

Examining the Role of Principals in the Retention of New Teachers 1

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## Examining the Role of Principals in the Retention of New Teachers 3

### Table of Contents

Title Page .....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Table of Contents .....	3
Abstract.....	4
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	5
Statement of Problem.....	6
Purpose Statement.....	6
Research Questions.....	6
Theoretical Rationale .....	7
Assumptions.....	7
Background and Need.....	8
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature.....	9
Introduction.....	9
Historical Context.....	9
Performance Accomplishment.....	11
Vicarious Experiences .....	11
Verbal Persuasion .....	11
Emotional Arousal .....	11
Review of the Previous Research .....	12
Causes Behind Turnover.....	12
What Principals Can Do / How Principals Can Help .....	23
Administrative Records .....	29
Special Collections.....	30
Chapter 3 Method .....	32
Description of Methodology.....	32
Description of Sample.....	32
Data Gathering Strategies .....	32
Data Analysis Approach .....	33
Ethical Standards .....	33
Chapter 4 Findings.....	35
Description of Site, Individuals, Data.....	35
Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis .....	39
Summary of Major Findings.....	39
Comparison of Findings to Existing Literature .....	40
Limitations/Gaps in the Study .....	41
Implications for Future Research.....	41
Overall Significance of the Study.....	42
References.....	43

### Abstract

New teachers are faced with many challenges during the first few years of teaching. They have to adjust to a new work environment, interact with parents, resolve a variety of conflicts, and design stimulating lessons for their students--often with few resources at hand. The large and varied workload that teachers carry during their first few years can often be overwhelming and intimidating. Without the proper support from their colleagues and principal, the likelihood of new teachers leaving the profession is high. In fact, it is estimated that fifty percent of new teachers leave the profession within five years of teaching. This is a chronic issue for schools and districts across America. The turnover of new teachers is very harmful to our Nation's school system—both financially and due to the discontinuity it brings within school communities

While school districts have little flexibility over the amount of money allotted to the support of first-time teachers, they *can* control the specific methods used and quality their of support. One of the most influential factors in determining new teacher retention is the level of support from the principal and school administration.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role principals play in the retention—or turnover—of first-time teachers, and to learn what cost-effective methods principals can utilize to provide support for their new teachers.

This study follows a qualitative design using interviews as the format. The participants included new teachers with three years or less teaching experience and an experienced education professional and writer. Results indicated that much can be done at the school level to retain new teachers, however much of the power to make this happen lies in the hands of the principal.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

Last year during my full-time student teaching experience, I often found myself overwhelmed and unconfident in my abilities as a teacher. On a few occasions I even questioned my place in the classroom. There was so much work to be done and so many people to please, and I constantly questioned how I was capable of doing it all. My mentor teachers frequently drilled me about appearing “in control” at all times and not exhibiting any weakness or struggle to my principal or fellow teachers. Because I was taught to appear in control at all times, I did not learn how to ask for help from my colleagues, nor did I know how to successfully network with my principal and administration; instead I became intimidated by them. At times I felt very alone in my struggle and did not feel that I could confide in anyone for support. While I was struggling to stay on top of my varied yet massive workload, I was also isolating myself with my façade of being in control.

Reflecting on my past experience, I can understand how many first-time teachers feel inundated and beat during their first few years in the classroom without proper support. Many new teachers feel the need to appear in control at all times, yet this prevents them from receiving the appropriate support from the principal, administration and fellow colleagues that they so desperately need. It is with administrative support and networking that new teachers will truly thrive (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). While schools and districts are constantly raising and extending the expectations for teachers, many teachers are not equipped with the necessary support and resources that will enable them to succeed.

### Statement of Problem

First-time teachers are not equipped with the proper support during their first few years of teaching. This often results in overwhelmed and over-worked teachers who struggle to establish themselves as confident, long-term educators. In the United States, 50% of first-time teachers leave the classroom within the first 5 years of teaching (Ingersol & Smith, 2004). It is unfortunate that teachers are leaving due to a lack of support from the administration, principal and colleagues within the school. Furthermore, the problem of teacher turnover is costly for the school district, and such instability negatively affects students as well.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to learn how to better equip first-time teachers with adequate support from principals so as to raise their confidence in the classroom, equip them with the proper tools to succeed and thus, lower the turnover rate for beginning teachers. In order to boost confidence in teachers and increase teacher retention, it is important to identify the specific factors that determine whether or not a first-time teacher feels supported by their school principal. Once these specific factors have been identified, possible solutions to the ongoing problem of teacher turnover can be addressed.

### Research Questions

What problems do first-time teachers encounter in receiving principal support?

What type of support from principals is necessary so as to enable first-time teachers for success in the classroom and thus increase the rate of teacher retention?

### Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical rationale stems from two perspectives; the first is Instructional Scaffolding. Originally developed by Jerome Bruner, Instructional Scaffolding is the support given by “a more expert individual” in a one-on-one interaction (Sherin, Reiser & Edelson, 2004). In this study, I will exam the scaffolding methods used by principals with their beginning teachers. Using the method of scaffolding, principals can gradually help teachers to their full potential without overwhelming them during their first few years.

The second theory is Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy and persistence. Self-efficacy is the belief that one is capable of successfully performing a particular task or at a certain level of achievement. If teachers have a high level of self-efficacy, they are likely to persist longer when faced with challenges within the school setting. In this study, explore effective ways for principals to raise the self-efficacy in their first-time teachers.

### Assumptions

A lack of support for a first-time teacher causes discouragement and may cause him/her to feel overwhelmed as an educator. A high turnover rate for new teachers is often a result of limited support within the school setting. The principal’s level of support for new teachers plays a large role in the retention—or turnover—of new teachers. Teacher turnover negatively affects school systems.

