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# Beginning Teachers' Experiences Working with a District-Employed Teaching and Learning Coach in the Role of a Mentor in a North Carolina School District

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Beginning Teachers' Experiences Working with a District-Employed Teaching and  
Learning Coach in the Role of a Mentor in a North Carolina School District

By  
Kari Sanderson Hobbs

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University School of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Kari Sanderson Hobbs under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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## **Abstract**

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This study is concerned with the experiences of beginning teachers working with a district-employed mentor. Based on Illeris's (2002) Three Dimensions of Learning, this study sought to understand the cognitive, emotional, and social processes involved in working with a mentor.

This is a qualitative study using the research method of phenomenology through one-on-one in-depth interviews. This research method was used for the purpose of gaining insight by gathering thick, rich data on the lived experiences of beginning teachers.

Nine beginning teachers participated in the study: four elementary, two middle, and three high school. Data collection took place at the end of the school year and included Year 1 and Year 2 teachers.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Mentorship is a valued and widely-used tool by many successful individuals in numerous and assorted professions. Professional basketball player Michael Jordan had a mentor (Harper, 2015; USA Today, 2015). Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg had one (Emerson, 2011; Farooq, 2011). Even Bill Gates, the richest person in the world, had a mentor (Zwilling, 2011). Mentorship is a common practice regardless of profession, status, or perceived success. Mentorship can be found in professional organizations from businesses to schools as well as in personal life ventures. In schools all over the country, beginning teachers and their mentors alike are experiencing mentorship in the pursuit of creating a more effective, more knowledgeable, and more prepared teaching force.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the year 2016, there will be a teacher shortage of 18 million teachers for primary schools around the world (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012). The teacher shortage estimate does not account for middle schools or high schools. The shortage of 18 million teachers is for primary schools alone. Unfortunately, researchers have found that the most talented and academically inclined teachers are more likely to leave teaching, a profession that accounts for 4% of the entire workforce in America (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Schwartz, Wurtzel, & Olson, 2007). To combat this problem, many educational systems have hired more and more teachers. Many of the newly hired teachers, however, do not stay in the profession. First-year teacher attrition has been increasing steadily with 30% of beginning teachers leaving the profession after the first 5 years (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2010). The focus, therefore, must be on teacher retention. Research has indicated new teachers "leave before they have had time to become proficient educators who know how to work with their

colleagues to improve student learning” (NCTAF, 2010, p. 4). The first few years of teaching, therefore, are a critical period of time in a teacher’s career. To address this problem, new teachers are often given a mentor to guide them during their first years. Mentors provide emotional and technical support to new teachers as they begin their careers. The mentoring process, when combined with an effective induction process, can provide a minimum of a year-long period of nurturing and support for those who need it most (Womack-Wynne et al., 2011).

Recent research by Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014) indicated that the nation’s teaching force has changed significantly from 1987 to 2012 and continues to change. Research has “found the teaching force to be: (1) larger; (2) grayer; (3) greener; (4) more female; (5) more diverse, by race-ethnicity; (6) consistent in academic ability; (7) less stable” (Ingersoll et al., 2014, p. 1). NCTAF (2010) reported almost half of the teaching force is Baby Boomers who are approaching retirement. The United States has the oldest teaching force in more than half a century (NCTAF, 2010). These teachers were committed, lifelong educators who are taking with them their hard-earned wisdom (NCTAF, 2010). The Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE, 2014) reported that roughly half a million teachers either move or leave the profession each year, costing up to \$2.2 billion annually.

These trends have resulted in a precipitous drop in experience in the classroom over the past several years. In 1976, the average teacher age was 36; by 2007-2008, the average teacher age was 42 (NCTAF, 2014). Nationally, the average turnover of all teachers is 17% and 20% for urban schools (Kopkowski, 2008). In North Carolina (NC), teacher turnover rates range from approximately 34% in Washington County to as low as 6% in Clay County (NC Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2014). The highest

number of teachers in NC reported leaving the profession due to personal reasons including career change, family circumstances, health issues, to teach in another state, dissatisfaction with teaching, or deciding to retire with reduced benefits (NCDPI, 2014). To reduce teacher turnover and to ensure the development of capable teachers in NC, the state mandated policies on the Beginning Teacher Support Program. NC policy requires teachers who hold an initial license after January 1, 1998, to participate in a 3-year induction period with a formal orientation, mentor support, observations, and evaluation prior to the recommendation for continuing licensure (NC State Board of Education, 2010).

NC's policy on beginning teachers requires specific expectations for school districts. Districts must ensure beginning teachers create a Professional Development Plan (PDP), have appropriate working conditions (such as limiting noninstructional duties or limiting the number of exceptional or difficult students in classes), are provided orientation that aligns with Mentor Program Standards, are assigned a trained mentor, and are observed and evaluated (NC State Board of Education, 2010).

The National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the nation's largest teacher unions, support the establishment of induction programs under which all beginning teachers would be assigned a mentor (Portner, 2008). Hall's (2005) research indicated that in 1998, 44% (or 21 states) mandated new teacher mentoring programs compared to 66% (or 33 states) in 2004. The states from the early study reported that 67% had full or partial funding for the mentoring program. Funding was reported to be one of the major stumbling blocks to mandating new teacher mentoring programs for states that had no established program (Hall, 2005).

## **Related Literature**

Mentoring, as part of an effective induction program, benefits the professional culture of the individual school and school system as a whole. Mentoring is the most complex and intricate role in the induction process (Portner, 2008). Boreen, Johnson, Niday, and Potts (2009) defined a mentor as a veteran teacher who works with a novice teacher during the beginning teacher's early experiences in the classroom. Joftus and Maddox-Dolan (2002) surmised teacher induction should be linked to a vision guided by understanding of teacher learning. Teacher induction should be supported by a professional culture that encourages collaboration and inquiry; includes strong administrative and mentor support, staff development beginning before the first teaching year, and observation of effective teachers; and allows for assessment and reflective evaluation opportunities (Joftus & Maddox-Dolan, 2002). Ingersoll and Smith (2004) explained the strongest factors for retention include having a mentor from the same field, common planning time with same-subject teachers, regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers, and being a part of an external network of teachers.

New teacher mentoring is such a critical key to teacher success that Lasagna (2009) offered four strategies for improving teacher retention—the first being providing high-quality induction and mentoring. Quality mentoring was followed by improving working conditions, creating diversified pay structures that reward quality performance, and providing advancement and leadership opportunities for teachers (Lasagna, 2009). Several factors should be taken into consideration in forming a mentoring partnership (Boreen et al., 2009). The mentor should (a) have a minimum of 3-5 years of teaching experience; (b) be teaching in the same content area or at the same grade level as the beginning teacher; (c) have a classroom close to that of the beginning teacher; (d) be

significantly older than the beginning teacher; and (e) be aware of gender differences, although the importance of this factor may depend on circumstances (Boreen et al., 2009, pp. 11-12).

Kram (1988), who completed research on mentoring relationships between junior and senior managers in a corporate setting, noted the relationships that support career development enable individuals to address the challenges encountered from moving through adulthood and through an organizational career. Kram explained that these relationships accomplish four tasks: (a) they address self, career, and family concerns by providing opportunities to gain knowledge, skills, and competence and to address personal and professional dilemmas; (b) they benefit both individuals involved; (c) they occur in a context that greatly influences when and how they evolve; and (d) they are not readily available to most people in organizations—they remain a greatly needed but rarely used occurrence (pp. 1-2).

Kram (1988) referred to mentoring functions as “those aspects of a developmental relationship that enhance both individuals’ growth and advancement” (p. 22). Through Kram’s research in corporate settings, a set of functions have converged: career and psychosocial. Kram identified career functions as aspects of a relationship that enhance learning the ropes and preparing for advancement in an organization. Psychosocial functions are concerned with enhancing a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in a professional role (Kram, 1988). Kram stated, “relationships that provide both kinds of functions are characterized by greater intimacy and strength of interpersonal bond and are viewed as more indispensable, more critical to development, and more unique than other relationships in the manager’s life at work” (p. 24).

Portner (2008) clarified the roles of mentors compared to evaluators. Mentors are

to be committed to their protégés' professional development. The purpose of a beginning teacher support program is not an evaluation program; the purpose is solely supportive, with an emphasis on trust building and nurturing (Cartwright, 2008). Portner (2008) provided a list of distinctions between mentors and evaluators: (a) mentoring is collegial; evaluating is hierarchical; (b) mentoring observations are ongoing; evaluating visits are set by policy; (c) mentoring develops self-reliance; evaluating judges performance; (d) mentoring keeps data confidential; evaluating files and makes it available; (e) mentoring uses data to reflect; evaluating uses it to judge; and (f) in mentoring, value judgments are made by the teacher; in evaluation, they are made by the supervisor (p. 6). Mentors have a specialized knowledge base, honed application skills, and a varied assortment of adjustment strategies (Portner, 2008).

### **Setting**

This phenomenological study took place in a rural school district in NC. The district serves just over 19,000 students and is composed of 13 elementary schools, seven middle schools, seven high schools, one developmental school, one K-8 school, and two middle/high schools. Qualitative data were collected by interviewing beginning teachers. Beginning teachers in Year 1 and Year 2 were included in the study. Teachers selected were representative of nine schools with eight different Teaching and Learning Coaches (TLCs). Data collection took place during the summer. The data were used for data analysis in which the researcher built patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up (Creswell, 2009).

The district employs 15 full-time TLCs. The county's induction program as a whole includes specific components that involve mentoring. For the purpose of this study, the entire induction program was not examined, only the mentoring component.

The researcher selected participants from nine different schools to ensure the study did not assume an evaluative approach. To reflect the numerous duties of the TLC, the county uses the title “Teaching and Learning Coach.” The TLCs’ job description includes serving as mentors for beginning teachers across the county, working with small groups of students for instruction and behavior management, administering assessments, mentoring students, and leading/guiding professional development and growth across the county. In order to promote professional growth and a spirit of collaboration, TLCs work with master teachers at each school to assist and share their wealth of knowledge. Table 1 includes the specific expectations set forth by the district for TLCs (Human Resources TLCs Job Description/Responsibilities, 2013). The TLC expectations will be important in helping understand the new teachers’ experiences working with their mentors. The TLC requirements directly align with the NC Mentor Standards addressed in more detail in Chapter 2. The six standards created by the state are used as the foundation for the TLC requirements and their supporting statements.

Table 1

*TLC Requirements*Support beginning teachers to demonstrate leadership

1. Establish and maintain confidential relationships with beginning teachers
2. Use a range of coaching skills to support beginning teachers
3. Encourage and support beginning teachers to engage in leadership at the school and district levels
4. Support beginning teachers to engage in collaborative dialogue to improve professional practice and school effectiveness
5. Provide resources and support of implementation of best practices
6. Model best practices for beginning teachers
7. Initiate collaborative dialogue with beginning teachers regarding ethical and professional behavior
8. Coach beginning teachers on methods of advocacy for themselves and their students
9. Provide principals, assistant principals, teachers, and central office staff professional development for local initiatives
10. Assist teachers who are placed on a Monitored/Directed PDP and Mandatory Improvement Plan (MIP)
11. Staff and enhance the Beginning Teacher Workroom, Resource Room, Professional Library, and Professional Development Room
12. Implement revised 3-Tier Response to Intervention in schools

Support beginning teachers to establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students

1. Collaborate with beginning teachers to assess the effectiveness of communications and interactions with students and their impact on relationships and learning
2. Facilitate the development of effective relationships and communications with parents and significant others to improve student achievement
3. Support beginning teachers to develop activities that foster positive collaboration between school and community
4. Expand self-awareness of culturally inclusive practices, their impact on teaching and learning, and assist them in planning, implementing, and reflecting on lessons
5. Support beginning teachers in the development of classroom management and understanding specific behaviors of their students and ways to adjust strategies to meet student needs and maintain engagement and learning
6. Collaborate with beginning teachers to increase understanding of diversity and appropriate instructional strategies to implement and assess differentiated lessons designed to meet individual learning needs
7. Assist in creating a student centered classroom learning environment

Support beginning teachers to know the content they teach

1. Support beginning teachers and any teachers on Mandatory Improvement Plans to design lessons that integrate 21st century goals and skill development with the Common Core (CC) or Essential Standards (ES) and to reflect on implementation
2. Ensure beginning teachers receive necessary CC or ES and state/district curriculum resources
3. Assist beginning teachers in the use and implementation of CC or ES and required curriculum
4. Collaborate with administration to ensure correct placement of content area teachers.

Support beginning teachers to facilitate learning for their students

1. Support the planning, implementation, and assessments efforts to improve instruction and learning
2. Provide additional assistance and professional development in areas of need

(continued)



3. Ensure beginning teachers are fully aware of professional license requirements
4. Encourage beginning teachers to pursue professional growth and to maintain professional practice
5. Facilitate ongoing dialogue with beginning teachers to reflect on and enhance professional practice
6. Support beginning teachers in the use and analysis of local/school-based assessments
7. Support beginning teachers in using a variety of data to make adjustments in instructional delivery, planning, and development of differentiated lessons
8. Assist with training on the use of STAR Enterprise
9. Assist with benchmark testing at Response to Intervention schools
10. Collaborate with principals to interpret school/subgroup data and analyze the core curriculum
11. Collaborate with principals to maintain data walls
12. Collaborate with staff on the use and analysis of universal screeners
13. Plan and escort teachers on guided observations focused on best instructional practices
14. Collaborate with principals on effective use of scheduling to incorporate remediation, intervention, and acceleration periods
15. Support Turnaround Schools

Support beginning teachers to reflect on their practice

1. Meet regularly with beginning teachers to clarify Beginning Teacher Program requirements and licensure
2. Collaborate with beginning teachers in the on-going improvement of teaching and learning through reflection
3. Observe in beginning teachers classrooms to gather data and reflect on instructional practices
4. Collaborate with beginning teachers to select a focus for data collection, reflect on results, and plan next steps
5. Assist with classroom walkthroughs
6. Maintain and implement Edmodo
7. Monitor Teacher Evaluation Instrument to ensure pre-conference, observations, and post conferences are scheduled and completed in a timely manner

Other program objectives include

1. Facilitate New Teacher Orientation at the beginning of the school year
2. Recruit highly qualified teachers
3. Facilitate Summer Institute at the beginning of the school year
4. Assist principals with observations when requested (not beginning teachers)
5. Update and maintain a Beginning Teacher Website
6. Assist with Home Base training and support for beginning teachers
7. EOG/EOC/MSL tutoring and remediation as requested

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*Note.* Retrieved from “Human Resources TLCs Job Description/ Responsibilities,” 2013, [District document]. Copy in possession of author.

Table 1 provides the expectations for TLCs as set forth by the district. Each TLC is assigned beginning teachers to mentor at up to four schools depending on the number of beginning teachers. TLCs have multiple beginning teachers at each school they serve. Prior to the district hiring TLCs full-time, the state provided funding for classroom teachers in the schools who served as mentors. The school district would provide a supplement to teachers who were willing to devote the extra time to serve as mentors.

Over time, the district transitioned to employing full-time TLCs who serve as mentors as one of their duties. The district's goal was to employ one TLC per two schools.

The school district provides new teachers with a Beginning Teacher Workroom, a Professional Library, and a Professional Development Room. The Teacher Workroom is at a centrally-located school within the district and is staffed by TLCs. The resource room provides a number of materials for teachers. The materials include online access to resources for printing, a binding machine, a die cut machine, cutting boards, laminating machines, and poster makers.

NC School Report Cards (2013) noted the teacher turnover rate for elementary schools is 9%, middle schools is 13%, and high schools is 14%. NC School Report Cards (2013) for this district also indicated teachers with 0-3 years of experience make up 15% of elementary school teachers, 17% of middle school teachers, and 20% of high school teachers.

### **Purpose Statement**

The intent of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experience of beginning teachers in working with a district-employed TLC as a mentor. The study included exploring the attitudes and beliefs new teachers experience during their first 3 years in the profession. Using the lens of Illeris's (2002) Three Dimensions of Learning Model focused on adult development, the experiences of beginning teachers was described using cognitive, emotional, and societal/environmental dimensions. Methods of inquiry included phenomenological reflection on data elicited by extensive one-on-one interviews with beginning teachers.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the development of this study. Each

question was addressed throughout the data collection process and analysis.

1. How do beginning teachers describe their experiences working with a district-employed TLC?
2. How do beginning teachers perceive the difference between the support provided by a district-employed TLC and the support provided by in-house colleagues?
3. How has having a TLC employed by the district impacted the self-efficacy of beginning teachers?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions of terms are provided by the researcher to ensure uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study. The researcher developed all definitions not accompanied by a citation.

**Beginning teacher.** In this study, beginning teachers are teachers in their first, second, or third year of teaching. The term is interchanged with “protégé,” “novice,” “new teacher,” or “mentee.”

**Induction.** Support programs designed to improve the performance and retention of beginning teachers with the ultimate aim of improving the growth and learning of students (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In the studied school district, the induction program is comprised of a number of components. For the purpose of this study, only the mentoring component of the induction program was researched.

**Mentor.** Refers to a “veteran teacher who works with a novice during the beginning teacher’s early experiences in the classroom” (Boreen et al., 2009, p. 9). In this study, the term is used to describe the individuals who were hired by the district to serve as TLCs. Although the TLCs have other duties outside of mentoring, the term

mentor will be used interchangeably with TLC. The TLC is employed by the district to serve the new teachers at multiple schools. The TLCs are responsible for guiding, supporting, coaching, encouraging, and befriending the new teachers.

