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# The Impact of Teacher Mentoring on Novice Educator Retention in High Poverty Schools

Gabriel D. Jackson

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THE IMPACT OF TEACHER MENTORING ON NOVICE EDUCATOR RETENTION  
IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

A Dissertation Submitted  
to the Graduate College  
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in School Leadership

in the Center for Leadership and Learning  
of the College of Education

May 2019

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## Dedication

I dedicate this to God, who has loaded me daily with benefits that I did not deserve.

To my wife Rachel who has pushed me when I could not push myself. Thank you for your kind words and loving support as I journeyed through this process. There is no way this could have happened without you Rae. We did it bestie!

To my children Leah and Gabriel II who have constantly served as my reminder to persevere. I hope I made you guys proud. Daddy loves you!

To my mother Leola who always taught me that the world was bigger than Blytheville, Arkansas. Mama, thank you!

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I am indebted to my brother, Ronnie. Thanks for always being there for me. I want to thank my committee Dr. Bounds, Dr. Bryant, and especially Dr. John Freeman for your professionalism, support, and commitment during this doctoral process.

## Abstract

Retaining novice teachers in today's educational system is proving to be extremely difficult. In schools of poverty, this challenge is much more difficult. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the effectiveness of a district-mandated teacher mentoring program in a Central Arkansas School District in regards to skills, dispositions, and retention. Eight novice teachers who work in high poverty schools were interviewed as part of this study. Through transcription and analysis, themes were established to gain a clear understanding of the novice teachers' thoughts and perceptions of the teacher mentoring program. The results indicated a strong presence of informal mentoring by colleagues, the necessity of administrative support while in mentoring, the lack of time spent with mentors, and that the mentoring program had no true bearings on the retention of the respondents.

Keywords: Teacher retention, mentoring.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Teacher retention is a significant concern for U.S. public education. Few educational issues have received more attention recently than the lack of qualified teachers in elementary and secondary classrooms, nationally (Ingersoll, 2001). Teacher attrition, the rate at which teachers leave the profession, is 8% nationwide (Tomasello, 2016). This statistic coupled with the overall decline in enrollment in teacher preparation programs means the teacher shortage problem will continue for the foreseeable future. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) state that about 90,000 additional teachers will be needed each year, with high poverty schools being the most affected by the teacher shortage.

Other studies revealed a contributing factor might be teachers leaving low-achieving schools to teach in higher achieving schools when the opportunity becomes available (Betts, Rueben & Danenberg, 2000). According to Scharton (2018), “in the last 20 years, teacher attrition has nearly doubled, and districts are finding it harder than ever to place a highly-qualified and effective teacher in every classroom” (para. 4).

To compound the problem, schools with 50% or more minority students experience attrition at twice the rate of schools with lower minority populations (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). These attrition rates appear to be higher for teachers in schools serving the largest concentrations of students of color. These schools are already staffed by less-experienced teachers, many of whom have received less training to teach (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). These statistics indicate that teacher attrition leaves low-achieving schools with the least-qualified teachers (Haycock, 1998).

Because of this national trend, school boards, school administrators, and policymakers are continually searching for creative ways to recruit and retain good teachers for all schools, but especially for those schools in most need of highly qualified teachers (McLaurin, Smith, & Smillie, 2009). Teacher mentoring may play a key role in addressing this problem. Through the mentoring process, novice teachers have an opportunity to interact with experienced teachers to gain knowledge and become more comfortable in their new professional role (Lever, 2010).

### **Problem Statement**

Peske and Haycock (2006) found that poor and minority children get fewer than their fair share of high-quality teachers. In today's complex educational system, our schools need to be infused with individuals who are committed to providing students of all races and socioeconomic statuses with a quality learning experience. These schools are often inundated with substitute teachers for a prolonged period whose only goal is to survive from one day to the next. As a result, these schools are deemed to be failing and are perceived as dumping grounds for learners that are considered to be unteachable. In short, the schools in most need of highly-qualified teachers are often the schools with the fewest highly-qualified teachers (Haycock, 1998).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether a district-wide teacher mentoring program used in a high poverty school district located in Arkansas, positively impacts the teachers' perception of their effectiveness in the classroom and whether the mentoring program may be impacting their potential to remain in that position beyond the first three years of service.

Mentoring can serve as a gateway to filling the need of educators by helping to construct a bond between the experienced educator and the novice teacher. Concerned about the rate of attrition during the first three years of teaching and aware of the problems faced by beginning teachers, many policymakers provide on-site support and assistance to novice teachers to help them build the self-confidence to become more effective as classroom teachers (Little, 1990).

According to Ingersoll (2001), the heart of a mentoring program is the mentor/mentee relationship. “After districts hire talented teachers, strong induction and support for novice teachers can increase their retention, accelerate their professional growth, and improve student learning” (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016, para. 28). Lynch (2016) found mentors assist new teachers in adapting to the school culture and norms, both official and non-official. They also help to guide the new teachers with curriculum, teaching strategies, successful scheduling, and communication skills. In short, strong mentors help their mentees become successful teachers (Johnson, 2001).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The goal of this study was to understand new teachers’ perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts about mentoring and how the process impacts retention. Several theories helped to guide the research.

One such theory was Bandura’s (1977) Social Cognitive Theory (SGT). According to this theory, people learn by observing others in action. The SGT explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1986). Individuals learn from

watching others in specific settings which are predicated on the environment where the observation takes place. In this instance, novice teachers learn by observing and modeling their mentor teachers.

The socio-cultural theory was also used in this research study, which promotes the idea people learn from their encounters with others. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that learning is a social process, aided by others who are more capable and through these interactions the acquisition of knowledge takes place. In this case, mentees are assisted in learning by mentors. Beginning teachers are found to be more motivated to learn when they receive support from more experienced teachers who have experience and knowledge to share (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Through collaboration, planning, and discussion, mentors can assist novice teachers in building their skill sets and understanding best instructional practices (Schwille, 2008).

The last theory used to support this study was Knowles's adult learning theory. Novice teachers must possess a keen awareness of how they learn. Mentoring programs designed to improve instructional practices focus on andragogy, which is the method or practice of helping adults learn (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012). In a teacher mentoring program, mentors and mentees can have a valuable experience when knowledge, strengths, and limitations are shared to boost student academic performance.

While these various theories are outlined and discussed separately, they can be combined to produce a teacher mentoring program that is effective and responsive to the needs of the novice teacher. These theories serve as the foundational underpinnings of what novice teachers believe to be impactful in their teacher mentoring program.



## **Research Question**

The following question guided the research by ascertaining the thoughts and perceptions of beginning teachers who are participating in the school district's mentoring program: how do novice teachers in this Central Arkansas School District perceive the influence of the district's mandated mentoring program on their effectiveness and retention as professional educators?

## **Significance of the Study**

Retaining novice educators is a daunting task. The goal of this research study was to identify the challenges faced by new teachers as well as how well the mentoring program is helping these teachers meet those challenges. This study sought to identify the factors identified by these participants that may impact the retention of teachers through this mentoring program. Therefore, this study has significance to determine if mentoring programs may help increase teacher retention.

This study consisted of interviews allowing the participants an opportunity to share a personal reflection of their experiences as a teacher, regarding the impact of the mentoring they received as a novice educator. The results of this study can be used to provide clarity, guidance, and insight to district and building leadership personnel who are committed to maximizing the potential of their novice teachers during their first three years in the field to retain them both in the school and the profession as a whole.

## **Operational Definitions of Relevant Terms**

*Building Leadership:* For this study, building leadership refers to a school-based group of individuals who work to provide a robust organizational process for school renewal and improvement (NIUSI, 2005).

*Mentor:* For this study, a mentor is a staff member who serves as a teacher and role model for new employees. The mentor helps new employees to learn their jobs and to adapt to the new work environment (USLegal, 2018).

*Mentoring:* A relationship between a more experienced person, the mentor, and a less experienced person, the protégé. The mentor's role is to guide, instruct, encourage, and correct the protégé (USLegal, 2018).

*Novice Teacher:* For this study, a novice teacher is defined as a teacher who typically has zero to three years of teaching experience and is a newcomer to the teaching profession (IGI Global, 2018).

*Retention:* The rate at which new teachers remain in the profession (IGI Global, 2018).

## **Assumptions**

As with any research study, the researcher must rely on the trustworthiness of the data collected. This study used interviews of teachers involved in the district's mentor program as a source of data to draw conclusions about the program. It was assumed that these participants answered the questions truthfully, reflecting their actual perceptions of their experiences in the mentoring program. It was also thought that the mentoring program was implemented with fidelity in all the schools participating in the program.

The evaluation of the program was not part of this study, so the researcher was not able to determine whether fidelity was maintained.

### **Limitations**

The information was obtained from schools in one district and may not be generalizable to other districts. The results of this research may not include all factors that impact teacher retention.

### **Delimitations**

The selection of participants was made using a convenience sample of eight novice teachers who experienced this mentor program. The data collected was delimited to secondary teachers in one district. The purposive sample of novice teachers in this district included teachers in low-performing, high-need schools. Therefore, the responses may not be reflective of teachers in more affluent and higher-performing school districts.

### **Summary**

The most valuable resource that can lead a student to succeed academically is a well-trained teacher at the head of the classroom (Heck, 2009). The chances of success are increased when a child has an educator who takes the challenge of touching lives in today's society. Mentoring can play a role in the preparation of novice teachers by building professional acumen and collegial dispositions. If done correctly, learners across all demographic categories can significantly benefit from the mentoring process, and as a result, the goal of providing quality education to all children can be achieved by developing and retaining high-quality teachers.

In Chapter 2, literature related to teacher mentoring, retention and attrition, and teacher development is presented. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the

methods and procedures used to collect and analyze data through participant interviews. Through these interviews of novice educators, the strengths of mentoring were identified, and the weaknesses were explored to construct a high quality, consistent process that builds strong educators.

Chapter 4 will present the findings from the data analysis and use them to address the research question guiding this study. Finally, in Chapter 5, a discussion of the findings revealed in Chapter 4 will be included along with a description of the implications for practice and the recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Many schools in the United States are struggling to meet the standards established at the state level due to a lack of quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2004). The majority of these schools consistently struggle with retaining effective, motivated teachers. To make a dire situation worse, many of these schools are serving students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds where quality teachers are most needed. Peske and Haycock (2006) have determined poor and minority children get fewer than their fair share of high-quality teachers. How we educate students in these schools reveals much about our values as a nation (Reed, 2005). Today's educational system must be infused with teachers and administrators who are committed to reaching all learners, regardless of ethnicity or income level (Peske & Haycock, 2006).

The purpose of this literature review was to discuss teacher training programs, as well as instructional strategies that have proven to be effective in equipping field candidates, interns, and novice teachers with the skills needed to teach a diversity of learners. Issues hindering novice educators such as classroom management and instructional practices and research that discusses the merits of teacher mentoring are provided as well.