### Background and Need

In a time of budget cuts and decreased funding for schools, the rate of new teacher turnover is further harming the school system. Not only is the instability from such turnover harmful to students and the school staff, it is also very costly to the district. Several studies indicate that the level of in-school support for new teachers greatly affects their decision to stay or leave. Luckily, additional support by the principal and other administration does not have to require more funding. While many studies point out what new teachers need, I will examine the different types of support that principals can provide to their teachers in order to enable them for success.



## Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

### Introduction

A major problem with teacher turnover is the financial toll it takes on its district. The recruitment, hiring and retraining of replacement teachers due to turnover costs approximately 7.34 billion dollars to school districts nationwide (Greenlee, 2009). Urban schools are estimated to spend \$70,000 each per year on transfers alone and non-urban schools spend \$33,000 each for the same reason (Understanding, 2008). A 2004 North Carolina study found the cost of recruiting, hiring and professionally developing newly hired teachers to be \$11,500 per teacher. In a 2003 study, it was found that the turnover rate for Texas teachers in their first three years was nearly 40%. The cost of each teacher who left was estimated at \$8000, with a total cost of \$329 million a year to the state of Texas (Greenlee, 2009).

Studies indicate a variety of reasons for teacher turnover. Some studies highlight the importance of new teacher induction programs for teacher retention. Many studies suggest that the level of support for a new teacher is crucial to their success as long-term educators. The purpose of this literature review is to examine the main reasons behind both teacher turnover and teacher retention in order to determine the most effective ways for principals to support their first-time teachers. In addition to explaining the historical context behind my research, I have segmented this section into three parts: causes of beginning teacher turnover, reasons behind the retention of new teachers, and solutions for principals in addressing turnover issues.

### Historical Context

In 1977 Albert Bandura, a psychologist and professor, wrote a book that broke new ground for the field of psychology: Social Learning Theory. Originally this theory was meant for people with phobic disorders to help them overcome their irrational fears. With further study, he learned that one's self-efficacy beliefs influence changes in behavior--and for the phobic, it affects their

level of fear-arousal. From the late 1970s onward, Bandura studied the role that self-efficacy beliefs play in everyday human functioning and discovered that his theory extends well beyond people with phobic disorders.

Perceived self-efficacy is the belief one has in one's personal capabilities. It determines the goals that people set for themselves, how much effort is expended, how long they persevere, and how resilient they are in the face of failures and setbacks. According to Bandura, perceived self-efficacy regulates human functioning in four major ways: cognitive, motivational, mood or affect, and depression. A high or low level of self-efficacy in each of these areas determines a person's level of persistence in a task (Bandura, 1977).

People with high-perceived self-efficacy tend to set high goals and sustain strong commitment to their goals. They take great interest in what they do and generally view difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered. In the face of obstacles, they increase their effort and recover quickly after a setback. Their outlook sustains motivation, reduces stress, and lowers vulnerability to depression.

People with low self-efficacy have weak commitment to their goals and generally low aspirations. When faced with challenging tasks, they dwell on obstacles, the consequences of failure and their personal deficiencies. They also blame their own inadequacies for any failure. They will slacken or give up in the face of difficulty, recover slowly from setbacks, and easily fall victim to stress and depression.

In order to raise one's perceived self-efficacy, a person needs to become equipped with tools for managing difficult situations that might arise. They must learn how to take control of their lives

and begin a process of self-regulative change.

Bandura (1977) suggests that there are four ways to develop a resilient sense of personal efficacy:

*Performance Accomplishment*

This involves personal mastery of a difficult task. Bandura says that successes raise mastery expectations while repeated failures lower them--especially if the mishaps occur early in their experience. Once a person develops a feeling of success, it permeates to other areas of his/her life as well.

*Vicarious Experiences*

A vicarious experience is one in which a person watches another perform challenging activities without adverse consequences. This can generate expectations that s/he can improve, too, with stronger efforts.

*Verbal Persuasion*

Verbal persuasion can increase a person's self-efficacy through positive feedback and "cheerleading." However, one can further undermine a person's perceived self-efficacy if specific feedback and support is not provided along with words of praise.

*Emotional Arousal*

Emotional arousal is the reliance on emotional and physical states to determine one's capabilities. Tension, anxiety and depression are interpreted as signs of personal deficiency. Once one becomes aware of their impulsive reaction to emotional and physical states, they can do a better job of curbing their response.