**Mentoring.** The process of personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans to beginning teachers in schools (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

**TLC.** The studied school district employs full-time individuals who serve as mentors to beginning teachers during their first 3 years of teaching. These mentors are referred to as TLCs. The TLCs have multiple duties mandated by the district which include mentoring beginning teachers, working with small groups of students for instruction and behavior management, administering assessments, mentoring students, leading or guiding professional development and growth across the district, and working with master teachers at each school to assist in sharing a wealth of knowledge.

### **Audience**

Novice teachers, teacher mentors, and mentor coordinators will find the results of this research valuable in understanding experiences of new teachers with a district-employed TLC. The research will also prove valuable for gaining insight into ways for improving the formal mentoring practice in the proposed schools.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Overview

There is a great deal of existing literature on beginning teachers and new teacher induction programs, including induction benefits and best practices. There is pertinent and valuable literature in relation to mentoring practices. In this study, the mentoring practice is a part of a complete induction program. The study focuses on understanding beginning teacher experiences working with their district-employed TLC. For the purpose of this dissertation, the literature review has included research on induction programs as well as mentoring due to their interrelatedness.

### History of Mentoring

Mentoring is an age-old practice that dates back hundreds of years. The first known account of mentoring is presented in a piece of literature known as *Odyssey* (Fletcher, 2000). The story is of a goddess, Athena, or Mentor, who undertakes a range of mentoring with Odysseus' son, Telemachus. As the story goes, Mentor begins her role as an instructor and trainer by carrying out tasks for Telemachus until he grows in physical and mental strength and determination (Fletcher, 2000). She transitions into the role of distant supporter and enabler, much like traditional mentoring (Fletcher, 2000). Mentor presents Telemachus "with challenges of increasing complexity as he gains confidence and support is reduced" (Fletcher, 2000, p. 3). The practice of Mentor's mentorship was much like the laws of Hammurabi of Babylon in the 18th century. The law required artisans to teach their craft to younger students (Boreen et al., 2009). For centuries, the practice of apprenticeship was used until it was eventually modified during the 20th century and adopted by businesses and industries. James Cash (JC) Penney became known as the father of business mentoring when he required his store managers

to train a newcomer who then founded another Penney's store (Boreen et al., 2009).

Today, the educational world has adopted the practice of mentoring from the business world. Educational mentoring was first used during the Industrial Revolution when teachers served as apprenticeships to "pupil teachers" (Boreen et al., 2009). Teachers were encouraged to replicate the practices of their "expert" teachers. In the 1920s, states began mandating teacher education courses; and in the 1950s, institutions made changes in educational wording that shifted thinking about the teaching practice (Boreen et al., 2009). "Practice teaching" became known as "student teaching" and "teacher training" became known as "teacher education" (Furlong & Maynard, 1995, as cited in Boreen et al., 2009). In today's classrooms, philosophy has transformed into teacher-centeredness. Instead of replicating other teachers' practices verbatim, new teachers are encouraged to be reflective thinkers and to explore their individual teaching styles (Boreen et al., 2009). Institutions now link practice and theory by working closely with preservice teachers through their third year of teaching to allow teachers to understand the "what" and "why" of their practices (Boreen et al., 2009). The guiding teacher is no longer identified as the cooperating teacher, but rather the mentor. The mentor role has transitioned from that of an advice giver or problem solver to a questioner, listener, and model for the new teacher (Boreen et al., 2009).

### **Teacher Shortages, Retention, & Attrition**

By the year 2016, an estimated shortage of 18 million teachers will affect our primary schools around the world (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) researched teacher shortage and the problems with current solutions to address the shortages. Ingersoll and Smith depicted the problem as a bucket rapidly losing water because of holes in the bottom. Pouring more water into the bucket will be of no benefit

if the holes are not patched first. Ingersoll and Smith claimed past policymakers responded to teacher shortages by trying to increase the supply of teachers. To do this, states, districts, and schools had to recruit new teachers by enticing them with incentives such as signing bonuses, student loan forgiveness, housing assistance, and tuition reimbursement. Ingersoll and Smith noted “patching the bucket” will require schools to be involved in the management and organization of staffing problems by improving working conditions to lower new teacher turnover and improve school performance.

Focusing on teacher retention will prove to be more beneficial than continuously hiring new teachers. Over the years, critics have charged that the teaching profession is an occupation that “cannibalizes its young” with the initiation of new teachers being a “sink or swim” experience (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). In any occupation, turnover is a normal and healthy occurrence in small percentages. Theoretically, a low level of employee turnover is normal in a well-managed organization while too little turnover indicates stagnancy. Most business organizations and educational systems benefit from a small amount of turnover by getting rid of low-performing employees and hiring fresh blood to facilitate innovation (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003, 2004). Lasagna (2009) defined retention as the ability to keep teachers on the job or eliminate turnover. Numerous benefits of retention of highly qualified and effective teachers include

1. Stability and growth among the teaching force.
2. Equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers.
3. Increased student achievement.
4. To save money (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Lasagna, 2009).

According to Breaux and Wong (2003, as cited in Lasagna, 2009) the cost for a district to find one new teacher can total up to \$50,000. Contrary to many researchers, Jenkinson

(2013) dismissed the notion of teacher attrition by claiming there is no reliable statistical information about how many teachers entered the profession in the past, stayed for 5 years, or until the end of their career. Yet, Jenkinson's claims were not supported with significant, statistical references or research. Jenkinson declared society should "celebrate teaching as a dynamic and refreshing profession that needs those who are just passing through as well as its experienced hands" (p. 4). Jenkinson noted that little opportunity is taken to temper retention statistics with thought to contextualization, and "we need not consider the money spent on teacher training as 'wastage,' if the individuals who are trained go on to contribute positively to other areas of society once they have left the classroom" (p. 4). The example of John Adams was given to support the claim. John Adams was a schoolteacher for 3 years before leaving to seek employment in law and later helped frame the Declaration of Independence. Jenkinson's point of view claimed that teaching is treated as a starter career; and if teachers leave to contribute to other commendable work, the statistics on retention are misleading.

### **Alternative Routes to Teaching**

As more teachers enter the profession through alternative methods, the need for mentoring through an effective induction program increases. Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2012) noted more than 40% of teachers enter through nontraditional or alternative routes. Ingersoll et al. studied the pedagogical training of math and science teachers and found that 68% of new science teachers and 42% of new math teachers had a noneducation, academic degree. The findings indicated these teachers had less pedagogical training, which was found to be one of the most influential factors in teachers staying in the profession after their first year. According to the study, 24.6% of teachers who left the profession after 1 year of teaching had little to no pedagogy training



compared to 9.8% of teachers who left who had comprehensive pedagogy training (Ingersoll et al., 2012).

### **Unquantifiable Benefits**

Teacher induction programs are used not only for combating teacher shortages and teacher turnover but also for promoting less quantifiable benefits. In the mentor-mentee relationship, mentors and mentees can both experience positive benefits. Boreen et al. (2009) identified increased professionalism, reflection, renewal, reenergizing, professional satisfaction, and leadership opportunities as benefits of the mentoring experience. In research conducted on mentoring at work by Kram (1988), a young, first-level manager partnered with an older fourth-level manager and had a mutually enhancing relationship. The young manager, or mentee, reported the mentorship enabled her to develop a sense of competence and self-worth and it provided opportunities for her continued advancement in the organization. The older manager, or mentor, reported the relationship enabled him as well to develop a sense of competence and self-worth by passing down his wisdom and experience to someone who could benefit from his interest and support (Kram, 1988). Maxwell (2008) encouraged mentors to “go into the process expecting nothing but personal satisfaction. Give for the sake of giving—just for the joy of seeing another person learn to fly” (p. 16).

Boreen et al.’s (2009) research findings indicated beginning teachers reported emotional support as the most helpful factor in their development. Boreen et al. identified reduced isolation, increased job satisfaction, greater effectiveness with diverse students, better instructional problem solving, better new teacher morale, increased willingness to take risks, and improved classroom management as benefits to beginning teachers. In a study conducted by Oliver (2009), one beginning teacher stated, “one of

the most important benefits of this mentoring program will be to discuss successes and failures, receive guidance and advice from teachers who have more experience than I do”

(p. 7). Another teacher stated,

Even though it is common practice by the experienced teachers to provide support to beginning teachers, it was great to have this formalized. I was always certain that I was not bothering anyone with all my questions regarding school and students. It was really helpful to have someone to turn to in case of any problems I was facing with the students. Also it was great to have someone to bounce ideas off and discuss strategies to make activities more suited to each level. (Oliver, 2009, p. 10)

Schools also reap unquantifiable benefits of the mentoring relationship. The quality and quantity of work-related initiatives is directly related to the ability of the organization’s workers to come together and surpass their expectations (Green-Powell, 2012). The nurturing and collaborating achieved through mentoring are enhancements to an organization’s work (Green-Powell, 2012). Green-Powell (2012) asserted, “people who feel better about themselves and their work will make a better impression on customers/clients. Customers/clients see the positive interactions and, in turn, feel better about the organization’s work” (p. 102). Seven organizational rewards of mentoring include

1. Contributing to a positive organizational climate and promoting a more clear understanding of professional responsibilities and expectations;
2. Increasing employee satisfaction and retention by reducing a new employee’s sense of isolation;
3. Resulting in improved employee job performance, contributing to faster

- learning curves and resulting in a better trained staff;
- 4. Reflecting an investment in employee development and increasing employee commitment and loyalty;
- 5. Promoting a positive image of the organization and reflecting employee-centered values;
- 6. Contributing to the development of partnerships or allies that may be useful to the organization in the future; and
- 7. Effective mentoring that can be one of the best tools for building diversity.

Small amounts of turnover in employees each year is expected and natural (Green-Powell, 2012, p. 104).

Schools must look at the measure of staff and school stability as a benefit of mentoring. Large amounts of teacher turnover are detrimental to a school district's most valuable resources because teachers are at the foundation of a district's ability to provide instruction and promote student learning (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). As a result of new teacher support, districts experience increased organizational stability, coherence, and overall morale (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

### **Effective Induction Practices**

The purpose of a beginning teacher support program is not an evaluation program; the purpose is solely supportive with an emphasis on trust building and nurturing (Cartwright, 2008). Ingersoll and Smith (2004) clarified in-service programs very differently from preservice training programs. In-service training is designed for individuals who have already received basic training and encompasses a variety of activities such as classes, workshops, orientations, seminars, and especially mentoring (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). New teacher induction programs are supported by a plethora

of research on best practices. Moir (2009) noted the best induction programs blend support for novice teachers with expertise from veteran teachers, creating collegial groups that benefit all teachers and all students. Research by Moir included 10 lessons learned from decades of new teacher induction:

1. A new teacher induction program requires a system-wide commitment to teacher development;
2. Induction programs accelerate new teacher effectiveness;
3. Standards-based formative assessment tools document impact;
4. Induction programs build a pathway for learners;
5. Good principals create a culture of learning;
6. Effective induction programs combine high-quality mentoring with communities of practice;
7. Teaching conditions matter to supporting and keeping new teachers;
8. Online communities provide timely, cost-effective mentoring;
9. Policy complements practice;
10. Good induction programs are accountable, not just compliant. (pp. 15-19)

Schwartz et al. (2007) supported developing a working environment that is more conducive to teaching and learning. Creating this work environment can be done by matching assignments to skills and providing a sense of leadership. Schwartz et al. attributed teamwork as a key to increasing teacher effectiveness and keeping teachers in the classroom. Jofus and Maddox-Dolan (2002) indicated teacher induction should be linked to a vision guided by understanding of teacher learning, supported by a professional culture that encourages collaboration and inquiry, and should include strong administrative and mentor support, staff development beginning before the first teaching

year, observation of effective teachers, as well as assessment and reflective evaluation opportunities. Hudson (2012) completed research on school support of beginning teachers and how the support could be enhanced in their educational environments. Hudson described a work-life balance, pedagogical knowledge, and an assigned mentor as elements of an improved school context. The school context referred to the school infrastructure, school culture, and networking and managing people (Hudson, 2012). Hudson's descriptions of the elements included resilience skills, workload monitoring, and intensive support in the first few weeks (work-life balance); guided planning, preparation, behavior management, assessment, and viewpoints in forums (pedagogical knowledge); and modeling pedagogical knowledge and feedback after observations of practice (assigned mentor).

Ingersoll and Smith (2004) conducted a study to determine if receiving more than one support in an induction package influenced retention. Findings indicated as the number of components in the induction package increased, the number of teachers receiving the package and the probability of their turnover decreased (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Lasagna (2009) offered four strategies for improving teacher retention:

1. Provide high-quality induction and mentoring;
2. Improve working conditions;
3. Create diversified pay structures that reward quality performance; and
4. Provide advancement and leadership opportunities for teachers (p. 5).

Ingersoll and Smith explained the strongest factors for retention included having a mentor from the same field, common planning time with same-subject teachers, regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers, and being a part of an external network of teachers. The factors with the weakest correlation included reduced teaching schedule, a

reduced number of preparations, and extra classroom assistance.

### **Effective Mentoring**

In the field of teaching, the mentor plays a vital role in the development and training of someone new to the profession. The primary task of the mentor is to establish a relationship based on mutual trust, respect, and collegiality. Trust is the single most important factor in building personal and professional relationships (Maxwell, 2008). An effective mentor has qualities and responsibilities that go beyond those of an effective teacher. Qualifications of effective mentors include (a) being a skilled teacher; (b) being able to transmit effective teaching strategies; (c) having a thorough command of the curriculum being taught; (d) being able to communicate openly with the beginning teacher; (e) being a good listener; (f) being sensitive to the needs of the beginning teacher; (g) understanding that teachers may be effective using a variety of styles; and (h) not being overly judgmental (Jonson, 2002, p. 9).

The mentor has certain responsibilities that are time-consuming and critical for the new teachers. Mentor responsibilities include meeting regularly with the protégé (formally and informally), guiding the protégé through the daily operations of the school, arranging for the protégé to visit other teachers' classes, demonstrating lessons for the protégé, observing the protégé's teaching and providing feedback, being a role model in all aspects of professionalism, developing mentoring and teaching skills, supporting and counseling the protégé, and providing perspective when needed (Jonson, 2002). In a study conducted by Oliver (2009), one mentor stated, "I deliberately seek out [my mentee] each day (this is not hard as we share an office) to see how things are going" (p. 9).

The knowledge base for effective mentoring is bilevel and complex. The mentor

must focus on both teachers and students. Table 2 by Achinstein and Athanases (2006) displays the bilevel nature of the knowledge base for mentoring.

Table 2

*The Bilevel Nature of the Knowledge Base for Mentoring*

	Learners and Learning	Curriculum and Teaching	Contexts and Purposes
Targeting New Teachers	Novice as adult learner Novice development needs Novice knowledge base, strategies, and cultural competence Novice's reflectivity level and receptivity to change	Professional knowledge: content, standards, assessment Knowledge of guiding educational reform and inquiry Pedagogies of mentoring Roles and interactional stances Languages of mentoring	Embedded professional contexts and communities Organizational and political literacy Leadership and change agency Philosophies of induction
Targeting students	Students as learners, individuals, and group members Learning theory Cultural competence Pedagogical learner knowledge	General pedagogical knowledge Content knowledge Pedagogical content knowledge Reform-focused and culturally responsive teaching Content standards and assessment	Schools and society Social and political contexts Classroom and community contexts that shape learning Educational philosophies

*Note.* Adapted from "Mentors in the Making: Developing New Leaders for New Teachers," by Achinstein and Athanases (2006).

Table 2 shows the bilevel nature of the mentoring practice. The mentor must assume a bifocal perspective where the mentor focuses on the new teacher up close while holding the big picture in view, which is the students, their learning, and their needs (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006). The bifocal perspective makes the mentoring practice

complex. Mentors face conflicts in meeting the needs of both adult learners and students while maintaining a trusting relationship with the teacher.

Mentoring requires commitment and a willingness to extend oneself for another person. Mentoring requires leaders to get past the discomfort of having difficult conversations for the sake of the people they lead (Maxwell, 2008). Mentors are focused on raising others to a higher level, demanding a change in ego (Jonson, 2002; Maxwell, 2008). Maxwell (2008) supported the Pareto (80/20) Principle which indicates

if you focus your attention on the top 20 percent in anything you do, you will get an 80 percent return—in the case of developing people, you should spend 80 percent of your time developing only the top 20 percent of the people around you. (p. 13)

This principle, however, does not mean abandoning some beginning teachers to only work with the best 20%, but rather limiting the number of mentees a mentor takes on. If mentors try to take responsibility for too many protégés, they will be spreading themselves too thin (Maxwell, 2008).

In many schools, teachers work in a setting where encouragement of interaction is little and feelings of isolation can brew. Effective schools can create more effective mentoring. Hicks, Glasglow, and McNary (2005) identified the eight characteristics of mentoring in effective schools: schools promoted mentoring from the whole person perspective, mentors were proactive, mentors took the lead in providing information ahead of time and worked with new teachers much like an aide helping with paperwork, mentors role-played as parents with the new teacher, mentors role-played student management and discipline scenarios, mentors met frequently with new teachers and sought them out, administrator's expectations for the mentors were that their role was



vital, and mentors focused on the assimilation of their new teachers into the total school culture (p. 20). Hicks et al. offered 81 research-based strategies for new teacher induction, training, and support. The strategies range from encouraging new teachers to think about homework from the perspective of their students to encouraging beginning teachers to explore and reflect on their own individual beliefs about privilege, bias, diversity, and multicultural education.

