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# Exploring the Experiences and Relationships of First-Year Teachers and Mentors

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Melanie Strey

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Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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## Abstract

Educators have a moral imperative and job-embedded expectation to effectively teach all students, which requires a commitment to continued personal growth. The purpose of this instrumental project study was to explore the lived experiences of first-year teachers and their mentors who teach in a culturally-diverse school district. The conceptual framework was based on supporting adult learning methods through the theories of critical thinking, constructivist perspective, the theory of mentoring, and culturally-instructional teaching. The guiding research questions addressed the perceptions of 5 first-year teachers and 5 mentors regarding individual and shared learning as a result of mentor-mentee relationship. A constant comparison method provided a process for analyzing the semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes to determine a unit of data. Triangulation of the units of data then informed possible categories that were noted in words and statements. This process continued until saturation of categories was reached. Spreadsheets provided a structure to organize the data along the way and chart tables and taxonomic representation were used to display results. The mentees' results encompassed 19 themes such as feeling valued, safe, supported, trusted, and believed. The recommendations include the development of long-term solutions for supporting beginning teachers during the first 3 years of their profession with mentoring as an essential component. These findings illustrate that formal and informal beginning teacher professional learning is critical to produce high quality instruction, and to ensure that students graduate with globally competitive skills.

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# Dedication

Words are not enough to say thank you to my husband who has been my rock throughout this entire process. He has inspired me stay the course with an unwavering belief in my skill and will. I am so thankful for our two children who give me extra hugs just when I need a boost. I also want to thank my sister for sharing her evenings and weekends with me as my lead editor and confidant. Lastly, I lovingly thank my parents for their daily prayers. I dedicate this journey to all of you who are the most important people in my life.

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There were several classmates and colleagues along the way that have been a source of support. Thank you for providing me, in that moment in time, the encouragement I needed to stay the course. I want to thank my doctoral chair for her endless support. Her expertise, insights, and words of encouragement were exactly when and what I needed to stay strong even during times of my own uncertainty. I am forever grateful!

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# Section 1: The Problem

## Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative project study was to explore the lived experiences of first-year teachers, teaching in a school district that has a culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse student population, that have chosen to participate in an optional, district-provided mentoring program. The secondary purpose of this study was to understand the role of the mentors and their lived experiences and beliefs about mentoring. Additionally, this section provides supporting literature and describes the qualitative research paradigm along with the theories of critical thinking, constructivist learning, mentoring, and culturally responsive teaching as constructs for better understanding the various aspects associated with this project study. This section also includes the following: the local problem, an introduction of the project study, a definition and rationale of the problem, significant project definitions, guiding research questions, the literature review findings, implications of the study results, and a section summary.

The local problem, as shared by the state superintendent office for the district in this study, was that in the 2009–10 school year, a total of 91,469 English language learners (ELLs) were enrolled statewide, which was an increase of 1,952 from the previous year. The growing number of ELL students suggested that districts such as the one in this study would encounter growing instructional challenges and opportunities as their student communities becomes more diverse. Therefore, a first-year teacher teaching in these diverse districts would also need instructional skills that successfully engage all

students in learning, which they may or may not have ascertained in their teacher preparation program. This section describes and provides a rationale of the qualitative research and the following adult learning theories: critical thinking theory, constructivist learning, the theory of mentoring, and culturally responsive teaching theory as these theories relate to understanding adult learning and continuous professional growth. First-year teachers may or may not effectively translate learned theories of teaching into everyday instructional practices when teaching to a classroom of students from various culturally diverse backgrounds (Menon, 2012). This project study used the learning theories as frameworks for understanding what conditions must be present for effective, transferable personal growth that ultimately has an impact on student learning. Also, the literature review provided information regarding conditions and challenges that may or may not impede or support successful teaching and student achievement.

The district in this study provided optional participation in the first-year teachers' mentoring program. In addition to classes and trainings, the district in this study committed five district peer mentors to coach and consult with the first-year teachers. The five district mentors were trained by a certified trainer from the Center of Cognitive Coaching on coaching strategies and supported by an executive director. The mentors each come with a unique set of educational experiences and beliefs about teaching and learning. The mentors share an understanding of how to engage in cognitive coaching strategies supported by Costa and Garmston's (2002) cognitive coaching strategies. In addition to direct mentoring, the mentors provided seminars on classroom management techniques, instructional strategies, and gaining specific teaching skills supported by

research to be effective with teaching ELL students. These suggested teaching strategies include the following: building student relationships, creating self-directed student learning opportunities, embedding various cultures in the learning, teaching that a dominant culture influences the system of learning, and using instructional strategies that embrace nondominant viewpoints (Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2012).

## Definition of the Problem

According to their website, the school district in this study had 27,000 students and was noted as the most diverse school district in the state, with 138 languages and cultures. In addition to the vast number of languages and cultures, first-year teachers in this district were challenged with underachieving students as compared to the state achievement index. Lindsey, Martinez, and Lindsey (2007) noted that student achievement is impacted by high quality teaching. In addition, achieving high quality teaching, in such a diverse district, requires teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to demonstrate the instructional skills comparative to more experienced teachers either through pedagogy or through lived experiences (Zozakiewicz, 2010). Therefore, student teachers not exposed to instructing in diverse student communities may not be prepared for their first professional job, especially if the job is located in a diverse culturally and/or socioeconomic community.

Lindsey et al. (2007) noted that culturally responsive teaching is difficult to achieve if the teacher's core beliefs are not in line with culturally proficient actions. These beliefs include using bias-free language, moving from talking about others to about how the instructor's practice needs to change and evolve to be more effective in cross-

cultural environments, and working to change procedures and policies that exclude any one person. The district in this study has provided mentors to the first-year teachers as a strategy for assisting first-year teachers with the teaching demands and any potential instructional deficiencies. The exploration of this project study provides adult learning practitioners with information on how adults learn, the types of relationships shared, and additional themes such as teacher challenges and/or culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Like Lindsey et al. (2007), Bergeron (2008) noted that the reality in urban schools is such that novice teachers often are put in a "cultural disequilibrium" (p. 5). Bergeron (2008) described disequilibrium as a cultural mismatch between the teacher and the students as well as a reflective state in which the teacher feels unprepared to handle the classroom challenges. In addition to "cultural disequilibrium" (p. 5), Bergeron also described several challenges that teachers encounter. Therefore, as teachers encounter these challenges, there is a richness that comes from teaching in a diverse school district. The challenge comes not from the diversity but from the lack of cultural understanding of cultures that are different from one's self (Zozakiewicz, 2010). Exploring the relationship between the mentor and mentee also provided additional insight into the school district in this study's existing mentoring program.