For this study, the researcher examined literature from several sources, including the online databases such as the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Education Research Complete, SAGE's online database, and Google Scholar, as well as sources obtained through the Arkansas Tech University Library. Peer-reviewed articles and studies were located by using a keyword search in (ERIC), EBSCO Publishing, and ProQuest databases. These sources make up the majority of this review. Novice teacher,

new teacher frustration, mentoring program, teacher improvement, effectiveness, retention, attrition, teaching practice, mentoring, teacher induction program, and teacher mentors were used as broad keywords.

### **Teacher Training**

To meet the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, teachers must be adequately prepared to provide a rigorous and relevant education. This preparation should provide the beginning teacher with a level of self-efficacy and self-confidence that will make them effective teachers. This process often begins in the teacher preparation programs on college campuses. According to Miller-Levy, Taylor, and Hawke (2014), teacher preparation programs have the responsibility of providing quality teachers for students across the nation. Embedded in this responsibility is the idea that teacher preparation programs not only prepare quality teachers but also tend to act as gatekeepers to prevent candidates that are not capable of being quality teachers' access to students and classrooms (Miller-Levy et al., 2014).

Teacher preparation has traditionally included a series of courses focusing on child development, instructional and assessment techniques, and methods and materials related to specific content areas. However, in recent years, teacher preparation programs and their usefulness to the teaching field have received considerable scrutiny (Stronge, 2007). Levine (2006) reported that many students seem to be graduating from teacher education programs without the skills and knowledge they need to be effective teachers. More than three out of five teacher education alumni surveyed (62%) report schools of education do not prepare their graduates to cope with the realities of today's classrooms (Levine, 2006).

Today, there are alternative methods leading individuals into the teaching profession outside the traditional four-year college track. Stronge (2007) stated a critical factor in the effectiveness of alternatively prepared teachers is the type of experiences within the preparation program. Teachers from alternative preparation programs that provided mentors, clinical teaching experiences, and preparation in pedagogy stated they felt confident in their teaching abilities and intended to continue teaching (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003).

Nontraditional licensure programs or alternative certification programs such as Teach for America (TFA) also assist in producing educators. Upon examination, one group of researchers reported that Teach for America was an organization that seeks to identify the injustices in America's educational system and to inform the professional community such as lawyers, doctors, policymakers, and other professionals about these inequities (Bialka & Andrus, 2017). Some scholars suggest TFA is not accomplishing its goal with fidelity. For instance, Schlitz (2018) reported that although 43.6% of corps members stayed in their original placement schools longer than the two-year commitment; after four years that percentage dropped to 14.8% who remained in their original schools. Greene (2016) stated that while TFA was touted as a way to fill empty classroom spots, in cities like Chicago and New Orleans the organization was seen as displacing trained, experienced teachers.

Schaffer and Welsh (2017) indicated an increase in specialized teacher training coursework and field experiences is needed to strengthen teacher candidates' skills before student teaching. This training should be directed to the specific skills, knowledge, and dispositions exhibited by career educators that would assist novice teachers entering the

workforce. The National Education Association (2011) supports this concept by indicating that the teaching profession needs to embrace a clear, rigorous, universally accepted body of knowledge and skills identifying what a prospective teacher should know and be able to do before entering the classroom.

### **Teacher Development**

Once working in the education field, a quality instructor understands the simultaneous relationship between training and teaching. There is no such thing as knowing it all or doing just enough. A significant factor in career success is the motivation to get better. An effective teacher is one who can self-reflect and gain from both strengths and weaknesses. Teacher work products, such as lesson and unit plans, teacher-developed curricular materials, and teacher-developed tests or performance tasks help to provide evidence that supports these reflections (NEA, 2017). Whitehurst (2002) calls for a strenuous type of professional learning. He recommends "high quality" professional development that emphasizes the importance of more intense, content-focused experiences (i.e., not one-day generic workshops), as well as more opportunities for peer collaboration and more structured induction experiences for new teachers.

The Common Core State Standards have called for a push not only for college readiness but also for today's learners to be prepared for the workplace (Rothman, 2012). To strengthen this pathway, educators must feel comfortable when presenting these standards in the classroom. Gewertz (2013) conducted a study randomly surveying 600 teachers and found the majority of these teachers felt unprepared to teach according to the Common Core regulations, especially when teaching disadvantaged students. Matherson



and Windle (2017) state “to prepare students for success, teachers must teach them to learn and, to do so, teachers must become active learners themselves” (p.30).

A significant component of quality teaching is the ability of the educator to reflect. Reflection allows the teacher to become self-aware of the strengths and weaknesses he or she possesses as it relates to skills, methods, and beliefs. This process then affords the educator with the chance to correct the inappropriate teaching action (Liu & Zhang, 2014). Not only do educators improve by self-reflection, but they also grow by collaborative reflection. Epler, Drape, Broyles, and Rudd (2014) indicate discussing and comparing experiences with others deepens the learning experience. Collaborative thinking helps teachers refine their teaching skills and approaches to teaching and provides a means for improvement.

An effective educator is also one who utilizes successful classroom management. Successful classroom management involves much more than rules and discipline. Indeed, research into classroom management demonstrates that effective teachers are proactive about student behavior, and they include students in the process of establishing and maintaining rules and routines (Stronge, 2007). A vital part of this management is when the educator possesses the right attitude. A study in the Los Angeles Unified School District indicated students whose teachers were positive, enthusiastic, and motivated performed better academically than students of those teachers who did not exhibit these characteristics (Fidler, 2002).

### **Teaching in High-Poverty Schools**

Never before has there been such a critical demand for quality teachers and instruction to meet and overcome the barriers and challenges of teaching in our nation’s

urban high-poverty schools (McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, & Robinson, 2008). With more than 14 million children living in poverty, “every miseducated child represents a personal tragedy” (Haberman, 2003, p. 2). Students from low-income families consistently, regardless of ethnicity or race, score well below average (Bergeson, 2006).

Meyerson (2001) speaks to the ills of this societal detriment by saying, “The failure of most public schools to teach poor children is a national tragedy and national disgrace” (p. 1). McKinney et al. (2016) state that as a result, many teacher preparation programs have begun to concentrate their efforts on providing quality opportunities during the internship experience to better prepare teacher candidates specifically for high-poverty schools.

### **Teacher Retention and Attrition**

Hughes (2012) stated teachers enter the profession for a variety of reasons. It was determined that the benefits of teaching such as vacation time, working conditions, salary, and the intrinsic value of helping students are higher than other available professional options. However, as most teachers and teacher educators would concur, the journey of becoming a teacher is not always smooth (He & Cooper, 2011). Danielson (1999) pointed to the erroneous belief that beginning teachers have acquired all that is required to carry out their responsibilities successfully. Thus, any shortcomings in terms of classroom delivery are seen as their fault (Confait, 2015).

After beginning teachers enter the workforce, there needs to be a concerted effort to keep these individuals employed in the educational system, which is known as retention. According to Lasagna (2009), retention is the ability to keep teachers in the

classroom and lessen turnover. Turnover involves transferring between schools or districts and quitting the profession (Ingersoll, 2001).

Building leadership personnel, if utilized correctly, can play an instrumental role in the retention of teachers. Varrati and Smith (2008) mention the leadership role the principal projects within the context of their educational community sets the stage for preservice teachers to respond in terms of their interaction, expectations, and actions as teachers. Cochran-Smith (2006) describes “the importance of school leaders developing and maintaining school cultures that sustain and support teachers’ learning over the long haul as a critical impetus for staying” (p. 104). Because teacher turnover directly affects student achievement, keeping highly qualified and effective teachers on-board is important, and researchers argue that to do this, school leaders need to support quality teaching (Martinez-Garcia & Slate, 2009)

New teachers often step into their classrooms filled with enthusiasm and hope about changing the lives of young students (Morgan, 2018). Once these individuals enter the classroom, however, they are faced with various challenges that many do not seem to overcome, which results in high turnover rates. Teachers entering the classroom experience "classroom or reality shock" and often mistake the uneasiness they feel as an indication they have made a mistake in their choice of profession (Inman & Marlow, 2004). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found teachers have a higher annual turnover rate than other occupations, with new teachers especially prone to leave after their first few years in the classroom.

Teachers depart the classroom for a variety of reasons. Approximately 150,000 new teachers are hired annually to replace those lost to attrition and retirement (Beaugez,

2012). To meet the increasing demand for teachers, McCreight (2000) reported the number of new hires would have to increase to 220,000 a year to keep abreast of the need. Young (2018) mentioned that because research has shown that hiring and retaining quality teachers makes a significant difference in student achievement, educational leaders need to know why teachers leave. Sarason (1990) alluded to these reasons by stating, “it is virtually impossible to create and sustain over time conditions for productive learning for students when they do not exist for teachers” (p. 145).

The biggest issue that novice educators face is classroom management. Public Agenda (2004) found 85% of teachers believed "new teachers are particularly unprepared for dealing with behavior problems in their classrooms" (p. 3). Many professionals choose the teaching profession because they want to help students; however, student discipline problems and lack of student motivation might lead teachers to doubt their impact and question their professional choices (Hughes, 2012).

A lack of professional support can also lead to high teacher attrition rates. Johnson et al. (2001) reported on a Massachusetts study that found most of the first- and second-year teachers they surveyed had little to no direction or support in their day-to-day curriculum plans or long-term student achievement strategies. McCreight (2000) identified the lack of professional development as one of nine factors directly contributing to teacher attrition, observing that “low emphasis on professional development results in insufficient training and support for teachers” (p. 8). Anderson and Fry (2011) contend administrative and colleague support contributes to increased self-confidence as well as self-efficacy of the teacher, which increase the sense of accomplishment, hence, job satisfaction.

## Teacher Mentoring

Throughout the U.S. educational systems began to realize in the early 1980s that a serious problem existed; teachers need assistance and guidance, especially during their first years in the profession (Jonson, Alpert, Seibel, Chalew, & Miller, 2008). A significant influence leading to novice teachers remaining in the field is the support given by older, experienced teachers in a process called mentoring.

Mentoring is not a new concept. The origins of both the idea of mentorship or the professional training of a pupil by a more experienced peer, as well as the name 'mentor' come from Homer's classic poem, *The Odyssey* (History of Mentoring, n.d.). Homer's poem was written about 800 BCE and described a time around 1200 BCE when the character Odysseus, king of Ithaca, was preparing to leave for Troy. During his preparations, he wanted to ensure there was someone who could look after his son, Telemachus, in his absence. He appointed someone to act in his place as a teacher, advisor, and friend. This guardian's name was Mentor, (History of Mentoring, n.d.).

In education, mentoring is “the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in schools” (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p. 203). A mentor serves as a guide, supporter, friend, advocate, and role model (Pitton, 2006). McCann (2011) indicates that the idea of a mentor is not to draw from one's experience and project it onto the newcomer in the form of distilled wisdom and authoritative directions for action, but to instead listen to the newcomer to learn how to meet their professional needs.

