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A Qualitative Case Study of Two School Districts' Onboarding and Retention Mentorship Programs for New Teachers during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF TWO SCHOOL DISTRICTS' ONBOARDING AND
RETENTION MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS FOR NEW TEACHERS DURING THE COVID-
19 PANDEMIC

By

Angelina Quiles

Accepted in Partial Completion
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Angelina Quiles
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents, Maria Quiles and Jose Quiles. Your unwavering belief in me and support and encouragement throughout my life have been instrumental in helping me pursue my dreams.

To my dearest daughter, Paulina Lyons, thank you for being my greatest source of inspiration and motivation. You have been the driving force behind my determination to succeed, and I am grateful for the joy and purpose you bring to my life and for standing by my side and believing in my ability to bring all my life journeys to fruition.

To Mama Angelina, though you are no longer with us, your memory, wisdom, and the promise we made together continue to guide me. This dissertation is dedicated to you as a tribute to your firm belief in my abilities and the profound impact you had on my life. I carry your legacy with me as I fulfill our shared promise.

To my best friend, Charles Beall, your support, encouragement, and companionship have been invaluable throughout the years. Together, we faced challenges and celebrated victories, as I pursued my academic journey. Your belief in my potential has propelled me forward. I'm grateful for your presence, friendship, and commitment.

To my sisters Maria and Luziris and brother, Saul, I am profoundly grateful for the immeasurable moral and spiritual support you each have bestowed upon me during my educational journey. Your unwavering presence, encouragement, and love have made an indelible impact on my life, and I forever cherish the bond we share.

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ABSTRACT

Every year, districts welcome new teachers to a school community and prepare them for the new school year. Establishing and maintaining a strong school culture is an important and vital part of a teacher's job. Part of this preparation entails hiring, training, and retaining the best teachers to establish a framework for ensuring that new teachers hit the ground running from the first day of school (Howard, 2019). This qualitative research case study focused on the onboarding and retention mentorship program for new teachers in two school districts in Washington State. This case study focused on two districts' onboarding and retention programs, their structure, and effectiveness. The case study included two specific educator groups from Sumner/Bonney Lake and Puyallup School Districts in Washington State. For this case study, I used Qualtrics, an online survey program, to collect participant feedback. The survey collected responses from 21 participants, 11 belonged to the district group, whereas the remaining 10 were teachers. The following six themes were central to district and teachers' onboarding and training experiences, as described by district-level personnel and early-career teacher participants: district onboarding support, district training opportunities, effective teacher onboarding, teacher barriers to effective training, teacher support systems, and training recommendations. The findings of this case study have implications for new teachers and district employees who are part of the onboarding and retention of new teachers.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

I was hired in 2005 as a teacher in Washington State, in a nonconventional way. My interview and hiring processes were done simultaneously a week before school began. The interview took place at the district office with the secondary school director and during a phone conference with the high school administrator who hired me. I remember working with the human resources department, mainly to share the necessary hiring documents, which included my educational credentials and West-B test results. However, upon my hire, I was not assigned a district or building mentor. When I began teaching, there was no onboarding process for new teachers. As I had worked in higher education for decades before teaching in a public school, I did not feel completely new to a teaching environment. Nevertheless, being thrown into the deep end without any onboarding was a jarring experience, and I felt unsupported to navigate new and unfamiliar issues.

During my first year, I went through a significant learning curve. I had three preparations (different classes taught during a school day). I had to create my own curricula, syllabi, and rubrics, along with management systems of classroom rules to create a safe teaching and learning environment for students. Fortunately, I still had contact with my teacher mentor from my Master's In Teaching program. I was able to count on her support when I needed someone with whom to collaborate regarding best teaching practices, creating solid curricula and lessons, and the incorporation of effective classroom management strategies. My mentor helped fill the gap created by the school district's lack of an onboarding mentorship. Her support gave me an appreciation for the value of having a teacher mentor to support, assist, and guide me in my early public school teaching career. Her help and encouragement were crucial to my growth as a new teacher because she was able and willing to call on her 20 years of to

answer questions and address my concerns in real-time. In my experience, this external support highlighted both the value of and the need for a comprehensive teacher-mentoring program for new teachers, which was lacking in the district when I started working.

The universal need for effective mentoring and onboarding programs surfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2019-2020 school year. Traditional teaching practices were upended in the spring of 2020. In the throes of a global pandemic, teachers were confronted with the biggest challenge of their careers, as they had to figure out how to instruct students through an online medium. Sure, 2020 presented unprecedented challenges with the transition to remote classes and then back to hybrid learning, and by 2021, many teachers felt like they could not keep their heads above water. They were responsible not only for the current year's standards in the classroom but also for all the lost learning of the previous 18 months and could not keep up (Davis et al., 2021).

School districts had to act quickly to keep their educational organizations up and running with a focus on a student needs assessment lens. The many pivots that were made to meet student needs created controversy among educators. The number of responsibilities and the stresses put on educators, both in their professional sphere and personal lives, had a trickling effect and caused many teachers to feel as though they could not cope with the demands (Davis et al., 2021).

These breakdowns, plus mental and physical health concerns and needs forced many into early retirement. Others left the teaching profession with no plans to return. The National Education Association surveyed approximately 3,600 of its members in January 2022 and found that 55% of respondents said they are more likely to leave or retire from education sooner than planned because of the pandemic (Will, 2022).

Background

Teacher attrition has been a persistent problem, especially in the last several years. Up to 50% of teachers leave the profession in their first five years of service. COVID -19 forced key players in the educational system to rethink and redesign teaching by adding more layers of teaching modalities and responsibilities to an already demanding profession. These changes made quality mentoring programs more necessary than ever. Attracting and retaining new teachers went from being a serious problem to an acute crisis (eCaudillo, 2022). According to The New Teacher Project (2015), "districts should not forego their investment in new teacher development but rather, districts should reexamine their assumptions about what support new teachers need to grow in their profession" (p. 41). The importance of providing effective onboarding and mentoring programs to new teachers is nothing new. However, the training and support for new teachers must include the current needs of students, including challenges associated with hybrid teaching and learning, as well as working with many students with mental health issues, students with multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), and families with high needs. Children have been uniquely impacted by the pandemic, having experienced this crisis during important periods of physical, social, and emotional development, leading to increased mental health challenges for children (Drake, 2022).

The high demands on teachers can be daunting and complex, especially for novice teachers. Changes in scholastic services demand that educators have the appropriate skill sets to address the many challenges they will confront while working with students, as they continue to provide an education that individualizes instruction according to each student's unmet needs. In the coming years, schools, parents, and children will have to continue catching up on missed services and loss of instructional time because of the pandemic. Though communities, including

school districts, have relaxed requirements such as social distancing, and schools have returned to face-to-face teaching and learning, many educators are still working to address the loss of instructional time and declining student achievement due to pandemic-related school disruptions (Drake, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative that new teachers have strong support systems at both the district and school levels.

Historically, public schools and teaching programs at accredited colleges and universities collaborated in providing opportunities for students in teaching programs to partner with an experienced certified teacher when completing their student teaching requirements. As COVID-19 restrictions forced unimagined measures to protect public safety, the closure of university and college campuses had an unprecedented impact on teacher preparation programs. Traditionally, preservice teaching is a period of guided and supervised training, which gives new teachers opportunities to develop theoretical and pedagogical knowledge through coursework. It also provides teachers numerous opportunities to practice teaching through field-based experiences in K-12 partner schools. When campuses and K-12 schools moved to remote teaching and learning, many preservice teachers lost the opportunity for traditional field experiences and guidance in the profession. As a result, a number of state departments of education waived field-based requirements, which, in turn, caused teacher education faculty to scramble to develop alternatives that would support the continued growth of their preservice teachers (VanLone, 2022).

Problem Statement

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher attrition was a problem affecting schools, students, and teachers. However, recent studies have shown an increase in teachers leaving the teaching profession. According to Washington State's Office of Public Instruction (OSPI;

2022a), "Washington beginning teachers (those with three or fewer years of experience in the profession) continue to outpace the growth in racial diversity of the total teaching workforce, with 23% of beginning teachers in the 2020–21 school year being teachers of color, compared to just 13% of the total teaching population being teachers of color (para. 13). A National Education Association (NEA) poll found that a disproportionate percentage of Black (62%) and Hispanic/Latino (59%) educators, already underrepresented in the teaching profession, were planning to exit teaching (Walker, 2022). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there were approximately 10.6 million educators working in public education in January 2020 compared to just 10.0 million today, a net loss of around 600,000 (Walker, 2022). The statistics are concerning because attrition of this magnitude negatively impacts students' performance, motivation, and well-being.

K-12 teachers report the highest burnout rate of all upper-level professions in the United States. According to a Gallup poll conducted in June 2022, more than four out of every 10 teachers noted that they feel burned out "always" or "very often" at work. The burnout crisis in teaching has been exacerbated by a national educator shortage. Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has plummeted, a trend amplified by the pandemic, and schools throughout the United States are competing for a shrinking pool of qualified educators (Smith, 2022).

Purpose Statement and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research two suburban school districts' onboarding and retention programs for new teachers in their first through third year of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. "The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to a staffing shortage in the nation's schools," said the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Commissioner

Peggy G. Carr, as cited in NCES (2022, para. 2). "Public schools report they are struggling with various staffing issues, including widespread vacancies, and a lack of prospective teachers. These issues are disrupting school operations. Schools have resorted to using more teachers and non-teaching staff outside of their intended duties, increasing class sizes, sharing teachers and staff with other schools, and curtailing student transportation due to staff shortages. Schools continue to face meaningful challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic." (Carr, as cited in NCES, 2022, para. 2)

The impact and ripple effects of COVID-19 on public education is a topic of discussion that many educators and scholars are researching. School districts invest in the process of hiring promising new teachers, only to find that a higher proportion than desired of these new hirees choose to leave the profession within the first five years of teaching. The findings from this study will guide school districts in measures they can adopt to support teachers new to the profession and help them acquire confidence and competence.

This study's objective was to examine the induction and retention programs at two different school districts in Western Washington. The framework designs that have been implemented to increase teacher retention rates in these schools were also examined. In addition, how these districts and their respective building administrators, mentors, and job-alike mentors collaborate to create effective and cohesive onboarding programs that support new teachers with relevant support systems was investigated.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study include the following:

1. In what ways, if at all, are onboarding programs aimed at retention important to the success of teachers new to the classroom?

2. What onboarding programs have been implemented to support new teachers and encourage their retention in the profession?

3. To what extent have the support programs in the Puyallup and Sumner-Bonney Lake School Districts been successful in achieving the outcomes sought? What strategies or traits associated with these programs have supported their success in inducting and retaining new teachers?

4. What barriers, if any, have inhibited the effectiveness of these programs?

5. How might school districts that seek to support and retain new teachers develop effective onboarding and retention programs?

Definitions

The BEST grant uses a strengths-based approach (recognizing that teachers enter the profession through many pathways and with various skill sets and differentiating through a multilayered web of supports, professional development can effectively address the immediate and longer-term learning needs of new teachers (OSPI, 2022a). The following definitions are used throughout this paper:

Teacher Attrition: Teacher attrition is the reported teacher turnover.

Onboarding Program: An onboarding program helps new teacher hires settle into a new work environment, and it goes beyond the classic orientation paperwork that comes with a new job. Teacher onboarding takes a more in-depth approach to help teachers adapt to their new work environment socially, culturally, and professionally.

Effective Mentoring: Effective mentoring is the pairing of novice teachers with more experienced teachers who can ably explain school policies, regulations, and procedures; share

methods, materials, and other resources; help solve problems in teaching and learning; and provide personal and professional support.

Induction and Retention: Sustainable induction programs attend to the recruitment, hiring, and onboarding of new staff in ways that reflect the values of the district, diversify the workforce, and create supportive, equitable, and welcoming environments for all new teachers.

Job Alike Support: Job alike support is in-building mentorship of a teacher new to their position. A suggested investment of time is about an hour a week. Because teachers have different levels of experience, the support provided could look different for each new teacher.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A district's commitment to the investment of a solid onboarding and retention program is essential to building an effective teacher workforce that is well-equipped to meet the needs of their students, help create a school culture that is supportive, respectful, and inclusive, as well as decrease teacher burnout and turnover rates. Strong and effective onboarding and retention programs and an available pool of skilled educators provide new and relatively inexperienced teachers with the tools and expertise they need to establish good teaching practices and help ensure their growth and retention.

Effective teacher onboarding and retention programs are fundamental building blocks for building a powerful teaching workforce. There is a growing body of literature on the importance of teacher onboarding and retention; however, there is still much to be learned, and new theories continue to surface about effective strategies for supporting new teachers. In this review, the current literature, key theories, findings related to mentorship in teacher onboarding are explored and gaps in the literature identified.