## Rationale

### Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The district in the doctoral project study has continued to implement various strategies to meet the needs of training novice teacher while at the same time ensuring

that all students achieve high academic success and graduate on time. At the time of this research, the district used peer mentoring as a professional growth strategy that incorporated peer observations, one-to-one peer coaching, and group knowledge building sessions as the core components of the district's mentoring program. Although the mentor program has existed for several years, the district had not conducted a program evaluation or gathered perception data through interviews until this study. Yet, the district has a moral imperative to provide high-yield professional learning because all teachers must assist with increasing the current student graduation rate of 78.2% and decrease 21.8% of students dropping out of school as indicated by the state report card. These statistics, along with growing diverse demographic data, have continued to influence the district's strategy for supporting the instructors to improve systems of instruction for all students.

The district's mission stated that all students will be prepared for their futures, and it relies on teachers to help meet the district's mission. In addition, a community organization that supports the district in this study noted that several of the neighboring districts to the district in this study had over 100 languages and cultures and a growing ELL population. As the state continues to develop into a more culturally diverse community, the results in this project will benefit the local, regional, and state educators and professional developers.

In addition to understanding the mentors and mentees' perspectives as related to adult learning, this study uncovered challenges first-year teachers encountered in the profession as a result of teaching in a diverse, urban setting (Bergeron, 2008; Ellsasser,

2008; Lindsey et al., 2007; Chesley & Jordan, 2012). Bergeron (2008) suggested that novice teachers throughout the nation are challenged by the new curriculum, effective classroom management strategies, feedback from their administrators and peers, diverse parent/guardian needs, peer collaboration expectations, school and district politics, working collaboratively with fellow staff, and the learning styles of students contrary to the first-year teacher's knowledge and preparation. The challenges were furthered supported by Ellsasser (2008), who noted that first-year teachers in urban schools are faced with overcrowding, inconsistent professional development, limited time for reflection and critical thought, scripted curriculum that does not allow for personalization and/or adjustments, and pressure to compromise core beliefs to conform to the school's status quo.

Lindsey et al. (2007) concurred with Ellsasser (2008) that a teacher's core belief is an essential element to achieving culturally proficient and responsive instruction. Furthermore, Lindsey et al. described a gap in cultural proficiency as individuals that are culturally destructive, incompetent, blind, and recognizing incompetency but not knowing how to move beyond recognition. Lastly, Chesley and Jordan (2012) concurred with Bergeron (2008) and Ellsasser by noting that beginning teachers face the challenges of transitioning from college student to the classroom teacher, which can increase the teacher's frustration and disappointment in his or her ability to handle the demands.

In addition to handling the day-to-day realities, teachers spend little time reflecting on their teaching instruction, content competency, and assessment methods with other teachers (Choy & Oo, 2012). Chun, Litzky, Sosik, Bechtold, and Godshalk

(2010) supported Choy and Oo's (2012) research by suggesting that mentors provide "psychosocial support" (p. 429). Choy and Oo described this type of support as the mentors' ability to demonstrate to the mentee genuine acceptance and friendship. Additionally, a new teacher's perceived level of success and need for mentorship can be influenced by a number of factors, including the challenges faced in the classroom, time to reflect, and the mentor-mentee relationship, the first-year teacher's age, personal characteristics as a learner, emotional stability, past experiences, intellectual capacity, and social status (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). A first-year teacher's ability to teach in a diverse district might also be impacted by his or her own cultural background, experiences with ageism, racism, power, oppression, and sexism (Merriam et al., 2007). Therefore, teachers face both internal challenges based in their beliefs and external challenges imposed on the first-year teacher by the teaching system.

Costa and Garmston (2002) also discussed the challenges for first-year teachers, suggesting that these challenges might lie within the individual person's personal life experiences and elements of his or her belief systems in addition to the challenges existing in the classroom environment. Therefore, the research indicated that for the first-year teacher the challenges are both induced by the school setting and as a result of his or her own upbringing and experiences (Bergeron, 2008). Teachers are entering the profession unprepared for the challenges in the teaching, and school districts have found a way to continue teacher preparation through formal mentoring (Chun et al., 2010). In addition to Chun et al. (2010), Chesley and Jordan (2012) noted that mentoring helps bridge the gap between teachers' undergraduate teaching preparation and the "realities of

21st century schools" (p. 2) and students. Like Chesley and Jordan, Chun et al. suggested that these challenges are made easier when first-year teachers receive mentoring. Mentoring includes opportunities for mentees to engage in meaningful learning as mentees construct their own learning through reflective conversations (Chesley & Jordan, 2012).

**Evidence of the Problem from Professional Literature**

Wang and Ha (2012) noted that teaching is a "challenging and demanding profession" (p. 48). A lack of adequate training and preparation leaves first-year teachers unprepared to teach within in a classroom of diverse learners (Wang & Ha, 2012). The literature has supported the concern that first-year teachers encounter many different types of challenges and may or may not be adequately instructionally prepared (Sleeter, 2012). Bergeron (2008) shared that culturally responsive pedagogy addresses the gap between the students' cultural background and the differentiation needed for students to successfully learn.

Chesley and Jordan (2012) and Wang and Ha (2012) noted that novice teachers tend to struggle with effectively implementing student management techniques that motivate students, teaching to an objective, and needing help with differentiating lessons to meet the needs of all students. Furthermore, Sleeter (2012) found that the challenges first-year teachers encounter include their inability to transfer learned pedagogy into culturally responsive teaching. Although the first-year teachers' needs might be unique to this school district, the need for understanding how mentoring impacts culturally relevant teaching practices is universal in the field of education. At the time of this research, the

school district in this study had not conducted an in-depth study of the complexities that first-year teachers face and whether mentors and mentees perceive the professional growth.