### **Mentoring and Adult Learning**

The structure and practice of mentoring has shifted over the years. Mentees are encouraged to share responsibility for the learning setting, priorities, and resources. Just as education has transformed from teacher-centered instruction, mentoring has moved to a learning partnership. Zachary (2000) defined the learning partnership as “congruent with the learner-centered mentoring paradigm, which is grounded in knowledge about adult learning . . . the mentee plays a more active role in the learning than the former mentor-driven paradigm” (p. 3). The mentor has moved from a position of authority to a role of facilitator. The shift in mentoring practice is consistent with what research shows about andragogy, or adult learning, by Knowles (1980):

1. Their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human being.
2. They accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning.
3. Their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles.
4. Their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and their orientation toward learning

shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness (pp. 44-45).

Effective mentoring is the application of adult learning theory. Knowles (1980) described adults as “having lived longer, they have accumulated a greater *volume* of experiences. But they have also had different *kinds* of experiences” (p. 50). The four assumptions of adult learning align to the changing paradigm of mentoring. Table 3 displays Zachary’s (2000) elements in the learner-centered mentoring paradigm that support elements of adult learning.

Table 3

*Elements in the Learner-Centered Mentoring Paradigm*

Mentoring Element	Change from	Change to	Adult Learning Principle
Mentee Role	Passive receiver	Active partner	Adults learn best when they are involved in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning.
Mentor Role	Authority	Facilitator	The role of the facilitator is to create and maintain a supportive climate that promotes the conditions necessary for learning to take place.
Learning process	Mentor directed and responsible for mentee's learning.	Self-directed and mentee responsible for own learning	Adult learners have a need to be self-directing
Length of relationship	Calendar focus	Goal determined	Readiness for learning increases when there is a specific need to know.
Mentoring relationship	One life=one mentor; one mentor=one mentee	Multiple mentors over a lifetime and multiple models for mentoring: individual, group, peer models	Life's reservoir of experience is a primary learning resource; the life experiences of others add enrichment to the learning process.
Setting	Face-to-face	Multiple and varied venues and opportunities	Adult learners have an inherent need for immediacy of application.
Focus	Product oriented; knowledge transfer and acquisition	Process oriented; critical reflection and application	Adults respond best to learning when they are internally motivated to learn.

*Note.* Adapted from "The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships," by Zachary (2000).

Table 3 indicates the changing paradigm of mentoring as well as the adult-supporting-adult learning principle. Zachary (2000) stated the "more the mentor is

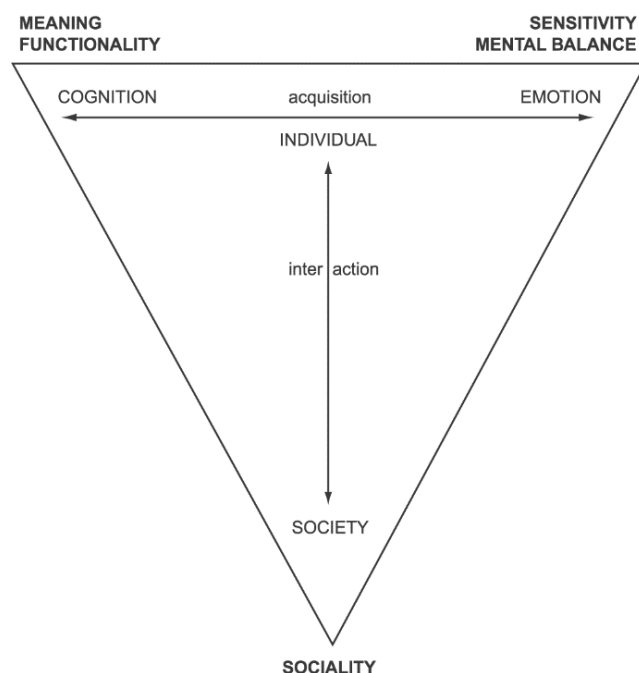
engaged in facilitating the learning relationship, the more the facilitator engages the mentee in the learning process by creating a climate conducive of learning” (p. 3). As the mentoring relationship evolves, the participants share accountability and responsibility for achieving the desired goals.

Knowles (1980) described the transition from childhood to adulthood: a self-concept of dependency is encouraged and reinforced as children; however, in adulthood, an individual’s self-concept becomes a self-directing personality. Adults have been deeply conditioned by previous schooling to perceive their role as an adult learner to be a passive receiver of knowledge. The adult perception presents a problem for teachers of adults who must encourage the adults to discover that they can take responsibility for their own learning (Knowles, 1980). Teachers of adults should take into consideration Knowles’s implications for practice: the learning climate must be conducive to learning so the adult feels at ease; adults need to engage in self-diagnosis of needs; adults should be participants in the planning process; teachers should conduct learning experiences that are the mutual responsibility of learners and teachers; and adults should engage in self-evaluation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Illeris’s (2002) three dimensions of learning.** Learning is a function of central importance for human nature (Illeris, 2002). Illeris’s comprehensive theory of learning asserts that learning comprises three different dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and social (Illeris, 2002, 2003, 2004). Each dimension is inclusive of work by Piaget, Freud, and Marx. Traditionally, learning theory has explored one dimension in depth but as a result limited applicability to other areas due to the singular focus. Illeris, however, created a plausible, coherent, and comprehensive theory of a very complex subject.

According to the theory, learning, thinking, remembering, understanding, and similar functions are not only cognitive matters. The acquisition process also has an emotional side with both dimensions embedded in a societally situated context. The figure displays an attempt by Illeris to display the concept.



*Figure.* Illeris's illustration of the dimensions of learning. Adapted from "Transformative Learning In the Perspective of a Comprehensive Learning Theory" by Illeris (2004), *Journal of Transformative Education*, 2, p. 82. Copyright 2004 by Sage Publications.

The cognitive function represents the idea that learning has a content of skill or meaning. The knowledge or skills of the learner build understanding and proficiencies, and the learner seeks to construct meaning and the ability to deal with life challenges to develop personal functionality (Illeris, 2002, 2003, 2004). The emotional dimension encompasses mental energy, feelings, and motivations. The ultimate function is to secure a mental balance of the learner and develop personal sensitivity. The third function, the social dimension, deals with external interaction including participation, communication,

and cooperation. Learners participate in the personal integration of themselves within the community and society with the goal to build up their sociality. This dimension takes place through the cognitive and emotional dimension. Each learning event consists of a learning process that includes perception, transmission, experience, imitation, activity, or participation.

Illeris's model also indicates that there are four different levels of learning: cumulative, assimilative, accommodative, and transformative. Cumulative refers to mechanical learning that takes place in isolation. Assimilation, the most common type, is learning by addition. This is when elements of new learning are linked with existing patterns of learning. Accommodation is when the learner breaks down new knowledge and transforms it to be linked to the new situation. Finally, transformative learning is when the learner experiences crisis-like circumstances and is forced to learn from the event and change oneself. The framework of the four fundamental learning types are very different in scope and complexity; however, one is no more valuable than another according to Illeris (2004).

**Rationale for theoretical framework.** Illeris's model of learning deals with the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of adult learning, therefore it was used to examine the beginning teachers' experiences working with their TLC. Boreen et al.'s (2009) findings indicated that new teachers often face problems associated with classroom management, diverse populations, and lesson planning. These cognitive aspects of the profession are intertwined with the emotional dimensions through teachers' frustrations, successes, contentment, insecurities, and other emotions. These two dimensions, cognitive and emotional, allow for the social dimension in teaching to take place. New teachers interact with their surroundings and integrate themselves into their

school community. The triangulation of the three dimensions allows for new teachers to engage in the learning process as it is “stretched out between the development of functionality, sensibility, and sociality” (Illeris, 2003, p. 399).

### **Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1995) referred to self-efficacy as the “belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p. 2). An individual’s perception of self-efficacy determines how much effort they are willing to exert and how long they will persist in the face of aversive experiences (Bandura, 1982). Self-efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act (Bandura, 1995). Bandura (1982) asserted an aid to good performance is a strong sense of self-efficacy to withstand failures in addition to a degree of uncertainty to stimulate preparatory acquisition of knowledge and skill. People’s self-efficacy beliefs form based on four types of experiences: (1) mastery experiences, (2) vicarious experiences, (3) social persuasion, and (4) psychological and emotional states (Bandura, 1995). Mastery experiences are the most effective means to create a strong sense of self-efficacy. When people believe they can succeed, they continue through tough times and emerge stronger from adversity. These types of experiences involve acquiring the cognitive, behavioral, and self-regulatory tools necessary to manage varying life circumstances (Bandura, 1995). Vicarious experiences are situations in which a person learns from watching someone else. Individuals who view social models similar to themselves develop a sense of self-efficacy by watching others master circumstances through perseverant effort. The greater the assumed similarity to the models, the greater the influence of successes or failures on the individual (Bandura, 1995). Social persuasion is effective when individuals are persuaded verbally of their

capabilities. These individuals are more likely to exert and sustain more effort because they are boosted to succeed. Unfortunately, however, it is easier to undermine the benefits of social persuasion than it is to instill high beliefs. Self-efficacy builders must structure situations for individuals that lead to their success rather than exposing them to situations prematurely (Bandura, 1995). People rely on their psychological and emotional state to judge their capabilities. Stress reactions, fatigue, and mood are factors that can influence an individual positively or negatively. The intensity of psychological and emotional reaction is not as indicative as the interpretations of the reactions. People with high self-efficacy view their current state as energizing, whereas people with self-doubt view their state as debilitating (Bandura, 1995).

### **NC Beginning Teacher Policy**

NC currently implements policy on the Beginning Teacher Support Program. The most recent policy update, which occurred in 2010, mandates any teacher with an initial teaching license after January 1, 1998, to participate in a 3-year induction program. The induction program must include a formal orientation, mentor support, and observations and evaluation prior to the recommendation for continuing licensure (NC State Board of Education, 2010). Any teacher with nonpublic educational experience may be exempt provided employer request to the state. The following policies were identified in the NC State Board of Education (2010) Policy Manual.

Policy 4.20 requires beginning teachers to develop a PDP in collaboration with the mentor and administration. Throughout the school year, formative assessment meetings must be conducted to reflect on the progress of the beginning teacher in meeting the goals.

Policy 4.30 described the working conditions beginning teachers should be



provided. The policy identified that a beginning teacher should be (a) assigned in the area of licensure; (b) assigned a mentor early, in the licensure area, and in close proximity; (c) provided orientation that includes state, district, and school expectations; (d) involved in limited preparations; (e) limited in noninstructional duties; (f) limited in number of exceptional or difficult students; and (g) involved in no extracurricular assignments unless requested in writing by the beginning teacher.

Policy 4.40 outlined the orientation expectations provided to new teachers. New teachers should be provided orientation prior to the arrival of students or during the first 10 days of school if employment takes place during the year. The orientation must consist of an overview of the school and school system's goals, policies, and procedures; a description of available services and training opportunities; the Beginning Teacher Support Program and the process for achieving a continuing license; the NC Teacher Evaluation Process; the NC Standard Course of Study; local curriculum guides; the safe and appropriate use of seclusion and restraint of students; the State's ABC's Program; and the State Board of Education's Mission and Goals

Policy 4.50 explained the mentor assignment should be aligned with the Standards of the Beginning Teacher Support Program (explained in more detail in the next section).

Policy 4.55 mandated the responsibility of training mentors to the school systems. Districts may choose a program to use or develop their own, but mentors must attain the knowledge, skills, and attitude to be an effective instructional coach, an emotional support, and an organizational guide.

Policy 4.60 described the observation and evaluation requirements for new teachers. New teachers must be observed at least three times by a school administrator and at least once by another teacher. Postconferences must be conducted after the

observation and observers must be appropriately trained.

Policy 4.80 outlined the beginning teacher timeline. A Year 1 teacher is assigned a mentor, develops a PDP, is provided orientation, completes required professional development, and is observed at least four times concluding with a summative evaluation. Year 2 and Year 3 beginning teachers continue the same tasks in the subsequent years.

Policy 4.90 explained the process of converting teacher licenses from initial to continuing. The individual designated by the school district is responsible for approving the acceptance of approval continuing license.

Policy 4.100 stated the act of issuing a license is through the State of NC and not a decision of the local school district.

Policy 4.120 described the role of the school district in developing an annual plan and providing a comprehensive program to new teachers. Beginning Teacher Support Plans should meet the following requirements:

1. Describe adequate provisions for efficient management of the program.
2. Designate, at the local level, an official to verify eligibility of beginning teachers for a continuing license.
3. Provide for a formal orientation for beginning teachers which includes a description of available services, training opportunities, the teacher evaluation process, and the process for achieving a continuing license.
4. Address compliance with the optimum working conditions for beginning teachers identified by the SBE.
5. Address compliance with the mentor selection, assignment, and training guidelines identified by the SBE.
6. Provide for the involvement of the principal or the principal's designee in

supporting the beginning teacher.

7. Provide for a minimum of four observations per year in accordance to GS 115C-333, using the instruments adopted by the SBE for such purposes. The plan must address the appropriate spacing of observations throughout the year, and specify a date by which the annual summative evaluation is to be completed.
8. Provide for the preparation of a Professional Development Plan (PDP) by each beginning teacher in collaboration with the principal or the principal's designee and the mentor teacher.
9. Provide for a formal means of identifying and delivering services and technical assistance needed by beginning teachers.
10. Provide for the maintenance of a cumulative beginning teacher file that contains the PDP and evaluation report(s).
11. Provide for the timely transfer of the cumulative beginning teacher file to successive employing LEAs, charter schools, or nonpublic institutions within the state upon the authorization of the beginning teacher.
12. Describe a plan for the systematic evaluation of the Beginning Teacher Support Program to assure program quality, effectiveness, and efficient management.
13. Document that the local board of education has adopted the LEA plan or that the charter school or nonpublic institution plan has been approved by the SBE.  
(NC State Board of Education, 2010, p. 5)

Policy 4.130 mandated the district to submit an annual plan that provides evidence of the proficiency of the program. Every 5 years, the Department of Public

Instruction reviews and verifies the proficiency of the districts' Beginning Teacher Support Program in order to ensure effectiveness.

### **NC Mentor Standards**

The State of NC developed mentor standards that align with the state's Professional Teaching Standards, 21st century standards, and the new teacher evaluation system (NCDPI, 2010). The standards focus on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions new teachers need and identify how mentors can help them achieve their goals (NCDPI, 2010):

1. Standard 1—Mentors support beginning teachers to support leadership.
2. Standards 2—Mentors support beginning teachers to establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students.
3. Standard 3—Mentors support beginning teachers to know the content they teach.
4. Standard 4—Mentors support beginning teachers to facilitate learning to their students.
5. Standard 5—Mentors support beginning teachers to reflect on their practice.

According to the NCDPI (2010), developing leadership for beginning teachers encompasses building a trusting relationship with the teacher, utilizing appropriate communication skills, making the new teacher aware of leadership opportunities, and advocating for new teachers. Mentors are also knowledgeable about best practices and ethical, professional standards. Establishing a respectful environment for diverse students calls for the mentor to support the teacher in establishing a relationship with the students, parents, and community. New teachers are encouraged to honor and respect diversity as well as to reach students with various learning needs by creating an optimal

classroom environment. Mentors support beginning teachers in the curriculum they teach by providing necessary resources and collaborating to develop curriculum plans.

Supporting new teachers involves supporting their instructional practice, professional practice, and student assessment. Mentors aim to provide facilitation assistance in order to improve teacher instruction and student learning. Mentors encourage data collection and reflective practice, and they allocate their time to effective coaching and time management (NCDPI, 2010). The state developed a self-assessment tool similar to the teacher assessment tool used in the teacher evaluation system (Appendix A). The self-assessment was created for mentors to determine if they are meeting the standards set by the state.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of beginning teachers in working with a district-employed mentor. This chapter presents the methodology that was employed to carry out the study. Specifically, the chapter describes the methodology, data collection, steps of data collection, data analysis, validation of data, role of the researcher, limitations, and delimitations and reports the findings.

### Methodology

**Research design.** Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research founded by Edmund Husserl (Richards & Morse, 2007). Phenomenological research is concerned with “examining the lived experiences or lifeworlds of people” (Hatch, 2002, p. 29) and describes what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (Creswell, 2013). Van Manen (1990) described meaning as “multi-dimensional and multi-layered” (p. 78). One of the most widely used phenomenological approaches in education is hermeneutic phenomenology. This type of approach is based on the belief that knowledge comes into being through language and understanding (Richards & Morse, 2007). According to Richards and Morse (2007), understanding and interpretation are intertwined and interpretation is an evolving process. It offers a descriptive, reflective, interpretative, and engaging mode of inquiry from which the essence of an experience may be elicited (Richards & Morse, 2007). The essence of something is referred to as “what makes a thing what it is” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). In this study, the researcher collected data from persons who experience the phenomenon and developed a composite description of

the essence of the experience.

**Design rationale.** Richards and Morse (2007) asserted there are two major assumptions that underlie phenomenology. The first assumption is that perceptions present us with evidence of the world. The second assumption is that human existence is meaningful and of interest in the sense that we are always conscious of something. This study engaged these two assumptions through examining the experiences of the beginning teachers working with a TLC. The beginning teachers offered their perceptions of working with a district-employed TLC as an evidence of the mentorship phenomenon. The mentees' perceptions were meaningful and of interest for the purpose of understanding their lived experiences with the phenomenon. Human behavior occurs in the context of four existentialisms: relationships to things, people, events, and situations (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 50). Van Manen (1990) identified the four existentialisms:

1. Lived space [spatiality].
2. Lived body [corporeality].
3. Lived time [temporality].
4. Lived human relation [relationality or communality] (p. 101).