Related Literature

Effective Mentorship

Two researchers in the field of education, Maor and McConney (2015), studied the effectiveness of mentorship programs for new teachers. Both researchers have published numerous articles and book chapters on these topics and are considered leading experts on teacher mentorship. In their studies, they evaluated the characteristics of the most effective mentorship programs for beginning science and mathematics teachers. In one of their studies titled, "Wisdom of the elders: mentors' perspectives on mentoring learning environments for beginning science and mathematics teachers," they cataloged mentors' experiences and

suggested various effective and ongoing supportive mentoring programs to better prepare new and early-career teachers in math and science. Mentors gave their perspectives on the motivations and attributes necessary for an effective mentorship program. The participants surveyed in this study said that effective mentors must be selected with the goal of establishing excellence in teaching. Mentors must also focus on providing "emotional support and instructional and organizational guidance" and "share pedagogical knowledge, model teaching practice, and provide helpful feedback" (Maor & McConney, 2015, p. 14). The mentors believe that mentees "should take ownership of the agenda, including the challenges and solutions to be addressed through mentoring" (Maor & McConney, 2015, p. 15). Maor and McConney emphasized the importance of socialization and support for new teachers as well as emotional and psychological support, opportunities for reflection, feedback, and collaboration.

Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization refers to the process by which organizational members learn the skills, norms, organizational structures, and behaviors necessary to integrate and adapt to their classroom environment and become effective contributors (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). It is the process of developing new relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and other organization members by the new members to gain a foundational understanding of the hierarchy, decision-making, and communications structures within by the organization.

Charles Van Maanen and Edgar Schein are prominent scholars in the field of organizational behavior and qualitative research methods. Both scholars have conducted extensive research and produced several notable contributions on this topic and its applications. Their perspective on organizational socialization is that the analysis of the socialization process cannot be complete unless three things are taken into consideration: "(a) the effects of

individual differences, (b) the effect of the attributional process involved in organizational learning," and (c) individuals as active participants in their own socialization experience (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 464). Their perspective that individual variables should be included in developing a theory of socialization is the major contention that others, such as Jones, have with the foundational theory of Van Maanen and Schein (1979). Figure 1 below represents Van Maanen and Schein's theory of the necessary new hire details to consider when developing an effective onboarding and retention program.

Figure 1

A Model of Onboarding
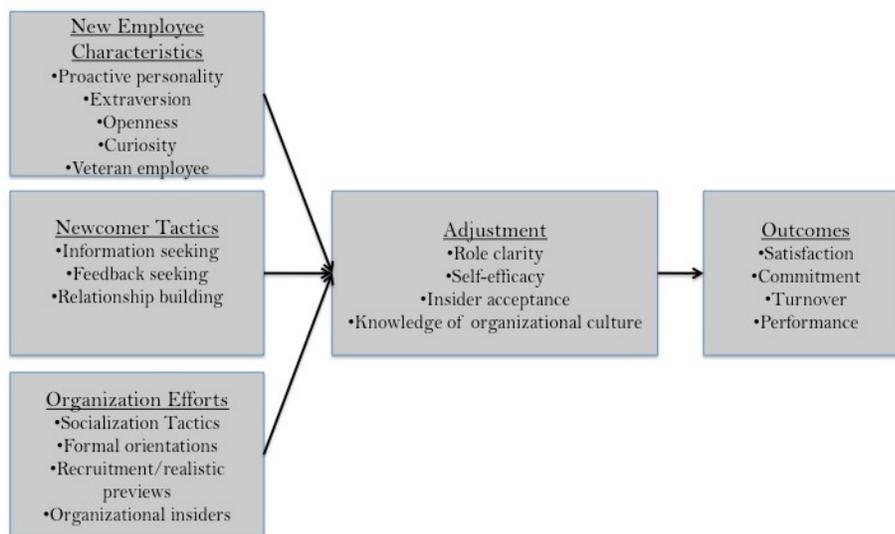
Note. Adapted from Bauer and Erdogan (2011)

Organization socialization theory formed the basis for a research study of job satisfaction and retention intentions by Eric Richter, Christin Lucksnat, Christopher Redding, and Dirk Richter. In their study, they concluded that socialization is not the sole factor in establishing job satisfaction and retention outcomes but personality traits such as extraversion also contribute to positive results (Richter et al., 2022). Additionally, the researchers found that

self-worth served as a variable that mediated the relationships between teacher extraversion and social support as antecedents and the positive work outcomes of higher job satisfaction and positive retention intentions (Richter et al., 2022).

Onboarding Retention and Job Satisfaction in Special Education

In 2000, Susan D. Whitaker, Director of Special Education, in Spartanburg County School District No. 7, wrote an article titled, "Mentoring Beginning Special Education Teachers and the Relationship to Attrition." She examined the components of an effective mentoring program for beginning special education teachers, and the impact mentoring has on their attrition. Whitaker (2000) stated, "First-year teachers viewed the mentor's knowledge of special education, in terms of both regulations and pedagogy, as the most important characteristic of a mentor" (p. 555). Whitaker's study provides guidance on specific structures of effective mentoring for special educators. "One recommendation was to select a special education mentor instead of a nonspecial educator. Additional benefits of mentoring included receiving emotional support and learning the mechanics of the job" (Whitaker, 2000). Whitaker further stated, "Evidence suggests that as a result of the guidance and support provided through mentoring, beginning teachers feel more competent and motivated and indicate that they are more likely to remain in the teaching profession" (Huling-Austin et al., as cited in Whitaker, 2000, p. 547). "Other benefits of mentoring included receiving emotional support and learning the mechanics of the job, policies, and procedures, working with other staff, and locating resources" (Whitaker, 2000, p. 562). In addition, providing training on working with paraeducators is essential for first-year special education teachers to establish effective collaboration, maximize instructional support, create a supportive environment, foster professional growth, and navigate legal and ethical considerations.

OSPI BEST Grant

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST) Grant in Washington State has a history rooted in the state's commitment to supporting and developing high-quality educators. The history of the OSPI BEST Grant can be traced back to the early 2000s when the state recognized the need for enhanced support systems for new teachers. OSPI provides state funding for this competitive onboarding and retention programs to districts and regional consortia. The BEST Grant program funds professional development for instructional training according to the district's need and its readiness to implement the state's Standards for Beginning Educator Induction (OSPI, 2022a).

According to the OSPI publication, "Standards for Beginning Education Induction, Effective Support for Washington State Educators":

> BEST works with districts to provide sustained and purposeful support for early-career educators. BEST provides information, professional development for mentors and leadership, resources, and grants (as appropriated by legislative funding) for comprehensive induction for novice teachers. The program's goals are to reduce educator turnover, improve educator quality for student learning, and ensure equity of learning opportunities for all students. (OSPI, 2018, p. 2)

The BEST Grant induction program is intended to support the reflection, evaluation, and improvement of those with varying roles and connections to induction. They implement Standards for Beginning Educator Induction, which include the following six essential induction standards for high-quality beginning educators in Washington State (OSPI, 2022a): (OSPI, Induction Standards, 2018)

1. Hiring – involves evaluating employment requirements, developing a robust candidate recruitment and selection process, and collaboratively deciding on teacher placement to positions that best fit their skills and knowledge and more closely align with the needs of students.

2. Orientation – Actively promote new teachers attending instructional orientations prior to the start of employment and recurring orientations scheduled throughout the school year.

3. Mentoring – Facilitate connecting new teachers with highly-qualified and experienced teacher mentors who can provide professional growth and learning opportunities.

4. Professional learning – Provide beginning educators with the opportunity to experience formal and informal "job-embedded" learning.

5. Feedback and formative assessment for educator growth – Provide formative feedback from evaluators and mentors prior to final teacher evaluations to foster teacher professional development targeting student learning.

6. Induction program assessment – Regular and consistent reviews of the status of teacher induction by building and district leadership to facilitate iterative data-driven program improvements.

OSPI's BEST Grant program provides a Mentor Academy 101 designed to prepare educators as leaders to serve in mentoring and coaching roles. Mentor Academy is grounded in the pursuit of equitable outcomes for students in Washington State. Academy content invites participants to examine themselves (their identity and experience), their approach to building relationships with mentees, and the systems change advocacy essential to mentoring for equity. The WA State Standards for Mentoring is the foundational text of Mentor Academy. These standards are centered in

educational equity: the heart of mentoring. Academy content is supported by Elena

Aguilar's Coaching for Equity; all pre-registered participants will receive a copy of

Coaching for Equity.

Topics include: Understanding identity, relationship building, confidentiality,

conversation skills, mentor roles, observation and feedback. (OSPI, 2022a, para. 3)

OSPI's Mentor Foundational Opportunities are designed to build core knowledge of

mentoring for equity. In June 2022, The University of Washington conducted a case study to

examine Washington State's onboarding and retention program. The study aimed to offer

educators and policymakers valuable insights and analyses regarding the implementation of the

BEST Grant program in school districts in Washington State. Figure 2, shown below, depicts

the four key elements and a summary of important attributes of each element that were informed

by the data in the study.

Figure 2

BEST Grant Model for Sustaining High Quality Teacher Induction
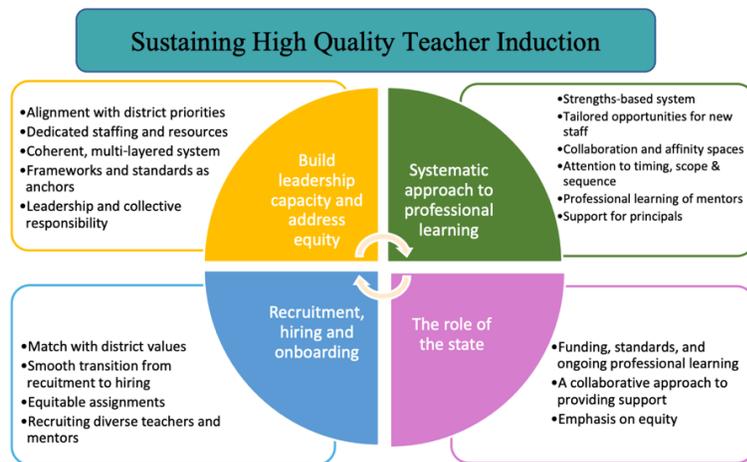
Note. Adapted from OSPI (2022b)

The New Teacher Center

The New Teacher Center (NTC) is a prominent organization founded in 1998 by Ellen Moir and a team of educators and researchers who recognized the critical need for comprehensive support systems for new teachers. It focuses on improving onboarding, support, and retention of new teachers. Its goal is to make available to teachers high-quality mentoring and professional development to enhance their effectiveness and job satisfaction.

In a report titled "New Teacher Center Induction Model: Findings from a National Randomized Controlled Study," Ellen Moir shared several best practices for new teacher onboarding and support. Moir described 10 lessons learned from over 20 years of data collected on new teacher onboarding. Lessons #2, #3, and #5 are most relevant to mentoring. In Lesson #2, a model that encourages consistent, one-on-one mentoring is described where "mentors help new teachers set professional goals, plan lessons, analyze student work, and reflect on their progress. Additionally, mentors may teach a lesson while the new teacher observes" (Moir, 2009, p.16). Lesson #3 addresses how good mentors have conversations with novice teachers based on data and focused on standards-based instructional practice. Effective mentors and their districts utilize tools to evaluate student and teacher performance and determine the next steps for mentees in pursuit of long-term goals. Lastly, Lesson #5 addresses how effective mentors regularly speak to school administrators for aligning goals. "They can discuss mentoring strategies and learn how to advance teacher effectiveness and student learning" (Moir, 2009, p.17). Teacher professional development through mentorship is critical to establishing good practice in the classroom and providing appropriate levels of teacher mentoring and support but it is not without challenges. Figure 3 below depicts the guiding framework for teacher induction

program for leaders, focusing on a continuous reassessment of foundational standards, followed by structural standards, and finally, instructional standards, in line with NTC's belief.

Figure 3

NTC's Guiding Framework for Teacher Induction Program Leaders

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT TOWARD EQUITABLE OUTCOMES
Program Assessment, Evaluation, and Accountability

INSTRUCTIONAL STANDARDS
- Instructionally Focused Formative Assessment of Beginning Teacher Practice
- Instructional Mentoring for Optimal Learning Environments
- Instructional Mentoring for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

STRUCTURAL STANDARDS
- Mentor Roles and Responsibilities, Selection, and Assignment
- Mentor Professional Learning, Learning Communities, and Onboarding
- Mentor Formative and Summative Assessment of Practice
- Beginning Teacher Professional Learning, Learning Communities, and Onboarding

FOUNDATIONAL STANDARDS
- Program Vision, Goals, and Institutional Commitment
- Program Leadership and Communication
- School Leader Engagement

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT TOWARD EQUITABLE OUTCOMES

Note. Adapted from NTC (2018)

The New Teacher Project

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) is a national nonprofit organization based in Brooklyn, New York. It was founded in 1997 by Michelle Rhee, an educator and advocate for education reform. TNTP is designed to address the challenges in the education system and improve outcomes for students by focusing on teacher quality. It involves a collaboration with school districts and educational organizations across the United States to develop innovative solutions and provide support in various areas related to teacher recruitment, training, and retention. TNTP's work regarding teacher onboarding and retention is guided by the belief that effective support during the early years of teaching is essential for teacher success and retention (TNPT, 2023). The New Teacher Project (2015) addresses the problem of new teacher development by looking at "the widely held perception among educational leaders that we

already know how to help teachers improve, and that we could achieve our goal of great teaching in far more classrooms if we just applied what we know more widely" (p. II). In short, "we bombard teachers with help, but most of it is not helpful" (The New Teacher Project, 2015, p. 2).