Mentoring cannot be merely handing off lesson plans to a newcomer to the classroom, but instead must be a carefully developed relationship that helps new teachers

understand how to maintain their optimism while confronting the daily realities of teaching (Stolpa-Flatt, 2006). Portner (2008) suggests that to be productive, mentor-mentee interactions must take place within a relationship that includes mutual trust, honesty, respect, and a joyful willingness to work together. Because it may take up to five years for teachers to become confident and highly skilled (Moore-Johnson, 2004), the induction and mentoring of novice teachers to help them develop both competence and confidence are of critical consequence for student achievement. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) share this sentiment by adding these programs are conceived as a bridge, enabling the “student of teaching” to become a “teacher of students.”

Novice teachers evaluate the collegial climate in part based on their interactions with their formally assigned mentors whose primary purpose is to socialize novices into the teaching profession and their local context and to provide them with additional learning opportunities (Pogodzinski, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). It is through this assignment that the novice not only learns about the profession as a whole but also about the culture and climate of the building.

In spite of walking fresh into the profession, novice educators assume a significant burden. In teaching, new entrants, fresh out of professional training, assume the same responsibilities as 20-year veterans (Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2000). Teachers are expected to be experts ready to tackle the most significant challenges on the first day they enter a school (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). It is these expectations that can lead the young educator towards doubts about their readiness. Stansbury and Zimmerman (2000) conclude this pressure is a situation ripe for frustration.

## **Summary**

Chapter 2 gave an overview of the literature related to teacher mentoring, development, training, and retention. Properly training and retaining novice teachers is a strenuous task. Despite the initiatives implemented by administrators and policymakers, this objective has not been fully reached. As a result, it is important to address these barriers faced by beginning teachers through thorough mentoring procedures. Current research yields insight into today's strategies of supporting novices, mentors, and ways to build quality mentoring programs. A vast amount of literature states that teacher mentoring programs are effective. There is also research that speaks to how mentoring can address the issues faced by beginning teachers. There needs to be an additional level of understanding through the eyes of the mentees that allows them to discuss what is required to improve the mentoring process. Chapter 3 is a description of the research methodology. It details the methods used to gather data for this study, including the research design, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and findings.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter presents the methodology used for this research study. It provides and describes research questions, setting, and participants. It represents the research design of the study which includes the theoretical perspective on which the study was designed and by which interpretations of findings were guided. Procedures and guidelines for the interviews are described. The method of data collection and analysis used to determine the research findings and conclusions was included in this section.

Schools in today's society are faced with many challenges. Retaining novice educators in high poverty areas is one of the biggest obstacles to quality education for all students. This study sought to identify the challenges faced by beginning teachers in a particular school district and to determine what supports school districts should provide to try and retain beginning teachers in their schools.

This study specifically examined the supports provided by a mentoring program that played a role in the retention of beginning teachers in these high poverty schools, by improving their teaching skills and content knowledge.

This topic is essential for current policy considerations. Based on the findings in this study, it is hoped that:

- Educators will better understand the reasons for teacher attrition and build capacity within schools to combat turnover;
- Policymakers will consider options to support or develop statewide strategies to combat turnover; and
- The Arkansas Department of Education will have data to provide support to schools with high turnover to mitigate the impact of turnover.



In trying to address the problem of teacher retention in high poverty schools, one general question guided the study: How do novice teachers in this Central Arkansas School District perceive the influence of the district's mandated mentoring program on their effectiveness and retention as professional educators?

### **Research Design**

The research design used in this study was a qualitative, case study design with the mentoring program designed and implemented by this Central Arkansas school district, as the single case. Data collected to develop the case study consisted primarily of teacher interviews and document analysis to view the program from a phenomenological perspective which provided a more profound and richer understanding of the impact that it had on these novice teachers (Patton, 2015). Through this methodology, a better understanding of the mentoring program may aid in the retention of beginning teachers in high poverty schools.

Case study methods guided the entire research process from the initial collection of data to the final writing (Yin, 2014). It was the most appropriate method of research as it sought to make sure that the emerging theory arises from the data and not from some other source. By utilizing this design, the researcher was allowed to capture thoughts and perceptions via personal accounts and reflections obtained by conducting individual interviews of beginning teachers in this Central Arkansas School District who have taken part in the mandated teacher mentoring program. The researcher was continually involved in the process of data collection, data coding, and data analysis. The constant comparative method was used to analyze interview data, and to answer the research question regarding beginning teachers' beliefs about mentoring (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **The District's Mentoring Program**

This Central Arkansas School District determined beginning teachers need support and guidance as they embark upon the journey of providing a quality education for today's students. As a result, this school district aligns its mentoring practices and procedures with those set by the Arkansas Department of Education. The Arkansas Induction Mentoring Model, known as AIMM, is a one to two-year program that is geared to assist novice teachers in becoming comfortable and proficient in leading a classroom. Each novice teacher in the district is assigned to a job-alike cohort which is served by one Master Mentor. The district moved from the traditional one-to-one format of mentoring to this style approximately one year ago. The Master Mentor is tasked with assisting the beginning teachers in terms of acclimation and support. Year 1 of the program consists of four face-to-face meetings between the mentor and mentee.

Following is a synopsis of those meetings:

### **Day 1**

- TESS Law and Process (One-half day)
- BloomBoard/EdReflect® Training (One-half day)
- Provide access to ProEthica®, which is an online professional development program

### **Day 2**

- Novice teachers (NTs) will explore Chapters One and Two of Intentional Teaching.
- Year 2 Teachers -The Growth Mindset Coach
- The afternoon session will focus on the application of the content of the

morning session. Local systems and expectations for the implementation of the Framework will be explored.

- Teachers will begin work around micro-credentials

#### Day 3

- NTs will explore Chapters 3 and 4 of Intentional Teaching.
- Year 2 Teachers-Growth Mindset Coach
- The afternoon session will include a PLC session to work on the application of the material gleaned from the morning session. Content Specialists and/or Master Mentors will facilitate this PLC session.

#### Day 4

- Content morning session for NT's. All content areas (NT teaching areas) will be facilitated by appropriate NT Master Mentors and content area specialists.
- Content PLC afternoon session for NT's to work together to plan content for the remainder of the year.

The first year of the mentoring program also requires novice teachers to participate in collaborative exercises through BloomBoard®. Novice teachers are also asked to participate in surveys, have a discussion platform, and a resource platform via Google Community® all of which will be monitored and supported by the NT Master Mentor.

The second year of the mentoring program takes a different approach. This part of the program shifts from the personal methods of the previous year to a more practical approach. During this term, the novice teachers work in support groups on BloomBoard® and complete micro-credentialing. Micro-credentials allow teachers to

learn in their way and at their own pace and promote learning by doing. To earn a micro-credential, educators must apply what they learn to their practice, collect evidence of the effectiveness of the practice, and demonstrate their competence in very instructional areas. Novice teachers are provided with resources that support their professional learning and implementation of methods outlined within each micro-credential in their classroom. Effectiveness is measured as micro-credentials are earned by novice teachers within the BloomBoard® program as well as through teacher reflection on the impact of micro-credentials on their professional learning as well as the effect on students.

To serve as a Master Mentor in this program, the Arkansas Department of Education (2014) requires the following qualifications:

- A current Arkansas Educator's license, unless the requirement for a teaching license is waived by law or in the charter of a public charter school
- A minimum of three (3) years of classroom teaching experience as the Teacher of Record
- Been trained in the Danielson Framework for Teaching
- Been rated as a proficient teacher or the equivalent thereof
- Recommended by the school district or building level administrator
- Complete the one day Arkansas Induction Mentoring Model (AIMM)

### **Data Collection**

Before beginning this study, the researcher obtained permission from the school district and the principal from each participating school in that district, to conduct the research in their schools. Once these permissions were received, the researcher applied

to the ATU Institutional Review Board for approval to do the research and begin collecting data (See Appendix D).

The study was conducted during the 2018-2019 school year. Potential participants were sent information explaining the purpose of the study along with a letter of consent. All elements required for the protection of human subjects required by the ATU IRB were maintained. They were assured identities would remain confidential and all data would be destroyed after the study. They were informed participation in the study was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. These protections were communicated to each prospective participant by script (See Appendix A). After receiving this information, the selected participants were asked to sign a consent form attesting to their willingness to be a part of the study (See Appendix B).

While interviews were the primary data collection instrument for this study (See Appendix C), the researcher also kept a journal to record notes, memos, and reflections of the participants. The interview sessions were audio-recorded to maintain *envivo* accuracy of the data. The interviews were conducted at locations convenient to the participants including their classrooms after school hours. Each interview lasted from 20 to 35 minutes.

### **Setting**

The Central Arkansas school district in this study is the largest in the state of Arkansas with approximately 23,000 learners in 48 campuses. The schools in which the selected participants taught have a 91% poverty rate as opposed to the 71% poverty of the district overall (percentages represent the students who participate in the free and reduced

lunch program). The selected schools are in the same area of the city and are a pipeline of sorts. Many learners who start in the elementary schools go on to the same middle schools and high schools, respectively. These campuses have about a 20-25% turnover each year which equates to entirely new staff in four to five years.

### **Selection of Participants**

The participants selected for the study were teachers identified as novice teachers with one to three years' experience who received mentoring support without regard to grade level. The participants were chosen from several schools within the school district based on a list of beginning teachers provided by the Chief Academic Officer for this Central Arkansas school system. After receiving the list, the researcher sent personal emails requesting participation in the study centered on the mentoring program.

The mentoring program in this school district provides a mentor for each first and second-year teacher. Each school has the same guidelines to follow for the program which provided evidence of fidelity of implementation across the schools. The participants included three beginning teachers from the middle school level and five beginning teachers from the high school level. These interviews took place either in the office of the mentor, the classroom of the novice teacher, or the school's conference room and generally lasted between 20-25 minutes.

### **Instrument**

Interviews were the primary means of gathering data for this study. The interviews were guided by a list of structured questions, some of which were followed-up with probing questions based on participant responses (See Appendix C). Individual interviews were conducted with eight beginning teachers. The interviews gave

descriptions, detail, and context of the mentoring experiences provided during the beginning years from the beginning teachers. Interview questions helped to generate the thoughts and beliefs of the participants regarding the impact of mentoring both in the school system and in individual schools and were designed with this process in mind.

### **Data Analysis**

A total of eight teachers participated in the interview-based study. They were beginning teachers who were also new to the school district. The researcher audio-recorded the interview sessions and then transcribed the recordings to make sure that the narrative data were captured accurately. The narrative data were then analyzed using the constant comparative method to determine any themes that arose that might lead to answering the research question (Lincoln & Guba, 1984).

### **Trustworthiness**

Within qualitative research, the researcher is often both the data collector and data analyst, giving the potential for researcher bias (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). To limit this bias, the researcher utilized member checking to validate the results. The transcript of the participant's interview was provided to them to review and provide feedback as to the accuracy of the data. The transcript of the first interview was used by the researcher to focus on the confirmation, modification, and verification of the interview transcript (Harvey, 2015).