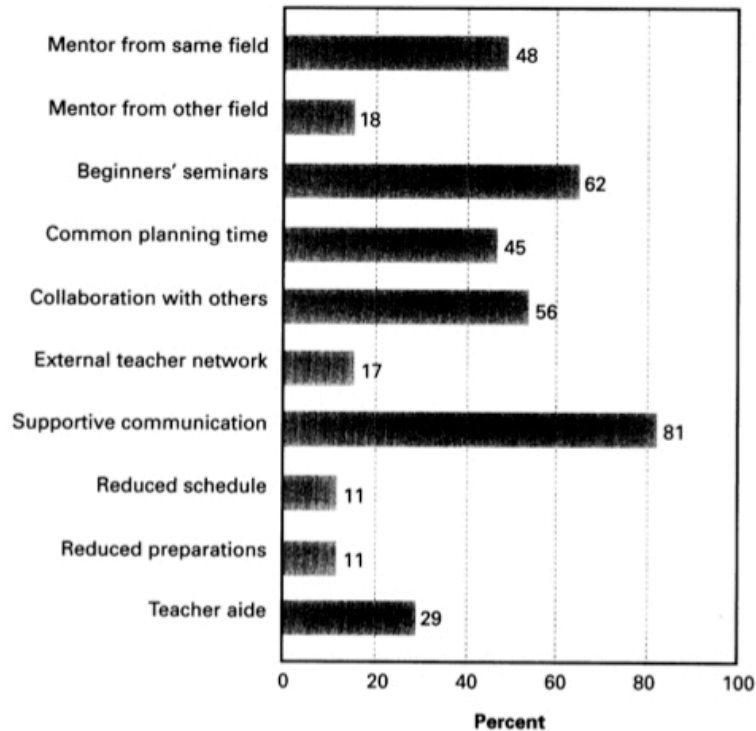
## Review of the Previous Research

### *Causes Behind Turnover*

Merrow's explanation for new teacher turnover is that “We train teachers poorly and then treat them badly—and so they leave in droves” (Brown & Wynn, p.40; 2009). For example, while our nation hired 232,000 teachers in 1999, we lost more than 287,000. Only 12% of this loss is due to retirement; the large majority of these lost teachers are leaving long before the age of retirement. This proves that the problem of teacher turnover extends far beyond our retiring educators (Brown & Wynn, 2009).

Ingersoll and Smith (2004) address a gap that the authors have found in research done on teacher induction. Their study compares new teachers who have gone through an induction process with teachers who have not. In this study, the researchers have a control group, which increases the validity of the data. The authors studied different types of support that new teachers receive from the school and analyzed the effectiveness of each.

Percentage of beginning teachers who received various induction supports (1999-2000):



(Ingersoll & Smith, 2004)

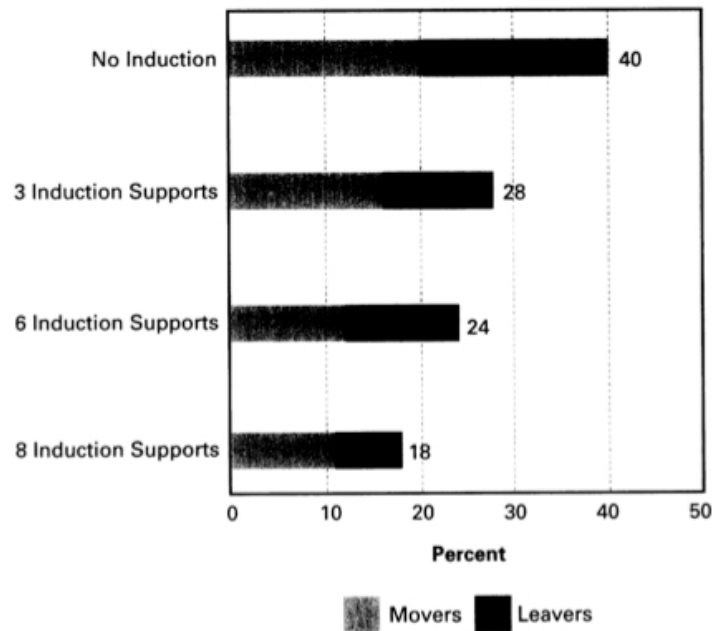
Ingersoll and Smith found a strong association between beginning teachers' likelihood of turnover and the level of induction and mentoring support that they receive. The strength of this association depended on both the type and amount of induction and mentoring support that beginning teachers were given. With Ingersoll and Smith's data, one can determine the potential rates of new teacher turnover based on their types and different levels of support.

The researchers considered ten different induction components that new teachers received. These components spanned from having a mentor to attending seminars, to being provided with a teacher's aid during the school day. Some beginning teachers in his study received only one induction component while other teachers received "bundles" of supports.

Of the sample of 3,235 beginning teachers, 29% left their school at the end of their first year. Of all the first-time teachers in his study, 16% received zero of the aforementioned induction supports during their first year; their “predicted probability of turnover” at the end of the year was 40% (see chart below). For the 22% of teachers that received three induction components, the probability of their turnover was 28%. Only 13% of beginning teachers received six induction components; their turnover probability was 24% after their first year. Finally, less than 1% of all beginning teachers examined in 1999-2000 experienced a “full induction experience,” receiving eight induction components. Their likelihood of turnover after the first year was less than half of those who received no induction support—under 20% (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

Not only did some types of support yield a lower level of turnover in beginning teachers, but Ingersoll also found that as the number of induction components increased for these teachers, the probability of their turnover decreased. In other words, new teachers that received multiple types of teacher induction support had a significantly lower probability of turnover at the end of their first year. Conversely, new teachers that received minimal amounts of induction support had a much higher rate of turnover after just one school year (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004).

Percentage of beginning teacher turnover after the first year, according to amount of induction support (2000-2001):



(Ingersoll & Smith, 2004)

Two major reasons that teachers list for leaving their school are working conditions and lack of support by school administration. Unfortunately, schools with a large concentration of disadvantaged or at-risk students tend to have poor working conditions—often with fewer teacher resources, fewer opportunities for teachers to make their voices heard, and less-than-adequate facilities. According to Pomanski (2010), a lack of resources “is suggested to weaken motivation, reduce work involvement and lead to disengagement from one’s work” (Pomanski, 2010; p. 1341)

Much of teacher turnover is a result of teachers migrating from schools with poor working conditions to schools with better resources, more professional development opportunities, higher student achievement and lower proportions of minority and poor students.

Many teachers who leave difficult schools cite inadequate administration support, lack of autonomy and a heavy workload among the most common factors in their decision to leave (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). However, beginning teachers across the nation cite these same reasons for leaving their school, whether or not they were teaching at an aforementioned “difficult school” (Futernick, 2007).

