# EXAMINING THE LAYERS OF BEGINNING TEACHER RETENTION: A CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

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Examining the Layers of Beginning Teacher Retention:

A Cross-Case Analysis at the Elementary Level

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(ABSTRACT)

The cross-case analysis described in this study examined the patterns of practice that support the beginning teacher in the elementary school environment of a large suburban school district. Bronfenbrenner's (1976) systemic model of the educational environment as a series of nested, interacting sub-systems was used as a compass for this study. Data were collected beginning in the exo-system and continued through the meso-system and micro-system of the educational environment. Interviews with central office staff at the exo-system level, with the school administrator at the meso-system level, and with beginning elementary teachers at the micro-system were the primary means of data collection. Interview data were collected from three beginning teachers in the elementary school with the largest number of beginning teachers in the district, the principal of the school, and central office personnel. Evolving display matrices were the primary strategy for data analysis. Themes were identified at each level of the educational environment. Findings reveal consistent themes within the levels of the elementary school environment.

DEDICATION


This dissertation is dedicated first of all to my parents, Charles and Lila Thornton.

They say a person is who he is because of where he comes from.

That is true. I am who I am because of them.

I only wish they could share this moment with me.

Kristy and Holly, my daughters, will always be my little women and greatest cheerleaders!

Being their mother is and always will be my greatest accomplishment in life.

Kennedy, Kendra, Ruth Anne, Zack, Thomas, Lewis, James, Daniel, and our yet-to-be-born

grandson, "Remember to reach for the stars. You control your destiny. I believe in you and your

strength to make a difference. That is the essence of life."

Larry, my brother, for taking my many phone calls and offering advice.

His voice continues to mean so much.

And finally, Bruce who lived with me through this.

Thanks to his love of hanging out with a person who has gone to school her entire life!

It's been a good ride.

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Next is my friend and colleague, Becky Danello, who was a wonderful coach and cheerleader. Together we survived parental illness, broken bones, surgery, and we made it. This one's for us, girl!  Thanks for being my travel partner on this journey.

I would especially like to acknowledge my husband who has lived 35 years with a woman who has never been able to completely leave school. Perhaps, now is the time. And to my daughters, Kristy and Holly, who have helped me throughout this process. They are truly my treasured jewels. They are my strength. This dissertation topic began because of them. Where are they now? They are now both married with children and continue to teach me about how to live and enjoy the moment. They do not teach in schools.

With laptop in delivery room, I witnessed Kennedy's first breath. Kendra, Ruth Anne, Zack, Thomas, Lewis, James, and Daniel who continue to teach me about giving back and loving at a different level. Finishing this is because of them, a legacy. My wish for them is that they will choose a path in life that allows them to make a difference and live life to its fullest.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the beginning teachers in my profession. It is my hope that, as they take the torch that is passed to them, this research will make their entry into the race a little smoother.

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# CHAPTER 1
## CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

My life as an educator has played a key role in defining my existence as a woman, mother, and citizen. My husband worked for the federal government, and with every promotion he received, we were transferred to a different state. Our travels took us to Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky, New York, and Virginia. With each change, I greeted the movers with my two young girls in hand and a new teaching position.

Yes, I taught in every one of those states, and my positions varied from teaching elite populations to inner city children living in poverty. While my adventures in education were unfolding, my young children were watching. They were with me on a Saturday in Kentucky when I went to run-down homes to pick up students and take them to various events. They spent that day and many other days watching and listening. They experienced first hand someone trying to make a difference in the lives of others.

When my oldest daughter graduated from college with a teaching degree, she proudly stated that she wanted to make a difference. I looked at her and saw myself 30 years ago. As a novice, she was concerned about the national emphasis on testing, support given to new teachers, and student discipline, but she felt prepared to face the challenge.

As the year progressed, I saw my daughter's zeal disappear. She needed assistance and support in meeting the state testing requirements. Her class size was too large, and many of her students had problems that she was too inexperienced to handle. She was assigned a mentor who was working on her masters degree, and that made it impossible for her to meet with my daughter on a regular basis. At its most basic level, it was on-the-job training with no trainer.

The school's induction program consisted of a simple faculty meeting at the beginning of the year. Everyone was given a tour of the building and copier code numbers were passed out to all new employees. The principal paired all new employees with veteran staff members and only met with them if there was a problem.

That year passed, and she left teaching. She had other opportunities and did not feel that teaching was a good match for her. When I was deciding on the topic of this study, I gave her a call. I told her that I was thinking about looking at why beginning teachers decide to remain in education. She stated that she thought that would be a wonderful topic. It was certainly too late

to help her, but maybe it would prove beneficial for others. Seeing my daughter leave education led to my desire to study beginning teacher retention.

My youngest daughter still has dreams of being a teacher and will soon enter the field of special education. She has one more year to go before she enters her own classroom with the dream of making a difference. I hope the system will be there to support her and all other beginning teachers who want to make that difference.

## *Statement of the Problem*

Our nation's schools are experiencing increasing student enrollments and alarmingly high levels of teacher turnover. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2002), public school student enrollment is predicted to increase from 47 million in 1999 to 48 million in 2008. Research also reflects the need for 2.4 million new teachers by the year 2012 as compared to the present teaching force of 2.8 million (Cromwell, 2002). Additionally, data reveal that 200,000 new teachers will be hired annually (American Federation of Teachers, 2001). The student population is also becoming more diverse. The Bureau of the Census (1996) reported that by 2010, 40 percent of Americans ages five to nineteen will be Latino, African American, Asian American, or Native American. Murphy and DeArmond (2003) stated that schools servicing students with high needs have increased problems with teacher retention.

Ingersoll (2001) reported that school staffing shortages are not primarily the result of too few teachers being trained and recruited. Adding to that, Ingersoll (2004) stated that recruitment of new teachers would not solve the teacher shortage problem if those entering the profession continue to leave. He found that over 90% of the teachers entering the workplace were replacements for teachers departing the field.

Nationwide, 9.3% of public school teachers leave before they complete their first year in the classroom, and over one-fifth of public school teachers leave their positions within their first three years of entering the teaching field. Nearly 30% of teachers leave the profession within five years of entering teaching, and even higher attrition rates exist in more disadvantaged schools (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Murnane, Ingersoll, & Smith (2003) reported that 40-50% of new teachers leave within the first five years of entry into teaching. The attrition rate for those who enter the classroom through an alternative path can be as high as 60 % (Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001).

The nation's teacher preparation system has responded to the demand for additional teachers. Between 1984 and 1998 the number of institutions preparing teachers increased from 1,287 to 1,354. The number of students graduating with bachelors and masters degrees in education increased by 50 percent to 230,000 by the 1999-2000 school year (Feistritzer, 1999). School staffing problems are largely due to a revolving door, where large numbers of teachers exit the field long before retirement. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2002) stated that "Our inability to support high quality teaching in many of our schools is driven not by too few teachers coming in, but by too many going out" (p.3). Research data on why teachers leave the profession indicate better salaries, opportunities in other career fields, teaching salaries, working conditions, and preparation and mentoring as themes that drive teachers away (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Additionally, Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley (2006) stated that schools with higher proportions of minority, low-income, low performing students, and urban schools tended to have higher attrition rates.

Darling-Hammond (2003) stated, "Effective teachers constitute a valuable human resource for schools one that needs to be treasured and supported" (p.9). Inman and Marlow (2004) stated that unless educational systems change support systems and improve working conditions, teachers will continue to close the door and walk away. In looking at the need for support changes, Hoernemann and Hirth (2004) stated that many educators in Human Resources are "doing exactly what they have always done: attending job fairs, reviewing resumes, promoting their schools via the Internet, supporting cadet teaching programs, and developing mentoring and induction programs for beginning teachers" (p.18).

Tye and O'Brien (2002) studied why experienced teachers (six to ten years teaching experience) left the profession. Of the 114 teachers surveyed who had already left the profession, they ranked accountability, paperwork, changing student demographics, parental pressure, and administration as reasons for leaving. Salary was last on the list as a reason for departure. Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch & Enz (2000) surveyed 26 National State Teachers of the Year, who cited personal problems, professional image, and administration as reasons for leaving the profession.

Supply and demand issues in the teaching profession may be better understood if viewed from the angle of retention. The high demand for teachers is not being driven by an inadequate supply of entering teachers, but by a demand for teacher replacements caused by high teacher

turnover. Accordingly, this study will examine how the elementary school educational environment supports the beginning teacher.

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to conduct a cross-case study of one school system's response to the needs of the beginning teacher at the elementary level. Because the elementary school's environment can be viewed as a system, Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model will be used as a lens through which to examine the elementary school environment and its impact on beginning teachers. Bronfenbrenner proposed the educational environment as the following four, nested, interrelated systems: (a) "micro-system" (p.5); (b) "meso-system" (p.5); (c) "exo-system" (p.6); and (d) "macro-system" (p.6). An examination of the layers will reveal how the interrelated systems respond to the needs of beginning elementary level teachers.

*Research Questions*

The overall guiding question for this study is: How do patterns of practice used across the total educational environment of the elementary school meet the needs of beginning teachers? Subordinate questions include the following: (1) At the classroom level, how do beginning teachers describe their first year's experience? (2) At the elementary school level, how do those in positions of influence respond to the needs of beginning teachers? (3) At the system-level, how do personnel respond to the needs of the beginning teacher? and (4) At the university level, how do teacher educators respond to the needs of the beginning teacher?

*Background of the Problem*

What is the profile of the new teacher entering today's classroom for the first time? According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, July 1996), of approximately 2.6 million public school teachers in the United States in 1993-94, 11% were newly hired, but 39% of those new hires will leave the profession after five years (Ingersoll, 2002).

The No Child Left Behind U.S. Department of Education, 2004 Act (NCLB) requires all classrooms to have highly qualified teachers. This is an added stress for districts. According to Darling-Hammond (2003), "…we produce more qualified teachers than we hire. The hard part is keeping the teachers we prepare" (p.7).

The newly hired teacher's profile today is very different from that of past decades. Bullard (1998) emphasized that the following five groups compose the current teaching pool: (a) active pool or recent graduates of teaching programs; (b) reserve pool or teachers who have not

used their teaching credentials; (c) those with teaching experience; (d) career switchers; and (e) college students. Gone are the days when the pool consisted primarily of students exiting the university system.

In addition to having diverse groups entering the teaching marketplace, there is a variety of licensing requirements across the states. One consequence of the complicated licensing component is an increase in the number of people entering the teaching field who have not met their state requirement for certification. Darling-Hammond (1999) reported that in 1994, approximately 27% of newly hired teachers were hired, either with no license, or with a sub-standard license in their content area. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1997) estimates that over 25% of all teachers enter the classroom without proper qualifications in their field of teaching. With states now having standards for students to meet in order to graduate, that can result in severe consequences for the school and its students.

Getting and keeping good teachers is essential for all schools, but it is proving to be a very difficult challenge for urban school systems. In addition to many new hires leaving the field after a short period of time, recent graduates are also hesitant to take teaching positions at inner city schools. Many of those who do venture into city schools do not stay (Shann, 1998).

While the newly hired teacher is in the classroom, it is highly possible that she is experiencing problems. Ryan (1979) reported the following three reasons that novices experience trouble: (a) they are under trained for the demands of the work; (b) there are no clear selection criteria in teacher training; and (c) the training received is general and not specific.

This collection of teachers, who are employed to educate students, will need appropriate support that assists them in delivering instruction and improving their knowledge and skills. Consequently, this study will examine how the total educational environment of the elementary school responds to the needs of the beginning teacher.

*Significance of the Study*

It is essential that educators understand how patterns of practice meet the needs of beginning teachers. That understanding can improve teacher retention and lead to program stability and quality, which are essential for student learning, program continuity, and control of recruiting and hiring expenditures.

The results of this study will contribute to and amplify the current research on the patterns of practice used to respond to the needs of beginning teachers. The conceptual model

will provide a framework of practices for members of the total educational environment of the elementary school.

<p style="text-align: center;">*Definitions of Terms*</p>

The definitions of terms below are used in this study and are explained for the benefit of the reader.

*Beginning Teacher* is a state-licensed individual who is completing his or her fourth year of teaching, has been granted tenure, has positive evaluations, and has participated in a year-long beginning teacher support program.

*Principal* is a state-licensed individual who is the leader and manager of a public school.

*Mentor* is a state-licensed teacher who promotes the professional and/or personal development of the beginning teacher.

*Induction Program* is a planned program that provides systematic and sustained assistance to the beginning teacher for at least one year (Huling-Austin, 1990).

*Retention* refers to the process by which a state-licensed teacher returns to the same teaching position held during the previous year.

*Attrition* refers to the process by which a state-licensed teacher exits the teaching field.

<p style="text-align: center;">*Limitations/Assumptions*</p>

The findings and conclusions developed in this cross-case study are based on practices in one elementary school in a large suburban school system. Interviews were used in the study. An overview of the school system, a description of the school, and consideration of the participating individuals will assist the reader in making the decision of generalizability.

<p style="text-align: center;">*Overview of the Dissertation*</p>

This study involves a qualitative examination of the patterns of practices used within the total educational environment of one elementary school to respond to the needs of beginning teachers. Subcategories for examination include beginning teachers, their instructional supervisor within the elementary school, and support personnel at the central office level. Data were collected via interviews. Findings and conclusions are supported by ongoing data collection and analysis.

The following chapter provides a review of the related literature describing the problem in its current context and current models of practice. Theoretical literature related to the beginning teacher was reviewed. Six research studies focusing on practices that respond to the

needs of beginning teachers are included. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the study, including an explanation of the study's design, the sampling procedures, the data collection and management procedures, and the data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 describes the findings by using Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model and my conceptual framework as a lens for examining the elementary school educational environment, the special needs of beginning teachers, and the patterns of practice used to respond to the needs of beginning teachers. Information from individual cases was used to support the case analysis. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, conclusions that can be drawn from the study, implications for practitioners, and implications for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents an examination of the literature related to patterns of practice used to respond to the needs of beginning teachers. This subject is important for several reasons. Olsen (2000) illustrates the severe need for more and better teachers with the following demographic factors: (a) student enrollment is projected to grow by 4% between 1997 and 2009; (b) there are increased job opportunities for women and minorities outside of education; (c) the average age of American teachers is forty-four, resulting in a "graying" of the workforce; and (d) one out of five novice teachers leaves the profession after three years.

Current research suggests that teachers leave education for multiple reasons. According to the Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium (2001), external factors such as the initial commitment to teaching, preservice training, the external employment climate, salaries, retirement, and relocation contribute to teachers' decisions to leave the profession. Local school systems may have little or no control over some of those factors. School systems, however, do have influence over several internal factors in the teacher attrition puzzle, and, given the large number of teachers exiting the business, those factors should be closely examined (MERC, 2001). Salaries, working conditions, teacher preparation, and mentoring are four major influences on whether a teacher leaves the teaching profession (Allen, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2003, 2006; Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The following review of literature is an examination of factors within the control of the local school system that have been attributed to influencing new teachers to remain in education.

*Purpose of the Review*

The major purpose of this chapter is to examine professional literature in the field of teacher retention especially related to the beginning teacher. The guiding question for this review is: How do patterns of practice used across the total educational environment of the elementary school meet the needs of beginning teachers? Analyzing and synthesizing what the literature reveals about the needs of the beginning teacher has prepared me to explore how the total elementary educational environment is reacting to these needs. To answer my guiding question, I will examine the following: (a) the current context of teacher retention for beginning teachers; (b) current models of practice; and (c) theoretical bases supporting teacher retention. Next, I will critically analyze and synthesize findings of six selected research studies. Finally, I will describe

the current status and future needs related to research in the area of teacher retention and beginning teachers.

The review of literature is supported by computerized database searches of ERIC, WILSON, and Dissertation Abstracts International. References located in dissertations, journal articles, and texts related to teacher retention also generated additional sources. In reviewing literature on teacher retention in general, search terms including, but not limited to, *retention*, *attrition*, *mentoring*, *induction programs*, and *principal* were used. No time limits were applied to the initial search terms.

In order to locate studies related to the retention of beginning teachers specifically, the same databases were searched with the above terms paired with qualifiers such as *beginning teacher*, *first-year teacher*, *principal*, and *instructional leader*. Studies were included for this critical review that specifically investigated the following: (a) principal practices teachers identify as important in influencing them to remain in education; (b) mentoring practices teachers identify as important in influencing them to remain in education; and (c) induction and orientation practices teachers identify as important in influencing them to remain in education.

*Current Issues Influencing the Retention of Beginning Teachers*

The area of beginning teacher retention is problematic and is influenced by many factors, including teacher demographics, leadership responsibilities, and available support programs for the novice educator. After reviewing attrition data, Hope (1999) characterized the teaching profession as one that "eats its young" (p.55). It is essential that educators understand practices that influence beginning teachers to remain in education. That understanding can lead to program stability and quality, which are essential for student learning, program continuity, and control of recruiting and hiring expenditures.

*Role of Principal Related to Teacher Retention*

Research is available on programs such as mentoring and induction to help beginning teachers with their transition into teaching. However, there is not ample research on the principal's role in retaining beginning teachers. Principals are asked to be instructional leaders, but research provides little guidance on how to navigate that process (Brock & Grady, 1998). Faced with a teacher shortage, principals are finding it increasingly difficult to keep their schools fully staffed. In addition to being responsible for filling teaching vacancies, principals must also support the beginning educators in order to retain them.

In order for teachers to develop a commitment to the organization, school administrators need to deal with the issue of job satisfaction (Shin & Reyes, 1995). To increase job satisfaction teachers need to be supported by the principal. Williams (2003) stated that beginning teachers acknowledge support from principals as important. Just as a student needs challenge and support, so does the beginning teacher.

When considering why teachers leave, Gonzalez (1995) found that teachers frequently cited lack of administrative, collegial, and parent support, as well as insufficient involvement in decision making as common reasons for being dissatisfied. It is the principal, as leader of the school, who is able to modify that working environment by providing the support that teachers need. Fimian (1986) reported that teachers who enjoy administrative support experience less stress. Administrators who possess knowledge of best practices in the area of retention will be better able to support the teacher who is beginning his career in education, hence leading to increased job satisfaction and higher rates of retention. It is fair to say that if principals do not provide the instructional and emotional support through induction, then the beginning teacher will seek that support in another school system or career (Hope, 1999; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

The field of education is striving to adapt to a changing environment with teacher retention issues. In times of survival, when resources are limited, resources must be reserved in order for an organization to excel. Today, the role of the school administrator is crucial to the survival of education as a public organization. Therefore, administrators must provide the leadership required to move an organization from its present state to a more desired state (Hitt, Ricarti, & Nixon, 1998). Administrators who are able to acquire and use new skills will be better suited to successfully lead their organization during this period of adaptation.