### **Researcher Positionality**

My interest in the education of impoverished students is something that I have carried with me since my earliest years. I am an African American, heterosexual, cisgender male born and raised in the Arkansas Delta, which is widely known as an area

of poverty, destitution, and inadequate education. As a result, I have been afforded first-hand access to witness the adverse effects of lackluster teaching and learning. Enhancing my knowledge related to the needs of novice educators in impoverished schools prompted me to delve into this study. Upon graduating from college, I taught in low-income schools that served as professional carousels which brought in new staff members yearly. These constant shifts in personnel made it extremely difficult to build up the culture and climate of the schools. Student achievement was fragmented as well due to the lack of teacher retention. I vividly remember the challenges I faced in these conditions as a novice teacher providing a personal connection when interviewing the participants in this study.

Now, as an administrator in a high-poverty school in the district that was utilized in this study, I see the same struggles as it relates to keeping teachers, especially novice teachers, after their initial years of service and how this inconsistency directly affects academic performance. Many of these beginning teachers over the years have shown glimpses of effective instruction and classroom management with limited assistance. This effort proved to me that while these novice teachers face obstacles in the classroom, they have the potential to be quality, tenured educators if they receive the proper training and support.

## **Summary**

Chapter 3 presented an overview and discussion of the methodology that was used in this dissertation study. It included the research question, purpose of the study, sample, instruments utilized, data collection, and data analysis. The research procedure involved an open-ended interview protocol for beginning teachers who have been involved in the



school district's teacher mentoring program. This chapter provided a detailed explanation of the study. Chapter 4 will include the results of the research project.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The findings of this study are presented in this chapter. The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the impact of mentoring on beginning teachers in a Central Arkansas School District. The interview process gave a much clearer insight into how novice teacher mentoring takes place. The information presented by the mentees during the interview process helped to answer the research question; how do novice teachers in this Central Arkansas School District perceive the influence of the district's mandated mentoring program on their effectiveness and retention as professional educators?

The researcher set up interviews with the teachers at a time convenient for them. The researcher sent through e-mail the approach script explaining the purpose of the research project (see Appendix A). The researcher conducted eight individual interviews with beginning teachers who were participants in the school district mentoring program. Before the one-on-one interviews taking place, the researcher provided the informed consent to be signed by the participants (see Appendix B). Names of favorite singers have been utilized as pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality for the participants. The individual interviews were audio-recorded to allow the researcher to transcribe the data and to report the findings. The researcher analyzed the interview responses of the participants about their unique experiences with their mentors and identified common themes and categories among them. Table 4.1 provides demographic data of the participants who were interviewed individually.

Table 4.1

*Interview Participants*

Name	Years of Experience	Race/Gender	Grade Level Taught	Return
Jesse Powell	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Black Male	High School	Yes
Faith Hill	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	White Female	High School	Undecided
Drake Knowles	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	Black Male	High School	Yes
Vanessa Carlton	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	White Female	High School	Undecided
Chris Botti	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Black Male	Middle School	Yes
Adele Smothers	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	White Female	High School	Yes
John Mayer	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	Black Male	Middle School	Yes
Bruno Mars	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	Black Male	Middle School	Yes

Each participant in the study consented to a face to face interview. Participants were informed that the interviews would involve their thoughts and perceptions about the

district mandated mentoring program and how it affects teacher retention. Specific questions were not provided in advance of the interviews. All interviews were recorded via audio for playback and analysis and some notes were taken during the interviews. For further clarification, follow-up meetings were done by email. I also kept a notebook in which I documented my thoughts and opinions of each interview and how it relates to the research study. All participants were helpful, transparent, and inviting during the interview process. They were very interested in the study and expressed a desire to keep up with the findings once they are presented.

### **Interviews**

Jesse Powell was interviewed in his classroom on November 27, 2018. His classroom seemed to be very dark, yet organized. The interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. I could tell that he was extremely nervous, primarily since this was his first year teaching. In spite of his nervousness, he was very forthcoming and supported the task wholeheartedly. He also expressed a desire to enter the field of educational administration after he teaches a few more years.

The interview with Faith Hill took place on November 29, 2018, in her classroom. This process took roughly 25 minutes. A quick observation of her classroom quickly indicated that her room was a center of learning. She appeared to be very sure of her skill set and strategic plan to reach various types of students. Her persona was that of a veteran educator, and she attributed that to her Teach for America training.

Stern and matter of fact are how I would describe Vanessa Carlton. Her interview took place on November 29, 2018, as well. Time spent with her was roughly 20 minutes. She was interviewed in her classroom as well. She was very eager to share her

experiences in the teacher mentoring program. As a second-year educator, Vanessa indicated to me she has settled into her role as a teacher and has even taken on some leadership roles within the school.

Drake Knowles was the next interviewee on November 29, 2018. His interview occurred in my office after school. Drake is a well-spoken young man who is slowly moving up the ranks in the district. He has been thrown into various leadership positions and has taken them in stride. When talking after the interview, he mentioned how his time spent in the business arena gives a different outlook when it comes to the education field. He is all about the facts, and there is a little grey area with him. In our talk, he showed some apprehension regarding the plans of a new multi-million dollar high school. While he is for the new building, he does not want stakeholders to be promised one thing and then receive a different result.

Chris Botti was the next novice teacher interviewed. His interview was conducted on November 30, 2018, in the conference room on his campus in a space that was clean, neat, and well lit. He displays a stern demeanor and appears to be dedicated to his craft. Upon arrival at his classroom, I witnessed him pulling up videos for his students so that they could practice their music routines. Chris expressed a strong desire to see politics taken out of education. He showed a great deal of remorse because he feels as though learners are not being viewed as young lives needing to be shaped, but rather pawns in a big game fueled by competition and personal vendettas. This self-described “eclectic” feels as if there needs to be a multifaceted approach to ensuring student achievement and if understood correctly, will maximize educator potential.

Bruno Mars was interviewed on December 3, 2018, in the office of the researcher. Bruno has a very interesting back story in that he has worked in the school system for over 20 years, but this is his first year as a classroom teacher. He has a passion for children and works not only in the school but also in the community as well to help give them opportunities to be successful. During our 15 minute conversation, we had the chance to discuss his role in the school and how he has embraced being a familiar face in an unfamiliar position. He has, in my opinion, the qualities and dispositions to become a positive agent of change.

Adele Smothers was also interviewed as part of the research study. This second-year teacher was interviewed on December 4, 2018, in my office and the process took 20 minutes. Her comments were very meticulous and guided towards the makeup of the mentoring process. A quick listen to her revealed a quality that makes for a strong educator; her attention to detail. She made it clear that she is purposeful and intentional in her approach to instruction, collaboration with other teachers, and following the guide of administrative staff personnel.

John Mayer was interviewed after school on December 4, 2018, in my office. He was very detailed and forthcoming in answering the interview questions presented to him. His interview session lasted for approximately 20 minutes. John showed an extreme level of enthusiasm during our conversation regarding his early experiences as a teacher. After the question and answer portion was complete, he inquired about graduate programs in the area and indicated that he is ready to pursue another degree. It was quite comforting to see a novice educator so full of zeal and vigor regarding the profession.

One could only imagine the type of energy that he displays to his learners in the classroom.

### **Presentation of Data**

The chapter is divided into sections and will address each interview question individually. The data offered general information as it relates to the participants' experiences with mentoring. The individual experiences as reported by the participants helped to identify common patterns and themes.

*Interview Question One: What are your thoughts and perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the mentoring program?*

The response of the participants revealed very different views of the school district's mentoring program. This perception seemed mostly due to each participant's direct experience with the program. The strengths of the program were similar among the novice teachers interviewed. According to the participants, one of the most beneficial aspects of the mentoring program was that it allows novice teachers to network. In their opinion, mentoring gave them a sense of community and took away the barrier of novice isolation. These new educators shared the sentiment that being in the classroom alone can be a daunting experience and mentoring allowed them to have a team of individuals who share the same struggles and a chance to discuss those issues to build professional capacity.

Another strength of the mentoring program was the unofficial, informal mentoring that the novice teachers received. This informal mentoring took place, for many of them, in the hallways and offices of their respective school buildings. It was during these times the novice teacher learned about the culture, climate, and expectations

of the principal and other administrative staff members. Several of the novice teachers interviewed expressed deep, extreme gratefulness for the seasoned veterans in their school buildings that took them under their wings to show them what it meant to teach in a high-poverty, low-income school. Vanessa directly expressed this sentiment by saying, “I found more mentoring through informal means of mentorship with teachers who are actually at the school who understand more so, the struggles of my school.”

The participants also had detailed comments regarding the weaknesses of the mentoring program as well. According to the majority of interviewees, there was not enough contact time with the mentor to feel supported. While they were ecstatic about being connected to other novice teachers, they felt as if there was a great divide between themselves and the mentor teachers. The main reason this divide was evident to them is that the mentor teacher was not in the same building as the novice. Six out of the eight participants indicated this was their primary issue with the program. As a result of this separation, there was not any consistency regarding when the two entities met, thus limiting the opportunity for a professional working relationship to be forged.

Another identified weakness was the “one size fits all” approach that is applied to the teacher mentoring program. All of the novice teachers in the study work in schools that are identified by the state department of education as failing schools. The mentees indicated that methods should be taught in the mentoring program to help them meet the needs of struggling learners.

*Interview Question Two: What are your thoughts and perceptions of the approaches used in the teacher mentoring program?*



The goal of interview question two was to understand how the participants felt regarding the approaches of the mentoring program. Upon analyzing the responses of the interviewees, it was quite evident that these individuals had varying expectations of how the process should function.

The school district has recently transitioned from the traditional one-to-one mentoring format to a new “grouping” mentoring. This new format places novice teachers in hubs of five to ten with one veteran teacher to assist in meeting their individual needs. Novice teacher John liked this approach of the mentoring program. When asked, he stated,

I appreciated linking up with experienced teachers and having a small group. It wasn't broad; it was a small group in which there was a mentor and I believe it was maybe five novice teachers and in my case everyone that was represented were at schools that mirrored each other as far as the standards, grades, socio-economics, and demographics, so we felt each other and our more experienced teacher was in a school of a similar background so we had that camaraderie and it worked well because we understood each other.

While some novice teachers welcomed the idea of peer grouping, there were others who were not fond of this type of interaction. These individuals believed the groups were too big to really make an impact on the beginning educator. Jesse stated, “I would like to spend time with my mentor to pick her brain, to learn the ropes, but it is tough to do when she is spread so thin.”

The participants also indicated that there was not an abundance of scheduled time with the mentor. The program, as it is currently formatted, allows for the mentee to do

many tasks independently to build professional capacity, but the novice teachers stated that this freedom might not be a best practice. This lack of quality mentor/mentee time was also due in part to the many scheduling conflicts that arose during the mentoring process.

*Interview Question Three: How has the mentoring program affected your attitude toward staying in the school?*

This interview question was utilized to ascertain if mentoring played a role in the participants' willingness to stay in their current teaching assignments. To fully disaggregate this interview question, I investigated the responses by utilizing three groups: women participants, middle school male participants, and high school male participants.