Data from Futernick's survey of 2000 current and former California public school educators highlight the specific factors that contribute to teacher turnover. The most basic findings from his study suggest that teachers are less concerned with compensation than they are with certain components pertaining to their work environment. The definition of “work environment” in this study goes beyond physical conditions of the school grounds (although the physical environment is also considered); rather, it encompasses “a whole range of instructional, collegial, and systemic conditions” within the setting (p. 2). Futernick refers to the teachers that left the profession prior to retirement age as “leavers”.

Overall, the “leavers” in Futernick's study cited three main reasons for abandoning their profession. The first reason teachers listed for leaving is due to inadequate system supports. This includes “a lack of time for planning and professional development, textbooks for their students, and reliable assistance from the district office.” The factor most frequently cited by “leavers” was bureaucratic impediments. Such impediments include excessive paperwork, too many unnecessary classroom interruptions, or too many restrictions on teaching itself. Many teachers viewed these impediments as issues that essentially drove them out of the classroom (Futernick, 2007). Besides inadequate system supports and bureaucratic impediments, a third common reason for leaving was a lack of collegial supports. An environment without such support lacks a



sense of team and common purpose among faculty and staff members. This makes the act of collaboration and the development of mutually supportive relationships among teachers difficult to maintain. Such conditions can cause teachers to feel secluded within an uncooperative environment and may essentially lead them to question their place in the classroom (McLaurin, 2009).

#### Reasons for Retention

According to a 2006 study by Duke University, beginning teachers that are satisfied with the principal's leadership and school climate are more likely to remain in their profession (Gilmer, 2006). Of the 217 first- and second-year teachers, the research team discovered that 30 percent planned to remain in teaching for five years or less. While teachers reported being generally satisfied with their mentoring programs, the results from this study indicate that there is no relationship between mentoring support and a teacher's decision to remain at the school or within the district. This study did find that teachers are more likely to stay at their school if they are satisfied with their principal's leadership and with the school climate. The researchers in this study believe this is due to the fact that the principal is the key player in decision-making on the school-level (Gilmer, 2006). One way that North Carolina is ensuring that teachers get adequate principal support is by requiring that principals receive training in topics such as teacher retention, effectiveness and empowerment.

Brown and Wynn (2009) describe an empirical inquiry of teacher retention issues and examine the different leadership styles in principals with low teacher turnover rates. The researchers also address teacher shortage, turnover and support. They reference a recent survey

that suggests that the decision by a new teacher to remain at her school site is strongly influenced by principal leadership and school climate.

In Brown and Wynn's study, the researchers identify specific traits and leadership styles of principals that most effectively promote teacher retention. The researchers focus on twelve successful principals within one small urban district and examine how they prevent turnover in new teachers through semi-structured interviews. A common trait among all twelve principals is that they genuinely like new teachers and nurture teacher bonds. They encourage all of their staff to mentor and support the new additions to the team. All twelve principals also developed a family-like atmosphere in order to motivate and help new teachers feel positive about their placement with the school. Additionally, all twelve principals welcome and value their new teachers' ideas and leadership.

Each principal in this study identified support as their primary role and responsibility in retaining new teachers. For most of these principals, support covers a variety of things, including organization, discipline, affirmation, resources, curriculum and instruction. All twelve principals agree that spending more time, providing resources, and building capacity are critical components in retaining their teachers. When asked why the turnover rate of new teachers is so high, most principals agreed that the answer is due to a lack of support. The supportive leadership qualities in principals such as these twelve can only be attained through flexibility, collaboration, and understanding. Rather than viewing their role of principal as "top-down" administrator, these leaders prefer to identify themselves as "facilitator," "collaborator," and "team leader" (Brown, 2009).

The high teacher retention rates of these twelve principals are due to the high value they place on new teacher support. All twelve leaders provide conditions and resources necessary to support their new teachers in their professional development, growth as educators, and continuous learning. These principals share in decision-making with their staff, work collaboratively towards shared goals, and provide nurturance, guidance and leadership when needed. All of these factors greatly influence the retention of their teachers (Brown, 2009).

A new job often comes with a high level of uncertainty resulting in stress, so Pomanski (2010) suggests that supportive relationships are particularly crucial to new employees—or in this case, beginning teachers. Supportive colleagues, such as mentor teachers, can make new employees feel respected, assist them in mobilizing other resources, help them in acquiring new skills, and provide opportunities for “new perspectives to work-related issues” (p. 1341). Fellow employees can provide opportunities to discuss work-related problems, necessary affirmation of a new teacher’s abilities, and exchange key information. Feeling trusted and accepted by one’s colleagues is an important predictor of successful adjustment to the workplace, and is “manifested in intention to remain on the job” (1341). Thus, beginning teachers with supportive colleagues are more likely to be retained at the end of their first crucial years.

Pomanski’s 2010 study also reveals that social support becomes particularly important when one is under a heavy workload. Under heavy workloads, teachers with sufficient social support indicated less intention to turnover than those with low social support. Teachers with high levels of support from their colleagues have a stronger desire to stay in the profession, despite their increasing workload. Pomanski hypothesizes that these teachers learn to value their

supportive environment, which strengthens their willingness to stay on the job. Higher levels of social support from colleagues “may have reparative properties in terms of teachers’ willingness to quit their jobs” (p. 1341). Perhaps teachers develop a sense of being “in it together” when under conditions of both high stress and high social support. If one of these teachers were to quit, they would be leaving their colleagues to deal with the situation without them, perhaps even increasing the stress and workload of their colleagues. This idea suggests that social support serves as “glue” in keeping a unit together under stress and, as Pomanski suggests, should be further explored in future research.