*Support Programs*

The amount of money spent on teacher recruitment, hiring, and support programs for new hires varies from state to state and from systems to systems. Breaux and Wong (2003) note that while 28 states have laws to require or encourage districts to offer support programs, only 10 cover the full monetary costs of the training. These support programs have implications for the beginning teacher in today's public school setting. Supervisors must possess knowledge of research in the area of support programs, as well as best practices, in order to assist educators who are beginning their teaching career.

*Mentoring Related to Teacher Retention*

The first year of teaching can leave the beginning teacher feeling isolated and frustrated (Monsour, 2003). One approach that is often used to assist new teachers with those feelings and to assist in developing their teaching expertise is mentoring. According to Huling-Austin (1992), teacher mentors can help beginning teachers survive the reality of the classroom. Other researchers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Guarino et al., 2006) found that mentoring can increase job satisfaction and retention.

Feiman-Nemser & Parker (1992) classified mentors into the following three categories based on their observations and interviews with mentors and novices: (a) local guides, who work to familiarize beginning teachers with school policies, teaching practices, and materials; (b) educational companions, who help novices to understand students' thinking and to develop sound reasons for action; and (c) agents of change, who foster norms of collaboration, shared inquiry, and work to break down the barriers of isolation.

Much has been written about mentoring, but most of the literature deals with the role of the mentor and overviews of mentoring and its management (Hawkey, 1997). Mentored teachers seem to emerge with more competency and motivation than teachers not mentored (Huling-Austin, 1990). "What is less clear is how teacher mentoring affects the retention of teachers in the profession" (Odell & Ferraro, 1992, p. 200). Chapman (1984) argued that the quality of the first teaching experience is more important in retaining the beginning teacher than either the quality of the teacher-preparation program or the teacher's academic performance.

*Induction Related to Teacher Retention*

Induction in education has received new emphasis in recent years, but can induction programs increase the retention of beginning teachers? A positive induction can make a lasting difference in retention (Halford, 1998). However, it must involve more than a general faculty meeting where polite introductions are made and the handbook is reviewed, followed by a walk around the building to point out important locations such as the nurse's office (Hope, 1999). The process of introducing a beginning teacher to a school system is should be a complex endeavor (Odell & Ferraro, 1992).

Induction programs, also referred to as beginning teacher support programs, can ameliorate the teacher retention problem by improving teacher satisfaction. Of greater

importance, a successful induction program can improve practice by helping teachers apply what they learned at the college level to real-life teaching (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002).

Another way of looking at induction programs is through the lens of fairness. Beginning teachers are facing more mandated state testing. Not only are teachers being asked to do more, they are also being held accountable in yearly evaluations. They are being asked to do the same things that a 30-year veteran is expected to do. That high level of expectation should be met with an equally high level of support. While they may be intellectually prepared, their limited experience makes their entry into teaching potentially frustrating (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002). Beginning teacher support programs may be offered through the following institutions: (a) school systems, either independently or in partnership with other systems or universities; (b) state departments of education; or (c) individual schools working alone (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002).

Regardless of the program, funding is critical, and it often dictates the level of support. Stansbury and Zimmerman (2002) differentiated the types of programs as low and high intensity. Low level programs are generally often one-time or low frequency events with minimal cost. Higher intensity programs tend to require more time and money, and they are often coordinated with other schools or agencies. Examples of low- and high-level strategies include: (a) orienting new teachers; (b) promoting collegial collaboration; (c) selecting and training effective support providers; (d) providing release time; and (e) examining the evidence. Even the less intensive programs promote job satisfaction, but the more intensive strategies offer the added effect of improving the beginning teacher's practice.

As with entry into any career, the first year of a beginning teacher's career is often uneven. Success requires support from all levels – state, local school system, and school. There are a variety of ways of providing support in terms of induction programs. The dividends related to investing in such support are higher teacher morale, job satisfaction, improved teaching, and learning higher teacher retention (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002). Induction programs must be studied to determine what works and what does not. School systems can then make wise decisions when designing programs that assist beginning teachers.

*Theoretical Foundations for Instructional Supervision*

Thus far in this review, the need for an increase in the retention of beginning teachers has been set forth, and several practices that influence teacher retention have been discussed. In this

section, the theoretical basis for teacher retention in general will be discussed. The meaning of theory and why theory should be used to guide practice will be briefly discussed. Finally, models that can be used for understanding teacher retention will be presented.

*Theory to Guide Practice*

What is theory? The definitions of "theory" in *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2007) range from "an assumption to a systematic statement of principles involved" (p.1335). Theories allow one to approach new situations and make decisions, and they help one improve and understand. Sergiovanni (1996) proposed that theory is underneath every school culture, and that culture is driven by theory.

Despite John Dewey's (1929) proposal that nothing is as practical as a good theory, theory is often not included in many educational decisions. Practitioners often state that theory is impractical and they are skeptical of it. Mott and Ross (1957) believed that denying a role for theory leads one to collect facts with little or no purpose in mind about how they are to be used. They characterized practicing without theory like the indiscriminate scurrying of a rat in a new maze. When one observes politicians and educators dealing with retention issues, the vision of scurrying rats becomes a reality, which leads to the question of the purpose of theory.

Pisapia (in press) stated that theories have at least six purposes: (a) to identify what is relevant, what to observe, and what to ignore; (b) to construct frameworks; (c) to explain why certain behaviors occur; (d) to integrate isolated data into a broader conceptual scheme; (e) to predict behavior when no data are available; and (f) to generalize about and predict events.

If a theory explains behavior, then theories should be used to guide educators in framing the issue of teacher retention. This will lead to educational decisions being based on theories, not political whims. Such an approach, however, requires a new paradigm for education, one that allows theory to guide practice. Without such a paradigm, public education may become as endangered as the overhead projector.

*Social Learning Model.* Chapman (1983) presented a conceptual model of the multiple influences associated with teacher retention. His model, grounded in social learning theory, can be used to guide inquiry and suggest issues related to teacher support and school administration that could alter the teacher-retention puzzle. The model suggests that teacher retention is dependent on: (a) teachers' personal characteristics; (b) educational preparation; (c) initial

commitment to teaching; (d) quality of first teaching experience; (e) professional and social

integration into teaching; and (f) external influences. Figure 1 displays this information.

*A Suggested Model of the Influences Associated with Teacher Attrition*
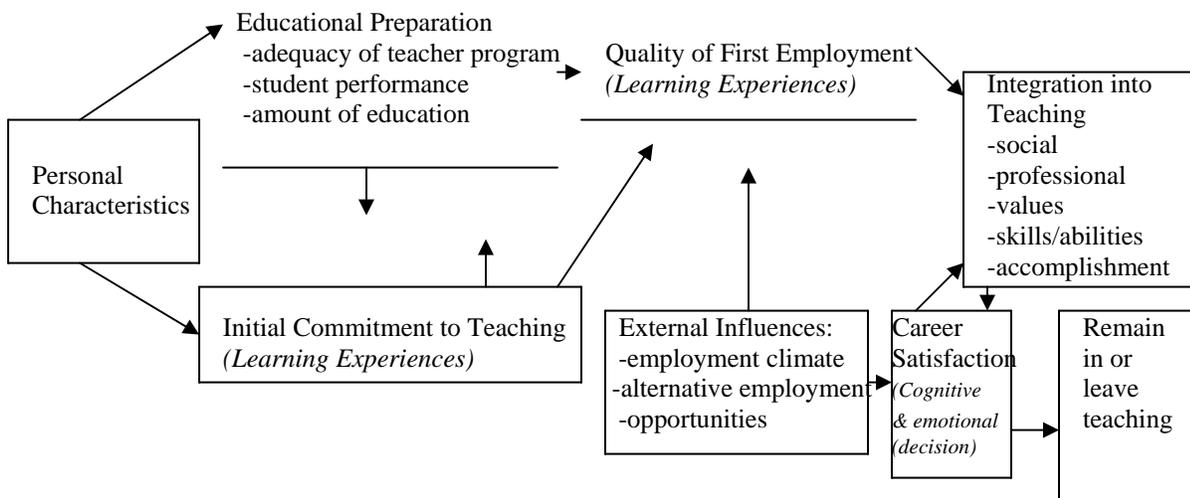


*Figure 1.* A Suggested Model of the Influences Associated with Teacher Attrition

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From "Teacher Retention: The test of a model," by D.W. Chapman, 1984, *American Educational Research Journal, I21, 3, 645-658. Italicized words in parenthesis indicate the relationship of components of the model to the more general tenets of social learning theory* Used with permission from Sage Publishing Company, on April 8, 2008.

*Educational Environment Model.* Bronfenbrenner (1976) proposed the educational

environment as the following four nested, interrelated systems: (a) micro-system; (b) meso-

system; (c) exo-system; and (d) macro-system. To view education in this manner is to view the

individual teacher within larger contexts and from different angles. The micro-system is the

teacher's immediate environment- the classroom, students, and interactions that occur in that

setting. The meso-system involves interrelations within the teacher workplace. Examples of this

are support from the administration and colleagues. The formal and informal social structures,

the exo-system, exert influence on the teacher's workplace. The socioeconomic level of the

community and the school system as a whole are found here. The macro-system consists of

cultural beliefs and ideologies that impact the schools in the system and the decisions of teachers

who work in those schools. Figure 2 displays this information.
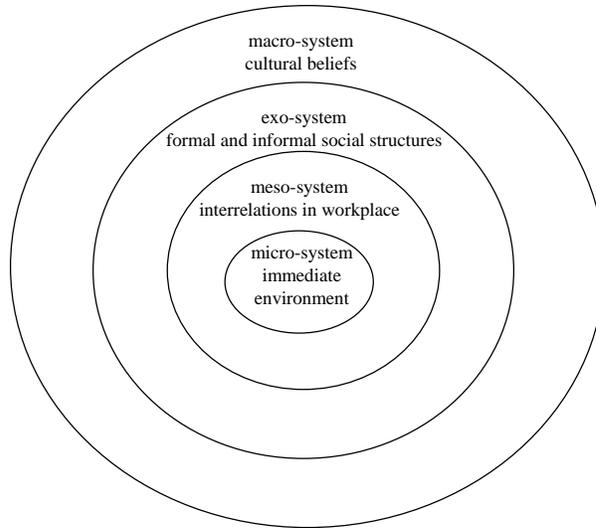
*Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's Educational Environment Model*

Research Studies Related to Beginning Teacher Retention

This section of the review will include an analysis of practices that influence beginning teachers to remain in education. First, the rationale for including studies for review is discussed. Next, a brief synthesis of the studies' purposes, methodologies, and samples is provided to give the reader an overview. Then, the six studies are presented and critically analyzed. The review addresses three general conceptual areas: (a) What types of support are perceived as sufficient for beginning teachers? (b) What skills and knowledge are perceived as sufficient for people to possess in order to work effectively with beginning teachers? and (c) What observable behaviors characterize support of a beginning teacher in a school? These areas are the organizational framework for the analysis and synthesis in this section.

*Research Studies Included for Review*

Specific criteria for the selection of studies for the review were developed prior to searching the literature. First, only studies conducted with school supervisors and beginning teachers in K-12 public schools in the United States were included. The role of supervisor could be filled with various individuals, such as principal, mentor, central office personnel, or university personnel. Because many people work with beginning teachers and influence their decisions to leave or remain in education, I did not limit my studies to one particular position.

Second, only studies conducted with full-time public school teachers were included. I wanted to frame the experience of the fully employed beginning teacher.

Third, only studies that addressed support that increased teacher retention were included. Many articles address attrition, but I wanted to focus on why teachers chose to remain in education as opposed to why they chose to leave.

*An Overview of Studies Included*

Descriptions of the six studies included for review appear in Table A1 in the Appendix. The studies are arranged alphabetically by authors' last names. This table briefly summarizes the following elements: (a) author and year of publication; (b) purpose of the study; (c) methodology and sample used; and (d) implications for each study.

*Purposes*. Researchers have studied various aspects of teacher retention. Some looked at teacher-support programs (Chapman,1984; Odell, 1986; Odell & Ferraro, 1992; and Schaffer, Springfield & Wolf, 1992). Others investigated the role of the principal (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Brock & Grady, 1998). One study looked at predictors of commitment and job satisfaction (Billingsley & Cross, 1992).

*Methodologie*s. The predominant methodology used in these studies was mail survey (Billingsley & Cross,1992; Brock & Grady, 1998; Chapman, 1984; Odell & Ferrano, 1992;) or observations (Odell, 1986; Schaffer, Stringfield & Wolfe, 1992).

*Participants.* Studies collected data from induction programs for beginning teachers (Brock & Grady, 1998; Odell, 1986; Schaffer & Stringfield, 1992), teacher mentoring ( Odell & Ferrano, 1992), and influences on retention (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Chapman, 1984).

*The Principal as Leader*

Good teachers are hard to find, and it is likely that they will be even harder to find in the coming years. One common thread found in many teachers' decisions to leave the field is dissatisfaction with the working conditions (Armstrong, 1984). Principals play a vital role in influencing the level of job satisfaction and retention of teachers. They are the instructional leaders in their schools, and a major component of their instructional role is to retain qualified teachers. That role puts them on the front line in securing, training, supervising and evaluating beginning teachers, as well as fostering a climate that promotes retention.

*Principal and Teacher Perceptions.* A study conducted by Brock and Grady (1998) examined the perceptions of principals and beginning teachers regarding the problems, role expectations, and assistance during the first year of teaching. Brock and Grady (1998) posed two questions: (1) What were the differences in reports given by principals and first-year teachers

regarding the problems experienced during that first year?  and (2) Were the kinds of assistance that beginning teachers needed the same kinds of assistance provided by principals?

Brock and Grady's study (1998) consisted of two phases. In phase one surveys were mailed to a random sample of 75 second-year teachers at the elementary and high school levels in both public and nonpublic schools. Sixty-five percent returned the survey. Nine teachers participating in a course at a university were then interviewed and asked to describe their expectations of assistance from principals.

The second phase involved surveying principals. Surveys were mailed to a random sample of public and private school administrators in Nebraska; 75% returned the surveys. The principals provided information on their expectations for beginning teachers, problems they had experienced with them, and the methods of assistance provided to beginning teachers during their first year.

Principals reported that they wanted first-year teachers to demonstrate the following characteristics: (a) a professional attitude; (b) adequate knowledge of subject areas; (c) classroom management skills; (d) communication skills; (e) a belief that every child can learn; and (f) a desire to help students succeed (Brock and Grady, 1988). Beginning teachers reported they wanted principals to demonstrate the following proficiencies: (a) communication of criteria for good teaching; (b) regularly scheduled meetings with new teachers; and (c) classroom visits with feedback and affirmation.

The problems reported by beginning educators and principals were similar. Teachers reported the following list of concerns, ordered from most frequent to least frequent: (a) classroom management and discipline; (b) working with mainstream students; (c) determining appropriate expectations for students; (d) stress; (e) angry parents; (f) paperwork; (g) evaluating and grading student work; (h) student conflicts; (i) pacing lessons; (j) varying teaching methods; (k) dealing with students of diverse abilities; and (l) feeling inadequate as a teacher. The principals reported many of the same concerns with most reporting overall satisfaction with the preparation of beginning teachers.

The main findings reported in the study concerned the length and comprehensiveness of the induction program.  Many principals reported that they provided fall orientations, mentors, and evaluations. Teachers reported that they wanted a year-long induction program that included

mentors. Sixty-one percent of the principals reported that they offered an orientation for new teachers before the opening of school.

This study provided evidence that principals are a key source of support for beginning teachers. It also revealed that principals recognize that new teachers require assistance and are attempting to provide that guidance. "More structured and comprehensive mentorships and entry-year induction programs will develop as principals observe their positive, long-term effects on the improvement of teaching and the retention of quality teachers" (Brock & Grady, 1998, p.182).

*Commitment and Leadership Style.* Billingsley and Cross (1992) investigated predictors of commitment, job satisfaction, and intent to stay in teaching with general and special educators. A mail questionnaire was sent to 558 special educators and 589 general educators in Virginia. Of the 1147 teachers, 83% of both samples returned the survey. Using the data, variables that influence teachers' commitment and job satisfaction were identified. In addition to that, the extent to which the commitment and satisfaction variables influenced teachers' intent to stay in teaching was identified. One area of particular interest in this article was leadership support. It was measured using a 9-item leadership scale. The participants were asked to identify areas of principal support in terms of personal actions and ideas, decision-making involvement, and shared assessment of teaching performance.

In addition to leadership, three measures of commitment were used. Job satisfaction, job involvement, stress, role conflict, and role ambiguity were also measured. All measurements involved Likert-type scale response choices.

Among the commitment variables the only one that was significantly different (p = .003) was commitment to the school system, with commitment somewhat higher among general educators (M= 2.39 vs M = 2.25). Leadership support was marginally higher among general educators, but the mean difference was not significant.

The investigation found that across special and general educators, job satisfaction was associated with greater leadership support and work involvement and decreased levels of role conflict and stress. However, leadership was not a significant predictor of commitment. The authors went on to state that teachers may leave an organization because of lack of principal support, but they may not leave the teaching profession. That finding could possibly have grave consequences for those inappropriately placed in leadership positions. One must have a

consistent work force to build momentum. The principal, as the instructional leader, should seek to build employees' commitment to the organization. By doing so, the principal can build a committed and satisfied teaching staff.

*Induction Process*

There is currently the need not only to recruit more persons into the field of education, but also to develop support and induction programs for them. Induction programs assist beginning teachers in increasing their instructional competence. As this occurs, student learning increases, and teachers' satisfaction and confidence are enhanced. Feelings of satisfaction and confidence are closely related to teachers' choices to remain in teaching (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Webber, 1995).

*A Two-Year Induction Program to Increase Expertise.* Schaffer, Springfield, and Wolf (1992) conducted a study that focused on classroom observational data on 19 beginning teachers participating in a university-based, 2-year, teacher-induction program. In 1986, legislation was mandated in North Carolina for a 2-year probationary period for initial certification of teachers. The goal of the legislation was to assure that beginning teachers could manage a classroom and provide instruction at a satisfactory level of performance. To assist teachers with that mandate, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC-C) formed a partnership with surrounding school systems and instituted the Teacher Induction Program (TIP). Two major goals of that program were to help teachers achieve expertise as quickly as possible and to note the changes in teacher behaviors during the induction period.

The 19 applicants were chosen based on scores on the National Teachers Examination (NTE), undergraduate grade-point average, and interviews held by both UNC-C faculty and administration from local school systems. Areas of study ranged from kindergarten through high school. All 19 were admitted to an experimental masters degree program. University faculty and local school system personnel jointly supervised the beginning teachers through a cycle of observation, feedback, and staff development conducted during the 2-year commitment (Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992).

The study required data that indicated whether the inductees' paths toward expert status resembled that of more seasoned teachers. Therefore, a comparison group of 12 experienced teachers was selected from teachers involved in a Stallings Effective Use of Time Program (EUTP) (Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992). The Stallings EUTP is centered on gathering

classroom observational data and using that data to guide beginning teachers as they examine different areas of teacher-effectiveness research and make decisions about areas to modify. All experienced teachers had completed at least five years of teaching, and all volunteered for the study. The majority of the first-year training mirrored specialized training procedures used in the EUTP.