The women respondents, all high school educators, indicated that the teacher mentoring program had little to no impact on them staying in their respective schools. In their opinion, the shift in the program methods created levels of inconsistency that were too much to overcome. Mentoring, to them, was merely a process of compliance and not a conduit of progress. They expressed a deep disappointment not in the schools per se, but in the district for not developing more appropriate, reasonable activities to strengthen the novice learning process. Faith said:

I think it's a two-fold question: on one hand it did leave me with kind of a bad taste in my mouth and negative experience in the school district because I was a first year teacher, and I was very enthusiastic and excited about getting to be part of this program and getting to gain the benefits,

and so, because I wasn't given that opportunity to the fullest extent, I did kind of have a negative attitude about the school district in general.

The middle school male novice educators, John, Bruno, and Chris also indicated the teacher mentoring program had not affected their attitudes regarding retention. Their responses were more about the intrinsic nature of teaching, rather than the details of the program itself. These participants expressed a desire, commitment, passion, and motivation to serve the students they see daily. Teaching, in their opinion, is a calling, and not just a career path. They realize that many of the students they encounter have never seen an adult male in a positive light. The ability to impact lives is what they enjoy the most. Bruno stated, "Well I've always been passionate about the kids, and even without the mentoring, there's a lot I still want to do as far as education, educating the kids on what they need to be educated on." Chris summarized his thoughts by simply saying, "I want to be a change agent, you know, for the kids that are in need."

Drake and Jesse, the high school male participants, expressed that the mentoring program has changed their attitudes about staying in the school for the better. They both mentioned that if they want to leave, there would be a plan in the works, but mentoring has paved the way for them to become hands-on, effective teachers in struggling schools. Drake indicated that he was pleased with the mentoring program and he believed it was stable enough for him to grow. Jesse expressed an appreciation for the resources and strategies he has gained, and he is in the process of developing a plan to increase the implementation of those tools.

*Interview Question Four: As a novice teacher, have you received feedback regarding your teaching from your mentor?*

The goal of question four was to understand if novice teachers in the study had received feedback from their cooperating mentor regarding their teaching practices. After looking at the replies from the participants, it was easy to place the answers into three distinct groups: no feedback, little feedback, and adequate feedback.

Chris and Bruno were the two novice educators who received no feedback from their mentors. They both attributed this lack of communication to the mentors having busy schedules and not being able to fit them in to observe their classrooms and start the rapport building process. Chris indicated he did know who his mentor was and what school he was located, so he considered that a small victory. Bruno, however, has not been granted that simple step. In addition to not receiving any feedback regarding their teaching strategies as of yet, Bruno also indicated he has not officially met his mentor.

Adele, Vanessa, and Faith all indicated they received little feedback from their mentor. These teachers mentioned that they did not gain any valuable information as they would have liked from their mentor to become better classroom teachers. Adele discussed how her feedback was too positive and not detailed enough for proper growth. She wanted to know not only about her strengths but about weaknesses as well, to become a proficient educator. Faith shared those same sentiments as it relates to concrete details. She stated:

She was in here for five minutes. I'm pretty sure all she did was watch me do a do now, like go through that motion, so as far as that goes I think she told me that I needed to speak louder, but as far as any concrete evidence or details as far as how I can become a better educator, no.

John, Jesse, and Drake were the participants who were pleased with the feedback they received from their mentor. These interviewees expressed a genuine understanding of the critiques and concerns given to them and that those criticisms have made them better educators. Drake indicated that his mentor was very thorough with his feedback and even dropped in on his classes whenever his schedule permitted him the opportunity. They also had the chance to collaborate in professional learning communities, so there were additional moments for them to bounce ideas off of each other to build Drake's professional capacity. Jesse spoke highly of his mentor and how she admonished him to work "smarter, not harder." He also stated her feedback gave him what he needed to simplify his assignments and keep his records organized. John said his mentor provided him with feedback and taught him how to adapt to the culture of the school.

*Interview Question Five: What tools and/or strategies have you gained as a result of teacher mentoring?*

Question five was centered on the tools and strategies if any, those mentees gained through teacher mentoring. Individual responses from the participants were analyzed, and the findings will be shared according to what each person felt like they gained or did not gain from the mentoring program.

Bruno answered this question very succinctly. He indicated he had not gained any tools or strategies from his mentor. This sense of not gaining anything from the mentor program, once again, stems from the fact he has not officially worked with his mentor. He did state he has, however, learned vital information informally from the faculty and staff at his school.

Faith, now a second-year teacher, learned through the lens of informal, school-based mentoring as well. She was grateful to learn how to communicate with her peers, students, and administration effectively. She also was taught to collaborate via departmental meetings and professional learning communities.

Chris indicated informal mentoring and professional development had taught him certain traits associated with teaching. He was also fond of the resources, for example, time management tools, that were available to him online. He mentioned the teachers in his building had assisted him in trying to weed out the daily details of education and how to get his students to look at the big picture of learning. Chris has also learned some resources on how to minimize classroom disruptions that will allow his learners to stay in class even after small disciplinary infractions.

Participant Vanessa also stated she did not gain any tools or strategies from the mentoring program. There was a bit of angst as we discussed this topic. She mentioned during this portion of the interview that by the time she was presented with something that could have been of substance, the school was almost out for the year.

Adele indicated, like Bruno, that she has gained many tools from informal methods at her school, rather than through the formal mentoring process.

John stated in question five that the strategies and tools he gained from mentoring were a result of him adapting when he deemed it necessary to do so. He indicated reaching out and listening to more experienced teachers and other novice teachers assisted him as well. John mentioned in great detail that new teachers have to be willing to step out and find their niche. He said, "I think every teacher just finds his or her own style and rock with that. Some people are sponges and take in everything they see. I just

learn best from myself.” His strategy is to amalgamate what he hears, observes, and researches to reach a level of comfortability in his classroom.

Novice teacher Drake had a different experience as it related to tools and strategies. Drake expressed a great deal of appreciation for learning how to examine and interpret data related to pre- and post-testing from his teacher mentor. This was a significant accomplishment for him since he was teaching in a high stakes testing area and was required to conduct common formative assessments, analyze those assessments, and then build a plan to maximize student growth.

Jesse mentioned that he has grown in the areas of organization and lesson plan building thanks to his mentor. He has also learned AVID tools. AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, and it is a college readiness program that teaches learners how to think critically, build teams, and organize, among other things. Jesse stated these tools had made a significant impact on the students in his classroom.

*Interview Question Six: In what ways has building leadership assisted in your growth as a novice teacher?*

This question was included to capture the roles building level administration played in building the capacity of the novice educator. This question will be discussed individually as well to ensure that personal thoughts were captured in detail.

Chris indicated that his building leadership has been incredible in their efforts towards him. Whether it is during an observation or just passing him in the halls, he stated that someone from the building leadership team always says something positive and productive to him. According to Chris, his administrative team gives him quality feedback as well. He mentioned, “She gives me feedback..... She told me that I'm

redirecting my kids on classroom management with our classroom pledge, so I believe my building leadership is doing a fantastic job, you know, but that's just one example though.”

Faith’s experience with the school leadership was not positive. She said, “Unfortunately last year we had some struggles with building leadership and it was almost really hard for us to bounce back.” She stated the first three weeks started off really well and she felt comfortable with the leadership that the school had. Through a series of unforeseen, unfortunate events, her school leadership changed and they just never seemed to bounce back. She made it very clear she did not place the blame on the shoulders of the individuals who left, but she is a firm believer leadership has to be the core of something and because there was not a strong core and a strong foundation, there were a lot of cracks in the school’s ability to help students last year.

Drake stated, “Building level leadership has geared me towards a more positive view of the school and the students I serve and more importantly, the students I serve.”

Bruno answered this question by showing gratitude for his school leadership. As a novice teacher who has not met his mentor yet, he stated he would have been lost without the guidance and support of his principal and assistant principals. Bruno said:

The leadership at my school is just tremendous and the principal there has helped me as much as she could and the assistant principals as well. They have definitely talked me through many things that I'm going through as a first-year teacher, so I've had a wonderful experience with the leadership.

When John was confronted with this question, his response was not as confident as some of the others. He believed he has been on his own as far as being able to adapt,



learn, and figure out how to go about becoming a better teacher. John stated his building leadership could do a much better job in strengthening teachers at his school. He indicated knowing and understanding running a school is a very complex and tedious task and a lot is going on that he is not aware of, but he felt as though building leadership can do better at building teachers as they are growing during their time at the middle school in which he works.

Adele spoke explicitly about her assistant principal because that is with whom she works most closely. She said she is comfortable making mistakes and taking risks because she knows that her administrator will support her. She said she could go to her sincerely with the actual problems that she faces without fear, doubts, or hesitation. Adele mentioned that even in the frustrating environment of working in a struggling school, her assistant principal maintains a positive outlook and encourages others to do so as well. She stated, “Our students are facing struggles that are out of our control, so we feel a sense of powerlessness sometimes and hopelessness. She comes to work every day with so much energy and re-energizes us all.”

Vanessa indicated she felt like she did not get a lot of support from administration last year. She said, “I was observed I think one time the entire year last year and had again minimal impact or minimal feedback so administration did not have as much of an impact as it could.” She believed her administration was very overwhelmed last year with a variety of different things that happened which directly impacted the support they were able to provide for teachers, but she did think her building leadership was qualified to assist novice teachers. She elaborated on this by saying,

I think the building administration has the clearest picture of what's going on at the school. Principals have the best understanding of anyone else who could be a mentor, and they see the whole picture because teachers at the school only understand what is going on in their classroom. The building administrators have this view that is school-wide, so I think they have a really unique perspective that can be invaluable to novice teachers. I didn't necessarily receive this support even though I think they are very much so qualified to give it.

Jesse indicated his leadership team has made him more accountable in how he does things, both inside and outside of the classroom. He stated that the administration helped him learn how to take his time and focus on the best ways to get information and then deliver that information to his students. Jesse said, "They gave me something like a roadmap, you know, so any time I feel off track, I work to put myself back on track, so that is a good tool and strategy that I have gained as a result of my teacher mentoring."

*Interview Question Seven: Do you believe your new teacher experience would have been different if you did not have a mentor?*

The goal of this question was to understand whether or not the mentee believed that his/her mentor played a significant role in the mentoring process. The answers of the participants will be shared in the following section.

Jesse strongly believed mentoring has helped him make great strides as a novice teacher. He stated mentoring gave him a sense of purpose and direction and without it, he would have been raw as an educator. He was suspicious of learning as he went along but mentoring and his mentor afforded him the proper tools to prepare himself for his

new environment. Not only was Jesse in tune with his official mentor, but his informal mentors greatly enriched him as well. He mentioned,

The teachers here have been a good key to help me. I could always go across the hall and ask the teachers for help and things like that, but as far as protocol, you know, the mentoring kind of helped me on the protocol aspect.

Jesse indicated his mentor made sure to assist him on the small things such as posting objectives and bell ringers that he would have probably overlooked as a novice educator.

Drake, like Jesse, also showed gratefulness for his mentor. He indicated the mentoring program gave him a sense of community and a focal point. As a novice teacher, he mentioned a sense of nervousness and trepidation each time he entered the classroom. Over time, he said, his fear went away due to the conversations he had with his mentor. Drake insisted that if it had not been for his mentor, he is not sure he would be as sure of himself as he is now. In his words, his mentor did a great job in building up a rookie and making him a pro.