In addition to social support, successful socialization of new teachers is another important factor in retention. According to researchers Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2010), successful socialization “results in more competent teachers who are committed to remaining on the job” (p. 1592). New teacher induction programs have been widely implemented to optimize this socialization process. These induction programs are designed to work directly with teacher socialization by offering assistance, guidance, and support to new teachers.

While the most common method of induction support is mentoring, other components include workshops, orientation, classroom observation and reduced workloads. The induction phase of new teachers is a crucial time in which “they expand their content-specific repertoire of teaching strategies, acquire important practical knowledge related to students, curricula, workplace norms and school policies, test their beliefs and ideas about teaching, and mold their professional identity” (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010, p. 1593). In order to become a

successful, long-term educator while simultaneously undergoing the intensive induction process, teachers are encouraged to utilize the support of their colleagues.

Nasser-Abu Alhija's research focuses on the relationship between socialization and teacher satisfaction in their job. Data was collected via questionnaires of 243 beginning teachers. Data analysis indicates that the most significant predictor variables with the greatest impact on new teacher assimilation in new teacher retention are support from a mentor and/or school colleagues. The three additional predictor variables are help from the principal, workload, and completion of teacher training (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010).

Research studies consistently point to mentors as the key to new teacher retention. McLaurin (2009) highlights different ways that principals can incorporate new teacher mentors in their schools. Virginia's Fairfax County has implemented a program called "Great Beginnings," in which new teachers meet with veteran teachers the summer before they begin teaching, monthly during their first year, and continue collaborating until their third year of teaching. This program has become so successful that other school districts are adopting the "Great Beginnings" induction and mentoring program for their own schools.

Several districts in New York and Ohio have significantly reduced their turnover of new teachers by giving new teachers free time to collaborate with their mentors during their beginning years. Teachers in this mentor program not only stayed in the field of education at "sizable rates" but also became effective much faster than the teachers who did not receive mentor support. McLaurin (2009) suggests that mentorship programs can be beneficial to

experienced teachers too, as it challenges veteran teachers while keeping them motivated and passionate about teaching.

Retaining teachers is most notably difficult in “challenging schools”—schools that serve greater portions of low achieving, low-income, and/or minority students. Such schools have a significantly higher turnover rate than those with a wealthier, low-minority population. Thus, extra attention must be given to the retention of teachers at these challenging schools in order to decrease the overall turnover rates of new teachers.

While challenging schools come with an array of difficulties for teachers, many educators truly want to work in such places if there is well-rounded principal leadership. Such desired leadership by these teachers includes principals that will: build relationships, advocate for teachers, include teachers in their decision-making process, empower the staff, build leadership capacity within their school, allow opportunities for teachers to grow, be accessible to teachers, provide individual and team planning time, and ensure a mix of both new and expert teachers within each team (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). A principal that provides some or all of these opportunities to their teachers is preferred by educators, even over added bonuses to get them to stay. Of the teachers surveyed, the majority did not place emphasis on bonuses or increased salaries as determining factors behind their retention. Rather, most teachers feel that the leadership within the school is most important in deciding whether or not to stay at a challenging school.

*What Principals Can Do / How Principals Can Help*

The desired traits of principals listed above are not just those wanted by teachers working in challenging schools. Principals who view teachers as leaders and support them in their leadership process are most desired by teachers, regardless of the economics surrounding the school (Carr, 2009). Because the principal is a key influence in retention, it is worth taking a good look at how their leadership can help—or hinder—the retention of new teachers (Greenlee and Brown, 2009).

Contrary to what many may think, low salaries are not the top reason teachers leave. Top factors for teacher turnover include too little preparation time, heavy teaching load, and a lack of say in factors affecting teaching and student achievement (Exstrom, 2009). Educators want supportive school leadership, enough time for planning and collaboration, an atmosphere of trust and respect, and an appropriate workload. When these needs are met, not only do teachers stay, but students tend to achieve at higher levels, too. When these needs are not met, however, the rate of teacher turnover is higher and student scores are low. More than high salaries, the factors amounting to a quality work environment are what most influence a teacher's decision to work—and stay—with a school (Exstrom, 2009).

Exstrom's work (2009) was printed in the "State Legislatures" newsletter, written for the National Conference of State Legislatures. The article sites a new report from the National Commission on Teacher and America's Future as well as a national survey of school personnel conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in 2000-2001. The author of this article stresses the need for surveys designed for teachers to assess their working conditions. Some states are already showing the benefit of these surveys, as the results have already led policy makers to

examine the conditions in which teachers have been working. Essentially, this data gives legislators, administration and school principals a new perspective by revealing teachers' real needs.

According to Carr (2009), a critical piece in teacher retention by principals and administration is understanding the psychology behind who becomes a teacher and why. By understanding the motivation behind those who become teachers, Carr believes that administrators can better recruit and retain teachers without “breaking the bank.” Most teachers choose education because it gives them the opportunity to make a real, lasting difference in children’s lives. For many educators, teaching represents not only a career, but also an important life mission. Carr suggests that, by nature, educators are intrinsically motivated. Therefore, a successful principal enables and encourages her teachers to do that which they’re already driven to doing—making a real, lasting difference in the classroom—and thus, keeps teachers satisfied in their jobs. Carr’s article sites a 2006 analysis of teacher retention studies which suggests that non-monetary rewards (such as strong mentoring programs and staff development) matter more than higher salaries and signing bonuses to new teachers. Thanking teachers for what they do, says Carr, can go a long way for principals and district leaders.

Morgan and Kritsonis (2008) examine the alarming statistics of teacher turnover and take a deeper look at the retention of new teachers in urban schools. The authors emphasize the importance of principals making new teacher development a top priority. Teacher stability, they suggest, is the key to long-term improvement within the school. Morgan and Kritsonis recommend several techniques for principals to use in the training and support of new teachers.