In the fall of the first year all new and experienced teachers received a profile of their in-class behavior. That profile was based on the results of three hours of observation using the low-inference Stallings Observation System (SOS). The SOS profile was repeated again toward the end of the first year. All data were gathered during academic classes and during the morning in order to minimize variance caused by time of day. Length of each observation was one hour.

At the end of the first year, twelve teachers were chosen at random for further classroom observation. Nine of the twelve were available. Two hours of data per teacher, in the fall and spring, were gathered. Field notes were also gathered during the observations, interviews with the TIP participants in their schools were conducted, notes from discussions were gathered about four videotaped lessons per year, and monthly analyses of reflective journals were required of all TIP participants. A case-study database was developed on each participant. The goal of the second year was to raise the teachers' performance and professionalism to the level expected of a model teacher (Schaffer, Stringfield & Wolfe, 1992).

Three analyses were conducted, with the first looking at changes in the TIP participants' behavior patterns over time. The second analysis compared TIP participants and experienced teachers. The third analysis centered on the case studies of TIP teachers. All qualitative data and students' journals were used (Schaffer et al., 1992). Analyses of five SOS variables are presented in Table 1.

The EUTP program suggests that classes that spend less than 80% of time on academics usually achieve lower than average levels of student achievement gain. Since all academic statements include many different instructional activities, two variables that contribute to AAS (All Academic Statements) are shown on the table. The EUTP program suggests that 25% of academic time be spent on explanation and instruction, and spending more than 12% of class time making organizing statements is negatively related to students' achievement gains. It was recommended that teachers keep class behavior discussions under 3% of class time (Schaffer et al., 1992).

Qualitative data supported the pattern found in the analyses of the quantitative findings. Year-one journal entries expressed concern with classroom survival. During the second year, delivery of instruction was the main area of concern. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses support the finding that TIP participants made gains during the two-year study. Several patterns emerged from the analyses. During their first year, TIP participants significantly decreased inefficient use of time. Class time spent in organizing decreased by 7%. Reducing time required for organization freed time for instruction, and time in AAS rose by 7% (Schaffer et al., 1992). Even with the assistance received in TIP classes, time spent on classroom behavior remained high throughout the first year. In the second year, time spent on behavior and organizing decreased, leaving more time to be spent on academics. A central theme of this AAS gain was a 2-year improvement in the time teachers were able to dedicate to instructing and explaining (from 14% to 23.5%) (Schaffer et al.).

The study indicated that the teachers improved their teaching while in the TIP program. That change could be influenced by the fact that all 19 participants were chosen by use of certain criteria and not randomly selected. However, the data do suggest that beginning teachers require time to develop the skills and behavior necessary to become successful members of the teaching profession.

Table 1

*Percentage of Class Time Spent in Specific Behaviors*

_____

|  |  | Fall |  | Spring |  | Fall |  | Spring |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SOS behavior category (criterion) | n | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M |
| **All academic statements (> 80%)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Experienced Teachers | 12 | 81.8 | 12.5 | 93.1** | 14.7 |  |  |  |
| First-year TIP | 19 | 73.6 | 10.3 | 80.9** | 4.6 |  |  |  |
| 2-year TIP sub sample | 9 | 70.8 | 6.0 | 78.2* | 12.8 | 86.4 | 5.3 | 82.6* 11.6 |
| **Teacher instructs and explains (>25%)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Experienced teachers | 12 | 21.0 | 16.0 | 25.8 | 13.2 |  |  |  |
| First-year TIP | 19 | 15.8 | 9.7 | 19.4 | 11.2 |  |  |  |
| 2-year TIP sub sample | 9 | 14.0 | 10.0 | 14.2 | 7.0 | 23.4 | 9.0 | 23.5* 12.9 |
| **Teacher asks direct questions (>8%)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Experienced teachers | 12 | 12.6 | 4.7 | 15.6 | 4.1 |  |  |  |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| First-year TIP | 19 | 12.7 | 4.1 | 12.2 | 5.2 | | | |
| 2-year TIP sub sample | 9 | 12.5 | 3.3 | 12.3 | 5.8 | 16.1 | 5.5 | 15.2 |
| 5.9 | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All organizing statement (<12/%) | | | | | | | | |
| Experienced teachers | 12 | 14.5 | 9.8 | 4.9** | 4.8 | | | |
| First-year TIP | 19 | 22.3 | 8.2 | 15.0** | 12.0 | | | |
| 2-year TIP sub sample | 9 | 22.8 | 5.3 | 15.8 | 9.8 | 9.5 | 5.2 | 14.5* |
| 11.2 | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All behavior-related statements (<3%) | | | | | | | | |
| Experienced teachers | 12 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 1.2* | 1.7 | | | |
| First-year TIP | 19 | 3.8 | 3.7 | 3.8 | 4.9 | | | |
| 2-year TIP sub sample | 9 | 5.3 | 4.6 | 5.3 | 6.5 | 2.6 | 3.5 | 2.2** |
| 3.0 | | | | | | | | |

*p* <.05  **p* <.01

Note. From "An Innovative Beginning Teacher Induction Program: A Two-Year Analysis of Classroom Interactions," by E. Schaffer and D. Wolfe, 1992, *Journal of Teacher Education,* 43 (3), p. 186. Used with permission from Sage Publishing Company, on April 8, 2008.

*Assistance Offered in Two-Year Induction Program.* Odell (1986) conducted a study of 86 first-year and 79 new-to-system elementary-level teachers who were involved in a 2-year teacher induction program to determine how the induction program assisted beginning teachers. The induction program was a service model between a collaborating college of education and a major school system. The school system released nine veteran teachers to provide support under the leadership of the university-based teacher induction program.  The clinical support teachers were trained at the university on the needs of new teachers, effective teaching, and how to offer non-evaluative teacher support (Odell, 1986). Each full-time support teacher was responsible for 18 teachers distributed across eight elementary schools in a system with a total of 73 elementary schools. 73.3% had obtained their teaching degree from the participating university. The sample also included 79 teachers who were new to the system. Of those, 89.9% were women, 69.9% were above the age of 30, and only 25.5% had obtained their teaching degrees from the participating university

Of the 86 first-year teachers, 90.7% were women, and 50% were under the age of 25. New teacher requests for assistance were recorded, and observations were made of the assistance offered by support personnel in regard to their interpretations of new teachers' needs. During the

year the support, teachers recorded the questions asked by the teachers. That resulted in a semester record of each new teacher.

Odell (1986) found that experienced teachers new to a school had similar needs to the assistance offered to the new hires. Categories that emerged were (a) system information, (b) resources/materials, (c) instructional, (d) emotional, (e) classroom management, (f) environment, and (g) demonstration teaching (Odell, 1986). The two most requested areas of assistance of both groups of teachers were (a) information about the school system and (b) resources and materials pertinent to the curriculum to be taught by first-year teachers. The experienced teachers are not new to a school system, but they can be considered to be in transition. The retention of experienced teachers could possibly be increased if those teachers are provided induction support. The results of the data in the study support the assertion that classroom management skills are not the most important need perceived by new teachers.

*Mentoring*

Beginning teacher mentoring is a common topic for research and scholarship in the American educational arena. Many recent studies suggest that strong mentor relationships can increase the retention and success of beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992). Because of the importance and complexity of beginning teachers' experiences, mentoring programs are being used to ease first-year teachers into the profession, help them acquire expertise, shape their practices, and increase the likelihood that they will remain in the field of teaching.

*Social Learning Model and Retention*. Chapman (1984) conducted a study with three groups of college graduates to test his model. Discriminant analysis was used to study differences among: (a) those who continued to teach; (b) those who started teaching but left within 5 years; and (c) those who never taught. The total number of graduates from the University of Michigan who completed the Survey of Graduates with Teaching Certificate was 2,933. Respondents were grouped into three categories: (a) those who started teaching and remained; (b) those who started and left teaching; and (c) those who prepared for, but never actually entered, teaching.

The sample consisted of 400 subjects per year, every other year between 1946 and 1978. The subjects were randomly selected from a pool of teaching certificate recipients who graduated from the University of Michigan. In years with less than 400 teaching graduates, all recipients

were surveyed. A total of 5,764 graduates were contacted and 2,933 returns were collected, a response rate of 51%.

The single strongest predictor of retention in this study was initial commitment to teaching. However, among those who entered teaching (two of the three groups), the quality of the first teaching experience was more strongly related to attrition than was either academic performance or the adequacy of the educational program. The study revealed that one way by which administrators can influence attrition is in shaping the tone and quality of a new teacher's first teaching experience. If an administrator is concerned with teacher retention, working with beginning teachers is a strong intervention strategy. This has implications for administrators concerned with teacher retention. If the quality of the first teaching experience can increase retention, then it will probably be useful to examine the nature and content of the mentoring experience (Chapman, 1984).

*How Mentoring Affects Retention.* "Two successive groups of K-5 teachers who received year-long structured support from mentor teachers in a collaborative university/school system teacher mentor program during their first year of teaching were the focus of a 4-year follow-up study" (Odell & Ferraro, 1992, p.201). The two groups consisted of all beginning teachers working in a school system with 76 elementary schools for 2 successive years. The system offered ongoing support for all new teachers through a mentor program.

 Nine mentor teachers met weekly with the beginning teachers. Mentors were selected by both university- and system- level employees. Criteria used included classroom teaching effectiveness, effectiveness in working with adults, and commitment to being an open and active learner. Teaching time for the mentors was reallocated to provide ample mentoring time for two years.

Mentoring was nonevaluative and supportive. Mentor teachers used a variety of support strategies, such as peer-coaching, shared teaching, and questioning, which guided and encouraged the beginning teachers to identify their trains of thought and what they were focusing on in their teaching (Odell & Ferraro, 1992).

Retention data were gathered on both groups 4 years after their mentoring experience. For the purpose of the study, beginning teachers were considered retained if, after 4 years, they were still teaching in a classroom. Eighty-eight percent of Group 1 was located and 90% of Group 2. The participants were sent 12-item questionnaires. Items pertained to teacher

demographics, assessment of the mentoring, perceived quality and influence of the mentoring, and the teachers' present and future intentions about teaching (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). Group 1 had an overall return rate of 72.9%, and 69 % of the members of Group 2 returned the questionnaires.

The data revealed that approximately 96% were still in teaching. Even if the participants who could not be located were assumed to have left the field of education, the attrition rate would only be 14%. Table 2 displays this information.

Emotional support was cited as the most valuable support received from mentors. Support in using instructional strategies and obtaining resources followed. Help with student discipline and in working with parents received less value. The least value was placed on support received in managing the school day and functioning in the school system (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). Although there was not a control group of beginning teachers, 5-year, statewide data are available for nonmentored teachers from the time approximate to the study. Those data show an attrition rate above 9% per year across their first 5 years of teaching (New Mexico State Department of Education, 1988).

Table 2

*Four-Year Retention Data for Mentored Beginning Teachers*

|  | Located | | Retained | | Attritional | | Attritional/Unlocated | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *N* |
| 1 | 70 | 86 | 67 | 96 | 3 | 4 | 14 | 17 | 81 |
| 2 | 71 | 90 | 68 | 96 | 3 | 4 | 11 | 14 | 79 |
| Total | 141 | 88 | 135 | 96 | 6 | 4 | 25 | 16 | 160 |

Note. From "Teacher Mentoring and Teacher Retention," by S. Odell and D. Ferrano, 1992, *Journal of Teacher Education,* 43 (3), p. 202. Used with permission from Sage Publishing Company, on April 8, 2008.

Although the retention issue has many sides, the data from this study are consistent with Chapman's (1984) model that places importance on the quality of the first teaching experience.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter will address how the methodology was used to complete a cross- case study of the patterns of practice used across the total educational environment of the elementary school to respond to the needs of beginning elementary teachers. Based on the assumptions described in the literature review regarding teacher retention, the study examined patterns of practice at the following levels: (a) classroom; (b) school; and (c) system. This chapter provides a rationale for the study's design and an outline of the data collection and procedures used for analysis.

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to describe how the elementary school educational environment responds to the needs of beginning teachers. The cross-case analysis is intended to enhance the understanding of responses that assist or impede the induction process for beginning teachers in the elementary school environment. This understanding can lead to program stability and quality, which are essential for student learning, program continuity, and control of hiring and recruiting expenditures.

*Type of Design*

The method used is the cross-case design. According to Merriam (1998), the case study design is a particularly useful approach for studying educational innovations. The case is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a…phenomenon…" (p.8) in a system that is bounded by individual experiences. It was chosen because of a rising concern over the difficulty in retaining teachers and the growing references in the literature to the loss of teachers in general who have achieved four to five years of experience. This phenomenon is of particular interest because of the issue of experience; that is, the subject has attained tenure and passed the difficulties typically associated with new or inexperienced teachers and has decided to remain in education. This research may suggest to the reader possible responses to beginning teachers in similar circumstances. The researcher described the complexities of the situation. That description included information from sources and perspectives that were enhanced by interviews. The study explained the subjects' needs as beginning teachers and the responses to their needs. Possible responses that might be used in the future with beginning teachers were discussed and evaluated. The researcher summarized the findings and presented conclusions, thus increasing the study's potential ability to be applied to future situations of a similar nature.

*Research Questions*

The guiding question that directed this study was: How do patterns of practice, used across the total educational environment of the elementary school, meet the needs of beginning teachers? Subordinate questions included the following: (1) At the classroom level, how do beginning teachers describe their perceptions and understanding of support given to them as beginning teachers? (2) At the elementary school level, how do those in positions of influence respond to the needs of beginning teachers? and (3) At the system-level, how do personnel respond to the needs of the beginning teacher?

*Significance of the Study*

It is essential that educators understand how patterns of practice meet the needs of beginning teachers. Such an understanding can lead to program stability and quality, which are essential for student learning, program continuity, and control of recruiting and hiring expenditures.

The results of this study contribute to amplify the current research on the patterns of practice used to respond to the needs of beginning teachers. The conceptual model provides a framework of practices for members of the total educational environment of the elementary school.

*Theoretical Framework for the Study*

Bronfenbrenner (1976) proposed the educational environment as the following four nested, interrelated systems: (a) micro-system; (b) meso-system; (c) exo-system; and (d) macro-system. To view education in this manner is to view the individual teacher within larger contexts and from different angles. The framework he developed will provide a lens for examining and describing the elementary school settings in which many beginning elementary teachers find themselves.

Bronfenbrenner (1976) viewed the school environment as a "nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next" (p.5). The micro-system is the teacher's immediate environment, the classroom, students, and the interactions that occur in that setting. The meso-system involves interrelations within the teacher workplace. Examples of this are support from the administration and collegiality. The formal and informal social structures, the exo-system, exert influence on the teacher's workplace. The socioeconomic level of community and the school system as a whole are found here. The macro-system consists of cultural beliefs and

ideologies that impact the schools in the system and the decisions of teachers who work in those schools. What is not clear is how these interrelated systems are responding to the needs of the beginning teacher. This is the problem that this study addresses.

*Conceptual Framework*

The three domains that emerged from the review of literature were: (a) leadership support; (b) organization support; and (c) teacher preparation support (Brock & Grady, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Chapman, 1984; Odell, 1986; Odell & Ferrano, 1992; Schaffer, Springfield, & Wolfe, 1992). The conceptual framework developed for this study is based on those domains, which reflect responses to the needs of the beginning teacher as they are identified in the research (see Figure 3). Each domain is composed of multiple variables that function together to form what is considered to be effective responses. This conceptual framework, along with Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model, will be employed to examine the data in this study.

The conceptual framework aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1976) circle of four, nested structures. At the micro-system is the beginning teacher. Next, the meso-system is composed of

**Recommended Input**

*Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for Examining the Practices that Influence Retention*
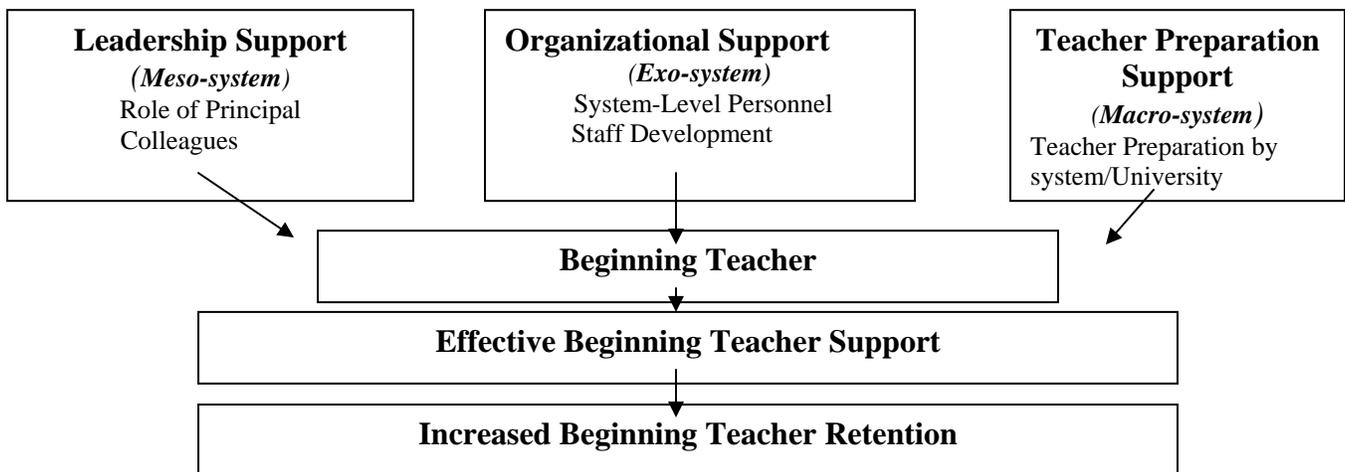
**Expected and Desired Outcomes**

Note. Adapted from Bock & Grady, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Chapman, 1984; Odell, 1986; Odell & Ferano, 1992; Schaffer, Springfield & Wolfe, 1992.

leadership support. Members of that layer are the school administrative team, total school faculty, school assigned mentor, and grade-level members. Organizational support is contained

in the third layer, the exo-system. For the beginning teacher, system-level personnel and staff development compose this layer. The fourth layer contains the macro-system, which consists of educational, legal, and political systems that impact the school. That layer is embedded in organizational support in the form of teacher preparation offered in conjunction with the school system.

*Leadership Support.* The success of any beginning teacher is contingent upon leadership support. Quality leadership means continuous monitoring and feedback and an established system for monitoring teacher progress, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and making improvements is critical to that success. Two variables that make up this domain are: (a) principal's involvement in induction program and (b) administrator's involvement in shaping the tone and quality of the teaching experience *(*Brock & Grady, 1986; Chapman, 1984; Odell, 1986; Odell & Ferrano, 1992; Schaffer, Springfield, & Wolfe, 1992).

