myself. My self-talk has changed for the better, too. Now I can’t imagine not participating in self study!”

Judy commented about how, once she was comfortable with watching herself on video, it was helpful to have her mentor frequently video record her teaching and then review it together. “I needed to see myself teaching and then reflect on that. Video observation and feedback was very, very helpful in breaking some bad habits that I didn’t know I had started.” Carol also benefitted from observation and feedback:

Being mentored got me into the habit of looking to others to improve my own practice, and that is something I’ve sustained and still find useful. Whether it’s talking over a lesson with a colleague, or having them pop in for a few minutes to see a certain aspect of a lesson, I welcome people into my classroom to critique or tell me how I can improve. Maybe I’m in the minority, but I like it when people come in, and they don’t have to announce it first.

Carol described how she invited instructional coaches to see her teach, but also enjoys having her fellow teachers watch and give her feedback. She offers to do the same for them, and

some occasionally take her up on it. In addition, she has used video observation and feedback to improve her professional practice.

Early career teachers sometimes lack an accurate perception of their skills. Rachel recounted a time when a teacher called her and said, “Third period is going terribly! There are so many disruptions to the teaching and I can’t figure out what to do.” So Rachel offered to observe and give this teacher feedback on the number of disruptions during class, as well as the level of student engagement. After watching his third period class, she was able to share with him that his class actually had relatively few disruptions and high levels of student engagement. When she showed him comparison data from other early career teachers, he was shocked. Being able to give him that data helped him gain the confidence he needed in his teaching skills, “and today, he is a really good teacher!”

Rachel also shared about times when teachers felt they had done well, but had not. Her job at those times was to help them see the need for a change. She said she had to provide a reality check for one teacher by telling her, “Well, I think you presented the material to your students, but if they can’t demonstrate to you that they’ve learned it, then, I mean it may be semantics here, but it wasn’t successful teaching.” She said shifting teacher perceptions is often challenging, but when they see what is lacking (or not lacking) and get excited about making a change, that is when work can begin.

Sometimes the perceptions are lacking and so are the skills. Rachel shared that problems in the classroom almost always stem from classroom management issues. “It’s a hard day when you wake up and suddenly understand that teaching isn’t just joking around with kids all day. It’s just plain hard work.” She talked about the difficulty in helping an early career teacher recognize that teaching might not be the career for them. “Rarely have I had teachers who

simply aren't successful, and are either invited to leave, or kind of recognize themselves, 'This is not for me,' and they follow a different path, and that is painful." Chandler echoed this, "There are times in mentoring where we see people who aren't cut out to be teachers. Sometimes our job as mentors is to help people realize that this isn't the profession for them, and that's an okay thing too." Usually, once the decision has been made, the teacher feels a sense of relief and may even thank the mentor for assisting them and giving them permission to move on.

Joey dug deep within himself during his first few years of teaching and knows he grew as a result. "I've developed stamina I didn't know I had because teaching is the toughest job on the planet, and I've had some really tough jobs." Each of the mentors mentioned this as well, describing the cycle each beginning teacher experienced during the course of the school year. Emotions typically ranged from joy to disillusionment, and back to contentment. Chandler shared, "One of the things I love about working with [early career] teachers is I'm surrounded by people realizing their dream...they've played school since they were kids and had a lifelong goal of being a teacher, and now they are!" He went on to say, "You can't help but fall in love with education! But it's also one of the hardest things to watch when frustration sets in. You focus on successes and hope that outweighs all the other stuff that is going on." Chandler shared that as a mentor it is difficult to watch new teachers struggle.

Teaching is really hard! You forget a lot of the little nuances until you are with someone brand new and you realize just how many layers there are and how complex every little thing is. It's hard to be that new person, and to feel you are never doing a good enough job and that, by just being new, you're letting down your students and you're letting down yourself, and that's a lot to take on at the beginning of a profession.



Chandler knows how challenging and complex teaching is, and feels that a large part of his job is to help the early career teachers be resilient. The mentors provide emotional support because, “If we’re not in a place where we’re emotionally able to handle stresses in our life, then we are not going to be effective in our jobs.” Mentors are sounding boards and provide resources and supports to help early career teachers get through difficult times and stay strong in the profession. “We help them see that they really are growing and improving, and they can do this.”

Estelle shared that she believed the school district valued her by providing her with resources and opportunities, and that was important. She said she struggled with being hard on herself for not keeping up with everything she felt she should, “We were in our PLC talking about writing and I honestly hadn’t graded writing in three months, and I was horrified.” She said her mentor helped her enormously as she worked through the guilt and frustration, and also helped her find a way to stay on top of her grading. “My mentor was that one person that I knew I could confide in, that wasn’t being judgmental, and would help me figure out what to do.”

Although each participant had different relationships with self, all identified how they had grown and changed as a result of being a teacher, and most identified specific ways their mentor had assisted with that growth. Early career teachers described how they improved their teaching as a result of their relationship with self. They confronted the reality of their early teaching practice through video, or through observation and feedback, and then made changes to address any identified weaknesses. The process of self-study and reflective practice increased the speed at which they improved their professional practice.

**Relationships with colleagues.** *“Without the amazing support of my colleagues, I don’t know what I would have done.” - Joey*

Participants who were early career teachers pointed out the importance and value of colleagues to them in their first year in the profession. Joey, a second-career high school math teacher in his seventh year of teaching, described how hard his first year was, and explained that being a second career teacher with a family to support made him take his job seriously. “I couldn’t just say, ‘I’m sorry, I can no longer work under these conditions, and so I quit.’ That just wasn’t in my bag of tricks!” He recounted how important it was to have the support of colleagues who had taught the math curriculum and knew the ins and outs of teaching each unit. Before he even knew he needed materials, a fellow math teacher would come to him and say, “You’re going to need eight cups with a dozen pennies each for this next lesson, so here they are” or “You need stopwatches tomorrow, so I rounded some up for you.”

Joey talked about how he was inspired to work with colleagues when he said, “I saw those teachers out there who partnered up with somebody and planned together, and they were the most successful.” Other math teachers also helped him figure out how students might respond and what he should do. “When you teach this lesson, the kids might do this, but let them go with it because they will eventually figure it out. You have to be patient and let them work through it.” He explained how his colleagues kept an eye on him, and when he was losing energy they told him, “Let’s change things up and do this for the next three days.” He described how he had previously run a business, and worked in other demanding industries, and still thinks teaching is the toughest job he has ever had, but because he had strong relationships with colleagues, he continued teaching.

Joey’s story illustrates the power of having colleagues with whom to partner. Veteran teachers anticipated his needs and assisted him with the gathering and preparing of materials, saving him precious time. Having taught the units in prior years, they could also predict how

students might respond and help Joey be prepared to maximize student learning. Additionally, his coworkers were able to gauge his stress levels and encourage him when he most needed support.

Just as students learn by working in groups, so do teachers. Felicity shared the importance of planning together with other teachers. “I learned so much from teaching lessons that teams planned, and becoming part of the planning process. We would meet after school and plan lessons... that collaboration with other teachers...I learned so much through that process.” She said that beyond the learning of teaching skills, “it led to me enjoying what I was doing and not feel so isolated.”

Susan talked about the importance of having colleagues on which she could rely: “My mentor couldn’t be there by my side all day long, so I relied on the veteran teachers who worked in my school.” She described having “a top-notch staff to work with and a fantastic grade-level team. It would be really hard to be alone in this setting, but having teams in place and being able to collaborate, that’s been great.”

Carol shared about her appreciation of coworkers who helped her out with specific day-to-day nuances of her school, “People were super supportive and showed me, ‘Here are the copy machines, here are the bathrooms that are least populated by students during the day,’ and stuff like that within the building.” She described how even something small, such as not knowing where things are, can throw off a new teacher. “I remember another teacher showing me where to get butcher paper and how to tear it off the roll straight, and I didn’t even have to ask her, she just knew I needed it.”

Susan described the support she felt when meeting with others in similar teaching assignments at the beginning teacher seminars: “Meeting with other beginning teachers was

really helpful. [There were] opportunities to dialogue about what they were doing in their classrooms and struggles they were experiencing.” She also explained how networking with other beginning teachers helped her feel more connected. “Having that camaraderie feels like you’re not alone, because sometimes teaching can be really isolating.” She said sometimes the best part was just hearing she was not the only one struggling with a particular issue, and then brainstorming with that other person ways to make it better. Felicity discussed attending learning labs and meeting other teachers in the process. She said, “They made it easier over time to build relationships with other teachers.” Susan also appreciated the opportunity to learn from her colleagues through learning labs:

They would take us to different elementary schools and we’d get to see other teachers in action...I learned so much from that because you do your student teaching but you don’t have all the responsibility; you can only take in so much at a time. Having that opportunity to go and see veteran teachers doing their thing in the same school district in the same grade level was really helpful. It was one of the best things that I experienced.

Similar scenarios were common across other participant interviews. Felicity recalled, “I learned so much from teaching lessons that teams had planned, and then becoming part of the planning process with other teams - that collaboration with other teachers is crucial.” She described how the team drew her in and supported her, “We met after school to plan lessons, and I learned so much through that process. Those were really important supports that helped me enjoy my work, not feel so isolated, learn a lot, and become a better teacher. “

Gunther talked about working in a difficult situation his first year and how important collegial relationships were to him. “I worked with another new teacher that first year and we supported each other a lot as colleagues, just sort of figuring things out and keeping each other

sane.” Gunther had to deal with a lot of what he described as “teacher drama” on a team he was assigned to work with, which he found emotionally draining. Yet he still maintains, “What has made me want to stay in teaching the most is the people.”