John, on the other hand, did not believe his experience would be much different because his personal opinion is classroom experience solely depends on the person and building in which they work. He said, "I have someone who I can go to, but me personally, I like to just take in what I can, and I try to do things myself." He indicated he is not opposed to accepting help, but he is particular to carving out his own style and believes experience is the best teacher. Even though other teachers may be comforted by having someone in their corner or being able to go to someone, he believes all educators

do their things in the classroom that allow them to become more comfortable and effective in the classroom.

Bruno said he feels like he is in isolation now since his mentor has been absent in his professional development up to this point. He said, “I really think it would probably be better if I did have a mentor who has been in the trenches for a while that can assist me with problems that I may run into that my mentor is probably already experienced.”

Adele simply stated her experience would not have been different if she did not have a mentor.

Chris expressed a level of indifference as it related to this question. His growth as a novice educator did not rest solely on his mentor, but on his school leadership as well. He indicated, “Mentor or not; I believe my experiences would be the same because of the fact that I have a fantastic building leadership that will stay on its teachers and will always give feedback to teachers.” He mentioned his administrative team is never negative, but always constructive and it is that consistency that has strengthened him in multiple areas of his growth.

Vanessa stated that, in her opinion, her mentoring experience would not have changed at all. She said:

I think it would have been largely the same and again, I think that is because our mentoring program as it was last year was so like hands-off in his approach. It did not have a large impact on me as a new teacher, and I think that's just based on the structure that they chose.

Vanessa mentioned that the mentoring program shifted to a new format during her first year and she believes that it is going to navigate through growing pains until they find a

way of making this program work. She understands systems change, but she would have appreciated more interaction with her mentor to build a relationship. Vanessa said there has to be a priority in the mentoring process and that is building the skills and practices of the new teacher.

Faith stated as far as the mentorship program goes, yes, she thinks it would have been different. She would have loved to have a mentor in her classroom telling her ways she could be better. She believes she would have grown exponentially by someone affirming and challenging her and her teaching strategies formally, but she did have great mentors on campus that stepped in and helped her.

*Interview Question Eight: What challenges, if any, did you face as a novice teacher? Did mentoring assist you in those areas?*

Question eight dealt with the issues these novice teachers faced in the early stages of their careers and if mentoring helped them address those challenges. The participants were very candid in their replies to this question, and their responses will be discussed below.

Adele believed her struggles were the same things that all novice teachers face. In her opinion, you cannot abstract or intellectualize being an effective teacher. To get better, you have to do it. She said, “No matter how many books you read or how much you study, the only thing that's going to make you better after a certain threshold of study is actually teaching in the classroom.” Adele was okay with making the fundamental mistakes to learn the best way to manage her classroom effectively, teach a rigorous curriculum, be a leader, and have relationships with her students. She was also challenged due to the factors that her students face daily. She indicated, “The systems in

my students' lives are failing them, and that prevents them from being fully emotionally present in the classroom or being able to constructively process their emotions.” She recalled how her students would often lash out and run away instead of realizing that they could sit down and have a reasonable conversation about how they were feeling.

Adele also discussed that a lack of engaged parents served as a barrier of hers as a novice teacher. Many of her parents were busy and struggling, so they could not be there to support their child as she would have liked them too. She also encountered those parents who, for different reasons, exhibited levels of disappointment and resentment in their children which made it difficult for her as a teacher to build a positive relationship with the parent.

Drake indicated school adjustment was the most troubling for him. He stated, “Being a first-year teacher, it was difficult to absorb all of the education and then transfer that into all the other things you have to do if you've never done it before.” He mentioned his mentor was very accessible during the program and helped him to assimilate to the climate and culture of the school and help him interpret some of the things that he had not heard before.

Vanessa dealt with challenges in figuring out how to present the academic content to her students. She said, “I know all this about civics, and I know about world history, but you knowing is not the same as knowing how to transfer that information.” She went on to discuss how there were times when she would give students assignments, and there would be looks of confusion and frustration returned to her because they did not know what she was asking of them. It was moments like this that made her realize there is a steep learning curve in teaching that comes from being in front of learners and trying to

convey information. She explained this is something she needs to model for them without the assumption they are going to get anything told to them. She elaborated on this thought by stating,

They're not going to have a frame of reference, and so I think I really struggled with finding that balance of this is something I need to really go through and model for them versus something I can say go do it.

Another issue faced by Vanessa was classroom management, and according to her, it is probably still her weakest area. She said, "I think that is a struggle for most teachers, especially novice teachers. You have to work at finding that balance of having a good relationship with your kids, but also maintaining order in the classroom and making sure kids are focused and on task." She talked about seeking out ways to redirect learners without making the students feel like certain ones are just being regularly targeted. To her, classroom management is all about finding that balance and finding a way that is fair and consistent which will not interrupt her class but allows her to let kids know the expectations. In her honesty, she admitted it took a while to find a system that worked for her because her goal was accountability not for her students, but herself as well.

After discussing those challenges, I asked if mentoring assisted her in those areas. She indicated that it was her informal mentoring, not mentoring through the school district, that helps her figure out those situations. Vanessa said,

I did have some assistance through my mentoring through Teach for America that allowed me to work through it, but it wasn't through the school program. I also did ask other teachers at my school. I was like, hey what are you doing because what I'm doing is obviously not working

and I just need ideas and teachers here were very willing to talk with me so again that informal mentoring did a lot.

Bruno also mentioned his biggest challenge is student behavior. As he has previously mentioned, he has not met his mentor to figure out how to deal with those challenges. The bulk of his assistance to deal with difficulties with classroom management has come from administration at the school.

Faith believed coming from a different background than many of her students was a challenge and a very eye-opening experience. She indicated that she worked with low-income communities in the past, but this task was a new mountain to climb. She mentioned:

I'm from a small farm town community, so it's not like I'm from this crazy big city and I'm coming to Little Rock, but this was a big challenge. I had to learn how to meet my students where they were, and I also had to learn how to be comfortable being uncomfortable. That was probably the biggest challenge that I faced as a novice teacher.

Novice teacher John talked about his many challenges with student conduct as well. He also had to learn how to utilize a diversity of activities for the children to complete. He expressed knowing his content, but the struggle came from not knowing how to deliver that content, which he had to learn on the fly. His mentor was available to him but did not teach a subject similar to his. That is one reason why he felt like his experience may not have been as effective. He stated,

Although I do appreciate her, she was amazing as far as just being there for me, she taught science. I taught social studies; maybe if it was social



studies and English, there could be a little more blend, but you know we had kind of opposing subject from that aspect.

Chris mentioned one of his most significant issues was trying to adjust to the classroom environment. Classroom management was a significant hurdle for him because what he learned in his classroom management courses did not mirror the realities he encountered once he got in the actual classroom. He said, “What they do not teach you is about the actual reality of classroom management or the classroom environment especially in the urban areas, so that was my biggest downfall.” Chris, a native of the city in which he teaches, admitted he forgot where he came from so it took him having to readjust to this culture so he could understand the population of students he was serving. He mentioned, “There are some kids that will talk to you as if they are your equal because at home, they talk to their parents like that and the parents accept that.” He spends most of his time attempting to reprogram his learners so they may know how to act and learn in a school setting. He indicated, “I have to work on my kid's mind so they can understand what it means to be a respectful citizen of the society rather than you know somebody in the B section in the newspaper.”

Jesse mentioned his primary challenge was motivating his learners to look beyond their present circumstances to reach their full potential. Most of his resistance comes from the students, in his opinion, that need to be listening. His struggle is not with the ones that come up in a good home and have a good background since they seem to follow the instructions and they know how to say when help is needed, but it is the ones who come from unfavorable circumstances, adversity, and challenges. His positive attitude is what he utilizes to try and break down the walls put up by his learners. His mentor has

helped him address those issues head-on. Both Jesse and his mentor work in schools with high poverty demographics, so the students tend to have the same outlook on education, as well as life. He stated, “It is a lot of struggle, so she just gave me a lot of good helpful tools to hold students more accountable, to try to deliver the information in a different way to help them understand and grasp it. I love presenting things differently.”

According to Jesse, these tools not only benefit his teaching practice, but it also helps to build a rapport with his parents because his students know that he will call home to gain the support needed to reach the child when necessary.

*Interview Question Nine: What changes, if any, would you like to see made in the teacher mentoring program?*

Question nine asked the novice participants about any changes they would like to see made in the teacher mentoring program. The results of the analysis will be discussed below and will be reported according to the replies of each mentee.

Jesse mentioned that he would like to see mentors who could be accessed at all times. Besides that, he admitted being fine with the teacher mentoring program. He said:

No heavy changes in my opinion. All programs are up to date. I feel like the tools and resources that they give us and ask us to develop are very key and can be beneficial so like I said I wouldn't change anything except make the mentor more accessible, more reachable but I guess you can't do that because then it won't be a mentoring program: you would have an actual teacher teaching you the game.

Faith mentioned a broader need for mentor accessibility as well. She indicated having a mentor on a different campus was difficult on the novice teacher and that you

have to have mentors within each of the school buildings for various reasons. She said that for one, it would be easier on the novice teachers to be able to walk down the hall versus drive 20 minutes to talk about a problem or question they have. Secondly, as one of the mentors, it has to be strenuous to have eight people to mentor at five different school sites while still teaching in the classroom. She said, “They have a classroom, they have grades they have to put in so you have to have somebody at every building and there also just needs to be more accountability in the program.” She indicated the need for more mentor visibility because that was a significant area of concern. Faith sadly stated she did not even know the name of her mentor.

Adele mentioned a plethora of potential changes for the mentoring program. She expressed a need for fewer teachers per mentor and mentors at the school where the mentee teachers are employed. She would also like to have an institutional means to observe and evaluate the mentor teacher and the opportunity to interview the students of the mentor teacher. She believed in order for the relationship to thrive, there has to be a system to collaborate outside of the classroom. She also stated there should be more frequent classroom observations, quicker follow-up, and more negative feedback or specific feedback to help grow the novice teacher. She said, “I want to feel more connected: maybe check-ins would be wonderful. You know once every couple of weeks. Just shoot me a text and see if I want to brainstorm about anything or talk over something.”

John believes the best change that could be made is to make the mentoring program much more building-centered. He thinks it would have more meaning if it was tailored to fit the specific needs of the individual school, versus the district as a whole.

John would also like the school administration to be more actively involved in the mentoring process. He indicated, “It would have helped a lot more had administrators been doing a lot of the mentoring so they can see exactly the challenges we all were dealing with.” Buy-in from leadership, he believes, will give a better context to the needs and skills of the novice teacher and a stable baseline on which to grow.

Chris would like to have a purposeful selection of teachers especially when it comes to the Arts. He also wants mentor teachers to stay consistent. He stated, “Stay consistent: please call me at least once a week and check on me as if I am your little brother. You know, be that nag that I need.” He understands some mentors want the novice teachers to become independent, but many new teachers need stringent guidance and support before they can get to a level of professional autonomy.