*Organization Support*. An important determinant of a beginning teacher's success is organizational support. It is defined as encouragement and support of the teacher from a system. Some of the variables that indicate organization support are: (a) structure of mentoring process; (b) training offered to mentor and mentee; and (c) length and quality of assistance offered in induction program (Brock & Grady, 1986; Chapman, 1984; Odell, 1986; Odell & Ferrano, 1992; Schaffer, Springfield, & Wolfe, 1992).

*Teacher Preparation Support.* Quality programs for beginning teachers have been based on partnerships between local school systems and teacher preparation programs. Some variables that make up this domain are induction programs and mentoring where the two systems work together to support beginning teachers (Brock & Grady, 1986; Chapman, 1984; Odell, 1986; Odell & Ferrano, 1992; Schaffer, Springfield, & Wolfe, 1992).

Procedures

The following sections of this chapter describe the rationale and design of the study, the data collection and the data analysis. Quality issues including credibility and transferability are addressed in the data analysis description.

*Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design*

A qualitative design was selected because "qualitative data are attractive. They are a source of well grounded, rich description and explanation of process occurring in local contexts" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.21). Merriam (1998) maintained that the case study design is a

particularly useful approach for studying educational innovations. She also noted that the case study is effective when a phenomenon consists of multiple variables of possible importance that are "so well integrated in the situation as to be impossible to identify ahead of time" (Merriam, 2001, p.32). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the following purposes for the case study mode: (a) thick description; (b) axiomatic representation; and (c) vicarious reader experience. According to Yin (1994) the evidence from multiple cases is often more compelling and the results of the overall study are more robust. Given these descriptions, qualitative research is highly suited to studying how the total educational environment of the elementary school responds to the needs of beginning teachers.

*The Researcher's Role*

This researcher has been observing and recording classroom instruction for over fifteen years. Additional training in scripting and analyzing teacher lessons has been obtained to hone these skills. Qualitative course work has supported the researcher in triangulation and data analysis. Interviewing techniques were new to this researcher so additional practice was acquired in order to elicit rich responses from participants. With that in mind, the researcher paid particular attention to probing in order to uncover additional information about the total educational environment responses of the participants.

*Gaining Access and Entry*

I gained access to participants by requesting permission from the Director of Testing and Guidance. The Director reviewed the research prospectus before granting entry. Once permission to conduct the study was granted, I requested a list of potential participants from the Director of Human Resources. From that list, names of teachers who met the criteria stated in the Participant Selection section below were generated.

*Setting Selection*

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) cross-case sampling adds confidence to a study. Consequently, the elementary school with the highest number of beginning fourth-year teachers was selected for the study.

*Participant Selection*

Purposive sampling was used to obtain individual participants. To qualify for this study, prospective participants met the following criteria: (a) 24-30 years of age; (b) full-time teacher; (c) teachers in their fourth year; (d) fully licensed; (e) positive evaluations; (f) assigned a mentor

during first year of teaching; (g) attended a program of induction training for new teachers sponsored by the school; and (h) taught all years in current school. Three teachers who met these criteria and their instructional supervisor were chosen at the school. That produced a sample, which consisted of three teachers and one instructional supervisor. The instructional supervisor was the individual directly responsible for on-site support and performance evaluation of the teachers. One central office staff member who works with beginning teachers was selected.

*Assurance of Confidentiality*

Before the study began written consent for participation was obtained from the participants. They were assured of confidentiality. The consent form explained the study's purpose, the procedures, and the proposed use of data. The consent form was approved for use by the Institutional Review Board of the university (see Appendix C). Pseudonyms were assigned for individuals, schools, and the school system.

<div align="center">Data Collection Procedures</div>

Merriam (2001) stated that data are ordinary pieces of information found in the everyday environment. Data in the form of interviews were gathered from the one participating school. For this study, the main vehicle for data collection was the interview. Observations and documents were either not available, or were not useful in confirming and supporting participants' statements.

*Means of Collecting Data: Instrument Selection/Construction*

The interviews were conducted at each level of examination- classroom, school, and central office. My review of literature and my experience as a teacher, department chair, central office specialist, system-level staff development coordinator and presenter, and, currently, as a system-level office administrator guided the development of the construction of the interview protocol.

*Interview procedures and protocols.* According to Yin (1994), the case study protocols are more than instruments. They also include the procedures and general rules to be used in conducting the study. The interview protocols are included in Appendix I. Taped, person-to-person interviews of 45 to 60 minutes were conduced with the Coordinator of Staff Development and with three beginning teachers and their instructional supervisor as described in the participant selection section above. A total of 5 taped interviews were conducted.

The interviews were scheduled at convenient times and places for the participants. Because this study is a case study, semi-structured interview protocols were developed. Merriam (2001) stated that in the semi-structured interview, "the largest part is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time" (p.74). This assisted in comparison by allowing some standardized information to be retrieved from all participants. Merriam (2001) noted "this format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p.74).

As suggested by Yin (1994), "the questions should reflect the full set of concerns from the initial design, but only those to be addressed at the single-case level, not those at other levels" (p.70). Separate, semi-structured interview protocols were developed for teacher participants, supervisors, and system level personnel. (See Appendix G). A professional transcriber transcribed all interviews.

*Observation procedures.* Yin (1994) stated that observations add new dimensions to a study, which are helpful in understanding the context or the phenomenon being examined. By having more than a single observation, reliability increases (Yin, 1994). Due to reorganization of central office's Staff Development Department, it was not possible to conduct observations.

*Document data collection or recording.* Yin (1994) noted the following strengths of documentation as a source of evidence in a case study: (a) can be reviewed repeatedly; (b) not created as a result of the study; (c) contains exact details such as names, references, and event details; and (d) covers a long span of time and many settings. On the other hand, he stated that they may reflect bias of the author and collection may be incomplete or blocked. Document review of the Mentor Handbook was not found useful for my study.

*Assessing the Cultural Context.* Each teacher, administrator, and system-level participant is described in Chapter 4 in terms of demographics and contextual data.

*Pilot Study.* Yin (1994) noted that the pilot study is the final preparation for data collection. The pilot case helps the researcher refine her data collection plan and the procedures to be followed (p.74). A pilot study was conducted with one beginning teacher and his instructional supervisor at one of the system's elementary schools not selected as a site for this study. The proposed interview protocols were used. The interview was audio taped and

transcribed. The participants then reviewed the transcription. Further elaborations were added to the interview protocol.

<div align="center">Data Analysis Procedures</div>

Merriam (2001) noted that qualitative design is emergent. The researcher does not know ahead of time all possible questions to ask unless the data are analyzed as they are collected. "Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts" (p.178). The meanings that are revealed from the analysis form the findings of the study. Yin (1994) explained that the data analysis consists of the following: (a) examining data; (b) categorizing data; and (c) combining the data to address the questions of the study.

*Addressing Quality*

Qualitative researchers have developed several methods for addressing the quality of research designs. The study's internal validity or credibility, external validity or transferability, and reliability are relevant to this case study and are described below.

*Credibility.* Triangulation of the data was used to increase credibility. Interviews were crosschecked for findings. Member checking of transcriptions was completed in order to allow inclusion of additional information and clarification of data. Peer debriefing was also used to help solidify common themes and "recurring regularities" (Guba, 1985).

*Transferability.* Using the cross-case study design provides evidence of replication, and a richer "theoretical frame" (Yin, 1994). Elaborating on replication, Yin (1994) stated that conducting cross-case studies is analogous to conducting multiple experiments on related topics. If all cases turn out as predicted, the cases "would have provided compelling support for the initial set of propositions. This logic is similar to the way scientists deal with experimental findings" (p.46). The results of a study yield findings that similar school systems might apply to their particular beginning teacher support programs or use to implement their first beginning teacher support program (Yin, 1994).

*Data Management.* Merriam (2001) divided data management into three categories: (a) data preparation, which includes transcribing data from interviews and field notes; (b) data identification, which involves dividing the data into meaningful segments; and (c) data manipulation, which includes sorting, retrieving, and rearranging the meaning segments of data.

Data preparation for this study first included bringing all materials together – interviews, tapes, and transcriptions. To assist in easy retrieval, the materials were assigned source tags consisting of numbers and letters (Miles & Huberman, 1994). An index of source tags was recorded at the front of each file of transcripts and researcher's journal. A database was used to manage all information.

Merriam (2001) noted, "data analysis is done in conjunction with data collection" (p.181). As each interview was read, comments and observations were noted in the margins. After reading the interview, comment and observation notes that appear to have common attributes were grouped together. The next interview was read, and comments and observations were noted in the margins. Again, comment and observation notes with common attributes were grouped together. These two separate lists of groupings were "merged into one master list of concepts derived from both sets of data" (p.181). All data were handled in the same manner.

According to Merriam (2001) "the names of categories come from three sources: the researcher, the participant, or sources outside of the study" (p. 182). For this study, the literature review served as the frame of reference for the coding scheme. The following guidelines proposed by Merriam (2001) were used when deciding on categories: (a) categories reflect the purpose of the study; (b) categories are exhaustive, that is, all important data were placed in a category; (c) categories are exclusive, that is, a piece of data only fits into one category; (d) categories are sensitizing, that is, a person is able to read the categories and understand their meaning; and (e) categories are conceptually congruent, that is, all sets of data make sense together.

Miles and Huberman (1994) encouraged qualitative researchers to use data display matrices as tools for data management and analysis. A matrix consists of rows and columns, with the headings evolving during analysis. Evolving matrices for the exo-system, meso-system, and micro-system of the educational environment were the primary tools for data analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest two ways in which displays can be used to draw conclusions and test conclusions. One strategy is to write memos explaining the conclusions drawn from the matrix. Because "writing is a form of analysis that leads to synthesis and the development of ideas for further analysis" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.243), the memos promote the clarification of the conclusions. As new data were collected, they were analyzed to see if they were consistent with the original data collected. This allowed for a constant data comparison process. The notes that

accompany each matrix and its categories and memos provide a written record of the comparison process and the trail that will lead to the final conclusions. A second strategy of the third party review, suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), was implemented. Colleagues were asked to review the matrix and to check for procedural accuracy. Based on this process, conclusions and findings emerged and were placed in a qualitative narrative.

## Reporting the Findings

The reporting of findings in a case study is often the most difficult phase. To address this difficulty, Yin (1994), recommended beginning the case study report before the data collection and analysis are completed. Yin noted the following five characteristics of an exemplary case study: (a) case must be significant, that is, the issues should of national importance; (b) the case must be complete, that is the collecting of relevant evidence has been exhausted; (c) the case must consider alternative perspectives, that is, evidence should be examined from different perspectives in order to question the conclusions of the study; (d) the case must display ample evidence, that is the case study report should contain critical pieces of evidence enabling the reader to reach a judgment; and (d) the case must be composed in an engaging manner (1994).

Chapter 4 includes a case analysis. By using direct quotations of comments and explanations that explain how the categories emerged, the researcher provides the reader with a rich portrait and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon - how patterns of practice used across the total educational environment of the elementary school respond to the needs of beginning teachers, which is, after all, the goal of qualitative research.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe patterns of practice that support the beginning teacher. This chapter examines how Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model, which represents the educational environment as a system, was used to examine the patterns of support for beginning teachers in a suburban school district with 24 schools and approximately 20,000 students. The pseudonym, Sail School District, is used to represent the school district through this study. Data collection began in the outermost circle of Bronfenbrenner's (1976) educational model, which he referred to as the "macro-system." At the time of the study, there were no university partnerships formed with Sail School District so interviews at the macro-level were not completed. The next layer Bronfenbrenner (1976) envisioned is the "exo-system," which he saw as an addition to the macro-system. The exo-system contains social structures that mirror the principles of the macro-system. In this study, the exo-system of Sail School District is represented by the central office support staff, whose role in Bronfenbrenner's model is to communicate the information of the macro-system. Closer to the classroom center of the educational environment, Bronfenbrenner (1976) described the meso-system, which consists of the "interrelations among the major settings containing the learner" (p. 5). The principal, who represents the school's administrative leader, by overseeing the support services of the schools, represented this layer. Finally, the study explored the core of the educational environment, the elementary school classroom or "micro-system." Here, at the core, is where the support structures developed and implemented in the outer layers of the educational environment merge to support the beginning teacher.

This chapter describes the patterns of practice revealed at each of the layers of the educational environment in Sail School District. Based on data from interview transcripts, the patterns of practice introduced into the elementary school environment at the exo-level are first explained. Next, descriptions of patterns of practice at the meso-level are given. Following this, results of a comparative case study of three beginning teachers in one elementary school in the suburban school district under investigation are described through a cross-case analysis.

The elementary school selected contained the largest concentrations of beginning teachers in the school district. Interviews with beginning teachers, their administrator, and the district's Coordinator for Staff Development, served as the primary source of data for the case

studies. The document search did not reveal relevant data for this study. Data sources throughout the chapter are referenced using a source code (I-interview transcript). Codes identifying the participant and page number are also included as part of source references where applicable. An explanation of the codes can be found in Appendix G.

<div align="center">Describing the Context: Sail School District</div>

Sail School District serves approximately 20,000 students, pre-K-12, in twenty-four comparably successful schools. Steady growth in student membership is projected over the next decade. The Human Resources Department expects to fill over 200 teacher vacancies each year. Currently, the district contains 14 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 4 high schools. A school for alternative education opened early 2007, and an elementary school and trades-based center are slated to open in 2008.

Sail District's less-than-one-percent student dropout rate is coupled with standardized test scores ranked among the very best in the state. Sail District teachers enjoy excellent student to teacher ratios, many active parent volunteers, abundant technological equipment, a beginning teacher mentor program, peer coaching, and many other professional development opportunities, including tuition reimbursement.

Exploration began at the macro-system, or university level, to explore the role that university expertise plays in supporting beginning teachers. At the time of the study, there was no university partnership formed with Sail School District, so interviews at the macro level were not completed.

<div align="center">Participant Description</div>

Participants were asked to provide demographic information including age, race, and why they decided on a career in education. I chose these demographic descriptors, not only for purposes of data enrichment, but also to help the reader connect with their stories and understand the emergent themes. This section provides a brief description of each participant.

<div align="center">*MS*</div>

MS, a 37-year-old, Caucasian female, was the first participant to be interviewed. She was a guidance counselor for ten years at a middle school before entering Human Resources. This was her second year in her position as Coordinator of Staff Development. She stated that she was still in a "learning curve" in her new position and was figuring out how to connect the pieces of the "central office-to-school puzzle."

She expressed that she felt tremendous stress from having to staff "high qualified teachers," who are required under No Child Left Behind. She seemed very excited, though, when she talked about the future process of entering a partnership with a nearby university. She elaborated that in the following year she would be working closely, through a grant, with a nearby university to realign the college curriculum. Together, they will phase in a beginning teacher coordinator and teacher advisors. Afterwards she looked at me, sighed, and stated, "But that is ahead of us. Right now I need math and foreign language teachers. Do you know anyone who is highly qualified?"

### MA

MA, a 43-year-old, Caucasian male, opened the doors of his new school on September 5, 2000. His school offers a pre-school program and kindergarten through fifth grade classes. It serves over 1,000 students. The school has 15% of its students receiving special education services, 8% receiving gifted/talented services, and 14 students receiving English as a Second Language instruction. There are 70 teachers in his building, and 40% of those have advanced degrees. Before opening his school, he was an assistant principal in another elementary school in Sail County.

MA remarked that he loved being in the elementary school environment, but he was concerned with the large student body and the number of young teachers in his building. He stated that because there are so many new teachers in his building it was difficult for him to find teachers with three, four, or five years of teaching experience to help beginning teachers.

### AG

AG was the first teacher interviewed. She is a 26-year-old, Caucasian female. She grew up in a city near the Sail School District. AG was educated in a private school system. During the time of the interview, AG shared that she was engaged and planning her wedding. She stated that this was her fourth year of teaching, and all four years had been in the same school. Her classroom was located in a trailer behind the main school. At the time of the interview, housing developments necessitated 13 classroom trailers at the school. The interview took place while her students were attending a music class inside the main building.

At the beginning of the interview, AG stated that since she was a small child, she knew she wanted to be involved with children. She originally thought she would be a pediatrician, but once she was in college, she realized that she was "more involved in developing a child as a

person instead of looking at him from a doctor's view." She stated that when she went to college, if she wanted to major in education, she had to apply immediately to the education department and that she considered that a drawback. At that point, she looked at me and seemed to struggle with her use of the word "drawback." She then stated that this would be her last year in public education. After her marriage, she had decided that she would return to teach at the private school that she attended as a child. She said that it was a very elite private school in a nearby city. When asked if there were other reasons that she was going to the private sector, she stated that her family and her future husband's family had strong ties with the private school, and she felt that she should give back to the system that "grew" her.

<div align="center">

*RR*

</div>

RR was interviewed next. She is a 27-year-old, Caucasian female. She moved to the area when she was in the ninth grade and graduated from a high school in the Sail School District. She stated that she, too, had always wanted to work with children, and she grew up wanting to be just like her older sister, who is also a teacher. She and her sister attended private elementary and middle schools in another state. She often writes her sister and tells her what is going on at school and feels that her sister is an excellent "sounding board." She thinks that their sharing keeps their bond close, and her sister continues to give her good advice.

She elaborated on her situation as a first-year teacher being a little different from other first-year teachers. She graduated with her teaching degree at the end of a fall semester. That enabled her to substitute teach in her current school during the spring. She felt that her work as a long-term substitute teacher allowed her to slowly enter the teaching culture. With that experience "it never really felt like a first year in the building." She then told me that when she got her first class roster, she was completely overwhelmed, because she knew some of the students from being a substitute teacher. Out of 23 students, she had 8 special education students in her first class, and she has had a special education collaboration class every year. She appeared excited to tell me that she tried to always see that as a challenge and not being "dumped on" and that she "took it on and did it." She stated that she has decided that she wants to be a principal and is currently working on her masters degree in administration at a nearby university.

<div align="center">

*RM*

</div>

RM is also a Caucasian female, 26 years of age. RM, who is in her fourth year of teaching, taught 2$^{nd}$ grade for three years and "looped" to 3$^{rd}$ grade this year. When reflecting on

why she chose to enter teaching, she said that her mother was the catalyst. Her mother has taught kindergarten for thirty years and is still in the profession. RM stated that her mother is well known for her teaching and, as a child, RM spent many hours after school in her mother's classroom.

At first glance, RM's case seems qualitatively different from the others, because she almost left the profession after her first year. She smiled when she expressed how shocked her colleagues were when she returned after her first year.

As she struggled with management and instruction, and thought of leaving the profession, her mother was the person who was the most helpful. She stated that she loved the way her mother teaches, and she sees the work and positive attitude that comes of out her mother's students. "It is just admirable" and she used that as a foundation. RM strongly believes that teachers can produce students who are educated and interested. "They don't have to be in a completely silent classroom, and they don't have to be in their chairs all of the time." She stated that she had definitely gained the most from having her mother's input, help, and honest advice. She loves the way her mother talks to her and helps her realize "some stuff." "She's great; she's my mom!"