Beginning teachers shape their behavior based on these four existentialisms in the educational setting through the school as a space, their personal selves or bodily presence, the time (past, present, and future), and their relationships with mentors as well as other colleagues. Each of the four existentialisms cannot be separated; they form an intricate unity called the lifeworld (van Manen, 1990).

**Theoretical framework.** Illeris's (2002) Three Dimensions of Learning was used to understand the beginning teachers' experiences working with their TLC. Illeris's

framework combines the cognitive, emotional, and social elements of learning. All learning has a content of skill or meaning (Illeris, 2002). When entering the teaching profession, teachers are challenged to acquire skills necessary to increase student learning. For beginning teachers, Illeris's element of cognitive learning is exceptionally relevant. Teachers must have knowledge in classroom management, curriculum and instruction, and communication. All learning is an emotional process simultaneously involving emotions, attitudes, and motivations (Illeris, 2002). Beginning teachers encounter a whirlwind of emotion as they transition from inexperienced newcomers to polished professionals. Research supports the emotional branch of learning by indicating a mentor's parental role to his/her protégés and his/her duty to be a good listener (Hicks et al., 2005; Jonson, 2002). Illeris's (2002) social element of learning deals with the interaction between the individual and his/her surroundings. Mentorship calls for establishing a connection with others to create mutual understanding (Zachary, 2000). Beginning teachers interact with their mentors, their colleagues, their students, and the community. Each interaction shapes his/her learning.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection took place at the end of the school year. Nine beginning teachers in Year 1 and Year 2 participated voluntarily. Teachers were representative of nine schools with eight different TLCs. Data were collected through two in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher and were in the form of "lived-experience descriptions" (van Manen, 1990, p. 55). Initial interviews were conducted by the researcher using guiding questions. After preliminary data analysis, the researcher conducted another interview with each participant to understand the beginning teachers' experiences in more depth. Interview questions for the follow-up interview were created after initial data analysis.



Interview questions for the first interview (Appendix B) were developed by the researcher and validated through the use of a pilot study. Interview questions for the second interview were developed after preliminary data analysis (Appendix C). Both sets of interview questions were aligned with the three research questions as well as Illeris's (2002) Three Dimensions of Learning. Table 4 displays the alignment of research questions with interview questions and the dimensions of Illeris's theory.

Table 4

*Alignment of Questions*

Research Questions	Alignment of First Interview Questions	Alignment of Second Interview Questions	Illeris's Three Dimensions
1. How do beginning teachers describe their experiences working with a district-employed TLC?	4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 21, 22	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	Cognitive, emotional, social
2. How do beginning teachers perceive the difference between the support provided by a district-employed TLC and the support provided by in-house colleagues?	9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 22	1, 2, 3, 9, 10	Cognitive, emotional, social
3. How has having a TLC employed by the district impacted the self-efficacy of beginning teachers?	17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22	1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	Cognitive, emotional, social

Several interview questions addressed more than one research question. For example, interview question nine from the first interview addressed both Research Questions 1 and 2. The cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of Illeris's learning

theory were included for each research question. The researcher anticipated participant responses to address all three dimensions.

The researcher included three beginning teachers in the pilot study. The researcher conducted interviews with two participants and then revised the interview questions before interviewing the third participant. After the first two interviews, the researcher added additional interview questions and separated several questions into parts. The first two pilot study interviews were not successful in collecting sufficient data; the interviews were very short, and the participants did not elaborate with enough detail. The two initial interviews were completed in 15 minutes while the third interview was completed in 30 minutes. Question 11, “Does having a coach employed through the district have an impact on your teaching, professional identity, or motivation to remain in the teaching profession,” was revised into three separate questions. Question 6, “What has been instrumental in the profession so far? Are there certain resources, training, people, structures, etc., that have aided in your success,” was also broken into separate questions. Both questions were split into separate questions because participants did not address each part of the question as anticipated. Additional questions such as “How would you describe your experience working with your TLC?” and “How would you describe your experience working with your colleagues” were added. Questions were added to gather more details by encouraging participants to elaborate on their experiences. The third pilot study interview was conducted, and the researcher gathered more detailed data. The pilot study served as an opportunity for the researcher to become familiar with the interviewing process and understand desirable conditions of interviews. The second pilot study interview was initially scheduled for a weekday after school but the participant had to postpone until a Friday afternoon. The postponed time was not

conducive for collecting data because the participant was anxious to leave for the weekend. The researcher recorded and transcribed the pilot study interviews. The researcher asked participants to offer their opinions on the clarity of the interview questions. Questions were revised according to the feedback and data gathered from the participants. Permission from the superintendent was requested prior to beginning research (Appendix D).

To create the second set of interview questions, the researcher completed initial data analysis. The researcher created themes based on participant responses. The interview questions were developed based on areas in which the researcher needed to gain a better understanding. For example, one of the initial themes was collaboration, so the researcher asked questions in the second interview that would clarify the type of bond the teacher had with the mentor and with his/her colleagues. During the second interview, the researcher included the three initial findings and each participant identified whether he/she agreed or disagreed. This process confirmed the researcher's thoughts as well as carried out member-checking. Interviews were face-to-face, with the exception of two: During the second interview phase, two teachers were not available to meet face-to-face; therefore, the researcher used Zoom to conduct a virtual interview with the participants.

**Forms of data.** The study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning of structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). Van Manen (1990) described two purposes of the interview in hermeneutic phenomenology: (a) to be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper

understanding of a human phenomenon, and (b) to be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with an interviewee about the meaning of an experience (p. 66).

The researcher used specific interview techniques to bring the hidden meanings to the surface for analysis. Interviews are “tools used to reveal the meanings and significance of artifacts collected in the field” (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). Hatch (2002) referred to semi-structured interviews as formal interviews or structured interviews. These types of interviews are structured so that researchers are in charge of leading the interview; there is a set time established for the interview; and they are most often recorded (Hatch, 2002). In contrast, they are semi-structured because the researcher comes with guiding questions but is open to following the lead of the participants and probing into areas that arise during that time. In this study, the researcher was prepared to ask guiding questions to the beginning teachers that led to answering the three research questions. The researcher was open, however, to investigating areas brought to attention by the beginning teachers. The second interview was conducted by the researcher after initial themes were developed. During the interview process, the researcher was a complete participant, or fully engaged with the participants being interviewed. The researcher used a recording device and later transcribed the interview.

Interview questions reflected considerations developed by McNamara (2009). McNamara identified that interview questions should be open-ended, neutral, worded clearly, and asked one at a time; and “why” questions should be limited. The researcher began the interview by explaining the purpose of the interview, addressing the terms of confidentiality, explaining the format of the interview as well as the expected length of time, providing contact information, and addressing any questions the participants felt they needed to ask (McNamara, 2009). Participants were engaged in the interview as

soon as possible, and the researcher began with asking fact questions prior to moving into matters that involve feelings or conclusions (McNamara, 2009). McNamara suggested interspersing fact questions throughout the interview, asking questions about the present before asking questions about the past or future and allowing participants to provide any other pertinent information they feel necessary before the interview is concluded. The researcher included a total of 22 main interview questions, and two main questions had subquestions. The questions were selected based on the likeliness each would contribute to answering the research questions set forth by the researcher. The first four questions were background/demographic questions followed by a knowledge (fact) question. The demographic and factual questions were asked because they played an important role in understanding the experiences of the beginning teachers and were anticipated to have an effect on the conclusion of the study. The remaining questions were more in-depth and asked the participant to describe his/her experiences including struggles, surprises, and impact on his/her profession. The concluding question asked the participant if there were any other topics he/she would like to elaborate on regarding his/her experience working with the TLC. Interview questions were ordered from surface, demographic questions to deeper, emotional questions in order to acclimate the participant to the interview session. Respondents can more easily engage in the interview with demographic questions before warming up to more personal matters (McNamara, 2009). The second interview included 10 questions, beginning with validating the initial synthesis of data and ending with allowing participants to elaborate on any other experiences they felt relevant to the study.

**Number of participants.** Nine beginning teachers in Year 1 and Year 2 participated in the study. The researcher initially planned to include Year 3 teachers as well; however, there were no Year 3 teachers willing to participate. The researcher also

initially planned to include three participants at each school level: elementary, middle, and high. After gathering participants, however, four elementary, two middle, and three high school beginning teachers were included based on willingness to participate. The initially proposed schools for the research study were two high schools (School A and School B), one middle school (School C), one elementary school (School D), and one K-8 school consisting of elementary and middle school teachers (School E). However, the final schools included in the study were four elementary schools (Schools A, B, C, and D), two middle schools (Schools E and F), and three high schools (Schools G, H, and I). Participants were representative of nine schools from the district. Schools for the study were selected based on close proximity to the researcher for ease of use. Schools were also selected to be representative of several different TLCs in the district as to ensure an evaluative judgement of TLCs as individuals was not made. The beginning teachers were representative of eight different TLCs. Participants were selected based on convenience and willingness to participate. The requirements for participation were that the teachers were in Year 1, Year 2, or Year 3 of their teaching career and had worked with their TLC for at least 1 full year. Participants also had to agree to be interviewed twice. A pilot study was conducted at the researcher's current school, School Z. Two beginning teachers participated in the pilot study interviews. The researcher practiced interviewing the participants, recording the interview session, and transcribing the interviews to determine if the interview questions needed revision.

**Demographics of participants.** The sample was made up of participants who volunteered to join the study, given they were in their first 3 years of teaching. The teachers consisted of elementary, middle, and high school teachers of diverse genders and teaching backgrounds. Table 5 outlines the specific demographics of the participants.

Table 5

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	School	TLC	Program Year	Grade/Subject	Pathway
Participant 1	School A	TLC 1	Year 2	Elementary (Music)	Education major
Participant 2	School B	TLC 2	Year 2	Elementary (Kindergarten)	Education major
Participant 3	School C	TLC 3	Year 1	Elementary (Third)	Lateral entry
Participant 4	School D	TLC 4	Year 2	Elementary (Kindergarten)	Lateral entry
Participant 5	School E	TLC 5	Year 1	Middle (Fifth/Sixth Self-Contained)	Education major
Participant 6	School F	TLC 6	Year 2	Middle (Seventh Science/Social Studies)	Education major
Participant 7	School G	TLC 7	Year 2	High (Spanish)	Lateral entry
Participant 8	School H	TLC 8	Year 1	High (Science)	Lateral entry
Participant 9	School I	TLC 8	Year 1	High (English Language Arts)	Lateral entry

Nine beginning teachers were included: four Year 1 teachers and five Year 2 teachers as indicated in Table 5. Participants included were teachers of music, self-contained exceptional children, science, English/language arts, Spanish, kindergarten, and first grade. Five teachers were lateral-entry and four teachers were education majors.

### **Steps of Data Collection**

1. Researcher decided on research questions to be answered by interviews and developed guiding questions.
2. Researcher conducted a pilot study to refine data collection plans and to develop relevant lines of questions.
3. Data from the pilot study were transcribed and guiding questions were refined if necessary.
4. Participants for research study were selected based on convenience and willingness to participate.
5. Participants were contacted to set up an interview time and place.  
Specifically, the location was to be a quiet location free from distractions.
6. Prior to data collection, participants signed a consent form (Appendix E).
7. Participants participated in a semi-structured, in-depth interview conducted by the researcher.
8. After initial data analysis, the researcher met with participants to complete member-checking of preliminary data analysis and to conduct another interview with each participant to allow for deeper exploration into teacher experiences with their TLC.
9. After final data analysis was completed from the second interview, the researcher utilized peer-review from an external professional unassociated with the study (Appendix F).
10. Researcher compiled an “essence” description of the study and documented the research findings.



## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis took place based on a set of specific steps for phenomenology as set forth in research by Creswell (2013). Creswell developed steps to phenomenological data analysis based on the work of Moustakas (1994). The researcher first described personal experiences with the phenomenon. This is referred to as an epoche or bracketing, in which the researcher attempted to set aside any bias and personal experience so that the focus can be explicitly directed to the participants (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing aided in the validation of data. The researcher then conducted two cycles of data analysis. The first cycle, known as values coding, required the researcher to look at the interview transcripts as a method of attuning the researcher to the perspectives of the teachers (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher completed this by developing a list of significant statements by using the transcribed interviews to determine how individuals experienced the topic. This was horizontalization of the data and the list consisted of nonrepetitive statements. Next, the researcher took the significant statements and grouped them into larger units. After developing these units, the researcher interviewed participants for a second time. This allowed the researcher to explore the data in more depth. After the second interview, the researcher conducted a second cycle of coding data. The second cycle, eclectic coding, was used to refine the first cycle choices (Saldaña, 2013). After the second interview, the researcher wrote a description of “what” and “how” the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Development of this textural description included verbatim examples from interview participants. This “essence” represented the culminating aspect of the study, and the researcher described the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced. After preliminary data analysis took place, the researcher utilized member-

checking of data; after the final data analysis, the researcher utilized peer review of data analysis (both concepts are explained in more detail in the next section).

### **Validation of Data**

The researcher used several validation techniques proposed by Creswell (2013). Triangulation occurs when the researcher corroborates evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2013). The four strategies the researcher used included peer review; clarifying researcher bias; member-checking; and rich, thick description.

Peer review was conducted after data analysis was completed by the researcher. The researcher asked an external professional to review the data analysis and provide feedback. To carry out this process, the researcher sent the interview transcripts as well as the descriptive narrative of data to the peer. The peer reviewed the documents to verify the researcher's analysis was accurate. The researcher did not revise the analysis after peer review because the external professional confirmed the accuracy of data.

To clarify researcher bias, the researcher used an epoche. The researcher defined her role in the research as well as her experiences with the phenomenon.

After the researcher's initial data analysis was completed, member-checking took place. Member-checking is defined as the "verification or extension of information developed by the researcher" (Hatch, 2002, p. 92). Creswell (2013) described this process as taking the preliminary data analysis to participants to understand their views of the written analysis as well as what is missing. The candidate met with the participants to give them the opportunity to consider and give their reactions to the interpretations. The researcher read the following summary statements to participants and documented each participant's response:

1. Most teachers' experiences were positive. The TLCs were very helpful at providing ideas and getting materials. However, they need to be more available by having less of a load of teachers.
2. Support by TLC and colleagues were both beneficial but different. Colleagues were more invested in their own classrooms but still helpful; TLCs were solely committed to new teacher success. Both provide emotional and professional support. Support from colleagues was usually instantaneous while TLC is not.
3. TLCs have impacted new teachers' self-efficacy by validating what they are doing. They often second-guess themselves. TLCs provide confidence to new teachers through their constant encouragement and feedback.

All nine participants agreed with the first summary of analysis statement. A few teachers did not completely agree with the second summary statement; therefore, their responses were recorded and considered. One participant did not feel as though she received as much support from her colleagues. The participant also felt as though teachers do not second-guess themselves, hence contesting the third statement. Using the teachers' responses, the researcher was able to revisit the data analysis to develop the overall findings addressed in Chapter 4.

In order to understand the teacher's agreement or disagreement with the statements, it is important to understand the context of his/her experiences with the phenomenon. Each participant's experiences are addressed individually with Research Question 2 in Chapter 4 along with the context for his/her experiences. Based on participant feedback during member-checking as well data gathered from the second interview questions, the researcher revised the final data analysis by developing four

findings.

The last validation strategy, rich, thick description, entailed using a detailed description that will “[enable] readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). Data triangulation took place through the use of a second in-depth interview conducted with each participant. The second interview allowed the researcher to explore the initial themes in more depth.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In an attempt to reduce bias and set the researcher’s personal experiences aside, the researcher used one of Husserl’s (Moustakas, 1994) concepts, epoche. This technique allowed the researcher to take on a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination (Appendix G). The epoche includes a description of the researcher’s role in the study as well as her experience with the phenomenon of mentoring.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are influences that the researcher cannot control (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2010). Limitations must be thoroughly addressed in a study. The researcher attempted to set aside all bias prior to conducting the research. The researcher followed specific steps to decide how and in what way personal understanding would be introduced into the study. However, bracketing personal experiences can be difficult for researchers to implement because interpretations of data always incorporate the assumptions researchers bring to the topic. Therefore, the researcher identified this issue as a limitation of the study.

During the interview process, participants may have acknowledged the fact that the ultimate purpose of the interview is to collect data. Participants may have felt

inclined to describe their experiences in a more positive manner due to the established relationship with their mentor. Teachers may have feared answering honestly as to protect the bond they had created with their mentor. Participants were ensured confidentiality from the researcher; however, this could still have been seen as a threat to participants. Data collected were in the form of in-depth interviews. While the data collected were thick, rich data portraying beginning teachers' experiences, they were still self-reported. According to the LibGuide at the University of Southern California (n.d.), self-reported data contains several potential sources of bias which include (a) selective memory [remembering or not remembering experiences or events that occurred at some point in the past]; (b) telescoping [recalling events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time]; (c) attribution [the act of attributing positive events and outcomes to one's own agency but attributing negative events and outcomes to external forces]; and (d) exaggeration [the act of representing outcomes or embellishing events as more significant than is actually suggested from other data]. When employees are asked to elaborate on their experiences working with a district-employed TLC, they may refrain from providing valuable information due to the negativity of the information.