In addition, teacher development, in many cases, tends to be "a highly individualized process, but one that has been dramatically oversimplified" to a one-size-fits-all program (The New Teacher Project, 2015, p. 3). As a result, educators can no longer draw clear conclusions about what strategies work best for teacher development. Despite this difficulty, the TNTP indicates that districts should not forego their investment in new teacher development but should reexamine their assumptions about what support new teachers need to grow in their profession. Included in the article are three suggestions on how districts should move forward:

1. Revisit the definition of what it means to help teachers improve (e.g., Define 'development' clearly, as observable, measurable progress toward an ambitious standard for teaching and student learning) (The New Teacher Project, 2015, p. 35)

2. Reevaluate current systems for professional development (e.g., Reallocate funding for particular activities based on their impact)

3. Redesign how we support teacher development and excellence at scale (e.g., Reimagine how we train and certify teachers for the job). (The New Teacher Project, 2015, p. 3)

The New Teacher Project's evaluation of existing challenges to providing the right support systems to teachers gives a roadmap on how districts can more effectively align their mentorship programs for new teacher onboarding. The NTP suggested that districts review their traditional approaches through periodic evaluations and realignments to their onboarding and retention program and then altering their curriculum to one that is more flexible and adaptable

to individual teachers' needs. By continuously assessing their onboarding and retention programs, districts can update their practices and meet the needs of each incoming group.

Mentoring Models

New approaches to effective mentoring and teacher development are the subject of Weisling and Gardiner's (2018) analysis. In their paper, they outlined four novel approaches to teacher mentoring and proffered the idea of co-teaching and intensive support from a veteran teacher. The authors believed that traditional methods of creating lesson plans, gathering data during a lesson, analyzing student work, viewing, and discussing a classroom video, and on-the-fly conversations about challenges and successes may seriously limit new teachers' potential. Instead, the authors proposed the following alternatives to mentoring:

1. Co-teaching: The mentor and mentee plan and execute a lesson together. The mentor provides modeling and immediate support and then debriefs with the teacher afterward.

2. Modeling: A new teacher benefits from a skilled, veteran teacher who can model strategies with their own students.

3. In-the-moment coaching: Real-time suggestions can be effective if there is trust and the mentee is aware that this may occur. Examples include using subtle hand signals, whispering tips on the side, or using co-teacher talk to redirect the class.

The authors argued that mentors must be flexible and adjust to each unique situation. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. The authors stated, "It is important, then, for administrators to give mentors the time they need to get to know the students enrolled in their mentees' classes" (Weisling & Gardiner, 2018, p. 68). They went on further to state that

Also, principals should treat mentors as part of their instructional cabinet.

When mentor teachers are seen as trusted members of a support team, and not as

tattletales, playing "gotcha" with their mentees, they can serve effectively as liaisons.

On the one hand, they can help new teachers understand and implement school policies;

on the other hand, they can help administrators understand and respond to new teachers'

needs. (p. 68)

Weisling and Gardiner's theory is consistent with the broader literature review on effective

onboarding and retention programs for new teachers. Their work is an important contribution to

the field of teacher education related to onboarding and retention programs.

Elena Aguilar is an educational consultant, author, and speaker. In her work, she

emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive work environment for

educators and provided practical strategies for improving teacher retention (Aguilar, 2018).

Along with addressing strategies for improving teacher retention, Aguilar's book, "Onward-

Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators," provides a practical framework to avoid

burnout and keep great teachers. She encouraged teachers to become resilient in their teaching

practices as a way of adapting to the high levels of stress that are present in the teaching

profession. Aguilar claimed that, according to research, there are neurobiological underpinnings

of emotional resilience within each individual and that everyone has both a predisposed

threshold to dealing with adversities and the ability to bounce back. She also stated, that the

"key to achieving our purpose lies in the moment between stimulus and response" (Aguilar,

2018, p. 2).

Teachers' resilience sets the stage for how teaching and learning will occur in their

classroom and, ultimately, the effect that it will have on teacher performance and retention.

Aguilar (2018) provided a conceptual framework for resilience based on the key components of

resilience and its development. Aguilar's book addresses the concept of knowing oneself and discovering one's resilience threshold through a battery of questions, self-exploration, disposition, vulnerability, strengths, sociopolitical identity (social affiliation and group belonging), and the power of staying anchored in one's purpose. Figure 4 below represents the four parts of how people respond according to life's challenges based on "who are we, where we are, what we do, and how we are" (Aguilar, 2018, p. 7)

Figure 4

Four-Part Wheel for Who, Where, What, and How We Are

Note. Adapted from Aguilar (2018)

Aguilar's manifesto for resilience includes the principles and intentions shown below in Figure 5.

Figure 5

The Resilience Manifesto

> **The Resilience Manifesto**
>
> A manifesto is a public declaration of principles and intentions. May these principles guide our individual and collective commitment to resilience.
>
> 1. A wellspring of resilience is inside us. We are stronger than we think.
> 2. We were born with individual and collective resilience. Our quest is to find our way to these internal springs and nurture them.
> 3. We cultivate resilience so that we can thrive, not simply to prevent burn-out or survive.
> 4. Resilience is cultivated through daily habits and thoughts that strengthen dispositions.
> 5. It is a human right to explore and express emotions.
> 6. To help children build their emotional intelligence and resilience, we must simultaneously tend to our own emotional intelligence and resilience.
> 7. Powerful and effective educators talk about emotions at work.
> 8. How we interpret events and tell our story matters most. In our interpretation, we exercise the freedom to choose our attitude.
> 9. We are all connected and responsible for each other: Caring for the other is caring for the self.
> 10. We cultivate our resilience and become stronger so that we can help others become stronger; we cultivate our resilience so that we have energy to heal and transform the world.

Note. Adapted from Aguilar (2018)

Teachers deal with stress daily, but when 70% of the teachers quit within their first five years because of stress-related physical and mental illnesses, then urgent intervention is needed (Aguilar, 2018). Aguilar's framework addresses the important work of self-care that must be center stage in all onboarding and retention programs. Aguilar's view is that investing in building teacher resilience will allow for healthy, strong, and better-prepared instructors who will serve as students' role models who are equipped with conflict management skills, self-regulation abilities, and emotional intelligence. These high-level coping skills and strategies will undoubtedly have a positive trickle-down effect on the school climate and culture and provide safe teaching and learning environments for both students and teachers.

Summary

In conclusion, in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, a comprehensive literature review was provided focusing on the critical aspects of onboarding and retention strategies for new teachers within the context of public schools. An extensive examination of scholarly articles, research papers, and relevant publications was conducted in this chapter, providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by novice educators and the diverse onboarding practices employed by educational institutions to support them. Additionally, the review shed light on the influential

factors contributing to teacher retention, including the significance of professional development opportunities and mentorship programs. The synthesis and analysis of the existing body of knowledge provided in this chapter has laid the groundwork for designing effective onboarding and retention initiatives, emphasizing the importance of cultivating a positive and nurturing environment for new teachers in the public school system. In short, these insights will serve as a valuable foundation for the subsequent chapters, and inform practical recommendations and strategies to enhance the onboarding and retention experiences of new teachers in public schools.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the support systems that two suburban school districts in Washington State provided new teachers through their onboarding and retention programs during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The researcher investigated the perceptions of the two districts' central office onboarding and retention administrative team regarding how they deliver their training and avail support systems to prepare new teachers in their respective districts. How those supports impact teacher retention was also examined. In addition, I explored the teachers' perspectives and perceptions regarding their experience with onboarding and retention programs and the teachers' recommendations to help enhance the effectiveness of these programs. The research questions posed in this case study were addressed by conducting a comprehensive literature review, gathering and analyzing survey data sets from the two school districts' onboarding and retention programs, and then analyzing the results using the organizational socialization framework for mentoring and onboarding.

To sum up, I identified successful outcomes, possible barriers, and examples of ineffective onboarding and retention practices according to the research participants through analyzing the data I collected. Through this analysis, these outcomes were explicitly identified. Based on the results, recommendations are made to help increase new-teacher retention rates.

Research Design

A case study is an in-depth analysis of people, events, and relationships, bounded by some unifying factor (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A case study approach was considered an appropriate method for this study to help in examining and gathering information regarding the onboarding and induction programs in the districts selected and from the participants identified.

The research design for this study was a qualitative case study. I collected, sorted, and categorized data from district-assigned personnel as well as teachers who were in their first three years of teaching. Because my data came from two districts, I applied a multiple case study method and conducted an in-depth analysis of these cases to identify common themes, patterns, and insights, as suggested by Merriam & Tisdell (2016).

In a multiple-case study, there are two stages of analysis—the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis. The researcher collects data to learn as much as possible about the contextual variables that might have a bearing on the case. "Once the analysis of each case is completed, cross-case analysis begins" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The aim of a qualitative, inductive, multi-case study is to build abstractions across cases. Although the particular details of specific cases may vary, the researcher attempts to build a general explanation that fits all the individual cases (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 41)

I used inductive analysis to sort the data into organizational categories, data types, and participants. After organizing the data into categories, I established alignment between the data collected and research questions. To help maintain focus, I applied the theoretical framework to the purpose of this study.

Theoretical Framework

The term organizational socialization first coined by William M. Evan, a scholar and researcher in the field of industrial and organizational psychology. In his study, "Peer-Group Interaction and Organizational Socialization: A Study of Employee Turnover," Evan (1963)

tested the hypothesis "that a necessary condition for successful organizational socialization is the formation of peer-group bonds; more specifically, the level of turnover is negatively associated with the level of peer-group interaction" (p. 436). Evan's study involved looking at how an industrial organization undertook a 3-year new employee training program for new employees with bachelor's or master's degrees in engineering and science. He hypothesized that the more socialization a newcomer was exposed to the greater the chances of the employee remaining in the hired position. Based on the results, Evan concluded that "the peer group, as a special type of primary group, spontaneously performs the critical function of reducing stress in organizational settings when, as is often the case, status occupants work under ambiguous or conflict-laden situations. An understanding of the dynamics of peer-group interactions may throw light not only on the processes of organizational socialization and hence on the determinants of conformity and performance in organizations, but also on adult socialization." (Evan, 1963, pp. 436-440). This case study showed that the socialization of new employees within an organization was an essential component of new employee retention. Within these perimeters, I utilized a theoretical framework that embodies the basis of most onboarding and retention programs, the organizational socialization theory. This theoretical framework supports the goal of teacher onboarding as an important component of employee efficacy, perception of service culture, and increased retention.

The framework for organizational socialization includes the process of recruiting and accustoming a newcomer to a given organizational role through a gradual socialization process. However, a conscious effort is necessary from the start to attain the best results (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Connie Wanberg, a psychologist and a professor in the field of industrial and organizational psychology, has published numerous articles and book chapters on

organizational socialization. Her book, "The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Socialization," is a series of handbooks published by Oxford University, one of the world's oldest and most highly respected publishers. This book comprises a set of handbooks that capture the status and future prospects of subfields with its main topic of organizational socialization (Wanberg, 2021, p. ix).

Organizational socialization is a theoretical framework for onboarding and retention, organizational practices, and processes. Its framework spans over 40 years with many additions made by various scholars. They include John Van Maanen, a sociologist and a professor who has made significant contributions to the field of organizational socialization, and Edgar H. Schein, a sociologist and an organizational psychologist who has explored how cultural norms, values, practices, and processes, including onboarding programs help leaders shape the organizational culture of their schools. The scholars stated that

> An organizational culture consists broadly of long-standing rules of thumb, a somewhat special language, an ideology that helps edit a member's everyday experience, shared standards of relevance as to the prejudices, models for social etiquette and demeanor, certain customs and rituals suggestive of how members are to relate to colleagues, subordinates, superiors, and outsiders, and a sort of residual category of some rather plain "horse sense" regarding what is appropriate and "smart" modes of thinking, feeling, and doing are, of course, fragmented to some degree, giving rise within large organizations to various "subcultures" or "organizational segments (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 1).

Tayla Bauer is a professor of management and organizational behavior who is best known for her research on employee socialization, onboarding, and employee turnover. Bauer and Erdogan (2011) stated,

> onboarding or organizational socialization is the mechanism through which new employees acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors in order to become effective organizational members and insiders. Organizational socialization refers to the process by which newcomers make the transition from being organizational outsiders to being insiders. (Bauer et al., 2007, p. 707)

I chose the organizational socialization theory as a theoretical framework for this study because its tenants or key themes are relevant to this research. Themes such as the importance of the socialization process, including preentry, promoting employee well-being, job satisfaction, culture, communication, mentorship programs, and ongoing professional development opportunities, appeared in my literature review as crucial components for a successful framework if followed with fidelity and intentionality.

The framework for organizational socialization includes the following stages:

1. Pre-entry: This stage involves preemployment activities such as recruitment, selection, and job offer.

2. Encounter: This stage involves the new employee's first impressions of the organization, including their initial interactions with colleagues, supervisors, and other stakeholders.

3. Metamorphosis: This stage involves the development of the employee's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in response to the organization's norms and values.

4. Change and acquisition: This stage involves the employee's increasing integration into the organization and acquiring new knowledge, skills, and behaviors.

5. Re-entry: This stage involves the employee's integration into their new role and their ongoing role in the organization.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. In what ways, if at all, are onboarding and programs aimed at retention important to the success of teachers new to the classroom?

2. What onboarding programs have been implemented to support new teachers and encourage their retention in the profession?

3. To what extent have the support programs in the Puyallup and Sumner-Bonney Lake School Districts been successful in achieving the outcomes sought? What strategies or traits associated with these programs have supported their success in inducting and retaining new teachers?