Zozakiewicz (2010) identified culturally responsive teaching as instructional and classroom management methods that lead to an increase in students' participation in daily lessons, ability to complete learning tasks, and overall disposition when asked to participate, such as those identified in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). The literature revealed that beginning teachers encounter challenges and through the help of a mentor are able to reflect and learn through their experiences (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Furthermore, Choy and Oo (2012) conducted research on the link between reflective thinking and critical thinking. Choy and Oo noted that reflective thinking learning practices engage the learner in a deeper level of critical thinking, which Brookfield (2010) linked to constructivist theory. The challenges that first-year teachers encounter on a daily basis can become overwhelming if the first-year teacher is left to learn alone in isolation (Menon, 2012).

Therefore, first-year teachers who have mentors have the opportunity to learn from these more experienced teachers also referenced by Brookfield (2010) as "critical helpers" (p. 10). Critical helpers become sounding boards, coaches, antagonists, and support systems that assist the learner in their professional growth. The mentor functions like Brookfield's idea of a critical helper. Additionally, Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) noted, like Brookfield, that critical thinking theory is linked to the mentoring theory. This learning process Brookfield and Bransford et al. described is the

foundational framework of critical thinking theory that Brookfield noted as person's ability to analyze, examine, question, contemplate, disagree, connect information, and form opinions and reasoning.

A strong mentor could help a first-year teacher become more culturally competent by guiding the novice teacher through a reflective process (Brookfield, 2010). Zozakiewicz (2010) identified a gap in the research that beginning teachers struggle to teach students from culturally diverse backgrounds unless the novice teacher has strong professional support structures. Zozakiewicz conducted a case study of two preservice teachers who participated with culturally responsible mentoring. Zozakiewicz noted that culturally responsive mentoring helped novice teachers become critical thinkers on their own teaching abilities and the complexity of teaching in a culturally diverse school district. Zozakiewicz concluded that additional studies are needed to better understand how first-year teachers improve their ability to teach in a more culturally responsive manner, especially if they have no previous training. Understanding culturally responsive teaching was not the primary purpose of this study, but the research indicated that the challenges presented to teachers in urban school districts will require a change in traditional teaching.

## Definitions

To better understand key concepts described in this study, especially for noneducators, it is imperative that particular words/concepts are defined as they are intended to be understood in this project study. The following definitions are from the perspective of educational researchers and theorists.

*Critical thinking*: Individual's ability to consciously engage in understanding their own thinking as related to making connections about a concept or idea (Yenice, 2012).

*Culturally responsive:* Instructional and classroom management methods that lead to an increase in students' participation in daily lessons, ability to complete learning tasks, and overall disposition when asked to participate, such as those identified in the SIOP (Echevarria et al., 2008).

*Constructivism:* A way of learning that engages the learner in thinking in new ways and constructs new learnings while the learner monitors and assesses their own understanding along the way (Flores, Matkin, Burbach, Quinn, & Harding, 2012).

*Mentoring:* An experienced employee (mentor) is paired with a novice employee (mentee) with the potential to enhance the mentee's ability to transition into the organization through a relationship based professional learning approach (Horvath, Wasko, & Bradley, 2008).

*Reflective thinking:* A person's ability to consciously think about how they learn, solve problems, think about their beliefs, and how they self-assess their state of consciousness (Choy, 2012).

*Self-efficacy*: The belief that a person has about oneself and how that belief influences their ability to influence self-change and system change (Bandura & Locke, 2003).

## Significance

The significance of understanding the relationship of the experienced teacher (mentor) and the inexperienced teacher (mentee) is so that principals and district support

staff can learn what conditions and components of mentoring are most effective and ineffective at increasing adult learning capacity. By understanding what works and does not work and/or what conditions must be in place for learning, it is possible to better understand how improving the learning of the teacher may or may not result with increased student achievement. This study provided an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of mentoring by exploring the relationship of the mentor and mentee within the context of teaching in a public school setting.

Additionally, the significance of the study is to provide information on the strategies that were most and least effective with helping the first-year teacher teach in a culturally responsive manner that could bring social change to public education. Specifically, the information gained from this study will aid school districts that are implementing or revising mentoring programs. This study provides information linked to mentoring and culturally responsive teaching as a moral imperative to teaching today's students (Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008). Education continues to be a critical component for preparing students to be competent, informed citizens. Schools in the United States are preparing students to meet national standards and be globally competitive. Therefore, every year of a student's education is critical, including any year the student has a first-year teacher.

## Past Supporting Research and Guiding Questions

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) along with Zozakiewicz (2010) suggested that further examination is needed to better understand whether mentoring needs to be conducted differently in high poverty versus affluent schools. Research has been conducted on the

mentor and mentee relationship, but much of the research was not conducted in a culturally diverse school district. Therefore, further exploration of peer mentors and first-year teachers' experiences while teaching in an urban, culturally rich school district was necessary to better understand one district's professional support to beginning teachers. In the district in this study, administrators chose to implement a mentoring program for first-year teachers. However, simply implementing the program did not guarantee that optimal and relevant adult learning took place. Therefore, program developers need to understand the mentors' perception on their own experiences, as well as their beliefs about the experience of the teachers they mentor. Also, this project explored the mentees' experiences as they shared their first year of teaching.

The outcome gained from better understanding the mentor and mentee relationship will be shared with the district in this study's professional development executive through a summary of the findings. The program executive has used surveys to capture participant feedback; however, no in-depth analysis had been done on understanding the relationship that occurs or does not occur between a mentor and mentee. Therefore, in alignment with the research problem and purpose of the study, the research was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of first year teachers about their individual and shared learning gained or not gained as a result of their relationship with their mentors?

2. What are the perceptions of mentors about their individual and shared learning gained or not gained as a result of their relationship with the first-year teachers?
3. How do mentors describe their experiences with mentoring novice teachers?
4. How do first year teachers describe their experiences with participating in the first-year teacher mentor program?
5. What are the perceptions the mentors have about the first-year teachers' experiences?
6. How does the first-year teacher describe their perceived satisfaction or dissatisfaction with teaching?