Phenomenology as a method of qualitative research has limitations in itself. Four specific limitations identified by van Manen (1990) deal with the study's methodology: (a) phenomenology is not an empirical analytic science; (b) phenomenology is not mere speculative inquiry in the sense of unworldly reflection; (c) phenomenology is neither mere particularity nor sheer universality; and (d) phenomenology does not problem solve (pp. 21-23).

In this study, the beginning teachers' experiences were not meant to seek to describe actual states of affairs such as who did what, when, where, how many, etc.

Rather, the study sought to attach meaning to their descriptions. The results of the study were valuable in understanding beginning teachers' experiences working with a district-employed TLC but not for the purpose of generalizations. Van Manen (1990) asserted "the only generalization allowed by phenomenology is this: Never generalize!" (p. 22). Phenomenology consists of being concerned with the particularities of experiences as well as the universality or to "interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being" (van Manen, 1990, p. 43). The purpose of the study was to understand meaning, not to solve a problem. Thus, the data collected helped individuals such as district staff gain a more thoughtful understanding into the experiences of new teachers by being exposed to the lived experiences of the teachers. The data, however, did not allow district officials to oversimplify results to the entire district. District staff should take caution as to not make decisions for the district as a whole without additional research.

The study employed interviews as the data collection tool of choice. According to Hatch (2002), interviews are excellent tools to provide a means for figuring out what is on someone's mind; however, one limitation is tied directly to the "difficulty of doing just that" (p. 92).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are influences that the researcher can control. Delimitations include the researcher's choices and boundaries set for the study. Nine teachers from the district were included in the study; therefore, there were numerous beginning teachers who did not participate in describing their experiences. Teachers who participated were from nine different schools in the district. The results for this study were informative for these specific schools; however, they could not be generalized for every school in the district.

One TLC serves the needs of all the teachers in the schools where they are assigned. The experiences described by teachers represented eight of 15 TLCs for the district.

The researcher chose to study the experiences of beginning teachers working with their TLCs. The TLC serves as the new teacher mentor as a part of a complete induction program. Mentoring is one component of an elaborate support program for beginning teachers in the district. The study only sought to understand beginning teachers' experiences with their mentors, not the induction program as a whole. More research on all components of the induction program would be desirable.

Sole data collection was through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Twenty-two interview questions were used by the researcher based on considerations by McNamara (2009). The researcher chose to use interviews as the primary data collection tool to obtain a thick, rich description of beginning teachers' experiences. Mixed-methods methodology could have been employed, but the use of phenomenology was more applicable to understanding the teachers' true experiences. The use of qualitative methodology minimized the threat of self-reported data collected through quantitative instruments such as surveys.

### **Reporting the Findings**

After the researcher developed themes for each participant as well as for the entire study as a whole, the information was compiled together. The data were synthesized and the true essence of the experience was found. Once this was done, the researcher met with district staff to share findings. Exposing stakeholders to the analysis of teachers' lived experiences will hopefully have an impact on professional gain and on the future of the mentoring practice in the district.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of beginning teachers in working with their TLC. The TLC performs numerous duties outlined by the district; however, the study was only concerned with the TLC's duty as a beginning teacher mentor. Numerous thoughts and perceptions were presented as the nine teachers, Year 1 and Year 2, reflected on their experiences in the career. The participants participated in two in-depth interviews in which they were open and candid with their responses. Consistent themes emerged throughout the analysis of their interviews that answered the three research questions:

1. How do beginning teachers describe their experiences working with a district-employed TLC?
2. How do beginning teachers perceive the difference between the support provided by a district-employed TLC and the support provided by in-house colleagues?
3. How has having a TLC employed by the district impacted the self-efficacy of beginning teachers?

The research findings for the study are organized based on each of the three research questions. Specific themes accompany each research question and arose based on the teachers' responses. The researcher analyzed each initial interview by developing codes based on the teachers' responses. Each time a code was identified in the participant responses, the researcher recorded a tally mark on the coding chart. Table 6 outlines the initial data analysis by identifying the preliminary codes distributed by participant number. The researcher categorized the codes by reference to TLC or by



reference to colleagues.

Table 6

*Initial Code Distribution by Participant*

	Participant Number								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
In reference to the teachers' TLC:									
Scheduling	3	12	11	10	8	6	2	4	1
Safe	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Someone to talk to	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1
Ideas & Resources	1	6	5	4	2	7	3	0	1
Support	8	0	1	4	4	2	1	0	2
Guidance	9	2	0	1	4	0	0	1	4
Feedback	13	9	2	6	3	6	5	3	3
Positive	5	6	1	3	2	5	2	3	5
Expertise	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Helpful	5	9	3	5	2	3	5	6	6
Growth/Confidence	6	6	3	3	0	2	2	2	5
Encouragement	3	3	0	3	3	5	3	0	2
In reference to the teachers' colleagues:									
Positive	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Supportive	3	3	1	7	3	5	1	1	2
Collaboration	4	8	2	4	1	2	3	1	6
Experience	1	4	1	2	0	1	0	0	2
Encouraging	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Helpful	3	3	2	5	2	1	0	1	0
Busy	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	0
Ideas	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Honest	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

Since the researcher asked participants to compare and contrast the support they received from their TLC with the support from their colleagues, some responses only dealt with the teachers' colleagues. Therefore, to code the interviews, the researcher used two separate sets of codes for the TLC and for the colleagues. The researcher read

through each interview and highlighted pertinent data. The researcher then went back and broke the highlighted information down into specific codes. The researcher coded the TLC data in one color and used a separate color for the codes associated with the colleagues. For example, if a teacher stated, “I get support from my TLC because she is very positive and she’ll say I’m a great teacher . . . but support from my colleagues is great too. They’re busy with their own classrooms,” the researcher coded the response with “positive,” “support,” and “encouragement” for the TLC and “support” and “busy” for the colleagues. The researcher carried out the same process of coding the data for the second cycle. During the second data analysis, the researcher added codes such as “someone to talk to” for the TLC section and “honest” for the colleague section. Next, the researcher used the codes to create larger themes. To do this, the researcher combined codes into categories. For example, the codes “encouragement” and “confidence” were placed with the theme of “validation.” The researcher then used the themes to identify which research question they addressed. Table 7 displays the initial meanings, themes, and research questions that were noted by the researcher. The initial meanings will be addressed in more depth when each theme is explained individually.

Table 7

*Final Data Analysis*

Initial Meaning	Final Theme	Research Question
Provided Instructional ideas/resources Positive Feedback Support	Helpful	1
Shared availability Multiple new teachers	Scheduling	1
<u>Influencing Factors:</u> Experience of colleagues Logistics of school (time, scheduling) Availability of TLCs Closeness of relationship	Supportive, differing experiences based on school and TLC	2
Increased confidence Encouragement Growth Inspirational Support	Validation	3

To clarify each theme, the researcher identified the theme as positive or negative.

Table 8 identifies the theme as well as the appropriate label.

Table 8

*Theme Clarification*

Theme	Clarification
Helpful	Positive
Scheduling	Negative
Supportive, Differing Experience	Both positive and negative
Validation	Positive

To explain the themes in more detail, each research question is addressed individually in the following sections. Themes have been restated in the form of a sentence or finding. Each finding is supported by direct quotes from teachers.

### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked, “How do beginning teachers describe their experiences working with a district-employed TLC?” This research question was addressed by teachers during the interviews and a common theme was interwoven throughout the responses. The following sections address the overall findings with supporting evidence.

**Finding 1: Beginning teachers indicated their TLCs were helpful.** When asked to describe their experiences working with their TLC, the majority of participants described their TLC as “helpful.” Although seemingly simple, teacher responses indicated the help was received in diverse ways. The TLC provided help that was tangible as well as intangible. Teachers referenced instructional ideas and resources as an area of need in which TLCs provided a valuable amount of support. Other teachers referenced the fact that their TLC was “understanding,” “involved,” or “always positive” as being incredibly helpful. Overall, the TLC was helpful by providing instructional ideas and resources, by providing feedback, by being continuously positive, and by always showing support.

**Instructional ideas and resources.** Every teacher stated that they valued the ideas the TLCs had to offer. All nine teachers said their TLCs either had great ideas or helped them refine their own ideas. Many teachers received help with classroom organization, classroom management, and paperwork. Help from TLCs was readily accepted by most beginning teachers. Participant 1 stated,

[The TLC] has helped me see that I'm here for the students and that it's my job . . . that I'm prepared as I can be . . . that I'm as organized as I can be . . . and that it's not how perfect I can be, but how effective as a teacher I can be so that the kids are getting a good education.

When Participant 1 was asked how the TLC had provided organizational help, the teacher responded,

Like labeling my records, cubbies . . . she has given me file folders to put papers in so I won't have a stack of papers with no rhyme or reason. She has just given ideas for organizing things in different places. And she is always talking about that.

When the same participant was asked to describe a specific experience in which the TLC was helpful, he reminisced on a previous occurrence in his classroom by saying,

I can always call her and ask a question like "how should I do this." There was a conflict with a parent that I wanted to handle correctly and she said "you need to do this." It's been helpful to know I can call her and she can talk through things.

Participant 2 indicated her TLC was helpful by providing ideas and bringing resources. The teacher noted that "She even gave me morning work books so I got to vary what I was doing." Participant 2 continued by stating, "Sometimes she would observe the lesson, sometimes she'd pitch in and help with the kids . . . she would work with a group and go around and do that."

Participant 3's experience with her TLC was somewhat different than the other teachers. While the other eight teachers had one TLC during the year, Participant 3 had two TLCs during 1 school year due to the first TLC being switched to a different school mid-year. She explained, "The first one was helpful at getting me the things I needed . . .

notes home, laminating everything, posters, she was helpful in that manner . . . she got me books to read to the class . . . things like that.” However, she did note that the second TLC “would come in and try to handle discipline . . . but it was going to be her only task because there are so many discipline issues in my class.” Overall, Participant 3 felt the first TLC was a good experience and was helpful in numerous ways but there were many areas of improvement which are addressed in the next finding. Her experience with her second TLC was not as desirable because she did not interact with her TLC as much as she would have liked.

Participant 4 identified a similar experience to some of the other participants by explaining,

[The TLC] watched me do a writing lesson one time and I had a bunch of students that were struggling . . . so that’s when she brought me the resource, “Write from the Beginning” . . . so she had went back and thought about it some more and thought, “oh this could really help her” . . . she is always helpful . . . when I call to ask her something, or ask her opinion on something.

The teacher explained that her TLC helped her keep up with her writing portfolios and her testing. When asked to imagine her teaching career without a TLC, Participant 4 explained,

Well I probably wouldn’t have had the same beginning because I had ten days where she was pretty much working with me . . . or she would give me an assignment and I had to complete that . . . so I probably wouldn’t have been as prepared in the beginning.

When Participant 5 was also asked to imagine her career without a TLC, she responded by saying,

Well that's a good one because I'm a little concerned if we are going to have one this year. I'm a little concerned because if I need something or don't understand . . . am I going to be able to have someone help me without having to go through 55 different channels?

Participant 5 discussed that her TLC was there if "you needed to talk out something" and "she'll bring you stuff, she'll tell you where stuff is." The teacher was very fond of her TLC because she felt that if you asked the TLC a question, "she don't just shut you . . . she's there." Specifically, Participant 5 identified that her TLC was extremely helpful in preparing new teachers for their PDPs. The teacher stated,

She helps make sure we know what we're supposed to be doing, and how to do it . . . and how to get information . . . with our PDPs especially . . . to make sure everything is finalized and like it is supposed to be . . . she's really good about that.

Participant 6 indicated similar experiences by elaborating on specific ways in which her TLC was helpful. The teacher discussed,

If there is ever anything that you're unsure about she will give you a path of where you're trying to go or she'll bring in some kind of resource. She'll even come in and be that extra set of hands when I do hands-on stuff so I don't have to do it all on my own . . . so that's been great.

Participant 6 said her TLC provided supplies such as glue, chart paper, and other teaching aids. In Participant 6's opinion, the TLC recognized that the teacher had a "rough" group of students and helped the teacher utilize a variety of hands-on methods. Specific strategies the TLC introduced to the teacher were foldables and interactive notebooks.

Participant 8 entered teaching after the school year had already begun. The

teacher was asked to identify people who were instrumental in helping her succeed. The teacher recognized the school principal and the TLC. Participant 8 stated,

My TLC helped me prepare because I didn't have a clue of what to expect at all coming in here. She gave me a lot of resources and helped me work on lesson plans. She helped a lot on paperwork, because that has been super confusing.

The same teacher continued to explain how her TLC focused on meeting her needs in the very beginning:

Especially in the beginning or before I even started out here she helped me prepare. I had to be out here ten days before I started so I met with her most of those days. We would work on stuff and she helped me get more comfortable with the teaching thing . . . it might have been different if I hadn't come in lateral entry, but I didn't have a clue . . . I remember high school but not from the other side.

Participant 8 credited her TLC with helping her understand PDPs and Personalized Education Plans (PEPs). When she needed help, she emailed her TLC and they worked on them together.

**Feedback.** Beginning teachers valued receiving feedback. Most teachers felt their TLC's feedback was helpful in making them a better teacher and their assistance was offered in a professional manner. Teachers felt their TLC's feedback was not "an assault." All nine teachers were asked to describe their TLC's feedback. Participant 7 explained, "She always gave me positive feedback. She liked the different activities I had prepared for the kids. She did say there was probably a way to reduce down time. She always encouraged me to keep them busy." Participant 5 described her TLC's feedback as "always positive, never demeaning . . . she always told you what areas you



may need to focus on but in a positive way . . . which helps especially new, when you don't know." All nine teachers said the TLC visited their classrooms and gave them feedback on how they were doing. Participant 1 described his TLC's feedback as

Written, verbal, tangible, very gracious and generous as far as bringing treats for us at the end of the day . . . just positive. Very direct. It's not sugar coated but I've always felt that how she was respectful although it could be firm and direct . . . or matter-of-fact . . . but [the TLC] never screamed or used all capital letters in an email.

When Participant 1 was asked what had been instrumental in the profession so far, he responded, "The BT program and my TLC . . . just having that support, guidance, and feedback." The teacher felt that his TLC was an instrumental resource to him. He explained,

Having her come in and see me teach a lesson . . . and say "well this went very well, this didn't" . . . and fill out an evaluation form . . . I really appreciate that. She has never been condescending, I'm always glad for her to come in here.

The teacher identified that his TLC was quick to offer praise before constructively criticizing his work. The teacher reflected back to a specific incident in which the TLC's feedback was helpful by saying,

I was teaching a song to first grades last year that I wrote. I didn't have the words and [the TLC] said it might have been more helpful if I had had the words. [The TLC] gave me resources to know where I could put words on posters . . . so she said I was doing a great job being positive but I may want to have more visuals with this lesson.

Participant 2 elaborated on her TLC's feedback in an optimistic manner.

Participant 2 saw her TLC as an indispensable tool and welcomed constructive feedback.

The teacher explained,

She would leave me little notes on my desk. That was positive because sometimes you don't get immediate feedback. Just to hear her say great job on this . . . words just build you up and make you feel better about what you're doing. When the administration would come in, they would go quickly and you don't always know how you're doing . . . you really don't know what they're thinking until you get to your postobservation conference . . . and you're like, "I don't want to get to my conference and be doing something wrong."

The teacher felt that the TLC chose her words carefully. When offering feedback, the TLC did not look for negatives. The TLC did not say, "Well I would have done it this way," but rather, "I like the way you did that." When Participant 2 was unable to get feedback from the principal, the TLC was able to bridge the gap. The teacher went into more detail by saying,

She met with my principal on a regular basis and she knew how my principal felt about me as a teacher and she gave me feedback. And that's important for your principal . . . like if they see something that you're not doing, please tell me, don't leave me in the dark . . . so [the TLC] was kind of the go-between with that.

Participant 5 viewed her TLC as a go-between with administration as well. The teacher explained that during meetings her TLC would go over her requirements for the beginning teachers as well as whatever requirements the principal needed at the time.

Participant 6 did not identify her TLC as a bridge between the teacher-administration gap, but the participant did elaborate on the TLC's feedback by explaining, "They fill out observation sheets where they check your lesson plans, check the questions you ask, and

give tons of feedback . . . saying ‘this lesson was really good’ . . . she’ll even give you an idea.”

**Positiveness.** Data from teacher interviews indicated the TLCs were extremely positive. In fact, all nine teachers used the word “positive” when asked to describe their TLC. Participant 1 described his experience by saying,

It [teaching] was scary at first . . . like, “what am I getting myself into” . . . but to have someone come in and be very positive . . . always positive . . . but also helpful and to say, “you might want to try it this way,” or “you might want to do this” . . . or to get me on the straight and narrow . . . has been very effective.

Participant 2 stated, “She was totally positive the whole time”; and Participant 9 explained, “She didn’t let the environment drag the conversation down. She would have positive assumptions about the school no matter how horrible it got . . . we had gang violence one time, but she still carried high expectations in the situations.”

Participant 3 worked in an inner-city school, switched TLCs mid-year, and indicated she did not have a close bond with the TLC. The participant, despite the fact that her experiences were not as desirable as other beginning teachers, stated, “They were positive, they were warming.”

Participant 6 reported similar experiences with her TLC by saying, “I feel like it’s always positive. She doesn’t give a lot of negative feedback . . . I don’t know if that is for encouragement purposes, but she gives a lot of positive.”