All of these educators live very distinctive lives, but their stories share as many similarities as they do differences. In the following sections, I describe the patterns of practice uncovered at each of the "layers of teacher retention" referenced in the title of this study. Based on data from interview transcripts, the patterns of practice introduced into the elementary school environment at the exo-level are first explained. Next, descriptions of patterns of practice at the meso-level are provided. Following this, results of a comparative case study of three beginning teachers in one elementary school in the suburban school district under investigation are described through a cross-case analysis.

The Exo-system: Response of Central Office Staff

According to Bronfenbrenner (1976), the exo-system includes the "concrete social structures, both formal and informal, that encompass the immediate settings containing the learner and, thereby, influence and even determine or delimit what goes on there" (p. 6). For the purposes of this study, the exo-system is represented by the central office layer of the elementary educational environment in the Sail School District. To analyze the role that the central office plays in initiating and developing patterns of practice that support beginning teachers, an

interview was conducted with the Coordinator of Human Resources and Staff Development, and the Mentor Program Handbook was reviewed. The Mentor Program Handbook was incomplete and in the process of being revised. Consequently, it did not prove to be useful. Based on the analysis of the interview, the following themes emerged: (1) a focus on creative teacher-support practices and (2) development of a new comprehensive support system for beginning teachers. This section elaborates on each of these themes, provides specific examples, and describes the perspective of the interview subject.

*Creative Support Practices*

The interview at the Sail-School-District-Central-Office level included data that revealed a focus on creative approaches to supporting beginning elementary teachers in the face of increasing teacher vacancies. The Coordinator of Human Resources and Staff Development stated:

> I'm feeling it right now. With the unfortunate number of people who are having illnesses, or the fortunate experience of having children, and with No Child Left Behind, we are even forced to look for licensed teachers to be in the classroom for a long-term substitute position. Both applicant pools, fulltime and long-term substitute, are very small. For example, we have a middle school math position open. I know college students are graduating in December; however, many of them are not ready to make that commitment. I could hire someone with a middle school endorsement, but I would prefer someone who is math endorsed. We have already had two people in that classroom, and I worry about the instruction and the pieces the students have missed. I will say that working in Human Resources has given me a different outlook. When I was in a school, I did not think about the big picture. I always heard about critical shortages, but I never really thought about it. Fortunately I have some of the content teachers helping me, but I am floored. I'm new to this and I never realized that the applicant pool wasn't there. (I/MS/9)

In the face of these shortage conditions, many creative support practices are being considered or have already been implemented. As reflected in the transcript data, Sail School District uses a three-prong approach of support. Each year the school district provides a building-level mentor coordinator, a teacher mentor – who is either on the grade level or teaches the same content – and a peer coach in the building who can assist with visiting and observing a lesson.

That observation is not one that counts toward their clinical evaluation (I/MS/7). The Coordinator stated:

> Some schools have more than one peer coach, and there is also a technology coach who can help with infusing technology into lessons. There are lead teacher specialists in all content areas that are located at the School Board office. Additionally, middle and high school buildings have senior teachers. You can see that there are many creative layers of support. (I/MS/8)

*Developing New Comprehensive Support*

There is evidence that within its current support structure, the school district has already begun to develop a new comprehensive support structure for the growing number of beginning teachers. The Coordinator stated:

> I will be working with a group from surrounding counties and our local university to implement a grant from the United States Department of Education. We will be working closely with the humanities and sciences to realign the college curriculum and put in place a Beginning Teacher Coordinator and a Beginning Teacher Advisor in four counties to work exclusively with the new teachers. My guess is that my responsibility will be to help interview and to assist with infusing the program into our Human Resources Department. I am currently looking at our schools with the biggest needs in terms of new teachers needing assistance from a building-level Beginning Teacher Advisor. (I/MS/2)

When discussing whether Sail School District would be bringing someone from the university level to work with the school district, the Coordinator stated:

> Actually, the Beginning Teacher Coordinator will be a position through our university partner, and the Beginning Teacher Advisors will be classroom teachers who are already in our division. The Coordinator will come to the district and oversee what the advisors will be doing. This person will hold weekly meetings with the Beginning Teacher Advisors. They will be infusing the Santa Cruz Model, but all of that is in the beginning stages. They are actually going to start advertising for the position. The scary part is that the teachers in the division who will apply for the Beginning Teacher Advisor positions will be our strong top- notch teachers. They are looking for someone with a masters degree and National Board Certification. You know they are going to be pulling the

strength, and I'm sure that is going to make principals nervous. The wheels are slowly starting to turn. Study after study talks about how teacher retention is a problem, so I am very excited about this. (I/MS/3)

<div align="center">Conclusions About the Exo-system</div>

Investigation of the exo-system in Sail County District showed support structures for beginning teachers at the meso- and micro-system levels of the elementary school environment. The data suggest that there is a commitment to the mentorship program, an essential and important component in new teacher retention. There is a commitment to building a close collaboration between the university's school of education and the school district in order to apply theory to practice for beginning teachers. In the next section, the perspectives of the school administrator and beginning elementary teachers and the influence of the exo-system on the elementary school and elementary school environment will be examined.

<div align="center">Examining the School and Classroom Context</div>

In the previous section, the exo-system of the educational environment of Sail School District was described. The next layer of the educational environment, as defined in Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model, is the meso-system or the elementary institution itself, and the micro-system, or elementary classroom. The elementary school's mentor program, the culture of the school, the vision of the principal, and the demographics of the school are just a few of the many elements in the meso-system, which impact the induction experience for beginning teachers. Because the principal is the instructional leader in this educational environment, his interview was used as the primary source of data for examination. Sample selection was based on analysis of the beginning teacher data for the school district. The elementary school with the largest percentage of beginning teachers was selected.

Three beginning teachers and their principal were interviewed at the selected school. A total of one principal and three beginning teacher interviews were conducted. Observation data from school-based mentor meetings and relevant documents were not available. This section describes findings related to the meso-system of the elementary school as seen from the perspective of the building principal. Following this, an analysis of the interviews with beginning teachers will be described.

Overview of the Meso-system

The administrative voice from the meso-system echoes many of the themes heard in the exo-system. The following patterns emerged in the interview with the school principal: (1) his understanding of the "shock" experienced by most beginning teachers; (2) the important role of the mentor program in helping beginning teachers build success; and (3) the importance of differentiating support for beginning teachers. In this section, each of these themes will be described.

*Empathy for Shock Experience*

Having helped to hire the beginning teachers, whom he believes will be successful, the next pattern of practice that the administer implements is helping the new teachers navigate their "shock experience" as they enter teaching. The administrator stated the following:

> That first year is so draining that one could literally work twenty-four hours a day and never get the job done. A beginning teacher needs a balance of being able to say that he has done enough. I really feel for anyone who is a perfectionist that first year. It is very challenging for them to leave the building at a decent time. They can become so overwhelmed. (I/MA/9)

The administrator believes that the reality of the teaching environment is difficult, particularly because of beginning teachers' expectations of the career. Supporting beginning teachers is an important part of the induction process. For many it is like "flying the plane and learning to fly at the same time" (I/MA/3).

The administrator went on to stress that the shock is felt most acutely when beginning teachers work with children with special needs. He stated:

> Most of our beginning elementary teachers enter the building with only one undergraduate class in special education. They come in and we throw them into a collaboration setting. They have all of these groups with individual needs and they are lucky if they can even read and stay ahead of the students and know what they are going to teach the next day. (I/MA/1)

He elaborated further on that theme, touching on what is, for some beginning teachers, the missing puzzle piece. He stated:

> Another part of the shock deals with the many non-instructional duties they have to perform. Things like how to make copies and do attendance. All of that has become very

technical. Receipting money as it comes in can be a nightmare for a beginning teacher, because they have to receipt it, and they have twenty-four students sitting looking at the teacher and just waiting to bring up their wad of money. They then worry what to do with the others while receipting the money. Morning routines can be another nightmare. They look at that first fifteen to twenty minutes before class starts and students are staggering in and realize that no one ever taught them what to do during that part of the day. (I/MA/7)

Negotiating the many paths of culture shock is a critical process for beginning teachers, and the realization that there are only twenty-four hours in a day hits many hard (I/MA/20). As the administrator poignantly stated:

The thing they most need is time. If we could teach them how to do word study, how to give all of the assessment tests, how to give the PAL's test and the QRI. They have to learn how to give all of that, and it is done after school within those first three or four weeks. They have to know how to do the assessments and turn the data in. That's a lot. It's no wonder they want to jump ship. (I/MA/20)

In response to this predictable culture shock, the administrator supports beginning teachers in making the transition to the reality of teaching. His consistent response to this was to try to be as proactive as possible.

That first week is a crazy week since we are required to do so many things. We have to do safety and security, go through blood borne pathogens and all of those types of requirements. I cannot technically bring the new hires in over the summer, but I set up three different meetings throughout the summer so they can pick one that works with their summer plans and attend. It has worked, but it is a lot on me. I usually end up doing four sessions because there were still some people who cannot come in during the summer. I wasn't able to do it this past summer because I had summer school in my building. (I/MA/17)

Each year, the administrator tries to visit beginning teachers' classrooms once a day. In explaining the reason for his visits, he stated, "I want to be sure there aren't any behavior problems, because I can help with that" (I/MA/17). In a similar proactive stance, he gives new beginning teachers a little extra money.

I give them a little more than I give to everyone else. They are spending half of their paycheck on materials. I give it to them in school activity funds so they can go to Wal-

Mart and buy items and just turn in a receipt. With school board funds they have to go through a catalog, and it is just more convenient for them to be able to run to Wal-Mart. (I/MA/19)

*Role of the Mentor Program*

The importance of the mentor program for beginning teachers was a constant theme in the administrative interview. Based on the principal's experience with the needs of beginning teachers, he is the person who directly connects mentors and mentees. He does that by "knowing his staff and the new teachers who enter the building" (I/MA/6). In supporting that connection he stated the following:

One of my big responsibilities is finding the appropriate mentor to put with the beginning teacher. There are always more veteran teachers, but we have had so many new teachers in this building that it has been difficult to find someone with three, four, or five years of experience. For example, my fourth grade has two first-year teachers, two at their second year of teaching, and three who have taught for four or five years. So I look at that and start thinking about who has the skills and is willing. I have to make sure that the teacher I am assigning as the mentor is someone who is modeling appropriate instructional practices and strategies. It is essential that the mentor has a good attitude and not be chosen just because it is her turn to mentor. The key for me is making sure that I choose correctly. (I/MA/13)

There is a mentor coordinator at each building, but the person who fills that role varies from year to year. The administrator stated that in some buildings, it might be the assistant principal or the principal. The school board requires that each school have someone "in charge and that they offer some training. That was in place when these teachers were beginning three years ago" (I/MA/16). In a similar vein, he elaborated on developing the mentor program at his school:

Mentoring is done rather informal in our county. It is just pretty much you have your mentor help you out and answer questions. I have taken that a step further. Mentees can go in and watch their mentor teach. We actually have a full release person who can provide time for that. (I/MA/8)

In conclusion, the prevailing thought of the administrator is that Sail District's mentor program is essential to retaining teachers. However, his experience in working with beginning

teachers has verified that the mentor program is just one piece of the puzzle in teacher retention. Providing a variety of support in induction and differentiating the support to meet the individual needs of the beginning teachers is also critical in helping them survive the many challenges of the educational environment.

*Differentiating Support*

According to the perspective of the administrator interviewed, most beginning teachers come to him with a special set of induction needs. Personal qualifications and levels of independence are used to determine the types of support that should be differentiated from that provided to other beginning teachers. He stated the following:

> I can give you a perfect example. We had a struggling first year teacher. Her mentor came to me saying that we needed to give this person more support. We had already done the standard things, but I arranged for her mentor to go in and teach two days with her. She was really trying to model strategies for her. I can't always get release time for that, but that time it worked. (I/MA/22)

The administrator believed that support in planning was another area that should be differentiated. He stated that:

> Some of our new teachers need more assistance with planning. I think having a good person help them plan is essential. Otherwise it can be overwhelming. At the elementary level common planning time doesn't always work. Much of the planning takes place after school. When our teams do plan together, they do it after school, because we have such large teams. We have seven or eight teachers on a grade-level team, so we just don't have that many resources to be able to give them all time to plan together during the school day. It is not mandatory for teams to stay after one day a week to plan, but I try to make sure that someone does plan with a teacher who needs additional support in that area. (I/MA/14)

Perhaps this administrator's experiences with beginning teachers have assisted him in differentiating some areas of support to address the needs of the individual. He said:

> When looking at how important support given to the beginning teacher is to job retention, I would give it an eight or a nine. Especially with the good teachers. They know they can do something else and be fine. You know people who think that this is the only thing they can do in life, then they might just hang in there regardless. But those good people with

good people skills, they have a lot of skill traits that would be good in other areas. I think our support is very important. (I/MA/21)

It may be that this administrator's experiences have given him a clear view of the induction process from the beginning teachers' perspectives and aided him in addressing their individual needs. The administrator takes responsibility for assisting with the recruitment and retention of beginning teachers, because he sees himself as a leader in that process. Like his colleague at the central-office level, he has learned to value and support beginning teachers. He has learned to spend time with beginning teachers and to respond to their individual needs. He sees that as essential in having a successful school.

<div align="center">Conclusions About the Meso-system</div>

The data collected at the meso-system level of the elementary school environment reflect the themes or patterns of practice introduced by the exo-system or central office layer. The administrator has learned to value and implement the support offered by the district's mentoring program. The mentor program structure is a guide that assists him in supporting the large number of beginning teachers who enter his building. He has taken responsibility for directly connecting mentors and mentees, and he uses his knowledge of his staff and new teachers to make effective connections between them. He views his role in the mentorship program as both an added benefit for beginning teachers and an essential aspect of survival in today's educational environment. Furthermore, just as instructional expertise was a concern at the district-level, the school administrator has placed special emphasis on knowing the individual needs of beginning teachers and using that knowledge to differentiate support.

Analysis of the data suggested that these themes have equal validity at the exo- and meso-levels. However, there were some variations on the themes that were particular to the meso-level. The administrator described the experience of shock as being complicated by dealing with the reality of teaching and, moreover, teaching children with special needs. He has found that beginning teachers arrive in his building with a limited understanding in the area of special education, especially in the area of collaboration, which is a service model endorsed at the county level. The challenge of classroom management was more complex as a result of these factors. Finally, the administrator's experience in working with beginning teachers has increased his awareness of the importance of providing for their special needs. By being proactive to their

support needs in this area, this administrator is finding success for teachers, students, parents, and community. Table 3 summarizes the patterns of practice identified at the meso-system level.

Table 3

*Patterns of Practice for Beginning Teachers at the Meso-system*

| Patterns of Practice | Description |
|---|---|
| Empathy for Teachers | The school administrator works to respond to the culture shock experience when new teachers first begin teaching. He works to proactively provide for their needs during their induction to teaching. |
| Dependence on the Mentor Program | The school administrator uses the district's mentor program to supply a network of support for beginning teachers, and he is actively involved in his school's program. He works diligently to try and match mentor to mentee, which can be difficult in a school with a young staff. |
| Differentiating Support for Beginning Teachers | With a new large school in a growing community, the administrator is attempting to meet the unique needs of beginning teachers. At this school, this means at times offering the same support to all beginning teachers, and at other times, tailoring that support to meet the special needs of the individual. |

The Micro-system: The Beginning Teacher in the Elementary Classroom

Previous sections of this chapter described the exo-system and the meso-system of the elementary school educational environment in the Sail School District. Interviews with the Coordinator of Professional Development at the central-office level and the school administrator at one selected elementary school represent each individual layer of the educational environment. The following section describes the core of the educational environment, the beginning teacher in the elementary school classroom, and explains how beginning teachers describe their experience. The findings included in this section are based on interview transcripts with three teachers from the case study school.

In selecting the three beginning teachers, the following criteria were used: (a) 24-30 years of age; (b) full-time teacher; (c) teachers in their fourth year; (d) fully licensed; (e) positive evaluations; (f) assigned a mentor during first year of teaching; (g) attended a program of

induction training for new teachers sponsored by the human resources department of the school system; and (h) taught all years in current school. Appendix G contains a summary of participant characteristics.

<p style="text-align:center">An Overview of the Micro-system</p>

Many of the important themes that emerged in interviews at the micro-system aligned with the themes found at the exo-system. These themes included the following: (a) the shock that beginning teachers face upon entering the educational environment; (b) the desire for administrative support and feedback; (c) the significant role of mentors in achieving success; (d) the tremendous struggle with mixed-ability classroom issues; (e) the challenge of dealing with parental concerns; and (f) the effect of classroom placement on feeling isolated. For many of these themes, the perspectives of the beginning teachers were aligned from teacher to teacher. For some themes, the beginning teachers were in line with the principal as well as among themselves. However, in all cases, they added to the themes by sharing their personal stories. In the following sections, each of these themes is explored.

*Shocking Reality*

Consistent with the findings described in the meso-system, beginning teachers report that the entry into teaching is shocking. In thinking about the reasons for the overwhelming sense of pressure, one beginning teacher stated:

> I would say that my first year was just a real learning experience. In all my student teaching time, I actually was never given full control in a classroom. I was always in a cooperating classroom. We would just split the class into smaller groups. So I had to figure out the kind of teacher I wanted to be. The kind of discipline I wanted to instill in my classroom. The kind of, you know, morale I wanted to have with my students. (I/RM/1)

Beginning teachers also reported that they were completely unprepared for and overwhelmed with the demanding task of time management. As one teacher stated,

> Time is a major cause of the shock. There is just so much pressure to get everything accomplished. I always feel like there is never enough time in the teaching world. I look at my list of objectives and what I want to teach my students. When I plan it out in my mind it all fits in, but then once I get into the day it all falls apart. Fire drills, special

programs, and just rewards for things that the students do well can make me pull my hair out. It's just hard to accomplish everything that I feel responsible to accomplish. (I/AG/4)

Another beginning teacher touched on the same theme of time constraints. "The biggest thing I needed during my first year was time. I know you can't give time, but new teachers definitely need time to just breathe and not feel so overwhelmed" (I/RR/28). One beginning teacher summed up the phenomenon by stating, "I didn't have enough time. I was trying to do so much and I was here until seven p.m., almost every night. I just had to learn to leave it unfinished, and that was very difficult to learn" (I/AG/98).

Based on the information on the interview transcripts, it appears that the overwhelming sense of shock comes from multiple components. Given the unique environment of the educational workplace, it is not surprising that beginning teachers felt out of control in managing the work demands during their first year or two. Struggling to adjust to that educational environment is one aspect of the adjustment to teaching. In the next section, the challenge of dealing with mixed-ability classes will be described.