Chandler described the nuances of teacher relationships when he said, “I think the ability to work together in a way where we understand each other creates a trusting environment.” He further explained that teaching is hard work and teachers need safe outlets. “There are sometimes tears, and there is a lot of laughter, lots of conversations, many good jokes, and what starts out as a collegial relationship ends up in some good friendships that have grown out of that.”

**Relationships with administrators.** *“Last year was one of the hardest years I have ever experienced, and if it hadn’t been for the support of my principal I’m not sure I could have made it through the year.” – Susan*

Early career participants frequently described the importance of having supportive administrators. Last year Susan had a very challenging class of first grade students. She was feeling inept, as if all she did all day was put out fires. She describes one day when she sat in her classroom and thought, “Maybe I’m not cut out for this. Maybe this is the wrong place for me because I’m not doing a service for these kids right now.”

Susan went to her principal and asked, “Am I helping, or is it time to back out and let someone else who knows what they’re doing a little better come in?” Her principal offered to visit her classroom and take a group of ten students for math each day. The next day after her math group, the principal came to Susan and said, “Susan, I’ve been in there with them for twenty minutes and I’m tired and I want to go home! That was really hard!” Her principal’s honesty helped Susan understand it was not poor teaching that was the problem, so she decided to stay and work through it with the assistance of her principal and the instructional coach.

Susan made it through the year and knows she is a stronger teacher because of the challenges she faced. She ended her story by confirming, “There are things I did to improve the situation, but sometimes we have to learn how to form a tough mix of kids into a functional group so they can learn. My principal and coach helped me do that.”

Janice described the professional development her principal led: “We met weekly for professional development around a theme, and then we got to go practice.” This learning was then reinforced in classroom visits by her instructional coach and principal. They provided feedback to her, and even encouraged her to watch other teachers in her school teach similar lessons. Emily talked about how her principal had been instrumental in opening doors for her to experience new things and help her grow. “I’ve had excellent administrators who have been really encouraging and positive, have been interested in my professional goals, and have put me into leadership positions.”

Not all principals were portrayed in such positive ways. Ross described how excited he was to finally have an elementary teaching position, but he was new to the school and so was his principal. What he discovered was the teachers at his grade level had gotten together and assigned students to the classes, and his class was the one in which all of the most challenging students were placed. He quickly realized what had taken place and brought it to the attention of his principal, but “the principal was new and unwilling or unable to undo that cherry-picking scenario, and there just wasn’t the behavior support to handle so many high-needs students.” As a result, he moved to another school mid-year. Although he was very sad about leaving in the middle of the year, he knew he could not continue in the classroom to which he had been assigned. “I talked to the principal to try and create a happier work environment, but I knew that

wasn't going to happen. You don't want to be driving to work and see your school's name and kind of stop breathing."

Monica, a long-time mentor shared, "An administrator can be the factor in what causes a new teacher to stay or to go." This came through clearly in Felicity's interview, "Part of why I left my last school was really about administration and the pressures that she put on teachers to do things that were taking away from what we were really supposed to be doing." She described her frustration as, "Our principal didn't protect us, but I knew it wasn't like that everywhere, just jumping hoops and checking boxes to please other people instead of trusting us to be professionals." She was tempted to quit, but her mentor convinced her to try a change of location instead. "I talked to other teachers and chose to come here where I really like it. This is a better spot for me and I feel like a weight lifted off my shoulders." Ross had a similar experience, describing how relationships with principals at two different schools caused him to change locations, as well. Nearly every participant discussed their relationship with the administrator, and most were complimentary of the work their administrator had done in the school.

**Relationships with district systems and programs.** *"This district has provided me with so many opportunities for furthering myself as a professional. They supported me through my ESOL endorsement, gave me tuition reimbursement for other classes I have taken, and invested in professional development for me. I also got loan forgiveness and pay scale increases. I feel valued here."* - Emily

Both the early career participants and the mentor participants identified programs and systems within the district as important. The competitive pay scale attracted some early career teachers, such as Gunther, who grew up in a smaller town nearby. "I didn't seek a job in some of

the smaller districts because it was almost a \$10,000 difference in pay for a starting teacher. That is motivating.” However what kept him in this district, in part, was the systems of support available to him. “This district provides so much support for teachers. I had no idea all the resources and professional development I could tap into.” Gunther was placed on a restricted license his first year, and the school district paid for him to complete his ESOL endorsement in a cohort model with other district teachers through a local university, which was “about a \$12,000 value.” Additionally, because of his work in low-income schools, he qualified for loan forgiveness, meaning his student loans were paid in full after he made a specified number of payments. He also received college credits for his participation in the mentoring and induction program he could use for renewing his teaching license, and for increasing his base pay. Gunther said, “Because I had all these credits, I was able to change pay columns and move up the pay scale more quickly. I’m grateful for the opportunities. This district invested in me and now I am invested in this district.”

Carol also appreciated the supports she found in this school district, “I think it’s well worth the investment...to continue to offer the graduate credits for beginning teachers to use for license renewal...I went immediately into the initial two license because I had the credit to do it.” She said she talked to friends in other school districts, and few of them had been offered options such as the graduate credits and tuition reimbursement, so she was glad she chose the school district in which she teaches.

Ross was a second career teacher who appreciated all of the professional development opportunities from which he was able to choose. He liked the district-wide support for classroom management training such as ENVoY and A Healthy Classroom. He also attended English Language Development (ELD) classes, and Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) training.



“Maybe I’m more satisfied with teaching because I’ve been in another profession and I know what that’s like.” In his prior profession he was required to take ongoing education classes from a robust menu of options, “and I’ve found a corresponding quality of support for teaching in this district. This has made it comfortable for me to stay in teaching.”

Janice participated in classes she selected and had training provided at her school. She mentioned the high quality of both the district-based and school-based training she received, “The professional development in this district is amazing, and that is what keeps me here.” Having taken part in professional development at two middle schools, she noted the difference in quality of training between the two schools:

At one school it was a completely different situation than the other because it felt like even though the demographics were similar... there was a lot more in place at one. We had RTI [Response to Intervention], and we had a principal who was much more interested in us. The principal started us on day one learning RTI protocol by the book...so we had a lot more structure for teachers to talk and get support and get other ideas about how to work with certain kids, or just to voice our concerns about students or about the RTI process, which was wonderful.

Janice described the way her principals and instructional coaches worked together to provide structure and follow through for professional development and classroom observations, and how all of that was based on the district’s expectations for principals and schools. She felt it helped her know what was expected of her. She had explicit training and time to practice and get feedback from her mentor and instructional coaches before her principal observed her, making her much more comfortable with the process than she had been at her previous school.

Gunther stated he “wasn’t a big fan of the beginning teacher seminars” when he was an early career teacher, “because they didn’t always fit my needs as a new teacher.” In response he worked hard to create seminars that better met the needs of early career teachers, since he later became a mentor. “The mentor program continuously adapts, so now we do something called menu options, which they didn’t offer when I was in the program.” He described the new format, “Now each beginning teacher is required to attend three mandatory seminars, and then selects two menu options for the year” giving them flexibility and choice. “When I’m planning these menu options I try to think about how I can make it engaging and interesting. Whereas with the seminars you were required to go, with the menu options you can choose what interests you.” Gunther felt that this was a big improvement in giving teachers control over their own professional learning, and feedback indicated that it was well-received.

Each participant identified supports and systems they found valuable. For some it was the professional development, with many mentioning the classroom management training or ENVoy classes. For others, it was the tuition assistance, loan forgiveness, or the ample credits available for licensure renewal through participation in the mentor program. Others liked the structures of data teams or Professional Learning Communities, or the team approach for helping students through Response to Intervention or Positive Behavior Supports. The overall impression I received is that the variety of programs and systems available meant most teachers were able to find something that appealed to their specific needs.

**Relationships with the mentoring and induction program.** *“The biggest, most important person in my whole career has been my mentor and I am so grateful for her.” - Emily*  
*“What kept me in the district those first years was the mentor program.” – Gunther*

In every early career teacher interview I asked about supports, and with only one exception, each participant identified their relationship with a mentor as the biggest support, before I even asked about the mentoring and induction program. I expected that some participants would identify other supports and might not even mention the mentor program until I asked specifically about how being in the mentoring and induction program had impacted them.

The four elementary early career teachers (Emily, Susan, Felicity, and Judy), all identified mentoring as their most significant support in their first three years of teaching. Specifically they mentioned the emotional support their mentors provided, support with classroom management, planning, and networking with other early career teachers at beginning teacher seminars or professional development workshops. Some of their biggest frustrations included challenging student behaviors, lack of colleagues in similar teaching assignments with whom they could plan, feeling overwhelmed, experiencing isolation, and finding work-life balance.

Three of the four secondary early career teachers (Ross, Carol, and Janice) all identified their mentor as the most important support in their first three years, with an emphasis on emotional support, classroom management training, and learning labs. Their biggest frustrations centered on challenging student behaviors and navigating difficult work relationships. Joey indicated his mentor was an excellent support, but his colleagues were more important during his first year teaching because they were easier to access and had deep content knowledge of the courses he was teaching. In his second and third years, his relationship with his mentor was more meaningful.

The mentor interviews focused heavily on relationships, just as the early career teacher interviews had. Each mentor described how important it was to establish a trusting relationship

before mentoring could take place. Chandler shared, “When they see we’re willing to be vulnerable and take risks, that it’s okay for them to do that same thing; we’re not there to judge or critique them, but to support them, that’s when we see growth.” Monica described the importance of listening, asking questions, helping her early career teachers be reflective, and “knowing they have a trusted listener who is an advocate that is there just for them. I believe they find that more valuable than anything else we do.” She went on to describe the mentoring relationship as a “professional friendship that is all about the core of who they are as a teacher and what they are going to do for their students. It’s teamwork – a partnership.”