**Supportive.** While coding data, the researcher noticed “support” was frequently identified by beginning teachers. To gain a better understanding of the term “support,” the TLC analyzed what the beginning teachers referenced when the code was identified. Many beginning teachers felt the TLCs were supportive by advocating for their success

and being open to the beginning teacher.

One teacher referred to his TLC by saying, “I guess that’s comforting and reassuring, that I have an agent.” Participant 1 stated,

It’s a good feeling to know that there’s someone supporting you and that you’re not alone, I’m just thankful to have her . . . I think her presence brings [the school] all together . . . just like making sure the environment is positive, conducive to learning, and professional.

Teachers also described their TLC as being “someone to talk to” and “not judgmental.” Participant 1 stated that the TLC was “a neutral identity at the school . . . she’s neutral in the fact that she’s supporting you . . . she’s not going to run and tell someone else.” Participant 2 noted a similar experience by stating,

I could tell her things if I had any worries or concerns. She was open enough and not judgmental. It’s kind of like the TLC was objective . . . she wasn’t working with you . . . she was like a third person coming in.

Participant 1 and Participant 8 felt the TLC was a safe individual to talk to. Participant 8 stated, “She is personable, you can talk to her about anything.” Participant 1 elaborated on his experiences by saying,

I can call her at the end of the day or in the evening . . . . I go through what happened and she listens. She is very reassuring and I know it’s not going to affect my standing as far as employment. I mean yes, I know I’m expected to do my job, and she’s looking for that.

**Finding 2: Most beginning teachers indicated their TLC’s scheduling needed improvement.** All beginning teachers reported that their TLCs were overloaded in some manner. Most new teachers felt the TLCs had too many new teachers to work with,

while a few teachers explained the extra duties required of the TLC were too much.

Participant 6 noted, “She had a lot of other jobs besides this . . . I think she had the substitute teacher thing too.”

When asked how many schools their TLC worked with, the majority of teachers identified two schools; some identified three schools. When asked how many new teachers their TLC worked with, one teacher identified up to 14 teachers. Participant 5 said, “I think maybe 14 . . . it’s a lot . . . at least 14 or maybe more.” Participant 4 stated, “I think this year she had three other BTs at my school . . . actually four, one is exiting the program . . . but she serves three schools I think.” The participant continued by explaining,

I feel that the program is wonderful in theory but it is hard for her to serve so many people . . . I mean she is only one person . . . for any TLC, when they’re assigned three schools in three different locations, it’s got to be challenging . . . I think it would be more helpful if they had less of a load of teachers to work with . . . and maybe worked in a smaller radius . . . like if the schools were together . . . I know it’s a lot of driving that just takes up time going from one site to the next . . . I know it deals with budgeting and all this stuff, but I think they’re stretched really thin.

When the researcher asked the participants how the experience could be improved,

Participant 5 stated,

Maybe for her to have less stuff that she has to do so that she can [work with the teachers] . . . not that she didn’t try, but so that she can . . . she just had a lot that was delegated to her. I think the load of teachers was okay but it was the extra that was delegated to her along with what she already had to do which overloaded

her. I think when you have one [TLC] at the school full time that makes a big difference, they are more available, compared to having three or four different schools.

When Participant 5 began her school year in January, she had not met her TLC very much because the TLC served two schools. The TLC's position was then changed from serving two schools to one school. Participant 5 reflected on the initial experience by saying, "She wasn't there full time and that made a big difference."

When asked "How many TLCs have you been assigned during your teaching career," Participant 9 responded, "One but I would describe it as .5 because we share her with another school." When asked how many days he saw his TLC, he said once per week. Participant 9 described his experience as "I loved it, she just wasn't here enough. Life with a TLC . . . I just wanted more of her." Participant 8 supported the same idea by saying, "just being around more. It was a little difficult sometimes if she was two places . . . her scheduling." The TLCs were extremely busy with the load of new teachers as well as the extra duties their job entails.

## **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asked, "How do beginning teachers perceive the difference between the support provided by a district-employed TLC and the support provided by in-house colleagues?" Teachers addressed this research question during both interviews and the information was analyzed. The following section addresses the overall finding supported by participant experiences.

**Finding 3: Beginning teachers indicated the support provided by their TLC and their colleagues differed based on each participant's individual school and TLC.** Beginning teachers indicated their TLC and their colleagues were both supportive

and helpful. Overall, all teachers had a positive experience with the exception of one teacher, Participant 3. These experiences, however, were very diverse depending on each individual's circumstances. For example, the teacher with a very experienced team of teachers had a different experience than the teacher with little interaction with colleagues. Despite the differences in individual experiences, teachers appreciated collaboration with other teachers. Teachers with TLCs who were regularly present indicated a more positive experience than those who reported the TLC was spontaneously available. Since this study was concerned with describing teachers' lived experiences, each Participant's experience addressing Research Question 2 is elaborated upon individually. Each teacher's experiences are also paired with the context to provide deeper understanding and clarification.

**Participant 1.** Participant 1 was an elementary school music teacher. The teacher was considered Year 2 in the beginning teacher program and was an education major. This teacher had an extremely positive experience with the TLC and with the colleagues. The teacher was asked to compare and contrast the support received from TLCs with the support received from colleagues. The teacher stated,

I felt like I got more support from my TLC because she knows what's going on . . . but support from my colleagues is great too. They're busy with their own classrooms and their own responsibilities. So, it's a different kind of relationship but people give support here . . . people pretty much support each other.

This teacher noted he saw his TLC more than his colleagues. He reported seeing his TLC three times a week and stated, "I was never wondering . . . 'well I wonder where she is.'" When asked "How was your TLC's and colleagues' support similar," he offered several similarities: offering teaching strategies, best classroom management practices, and

organizational practices. His TLC was proficient in fostering the relationship between teachers. Participant 1 stated, “If she talked about how to organize a classroom, another colleague might say, ‘Yeah, I do it like this’ and we might go to her classroom and see it.” When the teacher was asked to contrast the support received, the teacher responded,

My TLC’s expertise is much higher . . . not to criticize my colleagues . . . but being a seasoned teacher, she’s been around. My colleagues, it seems, we all have our different ideas of doing things . . . it seems the TLC refines those ideas . . . . I would say the colleagues may perhaps be more practical because they can show it. She can facilitate all that but she doesn’t necessarily have a class of her own.

**Participant 2.** Participant 2 was an education major and taught kindergarten in an elementary school. The teacher was a Year 2 beginning teacher and had aspirations of continuing her education in the future. She had an exceptionally strong support system at her school. Towards the beginning of the first interview, the teacher was asked, “What has been instrumental in the profession so far?” The teacher replied, “Probably my team because they have so much experience.” Participant 2 taught with a team of veteran teachers. Two teachers had 30 years of experience while two others had approximately 9 years of experience. The teacher also had an informal mentor assigned by the principal (in addition to her TLC) as well as a teacher assistant. Participant 2 noted,

Mrs. A is my mentor. She was really patient and I asked a million questions. The other teacher, I probably bombarded with questions. She was very patient about it. My coworkers gave me a lot of resources. They had books and books.

When the teacher was asked, “How would you compare and contrast the support you received from your colleagues and the support you receive from your TLC,” she replied,



My TLC is really a smart person. From the beginning, we went to the new teacher orientation and I felt that she helped a lot. She gave away a lot of stuff. She would bring books to me that she got from the learning center. She was a great resource in that way. I feel that I've had more help from my team . . . and only because I see them quite a bit. I felt like I received more one-on-one support from them. She did her job because she had several teachers here and I think she had to spend time with other teachers who were struggling more. I also had my assistant who is like a work horse and she helped me tremendously. I probably relied more on my team and Mrs. A [informal mentor] more than I did my TLC . . . . She had a lot of jobs through the county office and I felt like I was just adding to that so I didn't ask her for a lot.

Although Participant 2 found her TLC to be very helpful, she noted that she did not see her TLC as often as her colleagues. She met with colleagues three to four times per week and generally saw her TLC once per week. The participant's experience was also influenced by the absence of her TLC who was on maternity leave during the year. The teacher, however, described her appreciation for the immediate feedback from her TLC by saying, "I did talk to her on some things . . . she would give me feedback and that made me feel good and my team couldn't tell me that because they didn't know how she felt about things." At the end of the first interview, the participant ended the discussion by reflecting on the overall experience:

Although it was helpful . . . could I have done it without her coming here? . . . . It helped my self-esteem but probably with the team I had I could . . . but not every teacher has a good experience with their team so they might need it . . . .

Different schools are different so some teachers need that and some may need it

more than I did.

**Participant 3.** Participant 3 taught third grade in an inner city elementary school.

The teacher was a Year 1 beginning teacher and entered the profession through lateral entry. During the course of the school year, the teacher had two different TLCs. The first TLC was reassigned mid-year, therefore requiring a different TLC to assume the position. Overall, the participant had a negative experience with her TLC. She attributed this experience to her TLC being busy. When asked to compare and contrast the support she received from her TLC and colleagues, she described,

Well I don't know if my TLC was just busy. The TLC I have now, I'm still waiting on her to help me with my PDP for two months. She was supposed to help me and eventually I just got someone else.

The participant went into detail about her experiences working with her colleagues:

"They're all helpful and each of them was able to add something different to what I needed. When one was busy, I just went to another. They're really good at helping me."

The teacher reported having a close bond with colleagues but not with the TLC. She elaborated on her bond with colleagues by saying, "Now that's a closer bond. I probably go to them a lot more than the TLC. I guess because they were right here all the time as opposed to only once a week." The participant addressed improving the TLC experience by saying, "Just more time. More information, showing me things."

**Participant 4.** Participant 4 was a Year 2 lateral entry kindergarten teacher. The teacher reflected on her experience with her colleagues and her TLC. The teacher was asked, "What has been instrumental in the profession so far?" She replied, "My team is incredible. They helped me from day one . . . gathering resources, advice . . . . They've helped me to know what things are important to worry about and what things shouldn't

stress you out all the time.” The teacher contrasted the support received by the TLC and by the colleagues by explaining that she saw her TLC about once per week and her team met several times per week. The participant noted,

Well the support I receive from my colleagues is daily, and it is instantaneous and ongoing. The support I receive from my TLC is less frequent . . . but she always reminds, like “if you need anything let me know.” But sometimes it’s easier to walk across the hall than to pick up the phone or email and wait for a response . . . and the response doesn’t always come when you need it.

Participant 4 taught with a group of teachers who had been at the school for a long period of time, therefore providing the teacher with a strong support system. According to the teacher,

A lot of them have been here for years so that’s good. They know their place here and they are able to look out for others. I have a BT that is on my kindergarten team as well so we go back and forth with different things we’re experiencing at the same time. All of the teachers actually . . . all of the teachers that I’ve asked for advice or for anything have been really helpful.

Participant 4 noted that the bond with her TLC was good and they had a positive relationship. The teacher said, “I feel like she’s starting to know me fairly well . . . she can help me with my strengths and weaknesses.” The teacher, however, did continue to contrast the support she received by saying,

I’m probably more honest with my colleagues and I share all of it—the good, the bad, the questionable . . . I feel like I can do that in a very safe place . . . I would much rather go to a colleague and say, “look, I’m not really sure about this,” before I would go to my TLC.

**Participant 5.** Participant 5 taught middle school self-contained students. The teacher was a Year 1 beginning teacher and entered the profession by earning a degree in education. The researcher asked the teacher to compare and contrast the support she received from her TLC with the support she received from her colleagues. The teacher explained, “I think my TLC does [help] more because we see her more. The colleagues, usually if I ask them, they’ll help . . . but it’s not like [the TLC], who makes her rounds.” The researcher responded by saying, “So you see your TLC more than your colleagues”; and the teacher replied, “I wouldn’t say that. Just different kinds of support is a good way to say it. It just depends on the type of support needed.” The teacher reported that she would approach her colleagues for emotional support and her TLC for classroom management and curriculum planning. At the beginning of the school year, Participant 5’s TLC served two schools. During the year, the TLC was reassigned to only one school. The TLC was able to focus all of her effort on serving the new teachers at Participant 5’s school. The teacher elaborated on this experience by explaining that having access to her TLC full-time made a “big difference” because they become more available.

**Participant 6.** Participant 6 taught science and social studies to seventh-grade students. The teacher was an education major in her second year of teaching. When asked, “What has been instrumental in the profession so far,” the teacher responded, “I would say the support not only from my TLC but also from the people at school that I work with.” The teacher reported she saw her TLC two to three times per week. The teacher contrasted the support from her colleagues and the support from her TLC by elaborating, “I like my colleagues . . . but they are not as supportive or encouraging as a TLC might be. Like we said, they are more invested in themselves than the whole entire

group.” Participant 6 referred to her colleagues as people “who I would throw around ideas with” but “they don’t really go out of their way.” The participant’s team of teachers was made up of four total teachers, each of whom had been in the teaching community longer than the participant. The teacher identified she would approach her colleagues for emotional support but her TLC for classroom management and curriculum planning. Participant 6 noted that without her TLC, her teaching career would have been much shorter.

**Participant 7.** Participant 7 taught Spanish to high school students in the district. The teacher was considered a Year 2 beginning teacher and entered the profession through lateral entry. Throughout the course of the school day, the teacher taught three classes and had one planning period. During her planning period, another teacher, who had teaching responsibilities at two schools, used her classroom to teach Spanish also. At her school, there were only two total foreign language teachers. The participant did not have a strong support system from colleagues. When the participant was asked who had been instrumental in the profession, the participant responded, “Just my TLC. I can’t think of any other one. I also share some ideas with the other Spanish teacher. We like to help each other out.” Participant 7 relied heavily upon her TLC, valuing her involvement and feedback. When the researcher asked, “So would you consider your TLC more helpful than your colleagues,” the teacher replied, “Yes.” Participant 7 contrasted the support she received by saying, “My TLC is here every week, twice per week. She makes a point to come help me and she’s working to help me. That’s her job. Other people, when I ask for advice, they have no time.” When the researcher probed the teacher to understand what barriers kept the teacher from relying on her colleagues, the teacher indicated time and scheduling. While the teacher did explain that having a TLC

did not have an impact on her belief in herself, she did have an impact on the participant's teaching. Participant 7 felt as though her TLC and colleagues had a similarity in the fact that both are not always instantaneously available. The teacher explained, "I think the TLCs are very helpful no matter what . . . you just have to email . . . maybe they're not right next to you, but sometimes the colleagues aren't either."

**Participant 8.** Participant 8 was a Year 1 beginning teacher who taught high school science. The teacher entered the education world through lateral entry and had a positive experience with her TLC. The teacher began the school year after the start of the year and had no classroom experience prior to starting. The teacher compared the support she received from her TLC with the support she received from her colleagues by reporting they were both helpful and supportive. The participant said her colleagues "made the transition a lot easier . . . being able to have support around here." The researcher asked, "How would you compare and contrast the support you receive from your colleagues and the support you receive from your TLC?" The teacher replied,

They both have been really helpful. I think the main difference between the two is . . . because [colleagues] are always here, if I have a question, I just go across the hallway. Sometimes it's harder because my TLC was between two schools . . . and next year she'll be in one place so I'm sure I'll see her more.

Despite scheduling challenges, the participant found her TLC to be relatable, personable, and straight forward. Her colleagues were resourceful, by providing materials the teacher used throughout the year, as well as willing to answer questions.

**Participant 9.** Participant 9 taught English/language arts in an inner city high school in the district. The teacher was a Year 1 beginning teacher who left the business world to become a teacher. Prior to the start of the school year, the teacher had no

classroom experience and noted, “The last time I was in a high school classroom, I was literally sitting in the high school as a student.” Participant 9 described his school context by saying, “A lot of these kids have substitute teachers all in middle school, so they never had a permanent teacher . . . so I think that sense of permanency is important to them.” The participant’s TLC was well-versed in the dynamics of the school, having previously taught English/language arts in the very same classroom as the participant. The teacher had a close relationship with the TLC and with his beginning teacher colleagues.

Participant 9 elaborated on collaborating with colleagues by saying,

We don’t do a lot of parents at our school. We get context for the way a child is behaving . . . by being able to talk to other teachers about what’s going on with the student or why they’re not there, or why they’re in a bad mood . . . it’s really helpful . . . also strategies, I had one kid who played with a spring . . . I discussed it with another teacher . . . and it was actually awesome because he could focus while he played with it and I would have never understood that if another teacher hadn’t brought it up.

Participant 9 described his TLC’s support similarly by saying,

The [TLC] just helped me with hum-drum stuff . . . like helping with PEPs, getting scores, just leg work while I was in class. She helped me with showing me lesson plans that were created by experienced teachers and techniques employed by experienced teachers. I guess the biggest thing was just confidence . . . I didn’t have student teaching so just the validation that what I’m doing was working. That was big.

Throughout the interviews, the teacher contrasted the support of his TLC and colleagues by pointing out that this TLC “had a more nuanced understanding of the

drama that went on at the school . . . just because she knew people and worked with them.” He continued by explaining that his TLC was continuously positive regardless of any dire situations she encountered; while with colleagues he stated, “I’ve experienced more hopelessness and negativity from the teachers here than I have from any group of students. I think a lot of them go into teaching for the wrong reasons.”

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 asked, “How has having a TLC employed by the district impacted the self-efficacy of beginning teachers?” Findings for this research question were very clear and strongly supported by every teacher. All nine teachers reported similar experiences in regards to their self-efficacy. The following sections describe teachers’ experiences along with the overall finding.