## Review of the Literature

University teacher programs aim to prepare teachers for the profession, yet first-year teachers have reported feeling overwhelmed with the demands in the classroom and school culture (Bergeron, 2008; Chesley & Jordan, 2012). Charalambos, Philippou, and Kyriakchides (2008) noted that in addition to traditional university preparation, teachers do not develop their skills in a uniformed manner, which complicates providing the right balance of professional development for first-year teachers. This synthesis of the literature focused on three main themes: the conceptual framework, teaching challenges, and the mentor-mentee relationship. The review of the literature consisted of journal articles, professional books, and educational websites using Walden University's library database and Google Scholar. The search terms used to discover research and citations were the following: *beginning teachers, conceptual framework, cognitive coaching,*

*constructivist, critical thinking, culturally responsive/sensitive teaching/pedagogy, first-year teachers, mentor, mentee, mentoring, novice teacher, professional development, reflective thinking, self-efficacy, teacher preparation,* and *teaching challenges*. The majority of the resources were collected from written documentation and research conducted over the past 5 years with exception to evidence supporting the conceptual framework.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this project study was based on supporting adult learning methods through the theories of critical thinking, constructivist perspective, the theory of mentoring, and culturally instructional teaching. The understanding of adult learning methods associated with critical thinking theory and the constructivist perspective provided the background knowledge necessary to comprehend the effectiveness of mentoring as a learning strategy. Brookfield (2010) noted that participants engage in critical thinking when there is an exchange of learning that creates both cognitive and affective responses.

Critical thinking takes place in the form of analyzing the situation and information (or lack of information) presented, examining the problem from multiple viewpoints, questioning the information and the approach to understanding the problem, reflecting on and in the process of gaining information, developing an opinions based on one's understanding, and engaging in reasoning that all information was considered prior to formulating an opinion (Brookfield, 2010). Critical thinking is a form of learning that allows for reflective thinking on individual practices and decisions (Choy & Oo, 2012;

York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2010). Critical thinking is a core element of constructivist theory and explains the process a person goes through as he or she gains new information and applies his or her learning to future thinking (Brookfield, 2010). Reflective thinking becomes the component that links critical thinking to constructivist learning as the learner becomes dependent on the mentor to independent self-directed learners (Brookfield, 2010). Additionally, the qualitative methods approach used in this study allowed me to categorize how the mentors and mentees felt about mentoring as through a constructivist approach of learning (Merriam, 2009).

For example, Costa and Garmston (2002) infused critical thinking into cognitive coaching practices in order for learners to consciously activate learned knowledge and cultivate new ideas through individual and shared experiences. Adult learners carry a vast amount of individual experiences that support or push away the idea of critical thinking (Brookfield, 2010). The theory of critical thinking can be seen as a practitioner's ability to reflectively think and analyze his or her own thinking (Brookfield, 2010). Like Brookfield (2010), Menon (2012) shared that when an individual critically engages in self-reflective practices, the individual increases his or her own self-efficacy that leads to self-directed decision making.

In addition to Brookfield (2010), Grow (1991) shared that the "goal of the educational process is to produce self-directed, life-long learners" (p. 127). Therefore, the theory of critical thinking combined with a constructivist paradigm allowed me to understand the mentor and mentee perspectives. Both the mentor and mentee must be active learners in the learning process rather than passive participants. Grow discussed

that learners who engage in constructivism are able to articulate "who they are and what they want or need to learn" (p. 130). The learner is conscious and self-aware of his or her own learning (Grow, 1991). This personal growth can be achieved through what Ingersoll and Strong (2011) noted as the mentoring theory. The mentoring theory is when a mentee learns through the insights and experiences of a mentor (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). A mentor helps the mentee center his or her thinking on what he or she knows, what he or she needs to know, and how the mentee will build his or her understanding (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Constructivists are grounded in cognitive psychology and engage in the act of acquiring knowledge and meaning from individual and shared experiences (Hatch, 2002). The mentoring that takes place provides mentees with their own experiences and understandings and in shared conversation with the mentor, an opportunity to learn from the mentor's experiences through shared conversations (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Zellers et al., 2008). The mentor and mentee both are equal partners in the relationship through their individual effort and engagement in the conversation as learners (Grow, 1991). Effort is important to note as Brookfield (2010) suggested that self-efficacy leads to increased effort, which contributes to participants becoming self-directed learners.

Dweck (2008) shared that a person has a potential "growth mindset" about learning and a "belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" (p. 7). Dweck noted that individuals who engage in critical thinking are more likely to be motivated to construct their own on-going learning. Motivated learners engage in the theory of constructivism through acts of continuous resiliency even when

they encounter obstacles (Brookfield, 2010). Additionally, Grow (1991) found that a person's effort provides the motivation needed for staying in a constant state of learning. In addition to Grow, DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010) shared that to achieve optimal student success the students' teacher must believe that his or her teaching makes a difference and operate in a mode of continuous learning in order to overcome the challenges that exists in teaching. The theories of critical thinking and constructivism provide a framework for understanding how adults reflect on personal experiences and find motivation for continued personal growth (Brookfield, 2010).

Understanding the mentoring relationship through the framework of critical thinking and constructivism allowed me to report on the project outcomes as related to adult learning theories. The adult learning framework (critical thinking and constructivist) allowed me to analyze and sort data using the framework and theoretical constructs. Therefore, connecting the findings of this project to a learning framework helped to determine how useful the information gleaned from this project would be on impacting teacher learning and consequently student achievement.

**Teaching Challenges**

Researchers such as Bergeron (2008), Chesley and Jordan (2012), and Hatch (2007) all noted challenges that teachers encounter in the classroom. Some challenges become greater because the teacher lacks the cultural proficiency needed when teaching in a diverse school district (Nuri-Robins et al., 2012). There are national data that confirm culturally proficiency in teaching is an area lacking in teacher preparation programs and systems of support once the teacher enters the profession (Nuri-Robins et al., 2012). In

2010, the United States Department of Education reported that teachers must prepare and provide equitable, rigorous curriculum to all students to ensure that each student is college and career ready. In addition, the report noted that the education profession must incorporate additional strategies for preparing and supporting novice teachers to ensure that all students have equal opportunity for academic success (United States Department of Education, 2010).

The idea that beginning teachers need additional support was supported by researchers such as Bergeron (2008). Bergeron suggested that the combination of professional development support structures along with the novice teachers' ability to take risks will impact the teachers' success with students. Like Bergeron, Chesley and Jordan (2012) observed that many beginning teachers struggled with daily challenges in the teaching profession. Chesley and Jordan noted that teachers did not know how to plan lessons, lacked skills for dealing with student behaviors, unable to provide instruction that linked to future lessons, unable to communicate clear learning objectives, and failure to differentiate lessons to accommodate all types of learners. Depending on the depth of the first-year teacher's experiences, these challenges can be debilitating. Teachers can lose confidence, efficacy, motivation, and effectiveness when they encounter challenges that the novice teacher is cognitively and emotionally unprepared to handle (Hatch, 2007).