Judy is an elementary teacher in her sixth year of teaching. When asked what supports she received as a beginning teacher, she replied, “Hands down my biggest support was my mentor. If it wasn’t for the mentor program I don’t know what new teachers would do. I just don’t. I would cry at the drop of a hat that first year.” She tells about how her mentor came to visit her on the second day of school. As soon as her mentor entered the classroom she panicked and suddenly couldn’t find the materials for the project she needed to start her class. She felt herself getting flustered in front of her class, so she grabbed the nearest book and did a read-aloud with them until it was time to go to PE. She walked her class to PE and returned to the classroom to see her mentor there, waiting for her. She burst into tears, apologizing profusely for her lesson. Her mentor walked over to her, put her arm around her and said, “You’re doing great. And all the new teachers are in tears right now.” In that moment Judy said she went from wondering if she was really supposed to be in the classroom, to realizing that she had an amazing ally who would help her improve. Judy said, “She became this incredible level of support. Modeling lessons, co-teaching, planning together, and just having fun while doing it all.”

Later, Judy had a very challenging class, and again, her mentor provided the support she needed to navigate it. She described how she thought, “I don’t know what to do because I’ve never done this before!” and how she had received all kinds of training, “but until you’re in the classroom by yourself with thirty kids of all different levels and backgrounds you just don’t know, and it’s really, really hard. My mentor provided the emotional support I needed to survive that and thrive.” Today, Judy is a clinical demonstration teacher, which means she has teacher candidates in her classroom most of the time. Now she is learning how to be a mentor to them so that when they have their own classroom, they will be ready.

Several early career teachers described the “incredible value” of attending learning labs with their mentors. Being able to observe other teachers teach and then discuss what they saw with their mentor was one of the most powerful learning opportunities they experienced. Estelle said, “There are so many different ways to get from point A to point B, so many different strategies and teaching styles, and it’s really opened my eyes to the craft of teaching.” Susan also cited the learning labs as crucial to her growth: “Having that opportunity to go and see veteran teachers doing their thing in the same school district in the same grade level was really helpful.” Ross and Joey both said they wished they could have participated in even more learning lab visits because the ones they attended had been so valuable. Other mentors echoed that desire, but explained that with a shortage of substitute teachers available, they were very limited in how often they could take teachers out of their classrooms.

Carol mentioned the solid foundation participation in the mentoring and induction program gave her. “I feel really, really supported in this district, and talking to friends that work elsewhere, I know that is not common.” She further described those supports: “Any time I

wasn't sure how to do something, or wasn't sure where to go for information or a certain skill, I knew I had somebody whose job it was to come and help me work through it."

Many teachers talked about the importance of learning basic teacher skills such as classroom management and lesson planning. However, the most frequently-cited support the mentors provided was emotional support. Felicity said:

With the mentors I just felt like it was a support, someone to vent to sometimes, or somebody that helped with little things, like, 'Where do I turn in my contract at the end of the year?' and 'How do I make sure the district has my credits so I can bump up a pay column?' ... or 'How many personal days do I get a year?' All those little things they just magically have the answers for."

The mentors seemed to be the lifeline that early career teachers knew they had; a safe person of whom they could ask absolutely anything. Felicity shared, "A mentor is like a person who's made to answer those questions for you, who can't be annoyed by you because it's their job to answer those questions."

Chandler, an experienced elementary mentor, was working with a beginning teacher who was struggling with classroom management, lesson planning, and the physical environment.

"She came to me and said, 'My classroom is a disaster. I spend hours planning but when I teach it's not right and it's not working for the kids. I just don't think this is the career for me.'"

Chandler said even with all his years of experience he was feeling overwhelmed himself, so he knew this was going to be a difficult situation that would require a lot of hard work. He asked, "What is your vision for your class? Forget about what's been going on and focus on what you want to have happen." She laid out her vision, they broke it down into steps, then started with a few small things so she could have some little successes to celebrate. Chandler recalled, "I felt

like we could tackle the room layout, or a word wall, or something to give her instant gratification, something her administrator might walk in and notice right away and comment on.” So they cleaned up and rearranged the room, then added the word wall, and it was almost immediate that “she had some pride in her classroom.”

Chandler said he knew the beginning teacher would make it if they could keep building on her successes, one small step at a time. “She had a heart for kids – that wasn’t missing. So we took it in baby steps and I walked alongside her giving her little chunks to try, and she had the will and she was trying things with fidelity.” She went through ENVoY classroom management training and began consistently using classroom routines and procedures. Chandler took pictures of her teaching, and at first she was critical of herself, but then began to see progress. She would say, “Oh my goodness! I can’t believe it was like that! How did I ever do that?” Her instructional assistant, who had been hesitant to team up with her, began to assist. Her teammates started to notice and began giving her positive feedback, and suddenly she was thriving. Chandler summed it up:

We started with that relationship piece, figuring out what her strengths were and building on those, giving her some successes so she could gain confidence in her abilities. Just like with our students, the relationship is the key. When they feel safe and you have their trust, you can work magic.

The interviews yielded story after story of how a mentor helped an early career teacher navigate a difficult situation that could have caused the teacher to leave the teaching profession. Having a trusting relationship with someone who would walk alongside and help make the work manageable helped the beginning teacher persist. That trusting mentor relationship was an important factor in the retention of many beginning teachers.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was an attempt to share the valuable perspectives of early career teachers and the mentors who serve them. Their experiences highlighted the need for strong relationships between early career teachers and their principals, fellow teachers, mentors, and systems of support within the school district. It also revealed a changing relationship with self as a result of being mentored. In the next chapter I will summarize the answers to my research questions and personally reflect on the meaning of the data and my own experiences in this research process.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

*“No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”*

*– Theodore Roosevelt*

#### **Introduction**

Through the use of qualitative research methods, I examined how the experiences of early career teachers influenced school district retention. In this process I used personal interviews of teachers who had completed six to eight years of teaching in one large Oregon school district, as well as mentors who worked with early career teachers during the teachers' first three years. The interviews provided an opportunity for teacher and mentor participants to reflect on their early career experiences, and how those experiences impacted their decision to stay in the teaching profession.

My study answered the following two research questions:

1. What experiences contribute to early career teachers' commitment to remain in the teaching profession?
2. What do early career teachers say about their experiences in a comprehensive mentoring and induction program?

Once I transcribed and coded the interview content, I discovered one main theme and five secondary themes in the data. The main theme of *relationships* had five secondary themes: relationship with self, relationships with colleagues, relationships with administrators, relationships with district systems and processes, and relationships with a mentoring and induction program. The main theme and secondary themes also aligned with the literature

review in chapter two regarding key reasons teachers leave or stay in the teaching profession. The following section answers the research questions and shares my reflections regarding the content of the personal interviews. I conclude with specific learning I received as a result of conducting this research, implications of the research, and recommendations for future research.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

**Research question one.** *What experiences contribute to early career teachers' commitment to remain in the teaching profession?* Participants identified a variety of experiences that contributed to their commitment to remain in the teaching profession. These experiences included new teacher orientation, professional development, learning labs, planning and problem-solving with grade-level teams, completion of endorsements such as ESOL, accessing resources such as tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness, and the emotional and pedagogical support of a mentor. Each of these supports correlates to relationships, the overall theme that emerged from the data.

Early career teachers indicated in the interviews that their relationships were the most important reason they continued to teach. This was the simplest, most straight-forward answer to the first research question. This correlates with research conducted by Schwille and Dynak (2000) which emphasized the need for building strong relationships with new teachers. The relationships most frequently discussed in the interviews were the mentor/mentee relationship (which I will further discuss in the answer to question two), the changing relationship with self (also discussed in the answer to question two), relationships with colleagues and administrators, and systems of support provided through the district. Although there was a great deal of overlap between the two research questions, I have separated them in order to focus on general supports in question one, and supports specific to the mentor program in question two. In question one I

discuss the relationships with colleagues, administrators, and systems of district support under question one. In question two I address both relationship with self and with the mentoring and induction program.

The research discussed in chapter two included studies that explained key strategies for teacher retention (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014; Boyd et al., 2005; Clark, 2012; Doney, 2013; DuFour, 2015; Gawande, 2011; Knight, 2015; Wong, 2005). The research indicated that effective strategies for the retention of early career teachers included:

- Recruitment of teachers from the local community
- Ongoing professional development tailored to the needs of beginning teachers
- Support of their administrator
- Access to an instructional coach and/or a highly trained mentor
- Comprehensive and systematic program of mentoring and induction
- Time for planning and collaboration with other teachers
- Loan forgiveness programs
- Fair pay and competitive benefits
- Good working conditions
- Demonstration of appreciation

Darling Hammond (2012) and Ingersoll (2012) both found that likelihood of early career teachers staying in the teaching profession correlated to the number of supports received, as well as the strength and consistency of those supports. Based on the content of personal interviews and themes that emerged from my data, I was able to determine that all of these supports were present in the district under study; however, their effectiveness appears to have been increased by the strong relationships identified by participants. Relationships are essential for effective

collaboration to take place. Providing time for collaboration only works if a team is well formed and can work together. Marzano (2003) identified collaborative working relationships with colleagues as a strong indicator for successful teacher retention. Gunther, one of the teacher participants, shared his experience as part of a team that was dysfunctional and did not collaborate. He eventually left that team and joined another at the same school so he could collaborate with teachers who worked well together. Once he was part of a team with solid relationships built on trust, he was able to enjoy the process of team collaboration. Although he was at the same school with the same structures, it was relationships that made one team work better for him than the other.