Bruno would want the first change to be mentors meeting with the novice teachers on the first day of employment so that way they would get to know the mentor and plan ways to contact them. This measure is a direct stem from him not meeting his mentor at this point and the first semester of school is almost complete.

Vanessa thinks there needs to be more contact between mentors and mentees. She stated, “If you're not going to return to a system where you're only mentored by people in the building, which I get if you can't do for one reason or another, there needs to be both a formal means of having contact with your mentor that is incentivized in a way that's going to make you actually do it for both parties and a push to form a relationship with the mentor.”

When relationships are forged, Vanessa said mentees would feel comfortable coming to the mentor with problems.

Drake wishes the mentoring program lasted longer. To him, a two-year program would be much more beneficial than the current standard. He stated, “It was a one-year program, and I think that there was a lot of things that could be covered in another year and could also help with teacher retention.”

*Interview Question Ten: Is there anything you would like to add that has not been covered in this session?*

The goal of question ten was to obtain any feedback from the participants that were not addressed in any of the previous questions. Only specific mentees answered this question, and the details will be discussed below.

Chris finished the interview by stating his belief schools need to think more about the children they serve. He feels like the education system is more tied up in the politics of teaching, rather than the actual definition and values of teaching. He indicated, “I feel that I just feel that there just needs to be a change.” He also sees the need to change the mindset of some leadership and teachers and realize why they became teachers in the first place.

Jesse concluded by discussing certain challenges he faced as a novice teacher. He reiterated his efforts in trying to reach students in order to ensure proper learning. He indicated how students would sometime disrupt the classroom just because they do not understand the content being presented. Jesse wants his learners to place more effort in learning, and he feels as though the mentoring process has given him the tools needed to meet his students where they are.

Bruno felt as if his most significant problem in the mentoring program was that the mentor assigned to him was on another school campus. He said, “I probably would

have preferred a mentor being on the campus with me so, during my prep period, I can go and talk to that person face-to-face daily instead of waiting for them to call or trying to set a schedule for us to meet up somewhere. I think that would be the biggest change I would make to the mentor program.”

### **Common Themes**

Further analysis of the data led to the identification of four common themes. These themes are direct expressions of the novice teachers’ experiences in the district’s mandated teacher mentoring program. The first theme identified the benefits of informal mentoring. The second theme dealt with the lack of time spent with the mentors. The third theme dealt with the necessity of administrative support in the mentoring program. The fourth theme dealt with whether mentoring had an impact on teachers staying in the school.

**Informal mentoring.** The first theme that emerged from the data was the benefits of informal mentoring. During the interview process, all eight of the respondents mentioned a deep appreciation for the things they gained from teachers in their building. These educators, while not actively working as district-provided mentors, proved beneficial in assisting the novice educator in understanding the roles of a teacher and learning the culture and climate of their respective school buildings. The respondents mentioned these individuals gave much-needed assistance. Faith said, “I also would not be where I am had it not been for the mentors in my school that really stepped up and tried to help me.” They said the informal mentoring fostered a sense of collaboration, provided resources, and reduced the feelings of being alone in the school. They stated

the teachers in their buildings pushed them to be educational leaders and decision makers, rather than just individuals waiting in the background to be told what to do next.

Two novice educators, Bruno and Chris, have not had any interaction with their assigned mentor up to this point, but they started having seasoned staff members on their campus take them “under their wing.” They stated this had been useful and such a relief. Due to informal mentoring, they were able to ask questions, make mistakes, and receive redirection that they both so desperately want and need.

**Time.** The lack of time spent with the mentors was the next theme. When looking at the responses provided by the interviewees, I noted that the mentoring program was not giving the novice teachers what they needed in terms of having a mentor readily available.

The school district in which the novice teachers work has shifted from a traditional format of mentoring to a cohort style, which means new teachers are grouped according to their taught subject area, skills, and abilities and placed under the direction of one teacher mentor. The indicated goal of the program is to provide novice teachers with “positive opportunities which impact effectiveness and retention.” According to program information, mentees were to be involved in various activities, such as face-to-face meetings with the mentors, Google Classroom®, and Bloomboard®, which is an online tool that among other things provides access to resources that can be utilized by novice teachers to learn and earn their micro-credentials. It also contains collaborative discussion spaces that allow teachers to upload and share resources and micro-credential evidence to gain formative feedback from peers and program facilitators.

The majority of novice teachers did not feel as if the mentoring program fully achieved its goal. In their opinion, the results did not meet their expectations. Upon review of the interviews, it appeared that not spending enough time engaged in the mentoring process created a divide for the participants. Vanessa mentioned:

I think the hardest thing for the mentoring program to overcome was that just there was not enough contact time; both with the other novice teachers, which I think, could really have been powerful to have people from different perspectives come in and talk to each other, and the mentor teacher. I feel like she really wanted to form a mentor-mentee relationship, but there was not enough time.

This time deficiency came from mentors now being assigned at different buildings than the novice teachers. Outside of Drake, whose mentor was actually in his building, the participants discussed the struggles of having a mentor who worked on another campus. This produced a lack of cohesiveness in the mentoring process. To them, not being able to see their mentor regularly made it difficult to reach out and ask for help when it was needed. Bruno stated,

I probably would have preferred a mentor being on the campus with me so, during my prep period, I can go and talk to that person face-to-face on a daily basis instead of waiting for them to call or trying to set a schedule for us to meet up somewhere.

It was this lack of time that made the teacher-mentoring program seem inconsistent to the novice teachers. The participants mentioned they could never get a real understanding of the program because of the struggles with implementation.



**Administrative support.** The next theme that emerged from the interview data describes how novice teachers perceived how the building leadership supported them while taking part in the mentoring process. The responses showed three of the eight beginning teachers believed school leadership played a key role during their mentorship process. These individuals indicated their administrators were very attentive to their needs and receptive to any questions that the novice teachers had. When discussing her assistant principal, Adele stated, "I know I can go to her for any problems and instead of meeting judgment, we will have a constructive brainstorming session of what we can do. I don't have to worry about my ego or saving face."

In contrast, five respondents did not feel as though they had any administrative support while participating in the district's mandated mentoring program. John expressed this thought by saying:

To be frank, I've been I felt kind of on my own as far as being able to adapt and learn and figure out how to go about becoming a better teacher. I believe my building leadership can do a much better job. I understand there is a lot going on that I do not know of but....I will leave it at that. My building leadership can do better at building teachers as they are growing during their time at our school.

All of the mentees expressed how needful it is for school leaders to be part of the mentoring process. They believe administrators have the potential to make or break how a novice teacher perceives the support given to them by the school.

**Novice retention.** The next theme found in the findings was geared towards understanding whether the mentoring program affected the participants' desire to stay

employed in their current buildings. The findings revealed that although mentees went through the mentoring program, it had no true impact on six of the eight novice teachers' decision to stay in the school. All eight of the participants mentioned there were factors outside of mentoring, both internal and external, that have given them the courage needed to continue in the education profession.

John indicated that for him, staying in a school has more to do with the professional and personal benefits that it can offer, rather than just going through a mandated process. He said, "Can I grow here has been the most pertinent question. It is the most pertinent factor of whether I'm going to stay or not." Faith stated the mentoring program left her feeling displeased and disjointed. She indicated she came into the program with high expectations and an eagerness to learn, but was not given a great opportunity to be groomed to her fullest potential.

Adele and Vanessa both shared Faith's level of disappointment with the teacher mentoring program. Infrequencies and inconsistencies were the two terms these novice teachers utilized to discuss their respective mentoring experiences. Adele indicated that her opinion of the school district was made lower due to mentoring. She talked about how she hoped her mentor teacher would be useful to her professional practices, but since she was inundated with other mentees, a void was left in her novice experiences. Vanessa disclosed that she did not gain much from mentoring. In her opinion, the lack of impact was directly connected to the changes in the practice mentioned earlier. She believed her mentor wanted to be an asset by saying:

I think my mentor had the purest of intentions and really did want to help me, but I think the system was not set up in her favor to really make those

changes. Because of that, the mentoring program was something I went through, but it is not something that had a profound impact on my teaching.

## **Summary**

The findings of this study are presented in chapter four. The focus of this study was the impact that mentoring has on beginning teachers in a Central Arkansas School District. The research question was addressed from the results of the interviews of the individual participants. Upon review of the data, themes were defined and explained. The participants welcomed the opportunity to share their experiences. They were forthright and candid in expressing their thoughts and perceptions of the mentoring program. The findings indicated that beginning teachers had a difficult task in embracing the components of the mentoring program. Chapter five will discuss the conclusions, summary, implications, and recommendations of the study.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate the impact teacher mentoring has on beginning teachers in this Central Arkansas School District. This study was completed by interviewing eight novice teachers who have participated in the district's mentoring program. A list of potential participants was compiled after talking with principals of high-poverty schools within the district. An email was sent to each principal and mentor that explained the research and asked for volunteers. Eleven mentees responded initially with three dropping out before the interview process.

The guiding research question for this study was as follows: how do novice teachers in this Central Arkansas School District perceive the influence of the district's mandated mentoring program on their effectiveness and retention as professional educators?

### **Summary of Findings**

Teachers discussed their personal experiences with teacher mentoring. They expressed both the positives and negatives of the mentoring program and gave feedback regarding changes they would like to see implemented.

The study evaluated one research question that sought to ascertain the effectiveness of the mandated teacher mentoring program of a Central Arkansas School District. The school district is composed of 48 campuses and currently serves 23,000 learners. For this study, eight beginning teachers participated in face-to-face interviews to collect data. These interviews consisted of 10 questions and allowed novice teachers to discuss their mentoring experiences. They explained the activities that they believed

made the mentoring experience meaningful and also provided the support that they needed to be successful.

During the study, the researcher discovered themes that affected the experiences of these novice teachers involved in the mentoring program. The research question directly addressed these themes. The analysis of the data revealed the following themes:

1. The benefits of informal mentoring;
2. The lack of time spent with the mentors;
3. The necessity of administrative support in the mentoring program; and
4. Did mentoring have an impact on teachers staying in their school?

The interpretation of the interview data showed that novice teachers thrived when they received informal mentoring from veteran teachers in their school buildings. These interactions helped the novice teachers to grow professionally. Informal mentoring, according to the participants of the study, helped to rid them of the feelings of isolation, which is common among new teachers. This process also served as a substitute for those novice teachers who did not have a chance to work closely with their mentor or been allowed to meet their assigned mentor.

The data above also indicated that the mentees devalued the mentoring process because there was not enough time spent with the mentors. Despite having several activities outlined to promote mentor-mentee collaboration, the mentoring program did not reach its full potential as it relates to strengthening the collegial bond between novice and expert. This lack of time was particularly evident because the mentoring program experienced a shift from a more practical one-on-one method of mentoring to a group

method which caused mentors to not be readily accessible in terms of meetings, feedback, and consistency.