**Cognitive Demands of First Year Teachers**

Yenice (2012) researched pre-service teachers and noted that 76.3 % of pre-service science educators indicated a preferred learning style embedded in critical

thinking. Flores et al. (2012) concurred with Yenice as these researchers linked cognitive processing and critical thinking of graduating university students entering the workforce with the ability to think critically. Flores et al. noted that limited cognitive processing skills leads to less effective leaders entering the workforce. The vast number of challenges teachers face in today's classrooms require that first-year teachers come with the ability to handle any situation and lead a class of individual learners in their classroom and school environment (Echevarria et al., 2008). The cognitive demands on teachers increase as novice teachers transition from university learning to the teaching profession (Menon, 2012). This transition from learner to leader requires high cognitive demands that for some teachers, if not given support structures, will leave the profession (Menon, 2012).

According to Menon (2012), some beginning teachers reported feeling unsupported by administrators. Menon noted that the role of the principal/administrator is influential in how the novice teacher views their self-efficacy. As Brookfield (2010) noted, a person's self-efficacy is linked to that person's ability to engage at a high level of cognitive demand. Therefore, according to Brookfield and Menon, the novice teacher's self-perception can either strengthen or hinder their ability to perform the required set skills necessary to be an effective teacher.

**Teacher Preparation Deficiencies**

While teachers face on-going cognitive demands (Menon, 2012), many teachers in Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff's (2009) study reported feeling isolated from support and encouragement with limited opportunities for professional

learning. The university programs lacked authentic learning situations that prepared novice teachers for coping with his or her own compassion fatigue, hopelessness, and a sense of isolation (Bransford et al., 2000; Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Cochran-Smith, Shakeman, Jong, Terrell, Barnatt, and McQuillan, 2009). As a result of the lack of professional preparation, novice teachers struggled to effectively teach in a culturally responsive manner while adhering to all the school, district, and state policies (Day, Sammons, & Qing, 2008). Also, Menon reported that teachers are expected to follow school policy which is not always clear and transparent. Additionally, beginning teachers are encouraged to insert themselves into school leadership right away (Menon, 2012). Teacher preparation programs often failed to provide the teacher with experiences and exposure on how to thrive with the job demands and school culture (Ellsasser, 2008). The beginning teachers tended to resort to isolation (Menon, 2012).

**Teacher Isolation**

Menon (2012) noted that many times first-year teachers defaulted to working alone because the novice teachers are placed in schools with challenging student behaviors alongside colleagues that are not interested in helping the first-year teacher be successful. Additionally, Ellsasser (2008) suggested that principal/administrator support influences the mentee's experience and yet there was little evidence that administration provided adequate support for the novice teachers. There is no time for peer-to-peer observation and many times the most novice teachers are placed in the highest impact schools and/or with students that have challenging behaviors (Menon, 2012). Additionally, Menon noted that the beginning teachers saw administration as passive

participants and unprepared to assist the novice teachers in developing the teachers professionally, help the teachers overcome the job demands, and provide the teachers with increased opportunities to collaborate with colleagues. These professional challenges have become more apparent as the teaching culture moves into an expectation that all teachers will collaborate (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

In high functioning collaborative teams, teachers have transitioned from teaching in isolation to learning and collaborating with fellow teachers (DuFour et al., 2010). The benefit of collegial collaboration is the increased exposure to best practices demonstrated by fellow teachers (DuFour et al., 2010). DuFour et al. (2010) offered a process of learning with and from colleagues as a way of expanding access to different ways of thinking and teaching. However, the challenge is that few administrators are able put in place an optimal set of conditions such as common teacher planning times and specific communication protocols that elicit collaboration (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Therefore, first-year teachers tended to rely solely on their own set of learned skills (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

Another factor that leads to isolation is when a first-year teacher has a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2008). Dweck (2008) concurred with DuFour and Fullan (2013) that some adults become stuck with his or her thinking, which disabled the learner from engaging in self-reflective and collaborative practices. A group of fixed mindset teachers contributed to the struggles administrators have with implementing and sustaining high functioning collaborative learning communities and perpetuates the culture of working in isolation (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Dweck, 2008). Learning communities provided

system of support for novice teachers (Dweck, 2008; Harrington & Enoch, 2009). However, the obstacles that prevent this collaborative learning can overpower the teacher's limited ability to access help (Menon, 2012).

**Culturally Responsive Instructional Practices**

In addition to the beginning teacher's level of perceived support by their administrators and colleagues, one of the growing challenges in today's schools is teaching in a culturally relevant manner (Zozakiewicz, 2010). DuFour and Fullan (2013) along with Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) agreed that cultural instruction comes as a result of the entire school system shifting from traditional academic practices to a transformation in beliefs and teaching practices. Zozakiewicz (2010) shared that culturally relevant teaching focuses on teaching in a culturally relevant manner by fostering a belief system that embraces new ways of approaching teaching. For example, teachers teaching students living in poverty must provide the students with opportunities to build background knowledge on subject matters rather than assume students come to school already being exposed to a middle class value system and set of experiences (Zozakiewicz, 2010). Additionally, Mitchell (2008) noted that culturally responsive teachers go beyond teaching with pencil and paper yet throughout their teaching teachers keep the student expectations high and the curriculum rigorous.

Gay (2010), Milner (2012), and Zozakiewicz (2010) all discussed how teachers' beliefs, worldviews, skill preparation, and attitudes all impacted the way in which the teacher planed, instructed, and assessed student learning. Milner suggested that in addition to teacher dispositions about learning that the teacher preparation programs lack

opportunities for teachers to experience diverse teaching environments. Teachers are influenced by the institutional norms that are typically based on a middle class value system (Gay, 2000). Like Gay (2000), Milner suggested that society needs to be concerned with the racial demographics of teachers as well as the faculty that prepare the future teachers. Milner concluded that the lack of racially diverse university instructors continues to make teacher preparation programs inadequate to prepare teachers to teach in a more culturally responsive manner. Although predominately white university faculty have good intention (Milner, 2012), Saffold and Longwell-Grice (2008) shared, inexperienced teachers have good intentions too but many times are limited by their own upbringing if different than his or her students' diverse backgrounds. Saffold and Longwell-Grice further explained that the problems that occur between low-income minority students and white, middle class teachers are the following: cultural belief conflict, ineffective communication, unsuccessful relationship building, lowered student learning expectations leading to gaps of academic achievement, and decreased teacher motivation.