*Mixed-Ability Classes*

Both the principal and the classroom teachers stated that teaching mixed-ability or heterogeneous classes was an area in which beginning teachers needed assistance. When reflecting on her first year of teaching, one beginning teacher stated:

> The students in my first class had a wide spread of instructional needs. I did not get good observations that year. I definitely see a difference between my first year of teaching and now. I was not happy with the teacher I was that first year. I didn't, I guess, outline the discipline as much at the beginning because, again, that was pretty much my learning year. I was not quite sure how much to push them instructional, like; can they do more than this? I was learning that as well and the students just got out of hand. When I came back my second year, some people where honestly like "Wow, I can't believe you are here! You had such a rough year!" But I love kids, and I love teaching, and the students just brighten my day. I love seeing them grow and learn. I just wanted to give it one more shot. I told myself that I would try one more time, and if I didn't like it, then I wouldn't return. I've had two really nice years. (I/RM/2)

All beginning teachers seemed bewildered by the breadth of instructional and support needs of students found in the same classroom. When reflecting on her first year of teaching, one teacher stated:

> I would say a great challenge would be meeting all the needs of the students. In the elementary classroom you have students who are below level and students who are above level. Then you have special education students and sometimes even gifted students! You have to figure out a way to teach them the content and get them to the level where they are going to pass the state test. And, at times, I know it is just overwhelming, because you just can't imagine how you are going to get this child to pass without having all the other students be bored to tears. And then you are just trying to figure out the curriculum and just get through it. (I/AG/97

> Another teacher echoed that initial shock of having a class with vary abilities. She stated: When I got my first roster, I was completely overwhelmed. I knew some of the students from being a substitute teacher the previous semester. Out of twenty-three students, I had eight special education students in my first class. (I/RR/33)

Given all the special features of the elementary educational environment and Sail County School District's endorsement of mixed-ability classes and collaboration for special education students, it is not surprising that beginning teachers feel somewhat out of balance in their initial years on the job. In the next section, the mentor support provided for beginning teachers will be described.

*Mentor Support*

All beginning teachers interviewed reported the importance of having a mentor program, as well as ways to improve it. The following statements are key observations beginning teachers made about their mentors. "I think the principal just tells new teachers who their mentor will be" (I/RR/1). "I think that contact outside of school, a phone call, 'Why don't we come and meet' would be nice" (I/RR/2). Another beginning teacher stated, "Even coming and sitting when there are boxes in the room would help. I know we have a first year teacher on our grade level this year. She came the first day we had to report to work, and it was really tough for her" (I/RM/5).

In one situation, a beginning teacher was assigned a mentor who did not appear to feel the need to meet on a regular basis. The beginning teacher stated:

My mentor didn't feel that she needed to walk me through, things because I was meeting with my team every week. We just had very different teaching styles. We just didn't agree, so I turned to another teacher on my team. Although the teacher on my team wasn't named my mentor, she took that role. (I/AG/91)

Another beginning teacher told the story of her mentor problems. She said:

I was hired in March, and I came in over the summer and met the principal. When I arrived in the fall, I received a mentor who was the lady next door to me. Throughout my first year of teaching, she would just kind of run me through things that I was unfamiliar with. "This is how we do reports cards," you know for consistency. She would just kind of give me the layout of the building and help me through the process of going through conferences. She focused on making me comfortable. My problem with her is that she is a right-brain thinker and I am very left brain. I like to know things in advance and she would tell me the day before and that was difficult for me. I probably did not get as much out of the mentor relationship as I wish I would have. So my first year was a big learning year for me! I came across some situations that she did not answer for me, or it was too late. I had to solve some major things on my own. So, I did not fully believe that I was given a mentor. My mother ended up being my mentor. I thought I would have gotten more out of the relationship, but we were just different thinkers. It was more difficult. (I/RM/1)

Interview transcripts include frequent references to improving the mentoring relationship. One beginning teacher summed it up by stating, "There needs to be some matching and thinking about certain styles of teaching. Or maybe even pairing two mentors to one teacher so that the teacher has several different views to see. There is another teacher on my team, and we have very different teaching styles. Maybe the two of us could mentor one person, and that beginning teacher would get to see both worlds. Now that might be beneficial" (I/AG/92). Another beginning teacher supported that by stating:

A beginning teacher needs someone who thinks along the same lines. Who is honestly interested in helping them and not just called on to be a mentor. Often times I now find myself going down to the new teacher on our grade level and telling her silly things that no one told me. Like I needed to have 35 cards for my lunch order. Things that just stressed me out at the last minute! So, it is definitely important to have a mentor on the

grade level who is excited, willing, and who appreciates and understands your teaching

style. (I/RM/13)

Without exception, beginning teachers reported the importance of a mentoring program for new teachers. However, for the most part, the beginning teachers interviewed believed that the selection of mentors could be improved.

*Principal as Leader and Supporter*

The beginning teachers interviewed all agreed that they had positive relationships with their administrator and that he was very supportive of beginning teachers. The following statement represents the general comments beginning teachers made about the principal's relationship with beginning teachers. "The principal plays an important role in that first year. If he doesn't check in on a regular basis or let that teacher know that he is going to support him, then the teacher will worry. You know thoughts like, what if I fail, runs through the mind. A beginning teacher needs feedback all year" (I/RR/12). In one situation, however, a beginning teacher stated that she needed more support from the principal. She stated:

> I would say more frequent observations, even just little pop-ins, five minutes here and
> there, special notes would be so beneficial. Beginning teachers are always nervous, and
> they need positive feedback. Any little positive that an administrator can give would be
> appreciated. Of course, the principal can also sneak in a criticism, because I know they
> have to balance it out. So I would just say, frequent communication and contact is
> essential to establish that relationship. You know, some teachers have been here five
> years, which is how long our school has been open. But then there are those that come in
> new every year, and they don't have a relationship with the principal or the school. So
> just frequent contact to help build that relationship would help a beginning teacher learn
> more about the administration. (I/RM/14)

Another teacher echoed that need for principal presence and support by stating:

> I feel like there are so many times that beginning teachers get lost in what is expected of
> them. Principals do have so many responsibilities, and sometimes it is hard to dish out the
> compliments and let them know what a wonderful job they are doing. You only have
> three observations a year, and that's your only chance to get positive feedback, and I
> think that is what is needed the most. (I/AG/94)

One beginning teacher summed up the phenomenon by stating, "The principal was great about coming in and checking on me, but I could have used more of that checking" (I/RR/10).

*Relating to Parents*

Beginning teachers regularly identified teacher-parent relationships as an area that affects the induction process for beginning teachers. "Understanding parents," "conquering the fear of parents," and wanting to deal with parents effectively were themes that emerged in two beginning teacher interviews (I/AG/100; I/RM/19). One teacher stated:

> Parents expect you to cater to every need of their child, and they forget that the teacher has twenty-four other students in the room. And that to me is an area that is just not focused on. Teachers desperately need some sort of guidance. I know my first year I had a parent that just about drove me out the door. I mean I could do nothing right, and she was consuming my life! Every day I had messages and emails and the administration had to check back and forth daily with me. That was just not what I signed up for. (I/AG/101)

In a similar vein, another teacher stated:

> Oh, parents want the best for their children, and we have a range of parents in this school. You can have just the nicest to the parents that really drive you crazy. And some of those difficult parents smell fear, and most first year teachers come in fearful and have no idea how to handle the parental factor. But I would definitely say that now when my team meets, dealing with parents is a topic that always comes up. I really try to make sure we support each other in that role; especially if we have a beginning teacher with us. (I/RP/28)

*Isolation*

According to beginning teachers, a pattern of practice that needs adjustment is the practice of placing beginning teachers in trailers, which leads to isolation. Two beginning teachers identified the isolation in their placement as a problem. One beginning teacher explained:

> I have been in a trailer, and that situation doesn't help the feeling of being isolated. That placement really limits your adult interaction. I love what I do, but there are some days when I feel like I haven't talked to another adult my entire day. I leave and I just feel drained. I want to go home and go out with my friends, but I just don't have the energy to even talk on the phone and catch up with other adults. My first year was tremendously

isolating! I didn't feel like I was establishing relationships with people my age. Not putting a beginning teacher in a trailer would give her a chance to see and even talk to an adult. (I/AG/86)

Another beginning teacher expressed how she tried to break that barrier of isolation, created by being in a trailer, by relying on moments in the hall, between classes, or at lunch to tell stories and build relationships with other teachers. She stated:

I really didn't have anyone here my first year to really talk to. I was having a difficult year, and I felt very alone. I knew everyone saw that I was struggling, but they just kept their distance. Being in a trailer kept me more isolated and I just didn't have anyone to talk to. My mom was a kindergarten teacher, and she would tell me stories about her teaching years. That helped so much to just know that she had once struggled. I just thought it was me! I think back to that year, and hearing the students arrive in the morning was like the tide coming in. I could hear them in the hall and tell if it was going to be a loud day or a calm day. I would really get down if I had a rough day. I would think that it was something that I did. And I didn't talk to anyone here about that. I kept those feelings inside. But I would go home and talk to my mother about it. It was very isolating. Then I just started seeing it! I could tell, you know, when they come in. Okay today they are going to be a little wild. So I would tweak my activities a little more, so they were given a little less independence and a little bit more structure. To help other new teachers in trailers with that feeling of isolation, I talk to them and tell them stories of my first year. I make a point to visit them, and that is harder to do when a classroom is outside of the building. Beginning teachers need to hear the stories and realize that it is not just them. Everyone has experienced something. Recently I was sharing with a beginning teacher on the playground, and she looked at me and exclaimed, "That happened to you?" I could tell that it helped her to hear my story and to realize that she is not alone. It sounds simple, but just being inside the building is very helpful in meeting others and sharing concerns. Seems like such an easy thing to do for a beginning teacher (I/RM//20).

Conclusions About the Micro-system

The micro-system of the elementary school environment in Sail School District requires a rigorous adjustment process for beginning teachers. The culture shock that beginning teachers experience is made worse by work demands that seem impossible to them. However, successful beginning teachers are supported by a wide network of support from formal mentors, informal colleague-mentors, a committed and involved principal, and the personal commitment they bring to teaching. For the most part, beginning teachers regarded their principal, mentors, and teammates as survival tools during their struggle to acquire instructional and classroom management strategies. The problems they experienced with teaching mixed-ability classes, handling parental pressures, and teaching in classrooms located in trailers were viewed as obstacles to successful induction. Table 4 contains a summary of the patterns identified in the beginning teachers' descriptions of their induction process.

Table 4

*Patterns of Practice for Beginning Teachers at the Micro-system*

| Patterns of Practice | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Negotiating culture shock | Beginning teachers reported that they had unrealistic expectations of teaching prior to their first year of teaching. The pace of the work, the unwritten norms of the culture, their new roles as teachers, and being assigned diverse groups of students are some of the key components of culture shock they identified. While the entry into the profession was challenging, their reported love of children can provide stability and assist in surviving the culture shock of entering teaching. |
| Unrealistic expectations | All beginning teachers reported experiencing difficulty in teaching mixed-ability classes. Classroom management and day-to-day routines were also cited as problematic. |
| Recognizing the role of principal | All beginning teachers reported the importance of the principal in supporting a beginning teacher's induction. A positive relationship and frequent feedback assists in easing the beginning teacher's transition into teaching. |
| Recognizing the role of mentors | Overall, beginning teachers reported that mentors, whether formal or informal, are an asset in the induction process. |

| | While they see value in mentoring, they felt mentor selection and matching should be carefully done. |
|---|---|
| Dealing with isolation | For the most part, beginning teachers reported that being placed outside of the school in a trailer created a layer of isolation for a beginning teacher. |
| Conquering the parental fear | Many beginning teachers reported that parents were a pressure that they were unaware they would have. While they value their ability to finally figure out the instructional aspect of teaching, they were unprepared for maintaining positive relationships with overly involved parents. |

Summary

This chapter has used Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model of the educational environment to examine the elementary school environment in the Sail School District. Beginning with the exo-system represented by the perspective of central office staff, each layer of the school environment was explored. The innermost layers, the meso-system, and the micro-system of the elementary school building and classroom were examined through a cross-case analysis of one Sail District elementary school. Consistent themes regarding patterns of practice that support beginning teachers were identified at each layer.

Findings reveal many consistent themes within the elementary school environment. These include: (a) the sense of culture shock beginning teachers experience as they enter the teaching culture and learn to master the complexity of the career; (b) the emphasis on providing and establishing mentors; and (c) the emphasis on the importance of principal involvement in the induction process of beginning teachers. Evidence at both the exo-system and meso-system levels indicated an emerging trend of differentiated support for beginning teachers and their acknowledgement of their individual needs.

Beginning teachers are characterized by the need for a strong support system from all levels. The data revealed that beginning teachers regard their formal and informal mentors and grade-level colleagues as essential in making the transition to teaching. On the other hand, a few beginning teachers believed that the selection of a mentor and the services delivered by that person could be improved by taking into consideration teaching styles and the needs of the mentee. Regarding the role of the principal in their induction to teaching, all beginning teachers agreed that they had a positive relationship with their principal. They reported that frequent visits

and feedback from the principal provided a sense of security that beginning teachers were doing the right thing during that first year. Beginning teachers expressed concerns about their perceptions that assignments for beginning teachers involved classes that included students with too many diverse instructional needs. They suggested that, as a pattern of practice, first-year teachers should not be assigned special education collaboration classes. That would give beginning teachers time to adjust to the demands of teaching mixed-ability students. Regarding the role of parents, beginning teachers all agreed that they were unprepared for the parental stresses that are experienced in their school. They also expressed considerable concern over the isolation that beginning teachers experience when they are placed in a trailer. They suggested that, as a pattern of practice, the first-year teacher should be located inside the building and close to grade level colleagues.

Table 5 provides a summary of the patterns of practice that were described at all levels of the educational environment.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the study's findings, offer interpretations, and make recommendations regarding patterns of practice that support the needs of beginning teachers.

Table 5

*Patterns of Practice for Beginning Teachers at All Levels*

| Patterns of Practice | Description |
| --- | --- |
| Coping with Culture Shock | Educators at all levels described the need to help beginning teachers cope with their adjustment to the profession, which is compounded by the many demands found in the educational environment. |
| Principal as Supporter | Veteran educators at all levels and beginning teachers reported the importance of having a principal actively involved with beginning teachers. Frequent visits and feedback are beneficial as beginning teachers struggle with feeling of insecurities. |
| Valuing Mentorship | Veteran educators at all levels and beginning teachers reported that mentors should be essential support systems in the induction process. Some beginning teachers struggled to see their assigned mentor as beneficial in helping the new teachers adjust to the norms of the school. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Differentiating Support | As experience with beginning teachers increases, methods to support their individual needs are being emphasized. This school with a large number of beginning teachers is seeking to be proactive in meeting their individual needs. |
| Surviving Parental Frustrations | All beginning teachers reported that new teachers need support systems in the induction process for managing parental concerns. Some beginning teachers struggled to balance the demands of overly involved parents with teaching. |
| Handling Mixed-Ability Classes | Veteran educators at all levels and beginning teachers reported that assistance with differentiating instruction for mixed-ability classes should be an essential support system for beginning teachers. |
| Surviving Isolation | Most beginning teachers reported that being placed inside a school building is an essential life support in the induction process. |

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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe the patterns of support for beginning teachers at the elementary level. Because the elementary school's environment can be viewed as a system, Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model was used as a lens through which to examine the school environment and its impact on beginning teachers. Bronfenbrenner defined the educational environment as the following four nested, interrelated systems: (a) "micro-system" (p. 5); (b) "meso-system" (p. 5); (c) "exo-system" (p. 6); and (d) "macro-system" (p. 6).

The primary question for this study was: How do patterns of practice used across the total educational environment of the elementary school meet the needs of beginning teachers? Subordinate questions include the following: (1) At the classroom level, how do beginning teachers describe their first year's experience? (2) At the elementary school level, how do those in positions of influence respond to the needs of beginning teachers? and (3) At the system-level, how do personnel respond to the needs of beginning teachers?

This study involved the collection of data through a cross-case study involving one central office administrator, one school principal, and three teachers at the school with the greatest number of beginning teachers. Data analysis began with the transcription and coding of the first interview and continued throughout the study until the final report was completed.

In this chapter, I summarize the findings and discuss my interpretations between the layers of influence with regard to the exo-system (central office), meso-system (school administration), and micro-system (classroom) levels, which ultimately become the columns of support for beginning teachers within the school system.

The findings were derived from interviews with individuals who have different perspectives of beginning teacher support, as well as with the beginning teachers themselves. Therefore, I will first discuss how beginning teachers viewed themselves and, then, how other educators viewed them. The third category of findings consists of patterns of practice that are currently helping the beginning teachers transition to the teaching profession. Following the summary of findings and my interpretations of them, I will describe my conclusions. Finally, I will provide suggestions for further research in the area of beginning teacher support and offer personal reflections.

Summary Discussion

The data in this study illustrated the importance of establishing and implementing patterns of practice across the total educational environment of the elementary school to meet the needs of beginning teachers. MS, the participant in the exo-system, concisely stated this crucial aspect. "It is the whole system coming together in partnership and providing support, and often times you don't see that in a school system. Many times people are doing it solo" (I/MS/56). Close analysis of the nature of these relationships became the heart of this study.

Consistent with the literature review in Chapter 2 and with the data collected in interviews, beginning teachers are characterized by: (1) having less practice and "know-how" than more experienced teachers; (2) having limited expertise in dealing with special education and mixed-ability classes; and (3) being less adept at surviving day-by-day (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002). It is understandable that the perceptions beginning teachers have of themselves as apprentice teachers and the perceptions that others hold of them can be described in relation to these defining characteristics. Furthermore, their status of having just entered the career and their special needs shape and influence the support structures that are required for successful induction and retention in teaching (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Webber, 1995). The mentoring support that is provided, the induction process, principal involvement, and the process of differentiating for their special needs are critical factors in determining the success of the beginning teacher (Feiman-Nemser, & Parker, 1992). The following sections will discuss the findings as related to both beginning teacher characteristics and the patterns of practice that support the induction process.

*The Micro-system: How Beginning Teachers View Themselves*

The guiding question for this study was: How do patterns of practice used across the total educational environment of the elementary school meet the needs of beginning teachers? The subordinate question for the micro-system was: At the classroom level, how do beginning teachers describe their first experience? Interviews at the micro-system are based on the experiences described through the perspectives of the beginning teachers who are beginning their journey.

The category of support for beginning teachers was a major theme that emerged during the first beginning teacher interview and continued throughout all other interviews. When discussing their entry into teaching, beginning teachers cited the following as areas in which

beginning teachers need support: (1) surviving shock and awe; (2) mentoring; (3) navigating mixed-ability classes; (4) managing parents; and (5) handling physical isolation. These factors represent the major hurdles beginning teachers must conquer when they first enter an elementary school environment. However, consistent with the literature findings (Hope, 1999), many beginning teachers were not expecting to be confronted with these issues when they crossed the threshold into the elementary classroom.