**Finding 4: TLCs have positively impacted teacher self-efficacy through validation.** When asked to describe how the TLC impacted the new teachers’ beliefs in themselves, all teachers responded in an affirmative manner. Teachers described how they changed from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Some teachers also described that the guidance they received at the beginning of the year changed by the end of the year.

**Growth.** Beginning teachers were asked to think about their growth over the year. Many teachers cited increased confidence as the most evident growth in their teaching. One teacher noted a growth in his curriculum planning. Participant 9 stated,

I remember the first few weeks, I was like “man, why doesn’t someone just make all the curriculum . . . just give it to me and I won’t have to mess with all that stuff” . . . but now I see that making all your lesson plans builds a competency in what you’re teaching. So, not having to do those things makes you less of a



person.

Almost all beginning teachers noted the TLC helped to validate their teaching. The TLC provided confidence to new teachers that they otherwise would not have gotten. Participant 1 described, “I’m surprised at how much I’ve learned about myself as a person . . . how I’ve felt stronger as a person . . . it’s not because of the money . . . it’s kind of like a mission . . . and that’s perfectly fine.” The teacher went into further detail by saying,

[The TLC] would say I’m a great teacher . . . that I have so much potential. I feel like she would tell me if this was something I shouldn’t be in . . . like this validation and reassurance that I’m doing what God would have me to do . . . I’m a confident, compassionate person and teacher . . . and with [the TLC’s] help and guidance I can stand in front of my class and teach the curriculum.

When Participant 1 was asked what his TLC would say if she was talking about his growth over the year, the teacher responded, “She would say my classroom management has improved leaps and bounds. My teacher voice has really developed. Overall, my assertiveness has come a long way.” In fact, the teacher explained that he had learned more as a beginning teacher than in college. Participant 1 stated,

Like any job you come in on, you need that training and help. You can only get so much going through school and being in the real world in the classroom is not like going to class. I dare say I’ve learned more from BT workshops and [the TLC’s] guidance than some of my college classes.

Participant 1 thought about his growth over the year and talked about the changes. The teacher elaborated,

I was not feeling very confident in teaching before I met [the TLC]. I was like, “I

don't know what I'm doing" or "how am I going to get things that I need?" . . .

"how am I going to stand in front of a class and teach?" . . . I went through the teaching process but having that as a job and being on my own was by far a scary thing . . . I began to feel connected . . . to the county . . . and I was still feeling unsure. Now, after two years, I feel so confident that I can pull off a lesson and have the confidence to have a plan B if it doesn't work and to think on my toes. So, just the confidence level has been a drastic change from before I met [the TLC] to after I worked with [the TLC].

Participant 2 grew over the school year, and the TLC released her guidance as the year progressed. The teacher's TLC complimented Participant 2 by saying she would love to have her own child in her classroom. The teacher stated, "I was like, wow! That made me feel like I must be doing something right." When the researcher asked the teacher what the TLC would say about her growth, she responded,

She would say my confidence increased, she liked my creativity . . . that I was a nurturing teacher. She told me after the first month or two that she didn't really need to see me as much. She said I had confidence and I was running with it. That went miles and miles with my self-esteem.

Participant 2 and Participant 4 both second guessed themselves regularly as teachers. Participant 4 said, "It's hard for me to feel like I'm doing everything that I can do. I always feel like, 'Oh, I could have done this differently.'" The teacher continued by stating, "Just to know that what I'm doing is . . . good enough . . . but for her to come in some random time and say 'I really like what you're doing' is really helpful." When Participant 4 first started teaching she was "nervous and didn't know what to do." The researcher asked if the TLC impacted her belief in herself, and she stated, "Yes, the

constant praise and ‘I can see how much you’ve grown’ . . . hearing that is great.”

While Participant 3 had the most undesirable experience of all the teachers, she did feel that she grew in her self-confidence. She supported this portrayal of growth by stating, “I think the most of my growth has come through confidence and knowing that what I’m doing is on the right track.”

One teacher, Participant 4, explained that her TLC recognized student growth in addition to teacher growth. The teacher described,

She tries to make relationships with children which is great. Even with her time here, she can see growth and she can say, “Oh this child has come such a long way” . . . and that’s great . . . that makes me feel like I’m succeeding.

Participant 9 had no classroom experience prior to the start of the school year last year. The teacher was lateral entry and decided to change his career and enter the world of education. He was asked if his TLC helped build his confidence throughout the year. The teacher responded,

Oh yeah, especially for me, having never gone in a classroom before . . . not having any experience. The last time I was in a high school classroom, I was literally sitting in the high school as a student. So that validation was really important. I can’t imagine not having it. I’m still coping with the ups and downs of being a teacher. You will start thinking that it’s you . . . at least I do . . . I’m my own worst enemy . . . thinking it’s you.

**Guidance.** As new teachers reflected back on the school year, some of their experiences with the TLC changed from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. As new teachers became more confident in what they were doing, the frequency in which they saw their TLC decreased. Participant 9 described,

I was a lot more competent the second semester than I was the first semester. As we approached the end of the school year, it was very sparse . . . [the TLC] being there . . . but she was really focusing on those beginning teachers that really needed help in their classrooms.

Participant 9 viewed his TLC's absence as a compliment of his teaching. Participant 2's experience was similar and the teacher went into detail by saying,

Sometimes she probably wanted us to be left on our own to see what we could do and then she'd come back to see if we improved on areas . . . instead of being here all the time because then you would feel like you're being observed every day . . . it would be like they were babysitting you.

When asked if having a TLC had an impact on the teacher's development, Participant 9 explained,

Oh definitely, at first, an incredibly positive impact on development. Over the long run, a negative one. There's this competency that people gain when they have to struggle. I talk to my kids about Forest Gump . . . if he always would have had the braces on, he'd never been able to run so fast . . . I think that as one gains competency, [the TLC] should become someone who is critical. At first like this loving mother but by the end she's pounding you into this finely-tuned instrument and gradually raising her expectations for the teacher.

Participant 9 felt as though the TLC positively impacted his development because he was able to use her guidance as a tool to become a better teacher. He noted, however, that he perceived the impact of TLCs to be negative if they were not effective at relinquishing their guidance as the teacher gained competence. In order to grow, teachers need to struggle. When the TLC is efficient at maintaining a healthy balance of

providing challenges and providing support, the impact on teachers is positive.

**Encouragement.** Beginning teachers often used the word “encouraging” to describe their TLC. All nine teachers described occasions in which struggles or challenges compromised their teaching. Many teachers noted their TLC provided constant encouragement to help them through these struggles. Some teachers noted their TLC helped to keep them in the profession on days they were ready to quit. When asked if the TLC had an impact on her motivation to remain in teaching, Participant 7 stated, “Yes, that’s what they’re really here for . . . to make sure we don’t leave or get burnt out.”

Participant 9 said the first day of school was a real reality check for him. He reflected back on this experience by saying,

I was teaching two freshman classes and then an English III class. It had 26 students and 18 were repeaters. I remember going into the planning period thinking, “alright these next kids are older than these freshman, so I don’t want to baby them or make them feel like I don’t have any respect for them” . . . and that was the worst mistake I ever made.

The teacher noted that his TLC kept him from becoming very discouraged during a tough year. The dynamics of his school were very challenging for any new teacher, but luckily his TLC had experience teaching there previously. Participant 9 felt that “just understanding how the special dynamics are here . . . negotiating that alone would have been very difficult . . . so the TLC brought in a lot of context.”

When the researcher asked Participant 6 to imagine teaching without a TLC, she laughed before saying, “Ummmm . . . short. I would probably have quit. I think it would have been more stressful on the supply end, ideas as well . . . it would be a lot harder.”

Participant 5 had a tendency to worry constantly about her job. Her TLC provided encouragement by saying, “Don’t worry about it, just don’t worry about it . . . I’ll help you . . . I’ll take care of it.” The teacher explained that when she gets overwhelmed the TLC tells her to take a deep breath and she helps “keep you cool.” Participant 4’s explanation was similar yet simple: “just the constant support and encouragement was helpful.” When the researcher asked Participant 4 if the TLC has had an impact on her motivation to remain in the teaching profession, the teacher responded,

Yes, I think so because she has given me so much encouragement and she really supports what I’m doing. She is constantly giving me compliments and she’s bringing people to watch my lessons because she thinks it might be helpful to someone else.

When Participant 1 was asked how his belief in himself changed over the year, he stated,

I’m excited about becoming better and [the TLC] is always saying “you’re always wanting to become a better teacher and in your third year of teaching, you want to teach like a third-year teacher” . . . I hope I can live up to those expectations.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Brief Overview**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand beginning teachers' experiences working with their TLCs as their mentors in a school district in NC. Research indicated a growing number of new teachers have been prepared in alternative route certification programs or are older adults who are changing careers (Portner, 2005). The availability and quality of mentoring programs can be an important factor for job candidates as they consider applying for or accepting a teaching position (Portner, 2005). Understanding the perceptions of beginning teachers in relation to their mentoring experiences has also become increasingly important for retention purposes. Many beginning teachers, although enthusiastic, abandon the teaching profession depressed and discouraged (Boreen et al., 2009). The advantages of being mentored include increased job satisfaction, higher retention, greater effectiveness with diverse students, and better instructional problem solving (Boreen et al., 2009). Effective mentoring of beginning teachers requires a fine balance among dependence, independence, and interdependence (Boreen et al., 2009).

This study included nine beginning teachers who were considered Year 1 or Year 2 in the Beginning Teacher Induction Program. Four elementary, two middle, and three high school teachers were included. Participants were chosen based on willingness and convenience. The study was concerned with teachers' experiences with the mentoring component of the induction program rather than the entire program as a whole. The researcher used Illeris's (2002) Three Dimensions of Learning to provide a lens for understanding the new teachers' experiences. The following research questions were developed for the study and were the driving force for data collection.

1. How do beginning teachers describe their experiences working with a district-employed TLC?
2. How do beginning teachers perceive the difference between the support provided by a district-employed TLC and the support provided by in-house colleagues?
3. How has having a TLC employed by the district impacted the self-efficacy of beginning teachers?

**Data collected.** Data collected were solely qualitative through the use of two one-on-one interviews conducted by the researcher. Four Year 1 teachers and five Year 2 teachers participated. Participants were chosen based on close proximity and willingness to participate. Nine total teachers participated—four elementary, two middle, and three high school—and were representative of nine different schools. Each teacher had a different TLC with the exception of two teachers who shared the same TLC; therefore, eight different TLCs were represented in the study. Participants taught a variety of content areas such as music, science/social studies, English/language arts, Spanish, kindergarten, third grade, and fifth/sixth grade self-contained. Five participants were lateral entry while four were education majors.

The researcher contacted the participants prior to interviewing them in order to begin forming a relationship. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and answered participant questions with regard to the overall process. Participants signed a consent form and agreed to meet the researcher twice. All interviews were in-depth, and 16 interviews were conducted face-to-face while two were conducted virtually. Two participants were unable to meet for the second interview; therefore, the researcher used Zoom to meet the participants virtually.



After the first interview, the researcher completed initial data analysis. The researcher then met with teachers again to complete member-checking and to carry out the second interview. Teachers were asked to respond to the initial findings the researcher developed. The majority of beginning teachers completely agreed, also adding more detail to the researcher's information. The researcher created the second interview questions after initial data analysis was carried out. The researcher recorded and transcribed each interview. After the second interview, the researcher completed final data analysis and had an external professional peer review the process.

**Data analysis.** To carry out data analysis, the researcher completed two cycles of data analysis. The researcher also validated the data through the use of two in-depth interviews with rich, thick descriptions; member-checking; and peer review. After the initial interviews, the researcher used the interview transcriptions to code the data. Each code was a word or phrase that symbolically assigned an essence-capturing attribute for each portion of data (Saldaña, 2013). This process required the researcher to read through the interviews several times and identify common meanings throughout. The researcher then met with participants for the second interview and to validate initial findings. Participants were asked to respond to the researcher's summary of analysis. Participants agreed or disagreed and elaborated on their experiences. After the second interview, the researcher conducted a second cycle of data analysis which consisted of coding the interviews and appropriating each one into a larger theme or unit of meaning. The researcher developed four findings to answer the three research questions. Finally, the researcher asked a professional external to the study to conduct peer analysis of data. To do this, the professional reviewed the interview transcripts as well as the descriptive narrative of data to confirm accuracy of analysis.

## **Overall Findings**

The research study uncovered four findings from teacher interviews that addressed the three research questions. The four findings were (1) beginning teachers indicated their TLCs were helpful; (2) most beginning teachers indicated their TLCs' scheduling needed improvement; (3) beginning teachers indicated the support provided by their TLCs and their colleagues differed based on each participant's individual school and TLC; and (4) TLCs have positively impacted teacher self-efficacy through validation.

The first finding was positive and suggested that the TLCs were helpful in numerous ways: providing instructional ideas and resources, always being positive, providing feedback, and always being supportive. New teachers described numerous challenges and struggles throughout the year and elaborated on how their TLC was helpful to them in overcoming those situations. Beginning teachers described classroom management, classroom organization, and curriculum planning as areas in which the TLC lent a helping hand.

The second finding revealed a negative experience associated with the TLCs' availabilities and responsibilities. New teachers described the TLCs' numerous duties in addition to mentoring. Teachers also identified that TLCs were assigned numerous schools and new teachers to service. New teachers saw their TLC from 1-3 days per week. Generally, teachers who had a TLC who was more available had a more positive experience. One teacher described her experience of having her mentor at her school full-time. She was highly satisfied with the experience and noted having a TLC housed at the school full-time made a significant impact on the quality of her teaching.

The third finding was both positive and negative and uncovered that the new teachers' colleagues and TLCs were both supportive but each teacher's experiences were

dependent upon the school and TLC. As mentioned above, teachers who had TLCs who made themselves readily available created a more positive experience for the new teachers. The support system at each teacher's school varied considerably. Some teachers had strong support from veteran teachers on their teams as well as support from administration. Other teachers did not have that type of support, leading to more reliance on the TLC. Teachers with a weaker support system valued the mentoring experience more.

The fourth finding suggested new teacher self-efficacy increased as a result of the validation their TLC provided. When reflecting upon the beginning of the school year versus the end of the school year, many teachers stated they had grown. The TLCs' use of constant encouragement and guidance aided in personal and professional growth for teachers. When asked how they had grown, many teachers responded by referencing their confidence level. Five research participants were lateral entry and had no classroom experience prior to becoming a teacher. These teachers especially valued the support provided by the TLC. One teacher's quote perfectly alluded to an effective mentor: "At first, [the TLC is] like a loving mother but by the end she's pounding you into this finely-tuned instrument and gradually raising her expectations for the teacher" (Participant 9, personal communication, June 15, 2015).

## **Interpretation**

**Theoretical framework.** Illeris's (2002) Three Dimensions of Learning guided the methodology for this study and provided a framework for understanding and interpreting the data. The model states there are three dimensions involved in learning: cognitive, emotional, and social; and each one was clearly recognized in this study. Beginning teachers described their experiences of working with a TLC through the use of

two interviews. Each teacher reported experiencing the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of learning in relation to the mentoring experience. An in-depth explanation of each dimension is included in the following sections.

**Cognitive.** Illeris's (2002, 2003, 2004) cognitive function is representative of the idea that learning requires a specific skill set or acquisition of content knowledge.

Beginning teachers portrayed this dimension of learning throughout the interviews by citing an appreciation for their mentors' helpfulness with regard to completing work requiring a specific skill. Many teachers identified learning how to write PDPs and PEPs as concepts their mentor addressed. Not only did the new teachers need to have content knowledge of their subject, they had to complete paperwork, find test scores, organize their classrooms, and carry out curriculum planning, each aiding in their personal and professional learning. One teacher explained that his TLC highlighted the need to have a procedure for everything, a simple yet invaluable piece of advice for a novice. Another teacher explained learning classroom management was a struggle: "Knowing when to be firm and when to back off . . . and that fine balance" (Participant 1, personal communication, June 15, 2015). Learning within the mentoring experience allowed new teachers to gain ideas and instructional strategies from their mentors. New teachers created their lesson plans and as a result developed a sense of competency as a teacher.

The value of meeting teachers' cognitive needs reaches beyond measure. Providing new teachers with the necessary knowledge to aid in their success contributes to increasing overall teacher satisfaction, leading to a higher-quality education for students and decreased turnover for school systems. The researcher placed importance on understanding the new teachers' experiences with regard to the cognitive function in order to highlight the need for new teachers to acquire a specific skill set. Understanding

the new teachers' lack of or presence of knowledge was useful by presenting ways in which the mentoring relationship met or did not meet the needs of teachers. The researcher associated the cognitive dimension with Findings 1 and 3. Finding 1 indicated new teachers found their TLCs to be helpful, while Finding 3 compared and contrasted the TLCs' support with the colleagues' support. Overall, in this study, the cognitive needs of the new teachers were met through the assistance of the TLCs and colleagues. The majority of teachers expounded upon the fact that they learned more about teaching in general from their mentors. New teachers became more proficient in executing their lesson plans, learning how to complete paperwork, learning how to discipline students, and implementing a variety of instructional strategies.