In addition to Saffold and Longwell-Grice (2008), Lindsey et al. (2007) described that culturally responsive practice come from the instructor's ability to see student advocacy as a moral responsibility, embraces learning about other cultures and perspectives, and intentional teaching strategies that support student centered learning. Frye, Button, Kelly, and Button's (2010) findings discussed that pre-service teachers feel higher self-efficacy when they are exposed to teaching in urban settings and specifically taught how to embed the students' culture into assignments. Embedding cultural into

assignments also includes taking into account a student's home language and language proficiency level (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedom-Gonzales, 2008). Culturally responsive practices included knowing the intricacies that come with learning another language and the teaching having the skill set to keep student expectations rigorous while at the same time differentiating learning so that the student is able to comprehend the materials and formulate their own thinking (Lucas et al., 2007). Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) provided a framework for understanding the complexity of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) noted the following three themes of culturally relevant teaching that emerged from the study of first-year teachers: developing curriculum that promoted individual connections to oppression, breaking down racial and social class biases that exist within the classroom of students, and creating opportunities for cognitive shifts that challenge stereotypes. In addition to the themes, Cochran-Smith et al. noted that a teacher must develop relationships with students and families. Bergeron (2008) supported Cochran-Smith's et al. findings that teachers encounter a cultural disequilibrium as a result of teaching from what they know and believe rather than what the students' need (Bergeron; Bondy, Ross, Hanbacher, & Acosta, 2012). For example, according to Cochran-Smith's et al. study, if a teacher is teaching a lesson on snow but the student has never seen snow and has no background knowledge on snow, the teacher must first help the student develop an understanding of snow before the student can fully engage in optimal understanding. This type of teaching that scaffolds the learning and intentionally uses the information they know about the student to ensure all lessons have access points for learning at high levels (Zozakiewicz, 2010).

Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) shared that student learning, developing relationships and mutual respect, engaging in the school, family, and community at-large, and responding to racial and economic inequities are examples of culturally responsive teaching. Additionally, Gay (2000) noted that culturally responsive teaching is seen by many teachers as a separate subject that stays framed in isolation rather than a system of teaching that believes all students have the right to be engaged in learning. Stanulis and Floden (2009) discussed the categories of effective teaching as teaching with a purpose, teaching using viable curriculum, teaching in a style that engages students in the learning, and teaching in a way that makes learning meaningful to the students and scaffold the learning so that all learners can achieve the learning outcomes. Lastly, teachers move beyond just delivering information to reflecting on student data as a way of monitoring student success and changing instructional practices (Gay, 2010).

The critical analysis of whether a teacher is effective at the areas described by Stanulis and Floden (2009) is whether the student's academic data is at or above standard (Gay, 2000). Morrison et al. (2008) synthesized 45 classroom-based research studies conducted from 1995-2008 looking for themes of culturally relevant practices. Morrison et al. found, similar to Stanulis and Floden (2009), that teachers who demonstrated culturally relevant teaching in the classroom combine high student expectations with a gradual release of inner dependency to dependent learning. Culturally responsive teachers used models of thinking aloud and other hands-on strategies to help students understand the learning targets (Morrison et al., 2008). Teachers looked for students' strengths as ways to engage the students in authentic and meaningful learning (Morrison et al., 2008).

Additionally, culturally responsive teachers held high student behavior expectations and well-established routines (Morrison et al., 2008). Teachers provided opportunities for student input and used strategies for ensuring that all students feel safe, cared for, and accepted as an essential person in the learning community (Morrison et al., 2008). In addition to how the teachers instruct, the teachers taught using curriculum and materials that reflected the students' backgrounds and incorporated the students' background knowledge as a critical teaching component (Morrison et al., 2008). Teachers provided opportunities for integrating students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum and activities that students gain multiple perspectives and life-experiences from classmates (Morrison et al., 2008).

Culturally responsive teachers held positive assumptions about the student and the student's family while working to build relationships with student (Morrison et al., 2008). Like Morrison et al., Bergeron (2008) added to the idea of culturally responsive teaching by noting that culturally responsive teachers support students and families from diverse communities. Additionally, Picower (2011) shared that culturally responsive teaching is the act of using teaching as a way to teach acceptance and kindness to all people. Teachers frequently affirmed the students' identities by incorporating opportunities for the student to speak in class using their home language (Morrison et al., 2008).

Culturally responsive teachers looked for opportunities to build bridges between the home cultural and language to the concepts that were taught in the school (Morrison et al., 2008). A culturally relevant teacher sought to understand the student's family situation as part of the lesson (Morrison et al., 2008). For example, Morrison et al. (2008)

noted that one way of bridging school and home is by providing open-ended discussions and opportunity for developing assignments that embrace multiple perspectives. Additionally, Morrison et al. suggested that teachers can teach about the dominant culture while still honoring the diversity shared amongst their students. Mitchell (2008) concurred with Morrison et al. by noting that culturally responsive teachers will address the issues of race and racism within the context of teaching instead of avoiding the topic. All of these components of culturally relevant teaching resulted in what Morrison et al. framed as a shared power where students help make classroom decisions. As described by Zozakiewicz (2010), the level competency required by a first-year teacher to teach in a culturally relevant manner concluded that the teachers must have a strong understanding and vast skill set in order to successfully prepare all students.

**Mentee and Mentor Relationship**

The theory of mentoring takes place through the exchange of insights and shared experiences between the mentor and mentee (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Costa and Garmston (2002) further described Ingersoll and Strong's findings by sharing that a mentor and mentee develop a relationship and trust which provides both participants a context for personal growth. Also, Chun et al. (2010) shared that a mentoring relationship is "inherently reciprocal and interdependent" (p. 428) because of the personal exchanges of information shared by the mentor and mentee. Mentors, like mentees, have a predefined set of beliefs about their role in the relationship (Fullick, Smith-Jentsch, Yarbrough, & Scielzo (2012). The researchers Zozakiewicz (2010) and Daloz (1999) discussed the timing of mentoring as occurring at the beginning of the mentee's career.