In the first part of each interview I asked about supports that helped keep teachers in the teaching profession, and it always came back to one of the relationship themes. Mentors for early career teachers had many things to say about their mentees and the relationships they were building in their first years on the job. They also identified many supports outside of the mentoring and induction program available to early career teachers:

“There are really good teachers...working with our kids...who have a heart for making a change, and that’s something that you want to be a part of.” – Chandler

“I think it is helpful to have a go-to person for questions, and the questions are all over the place.” - Rachel

“It’s so important to have connections with other teachers in order to recognize you are not alone.” – Phoebe

“An administrator can be a huge factor in what causes a new teacher to stay.” – Monica

Early career teacher participants identified many different experiences they had in their first few years of teaching. Although there is great variety in their responses, there is a clear

connection to the theme of relationships. The following sentences and phrases were taken from the interviews with early career teachers as evidence of the experiences which contributed to their staying in the teaching profession:

“I know my administrators are working as hard as I am, and they’re helpful, they’re supportive, and I feel like they’ve got my back.” – Joey

“We get a lot of good professional development in the district. And we get a fair amount of choice over it.” – Ross

“On a day-to-day basis I really appreciated having some people who had been there, even just a year or two longer than me that could help me out with the nuances or the specifics of the building.” – Carol

“I had student loans that were going to be forgiven after five years and, honestly, that’s what motivated me to stay.” – Janice

“I found a principal that I respected tremendously as a leader in the school and I felt like my voice was heard even as a young beginning teacher.” – Estelle

I think it really, really helps to be with a group of people who are going through the exact same thing as you are. Young, just out of school, first-year teacher. I mean it can’t get better than that. You’re in a room full of people who know exactly what your day was just like. I remember just feeling very safe and comfortable. – Judy

“[School District] provides a lot of supports for professional development and resources. I wasn’t aware of all the resources my first year – different people I could contact to help me with different things. It’s incredible how much we have access to.” – Gunther

“There was this thing called learning labs where we went to other elementary schools and we’d get to see other teachers in action, and that was the best thing.” – Susan

“I’ve always felt listened to...and I feel like the school district has provided me with so many opportunities for furthering myself as a professional. It makes me feel valued.” – Emily

“I learned a ton from the connections I made with other teachers even in my same year, or a year ahead of me” - Felicity

As participants described the various supports that positively impacted them, themes began to emerge. Several of these surprised me. For example, I would never have anticipated that loan forgiveness would be a reason teachers might stay for five years, but two teachers indicated that as one reason they persisted through their fifth year, and by the time they had made it through that fifth year, they were a stronger teacher, enjoyed their work more, and wanted to remain in the profession. I was also surprised to hear three different participants share how much they valued the numerous district resources invested in them. Participants indicated these supports contributed to their decision to remain in the district instead of seek employment elsewhere. This is supported in research conducted by the New Teacher Center (2012), which found that feeling unappreciated is one reason teachers leave the profession. By providing resources and supports to early career teachers, we increase the chances they will feel valued and appreciated, and thus choose to stay in the teaching profession.

The early career teachers who participated in this study explained the supports they received in a variety of ways, but all returned to the theme of relationships. When Emily said, “I feel valued,” I asked her to explain what made her feel valued. She described the investment the school district made in her by providing access to loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, opportunities for career pathways, and access to a mentor for three years. Her relationship with the school district was strengthened by the value she felt was placed on her as a teacher. All ten of the early career teacher participants identified the importance of the investment made in them

through district systems and programs. Five of the ten specified the importance of having access to tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness. Darling-Hammond and Barnett (2006) called for loan forgiveness in a series of steps they outlined for increasing the retention of early career teachers. While financial incentives may not be the reason early career teachers persist in teaching, my data causes me to believe there is a clear connection to feeling valued by the school district and continuing in the teaching profession.

The importance of collegial relationships was evident in my data. Eight of the ten early career teacher participants discussed relationships with colleagues as an important support to them in their first three years of teaching. Hollabaugh (2012) was one of the few researchers I reviewed who focused on collegial relationships in the course of her research on teacher retention. She concluded that strong collegial relationships were significant in a teacher's decision to remain in the profession. Others, such as Ingersoll (2012) focused on the need for specific supports, but did not discuss a need for relationships behind the supports. In fact, Sass, Seal, & Martin reported, "Colleague support is not always beneficial, as staff collegiality can interfere with a teacher's ability to manage an already heavy workload" (2011, p. 2).

Early career teachers struggled with some of their experiences. For example, two early career teachers perceived their principals to be unsupportive. Two other early career teachers experienced a stressful first year as a result of difficulties with colleagues. Only one early career teacher described his most significant challenge as student behavior, despite the fact that almost every teacher interviewed was placed in a high-needs school.

Throughout the interviews, I was struck by how much the supports and experiences centered on relationships. In fact, it was evident that the relationships increased the effectiveness of the supports. Relationships and supports seemed to create a circle of increasing strength as

they built one upon the other. Clearly, supports alone are not effective without relationships to make them meaningful.

**Research question two.** *What do early career teachers say about their experiences in a comprehensive mentoring and induction program?* The second research question examined the experiences of early career teachers in the mentoring and induction program. During this portion of the interview, the early career teacher participants were quite candid regarding their relationships with their mentors, as were the mentors regarding their relationships with mentees. One candidate described challenges he had with his first assigned mentor, but went on to outline the supports he had with his second mentor, who was with him for all three years.

Ingersoll (2012) found that the support of a mentor is the most important factor for early career teacher retention, which appears to be verified in my research. One participant said her mentor did not provide much support at the beginning of her first year, but was later released from the mentor program and she was assigned a new mentor who was more helpful. Although she had a less-than-ideal start, she was able to persist, and later thrive with the support of her new mentor. This is significant because it demonstrates that mentoring makes a difference – she floundered until she received the mentoring support. In fact, all but one participant cited the relationship with their mentor as a primary reason they remained in the school district through their first few years of teaching. The one who did not cite the mentor as a primary reason said his mentor was of help and support, but he would have remained in the school district even if he had not had a mentor.

Janice, an early career teacher participant, made a comment about how she was initially afraid to have mentor. She said:



A friend of mine...in another district... said her mentor...would observe her and then say, 'You did this wrong and this wrong, and you need to do this, and this, and this.' She just cringed when her mentor would come into the classroom unannounced and put her on the spot. When I heard about the mentor program, all I could think was, 'Oh no! I don't want a mentor!' But as soon as I went to my first mentor meeting and met my mentor, I knew it was going to be a completely different experience...my mentor was just like a friend. She was somebody easy to talk to. I felt like I could tell her anything and she understood. She was empathetic and her background in teaching helped her understand what I was going through...we just clicked and I felt completely at ease with her. Even when she challenged me to improve, I knew she was on my side.

The two mentors in Janice's story each attempted to help an early career teacher improve her professional practice, but only the second mentor was perceived to be effective. I believe the difference is in the relationship established between the mentor and the mentee. This is what Michael Grinder refers to as *receptivity* (Grinder, 2010), when the speaker is granted permission from the recipient for communication to take place. Janice had a firmly established relationship with her mentor prior to the mentor giving her constructive feedback about her professional practice, which made her more receptive to the information, even if some of it could be perceived as negative.

In the interviews, I repeatedly heard about the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship. Even from those who said they would have continued teaching if they had not had a mentor, there was still appreciation of the support offered. Below are relationship snippets from the mentor interviews:

“Start with the relationship piece.” – Chandler

“We all have strong relationships with our teachers.” – Monica

“It’s that confidential, trusting relationship that is crucial.” – Phoebe

“I have effective relationships with my beginning teachers.” – Rachel

The relationships mentors established with their early career teachers were intentional, not happenstance. Each mentor discussed the importance of working from the start to establish strong and trusting relationships in order to do the hard work of mentoring. There were protocols to address some of this, such as never sharing a teacher’s progress with their principal, but the relationships themselves were formed, not mandated.

From the early career teachers, I was also able to collect phrases and short sentences about the meaningful relationships they experienced through the mentor program:

“What has made me want to stay in teaching the most is the people.” – Gunther

“My mentor was the one person I felt I could be completely honest with about my teaching.” – Estelle

“Without my mentor, coach, and coworkers I don’t know what I would have done.” – Joey

“My relationship with my mentor was, without exception, positive.” – Ross

“If I hadn’t had my mentor I don’t know if I would have stuck it out.” – Janice

“I feel really, really supported in this district.” – Carol

“The most important person in my whole career was my mentor.” – Emily

“Having a mentor made me feel like I wasn’t alone.” – Susan

“I appreciated the relationship with and support of my mentor.” – Felicity

“I have a great relationship with my mentor...we are still friends.” – Judy

Joey had a rough start with his mentor, and early on in the school year he finally asked, “Do I have your permission to get a new mentor?” They both agreed it would be best, so he was paired with a new mentor, “and it was immediately better. [Mentor name] was fantastic and we did all kinds of things like learning labs, and now she brings other new teachers in to visit my classroom.” Joey felt well supported by his colleagues and administrators throughout his first years, but wished he had had a better initial mentor experience. Still, he ended his interview with a positive statement, “You have to make this job manageable if you want teachers to stay. I’m glad [district] has high numbers of new teachers staying. I believe it’s the mentor program and the administrators; at least it has been for me.”