4. What barriers, if any, have inhibited the effectiveness of these programs?

5. How might school districts that seek to support and retain new teachers develop effective onboarding and retention programs?

Participants

Participants for the current study were selected purposefully. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described purposeful sampling as a process where study participants are selected according to certain characteristics and relevance to the research question. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). Using purposeful sampling in this case study allowed me to solicit feedback from new teachers in the two districts that were the focus of this research. The information collected

was analyzed to describe each district's onboarding and retention programs. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. Aged over 18 years

2. Teachers certified in the state of Washington and hired in the last 1-3 years, and be members of the teaching staff in either the Puyallup School District or the Sumner/Bonney Lake School District.

3. District administrators, support staff, teachers on special assignment (TOSA's), building administrators, building mentors, and job-alike mentors must have had experience with onboarding and inducting new teachers and be employed in the Puyallup or Sumner-Bonney Lake School District.

After I obtained permission from both school districts to conduct the proposed research, including permission to contact potential participants, I identified participants through a recruitment email I sent to early-career teachers, as well as administrators, support staff, and mentors in these two school districts.

Setting

The two school districts included in this case study were in Washington State. The actual names of the school districts were utilized throughout the research process. However, to ensure the participants'' confidentiality, individual's names, pseudonyms, or any descriptors that could potentially reveal their identities were not revealed in this case study.

The Puyallup School District recognizes that it shares the name of the original inhabitants of the land on which it is located. The Puyallup Tribe is known as spuyaləpabš/puyaləpabš (people from the bend at the bottom of the river) in their ancestral language, Lushootseed. The district is located on the Puyallup Reservation and on the

traditional homelands of the Puyallup people, a sovereign nation that operates under the Medicine Creek Treaty (Puyallup School District, 2022).

The Puyallup School District was established in 1854 as the third school district in what later became the state of Washington. Several one-room log schools were built in the area to serve the children of the pioneer families moving to the west. In addition, Puyallup's hop crop was booming, which, combined with a stave factory, attracted many families to Puyallup. These wooden staves were essential for making barrels, a process known as "coopering." Since then, the Puyallup School District has continued to grow. More than 150 years after it was founded, the district is home to 21 elementary schools, seven junior high schools, three high schools, and one alternative high school (Puyallup School District, 2022).

For the 2022-23 school year, there are 32 public schools serving 22,398 students and 1,201 teachers. This district's average testing ranking is 8/10, which is in the top 30% of public schools in Washington (Public School Review, 2022a). The student body at the schools served by Puyallup School District is 53.4% White, 5.4% Black, 6% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 18.5% Hispanic/Latino, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2.3% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 13.4% of students are of two or more races. In addition, 48% of students are female and 52% are male. At schools in Puyallup School District, 28.7% of students are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced-price meal program and 13.2% of students are English language learners (Puyallup School District, 2022).

In 1891, the Sumner-Bonney Lake School District was initially founded as the Sumner School District. In 2017, after 6 months of deliberation and several public hearings, the school board approved a name change from Sumner School District to Sumner-Bonney Lake School District. According to Sumner-Bonney Lake School Board Member Erin Markquart and District

Superintendent Laurie Dent, "This new name reflects the district's growth and the fact that more of our families and facilities are now located in Bonney Lake." Markquart further stated, "The change also recognizes the significant community partnerships and contributions from Bonney Lake while honoring our important history in Sumner" (Markquart, as cited in Miller-Still, 2017). District Superintendent Laurie Dent agreed, stating, "The new name reflects the district today, while honoring our history and beginnings in the city of Sumner." She added, "No matter what our name, or no matter how individuals feel about the change, our mission remains the same: to educate children" (Dent, as cited in Miller-Still, 2017).

The Sumner-Bonney Lake School District has more than 9,000 students who attend 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, and one alternative high school. It is one of the largest school districts in Pierce County. The current student body is 68.2% White, 1.4% Black, 2.4% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 15.7% Hispanic/Latino, 0.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.5% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 11.3% of students are of two or more races. Nineteen percent of the students are economically disadvantaged and are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced-price meal program, and 4.6% of the students are English language learners.

Forty-nine percent of students are female and 51% are male. Within Sumner-Bonney Lake School District, 99.7% of teachers are licensed, and 92.0% have three or more years of experience. At 19:1, the student-to-teacher ratio is higher than the state average of 17:1. The district has 14 full-time counselors on staff (Public School Review, 2022b).

Since 2017/2018, both Sumner/Bonney Lake and Puyallup School Districts have participated in the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) BEST (Beginning Educator Support Team) Onboarding and Retention program. According to the

available data, the number of novice teachers supported by the best program in each district has varied over the years. Table 1 below provides counts of novice teachers who have been supported by the BEST program in Sumner/Bonney Lake and Puyallup districts since 2017/2018. To maintain anonymity between the two districts, I will refer to them as District A and District B in the table.

Table 1

Novice Teachers Supported By the BEST Program in Sumner/Bonney Lake and Puyallup Districts

District	2017-18 Total	2018-19 Total	2019-20 Total	2020-21 Total	2021-22 Total	2022-23 Total
District A	n/a	142	117	142	182	143
District B	68	53	25	42	63	107

Note. Data are provided for each school year and represent the total count of novice teachers supported by the BEST program in each district during those respective years (OSPI, 2023).

Instrumentation

Qualtrics is a browser-based flexible survey tool that can be used from any location with internet access. I used Qualtrics online survey to first obtain the consent of the participants and then administer the appropriate survey to each target group. This survey tool helped me with filtering, classifying, merging, importing, and data-cleaning activities and creating as many topics as possible to explore text responses in depth (Qualtrics, 2022).

Procedures/Data Collection

To acquire approval to conduct a research in these school districts' onboarding and retention programs, I followed the necessary steps to complete the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process for both Puyallup and Sumner/Bonney Lake School Districts. After obtaining IRB approval from both school districts, I was provided with the contact information of

individuals in each district who were in charge of their district's onboarding and retention

program. Each district had a specific process to distribute the surveys to both groups (district

and teacher participants). In District A, the overseer of the onboarding and retention program

distributed the consent form and survey to potential candidates. In District B, I was given a list

of personnel responsible for its district's onboarding and retention program, including the

district administrators' support staff, TOSA's, building mentors, job-alike mentors, as well as

names of teachers in their first three years of teaching. I sent the consent and online survey

directly to those on the list I received from the districts. For both districts, I used Qualtrics to

provide potential participants with an online link to the consent form and survey. I used two

different surveys, one for district personnel and their supporting staff and another one for new

teachers. In the district survey, participants were asked about the structure, training, and support

systems that their district implements to facilitate an onboarding and retention program for new

teachers. In the new teachers' survey, participants were asked how, in their experience, their

respective school districts delivered onboarding training and provided support systems to

prepare them as new teachers, how they felt those supports impacted teacher retention, and what

recommendations they would make to help enhance the effectiveness of these programs. I

utilized Delve, a software program designed for content analysis, to establish a categorical

system for organizing open-ended information. This program assisted me in coding the data

received from participants and facilitated the identification of emerging themes in the research.

Data Analysis

I created a data repository using Delve, a program developed by Digital Artefacts, to

help analyze and code qualitative data, including transcripts from survey responses. With Delve,

I created codes based on responses from teachers and district personnel. I analyzed each

transcript sentence by sentence to understand the responses to the questions posed. I then performed the coding process again to avoid missing any data followed by thematic analysis of the codes during the second pass. Reviewing the responses a second time allowed me to correct any oversights and capture essential data I might have missed if I had not conducted a second pass. I further analyzed responses from the data surveys and created categories, reanalyzed, and then created themes and patterns based on the responses. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, I summarized the data and compared the research data with the theoretical frameworks to see if the data I collected contradicted or agreed with the theory.

I used data triangulation to increase my confidence and enhance the credibility of my findings. "The subjective nature of qualitative research necessitates the use of triangulation as it helps reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation of data due to subjective biases in the data." (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 242). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) further stated, "Using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods help to confirm emerging findings" (Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). In this study, I performed triangulation using multiple data sources such as literature reviews, respondent responses, and data from OSPI personnel and colleagues in the districts who shared an interest in the onboarding and retention programs of both districts but did not participate or provide feedback in either survey. These three data points helped to create a triangulation approach that enhanced the validity and credibility of the research findings as I drew on multiple sources and methods to validate the study's results. Furthermore, using this type of data triangulation in my research increased the reliability of my findings by cross-comparing data sets from multiple sources and thereby creating internal validity.

Limitations of the Study

This case study was conducted following Tracy and Hinrichs's (2013) "big tent" criteria for conducting "excellent" qualitative research. Her eight criteria are that the research (1) be on a worthy topic; (2) be conducted with rich rigor; (3) be performed with sincerity — that is, transparency of methods; (4) have credibility; (5) resonate with a variety of audiences; (6) make a significant contribution; (7) attend to ethical considerations; and finally, (8) have meaningful coherence; that is, " meaningfully interconnects literature, research, questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other " (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 240).

My participants were not identifiable and data were not shared or analyzed outside of this study. Coded data were not shared or analyzed outside of Western Washington University. The names of the school districts were identified by their actual names, and the survey participants were not identified by either name; instead, I used "district or teacher respondents" according to their group. Potential biases may include the researcher's limited personal experience with induction and onboarding programs at the district and school levels. As a new teacher, I did not receive the kinds of support and onboarding that I explored in this research. Thus, my own experience may color my perspective on onboarding and induction. Qualitative research is, by nature, rooted in one's lived experiences, those of participants, and those of the researcher. Other limitations in the study include the lack of information regarding demographics such as gender, ethnic background, and age group. In addition, in-person interviews were not conducted to delve deeper into inquiry and information about the participants' educational background and teaching subject area was lacking.

The choice of surveys for data collection rather than conducting interviews was intentional because, as the researcher, I wanted to maintain anonymity of the participants. The

anonymity of participants was crucial for ethical, legal, and methodological reasons, as the anonymous surveys safeguarded the participants' privacy. The use of surveys also encouraged honest responses, reduced biases, and promoted trust between the researcher and participants, thus promoting the integrity of the data collected. My three-point data triangulation further assured that credible research-based literature and frameworks used by many in academia, survey responses, and input from colleagues that were not part of the survey would lessen the risk of biases in this research study.

Subject Positioning

Though I have extensive experience as a teacher and school administrator, I had limited knowledge of the two school districts' onboarding and retention programs. Learning more about them in Puyallup and Sumner-Bonney Lake helped me understand the process and impact of an induction program for new teachers and how to implement and support this important work. The development of research questions helped me become aligned with the literature review and focus on what I wanted to investigate in this research, which was the onboarding and retention programs implemented in two school districts in Washington State.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS/OUTCOMES

Discussion of the Results

As eCaudillo (2022) emphasized, the need for quality mentoring programs and onboarding new teachers has reached a critical level. Attracting and retaining quality teachers has shifted from a serious issue to an acute crisis. The urgency of this situation was further highlighted by the New Teacher Project, which concluded that districts must reevaluate their assumptions about the support new teachers need to thrive in their profession rather than abandoning investment in their development (Plessis, 2017). The purpose of this case study was to explore the onboarding and retention programs in two school districts in Washington State based on the experiences of new teachers in their first three years of teaching and determine if the two school districts' effectiveness in onboarding and retention programs prepared teachers in their respective school districts. Focusing on the two school districts I selected, I explored the following research questions:

- In what ways, if at all, are onboarding and programs aimed at retention important to the success of teachers new to the classroom?

- What onboarding programs have been implemented to support new teachers and encourage their retention in the profession?

- To what extent have the support programs in the Puyallup and Sumner-Bonney Lake School Districts successfully achieved the outcomes sought? What strategies or traits associated with these programs have supported their success in inducting and retaining new teachers?

- What barriers, if any, have inhibited the effectiveness of these programs?

- How might school districts that seek to support and retain new teachers develop effective onboarding and retention programs?

I used these research questions to guide the collection and analysis of data on the onboarding programs that are implemented in the Puyallup and Sumner/Bonney Lake School Districts. The responses to surveys indicated how much emphasis is being placed on these programs and whether they are considered crucial to retaining new teachers. In addition, the answers shed light on the onboarding and retention programs' effectiveness and helped identify the specific strategies or traits that have contributed to their success or failure in retaining new teachers. Moreover, the responses highlighted new teachers' challenges in the onboarding process and how these challenges can be addressed to improve teacher retention. In conclusion, the study's findings provide insights into suggestions and recommendations for school districts looking to establish similar programs or improve their teacher retention practices.

I used surveys to solicit feedback from teachers and district officials in the two school districts. Twenty-one participants completed the survey and were divided into two groups. The first group of 11 comprised district administrators, TOSAs, instructional coaches, job-alike mentors, building mentors, building principals, teaching and learning district directors, and technology instructional coaches. The second group included 10 teachers in their first three years of teaching in the two school districts. Table 2 below shows the participant groups and their roles in their respective districts. The survey consisted of six open-ended, long-form questions for each participant group.

Table 2

Participant Groups

Participant Groups	District Role
District Respondents	Teachers on Special Assignments (TOSA)
	Instructional Coaches
	District Mentors
	Job-alike Mentors
	Building Mentors
	Building Principals
	Teaching and Learning District Director
	Technology Instructional Coach
Teacher Respondents	All teachers in their first three years of teaching

My goal was to weave a coherent story based on the responses to the survey questions and the analytic process described in Chapter III. Once I collected the data, I used a multi-case study analysis to analyze the data systematically. I utilized a two-step coding system to identify patterns in the data. The first step involved importing the survey transcript into a tool called Delve, a software developed by Digital Artefacts for analyzing and coding qualitative data, including transcripts from survey responses. This initial step helped me create codes based on responses from teachers and district personnel. I analyzed every line in each transcript to understand the responses to the survey questions. In the second step, I repeated the coding process to capture any missed data and performed thematic analysis of the codes. By reviewing the responses a second time, I was able to correct any oversight and capture essential data I could have missed if I had not conducted a second pass. The subsequent phase of the coding process involved identifying big-idea themes through a series of first-order coding, which I performed to build themes as I analyzed the data. Corbin and Strauss (2015) stated, "Using axial coding is the process of relating categories and properties to each other, refining the category scheme." I merged codes to create overarching higher-order codes or themes. I used these

overarching codes to build the final themes. Finally, I used the results to present the findings and explain the process in the current study.

This chapter includes an in-depth examination of the major themes that emerged from the survey responses, further supported by my content analysis. The following themes were central to district leaders and teachers' onboarding and training experiences, as described by district-level personnel and early-career teacher participants: district onboarding support, district training opportunities, effective teacher onboarding, teacher barriers to effective training, teacher support systems, and training recommendations.

These themes reveal key factors that significantly impact teacher onboarding and retention programs in the Puyallup and Sumner-Bonney Lake School Districts. They are not only important factors in evaluating the success of onboarding and early-career training experiences but also key strategies for teacher retention. In the following sections, I explore these themes in detail, highlighting relevant quotes from the survey participants to provide insight into the nature and effectiveness of the two districts' onboarding and retention programs.

Table 3

A List of Six Themes that Emerged and Their Thematic Description

Themes	Description
District onboarding support	This theme represents the onboarding and retention programs that the districts provide. It includes represented departments, such as Human Resources, Technology, Instructional Leadership, and Teaching and Learning Teams.
District training opportunities	This theme represents training opportunities offered by the districts during the onboarding process, such as: New Teacher Orientation, GLAD, Danielson Framework, Cultivating Equitable Teaching and Learning Practices, Equity and Diversity, Asynchronous Trainings, Technology, Human Resources, and others.
Teacher effective onboarding	This theme represents positive onboarding experiences, support, preparedness, and effective system structures
Teacher barriers to effective training	This theme represents challenges and obstacles new teachers experienced during their onboarding process that affected respondents' perception of being supported, prepared, and successful in their roles.
Teacher support system	This theme represents the respondents who felt supported and empowered through a network of mentors, colleagues, and other stakeholders
Training recommendations	This theme represents teachers who felt that there were areas where their onboarding program could have been strengthened or improved to meet their needs better and support their success.

District Onboarding Support

Different definitions of organizational socialization are provided in the literature. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) stated, "Organizational socialization is then the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role." Additionally, Conney R. Wanberg (2021) further defined organizational socialization as the process by which organizational members learn new skills, norms, organizational structures,

and behaviors necessary to integrate and adapt to their organization and become effective contributors. Efforts to enhance new teacher's self-efficacy and help them develop new relationships with colleagues include supportive feedback from their building administration team regarding their new teaching position, offering opportunities for skill building and practice, and modeling successful behaviors.

In my survey, the theme of district onboarding support surfaced, and it relates very closely to the research question, "What onboarding programs have been implemented to support new teachers and encourage their retention in the profession?" In the context of this study on teacher onboarding and retention programs, this theme emerged, as the districts' respondents stated that their district had a structured and comprehensive onboarding process in place to support new teachers. The theme also signaled that the district was actively working to improve its onboarding program and address challenges to supporting new teachers in the district. Teacher professional development through mentorship is critical to establishing good practice in the classroom. Providing appropriate levels of teacher mentoring and support is not without its challenges. According to Ellen Moir (2003), "mentoring helps transform the profession of teaching from one of isolation and high turnover to one of collaboration, continuity, and community. Learning to teach becomes a process that extends across an entire career, in which training and preservice are only the beginning" (p. 14). This statement underscores the significance of teacher professional development through mentorship and highlights the importance of addressing these challenges and the need to create a robust onboarding mentorship program. District respondents identified district personnel such as human resources professionals, instructional coaches, mentors, and administrators as contributors to district onboarding support. They also indicated that these individuals played a key role in designing,

implementing, and evaluating the district's onboarding program. Regarding this point, one of the district respondents stated as follows:

> Teachers attend four days of training through New Staff Orientation. One day is in their building where the principal and building learning leader support new staff in learning/understanding the ins and outs of the building, then a day of curriculum training, Danielson Framework, one of three teacher evaluation frameworks used by school districts in Washington training, and instructional practices.

This respondent stated that the district provides its new teachers with a placement training program. The program includes a four-day comprehensive orientation for new teachers with a range of coaching that includes socializing opportunities, interacting with their direct building leader, and formal training related to their district's framework. It also encompasses support opportunities intended to align with teacher-specific training and preparation for future needs and challenges.

Another district respondent said, "New staff has access to HR for questions and support and lunch provided by the union to learn about membership and benefits and meet with their mentors regarding the mentoring program." By attending four training days, new teachers had time to learn about their district's curriculum, receive an overview of instructional practices, and focus on highlights of the district's evaluation framework. They also had an opportunity to meet their mentors and job-alike support person, and other key stakeholders. Another district respondent, describing how new faculty experience onboarding, said, "New teachers have the option of meeting for a half day with their mentor before the new staff orientation to help them feel connected with someone from the inside before meeting a larger group of new people."

Maor and McConney (2015) stated, "Mentors must also focus on providing 'emotional support and instructional and organizational guidance'" and "share pedagogical knowledge, model teaching practice, and provide helpful feedback" (p. 14). The focus on instructional and organizational guidance, pedagogical knowledge sharing, modeling, and providing feedback by mentors can help new teachers navigate the complexities of the teaching profession and fosters professional growth and confidence. This approach helped new teachers feel more connected, supported, welcomed, and socialized in their new work environment. By providing a range of support and access to key interested parties, as well as a mentorship program, the districts helped ensure that new teachers felt supported, remained aware of important details pertaining to their job, and established connections with key people with whom they will work as they begin their careers. As Maor and McConney (2015) stated, "Mentors play a crucial role in providing emotional support, instructional and organizational guidance, sharing pedagogical knowledge, modeling teaching practice, and providing helpful feedback" (p. 14).

In addition, district respondents reported that the ongoing support and resources provided to new teachers were designed to help them navigate the job demands and establish themselves in their new role. They also pointed out other potential resources or training opportunities for new teachers, such as community partners and local universities. The district respondents identified these initiatives as the onboarding and retention programs offered to support new teachers.

District Training Opportunities

District training opportunities also emerged as a theme, as three district respondents stated that the districts offered a wide range of professional development opportunities to support new teachers in their first three years on their job. A comprehensive training regime for

new teachers is essential for successful teacher onboarding. Therefore, the training opportunities offered by the districts in this study aligned with the research question, "To what extent have the support programs in the Puyallup and Sumner-Bonney Lake School Districts successfully achieved the outcomes sought?"

The opportunities described by respondents included mentoring programs, job-alike, and other forms of training meant to provide teachers with the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to succeed in the classroom. The district training opportunities were aimed at bridging the gap between theory and practice by providing new teachers with practical tools and strategies to support their teaching. One district respondent shared,

> During their first year, new teachers take a 15-hour-long training on the Danielson evaluation process and equitable high-leverage strategies, Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices to utilize in the classroom, and also receive tech support and induction training before school starts.

The Danielson Framework is the evaluation tool used in both districts. The framework provides teachers with a common language and expectations that can help promote consistency and equity across classrooms. In public education systems, culturally responsive teaching practices are becoming increasingly important in today's diverse classrooms as these strategies address how new teachers can better understand and respond to their students' unique needs and perspectives, ultimately promoting greater engagement, success, and equity.

Training on the Danielson evaluation process, equitable high-leverage strategies, and culturally responsive teaching are essential for new teachers to develop their skills, understand the expectations of effective teaching, and create inclusive and supportive learning environments. This training is important for the professional growth, alignment with standards,

self-reflection, feedback, mentoring, accountability, and career advancement of new teachers. By teaching early-career teachers about the Danielson Framework evaluation process, districts can promote a culture of continuous improvement, support their teachers' professional growth, and ensure high-quality instruction is provided.

The districts in the current study also made use of a mentoring program sponsored by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The need for culturally responsive teaching and promoting consistency and equity in all classrooms is at the core of OSPI's BEST Mentor Academy 101. As the OSPI website explains, the program,

> invites participants to examine themselves (their identity and experience), their approach to building relationships with mentees, and the systems change advocacy essential to mentoring for equity. The WA State Standards for Mentoring is the foundational text of Mentor Academy. These standards are centered in educational equity: the heart of mentoring. Academy content is supported by Elena Aguilar's Coaching for Equity; all pre-registered participants will receive a copy of Coaching for Equity. (OSPI, 2023, para. 4)

By providing mentors with training that incorporates self-reflection, relationship-building strategies, and systems change advocacy, the mentoring experience becomes more meaningful and impactful. This focused training helps mentors develop the necessary skills and awareness to support new teachers in culturally responsive and equitable ways focused on improving student outcomes. Second- and third-year teachers in the districts also participated in GLAD training. One district-level respondent said,

> GLAD training can help teachers feel more confident and prepared to teach a diverse range of students by emphasizing the importance of cultural competence and the value

of linguistic diversity. GLAD training is important for new public education teachers because they provide effective strategies for promoting language acquisition and creating an engaging and inclusive learning environment.

Moir (2009) noted that effective mentors and their districts' personnel "regularly speak to school administrators with the purpose of aligning goals. They can discuss mentoring strategies and learn how to advance teacher effectiveness and student learning" (p. 16). Regarding this point, Brechtel (2023) added,

> Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) can enhance new teachers' cultural competence by providing training on effective strategies to provide culturally responsive instruction, language, and cultural proficiency, building cultural connections, and implementing multimodal instruction strategies to their lessons (Brechtel, 2023, p. ??)

Induction

Teacher induction programs provide orientation activities that include a variety of onboarding online instructional methodologies, technology, teaching resources, and an introduction to future workshops and professional development opportunities. District respondents commented on their induction program. One district respondent stated, "New teachers received a one-day induction followed by seven follow-up sessions, and asynchronous recorded training on technology, teaching strategies, and curriculum development." Overall, the respondents noted, that this combination training can help new teachers feel more confident and better prepared. Moreover, access to asynchronous training materials gives new teachers the flexibility, support, and resources they need to succeed in their new role. This learning opportunity allows new teachers to learn and grow on their own schedule, helping them feel more confident and prepared to teach their students confidently and capably.

The training and induction of new teachers' experience are accompanied by an effort by the school districts to solicit feedback from participants in these district initiatives. One district-level respondent explained, "Teacher feedback is solicited through pre- and post-self-assessments via surveys to adjust and/or enhance induction training to meet their teachers' needs." Soliciting teacher feedback is an important part of designing effective training programs that meet the needs of new teachers. Teacher feedback can help districts make informed decisions about training, increase teacher engagement and buy-in, and ultimately improve student outcomes.

The National Teacher Center provides its users a guiding framework for use by teacher induction program leaders, which entails focusing on a continuous reassessment of foundational standards, followed by structural standards, and finally, instructional standards, in line with NTC's belief (Moir, 2009). By continuously reassessing and soliciting new teacher feedback, induction program leaders can ensure that they provide new teachers with the most relevant and impactful support. This process of reflection and refinement aligns with NTC's model of commitment to excellence in teacher induction and contributes to the overall effectiveness of the induction experience for new teachers (Figure 3). District training provides ongoing support and professional growth opportunities to enhance teacher productivity and teaching and learning effectiveness. By participating, new teachers build professional networks, connect with colleagues, and gain valuable insights into the local educational landscape.

Teacher-effective Onboarding

In my study, an emerging theme of teacher-effective onboarding surfaced as new teachers reported having positive onboarding experiences that helped them feel supported, prepared, and successful in their roles. Early-career teachers who responded stated that the

district provided the resources and support that they needed to navigate the job's demands. Their responses indicated that onboarding programs were structured, comprehensive, and responsive to the unique needs of new teachers. Their responses helped answer the research questions, "In what ways, if at all, are onboarding and programs aimed at retention important to the success of teachers new to the classroom?" and "What strategies or traits associated with these programs have supported their success in inducting and retaining new teachers?

Through their responses to the survey questions, the new teachers shared their thoughts about the effectiveness of the efforts employed by their districts. One teacher said, "The onboarding experience was informative, professional, and well-put together. There was a lot of information, and the building administrators were super supportive." Another teacher shared, "I appreciated that building administrators were present at the initial onboarding meetings and shared their stories with us. It was helpful and comforting to know that they were on our side from the get-go." One teacher respondent said,

> I was fortunate to have both an in-building mentor and a district mentor. Both individuals helped in many ways but in different ways. My in-building mentor helped with curriculum, discipline, and navigating systems used by the school district, while my district mentor helped with instructional coaching and different teaching styles. Having those two different people with different roles helped a lot.

Another teacher concurred, stating, "I like having a specific mentor so that there is an assigned person for help, especially at the beginning when I didn't really know anyone or whom to go to for help." Another focused on the role of their in-building mentor: "I was assigned an in-building mentor who helped me become familiar with the department and curriculum. The admin staff was very personable and genuinely supported me."

These statements highlighted the positive impact that the districts may expect when they provide new teachers with a well-organized and informative onboarding experience. The positive feedback on building administrators' support also suggested that the support provided by school leaders is vital to ensuring strong support from the very beginning of a new teacher's induction and crucial to a successful onboarding experience. New teachers highlighted the essential role that structured and supportive onboarding programs play in supporting new teachers in their first years on the job. Having both an in-building mentor and a district mentor can be valuable to a teacher's onboarding experience. By providing different types of support and guidance, these mentors can help new teachers navigate the complexities of their new job and develop their skills as educators. One teacher new to the job responded, "I was assigned an in-building mentor who helped me become familiar with the department and curriculum. The admin staff was very personable and genuinely supported me."

Mentors must also focus on providing "emotional support and instructional and organizational guidance" and "share pedagogical knowledge, model teaching practice, and provide helpful feedback" (Maor & McConney, 2015, p. 14). Building administrators' provision of organizational support should complement the mentor's role in providing emotional and instructional guidance. Although mentors focus on offering personalized support and guidance to new teachers, building administrators contribute to the broader organizational support system. Organizational support from administrators helps new teachers feel valued, empowered, and connected to the broader educational community. By working together, administrators and mentors can create an environment where new teachers can thrive, develop their instructional practice, and positively impact student learning.

Teachers recognized and appreciated the work done by in-building mentors to help new teachers become familiar with the department. They also explained how useful this support was for new teachers who may not have a background in the subject they are assigned to teach, or who may be unfamiliar with the specific curriculum of the school. Several teachers stated that having a specific assigned mentor provided a sense of security and comfort, just by knowing that they had someone to whom they could turn for guidance and support. New teachers were upfront in their desire to build relationships with a colleague who could serve as both a role model and mentor throughout their careers.

That brings me to organizational socialization, the process by which organizational members learn new skills, norms, organizational structures, and behaviors necessary to integrate and adapt to their organization and become effective contributors. Organizational socialization is defined as "the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 3). Organizational socialization is vital to new teacher onboarding and retention programs, as it facilitates skill development, adaptation, integration, relationship building, and understanding of organizational structures and ultimately contributes to the success and satisfaction of new educators within the organization.

Barriers to Effective Teacher Onboarding

Not all teacher respondents reported positive or supportive experiences as they embarked on their careers. Teacher barriers to effective onboarding surfaced as a theme as some new teachers reported experiencing challenges and felt unsupported, unprepared, and unsuccessful in their roles due to obstacles they experienced during their onboarding process. The responses to the survey questions related to this theme helped to answer the research

questions, "In what ways if at all, are onboarding and programs aimed at retention important to the success of teachers new to the classroom?" and "What barriers, if any, have inhibited the effectiveness of these programs?" This perspective emerged from statements made by five teachers who said that the onboarding program in their district was not comprehensive, responsive, or aligned with the unique needs of new teachers, contributing to frustration, stress, and burnout.

One respondent stated, "Yes, special services offered training, but not much in-building training. I received training on IEP online. No training was offered on how to build a para-educator schedule." Another teacher told of "wanting more guidance regarding working with paras and making a para schedule. More curriculum learning material." Whitaker's (2000) study guided specific structures of effective mentoring for special educators as follows:

> One recommendation was to select a special education mentor instead of a nonspecial educator. Additional benefits of mentoring included receiving emotional support and learning the mechanics of the job and focusing on the mechanics of the job, policies, and procedures, working with other staff, and locating resources. (p. 562)

Statements such as those above focused on the experiences of new special education teachers. These reflections represent dissatisfaction regarding onboarding, suggesting that special education teachers may not have received the support and guidance they needed to succeed in their roles. Feedback regarding barriers helps to highlight what challenges new teachers may face in the onboarding process and the need for more comprehensive support and resources to help them be successful in their roles.

Identifying and addressing barriers can help districts adjust their onboarding programs to incorporate helpful resources. As a result, new teachers can access the tools that they need to

build self-confidence and be better prepared for their particular roles. A teacher respondent said, "There was plenty of random training information that was either not applicable or caused more stress and chaos to the whole process." Two others had similar opinions, with one of them saying that the onboarding process was not helpful because it did not reflect their own particular teaching assignment.

The New Teacher Project (2015) revealed that among the pitfalls with onboarding programs are that "we bombard teachers with help, but most of it is not helpful" (p. 2). Inundating teachers with over-saturated, frontloaded information can defeat the purpose of providing a cohesive onboarding program. Another survey response aligned with this statement, noting that the information provided focused on a grade level irrelevant to the new teacher's assignment. Regarding the onboarding support, there was "little to none, due to most of the teaching practices being gauged towards primary education rather than secondary." Another teacher said, "You rely on other teachers in your field to clue you into how the program is run. Very few check-ins and support for new teachers. New teachers are thrown into classrooms to fend for themselves and figure it out." Another agreed, "There are trainings available but very few that we can take that would actually help in our classroom to build better teaching practices." This lack of connection between mentors and mentees can be problematic, as new teachers feel forced to rely on more informal support systems rather than structured onboarding processes. Some respondents shared that a lack of check-ins with a mentor can create a sense of isolation and a lack of accountability, making it more difficult for new teachers to feel supported and prepared. This lack of support can also result in new teachers feeling overwhelmed and uncertain in their roles. The National Institute for Excellence and Teaching discussed some of the failings of mentor programs and mentors, stating, "Researchers also point

to a lack of screening for the effectiveness of mentors and insufficient efforts to recruit effective teachers to serve as mentors." (Goldrick, as cited in National Institute for Excellence and Teaching, 2021, p. 4)

The teacher barriers to effective training highlighted in my survey illustrate the challenges that some new teachers faced during the onboarding process. It also demonstrates the impact that these challenges had on their success and confidence as they entered the teaching profession. Addressing these barriers and providing more tailored and relevant support can help districts support staff in their specific teaching areas.

Teacher Support System

The theme of a teacher support system surfaced as some new teachers reported feeling supported and empowered through a strong network of mentors, colleagues, and other stakeholders. This theme directly relates to the research question, "How might school districts that seek to support and retain new teachers develop effective onboarding and retention programs?" Teachers stated that their district created a culture of support and collaboration in which new teachers felt valued and encouraged to seek out guidance and advice from experienced educators. To illustrate this culture of support, one teacher answered the survey question as follows:

> Yes, during one of the more theory-based trainings, I observed many different teaching practices. One issue with this, however, was that the training often included too many different teaching practices, so we were never able to examine them in depth. But, having the ability to work with my district mentor helped me identify and feel more comfortable applying those practices in my classroom.

The statement underscores the importance of having a mentor as a crucial component of new teachers' professional development and the importance of building strong mentor-to-mentee relationships. Although district training can provide exposure to different teaching practices, it may not and probably will not always provide the opportunity to examine them in-depth. However, when a district has a good mentoring program, it provides personalized guidance and support to new teachers and an opportunity to delve more deeply into the new teacher's area of interest, while also building a relationship with their district-assigned mentor. A teacher respondent stated, "The most helpful takeaway from the onboarding process was how the district sees the staff as a community working together." This person's experience attests to the district's built-in support for its onboarding program. After all, the teacher support system is designed to consider the staff as a community working together. Effective onboarding promotes collaboration, support, and a shared sense of purpose among educators. Another teacher respondent shared that

> Onboarding to any new position or school is hard, but our school did a good job providing necessary information upfront to the whole school, department, and grade-level tiers. I knew where to go if there was any information I needed or questions that needed answers.

Similarly, another teacher respondent stated, "Although my onboarding timing was not ideal, I did receive multiple supports from other teachers, coaches, and mentors that made it more than bearable." New teachers stated that some of the structures in the district support system helped them build relationships and connect with others in the profession by reaching out to mentors and other educators for supporting guidance and building relationships and networks that can sustain them throughout their first three years in education. Reflecting a

similar theme, Maor and McConney (2015) wrote, "Mentors must also focus on providing 'emotional support and instructional and organizational guidance' and 'share pedagogical knowledge, model teaching practice, and provide helpful feedback'" (p. 14). Providing built-in support to early-career teachers helps new teachers feel supported, guided, and connected with their colleagues, thereby increasing their confidence and retention probability.

Training Recommendations

The final emerging idea was training recommendations. In my study, new teachers felt that there were areas where their onboarding program could have been strengthened or improved to meet their needs better and support their success. Like the previous theme, "teacher barriers to effective onboarding," this theme also helped to answer the research question, "What barriers, if any, have inhibited the effectiveness of these programs?" and "How might school districts that seek to support and retain new teachers develop effective onboarding and retention programs?" Highlighting specific training needs or gaps they observed during their onboarding process, teachers I surveyed responded with what they found effective and what areas they felt could be improved. One teacher respondent said,

> Another aspect of teaching I wasn't fully prepared for was a general overview of what I'm responsible for communicating with parents on, how often, what stuff do I need to keep track of. There are a lot of small things I didn't fully understand.

> Another said, "I think new teachers would benefit from having district policies and

procedures explained in depth." These recommendations suggest that new teachers will benefit from a comprehensive approach covering all teaching aspects, including administrative and communication aspects, and in-depth training on policies and procedures that can help teachers understand their responsibilities and rights as educators.

Training focused on human relations surfaced among the responses I received. Several teacher respondents shared recommendations regarding communication with students and parents and strategies for handling extreme emotions with students. One participant stated, "I feel that a class that covered communication between parents/guardians and how to handle extreme emotions with students would be helpful." Another respondent said, "More support and clear guidelines and expectations on the behavioral aspect would be very helpful."

A 2018 report by The American Institutes for Research for the US Department of Education proposed a set of strategies for promoting effective family engagement and student success. "Teacher-family communication is linked to better homework completion, attention during instructional tasks, and class participation rates, as well as improved teacher-student interactions and student motivation" (Kraft & Dougherty, as cited in Jacques & Villegas, 2018, p. 2). While there is an extensive body of research on general family engagement strategies, many schools and districts need information about how schools engage all families equitably. The following sections outline strategies and provide real-world examples across five major types of evidence-based strategies for promoting equitable family engagement:

- Making a commitment to equitable family engagement

- Making equitable family engagement "business as usual"

- Building relationships between staff and families

- Meaningfully involving and engaging families and trusted community advocates

- Engaging outside of the school building (Jacques & Villegas, 2018, pp. 4-13).

Providing more support, guidance, and clear guidelines and expectations on the behavioral aspect of their jobs can help teachers prepare for classroom management skills and strategies for managing challenging situations and support students positively. As more teachers

weighed in, one recognized "the need for specialized instruction teaching practices, more de-escalation strategies, and better curriculum." Another teacher asked for "some clarity on antiquated offensive language in historical texts and how to navigate policies." These recommendations are relevant to the current study because they suggest that specialized training can benefit teachers who work with students with special needs and those who learn in non-traditional ways. Training on policies related to antiquated offensive language in historical texts is vital for new teachers. Antiquated and offensive language, such as phrases or expressions once commonly used in historical texts, is now considered offensive or derogatory due to changes in societal norms and cultural understanding. Increased awareness of the impact of such language is needed, as expressions used against marginalized groups, such as racial slurs, derogatory references to gender, offensive terms related to disability, or other language, perpetuates stereotypes, discrimination, or prejudice. Currently, specific words and phrases considered offensive may vary based on context, cultural background, and evolving social standards. Language evolves over time, and what was once deemed acceptable may now be recognized as offensive or harmful language. In the two districts studied, there are Equity Advisory Councils that actively examine issues surrounding racial equity and ways to improve the educational experience for every student.

Training related to the best equitable practices equips teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and sensitivity to navigate potentially sensitive content while promoting inclusivity, critical analysis, cultural competence, and ethical considerations in the classroom. By addressing these aspects, new teachers can create a supportive and respectful learning environment where all students feel valued, understood, and engaged. Providing training on navigating these policies can help teachers create a safe and inclusive environment for all

students to receive a high-quality education. The curriculum recommendations brought forth by the respondents require districts to provide training on policies related to antiquated offensive language in historical texts. New teachers who responded to the survey questions advocated for their needs and interests and their professional growth and development.

Summary

In this qualitative case study, I examined the onboarding and retention mentorship programs for new teachers in two school districts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Six themes emerged from the study: the need for district onboarding support, district training opportunities, effective onboarding of new teachers, identifying barriers to effective training, teacher support systems, and training recommendations. In Chapter 5, I will clarify my research findings and identify any disparate study threads. The chapter consists of four sections: a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings in relation to each research question, relevant literature and theory, implications for practice and recommendations for changes or improvement in policy or practice, and implications for future research, as well as suggestions for further research. By contextualizing my findings in the literature and theory in Chapter 5, I will provide a comprehensive understanding of this study's implications for educational practice and policy.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Problem

A universal need for effective mentoring and onboarding programs surfaced significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2019-2020 school year as school districts, faced with pressure to support new teachers in ways never before imagined, sought to retain the teachers they had recruited. Traditional teaching practices were upended during the pandemic, starting in the spring of 2020. In the throes of a global pandemic, teachers were confronted with the biggest challenge of their careers, as they had to figure out how to instruct students through an online medium. The 2020-21 school year presented unprecedented challenges between the transition to remote classes and then back to hybrid learning, and by 2021, teachers felt like they could not keep their heads above water. "They're responsible for not only the standards that they have in the classroom for this year, but they're also responsible for all of the lost learning for the last 18 months. They feel like they simply can't keep up" (Davis et al., 2021, p. 1).

The need for district-effective mentoring and onboarding programs was of utmost importance for early career teachers, as was the provision of necessary support, guidance, resources, training, and a supportive network of experienced teachers who could help foster a sense of belonging and a real connection to the work that lay before them.

Purpose

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the induction of retention programs in two distinct school districts in Western Washington. The aim of the study was to examine the framework designed and implemented in these districts that enhanced teacher retention rates. I explored collaborative efforts among the districts, building administrators, mentors, and job-alike mentors in creating effective onboarding and retention programs designed to address the school districts' requirements and high-level teacher preparation and training.

To accomplish these research objectives, I solicited feedback from two groups of participants: district personnel and early career teachers. The first group consisted of district personnel, who provided insights and perspectives on the induction and retention programs from their institutional standpoint. Their feedback shed light on the strategies, resources, and activities employed by the districts to support and retain new teachers. The perspectives of district personnel were crucial in understanding the administrative and organizational aspects of the two districts' onboarding programs.

The second group of participants comprised early-career teachers who shared their experiences and perspectives regarding the onboarding process within their respective school districts. I administered a survey to early-career teachers to gather feedback on their experiences, the support systems provided, the overall effectiveness of the onboarding programs, and how these systems contributed to their professional growth and job satisfaction. This group's insights were instrumental in understanding the direct impact and effectiveness of the onboarding programs from the perspective of the teachers themselves.

I considered the feedback from both groups of participants to examine carefully the induction and retention programs. The analysis of the collected data enabled the exploration of common themes, challenges, successes, and collaborative efforts in creating supportive and effective onboarding programs. The feedback from participants also showed that the programs initiated in the school districts did not provide the desired support for all early-career teachers.

Through this research methodology, the current study contributes valuable insights into the field of teacher induction and retention programs. The findings have the potential to inform future practices and policies, facilitating the improvement of onboarding experiences for early career teachers in Washington as well as in other parts of the United States. Ultimately, the

outcomes will enhance teacher support systems to foster new teachers' professional growth and job satisfaction.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

- In what ways, if at all, are onboarding programs aimed at retention important to the success of teachers new to the classroom?

- What onboarding programs have been implemented to support new teachers and encourage their retention in the profession?

- To what extent have the support programs in the Puyallup and Sumner-Bonney Lake School Districts been successful in achieving the outcomes sought? What strategies or traits associated with these programs have supported their success in inducting and retaining new teachers?

- What barriers, if any, have inhibited the effectiveness of these programs?

- How might school districts that seek to support and retain new teachers develop effective onboarding and retention programs?

By exploring these research questions, I aimed to gain insights into the strategies, practices, and collaborative efforts employed by the districts to support and retain early-career teachers. The findings have the potential to contribute to the existing knowledge on effective onboarding and retention programs. The study is significant in that its findings provide valuable guidance for educational institutions seeking to improve their support systems for new teachers.

Summary of the Findings

A careful analysis of the survey responses provided insights into the major themes that emerged from the data. These themes were identified through content analysis and reflect the

experiences and perspectives of district-level personnel and early career teacher participants regarding onboarding and training. The key themes that emerged included district onboarding support, district training opportunities, effective teacher onboarding, teacher barriers to effective training, teacher support systems, and training recommendations. These findings shed light on the experiences and perceptions of the participants, offering valuable insights into the crucial aspects of onboarding and training in the study context.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to Research Questions

District Onboarding Support and Training

I discovered that both school districts in this study participated in OSPI's BEST Grant program, and therefore followed the Standards for Beginning Educator Induction (OSPI, 2018). In the following section, I elaborate the district's implementation of the state-funded program and its relevance to this study. Relative to the research question "To what extent have the support programs in the Puyallup and Sumner-Bonney Lake School Districts successfully achieved the outcomes sought?", district respondents shared information about their onboarding and retention program and support systems that were available for new teachers. District respondents shared that all early career teachers are onboarded with a new teacher onboarding orientation, comprehensive orientations encompassing various aspects such as socialization, curriculum training, framework understanding, instructional practices, and various pieces of training that included online modules. The district respondents also shared that new teachers were asked to complete pre- and post-surveys regarding their perspective on the district commitment to providing comprehensive support and training opportunities for new teachers. Onboarding and retention programs are crucial, as they align with the goal of an effective district onboarding and retention program. Setting aside four days of comprehensive training

helps new teachers become familiar with their assigned building and its operations and equips them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and support systems to thrive in their roles. The provision of this training emphasizes the importance of organizational socialization. As Van Maanen and Schein (1979) stated, "when new teachers learn the norms, structures, and behaviors necessary to integrate into the organization and become effective contributors." The district respondents highlighted their districts' efforts to enhance new teachers' self-efficacy and promote relationship building with colleagues.

In addition to the district's initiatives and practices, the district respondents shared that the districts followed the recommendations provided by the BEST (Beginning Educator Support Team) Grant program for effective teacher onboarding. The BEST Grant program, known for its focus on education improvement, emphasizes the importance of comprehensive onboarding strategies to support new teachers. The BEST grant program includes a recommendation that effective teacher onboarding includes a multifaceted approach to address not only the practical aspects of the job but also the social and emotional well-being of new teachers. Therefore, districts should provide comprehensive orientation programs, mentorship programs, and ongoing professional development and support new teachers in their transition. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) manages Washington State's BEST induction program. As part of this, BEST works with districts to provide sustained and purposeful support for early-career educators. BEST provides information, professional development for mentors and leadership, resources, and grants (as appropriated by legislative funding) for comprehensive induction for novice teachers. The program goals are to reduce educator turnover, improve educator quality for student learning, and ensure equity of learning opportunities for all students (OSPI, 2018).

District Onboarding Effectiveness

The theme of a teacher support system that emerged from the data illuminated the effectiveness of teacher onboarding in the districts studied. The findings highlight how school districts can develop effective onboarding and retention programs by creating a culture of support and collaboration. Many of the teachers in the study reported feeling supported and empowered through a strong network of stakeholders such as mentors and colleagues. They expressed that their district fostered a culture where new teachers were valued and encouraged to seek guidance and advice from experienced educators. This culture of support allowed new teachers to navigate the challenges of implementing various teaching practices. One teacher specifically mentioned the benefit of working with a district mentor who helped them identify and feel more comfortable applying these practices in the classroom. This example demonstrates how providing mentorship and establishing supportive networks can enhance the effectiveness of teacher onboarding programs by offering new teachers guidance and facilitating their professional growth. "During individual coaching sessions, mentors help new teachers set professional goals, plan lessons, analyze student work, and reflect on their progress. Mentors may teach a lesson while the new teacher observes. From this experience, new teachers learn to develop the habits of mind of exceptional teachers" (Moir, 2009, p. 16).

Teacher Dissatisfaction

Not all teacher respondents in the study reported positive or supportive experiences during their onboarding process, highlighting various and ineffective components of the program. The theme of teacher barriers to effective onboarding emerged, with new teachers expressing challenges and obstacles that hindered their ability to feel supported, prepared, and successful in their roles. One teacher respondent pointed out that building-level training was

lacking, stating that they received online training on individualized education programs (IEPs) but not on important aspects such as building a para-educator schedule. Another teacher respondent expressed a desire for more guidance on working with paraprofessionals and creating schedules, as well as a need for additional curriculum-related learning materials. Their statements indicated a gap in the program's ability to address specific needs and provide comprehensive support for teachers working in special education settings.

Whitaker's (2000) study provides relevant insights into effective mentoring for special educators, emphasizing the importance of selecting mentors with special education expertise. However, the teacher respondents in this study did not report receiving specialized mentoring support from a special education mentor. This misalignment highlights a missed opportunity to provide tailored support and guidance specifically designed for teachers working in special education. Furthermore, the absence of emotional support and a focus on job mechanics, policies, procedures, collaboration with staff, and locating resources exacerbate the ineffective components of the onboarding program.

To improve the effectiveness of the program, it is crucial to address these ineffective components. School districts should prioritize providing building-level training that addresses the specific needs of teachers, including guidance on working with paraprofessionals, creating schedules, and accessing curriculum materials. In addition, selecting mentors with expertise in special education and incorporating emotional support within the mentorship process can help create a more supportive onboarding experience for beginning special education teachers. By aligning the program with the recommendations from Whittaker's (2000) study and addressing the identified barriers, districts can enhance the effectiveness of the onboarding program and better support new teachers in their professional development and success.

Implications for Practice and Recommendations

Teacher Recommendations

In their responses, early-career teachers provided valuable recommendations to school districts regarding the relevant information that should be included in their onboarding and retention programs. These recommendations shed light on the areas that teachers found effective and aspects that could be improved. One teacher emphasized the need for a comprehensive overview of teachers' responsibilities in communicating with parents, including the frequency, content, and record-keeping aspects. Another teacher respondent highlighted the importance of in-depth training on district policies and procedures to ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

Other teachers expressed the need for clear guidelines and procedures for handling student behavior and extreme emotions, as well as effective communication strategies with students and parents. These recommendations underline the significance of equipping early-career teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to foster positive teacher-family communication and manage challenging situations. As cited in the American Institutes for Research, Jacques and Villegas (2018) underscored the importance of teacher-family communication and promoting student success and highlighted the positive impact referent has on various aspects of student engagement and motivation.

To address these recommendations, school districts should consider incorporating comprehensive training on effective communication with parents and strategies for managing extreme emotions and students. Providing clear guidelines and expectations for student behavior can also support early-career teachers in creating a positive and structured classroom environment. However, districts should also ensure that onboarding programs provide

information on equitable family engagement strategies, acknowledging the importance of engaging all families regardless of their background or circumstances. Equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to communicate effectively with parents, manage student behavior, and promote equitable family engagement will contribute to the overall on-the-job success of early-career teachers and ultimately enhance student outcomes.

Researcher Recommendations

The BEST Grant aims to improve teacher effectiveness in student achievement through targeted support and professional development. Therefore, it is imperative for these districts to evaluate the effectiveness of the onboarding and retention initiatives regularly to ensure they meet their intended objectives. Based on the findings and analysis conducted throughout this study, it is evident that continuous assessment of onboarding and retention programs is crucial for school districts utilizing the BEST Grant.

In light of the research findings, I have concluded that regardless of what particular framework a district chooses to use for teacher onboarding, that framework's mentoring and onboarding work must be aligned with the needs of the teachers in a direct and intentional way. I, therefore, propose the following recommendations for school districts using the BEST Grant to enhance the continuous assessment of onboarding and retention programs:

1. Establish a comprehensive assessment framework: School districts should have various metrics of evaluating their onboarding program to make sure that their program's induction serves its purpose. One way of evaluating onboarding programs is by teachers soliciting feedback from their mentees regarding their experience and using student achievement data and retention rates.

2. Implement regular data collection and analysis: Districts should monitor their programs effectiveness by analyzing data generated from survey responses, teacher assessments, mentor input and student surveys such as Panorama survey to solicit feedback on classroom experience. Rigorous analysis of this information will enable districts to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement within their programs.

3. Engage stakeholders in the assessment process: Schools districts should solicit feedback from stakeholders, such as community members, advisory boards, universities that monitor the effectiveness of onboarding programs, teachers, and students.

4. Foster a culture of continuous improvement: School districts should continuously assess their onboarding programs and focus on continuous improvement plan, by periodically collecting and analyzing assessment data to better measure the program's effectiveness and positive student achievement outcomes.

5. Allocate resources for professional development: Investing in teacher induction and preparation programs is nonnegotiable. Most recent pedagogy regarding best teaching and learning practices must become a part of the mentoring program, which would require funding for ongoing mentor training and professional development.

By implementing these recommendations, school districts utilizing the BEST Grant can establish a robust and continuous assessment system for their onboarding and retention programs. This proactive approach will enable them to identify areas of improvement, enhance program effectiveness, and ultimately contribute to the improvement of teacher quality and student outcomes. Continuous assessments serve as a critical mechanism for school districts to fulfill the objectives of the BEST Grant and ensure the long-term success of the districts' educational initiatives.

It is also evident that the assessment of assigned mentors working with early-career teachers is of paramount importance. The mentoring relationship plays a role in supporting the professional growth and development of novice educators. Therefore, it is essential to have a robust assessment process in place to ensure the effectiveness of these mentorship programs. The following three recommendations highlight the significance of assessing assigned mentors:

1. Quality Assurance: School districts should inspect what they expect from the mentorship programs. They should ensure that the teacher onboarding program remains robust and relevant to their needs, perform bi-annual evaluation of mentor's performance, and hire and retain mentors who participate in all required trainings. They should also measure performance based on establish mentorship framework, similar to the evaluation framework for teachers in their schools. Their performance per the framework will be a determinant factor of retaining mentors in that role.

2. Professional growth and development: District and OSPI lead targeted professional development and training for all mentors. They should provide feedback to the mentors regarding their strengths and weaknesses in their content area.