The need for administrative support while involved in teacher mentoring also surfaced while analyzing the data. Some of the respondents mentioned that administrative support profoundly influenced their success in the mentoring program. These novice teachers stated that their administrative staff was attentive, proactive, and sensitive to their needs as beginning educators. There were other interviewees; however, that felt as though they did not have the administrative support needed for optimal professional development in terms of efficacy and effectiveness. Those participants with a negative perception believed that in spite of the daily demands of principals, there should be a focused effort geared towards ensuring that new teachers feel a part of the school team.

Lastly, the research findings showed that the teacher mentoring program, as it is currently operated, had no direct impact on the retention of the majority of these novice educators. These educators indicated that professional goals, personal benefits, and a desire to reach failing students were reasons they chose to continue teaching in their schools rather than placing credibility on the mentoring program. Some of the mentees said mentoring was a mere formality that had no actual bearing on their professional acumen. Others felt as though the teacher mentoring program was disjointed and offered no real direction for beginning educators.

## **Conclusions**

This study examined the thoughts and perceptions of novice teachers regarding the effectiveness of the district's mandated teacher mentoring program. The research

discovered that the mentoring program had minimal influence on the effective and dispositions of novice teachers in terms of professional growth and development. The mentoring program also had no true bearings on the novice teachers choosing to stay employed in the high poverty schools in which they work.

The responses given by participants of this study revealed barriers in the mentoring program. The novice teachers shared how inconsistent interactions, coupled with foggy expectations, propelled them into a space of uncertainty and confusion regarding the makings of a quality teacher. Their statements provided insight on how the mentoring program is operating, both negatively and positively. The findings of this study should be used to help school officials gain a sense of what novice teachers need to be successful in the mentoring program, which could have a beneficial effect on teacher retention.

### **Implications**

The goal of this qualitative study was to understand how novice teachers perceived the effectiveness of the district mandated teacher mentoring program. As the need for new teachers continues to rise, it is imperative that school and district officials work to grasp best practices that can be utilized to not only provide quality training for beginning teachers but be instrumental in retaining them as well. According to the information and feedback gained through interviewing the mentees, the district needs to take an in-depth look at the strategies utilized in the mentoring program to see if they are accomplishing the goal of producing agents of change who can proactively lead 21<sup>st</sup> century learners on their quest for knowledge. The implications of this study showed that the mentoring program of this Central Arkansas School District is not adequately

enriching the skill sets of novice teachers that will compel them to stay employed at high-poverty schools within the district.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the research study, the following list serves as recommendations to the district and school leadership:

1. Design a mentoring process that is specific to the campus in which the novice teacher is assigned. The research showed that a generalist approach did not meet the needs of the participants.
2. District personnel should provide training and expectations for school leadership to make them key participants in the mentoring process.
3. Develop a schedule that allows for quality, intentional time to be spent between the mentor and mentee to foster collaboration, plan effective lessons, and allow the mentor to provide clarity and feedback to the novice teacher.

Based on the research study, the following are recommendations for further research:

1. Extend the design to include low-poverty schools in the district that utilize the district's mandated mentoring program.
2. Examine the impact of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on the effectiveness and retention of novice teachers.
3. Extend the study to include novice elementary teachers in high-poverty schools.



## Summary

Chapter 5 of the dissertation contains an overall synopsis of the research study as a whole. This study focused on one school district in central Arkansas and its mandated teacher mentoring program. According to the data findings, this program is not meeting the needs of its beginning teachers as currently implemented.

Undertaking this high level of learning has given me a deeper understanding and appreciation for lifelong education. Mentoring has a very crucial role to play in terms of building, guiding, and retaining quality teachers. As a school administrator, my sense of urgency has increased after researching this topic because our students desperately deserve to have an exceptional educational experience. The information that I have gained as a result of this study will assist, in my opinion, in building a mentoring program that yields high results that include collaboration, capacity, and student achievement, which is the overarching goal of our profession.

My philosophy consists of three simple terms: listen, learn, and lead. Through this study, I believe that mentoring can be a useful tool to assist in retaining novice teachers if we:

- listen attentively to the needs of the novice teacher and then work to meet those needs in the mentoring program
- give the novice teacher multiple resources from which to learn from while in the mentoring program
- put a strong community around the novice teacher to help lead them along the educational journey, while making the novice a leader in the process

If these things are done with fidelity, our schools should be able to witness a shift in retention, which will lead to a change in results.

This research study has caused me to take a more in-depth look at my administrative practices. To be an effective school leader, I have to continually seek out best practices to enhance the culture, climate, and cohesiveness of our school building. Since I now have an idea of what novice teachers' desire, my goal is to be proactive in establishing a positive rapport with them and to serve as a resource for them. This study gave insight into how a mentoring program should look through the eyes of novice teachers. As these teachers shared their thoughts and perceptions with me, I felt a sense of obligation to make changes that will give novice teachers a chance to succeed in the classroom. For any viable organization to function properly, there have to be key essentials in place. This research study has equipped me; the researcher and administrator, with valuable insight as it relates to what novice teachers' feel are necessary components for effectiveness, which can lead to retention. Now the work begins to ensure that those ingredients mesh in a way that proves beneficial and not detrimental to the educational system.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Approach Script

You are invited to take part in a research study to give your perceptions of the school district's teacher mentoring program. The researcher is inviting beginning teachers within the Little Rock School District who have participated in the teacher mentoring program to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Gabriel Jackson, who is a doctoral student at Arkansas Tech University. You may already know the researcher as a teacher/administrator, but this study is separate from that role.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to take part in a 30-45 minute oral interview. The interview will be audio recorded. There will be a follow-up meeting with you to review the interview transcripts to confirm the accuracy of the information.

Please reply to this email if you so choose to take part in this research project.

Your participation is greatly appreciated in advance.

Gabriel Jackson, Ed.S

Researcher

## Appendix B: Consent Form

### **Informed Consent Form**

### **Arkansas Tech University**

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INFORMED CONSENT SPECIFICS CAREFULLY AND SIGN THIS FORM IF YOU FULLY GIVE YOUR PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.

YOU WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS INFORMED CONSENT FOR YOUR RECORDS.

**RESEARCHER:** GABRIEL D. JACKSON

GRADUATE STUDENT,

CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP/LEARNING ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY

870-718-9147 (MOBILE)

**DISSERTATION TITLE:**

THE IMPACT OF TEACHER MENTORING ON NOVICE EDUCATOR RETENTION  
IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

**PURPOSE OF STUDY:** THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY WILL BE TO INVESTIGATE WHETHER THE TEACHER MENTORING PROGRAM IS POSITIVELY IMPACTING THE TEACHERS' EFFECTIVENESS IN THE CLASSROOM IN IMPOVERISHED SCHOOLS IN A WAY THAT MAY RESULT IN TEACHER RETENTION BEYOND THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF SERVICE.

**REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION:** THE RESEARCHER REQUESTS YOUR VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY. YOUR PARTICIPATION IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY, AND YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY AT ANY TIME. ADDITIONALLY, YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO WITHDRAW YOUR WORDS FROM THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME.

**RESEARCH METHOD:** THE RESEARCHER WILL INTERVIEW BEGINNING TEACHERS IN THE LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT WHO WORK IN HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS. THE RESEARCHER WILL ASK THE INTERVIEWEES QUESTIONS RELATED TO THEIR THOUGHTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE DISTRICT'S MENTORING PROGRAM AND IF IT LEADS TO STAFF RETENTION.

**DURATION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPATION:** YOU WILL PARTICIPATE IN ONE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW DURING THE FALL OF 2018 THAT WILL LAST APPROXIMATELY 30-45 MINUTES.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** ANY INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL. THE RESEARCHER WILL NOT USE YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION FOR ANY PURPOSES OUTSIDE OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. ALSO, THE RESEARCHER WILL NOT INCLUDE YOUR NAME OR ANYTHING ELSE THAT COULD IDENTIFY YOU IN THE STUDY REPORTS. DATA WILL BE KEPT SECURE IN A LOCKED FILING CABINET IN THE RESEARCHER'S HOME. DATA WILL BE KEPT FOR A PERIOD OF AT LEAST FIVE YEARS, AS REQUIRED BY THE UNIVERSITY.

**METHOD OF RECORDING INTERVIEW:** THE RESEARCHER WILL DIGITALLY RECORD YOUR INTERVIEW TO ENSURE COMPLETE ACCURACY OF YOUR RESPONSES. THE DIGITAL RECORDING WILL BE SECURED DURING AND FOLLOWING THE DATA ANALYSIS OF THIS STUDY.

**RIGHT OF REFUSAL:** YOU MAY REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** YOU MAY WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME. YOU MAY WITHDRAW YOUR WORDS FROM THIS STUDY AT ANY TIME.

**FEEDBACK AND BENEFITS:** THIS STUDY WILL PROVIDE NO BENEFIT TO THE PARTICIPANT. IT MAY, HOWEVER, PROVIDE INSIGHTS AS TO THE CHALLENGES FACED BY NOVICE EDUCATORS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING THE NEEDS OF THOSE EDUCATORS, WHICH WILL LEAD TO RETENTION.

**COPY OF CONSENT:** YOU WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS INFORMED CONSENT FOR YOUR RECORDS.

**PERMISSION TO QUOTE:** YOUR WORDS MAY BE USED IN THE FINAL RESEARCH REPORT TO CLARIFY OR FURTHER EXPLAIN A COMPONENT OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK. THE RESEARCHER WILL NOT IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF THE QUOTE. ALSO, THE RESEARCHER WILL TAKE PRECAUTIONS TO ENSURE THAT THERE ARE NO IDENTIFIERS WITHIN THE BODY OF THE QUOTE.

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTARY PARTICIPANT

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE



## Appendix C: Interview Questions

### Interview Protocol

1. What are your thoughts and perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the mentoring program?
2. What are your thoughts and perceptions of the approaches used in the teacher mentoring program?
3. How has the mentoring program affected your attitude toward staying in the school?
4. As a novice teacher, have you received feedback regarding your teaching from your mentor?
5. What tools and/or strategies have you gained as a result of teacher mentoring?
6. In what ways has building leadership assisted in your growth as a novice teacher?
7. Do you believe your new teacher experience would be different if you did not have a mentor?
8. What challenges, if any, did you face as a novice teacher? Did mentoring assist you in those areas?
9. What changes, if any, would you like to see made in the teacher mentoring program?
10. Is there anything you would like to add that has not been covered in this session?

## Appendix D: ATU IRB Approval Letter

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ARKANSAS TECH  
UNIVERSITY

*Office of Sponsored Programs  
and University Initiatives*  
Administration Building, Room 207  
1509 North Boulder Avenue  
Russellville, Arkansas 72801

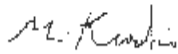
Office: 479-589-4327  
[www.atu.edu](http://www.atu.edu)

November 19, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

The Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board has approved Gabriel Jackson's IRB application, "The Impact of Teacher Mentoring on Novice Staff Retention in Low Socioeconomic Schools," through November 19, 2021. The approval code is Jackson\_111918.

Thank you,



Masanori Kuroki, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair