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2004) described the importance of professional development tailored to the needs of beginning teachers, as well as collaboration with mentors and colleagues. Learning labs seemed to be an effective way to meet this need for the beginning teachers in this study. The most common frustration around professional development was in regard to the discontinuance of learning labs. Every participant who mentioned learning labs talked about how they positively impacted their teaching practice, and how they wished they could experience more of the learning labs. Unfortunately due to budget cuts and a shortage of substitute teacher coverage, learning labs were discontinued. Both the mentors and early career teachers expressed a desire to find ways to bring back the learning labs.

Throughout the interviews, all participants made remarks about circumstances that encouraged or frustrated them, and how important their mentor relationships were in helping them work through various situations. I was astonished by how often reflective practice was mentioned in the interviews, but when I interviewed the mentors, every mentor interview included significant data regarding the importance of reflection for improving teaching practice.

This was emphasized by Wood and Stanulis (2009), who found that early career teachers need time with their mentors to be reflective on their practice. Mentors encouraged personal reflection and mentees found it helpful. Through this, I was intrigued to discover the secondary theme of relationship with self emerging from the data.

Participants described how they had grown and changed during their three years in the mentor program as a result of dialogue and feedback within the mentor-mentee relationship. Monica, a mentor, stated, "Mentoring is really about the core of who they are as a teacher." She went on to describe how she helps teachers "reflect and surface their own thoughts [about their teaching]. I think they find that more valuable than any other piece of what we do." Every early career teacher participant relayed at least one example of a situation where their mentor provided feedback that ultimately improved their teaching. Teachers shared how reflective practice encouraged them to rethink situations and alter their approach to challenges, producing more desirable outcomes.

Early career teachers described how mentors helped them work through their relationship with self. Several participants shared how their mentor helped them be realistic about what they could accomplish and more confident in what they were able to do. Felicity and Ross described how when they felt discouraged, their mentors provided courage to continue. Judy said mentoring helped her feel accomplished. Susan and Emily both shared that at times they felt inadequate, but their mentors constantly reassured them. Janice felt that mentoring helped her feel less lonely. Gunther said his mentor helped him deal with unrealistic expectations of himself. Eight of the ten early career teachers agreed that their mentor helped them achieve a sense of balance between home and work. Three mentioned the importance of not feeling judged, but instead, feeling valued and supported. Chandler summed it up: "Teachers are

opening up to me and letting me see their heart and soul because that's what people put into their teaching."

The mentoring and induction portion of the interview revealed differing results around professional development. Of the early career teachers, Gunther, Joey, and Susan all said they did not like the beginning teacher seminar professional development they were required to attend through their participation in the mentor program; they felt they could make better use of their time preparing for instruction or grading. Joey believed the program should respect the time of beginning teachers, which was already a scarce commodity. Gunther said the new professional development model within the mentoring and induction program was a much better fit than the old model. Susan said she developed an appreciation for the professional development workshops over time as she realized exactly what she needed. Felicity, Ross, and Estelle all said professional development was important to them because they learned valuable strategies and made important connections. The mentors felt their professional development gatherings had improved over time, and in the past year had become more relevant and timely for early career teachers, especially with the new menu of choices.

The effectiveness of a comprehensive system of mentoring and induction was evident in the review of the literature, but other than the Hollabaugh (2012) study, none of the articles reviewed specifically mentioned the mentor relationship as essential to the success of the early career teacher. Most of the articles discussed strategies for mentoring and the qualities of an effective mentor, but not the need for relationships. The articles that did mention relationships focused mainly on building strong student-teacher relationships, not mentor-teacher relationships.

The existing body of research seems to have an emphasis on strategies for teacher retention, but very little on the relationships needed to create an environment where those strategies can be successful. I wonder if there is a difference in the results of teacher retention between districts that use the same or similar strategies, due to the strength of the relationships behind the work. Repeatedly, participants described how their relationships helped them work together better, solve problems, and increase their productivity. Participants who struggled more in their work had fewer strong and supportive relationships. This seems to indicate that strong and positive relationships increased a teacher's efficacy.

During the interviews with both early career teachers and their mentors, the conversations centered on relationships and the reassurance that the mentor-mentee relationship provided. Although it may be possible to have a mentoring and induction program that offers every support recommended in the literature, without strong relationships to hold it together, I wonder if it would be effective in retaining early career teachers. Carol shared how supported she felt, "I've always loved being in this district... it's a wonderful place to be and I'm happy that I got hired."

### **Personal reflections**

While I found the focus on answering my research questions a valuable experience, there were many things I learned from this study that extend beyond those questions and answers. The information shared during personal interviews has already influenced my practice as a school principal. I learned that the excitement and dedication of the early career teachers I interviewed ignited a passion for learning in their students. Elementary school students respond positively to the energy and enthusiasm of early career teachers. Chandler shared that it was exciting for him to observe new teachers realizing their dream of becoming a teacher. Perhaps students notice this as well, and enjoy being part of the new teacher's experience.

As a school administrator I have a deeper appreciation for the impact my leadership has on the contentment of teachers on my staff. As I conducted interviews, I heard repeatedly how great an influence the principal had on whether a teacher stayed or left a school. Good principals attract, support, and retain high quality teaching staff. What surprised me was how strongly the administrator affected teacher morale among those interviewed. The principals either made a teacher's year great, or drove them to seek another placement.

The importance of principal involvement is supported in the research, "School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions" (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2010, p. 5). In 2010, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation conducted a survey of 40,000 teachers regarding teacher retention factors and found 97% of responding teachers cited supportive leadership as the top-ranked item in their decision to stay in a school. This positively reinforces what I found in the course of my research: those with supportive principals continued teaching in their school, even when other conditions were challenging, but those with unsupportive principals left their schools, even when they had good relationships with other members of the school community.

Another lesson I learned is the importance of providing resources to my teachers. After interviewing the early career teachers and hearing about how valued they felt when resources were made available to them, I have made a point to talk to my teachers about the same things highlighted by my participants. I was astonished to discover that many do not know about programs for loan forgiveness for which they were eligible, or about tuition reimbursement benefits available to them to help defray costs of continuing education. I also encourage my teachers to limit out-of-pocket expenses for their classrooms by providing the necessary

materials for core instruction, and supporting grant writing efforts for the rest, thus demonstrating to them that I value them and their work.

This research has reinforced how important it is that the professional development I provide in my school be of high quality, timely, and relevant. Several early career teacher participants shared about good professional development they attended, but mentioned that it did not directly benefit them. Either the teachers were so busy they were unable to fully engage in the professional development, or the timing was not quite right for them. This is an excellent reminder to me as a school leader that no matter how good the professional development is, if the time is not right, it will not have the impact I desire.

I see the value of maintaining a positive outlook, especially when faced with challenging circumstances. Each of the participants in my study faced difficulties in the course of their work, but chose to embrace them and learn from them. When leading a school, it is important that I build and maintain healthy relationships with my staff and learn to model resilience when facing challenges, and help them do the same. Early career teachers shared the importance of knowing their principals were not only willing to support them, but also willing to take risks and try new things. This has inspired me to take risks right along with my teachers. Participants who had the most compelling stories about overcoming difficult situations had the full support of their principals. Their principals provided resources, helped teach challenging classes, problem-solved, and often just listened and offered encouragement. These are things that any school leader can do, but it is easy to be distracted by administrative tasks and forget to engage in the meaningful human interactions that are so important for success. I must remember how important it is to say and demonstrate to teachers my commitment to them and to our students. In the future, I will make a conscious effort to be present in the work with my all my teachers,



but especially my new teachers. They need to know I am there beside them, supporting their efforts.

One early career teacher participant shared her angst when she did not receive a mentor right away in her first year teaching. Two other early career teachers talked about their experiences of having a mentor who was not a good match for them, or was not adequately performing the duties of a mentor. When they finally were matched with effective mentors, they felt supported and their professional growth accelerated. This underscores the need for highly trained, capable, fully committed mentors for every early career teacher. It is not enough to just assign them someone and wish them good luck. With this in mind, I can begin preparing some of my most promising teachers for the role of mentor by providing opportunities to engage in mentoring activities, such as working with a teacher new to our school or district but not necessarily new to the teaching profession. Additionally, I can carefully select and prepare some of my teachers to mentor student teachers in their classrooms, or perhaps even mentor one another in the use of specific teaching strategies or methods. I think it is important to state that I do not believe I can create the same types of high quality supports that early career teachers receive from a formal system of mentoring and induction, but I can create an educational community where teachers support one another in ways that encourage everyone to grow.

In my review of the literature, I learned that a teacher's level of support correlated with the teacher's likelihood of leaving the teaching profession. It is imperative that we support early career teachers as they work through their first few years of teaching. Richard Ingersoll (2004) contends that a comprehensive and systematic mentoring and induction program is essential for early career teacher retention. Specifically, Ingersoll's research revealed the number of supports and the strength of supports received correlated to the rate of retention for early career teachers,

with nearly twice as many teachers staying in the profession as compared to those who did not have a system of mentoring and induction support. This corresponds with my research, in which the district being studied had a 98% rate of retention for their early career teachers after five years in the profession – a figure roughly twice the national average of 40%-50% teacher retention after five years. Every participant interviewed cited the support of the mentoring and induction program as having a positive impact on them, with most citing it as a key reason they remained in the school district.

### **Recommendations and Implications for Further Study**

If I had the opportunity to conduct another study on the subject of early career teacher retention, I would construct a quantitative study using a large sample population so I could determine if the theme of relationships would generalize to a larger population, and across multiple districts and states. After examining this topic on a small scale, I would like to add to the depth of knowledge on a national level with larger studies. A follow-up to my research could include a study to discover what aspects of induction most affect teacher quality and retention, and which most affect student learning. Additionally, a study could be carried out to determine which aspects of induction have the greatest return on district costs. It would also be fascinating to study the role of reflective feedback and time for reflection within a mentoring and induction program. In addition to asking about their experiences in the program, I would ask early career teachers, “What brings you joy in your teaching?” I would want to dig more deeply into some of their responses with longer interviews or more of them.