Dweck (2008), in line with Zozakiewicz , suggested that culturally responsible mentoring relationships caused the mentees to think critically about his or her decision-making process, instructional practices, and belief systems.

Ehrich, Hansford, and Tenant (2004) synthesized over 300 research-based articles and identified problems associated with mentors. Ehrich et al. (2004) also concluded that few studies were conducted between the years of 1986-2002 that are from the mentors' perspectives. Ehrich et al. noted from the mentees' perspective a set of four cited outcomes from the mentor-mentee relationship as collaboration, reflective practices, personal satisfaction, and mutual growth. Additionally, Ehrich et al. noted that the majority of all studies reported by both the mentor and mentee reported lack of time for mentoring and a mismatch of professional expertise and/or personality (Ehrich et al., 2004). Mentors reported additional problems associated with the mentees which included lack of commitment and unproductive behaviors (Ehrich et al., 2004). Mentees suggested that mentors had a lack of interest, lack of training, and defensive behaviors (Ehrich et al., 2004). In addition to the individual mentor and mentee perspectives, the organizations that provide the mentoring opportunity have funding problems, lack of training for mentors, and lack of organizational commitment to mentoring as a viable form of professional development (Ehrich et al., 2004). In line with Ehrich et al. findings, Stock and Duncan (2010) noted perceived barriers to mentoring programs as the following: lack of time, no training, lack of organizational interest in mentoring, and the inability for mentors to help mentees better understand the use of data. The barriers discussed by

Ehrich et al., Stock and Duncan potentially impact the desired level of authentic learning referenced by Costa and Garmston (2002), and Zozakiewicz (2010).

Costa and Garmston (2002) like Zozakiewicz (2010) noted similar benefits gained by novice teachers when the first-year teacher has a mentor that helps him or her engage in a reflective process of learning. Costa and Garmston referenced mentoring as a collaborative process consisting of coaching and consulting the mentee through a series of reflective activities and conversations. Likewise, Brookfield (2010) and Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) both shared additional research that support looking at critical thinking as a framework for understanding and analyzing the mentor-mentee relationship. Mentees need to go through a cognitive shift and action oriented mindset as mentees reflected on their individual experiences (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Brookfield (2010), Costa and Garmston , Dweck (2008), Merriam et al., and Zozakiewicz (2010) all noted that mentors provide mentees ways of reflecting on their own experiences and critically thinking about elements of the teachers' professional practice that lead to increased self-efficacy and motivation.

Bandura (1993) and Bandura and Locke (2003) discussed the impact of self-efficacy on an individual's motivation and perceived success. Bandura described the impact of efficacy as a way to "predict not only the behavioral functioning between individuals at different levels of perceived self-efficacy but also changes in functioning in individuals at different levels of efficacy over time" (p. 87). Bandura looked at an individual approach to understanding teachers' self-efficacy while Day et al. (2008) categorized teachers into the following three professional life phases:

1. teachers who enjoy their career and feel a sense of efficacy that results in effectiveness,
2. teachers with self-efficacy handle challenges better than teachers with low self-efficacy,
3. teachers that have a declining sense of self-efficacy may have declined satisfaction and ineffective instruction.

Bandura (1993) and Day's et al. (2008) research supported the notion that self-efficacy is an indicator of individual performance levels and professional satisfaction. In order to be high functioning in the classroom, teachers need to believe that they are a critical component to the student's success. Mentors, who provided support to beginning teachers, are charged with providing mentoring services that resulted in novice teachers feeling that they have the technical and emotional skills for teaching in a culturally responsive manner. Self-efficacy and responsive teaching is not specific to the world of teaching. Other settings that utilized mentoring as a form of adult learning have found that there is a distinct difference between the mentor's perception and the mentee's perception on the mentoring experience (Horvath et al., 2008).

There are both formal and informal mentoring programs aimed at increasing employee satisfaction and professional contributions (Horvath et al., 2008). Some mentoring programs provided peer like mentoring while other programs used a supervisor as mentor to new employees (Horvath et al., 2008). Mentoring in the business world provided insight into components of mentoring. Horvath et al. (2008) suggested that mentors mentor through a lens of "career enhancement" and/or "psychosocial

behaviors" (p. 328). Career enhancement approach used a process in which the mentor protected, coached, and challenged the mentee to be a productive worker (Horvath et al., 2008). The psychosocial allowed the mentor and mentee to develop a relationship based on acceptance and friendship (Horvath et al., 2008). Weinberg and Lankau (2011) agreed with Horvath et al. (2008), however, Weinberg and Lankau found that a mentor's perspective is typically very different than how the mentee perceives the mentoring relationship.

**The Role of the Mentor**

Horvath et al. (2008) described the behaviors of a mentor as a person that works toward increasing a mentee's confidence through building a trusting relationship. Both Horvath et al. and Daloz (1999) suggested the impact of mentoring is a result of a mutual acceptance; the basis for building a relationship. Additionally, Fullick et al. (2012) concurred with Daloz that a mentor is likely to project their beliefs onto the mentee over the course of the formal mentoring time frame and in varying degrees depending on the levels of trust as perceived by both the mentor and mentee. Dweck (2008) also noted that mentors influence mentees to see beyond the current set of challenges and be open to alternative solutions.

Weinberg and Lankau (2011) noted that formal mentoring does not happen by chance and must have a predefined mentoring system, identified desired results, and an accountability system in place in order to increase the likelihood that the mentoring experience will be perceived valuable to the mentor. The results of Weinberg and Lankau are similar to Hudson's (2010) findings of a five-factor model of formal mentoring.

Hudson defined the five factors as personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modeling, and feedback attribute to a formal mentoring model. Hudson's findings were consistent with Daloz's (1990) research that suggested the mentor's investment requires emotional engagement and continued professional learning. Reid (2008) concurred with Hudson and Zozakiewicz (2010) that mentors needed clear program structures in addition to having adequate time to develop a mutual rapport and relationship. Although Hudson noted that mentors felt the mentor-mentee rapport was an effective means of support and professional learning, Ehrich et al. (2004) concluded a set of conclusions that suggested that there is limited literature to understand the mentor's perspective.