*Surviving Shock and Awe*

*(1)Unrealistic expectations of teaching had a negative effect on beginning teachers.* In the current study, all beginning teachers interviewed concurred that they had unrealistic expectations prior to entering the profession of what their roles as teachers would be. In particular they saw their first year as a stressful learning experience, and they all related their stress to the teaching field. AG/4 stated, "I look at my objectives… but then, once I get into the day, it all falls apart." All agreed that they needed more time in order to survive the job. In the words of two of the three teachers, they were completely unprepared for and overwhelmed with the demanding task of time management. Likewise, discovering the workload involved in learning the many subjects they had to teach, developing lessons, and scheduling in "fire drills, special programs, and rewards" (I/AG/4) made it difficult for the beginning teachers to adapt to the elementary school environment. AG/98 summed up the phenomenon by stating, "I was here until seven p.m. almost every evening. I had to learn to leave it."

This complicated profession, with its many stresses, is characterized by Hope (1999) as one that "eats its young" (p. 55). These unexpected challenges often frustrate beginning teachers while they struggle daily to master instructional and management skills that prove to be more complex than they ever imagined.

In the literature review researchers were in agreement with these findings. Teacher preparation and working conditions were cited as two major influences on whether a teacher leaves the teaching profession (Allen, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2003, 2006; Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 206; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Stotko, Ingram, & Beaty-O'Ferrall, 2007). Stransbury & Zimmerman (2002) further stated that, while beginning teachers may be intellectually prepared, their limited experience makes their entry into teaching potentially frustrating. Brock and Grady's (1998) survey analysis of perceptions of beginning teachers regarding their problems during the first year of teaching indicated that classroom management

and discipline, stress, pacing of lessons, varying teaching methods, and feeling inadequate as a teacher were commonly experienced by beginning teachers. This finding is also consistent with a study by Chapman (1984) who concluded that the quality of the first teaching experience can increase retention.

*Mentoring Landscape*

(2) *Formal and informal mentors had a positive influence on beginning teachers.* All three beginning teachers interviewed viewed mentoring as an important support structure for a beginning teacher. However, they related the importance of considering selection when matching mentor and mentee. That is a responsibility of the building-level administrator and, therefore, falls heavily on the principal. Choices are often made on availability of tenure teachers. The data in this study established the importance of personality and teaching style as important aspects in selection. Principals should consider carefully when matching, looking for a mentor who has outstanding human relation skills and excellent teaching skills. Getting to know the beginning teacher prior to the opening of school becomes vital, as does scheduling time for the mentor and mentee to work together prior to the opening of school. These findings are consistent with the literature, which suggest that mentor relationships can increase the retention and success of beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser, & Parker, 1992; Chapman, 1984; and Odell & Ferraro, 1992)

*Navigating Mixed-Ability Classes*

(3) *Teaching mixed-ability classes had a negative effect on beginning teachers.* In this study, all beginning teachers interviewed noted that teaching mixed-ability classes, which are often found at the elementary level, is usually difficult for a beginning teacher. They recalled situations in which the diverse ability ranges in their classes hampered their adjustment to teaching. RM/2 stated, "I didn't outline the discipline at the beginning….I was not sure how much to push them instructionally…the students just got out of hand." AG/97 added, "In the elementary classroom you have students who are below level, above level….special education and even gifted students….all in one class!" RR/33 expressed how stressed she felt when her first class had eight special education students. The manner in which a beginning teacher handles a diverse group of learners is a key determinant of whether that teacher makes a successful transition to teaching.

These findings are consistent with the literature. By 2010, 40 percent of Americans ages five to nineteen will be Latino, African American, Asian American, or Native American (Murphy & DeArmond, 2003). These diverse students will also have diverse learning profiles. Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley (2006) emphasized that schools with higher proportions of minority, low-income, and low-performing students tend to have higher teacher-attrition rates. Along with concerns of dealing with diverse student abilities, Brock and Grady (1998) reported that first year teachers cite problems of working with mainstream students and struggling to learn and use differentiated teaching strategies to instruct students with a wide range of abilities. Providing beginning teachers with differentiation training, resources, and materials pertinent to the ability and instructional needs of the students is essential for beginning teachers.

*Managing the Parental Factor*

*(4) The influence of parental demands had a negative effect on beginning teachers.* As previously stated, the beginning teachers interviewed quickly realized that they had overestimated what they knew about being a classroom teacher. In particular, they mentioned their lack of experience in dealing with the parents of the children in their classes. Learning to navigate the challenges of overly involved parents is particularly stressful to beginning teachers. Discovering the shifts in parental involvement since their own elementary school experience is often an unexpected and unpleasant experience. Although the beginning teachers interviewed were in their twenties, and, consequently, not far removed from their own elementary school years, the profile of an involved parent had drastically changed from their early elementary years. Earning the respect of the parents and maintaining constant communication with them is not necessarily a part of the job they anticipated. One teacher (AG/101) summed it up by stating, "My first year I had a parent who just about drove me out the door."

In the literature review, researchers were in agreement with this finding. Tye and O'Brien (2002) stated that parental pressure is one of the main reasons experienced teachers leave teaching. Gonzalez (1995) and Brock and Grady (1998) found that teachers frequently cited lack of parental support as a common reason for being dissatisfied.

*Living in Isolation*

*(5) Classroom location had a negative effect on the entry into teaching.* Two of the three beginning teachers interviewed recalled experiencing increased feelings of isolation from having their first classrooms in trailers. They understood and accepted the fact of working in a school

with a total school population that exceeds building capacity, but they saw the placement of beginning teachers outside of the main school as adding to the difficulty in adjusting to the teaching profession. This theme aligns with the conclusions of Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2005) that a common thread in supporting beginning teacher is the powerful impact of relationships. Although teaching in general is isolating, AG/86 said, "There were some days when I didn't talk to another adult my entire day."

*How Other Educators View Beginning Teachers*

In addition to the beginning teacher interviews, the data collected in this study include the perspectives of central office staff and the school administrator. The research questions that address those two areas are: (1) At the system-level, how do personnel respond to the needs of the beginning teacher? and (2) At the elementary-school level, how do those in positions of influence respond to the needs of beginning teachers? The main finding that emerged from the examination of how other educators view beginning teachers concerns the predictability of the shock experience. Their perspectives are consistent with those of the teachers, in that they recognize the tremendous shock beginning teachers face when they enter the world of teaching.

*Predicting the Shock Experience*

*(6) Administrators were able to predict the culture shock beginning teachers would experience upon entering the teaching profession.* Though beginning teachers wondered at times if administrators were aware of their challenges, the problems reported in this study by beginning educators and administration were similar. As expressed in the study's findings, the causes of stress varied (e.g., assessments, paper work, mixed-ability classes, daily classroom management, parental issues, classroom location), but coping mechanisms were offered. Though stress is an ongoing problem, and developing coping strategies is challenging, the teachers remain in the teaching profession. The support beginning teachers receive as they negotiate their entry into the teaching profession is a key factor in whether they make successful transitions to teaching. As stated earlier, these findings are consistent with Brock and Grady's (1998) survey analysis of perceptions of beginning teachers regarding their problems during their first year of teaching and are also consistent with a study by Chapman (1984) who concluded that the quality of the first teaching experience can increase retention.

*Exploring the Predictability*

Beginning teachers wonder if some of the practices and norms they experience are on the "radar screen" of the powers that make decisions. However, the research by Brock and Grady (1998) reveals that principals are aware of what beginning teachers face and try to support those experiences in a variety of ways. Brock and Grady's survey of first year teachers and their principals revealed that problems reported by beginning teachers and principals were similar, and that principals recognize that new teachers require assistance and attempt to provide that guidance.

Taking extra time to listen to the perceptions of beginning teachers could potentially benefit the elementary educational environment. For example, having frequent beginning teacher focus groups, led by school administration and/or central office staff, could provide valuable feedback leading to administrative reconsideration of how some practices are affecting the induction of beginning teachers. The beginning teacher who discussed her dismay when her first class had eight special education students explained that she did not discuss her stress with anyone. Having a forum where beginning teachers could articulate their concerns could possibly reinforce the bridge of communication between central office, school, and beginning teachers and could lead to positive changes.

The third category of findings consisted of patterns of practice that are currently helping beginning teachers' transition to teaching. These columns of support are assisting beginning teachers as they enter the teaching profession.

*Patterns of Practice*

The patterns of practice that support beginning teachers in Sail School District can be organized in to the following categories: (7) practices that promote principal support; (8) practices that support formal and informal mentoring; and (9) practices that differentiate support for beginning teachers.

*Practices that Promote Principal Support*

*(7) This study found that principals can be motivation to remain in teaching if the principals differentiate support for the individual needs of the beginning teacher and positive relationships are developed.* Therefore, a principal who supports a beginning teacher's entry into teaching provides for teacher growth and development. This support was perceived as a positive influence on retention in the profession.

Insight gained from the interview data indicated that the beginning teachers found their principal to be supportive. The school administrator differentiates the support at the school level in the areas of planning, modeling of strategies, observations, money for supplies, and his time. As his colleague at the central office, he has learned to value and support beginning teachers by responding to the needs of the individuals.

One teacher (RR/12) stated the following, "The principal plays an important role in that first year…if he doesn't check in on a regular basis…the teacher will worry…'what if I fail' runs through the mind." Another teacher (RM/14) had a strong opinion that "more frequent observations…five minutes here and there…special notes….would be beneficial… just frequent contact to build that relationship." (RR/10) summarized by stating, "The principal was great about coming in and checking on me, but I could have used more of that checking."

These findings were confirmed in the literature. Research reveals that school leadership is a crucial component in influencing a teacher's decision to remain in teaching. Billingsley and Cross (1992) said that across special and general educators, job satisfaction was associated with great leadership support and work involvement. Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch & Enzi's (2006) analysis of survey data revealed administration as a reason for teachers leaving the profession. Additionally, survey results of Tye and O'Brien's (2002) study reinforced this, listing administration as a reason for departure. Gonzalez (1995) also found that teachers frequently cited lack of administrative support as a common reason for being dissatisfied. Based on research, it is safe to say that if principals do not provide the instructional and emotional support throughout induction, beginning teachers will seek that support in another school system or another career field (Hope, 1999; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Finally, based on the interview data, it appears that the administrator in this "high beginning teacher" school, given his level of experience in supporting beginning teachers, is investing time and energy in meeting their needs.          .

*Practices that Support Formal and Informal Mentoring*

*(8) This study found that formal and informal mentor relationships can increase success of beginning teachers.* Nemser & Parker (1992) recommend strong mentor relationships, which help beginning teachers acquire expertise and shape their practices, to increase the retention and success of beginning teachers. Examination of interview data at the central-office level and school level revealed that Sail District is working to improve their patterns of practice in this area by moving toward a mentoring partnership with a local university. This university partnership

model of mentoring is supported by the research. Schaffer, Springfield, and Wolf (1992) revealed that beginning teachers improved their teaching from participation in a university partnership program. Data at the micro-level revealed that beginning teachers recognize the possibility of mentors being vital guides in navigating the transition to teaching. However, beginning teachers thought some of the assigned mentors were not a good match, so they sought mentors from elsewhere. Although assigned a mentor, RM/13 said, "Since I thought and processed differently from my mentor, my mother ended up being my mentor." This is consistent with research by Odell & Ferraro (1992) that places importance on the quality of mentoring. Creating a research-based mentoring model is valued by both central office and the school administrator.

*Practices that Differentiate Support*

(9) *This study found that differentiating support to meet the needs of beginning teachers had a positive influence on the beginning teachers' experiences.* Beginning teachers have special support needs during their induction into teaching, and that was a consistent theme in the literature review in Chapter 2. The patterns of practice in Sail District reveal an understanding of these entry needs and are evidence of support for this theme. There is evidence that differentiating support for beginning teachers from that of experienced teachers is an emerging and important trend. Each school relies on a three-prong approach of support, which includes a building-level mentor coordinator, teacher mentor, and peer coach. Additionally, based on size and need, some schools have more than one peer coach. Content lead teachers are located at the central office, and middle and high schools have senior teachers who help with instruction.

*Revised Conceptual Model*

The research in this study resulted in a revised conceptual model of how the elementary school's environment responds to the needs of beginning teachers by differentiating support. Introduced in Chapter 2, this study's conceptual model illustrated the importance of the strength of interactions between the meso-system, macro-system, and exo-system in responding to those needs. It was implied that when the same support structures were offered to all beginning teachers they would be appropriately supported.

The findings in this study, however, encourage a different view of the conceptual model. Research outcomes from the beginning-teacher data reveal that the educational environment of the beginning elementary teacher is a common ground with overlapping systems of influence,

but the systems do not always act in a balanced manner with all beginning teachers receiving the same support. Rather, the interactions are differentiated to meet the individual needs of the beginning teacher.

Not all beginning teachers are alike. According to Tomlinson (2001), differentiation is a process to approach differing abilities in the same system. To differentiate for beginning teachers is to recognize their varying background knowledge, readiness, preferences in learning, and to react responsively. Based on this knowledge, differentiated support for beginning teachers applies an approach so teachers have multiple options, which are based on their individual needs. The model of differentiated support for beginning teachers requires flexibility in adjusting the support offered to novices, rather than expecting them to modify themselves for the educational environment. Those options should include a blend of group and individual support and should be based on the premise that support approaches should vary and be adapted in relation to the needs of the diverse beginning teachers entering classrooms. This differentiation of support will maximize each beginning teacher's growth and individual success by meeting each teacher where he or she is (Tomlinson, 2001). These differentiated interactions, based on the needs of the individual, then determine the degree to which beginning teachers are supported. Figure 4 depicts the revised model.
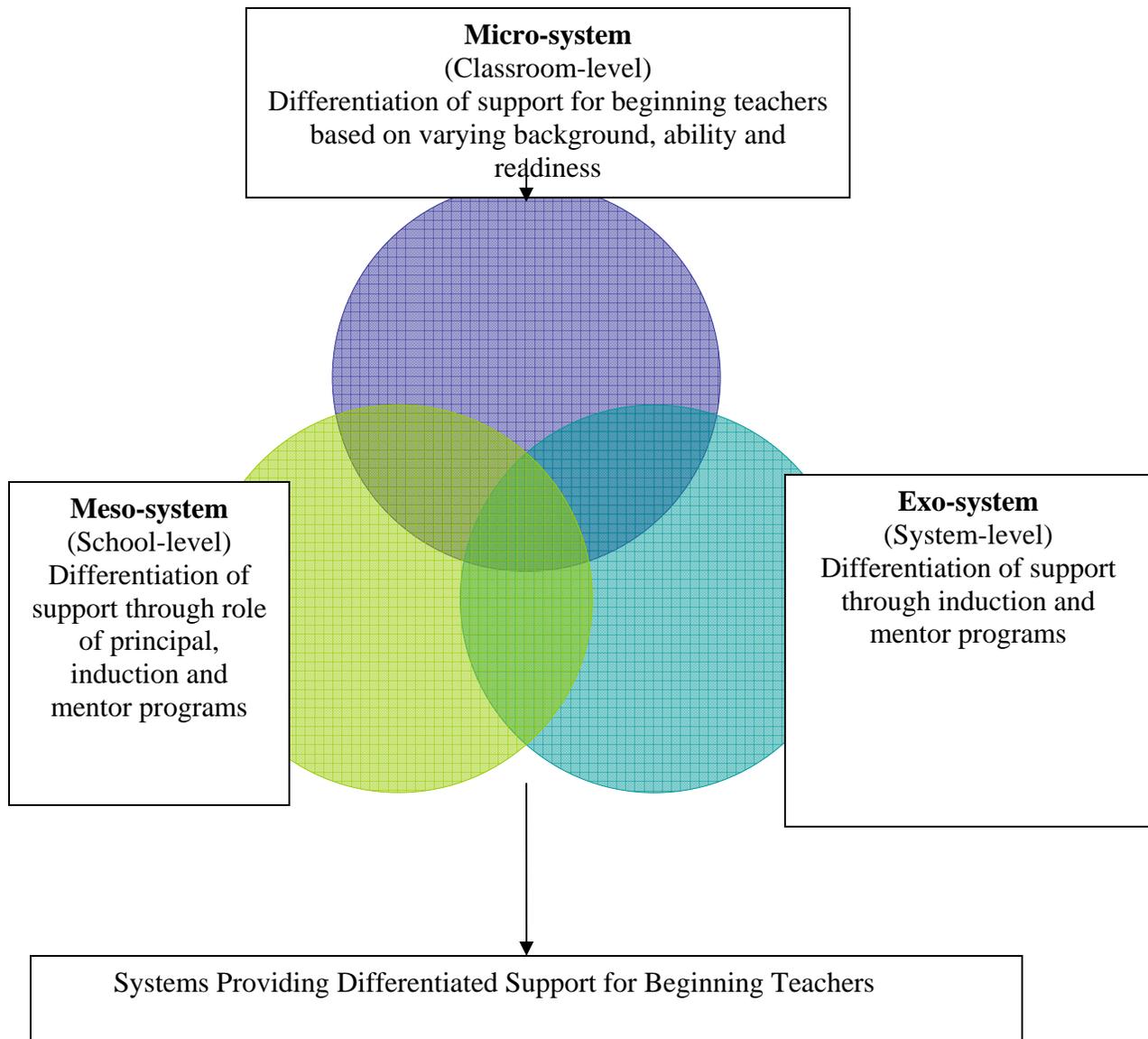
Figure 4. Systems Providing Differentiated Support for Beginning Teachers.

*Suggestions for Practice*

This section contains the following suggestions for Sail School District, which are based on the findings and conclusions developed in this research: (10) finding extra time; (11) connecting school to central office; (12) developing a university partnership; (13) careful matching of mentor to mentee; and (13) utilizing retirees as mentors. The suggestions are intended to strengthen the existing patterns of practice and to increase the current trend of using the individual needs of beginning teachers to differentiate the induction process.

*(10) Implications from this study suggest giving beginning teachers additional time, which could be in the form of paid contract days before school begins, to work in their building with their mentors and/or principals.* This suggestion is based on recommendations that created a consistent theme in the administrator and beginning teacher interviews. The administrator was aware of how frantic the first week of school is for the beginning teacher. He could not technically bring the new hires in over the summer, but he set up three different meetings throughout the summer, so they could choose and attend one. He ended up doing four sessions and still couldn't accommodate all of the beginning teachers in his building. While the district brings in new hires a week before returning teachers arrive, that week is dominated by district level meetings and staff development. By frontloading a few paid contract days, under the guidance of a mentor, to the beginning teacher's contract a significant improvement could be made in the first year experience for beginning teachers. Stansbury and Zimmerman (2002) also found that the more intensive strategies of support, such as this suggestion, offer the added effect of improving the beginner teacher's practice.