The fourteen participants, selected with purposive sampling in order to include a variety of perspectives, represented a broad spectrum of experiences. However, all of them cited a positive impact of the mentoring and induction program. Was this “chance” or a sign of an

effective mentoring and induction program? A quantitative study encompassing all of the nearly 1,000 early career teachers that have participated in the mentoring and induction program in this district since 2008 would be able to more definitively answer this question. It would also be fascinating to inquire about teacher preparation and how those experiences impacted their first years in the classroom. For example, was there anything related to teacher preparation that could give insight into teacher attrition or retention? It would provide thought-provoking data if we were to follow up with some of the early career teachers who did leave the school district to find out why they left. It would also be interesting to conduct a study that specifically focused on the role of financial incentives in teacher retention, such as loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, no-cost endorsement programs, and competitive salary and benefits. A study could be carried out at another large school district with a different model of mentoring and induction and then compare the results to my study. It would also be fascinating to do a similar study in a school district that has no beginning teacher mentoring and induction program and find out what motivates teachers to stay in that district.

My school district is in the second year of recruiting future teachers from our own high schools. This “pipeline” project involves identifying promising bilingual and/or bicultural students in high school, placing them in pre-teaching classes, then offering them scholarships for college in exchange for a promise to teach within the school district upon their graduation. It would be fascinating to study the first few waves of teachers who will begin exiting this pipeline in two years to see how many of them persevere in the teaching profession, and what experiences they identify as important to their decision to remain in teaching.

When I think about what my school district can learn from this research, I point back to the theme of relationships. Our teachers need to know they are valued. They need to hear it, and

see it demonstrated in the way they are nurtured by their colleagues, principals, and mentors. They also need time built into their day to collaborate with colleagues in order to problem-solve and reflect on their professional practice. Ideally, a weekly early release or late start would provide the necessary blocks of time for teachers to work together regularly in supportive and productive teams. It is difficult to form meaningful relationships with limited time to spend together.

Our newest teachers clearly benefit from the structures and supports of our comprehensive mentoring and induction program during their first three years in the classroom. These supports come at a cost, however. Related to educational policy, it is my sincere hope that the Oregon legislature will support reliable state funding for comprehensive mentoring and induction programs, which demonstrate effectiveness as measured by teacher retention data. With stable and guaranteed funding, I believe more school districts would commit to comprehensive programs of mentoring and induction for their early career teachers.

The good news for school districts is that nurturing relationships does not have to be expensive. It does require a culture of collaboration, but can be built over time with intentionality through modeling and practice. Teachers may feel they teach in isolation, but they do not have to plan, create assessments, grade, and learn in isolation. Deliberately providing opportunities for teachers to have even a small amount of professional interaction time together is a step in the right direction.

From this research I have gained new insight into the experiences early career teachers have as they begin their career, including opportunities and challenges they encounter. In addition, I better understand the importance of relationships in withstanding the difficulties present in the first few years of teaching. A 75-year longitudinal study led by George Vaillant

(2012) found that relationships were key to longevity and happiness. They discovered that close, stable, and supportive relationships created happy and healthy people. The study's data suggest a person's capacity for building and sustaining relationships is an important predictor for future happiness, as well as for success in the workplace. I believe this also rings true in schools. As evidenced by my study, teachers with close, stable, and supportive relationships are happy in their career and plan to continue teaching.

As I reflect on the process of conducting this study, I cannot help but think about the implications for my school district. It is evident from the data that the supports provided to beginning teachers are essential in encouraging them to persist in the profession. As a member of the district leadership team, I understand the challenge of securing funding for 22 full-release mentors and a mentor coordinator – the equivalent of an entire school staff of teachers and administration. However, the program of mentoring and induction protects our investment in early career teachers by keeping those we hire, thus avoiding the costs of continuously recruiting and replacing teachers who leave due to lack of support. The supports provided our early career teachers allow them to fully develop their skills over the course of three years. And most of all, the data underscores the importance of deliberately building relationships within schools. In a culture where test scores seem to be the only way success is measured, it is often difficult to justify time taken to build relationships, but the interviews clearly revealed the need for strong relationships.

Teaching can be an isolated task, yet these participants were able to build and maintain various relationships to assist them as they worked through their first few years of teaching. Over time they have become strong teachers who, in turn, are building and maintaining relationships with their students, positively impacting one life at a time.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how the experiences of early career teachers influenced their decision to stay in the teaching profession. It was my hope that by understanding why teachers persist in the teaching profession in one school district with high rates of early career teacher retention, it would help inform me about how to maintain or increase early career teacher rates of retention. Through the data collection and analysis process, I gained insight into the challenges faced by early career teachers as they navigate their first few years in the teaching profession. I also learned about the supports provided by the school district, and especially by the mentors assigned to work with early career teachers. Some of their experiences were expected, while others I did not anticipate. The findings and personal connections I made for myself were impactful and valuable.

Based upon the findings of this research project, it is apparent that early career teachers are in need of comprehensive systems of support that address their content knowledge, classroom management, and how to navigate the various components of a large school district. Even more importantly, early career teachers need someone they trust to walk beside them as they learn. When early career teachers have a trusting relationship with someone who can help them with those three things, they find success. It is no different for me this year, as I continue through my first year as an elementary school principal; I frequently call on my mentor. Sometimes I need to know where something is, or how something works, but often I simply need to be able to say, “This was a disaster and I have no idea what to do,” confident I will not be judged, and confident that help will be available. When I know I have a trusted advisor, it encourages me to embrace the challenges of my job each day and see them as an opportunity to learn and grow.

After spending time with these fourteen educators and hearing their stories, I have a renewed commitment to support teachers in ways they find meaningful. Although my study was about specific experiences which contributed to early career teachers' commitment to remain in the profession, I frequently heard about the joy their relationships with students brought to them. It was the reason they loved teaching. Judy shared, "I love the connections with kids and parents, and seeing kids from last year coming in and saying, "Hi!" It really is a good, good feeling. It's rewarding, it's satisfying, and it's such a good job to have." Emily concurred, "Sometimes I get frustrated, but then I come back to school and I'm with my students and they are giving me hugs, and even my toughest students...I'm an important person in their lives. How could I ever leave that?" As I again consider their words, I am struck by their resilience. Teaching is a challenging career, but I cannot think of one that brings more rewarding relationships. I only hope that I have accurately represented the comments of these teachers and that the data shared will benefit the educational community.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Letter of Consent for Participating Teachers

#### Experiences of Early Career Teachers and Their Influences on Teacher Retention

Dear Professional Educator,

My name is Rachael Harms and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also an elementary school principal in a school district in Oregon. As a requirement of my program, I will be conducting research and have chosen to explore why early career teachers keep teaching.

You are invited to engage in an interview regarding your experiences as a beginning teacher in your school district and why you have chosen to remain in the teaching profession. The questions are open-ended and relate to your background, views on teaching, professional experience as an educator, and career plans. I hope the findings of my interviews reveal greater understanding into the complexities and opportunities facing beginning teachers and provide insights on ways to retain beginning teachers in our district.

The risks associated with this research are minimal. The interview questions are general in nature and not personal. Therefore the interviews should not create any uneasiness. Nevertheless, please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to continue at any time or decline to answer any question at your discretion.

The results of this study will only be used for research purposes, which may include presentations at a professional conference and/or academic publications. Personal interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Information will be analyzed and presented in an anonymous fashion and no individual will be personally identified. I affirm to keep any personal information and identities confidential.

All research materials (i.e., audio recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) 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. After three years, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete the audio recordings.

Thank you for your time in considering this project. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at (503) 409-6973, or my advisor at George Fox University, Dr. Ginny Birky, at (503) 554-2854.

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

Participant signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions for Early Career Teacher Participants

1. Describe the supports you received as a beginning teacher. What supports do you wish you had received, but did not?
2. What supports have led you to stay in the teaching profession to this point? Stay in this district?
3. Tell me about a time you wanted to leave the profession or this district, and what made you stay.
4. How has being mentored affected your work?
5. Describe your relationship with your mentor.
6. How has participation in the mentoring and induction program impacted your decision to remain in the teaching profession?
7. Where do you see yourself in your career in the future?



## Appendix C

### Interview Questions for Mentor Participants

- 1) Describe the supports you provide to beginning teachers. What supports do you believe early career teachers find most valuable?
- 2) What supports do you believe help keep early career teachers in the teaching profession? Stay in this district?
- 3) Tell me about a time one of your mentees wanted to leave the profession or this district, and what you think made them stay.
- 4) How do you think being mentored has affected the work of your mentees?
- 5) Describe your relationship with your mentees.
- 6) How has participation in the mentoring and induction program impacted your decision to remain in the teaching profession?
- 7) Where do you see yourself in your career in the future?

## Appendix D

## School District Approval for Research



CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT

Oregon

FAX:

Superintendent

**SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVAL  
for Research**

School District  
P.O. Box

December 18, 2015

Dr. Ginny Birky  
Professor  
George Fox University  
414 N Meridian Street, V124  
Newberg, OR 97132

This is to inform you that the School District has reviewed the project proposal, interview questions, observation tool and letter of consent that Rachael Harms has designed and submitted for her research project. We trust that the confidentiality of teachers who will be involved in this study will be maintained and the findings will maintain the anonymity of all participants. We look forward to learning the outcome of Rachael's study and anticipate that the information will help inform our beginning teacher mentor program.