They stress the importance of new teacher support and development and say that funding for this purpose should be a priority. Just as student achievement is a priority, so should the success of new teacher.

Before new teachers sign their contracts with the school, the researchers recommend that they have job shadowing or apprenticeship opportunities. It is important for principals to immerse their new teachers in the school community as soon as possible. The sooner a teacher becomes involved with the school, the faster s/he will “develop a sense of commitment to the campus” (Morgan & Kritsonis, 2008, p. 3).

To allot for necessary trainings, job preparation and acclimation, the authors say that new teachers contracts should begin as early as June. Giving new teachers an earlier start can prevent them from feeling overwhelmed during the first few days of school. Professional development and training must begin early as well, and be “engaging, regularly repeated, and monitored for implementation” (Morgan & Kritsonis, 2008, p. 4). Once a new teacher has been hired, celebrations are an important way for new faculty members to meet returning staff—and such celebrations “should be initiated at the beginning of the school year and continued on a frequently recurring basis” (Morgan & Kritsonis, 2008, p. 4).

#### INVEST: Mentor Teachers

The researchers’ solution for successful mentorship is to hire a full-time teacher mentor. While most new teachers are already assigned a mentor upon their start at the school, these mentors are usually full-time teachers “with a full course load and additional duties” (Morgan & Kritsonis, 2008, p. 4). This leaves little time for in-depth collaboration and often forces a new teacher to

learn the ropes on her own. Morgan recommends that schools either allocate funds or be subsidized by their district in order to staff a full-time teacher mentor. The mentor's responsibilities would include "professional development, cognitive coaching, and coordination of mentor-mentee partnerships" (Morgan & Kritsonis, 2008, p. 4).

Another type of mentorship is utilizing help from retired teachers. Retired teachers would provide assistance and "personalization that conventional mentorship does not afford" to beginning teachers (Morgan & Kritsonis, 2008; p. 4).

The techniques that Morgan and Kritsonis list, while numerous, are critical to the retention of beginning teachers. The researchers not only encourage mentorship and training as a necessary tool in helping new teacher; they also believe that new teachers should quickly involve themselves in at least one student-centered activity during their first year. New teachers should also seek opportunities for professional development and additional endorsements, and the principal should allocate monies to enable them such experiences. Morgan and Kritsonis (2008) believe that "a principal's commitment to the development of new teachers can ensure perpetuity and ultimate progress to the success of a hard-to-staff school" (p. 6).

By examining the connection between persistence, self-efficacy and the turnover of new teachers, Grant (2006) suggests ways that teachers can feel adequately supported. Self-efficacy is the belief one has in one's capabilities. Grant explores the link between self-efficacy and persistence in new teachers. She incorporates psychologist Albert Bandura's theory on the four sources of efficacy expectations: performance accomplishment, vicarious experiences, verbal

persuasion and emotional arousal, and suggests that these sources be considered in order to help first-time teachers succeed.

“Understanding and Reducing Teacher Turnover” (2008) explores the costs that are associated with teacher turnover and examines the characteristics of those who are likely to leave, as well as what can be done to prevent turnover. The author links the retention of a teacher with her level of success in raising her students’ academic performances. Thus, in the author’s opinion, appropriate support for a teacher is deemed critical in order to prevent turnover.

Another element that the author stresses is *comprehensive induction* for first-time teachers, which usually includes a combination of training, support, mentorship and assessment during the first few years on the job. While few states are investing in this type of teacher support, its results have been vast and extensive. For example, “Understanding and Reducing Teacher Turnover” suggests that a first-year teacher in an induction program “is likely to produce the same levels of student achievement as a non-inducted fourth-year teacher” and saves thousands of dollars in replacing lost teachers (p. 25).

#### Statistical Information

2005 Special Analysis of Mobility in the Teacher Workforce by the National Center for Education Statistics:

- 17% of all teachers in the United States (or approximately 580,00 teachers) were new hires at their school in 1999; most hires were a result of teacher turnover from the previous year.

- At the end of the 1999-2000 school year, 280,000 teachers (8%) left their jobs as educators.
- Both teachers who left teaching and teachers who transferred at the end of 1999–2000 reported a lack of planning time, too heavy a workload, too low a salary, and problematic student behavior among their top five sources of dissatisfaction with the school they left.
- Teachers in high-poverty public schools were about twice as likely to move to another school as their counterparts in low-poverty public schools.

In a study by Ingersoll and Smith (2004) 3,235 first-year teachers were surveyed about their induction experiences within the school:

- 29% of first-time teachers who entered teaching in the 1999-2000 school year either moved to another school at the end of the year (15%) or left teaching altogether.
- Of all beginning teachers who entered teaching in the 1999-2000 school year, 16% received no induction or mentoring support in their first year. Their predicted probability of turnover at the end of the year was 40%.
- 22% of new teachers received 3 induction components (out of a total of 10). The turnover probability for them was 28%.
- 13% of new teachers received 6 induction components; their turnover probability was 24%.
- Less than 1% of beginning teachers in 1999-2000 experienced a full induction experience that included at least 8 different components. Their turnover probability was less than 20%-- half that of new teachers who were not offered any induction activities.

#### Administrative Records

The California Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Induction Program was initially implemented in 1998 after research findings by the California New Teacher Project (CNTP) identified the need for focused induction support for new teachers. CNTP suggested that in order to be effective, such support must be provided at a sufficient, intensive level so that it makes a difference in the new teachers' performance, overall satisfaction in their jobs and, ultimately their retention. BTSA was implemented along with legislation that restructured the

teacher credentialing process in California. A part of the new legislation is a requirement that new teachers complete a 2-year induction program with support and assessment in order to clear their preliminary teaching credential. The BTSA program is the preferred method to a California Clear Teaching Credential for public school teachers.