*(11) A second suggestion is to connect school administration more closely to central office's efforts to support beginning teachers.* For example, focus groups could be formed at both the central office and/or school levels. Those meetings could be moderated by a principal and central office staff and attended by beginning teachers representing different schools and levels. Likewise, the principal could also hold focus groups at his school. At that time, themes identified in this study, such as parental pressure, mixed-ability groups, physical isolation, mentoring, and the role of the principal, could be discussed. The themes that emerged from these meetings could be used to affect practices at both the central- office and school level.

*(12) A third suggestion, which emerged from the interview data, is to consider developing a university partnership to assist in applying theory to practice.* Having higher education as a partner could assist this system in using theory as a guide in framing the issue of teacher retention. That partnership could then facilitate the development and implementation of a research based induction program for beginning teachers. Additionally, a university professor could be invited to moderate focus groups of beginning teachers at either the central office or local schools. Having frequent beginning teacher focus groups could provide a valuable perspective if it leads to administrative reconsideration of how some practices are affecting the induction of beginning teachers. Although time is scarce, this additional investment has the

potential to provide new and improved support for beginning teachers. By viewing the environment of the elementary school as a team of players from all system levels, as suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1976), beginning teacher feedback and research can be used to improve the patterns of support for beginning teachers.

*(13) A fourth suggestion, which emerged from the interview data, is to consider giving particular attention to the selection and matching of mentor.* Choices are often made on the basis of who is available. The data in this study established the importance of learning preference as a key aspect in the partnership. Giving special attention to the needs of the individual can be beneficial in improving the beginning teacher's induction to teaching. Conducting a survey or interview with each beginning teacher to gain knowledge of varying background knowledge, readiness, and preferences in learning would be useful in tailoring the differentiation of support.

*(14) Additionally, based on the interview data consideration could be given to having more than one mentor assigned to beginning teachers.* One could be the traditional mentor assigned by the school. Another could come from a pool of the district's most talented retirees. At the current time, retired teachers in Sail District return to work for twenty paid days. This continues for seven years or until the retiree begins receiving Medicare. Their historical knowledge of the educational environment in a particular school, their years of experience and high performance; and their ability to focus just on mentoring would make them highly qualified for this role. Finally, the addition of these positions would give the school assigned mentors, who are often stretched thin, a partner in helping the novice reach levels of expertise.

*Recommendations for Future Research*

This study has described the patterns of practice that support beginning teachers across the total educational environment of the elementary school. Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model of the educational environment, which includes the macro-system, the exo-system, the meso-system, and the micro-system of the classroom, was used as a model. The following recommendation for future research are discussed in this section: (15) application of different roles to Brofenbrenner's model; (16) development of survey or interview instrument to support differentiation of support; (17) examination of mentor model being adopted by Sail District; and (18) investigation of physical location on isolation.

*(15) This study addressed elementary school level only and could be repeated using different roles to represent the levels of the educational environment.* For example, a middle

school or high school in Sail District might provide useful data in looking at the micro-system. Since a university partnership at the macro-system was not in place, the State Department of Education might provide a useful way of looking at the macro-system; similarly, central office lead teachers might be a productive way of looking at the meso-system. The potential for identifying patterns of practice that support beginning teachers would serve to add valuable information to the research on teacher retention.

*(16) Another research project might involve developing and implementing a survey or interview questions, which could be used with beginning teachers to determine their varying background knowledge, readiness, and preferences in learning.* Based on this knowledge differentiated support for beginning teachers could be offered.

*(17) Additional research might examine the Santa Cruz Mentoring Model, which Sail School District is adopting with a local university.* Studying the implementation of that model in Sail could possibly be used to describe how theory is used to guide practice. Case studies of beginning teachers, mentoring observations, and conferencing with involved university professors could be useful.

*(18) Further research might also examine the concern that two beginning teachers expressed regarding their classroom placement outside of the facility.* Investigating the impact of physical location on isolation and recommending limitations for first year teachers would be beneficial. As noted in the research, public school enrollment is predicated to increase from 47 million in 1999 to 48 million in 2008 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). That increase in student enrollment will bring into districts many beginning teachers who will need appropriate space and support to assist them in adjusting to the teaching profession.

<center>Post Script</center>

The beginning teacher participants in this study were unique individuals. They enjoy what they do, and they stay. Two expressed that they had always wanted to teach while one discovered the desire at college. The experiences and feelings of the teachers remind me of the resiliency that some children have. Like resilient children, these teachers bounced back from the shock they experienced when they entered the elementary school as a beginning teacher. Their love of children and "making a difference" enabled them to keep their eyes on the goal, and the differentiated support provided by the layers of the educational environment held them steady during their journey.

Moreover, the beginning teachers highly respected their principal, who met the challenge of differentiating for their individual induction needs. They felt that, though his time was scarce, he was there to offer advice, share ideas, and provide support. Each participant also had either a formal or informal mentor who listened to them and provided encouragement. For one, it was her mother, a respected kindergarten teacher. Another had a colleague, and for another, it was her school mentor. The encouragement from these sources helped the teachers to come back the next day and the next year.

Where are the participants now? The principal is now a Director of Elementary Education. The Coordinator of Staff Development remains in her position. One teacher completed her administrative degree and is now an Assistant Principal in an elementary school in Sail District. Another left the public system and is teaching in the private school she attended as a child, and the last teacher remains in her classroom and loves just where she is.

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Appendix A

Summary of Major Related Studies

Retention of Beginning Teachers

| Authors/Date | Topic/Title | Methodology/Sample | Findings/Implications |
|---|---|---|---|
| Billingsley B.S. & Cross, L.H. (1992). Predictors of commitment, job satisfaction, and intent to stay in teaching: A comparison of general and special education. | Predictors of commitment/investigated predictors of commitment, job satisfaction, and intent to stay in teaching with general and special educators. | Quantitative Mail questionnaire was sent to 558 special educators and 589 general educators in Virginia. 83% of both sampled returned the survey. Variables that influence teachers' commitment and job satisfaction and the extent to which commitment and satisfaction variables influenced teachers' intent to stay in teaching were identified from the data. | Across special and general educators, job satisfaction was associated with greater leadership support and work involvement and decreased levels of role conflict and stress. Leadership was not a significant predictor of commitment. |
| Brock, B. & Grady, M. (1986). Beginning teacher induction programs: The role of principal. | Role of Principal | `Two-phase study. Phase one; surveys mailed to seventy-five second year teachers at elementary and high. Forty-nine returned surveys. Nine teachers in a university course interviewed. Phase two, principals surveyed. Random sample of seventy-five public and nonpublic schools in Nebraska. Fifty-six returned surveys | Beginning teachers and principals agreed on the following: the nature of the first-year teachers' problems, the importance of fall orientation, and the helpfulness of mentors. Beginning teachers identified two areas that principals did not identify: the importance of the principal's role in the induction process and the beginning teachers' need for assistance throughout the year. |
| Chapman, D.W. (1984). Teacher retention: The test of a model | Teacher retention/to test a model of the influences on teacher retention | Quantitative 2,9333 grades completed the Survey of Graduates with Teaching Certificates (Chapman & Hutcheson, 1980). Respondents groups into three categories: (a) those who started and remained in education; (b) those who started in and left teachers, and (c) those who prepared for, but never entered teaching. Sample: 400 randomly | Findings: The administrator does not easily influence many of the variables related to voluntary attrition, but one area that administrators may be able to influence is in shaping the tone and quality of a new teacher's first teaching experience. If an administrator is concerned with teacher |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | selected teaching certificate recipients from Univ. of Michigan for every other year between 1946 and 1978.  In years with less than 400 certificate recipients, all graduates were surveyed. A total of 5,76 graduates were contacted yielding returns from 2,9333, a response rate of 51%. | retention, work with beginning teachers is a key intervention. Among the groups (two of the three) who did enter teaching, the quality of the first experience was more strongly related to attrition, than was either their academic performance or the quality of their educational program. |
| Odell, S. (1986). Induction support of new teachers:  A functional approach. | Induction Support | Quantitative Data obtained from a large elementary teacher induction program conducted with a collaborating college of education and a large school system.  Nine full-time teachers were released to serve as full-time support under the guidance of the university-based teacher induction program. Each full-time support person was assigned to approximately 18 first-year teachers in eight elementary schools.  Data were obtained from, 86 first-year teachers.  90.7% women, 50% below age of 25, and 73.3% obtained their teaching degree from the participating university. During the year, the support person recorded questions asked by the beginning teachers and the assistance offered.  These data served as basis for forming seven categories of support.   86 new and 79 new-to-system teachers | Most frequently offered induction was in first semester was providing information about the school system.  That type of assistance dropped during the second semester.  The type of assistance offered to new to system and first-year teachers showed that there are common threads in the needs of both. Although emotional support of importance for both semesters, the clinical support teachers offered more assistance with the formal teaching process than emotional support.  Management support, which is often perceived as high ranked, the amount of assistance offered was considerably less than anticipated. |
| Odell s. & Ferrano, D. (1992). Teacher mentoring and teacher retention. | Mentoring and Retention | Two groups of K-5 teachers who had received yearlong structured support in a collaborative university/school teacher mentor program during their first year of teaching | Data show that beginning teachers who were still in teaching after 4 years most valued the motional support they received from their mentors. |

| | | were the focus of the 4-year follow-up study. The two groups consisted of all beginning teachers from 76 elementary schools in a system. Group 1 consisted of 10% male and 32% ethnic minority. The 79 teachers in Group 2 were 11% male and 29% ethnic minority. Retention data were obtained from each of the two groups of beginning teachers 4 years after their initial mentored experiences. All of the located teachers were sent a 12-item questionnaire. 86% of Group 1 and 90% of Group 2 were located. 70% of the participants returned the questionnaire. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Schaffer, E. Springfield, S. and Wolfe, D. (1992). An innovative beginning teacher induction program: A two-year analysis of classroom interactions. | Induction 2-year program | 19 applicants chosen on basis of their scores on NTE (National Teacher Examination), grade point average, and interviews to participate in study. All 19 were admitted to an experimental master's program. Low-inference observational data were collected on all 19 beginning teachers during the fall and spring of their first year. Prior to the second year, some had left teaching or moved. From the available second-year sample, 12 were randomly chosen for further classroom observation. When gathering data, some moved or left, making the second-year sample contain a total of 9 teachers. A comparison group of 12 experienced teachers was selected from teachers involved in a Stallings Effective Use of Time Program (EUTP). All observation data were gathered during academic classes, with three 1-hour classroom observations. | Both quantitative and qualitative analyses indicated that the group of TIP participants made significant gains during their 2 years of TIOP participation. During the first year, teachers decreased their inefficient use of time. Time spent on classroom management remained high during the first year. Journals showed concern about classroom survival during the first year. |

| | | All fall or spring data were collected within 5 to 10 school days. Year 2 observations included 2 hours of data per teacher in the fall and spring. Observers were trained in the use of the SOS (Stallings Observation System). Three analyses were done. The first examined change in behavior patterns over time. The second made comparisons between the TIP participants and experienced teachers. Third, case studies of TIP students were constructed from qualitative data collected from interviews and journals. | |

Appendix B


Letter to Superintendent Requesting Permission

November 30, 2003

Dear Superintendent:

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic and State University.  I have successfully completed my course work and my prospectus examination and am seeking permission to conduct my dissertation study in your school system.

The purpose of my study is to examine how the elementary school educational environment responds to the needs of beginning teachers.  This study is intended to enhance the understanding of responses that assist or impede the induction process for beginning teachers in the elementary school.  That understanding can lead to program stability and quality, which are essential for student learning, program continuity, and control of hiring and recruiting expenditures.

I am enclosing the prospectus of my study.  They describe the problem and the purpose of the study, provide a literature review, and explain the proposed methodology.  I propose to interview beginning elementary teachers, their school-based instructional supervisors, and central office personnel who are in support roles to the teachers.  I also plan to collect and analyze relevant documents and to observe some professional development activities.  The study will not involve any students.

Thank you for considering my request to conduct the study in your school system.  Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further clarification.  I may be contacted at 804/365-4551 or via email at balexander@hanover.k12.va.us

Sincerely,



Rebecca J. Alexander                                      Dr. Steve Parson, Ed.D
                                                                           Faculty Advisor

Appendix C

**Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects**


**Title of Project:**

**Investigator(s):** Rebecca J. Alexander, Stephen R. Parson (faculty advisor)

**I. The Purpose of this Research Project**

The purpose of this research is to describe how the total educational environment is responding to the needs of beginning teachers.  A case study will be conducted with three beginning elementary teachers working in a suburban school system. Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model of the educational environment will provide the conceptual framework for the study.  A minimum of three teacher interviews will be conducted.  The number of interviews with instructional supervisors will be determined by any overlap of supervisors. (Teachers may have the same instructional supervisor.)

**II. Procedures**

The procedures in this study include interviews, observations, and collection of school documents. Interviews will be conducted with beginning teachers, their instructional supervisors, directors of human resources and staff development, central office content specialists and teacher educators at the college and university. Your interview will take place at a time that is convenient for you. Interviews will be face-to-face and will last 45 minutes. They will be tape-recorded and then transcribed at a later time. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and add hand-written comment to the contents.

Observations of (a) New Teacher Induction Program; (b) mentor training program; and (c) school-based mentor meetings will be conducted with permission of the subjects. Permission to examine documents, such as the Mentor Handbook, New Teacher Induction Handbook, and materials from professional development activities for new teachers may also be requested.

**III. Risks**

There are no risks to you as a subject in this study.  The assurance of confidentiality should relieve any potential discomfort you may experience discussing the support you are receiving in your current setting.

**IV. Benefit of this Project**   Your participation in this project will increase the understanding of practices that support the needs of beginning teachers.  You will receive a summary of this research when completed.

**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The results of this study will be kept strictly confidential.  At no time will the researcher release information that identifies individuals with their responses.  The information you provide will have your name removed and only a subject code or pseudonym will identify during the analyses and any written reports of the research.  However, the investigators will be able to identify you individually in terms of the data collected.

The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist.  The tapes will be stored in the investigator's home office and destroyed within one year of the completion of the study.

## VI.  Compensation

No monetary compensation is provided for participation in this study.

## VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this interview at any time without penalty. You may refuse to answer any question during the course of the interview.  You are also free not to participate in observations and not to provide school documents.

## VIII.  Approval of Research

This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic and State University, by the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, and by the school system.

## IX.  Subject's Responsibilities

I know of no reason I cannot participate in this study.

## X.  Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the informed consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered.  I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project. I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of the project.

_____

Signature                                                              Date


 Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I will contact:

Rebecca J. Alexander, Investigator

Steve Parson, Faculty Advisor
David Moore, IRB Research Division

**Subjects receive a complete copy of the signed informed consent.**

Appendix D

Exo-system Participant Characteristics

| Participant | Position | Years of Experience In Education | Years of Experience In Current Position | Other Positions Held |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MS | Staff Development Coordinator | 12 | 2 | Middle School Guidance Counselor |

Appendix E

Meso-system Participant Characteristics

| Participant Number | Position Title | Years of Experience in Education | Years in Current Position | Other Positions Held |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MA | Principal | 15 | 5 | Elementary Assistant Principal, Elementary Teacher |

Micro-system Participant Characteristics

| Participant Number | Age | Years of Experience in School system | Educational Background |
|---|---|---|---|
| RM | 26 | 3 | B.A. and Masters in Teaching |
| RR | 27 | 3 | B.A. and Masters in Teaching |
| AG | 26 | 3 | B.A. and Masters in Teaching |

Appendix G


Interview Protocol

**Interview #1 University Personnel**
Interviewee: _____
Date_____
Location_____
Years of experience in education_____
Years of experience in current position_____
Other positions held_____

Suggested question guide:

What kinds of support do you think a beginning teacher needs in order to be effective?

What would an ideal induction program for beginning teachers look like?

In your experience, what types of induction support do most beginning teachers receive?

What role do you believe principals play in the induction process for beginning teachers?

What role do you believe mentors play in the induction process for beginning teachers?

What role do you believe teacher educators play in the induction process for beginning teachers?

In your opinion, how important to job retention is the support of an individual's first years of classroom teaching?

Are there any other aspects of beginning teacher retention that my questions have not touched and you feel are important?




**Interview #2 Central Office Personnel Directors of Human Resources and Staff Development**

Interviewee_____
Date_____
Location_____
Years of experience in education_____
Years of experience in current position_____

Other positions held:_____

Suggested question guide:

Describe your responsibilities of your position that relate to the retention of beginning teachers.

How does your system support the beginning teachers that are hired?

What impact do you expect the teacher shortage to have on your system?

Suppose that I am a beginning teacher in your school system. What kind of help would I receive during my first years as a teacher?

Are there other aspects of beginning teacher support that my questions have not touched upon and that you feel are important?

**Interview #3 Elementary School Instructional Supervisor**
Interviewee_____
Position_____
Date_____
Location_____
Years of experience in education_____
Years of experience in current position_____
Other positions held:_____

Suggested questions:

Describe your responsibilities that are related to the support of beginning teachers in your building.

What do you think a beginning teacher needs in order to be effective?

What would an ideal induction program for a beginning elementary teacher look like?

Suppose I am a beginning teacher in your building. What kind of help would I receive during my first years of teaching?

In your opinion, how important to job retention is the support given to the beginning teacher?

**Interview #4 Beginning Teacher**
Interviewee_____
Age_____
Date_____

Location_____
Years of experience in education_____
Other positions held_____

Suggested interview questions:

Why did you become interested in being a teacher?

In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of teaching as a profession?

What support do you think a teacher needs in order to be effective?

What kinds of support and assistance are available to you as a new teacher? What additional kinds of support, if any, do you feel that you need?

What are the most challenging aspects of being a new teacher?

Are there any other aspects of beginning teacher support that my questions have not touched upon and that you feel are important?

# Appendix H

## Data Source Matrix for All Systems

| Participant system Level | Position | Differentiat-ing Support | Culture Shock | Mixed-Ability Classroom Challenges | Role of Formal and Informal Mentors | Role of Principal Support | Role of Parent Issues | Role of Isolation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MS Exo-system | Central Office, Staff Development Coordinator | x | x | x | x | x | | |
| MA Meso-system | Principal | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| RM Micro-system | Beginning Teacher | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| RR Micro-system | Beginning Teacher | x | x | x | x | x | | |
| AG Micro-system | Beginning Teacher | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |

Institutional Review Board

Dr. David M. Moore
IRB (Human Subjects) Chair
Assistant Vice President for Research Compliance
CVM Phase II- Dockpend Dr., Blacksburg, VA 24061-0442
Office: 540/231-4991; FAX: 540/231-6033
email: moored@vt.edu

DATE:        October 14, 2004

MEMORANDUM

TO:          Stephen R. Parson  Educational Leadership & Policy St. 0302
             Rebecca Alexander

FROM:        David Moore

SUBJECT:     **IRB Expedited Approval:** "Examining the Layers of Beginning Teacher
             Retention"  IRB # 04-489

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for
expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110.
As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a
period of 12 months, effective October 14, 2004.

cc: File.