The School District approves Rachael Harms to work on this project as outlined in her project proposal.

Sincerely,

Catherine  
Coordinator, Testing & Evaluation Department  
School District

Appendix E  
Institutional Review Board Approval



**College of Education**

414 N. Meridian St., V 124, Newberg, OR 97132  
503.538.8383 | Fax 503.554.2868 | [soe.georgefox.edu](mailto:soe.georgefox.edu)

Dec. 16, 2015

Ms. Rachel Harms  
Ed.D. Candidate  
George Fox University

Dear Ms. Harms,

This letter is to inform you that as a representative of the GFU Institutional Review Board I have reviewed your proposal for research investigation entitled "Exploring how the Experiences of Early Career Teachers Influence School District Retention." The proposed study meets all ethical requirements for research with human participants. The proposal is approved.

Best wishes as you complete your research investigation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Terry Huffman", written in a cursive style.

Terry Huffman, Ph.D.  
Professor of Education

## Appendix F

## Supports and Challenges Identified in the Data

			support	challenges	quotes	future	
	Chandler Mentor Elementary		Elementary mentor for the last 6 years, taught for about 13 years, married with 3 kids.	Disillusionment, overwhelmed teachers, challenging working conditions, teaching is so hard, teachers often feel unappreciated for what they are doing as well as what they are doing.	p.15: "Start with the relationship piece. Figure out the strengths and building on those." p.17: "Teaching is very personal, so by letting me into their classroom, teachers are opening up to me and letting me see their heart and soul because that's what people put into their teaching." p.14: "I have faith that there are good people in education, good people going in and working with kids, people who have a heart for making a change."	Mentor or teacher. Might pursue admin license.	
Monica	Mentor Secondary MS/HS		Taught 17 years, secondary mentor for 7 years. Married, 2 kids.	Challenging relationships with colleagues and admin, discouragement, disillusionment, lots to navigate.	p.15: "Take them where they're at, go where they want to go." p.15: "Mentoring is really about the core of who they are as a teacher and what they are going to do for their students." p.16: "Well, I have our strong relationships with our teachers, but I've also been able to step in and lead in the gap among mentors. Anytime I see the team is able to do that."	Mentor, classroom teacher, admin.	
Phoebe	Mentor Secondary MS		Spent teacher 7 years, secondary mentor for 8 years. Married, 2 young boys.	1:1 meetings, lesson planning, analysis of student work, model lessons, co-teach, video observation, video learning labs, confidential sounding board, behavior management, PD, ENVOY, curriculum study, grading, conferences, connections with colleagues, reflection.	Huge case loads.	p.17: "I think we need to recognize how important it is to validate beginning teachers."	Mentor, teacher.
Rachel	Mentor Secondary MS		Taught for about 20 years, mentor for 8 years, long-time partner. Dealing with significant personal stress but loves her work as a mentor.	Classroom management, routines and procedures, navigating district systems, connections with colleagues, paperwork, trouble shooting and problem solving, navigating PPS, ASW, digging into data, reflective practice, PLC work.	City isn't an exciting place for young teachers who like to party. Teaching is really hard work.	p.15: "If you've had this vision of being a teacher who inspires students and always has perfect lessons, that's a deal breaker. It's a little bit of a... most of the time it's kind of like logging through the best we can, crossing our fingers and hoping for more of those wonderful moments."	Mentor, teacher, retire.
Gunter	Mentor/ECT Elementary		14 years, teacher for 5 years, how as a mentor. Married, 2 kids.	Coach, mentor, vent, problem solve, emotional support, alleviate stress, modeling lessons, answer questions, networking, supportive principal, supportive colleagues, learning labs, mentoring and induction program, the people made him stay, competitive pay, loan forgiveness, ESOL endorsement paid for, bad mentor while having a student teacher.	Balance, prioritizing, trying to do too much, lack of time, beginning teacher seminars didn't like them.	p.12: "What has made me want to stay in teaching is the most of the people."	Mentor
Estelle	Mentor/ECT Elementary		Teacher for 5 years, how as a mentor. Married.	Weekly meetings with mentor, accountability, moving practice forward quickly, PD, language support training, PLC facilitator training, principal that she respected, coaches, lots of support and resources for teachers, opportunities for leadership, career pathways, could be completely honest with the mentor, district investment in her as a teacher.	Didn't have a mentor at first, used to late hiring and temporary status made first year really hard.	p.15: "My biggest support was my mentor, who kept me accountable and moved my practice forward." p.16: "My mentor was the one person I could be completely honest with about my teaching."	Elementary principal
Joey	ECT Secondary MS/Elem		Second career teacher, entered teaching around age 50. Middle school.	Mentor, math coach, administrator, colleagues who helped, learning labs, vacations.	PD that was not always relevant, lack of time, challenging colleagues, long commute.	p.37: "Teaching is the hardest thing I have ever done, and I have done some really hard jobs."	Teacher
Ross	ECT Secondary MS/Elem		2nd career teacher, how as a mentor. 6 kids, grown children, 7th year teaching.	mentor confidence, validation, demonstration of strategies and skills, learning labs to watch other teachers, ENVOY training, tech help, observation/feedback, success in the classroom, many career pathways, PD support, had once as a principal, loved.	Challenging teaching assignments, difficult administrators, challenging work environment, challenging behaviors from students.	p.19: "Maybe I'm more satisfied than some teachers."	Retire or become a coach (less work), take home but still get to see kids get the "Aha!"
Janice	ECT Secondary MS/Elem		2nd career teacher, married 13th year teacher.	mentor weekly meetings, ideas, answers, supportive colleagues, administrators, RTI, PLCs, PD, loan forgiveness.	Temporary position and no mentor the first year.	p.4: "I was afraid of the mentor program at first. I feel like the mentoring program was on the job training, and for me, I didn't think that, I don't know, I would have stuck it out."	Classroom teacher
Carol	ECT Secondary MS		mid-30s, married, children, 6th year teacher.	induction week, mentor observation, specific skill practice, ENVOY training, supportive colleagues, small town feel (community), coaches, observation/feedback, high level of support in the district compared to friends in other districts, grateful to be paid for the mentor work, tuition reimbursement.	Balance, long commute.	p.7: "I've always loved being in this district. I think it's a wonderful place to be and I'm happy that I got hired."	Classroom teacher
Emily	ECT Elementary		mid-30s, married, 2 kids, 6th year teacher, initial demonstration teacher.	mentor emotional support, model lessons, co-planning, supportive administrators, leadership roles, opportunities for ESOL endorsement paid for, initial endorsement paid for, clinical demo teacher, presenter at national conference, recognition, feeling valued.	Stressful challenging student behaviors.	p.2: "The most important person in my whole career is my mentor and I am so grateful for her." p.15: "I feel like a veteran teacher with all these skills and tricks up my sleeve that I wouldn't have had if it wasn't for her. I feel like I'm just kind of been left alone."	Teacher in this district. May be admin, but not sure.
Susan	ECT Elementary		6th year teacher with supportive family.	mentor program, learning labs, PD, other beginning teachers support, planning, safe place to ask questions, camaraderie, supportive family, supportive staff and team, collaboration, supportive principal.	Difficult teaching assignment with challenging student behaviors.	p.6: "I think that if I didn't have the mentor program those first three years I would probably still be pretty lost in the district stuff."	Classroom teacher
Felicia	ECT Elementary		6th year elementary language program teacher, married, 2 kids, moved to new school this year to escape difficult administrator. Loves new school.	mentoring, PD, connecting with other language support teachers.	Isolation, pressure, lack of colleagues in similar teaching assignments to plan with, working with curriculum that doesn't fit the requirements, feeling overwhelmed.	p.15: "All those little things that they just magically have the answers for, and they can't connect you with people and so they have to help you for me." p.17: "So there's like a person who's made to answer those questions for you, who can't be annoyed by you because it's their job to answer those questions."	Classroom teacher, program assistant for curriculum.
Judy	ECT Elementary		34 y/o, married, 2 kids, 6th year teacher.	mentor ideas, emotional support, answers, advice, video feedback, Admin, partner teacher, students.	Balance, lack of curriculum, supplies, lack of freedom (lock-step curriculum).	"I didn't want to be in the mentor program, I don't know what teachers would do, I just don't."	Classroom teacher

## Appendix G

### List of Words and Phrases Identified in the Data

#### **Supports**

Professional Development  
 Mentor Program  
 Provide Resources  
 Lesson Planning  
 Observation and Feedback  
 Differentiation  
 Setting Routines and Procedures  
 Setting Expectations  
 Classroom Management  
 Student Systems  
 Data Study  
 Interventions  
 Reflective Practice  
 Emotional Support  
 Stress Management  
 Supportive Administrator  
 Listening/Venting  
 Sounding Board for New Ideas  
 Celebrating Success  
 Showing Appreciation  
 Visioning  
 Building on Success  
 Finding Answers  
 Advocate  
 Navigate Work Relationships  
 One-to-one Meetings  
 Analysis of Student Work  
 Video Observations  
 Co-Teach/Model Lessons  
 Curriculum Study  
 Behavior Management  
 Grading/Preparing for Conferences  
 Connecting with Colleagues/Networking  
 Navigating District Systems  
 Paperwork Assistance  
 Troubleshooting and Problem Solving  
 Writing Individual Education Plans  
 Working with a PLC or Data Team