BTSA is administered by the California Department of Education and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC). The induction program provides targeted support and formative assessments for beginning teachers to reflect, evaluate and improve on their teaching performance. BTSA offers a variety of trainings, workshops and networking opportunities for participants at all levels of the program including program directors, site and district administrators and support providers.

#### Special Collections

<http://www.ed.gov/teachin>

This government-run website offers a variety of resources for new teachers including recent news regarding Education, free classroom templates and tools, relevant articles and links to additional websites.

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/newteacher/>

This website provides free classroom printouts, lesson plans and tips of advice for new teachers. It also has a new teacher “survival guide,” a monthly e-newsletter and a teacher helpline.

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_special/new\\_teachers.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_special/new_teachers.shtml)

Educationworld's site is dedicated to making the life of a new teacher easier by providing professional development columns, monthly newsletters, real first-year teacher diaries, advice for new teachers from principals and other new teachers, articles on classroom management, a variety of web resources, and free lesson plans.

### Chapter 3 Method

#### Description of Methodology

This is a qualitative study using interviews to gather information on first-time teachers' support levels and their perceived self-efficacy as teachers. The participants were elementary school and middle school teachers.

#### Description of Sample

The teachers interviewed for this project are acquaintances or friends of friends and/or family. Prior to participating, the teachers were given information about the current research project. After gaining verbal permission from each participant, they reviewed a copy of the research participant consent form, including their rights to privacy. All four interviews were conducted via telephone conversation.

#### Data Gathering Strategies

Data for this research project was gathered solely through telephone interviews. Interviewees were selected based on their employment as credentialed full-time educators with fewer than four years experience in the classroom. The interviews consisted of five open-ended questions asked to each participant, with follow-up questions when appropriate.



Each participant was asked to respond to the following:

1. Describe the atmosphere of the school staff. What is valued by the staff? Teamwork?  
Independence?
2. How often do you have allotted time to meet with grade-level teachers? Do you feel it is enough time?
3. What techniques do your principal use to help you succeed as a new teacher?
4. What techniques do you find helpful? What techniques do you find unhelpful?
5. What techniques (not currently used by your principal) do you think would be helpful to you as a new teacher?

#### Data Analysis Approach

Once the interviews were conducted, each participant's responses were reviewed to gain a new perspective. Interviews were also compared to look for overlap—or a gap—in levels of principal support. The information gathered through the interviews was compiled into one report to draw conclusions.

#### Ethical Standards

This study adheres to Ethical Standards in human Subjects Research of the American Psychological Association. (American Psychological Association, 2007).

Additionally, the project was reviewed and approved by the Dominican University of

California Institutional Review Board, number 8213. To protect participants' anonymity, names have been omitted. School names and specific locations have been left out as well. Participants were reminded of their rights, as well as their option to withdraw from the research at any time.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### Description of Site, Individuals, Data

The data for this research was collected through interviews held with acquaintances that have four years of full-time experience or fewer as a teacher. Each has several commonalities among the other teachers. The interviewees are all college graduates with a state teaching credential. Two participants teach single subjects in middle school; two participants teach elementary school. Two teachers teach at a private school; two teach public school. Two teachers work at “difficult” schools with a majority of at-risk and/or underprivileged students. Two teachers work at schools with a majority of upper-middle class students.

### Analysis of Themes

All teachers shared that the level of support from fellow staff members varies by each individual teacher. All teachers have a mentor; two were formally assigned, two are completely informal. Both middle school teachers work directly with their department and rely on the support from teachers within the same department/subject area for much of their support. Both elementary school teachers work directly with their fellow grade level teacher(s) and utilize their help for support. All participants are given time to meet with their mentors at least three times per week. One teachers shared that she meets with her mentor daily as a part of the principal’s requirements; another teacher said that she meets with her mentor on a daily basis because she values the support she receives.

All four teachers attend at least once-monthly faculty meetings with their staff; one teacher’s school faculty meets on a weekly basis. All four teachers say that their principals encourage professional development; one participant said that some professional development

days are mandatory according to the principal. All the principals of the teachers interviewed prefer that the teachers that have attended workshops and professional development days present what they've learned to the rest of the school staff.

In describing the attitude and values of the staff at their schools, all participants believed that it varied by grade level (for elementary school teachers) and by department (for middle school teachers). One elementary school teacher observed that the staff teaching the upper grades worked independently and were particularly closed off to new ideas. A middle school teacher shared that the staff within each department stuck closely together and did not venture outside of that circle very frequently.

Both private school teachers raised concerns about clearing their credential within the state's 5-year timeframe, as private schools are not required to fund induction programs intended to clear new teachers' credentials. The principals at both private schools have chosen to quietly ignore these teachers' request for assistance in clearing their credentials. Unfortunately, this means that the financial burden to clear one's credential—\$3000 to \$6000 through some Universities—falls on the teachers themselves.

While all four participants believe their principals have an "open-door" policy, each also expresses a need for more direct support from their principals. All four teachers also mentioned feeling distanced from their principals. Two teachers mentioned that their vice principals are the ones responsible for supporting new teachers, so the principals rarely interact with beginning teachers. Another participant mentioned feeling "thrown in" to the teaching position at the

beginning of the first school year, and says that the principal did not observe a classroom lesson until March.

One teacher mentioned that the principal has a passive-aggressive attitude and tends to play favorites with the school staff, allowing some teachers certain privileges and denying them to others. Another participant shared that the principal puts an inappropriate amount of pressure on new teachers, expecting them to lead focus groups, head student clubs, attend and present on professional development seminars while simultaneously balancing the heavy workload that naturally comes with being a new teacher. One participant said that the school principal frequently acted like she was too busy to help her new teachers, which made the new teachers feel helpless and alone.