3. Program evaluation and improvement: Data collection and program monitoring will help determine the program's effectiveness. All involved stakeholders need to provide feedback about their experience with the program, strengths, areas of improvement, and recommendations for any additions that might improve the program's effectiveness.

By implementing a robust assessment process for assigned mentors, school districts can ensure the quality, effectiveness, and continuous improvement of their mentorship programs. The assessment serves as a means of quality assurance, supports mentors' professional growth and development, and facilitates program evaluation and improvement. The investment in

assessing assigned mentors will ultimately lead to stronger mentorship experiences, enhance

teacher support, and improve outcomes for early-career teachers.

In light of the research findings presented in this dissertation, it is crucial for school

districts implementing onboarding and retention programs for early career teachers to seek and

welcome feedback from mentees. Specifically, it is essential to gather feedback regarding the

relevancy of the induction program in relation to the beginning teachers' assignment and the

alignment of the induction program with their individual needs. The following reasons

emphasize the importance of incorporating mentees' feedback into the ongoing evaluation and

improvement of induction programs:

1. Program effectiveness: School districts should solicit feedback from mentees to assess

   whether the program is addressing their individual needs and equipping them with the

   tools they need to address the challenges they will face in their early career years. A

   comprehensive and robust feedback mechanism will help illuminate areas where the

   program is struggling and will help districts to adjust their programs according to the

   needs of mentees.

2. Individualized support: School districts should promote mentee-led mentorship option

   where the mentee works with the induction program supervisors to design and create

   specialized mentorship trainings appropriate to the specific needs related to the mentees

   position. They should promote collaboration between the mentor and mentee to assess

   the mentee's needs. In addition, school districts should foster individualized support to

   promote a sense of ownership by the mentee in the program.

3. Continuous improvement: Periodic check-ins with mentees will be useful for soliciting

   feedback on their experience with the program and assigned mentor, addressing

concerns, positive experiences, conducting needs assessment, and formulating recommendations to incorporate relevant trainings.

By actively seeking feedback from mentees, school districts can gain valuable insights into the relevancy of their induction programs and their alignment with teachers' needs. This feedback-driven approach empowers districts to make data-informed decisions, tailor support to individual teachers, and continually improve the effectiveness of their onboarding and retention initiatives. Engaging mentees in the evaluation process creates a collaborative and supportive environment, leading to enhanced teacher satisfaction, growth, and retention. By valuing and integrating mentees' feedback, school districts can build robust induction programs that nurture the development and success of early-career teachers.

In this study, I explored various aspects of the induction program for early career teachers in two school districts in Washington State. To prepare future teachers better, it is crucial for higher education teacher preparation programs to align their programs with the current needs of early career-teachers. For this study's demographic, an example of this alignment would include incorporating relevant curriculum frameworks such as Marzano, Danielson, and the five Dimensions of Teaching and Learning. These frameworks provide comprehensive guidelines for effective teaching practices and offer valuable insights into the skills, competencies, and instructional strategies that early career-teachers need to master. By aligning their study programs with these frameworks, universities can ensure that graduates from teacher preparatory programs have a strong foundation and understanding of best practices and are better prepared to meet the demands of the profession. Higher education teacher preparatory programs should involve active collaborations with practicing educators to inform curriculum design and development for these programs. Achieving this goal requires

partnerships with local schools and districts, as well as the involvement of practicing teachers in the program advisory boards and curriculum review committees. By engaging practicing educators, valuable insights into the current needs and expectations of early career-teachers can be incorporated into teacher preparatory programs, ensuring that the program remains relevant and aligned with the realities of the profession.

By implementing these recommendations, higher education institutions can align their teacher preparatory programs with the current needs of early career-teachers. Reviewing and incorporating relevant curriculum frameworks, emphasizing practical application in-classroom experience, and collaborating with practicing educators will contribute to the development of effective and successful educators who positively impact student learning outcomes.

Limitations

Although this dissertation has provided insights into the onboarding and retention programs for early career teachers, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may have influenced the study's outcomes. The following section includes a discussion of two key limitations and recommendations for future research to address these gaps:

1. Lack of interviews and in-depth qualitative data: One limitation of this research is my reliance on survey-generated data and the absence of interviews with participants. Incorporating interviews or focus groups could help explore the factors that influence teacher satisfaction and program effectiveness more deeply. Face-to-face interviews could have added more intimate and personal conversions with interviewees as well as allowed for follow-up questions and clarifications.

2. Limited data on demographic variables and teacher characteristics: Another limitation is the lack of detailed information on certain demographic variables and teacher

characteristics, including the grade level taught, gender, age group, type of education received, whether the participants were Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers or certified teachers, retention data, and previous employment. This broader focus could shed light on whether there are any discrepancies or disparities between different groups with different backgrounds and demographics.

In addition, I recommend that future researchers address the following areas:

1. Inclusion of teacher evaluation data: Future researchers should incorporate teacher evaluation data. These data can provide additional insights into the overall effectiveness of onboarding and retention programs. A comprehensive assessment will allow districts to look at every facet of the program and make assessments and adjustments to improve the program's effectiveness and mentorship outcomes with the goal of improving student achievement. Future researchers should strive to access and analyze teacher evaluation data for a better understanding of the relationship between onboarding and retention initiatives and teacher effectiveness.

2. Examination of retention data: Understanding the long-term impact of onboarding and retention programs on teacher retention rates is vital. An investigation into retention rates would provide additional data regarding the effectiveness of district boarding and mentorship programs. Researchers should conduct longitudinal studies regarding retention rates should be conducted to further analyze the goals and outcomes of the program.

By addressing these limitations and exploring the recommended areas for future research, scholars and practitioners can deepen their understanding of onboarding and retention programs

for early career teachers, leading to more targeted and effective strategies for supporting the professional growth and development of novice educators.

Gaps in the Literature

This dissertation has shed light on various aspects of onboarding and retention programs for early-career teachers. However, it is important to acknowledge certain gaps in the existing research, particularly regarding specialized training and support for specific teaching assignments, such as special education. The following recommendations focus on addressing this gap and include suggested future directions for research:

1. Specialized training and support for special education teachers: A significant gap in the current literature relates to the lack of specialized training and support provided to early-career teachers in the field of special education. Special education teachers require specialized knowledge and skills to support students with diverse learning needs. Researchers should focus on investigating the effectiveness of specialized training programs, mentorship models, and support systems specifically tailored to the needs of early-career special education teachers.

2. Exploring mentorship models and support systems: There is a need to examine the role of mentors and provide guidance, encourage collaboration, and provide professional development opportunities tailored to the relevant needs of special education teachers. In addition, the impact of peer support networks, collaboration with specialists, working with paraprofessionals, and access to resources warrant investigation to understand their contributions to the retention and success of special education teachers.

3. Investigating the impact on student outcomes: Researchers should inquire about the direct and indirect effects of specialized training on student outcomes. These data can

provide insights and understanding into the effectiveness of onboarding as it relates to teacher instructional effectiveness and preparation.

The research gap addressed through these recommendations relates to the specialized training and support for special education teachers within onboarding and retention programs. By addressing this gap, future studies can contribute to the development of evidence-based practices that enhance the professional growth, job satisfaction, and retention of early-career special education teachers. These research efforts will ultimately support the provision of high-quality education and inclusive learning environments for students with diverse learning needs.

Another significant gap in the existing research is the limited amount of data on dissatisfaction with the outcomes of induction programs and mentoring. Understanding the reasons for dissatisfaction can help identify areas for improvement and is useful in enhancing the effectiveness of these programs and support the professional growth and retention of first-year teachers. Future research should focus on investigating the factors contributing to dissatisfaction and exploring strategies to address these concerns. Recommendations for future research are as follows:

1. Exploring factors contributing to dissatisfaction: Future researchers should conduct anonymous studies to explore the factors that contribute to dissatisfaction among early-career teachers. The feedback should include areas of dissatisfaction such as mismatched mentor-mentee pairings, inadequate support, lack of personalized feedback, or limited opportunities for professional growth. By understanding these areas of dissatisfaction, school districts can adjust their programs to eliminate ineffective training that can decrease retention rates.

2. Identify strategies to enhance program effectiveness: Future researchers should collect data from teacher feedback on improvement recommendations. They should investigate the consistency and frequency of mentors' training activities and professional development. Researchers should inquire about mentor performance assessments and how their performance correlates to new teacher onboarding and mentorship outcomes. Additionally, researchers should investigate the mentorship frameworks and their implementation to gain insight into their relevance to new teacher needs.

By addressing these gaps in research, future studies can contribute to the development of evidence-based practices that enhance the training and support of teachers.

Lastly, the existing literature on teacher induction programs reveals a gap concerning the lack of guarantees that a particular framework instead of induction standards will yield perfect results. Although numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of various induction programs, there is limited research providing a concrete success rate for these programs. This gap in the literature limits the current understanding of which specific components or approaches within an induction program contribute most significantly to positive outcomes for new teachers. Moreover, the absence of a standardized success rate for induction programs leaves an-unanswered question regarding the optimal composition, duration, and intensity of such programs. Although some studies suggest that longer and more intensive programs yield better results, there is no consensus on a universally effective approach. This gap in the literature signifies the need for further research to not only evaluate the effectiveness of specific induction components but also explore the contextual factors that influence the success of these programs. By addressing these gaps in the literature, this dissertation contributes to the field by providing evidence and insights into the effectiveness of specific induction components and

their impact on new teacher outcomes. The researcher sought to fill the gap in the literature by examining the success rate of the induction program implemented in the selected school districts, shedding light on the factors that contribute to positive outcomes for new teachers.

Triangulation

The survey responses collected from early career teachers, mentors and other stakeholders provided valuable insights into their perspectives and experiences with onboarding and retention programs. The literature review helped establish a theoretical foundation and identify best practices in the field, ensuring the grounding of recommendations in current research and scholarship. In addition, conversations with educational leaders who possess extensive expertise and experience in this domain provided valuable insights and nuanced perspectives that enriched the analysis and recommendations.

Using triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) not only ensured a comprehensive and well-rounded exploration of onboarding and retention programs but also enhanced the validity and credibility of the recommendations. The inclusion of diverse data sources and perspectives ensured that the recommendations are informed by a robust and holistic understanding of the subject matter, providing a solid basis for practical implementation and educational settings. It is important to note that although triangulation strengthens the research findings, there may still be inherent limitations. However, the combination of multiple sources of inquiry mitigates the potential biases and limitations of any single approach, enhancing the overall rigor and reliability of the research. Future researchers may consider expanding the triangulation approach by incorporating additional data sources or alternative research methodologies to enrich further the understanding of onboarding and retention programs.

Conclusion

This dissertation has highlighted the importance of early career teacher onboarding and retention programs and emphasized their impact on supporting and developing educators who will shape future generations. The findings of this study demonstrate that effective onboarding programs provide the necessary support, guidance, and resources to new teachers, enabling them to navigate the challenges of their profession and develop into highly competent and confident educators. By investing in high-quality induction programs, educational institutions fulfill their due diligence in preparing and supporting teachers who will positively influence students' learning experiences and contribute to the overall academic and personal development of all students.

The significance of early-career teacher onboarding and retention programs extends beyond individual educators. The quality of education and the success of future generations depend on the expertise and commitment of teachers. Providing comprehensive and well-designed induction programs will ensure that new teachers receive the necessary foundation, professional development, and ongoing support to excel in their roles. These programs play a crucial role in shaping the teacher's identity, pedagogical practices, and instructional effectiveness, ultimately benefitting students and the wider community.

It is society's responsibility to prioritize the provision of the best induction programs for the sake of students' education. Investing in the professional growth and job satisfaction of early career-teachers will create a positive cycle that enhances the retention rates of talented educators, reduces turnover, and fosters a stable and experienced teaching workforce. These outcomes will ultimately promote consistency, continuity, and academic excellence in the

educational systems, ensuring that future generations receive the best possible education and opportunities for success.

In conclusion, the research presented in this dissertation underscores the importance of early career-teacher onboarding and retention programs. These programs are not only instrumental in supporting the professional growth and job satisfaction of new teachers but also have far-reaching implications for students' education and the overall quality of our educational systems. Recognizing and prioritizing the significance of these programs help fulfill the responsibility to provide the best possible induction experiences for the sake of the students and the future generations they represent.

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Appendix A - Survey Questions

District Onboarding Personnel Survey

Onboarding:

- RQ1. How does the district onboard new teachers?

- RQ2. How does the district partner with principals to support the onboarding of new

  teachers?

- RQ3. How does the district measure the success of the onboarding of new teachers?

Retention

- RQ4. Does the district have a retention plan for new teachers? If so, what does the

  retention plan for new teachers entail?

- RQ5. How does the district partner with principals to support new teachers?

- RQ6. How does the district measure the success of the retention plan for new teachers?

Teacher Onboarding Mentoring Survey

Onboarding:

- RQ1. If you were to reflect on your onboarding experience, how would you describe the

  experience and what has been the impact of the onboarding process on your teaching

  career.

- RQ2. Was the content of the onboarding process interesting, understandable, and clearly

  articulated by the presenters?

- RQ3. Was the onboarding training helpful to your teaching practice? Please explain your

  experience.

Retention:

- RQ4. How would you describe your building's mentoring and induction program?

- RQ5. Did district and building provided trainings to help increase and enhance your teaching practices?

- RQ6. What additional trainings would you like to receive from both the district and your building to help support and prepare for the many challenges that come from being a classroom teacher?