Learning Labs  
 Competitive Pay  
 Loan Forgiveness  
 Tuition Reimbursement  
 College Credits  
 Career Pathways  
 Leadership Opportunities  
 Vacation Time  
 Technology Help  
 Success in the Classroom  
 Induction Week  
 Sense of Community  
 Endorsement Programs  
 Feeling Valued  
 Recognition/Appreciation  
 Sound Advice  
 Supportive Colleagues

#### **Challenges**

Disillusionment  
 Feeling Overwhelmed  
 Working Conditions  
 Teaching is Hard Work  
 Lack of Appreciation  
 Difficult Colleagues  
 Big District/Lots to Navigate  
 Large Class Size/Large Case Loads  
 Paperwork  
 Balancing Work and Life  
 Relevant Professional Development  
 No Mentor/Wrong Mentor  
 Teaching Assignment  
 Classroom Behaviors  
 Tough Students  
 Long Commute  
 Difficult Principal  
 Isolation  
 Stifling Curriculum  
 Lack of Resources  
 Want Freedom to Teach Creatively

## Appendix H

### Sorting the Themes in the Data

	Self	Colleagues	Administrators	District/Systems	Mentoring&InductionProgram	Other
Chandler	Observation&feedback, find their teacher's presence in the classroom, stress management, effective practice, feeling valued and appreciated, being vulnerable, taking risks.	PLCs/Data teams, grade level teams, instructional coaches, ELAS, collaboration with other teachers.	Does the administrator understand what it's like to be a brand new teacher? Does the administrator scaffold the growth of the new teacher instead of expecting it all at once? Does the principal celebrate teacher success?	There is so much available but it is hard to navigate to mentors help, lots of resources and supports, good structures in place.	Build relationships, build trust, collaborate, advocate for teachers, professional development, emotional support, problem solving, provide resources, lesson planning, differentiation, classroom management, systems/routines and procedures, setting the environment, creating expectations, data analysis, Sounding board/vent, navigate team dynamics/school culture, celebrate success, laugh and cry.	Teaching is hard work and beginning teachers need support.
Monica	Listen and help them reflect and surface their own thoughts, observation and feedback, emotional support, feeling valued.	Support from team in PLCs vital for growth, teachers need to be able to show them around and help them get the layout of the school and school culture.	Can be a huge factor in whether or not a teacher stays, most are really good to work with.	Opportunities for career paths, professional development, teacher data warehouse.	Advocate, listener, coach, cheerleader, lead learning labs, help them teach their vision, conversations to deepen their practice, analysis of student work, digging into data.	Communiting can be an obstacle.
Phoebe	Support for whatever the struggles are, reflective practice, celebration of small steps in the right direction, safe relationship with mentor, we need to validate beginning teachers.	Support from colleagues, if not alone, team support.	Principals support mentor program, like mentors to work with their new teachers.	Professional Development, PLCs.	1:1 meetings, 90 hours of support, lesson planning, analysis of student work, model lessons, co-teach, video observation and analysis, confidential coach, cheerleader, behavior management, classroom management, relationship building, curriculum support, beginning teacher menu options, sounding board, safe person for venting/help.	Huge loads are a barrier to more effective mentoring, eaching is difficult job.
Rachel	Teaching is hard work, imperfection is the norm.	Colleagues can help if they can't hurt, help ECTs avoid toxic co-workers, help them connect with positive peers.	Helping with colleague in PLC time out, monitoring staff and offering assistance as necessary.	PLCs/data teams, so many resources available, departments like HR are very helpful.	ENVOY classroom management, routines and procedures for the classroom, navigating the district, helping them connect with colleagues, all kinds of paperwork, trouble shooting/problem solving, lesson design, observation and feedback, career counseling, analysis of student work, answering questions.	This city can be a boring town for young people seeking adventure.
Gunter	Expectations of self were unrealistic, high in the first year, mentor helped with reflection on practice, networking, learning to prioritize.	Team support by grade level was good with the team, bad with the other, strong collegial relationships are helpful.	Supportive principals were enormously helpful.	Higher pay than other districts, endorsement programs, tuition reimbursement, professional development, student loan forgiveness.	Answer questions, let them vent, offer advice on team challenges, was mentored while having a student teacher, model lessons, learning labs, reassurance.	Had been an instructional assistant prior to becoming a teacher.
Estelle	Feeling valued and wanted in the district, invested in.	Feeling not so alone, beginning teacher seminars made connections, coworkers were helpful.	Principal who listened and helped made a difference for her.	Professional Development, ELAD, PLCs facilitator training, career pathways, opportunities for leadership and growth, honest conversations with teacher at gatherings.	Weekly meetings with mentor, accountability, moving practice forward, learning labs.	Plans to move quickly on the career pathway from teacher to mentor to principal.
Joni	Learning to balance life and work, stress management, teaching is so hard, realizing the need to relax and read every day no matter what.	Mentor, Math Coach, fellow math teachers were supportive, planning together, colleagues assisted with materials and lessons.	Supportive principal voiced their confidence in his abilities, hard working principals, they have thy back.	Loan forgiveness, did not like the required beginning teacher seminars, PD was okay.	First mentor was not helpful but second one was great, learning labs, answering questions, helping navigate issues with colleagues, planning.	Second career teacher and plans to teach until retirement.
Ros	High confidence in his abilities, struggled with discouragement due to work assignments and class loads, felt it a loss to deal with chronic challenging behaviors.	Colleagues at the school took advantage of him as a new teacher and stacked his class with challenging students.	Principal refused to correct situations of inequity with the classroom assignments, principals unfair in dealing with staff, had the principal be adored and would do anything for.	Good selection of professional development, Huge fan of ENVOY and a healthy classroom, PBIS, LEGENDS evaluation system.	Mentor provided confidence in skills, validation, modeled teaching strategies, observation and feedback, co-teaching, help with technology.	Second career teacher planning to teach until retirement, love to be less demanding roles such as instructional assistant.
Jacqui	Mentoring helped her not feel so alone, felt isolated prior to getting a mentor, learning to navigate the systems in the district, started mid-year which was difficult, struggled with doubt and had to talk herself out of quitting.	Colleagues offered assistance but she didn't know what to do for, behavior specialists helpful, coaches helped her, counselors were supportive.	Supportive principals has been critical.	RTI, PD is amazing, student loan forgiveness, beginning teacher seminars (mentor program) weren't good for her.	Helped her with details of teaching, had heard horror stories from teachers in the other district regarding mentoring but she loved her mentor, like having a personal trainer.	Second career with deep appreciation for teaching profession.
Carol	Stressed by things she can't do for her students, looks to others to improve her own practice, reflection and feedback.	Having a buddy in the building was helpful to how they day to day stuff in the school, colleagues were welcoming and helpful, enjoys modeling lessons for others and watching others teach.	Principals are supportive.	Feels very supported in this district, graduate credits for mentor program and not so to other, loan forgiveness, credits.	Appreciated the induction week before school began, ENVOY training, gave her a solid foundation of skills.	Enjoys the small town feel of the city, helps her feel good about the community.
Emily	Needed reassurance, feeling valued, feeling recognized and important, increased confidence.	Had helpful co-teacher, values colleagues who plan together and support one another.	Principal encouraged, gave leadership opportunities, reassured her, mentored her, principal supported her in a challenging classroom situation, principal inspires her.	PD, ESOL endorsement program, tuition reimbursement, loan forgiveness, opportunity to present at a national conference, news paper interviews, being a clinical demonstration teacher, math endorsement, college credits.	Was nervous to have a mentor at first, but then embraced it, emotional support, co-teach, model lessons, planning, confident, workshop practice, improved skills quickly.	Students and parents bring joy to the work.
Susan	Feeling isolated, feeling ineffective, needing reassurance from mentor, gaining confidence.	Buddy in the building to go to for help, collaboration with awesome colleagues, PLCs, camaraderie.	Supportive principal was vital in difficult classroom situation, feels like principal understands her work.	Lots of resources available but can feel overwhelming until you get to know the systems.	Help navigating all the district stuff, confidential conversation, learning labs, networking with other beginning teachers, long-term planning, finding answers for me.	Supportive husband and family.
Emily	Had to figure out all the things on her own for the language program in which she was teaching, felt lost at times, stressed by lack of resources, felt inadequate at first and had to learn to be herself, grace, work place stress was horrendous so she changed schools.	Planning with colleagues helpful, collaboration with essential, likes to problem solve with colleagues.	Principal put out of unnecessary pressure on her to be left in the school, happy with the assignment and likes the principal because she treats her like a professional, admin has her back.	PLCs, language program supports, PD, language program lessons on resources, huge help in year two and beyond.	Loved the beginning teacher seminars and PD, networking with other new teachers, learning labs, emotional support, someone to vent to, logistical assistance, still keeps in touch with mentor after 5 years, getting answers, no dumb questions.	Commutes but says it's worth it because she loves teaching in this district.
Judy	Easy to feel judged, stressed, needed to talk, hard to balance life and work, wants to put the fun back into teaching, feels like teaching is satisfying, needed to be observed to break some bad habits, felt accomplished due to mentoring.	Partner teacher with a lot to be experienced was helpful, loved getting together with other new teachers to talk, enjoys planning together with other teachers.	Supportive administrator is huge, feels like current principal's first creativity in requiring lockstep following scripted curriculum and pacing guide.	PD was always great but it was good, still struggles with lack of resources sometimes, PLC/data teams help fulfill most of the time, curriculum department needs to connect better with teachers.	First mentor was not helpful but second one was awesome, emotional support, help with challenging behaviors, honest conversations about her teaching, advice and non-judgmental support, helped with stressful situations, differentiation.	The students make everything worthwhile, rewarding career, loves to connect with kids and families.