**Emotional.** Illeris's (2002, 2003, 2004) emotional dimension includes the feelings, motivations, and mental energy associated with learning. Participants identified experiences that challenged them in diverse ways. One teacher explained, "I'm still coping with the ups and downs of being a teacher . . . you will start thinking it's you" (Participant 9, personal communication, July 22, 2015). That same teacher described his teaching experience as, "It's rewarding but not rewarding from an academic sense. It's more from trying to give people hope . . . to smile at someone" (Participant 9, personal communication, June 15, 2015). Another participant described his emotions at the beginning of his career and working with his TLC as "It was scary at first . . . but to have someone come in and be very positive . . . has been very effective" (Participant 1, personal communication, June 15, 2015). The teacher described a range of emotions by saying,

I've been surprised at how rewarding and gratifying it is to be able to see a smile on a child's face. To give that child hope, just to give them a hug . . . I'm

surprised at how much I've learned about myself as a person . . . how I've felt stronger as a person. (Participant 1, personal communication, June 15, 2015)

Research indicated even though beginning teachers may appear to be confident, they often need—and want—feedback (Boreen et al., 2009). Participants clearly described this idea throughout the interviews by associating their TLCs' feedback with their increased confidence and growth. One participant experienced aggravation due to her TLC's availability. The teacher felt as if the TLC was too busy, and her TLC's presence would have her "given a sense of importance" (Participant 3, personal communication, June 16, 2015).

The purpose of this study was to understand beginning teachers' experiences working with their TLCs as mentors. Understanding new teachers' thoughts, feelings, and motivations were crucial to fulfilling the purpose of the study and were used to address the study's research questions. The researcher used the data to associate the emotional dimension with Findings 3 and 4. Finding 3 highlighted the individualized differences of support received from colleagues and TLCs based on each participant's school context and TLC. Finding 4 addressed the validation provided by the TLC. The researcher found that the teachers' emotional needs were met through the utilization of a TLC provided by the district. Every teacher was emphatic about the confidence that resulted from receiving their TLC's encouragement. While the year was full of struggles and successes, ultimately each new teacher felt he/she grew tremendously. By understanding the new teachers' experiences, the researcher was able to conclude that the mentoring relationship was effective in the emotional dimension. Also, the researcher was able to conclude that new teachers' emotional needs were not met only by the TLC but by their colleagues as well.

**Social.** Illeris's (2002, 2003, 2004) social function involves external interactions such as participation, communication, and cooperation. Beginning teachers collaborate on a regular basis with colleagues, students, parents, administration, and their TLCs. These experiences shape them into their personal and professional beings. In this study, the participants elaborated on interacting with colleagues and their TLCs. Research supported the fact that new teachers need freedom to experiment and take risks in order to develop independence (Boreen et al., 2009). Research also suggested mentors can help beginning teachers navigate new terrain by self-assessing the school environment or school culture and providing a clarification to their mentees, introducing them to faculty and staff, modeling respect for administrators, and following school procedures (Boreen et al., 2009). These interactions can have a direct effect on a new teacher's experience. One participant stated, "It's a great feeling to be connected with faculty and like-minded folks" (Participant 1, personal communication, June 15, 2015). Another participant described time and scheduling to be factors that created a barrier for collaborating with colleagues. Many teachers who had a strong support system at their school had differing experiences with their TLC than teachers who had a weak support system, indicative of the influences interaction can have among the new teachers' experiences.

In this study, the researcher was able to link all four findings to Illeris's social dimension. The data indicated the new teachers reported areas that dealt with collaboration or the school environment. The TLCs were helpful, overloaded, provided individualized support, and increased confidence in new teachers—all of which relate to communication and collaboration. The regular interaction that took place between the TLC and new teacher was the most obvious type of social learning that took place in the mentoring relationship. Regular exchanges with the TLCs were a social function;

however, the new teachers were simultaneously learning through the cognitive and emotional dimensions. On a day-to-day basis, the new teachers collaborated with their colleagues as well as their TLC. By asking participants to describe their experiences with both the mentor and TLC, the researcher was able to attribute meaning to the data and understand the teachers' experiences with the mentoring phenomenon in the study.

### **Recommendations**

The findings from this study can help inform teacher induction policy, design, and implementation. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) stated, "Loss of new teachers plays a major role in the teacher shortage, but pouring more teachers into the system will not solve the retention problem" (p. 1). The researcher recommends that beginning teachers continue to be provided a TLC by the district. Support provided to new teachers through full-time TLCs is imperative to sustaining a high-quality, professional staff of teachers for the district. Learning how this support is provided and how teachers describe their experiences is informative to district staff.

Teachers are the most important factor for student learning; therefore, improving the quality of teaching is critical to student success. Continuous support through mentoring can help stimulate professional development for new teachers. In the study, many beginning teachers reported their interaction with the TLC to occur a few times per week. During the first few years, new teachers are in a transition phase of moving from a student of teaching to the teacher of students (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Other teachers are becoming familiarized with the educational world altogether through alternative licensure programs. Regardless of the pathway into the teaching profession, new teachers need intensive support from a mentor. The majority of teachers stated it would have been more beneficial if the TLCs were more available and had fewer teachers to service in the



county. The researcher agrees with this finding. The researcher recommends employing one TLC per school. If TLCs serve one school, it would eliminate the need for time spent traveling to multiple locations and result in increased time spent with new teachers.

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) identified lack of administrative support, poor student discipline and motivation, and lack of participation in decision making as effective improvement efforts. Beginning teachers reported the TLCs served the purpose of bridging the gap between the teacher and administrator. The TLCs also provided instructional ideas, resources, feedback, and encouragement to deal with classroom management and student engagement and motivation. The TLCs validated the efforts of new teachers and aided in increasing their confidence levels. The researcher recommends the TLC continue utilizing the current effective practices as well as identifying ways to give the beginning teachers a voice in the decision making regarding their mentoring experience and overall induction requirements.

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study provided insight into other areas of research that could take place in the future. First, since this study utilized phenomenology methodology, it was not concerned with solving a problem. The study was focused on beginning teachers describing their lived experiences with their mentor in order to attribute meaning to their experiences. Additional research is necessary to explore the beliefs and attitudes of more teachers using varied methodology. Phenomenology did not allow for generalizations to be made for the district. While this study was an excellent starting point for understanding the mentoring component for the district, additional research would be needed in order to make decisions with regard to change.

Second, research is needed to compare and contrast beginning teachers'

experiences working with a TLC who has mentoring duties at one school versus working with a TLC who has mentoring duties at numerous schools. In this study, only one participant had a TLC who was assigned only to her school. Eight other participants had a TLC assigned to two or three different schools. Participant 5's TLC began the school year serving two schools but the TLC was reassigned to serve one school. The participant was able to have experience working with the TLC while she was assigned to two schools as well as when she only had one school. While Participant 5 noted that having the TLC full-time made a significant difference, more research is desirable.

Third, while studying the mentoring component of induction is informative, mentoring is one component of the entire induction program for the district. In order to gain a holistic understanding of the induction program and/or effectiveness of the program, research would need to be carried out. The effectiveness of the mentoring component was not determined through this study. Research that evaluates the mentoring component and induction program would be beneficial and invaluable to the district.

Finally, the sample of participants was limited to nine beginning teachers. These nine teachers were diverse in content area; however, only Year 1 and Year 2 teachers participated. The researcher was unable to elicit cooperation with Year 3 teachers. Additional research regarding the experiences of beginning teachers in Year 3 would be appropriate to gaining a broader understanding of mentoring and induction. A more comprehensive sample size for additional research would be conducive to expanding the usefulness of a TLC.

### **Summary**

In this study, the researcher was able to explore and describe beginning teachers' experiences with their district-employed TLC. Beginning teachers revealed four themes

relevant to the three research questions posed by the researcher. The findings were valuable at providing insight into the mentoring phenomenon for new teachers. The data were used to identify ways in which new teachers' cognitive, emotional, and social learning needs were met. The researcher used the data to provide recommendations for the district and to serve as a guiding mechanism for understanding the mentoring component of new teacher induction. Overall, new teachers highly valued the contributions of their TLCs and felt an overall growth in their performance under his/her guidance.

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## Appendix A

### North Carolina Mentor Self-Assessment

<b>Mentor Self-Assessment</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Accomplished</b>	<b>Distinguished</b>	<b>Not Demonstrated</b>
<b>Standard 1: Mentors support beginning teachers to demonstrate leadership.</b>					
a. Trusting relationship and coaching					
b. Leadership					
c. Communication and collaboration					
d. Best practices					
e. Ethical standards					
f. Advocacy for beginning teachers and students					
<b>Standard 2: Mentors support beginning teachers to establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students.</b>					
a. Relationship for students					
b. Relationships with parents					
c. Relationships at school and in community					
d. Honor and respect for diversity					
e. Classroom environments that optimize learning					
f. Reaching students of all learning needs					
<b>Standard 3: Mentors support beginning teachers to know the content they teach.</b>					
a. NCSCOS and 21st century goals					
b. Content and curriculum					
<b>Standard 4: Mentors support beginning teachers to facilitate learning for their students.</b>					
a. Instructional practice					
b. Professional practice					
c. Student assessment					
<b>Standard 5: Mentors support beginning teachers to reflect on their practice.</b>					
a. Allocation and use of time with beginning teachers					
b. Reflective Practice					
c. Mentor data collection					

**Evidence that supports rating:**

**Reflections for Improvement:**

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions for First Interview

### **Interview Questions**

1. Briefly describe your pathway into teaching.
2. How many years of teaching have you completed?
3. What are your professional goals?
4. How many TLC's have you been assigned during your teaching career? Do you know your TLC's area of licensure?
5. How would you describe your teaching experience so far?
6. What has been instrumental in the profession so far?
7. What resources have you found to be instrumental?
8. Have you taken part in any trainings that have been instrumental? If yes, how?
9. Are there any people that you have found to be instrumental in helping you succeed? If so, who and how have they helped you?
10. Have you experienced any struggles in your teaching career?
  - a. If yes, please describe these experiences. Are the struggles ongoing or are they resolved? How and why do you think this?
  - b. In your opinion what would have been the ideal solution to the problem or situation?
11. Have you been surprised by anything in your teaching profession so far?
  - a. If yes, can you describe these experiences?
  - b. How do you negotiate or manage these surprises?
12. How would you compare and contrast the support you receive from your colleagues and the support you receive from your TLC?
13. How would you describe your experience working with your TLC?
14. How would you describe your experience working with your colleagues?
15. Are the TLCs helpful? If yes, how? If no, why?
16. Can you describe specific experiences when you found your TLC to be helpful?
17. Does having a coach employed through the district have an impact on your teaching? If yes, how?
18. Does having a TLC have an impact on your motivation to remain in the teaching profession? If yes, how?
19. Does having a TLC have an impact on your development as a teacher? If yes, how?
20. Has your TLC impacted your belief in yourself? If yes, how?
21. Can you describe ways in which the experience with your mentor could be enhanced or improved?
22. Is there anything else you would like to elaborate on or add regarding your teaching experience and working with your TLC?

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions for Second Interview

**Interview Questions**  
**Second Interview**

1. *Discuss initial data analysis with participants (member-checking).* Describe your responses to the following statements:
  - Most teachers' experiences were positive. The TLCs were very helpful at providing ideas, getting materials, etc. However, they need to be more available by having less of a load of teachers.
  - Support by TLC and colleagues were both beneficial, but different. Colleagues are more invested in their own classrooms, but still helpful; TLCs are solely committed to new teacher success. Both provide emotional and professional support. Support from colleagues is usually instantaneous while TLC is not.
  - TLCs have impacted new teachers' self-efficacy by validating what they are doing. They often second-guess themselves. TLCs provide confidence to new teachers through their constant encouragement and feedback.
2. What type of bond do you have with your mentor?
3. What type of bond do you have with your colleagues?
4. Imagine you didn't have a TLC. Describe what you think your teaching experience would be like.
5. If your TLC was talking about your growth over the year, what would he/she say?
6. How has your TLC assessed your growth?
7. Has your TLC seen your students' growth? If yes, how?
8. What was your TLC's feedback like?
9. How has collaborating with your colleagues been beneficial?
10. Is there anything else you would like to elaborate on or add regarding your experiences with your TLC?

## Appendix D

### Approval Letter to Conduct Study



**Interim Superintendent**  
Dr. Sandra R. McCullen

June 8, 2015

**Board Chairman**  
Don Christopher West

To: Kari Hobbs

**Board Vice-Chairman**  
Arnold L. Flowers

Re: Permission to Conduct Research in Wayne County Schools

**Members**

Patricia A. Burden  
Dr. Dwight B. Cannon  
Richard W. Pridgen  
Edward L. Radford  
Jennifer S. Strickland

Your request to conduct research in Wayne County Public Schools is approved. If I can be of further assistance to you, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David A. Lewis".

David A. Lewis, Ed.D.  
Assistant Superintendent for Accountability / Information Technology  
Services / Transportation

Cc: Dr. Sandra McCullen, Interim Superintendent



## Appendix E

### Consent Form for Research

**Consent Form**  
Gardner-Webb University

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled, "Beginning Teachers' Experiences Working with a District-Employed Teaching and Learning Coach in their Role as Mentor in a North Carolina School District." The purpose of the study is to better understand the impact of Teaching and Learning Coaches on beginning teachers during their first three years in the profession.

The study will seek to answer three research questions: (1) How do beginning teachers describe their experiences working with a district-employed Teaching and Learning Coach? (2) How do beginning teachers perceive the difference between the support provided by a district-employed Teaching and Learning Coach and the support provided by a colleague? and (3) How has having a Teaching and Learning Coach employed by the district impacted the self-efficacy of beginning teachers?

By signing this consent form I:

1. Voluntarily agree to participate in the research study.
2. May not personally benefit from this study, but acknowledge the information obtained may benefit others.
3. Am free to refuse participation and to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice towards me.
4. Understand my participation and all documents gained from the study will not be use in an evaluative way.
5. Acknowledge that records from this study will be kept confidential and, if applicable, pseudonyms will be used in the final document.
6. Agree to participate in *two* one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

If you have any questions regarding this study, you may contact Kari Sanderson Hobbs by phone XXXXXXXX or by email XXXXXXXXXXXXX.

Check one box:

☐ I choose to voluntarily participate

☐ I choose to opt-out of the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix F

### Peer Review of Data Analysis

August 4, 2015

Peer Reviewer: Cari Maneen

Title: Beginning Teachers' Experiences Working with a District-Employed Teaching and Learning Coach in their Role as Mentor in a North Carolina School District

Kari,

I have read the nine participant responses obtained from the first and second interviews in your study. I also compared your coding with the participant responses as well as my analysis of the responses. It is my opinion that you have provided an accurate and thorough representation of participant responses. Themes identified represent patterns in responses. Table 6 confirms the frequency of participant responses, and Table 7 details how the theme and research questions align. Your findings are confirmed with the data and reported accurately in your detailed narrative. If I can be of further assistance, please let me know.

Appendix G  
Role of Researcher

### **Role of the Researcher**

Over the timespan of my first three years as a teacher, I had at least six different mentors. Needless to say, I did not have an ideal experience. During this time, the induction program in our county was in a transition phase—moving from in-house teacher mentors to full-time county employed mentors. My first three years of teaching were a struggle. I struggled with organization, classroom management, curriculum planning, and basic school procedures. I could not find a healthy balance for my life. I would go in early and spend every night in front of the computer trying to figure out what to do for the next day. My students liked me because I was young, but they took advantage of me. I was intimidated by the veteran teachers and rarely asked questions. On one occasion, one of my female students told me another male student had been bothering her. I did not quite know how to handle the situation so I simply told her to stay away from him. Later that day, one of my co-teachers confronted me very harshly and reprimanded me for the way I handled the situation.

At the time, it was my first year teaching, eighth grade science. There were four eighth grade teachers—two veterans, two new teachers. The other new teacher taught English Language Arts. Our co-worker, who was a veteran teacher, did not approve of the way the other new teacher, Becky, was operating her classroom. She would randomly step into Becky's classroom and disapprove of what she was doing. I was mortified because it took away Becky's authority in front of her students. She ended up having her class switched with the veteran teacher's to finish out the year, a decision made without her input or collaboration. She was assigned to begin teaching Social Studies because it was not a tested subject. She was not given ample time to learn. She

was not guided or encouraged. She was not being treated as a professional, able to make decisions. This incident caused a great stress and put a lot of pressure on me.

By the third year, I resigned in November. I had had enough. I was a full-time *new* teacher, a full-time graduate student, the cheerleading advisor, and the FFA advisor. I could not handle it anymore, so I put in my two week notice and I went home. I spent the next several months working at home with my parents before I returned to teaching the next year at a different school.

I had almost become a statistic—a quitter. If it had not been for my internal motivation to succeed, I would have never returned and moved on to pursue another avenue. I do not want this to happen to other new teachers. Consistent and encouraging support is essential for the success of beginning teachers. The first three years were a huge learning experience in my career. New teachers need colleagues to rally for them and advocate for their success.

I chose to use this study as a way to advocate for our county's beginning teachers. It is important to figure out how our teachers feel—something that never happened when I was a new teacher. We have to understand the experiences, feelings, and attitudes that new teachers have when working with their mentors. We must learn to create meaningful relationships, build trust, and offer a supportive and listening ear.

Today, I am in my seventh year of teaching. I have seen significant changes in my classroom management, curriculum planning, organization, and my involvement with parents and community. I feel confident in what I do, and I am focused on improving my students' learning. I want all beginning teachers to feel valued, worthy, and competent. Beginning teachers should not be treated as an inferior to other teachers. When new teachers enter the profession, they assume the same responsibilities as veteran teachers. I

want to continue to grow in my profession and learn how to best support the needs and concerns of beginning teachers.