All participants felt that their mentor teachers are a big factor in their success as new educators. They all feel that the approachability of the principal can set the tone for the entire staff. Informal check-ins by the principal with the new teachers are valued by all participants. All participants also mentioned that their principals' expressed confidence in each of them is very encouraging and motivating.

In recommending ways that the participants' principals could provide better support, all teachers expressed a desire for more informal conversation and check-ins. One teacher suggested that informal quarterly reviews would be more helpful than summative, formal reviews. Another teacher said that less pressure from the principal to get submersed in the school's many activities would be nice, as new teachers tend to be overwhelmed already with their own classroom planning. One participant expressed that a "new teacher handbook" from the principal with basic

information such as recess times, school policies and fire drill routines would have been very helpful during her first year, as she felt “in the dark” about many of the school’s rules and schedules. The theme that carried through all four interviews with the participants was a desire for more personal, human interaction with their principals.

## Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

### Summary of Major Findings

A major finding after interviewing the participants in this study is that the teachers often view their principals as too busy to interact with them, offer feedback or be of substantial support. This prevents teachers from asking for help when they need it, as they assume that the principal does not have time to deal with their concerns. The problem with the principal being viewed as “too busy” is that teachers begin to feel like less of a priority and do not get appropriate guidance and support from their boss.

Ironically, all of the participants in the research study reported that their principals have an open-door policy. However, each teacher also mentioned that they desire more informal conversation and feedback from their principals. It seems that principals are sending conflicting messages; they may have an official “open-door policy,” but this policy is meaningless if he/she is constantly busy and foregoes her teachers’ needs for more pressing matters.

Teachers also have conflicting opinions on the amount of support principals should provide to new educators. Some of the participants felt unclear about the role of their mentor versus that of their principal in supporting them. Is it ultimately the job of the mentor or the principal to ensure that new teachers feel supported? If each had clearly defined roles, a new teacher would not feel as confused and unheard. When the vice principal is given the responsibility of helping new teachers, the role of principal is further blurred. If the vice principal is the primary supporter of new teachers, what duties does the principal then have to

her new teachers? Once a teacher understands the role of each administrator, s/he will have a clearer picture of who can offer her/him the appropriate support.

Above all, the amount of verbal and physical support seems to correlate with how satisfied a beginning teacher feels with his/her principal. From my observations, it appears that new teachers that feel supported by their principals also feel more confident in their roles as educators. If a principal offers limited support to her beginning teachers, they are more likely to feel isolated, overwhelmed and unconfident. Teachers are only as capable as their principals actively encourage them to be.

#### Comparison of Findings to Existing Literature

Findings from my interviews with new teachers are consistent with present research regarding the recommended role of the principal: a lack of support from the principal prevents teachers from being heard, feeling empowered, capable and successful in their jobs. Self-efficacy seems to be an ongoing theme in existing literature as well as with my teacher participants. New teachers' perceived self-efficacy can be raised with positive yet constructive feedback, personal mastery of difficult tasks, feelings of competence in one's abilities, daily encouragement from peers, and by observing experienced teachers implement successful classroom lessons.

Unfortunately, teachers with low self-efficacy are less likely to persist in the face of challenges and tend to be the first to leave their jobs, thus perpetuating the problem of high teacher turnover. Principals have the ability to influence new educators' self-efficacy, as they ultimately determine how much and which types of support their beginning teachers receive.



Thus, if a principal gives strong focus to increasing her new teachers' perceived self-efficacies, s/he can make a difference in the number of teachers that leave due to discouragement.

Two of the teachers interviewed receive a majority of their administrative support from their vice principal; their principals have other duties that do not involve much teacher-interaction. However, regardless of their workload principals need to prioritize their relationships with new teachers at the school. If teacher stability is the key to long-term success within a school, it is worthwhile for principals to make new teacher support a priority.

#### Limitations/Gaps in the Study

Due to the limited number of teacher participants in this study, the results from the interviews are not representative of new teachers throughout the Nation. It is unclear how well the participants' experiences correlate with beginning teachers around the United States. Principals were not interviewed for this research study, so their perspectives have not been represented. Additionally, high school teachers were not interviewed in this study, so their perspectives are not represented either. Unfortunately I did not encounter a new teacher that was completely satisfied with the level of principal support. If I had such an opportunity, I would have liked to explore the actions the principal took to be successfully supportive and satisfactory in a new teacher's eyes.

#### Implications for Future Research

While there appears to be significant research and data regarding new teacher support, few studies focus on successful principals or ways to educate principals in order to improve teacher retention. Principals have indirect control over whether a teacher chooses to stay or leave the

school, as new teachers are more likely to leave when they do not feel supported by administration. Are principals aware of their influence on new teachers' retention rates? Further research might involve an examination of school principals' education surrounding the support of new teachers. How much leadership training do principals receive? Is there enough emphasis on the importance of supporting new teachers? Do principals understand the implications of not providing support for their teachers? Research focusing on such ideas would prove whether or not principals are adequately educated about teacher retention and ways to effectively reduce new teacher turnover.

#### Overall Significance of the Study

Overall, this research study supports the need for increased new teacher support, more awareness surrounding the correlation between perceived self-efficacy and teacher retention, and further research examining principals' perspectives on teacher turnover. New teachers that are equipped with a variety of support modalities develop high levels of perceived self-efficacy, which promotes motivation and perseverance when faced with challenges. Once principals know the long-term effects of their support for new teachers, they can understand that they are capable of not only curbing teacher turnover, but also strengthening the community within their schools.

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