Mentors believed that making the right mentor-mentee match was a critical first step in the mentoring process (Horvath et al., 2008). In addition to the mentor-mentee pairing, mentors' level of commitment to mentoring was critical, the program must be perceived as mutually beneficial, the mentor was held accountable to making time for the mentee, and the mentors saw themselves as role models. Stock and Duncan (2010) studied the mentor's perception in elementary and secondary school settings. Stock and Duncan noted similar findings to the business setting in Horvath's et al. (2008) research. The biggest barriers to mentoring, as reported by the mentors, were limited time for communication, no clear guidance on to the steps and approaches to mentoring, no access to professional development on mentoring strategies, and no resources readily available to use with the mentees (Stock & Duncan, 2010).

On the other hand, Stanulis and Floden (2009) noted that mentors cited the following areas of mentoring as most successful: focusing on improving the teacher's instructional skill set, consulting with teachers on the types of curriculum that best engages learners, providing the teacher with ideas on how to scaffold the learning instruction so that all students could achieve higher levels of learning, modeling examples of increased student engagement, and analyzing formative and summative data as part of the instructional decision making process. Additionally, Horvath et al. (2008) went on to report that more importantly than the mentor's vocational skill set was the mentor's ability to listen, communicate, and advocate for the mentee. Mentors suggested that intensive mentoring also occurred before and after the teacher's lesson when mentor and mentee worked together on the planning of lessons, co-taught, held post conversations for reflective coaching, and analyzed student work together (Stanulis & Floden, 2009). According to the mentors, although the mentoring typically included classroom management, the most successful mentor-mentee experiences extended beyond daily routines (Stanulis & Floden, 2009).

Stanulis and Ames (2009) added to the idea that a successful mentoring experience was one where the mentor has also expressed new understandings about their own thinking. Mentors felt a need to have mutually beneficial learning in addition to an increased set of mentoring skills (Stanulis and Ames, 2009). For example, a mentor spends time reflecting with his or her mentor colleague or administrator as a way of critically assessing his or her own effectiveness with helping the mentee teach in a more culturally responsive manner (Zozakiewicz, 2010).

**The Role of the Mentee**

The mentee typically enters the mentor-mentee relationship with hope that the mentor has all the answers to helping him or her feel more successful as a first-year teacher (Stanulis & Floden, 2009). Both Bergeron (2008) and Horvath et al. (2008) found in the research findings that mentees felt the best when mentors began with establishing a relationship that was centered on acceptance, consulting, and a framework for helping the novice teacher move from student to teacher. Mentees felt less supported by mentors that held a supervisory role and/or mentors that appeared to lack any type of training or lack of time for mentoring (Bergeron, 2008).

Weinberg and Lankau (2011) findings took on a different context than Bergeron's (2008) findings with mentees indicating that the quality of time was more important than the quantity. Chesley and Jordan (2012) found like Bergeron , Horvath et al. (2008), and Weinberg and Lankau (2011) that novice teachers felt most supported by mentors when their basic needs were met. Weinberg and Lankau shared that the most important aspect to a mentee was that the mentee feels the mentor is a good fit. In addition, Stanulis and Floden (2009) found that mentees reported feeling exhausted, stressed, and overloaded with the demands of the job. Some mentees were unsure of his or her role in the relationship (Stanulis & Floden, 2009). Chesley and Jordan shared that beginning teachers wanted to understand what was required from him or her in the classroom and school community (Stanulis and Floden, 2009).

Additionally, beginning teachers wanted mentors to model and tell them how to teach the students who were struggling behaviorally (Chesley & Jordan, 2012). Mentees

reported needing assistance with analyzing student data, ideas for integrating technology, and suggestions for how to increase student motivation (Reid, 2008). Reid (2008) described the mentoring experience as "magical" (p. 71) when novice teachers become "better teachers" (p. 71). Ultimately, the mentee perceived the mentoring experience as successful when the mentee had increased self-efficacy as a result of gained instructional skills and improvement in student learning and student behavior (Menon, 2012). Ingersoll and Strong (2011) concurred with Menon (2012) that mentees who participated in mentoring programs had overall satisfaction, commitment, and professional longevity.

## Implications for Possible Project Directions

DuFour and Fullan (2013) concluded "every person in the system has an obligation to be an instrument for cultural change rather than waiting for others to make the necessary changes" (p. 4). The implications in this study provided a deeper understanding of what the mentor and mentee perceived to be most effective in the mentoring relationship that helped prepare the novice teacher for instructing students of diverse cultural backgrounds for the greater educational learning community. The results of this study potentially will impact revisions to the district in this study's mentoring program components and bring awareness to any other essential elements that might be missing from the current mentoring framework.

In addition to local implications, Szu-Yin (2011) found that teacher programs are inadequately preparing teachers to teach in a culturally relevant manner and therefore, beginning teachers were unable to achieve culturally responsive teaching alone. Szu-Yin's research implied that teacher preparation at large could benefit from the results of

this study as a way to better understand the preparation needs of novice teachers teaching in diverse school districts. Importantly, according to Zozakiewicz (2010), the demand for culturally competent instructors demonstrates a social justice implication that more research is necessary to understand the complexity of teacher readiness and job expectations.

A possible outcome of this doctoral project study is to inform development of future revisions to this district's mentor program as related to preparing teachers beyond traditional approaches of teaching to a more culturally responsive approach as defined by Lindsey et al. (2007). Potentially, I will collaborate with the executive of professional development to make suggested recommendations to continuing, including, or excluding certain mentoring components as a result of understanding the mentoring relationship from both the mentor and mentee perspective. The district in this study has not conducted a formal program review nor has the director gathered information from the mentors and mentees directly related to culturally relevant teaching as described by Lindsay et al. Lindsay et al. suggested that culturally responsive teaching is the actions of teachers based on what they believed and instructed in a way that addressed the following elements: assessing cultural knowledge, valuing diversity, managing conflict and dealing with historical inequities, adapting to diverse thinking, and the ability to incorporate cultural knowledge into everyday instruction. The information explored in this project study provided evidence linking culturally relevant teaching and teacher self-efficacy to mentoring as well as provided a deeper understanding of the mentors' and mentees' experiences.

## Summary

The evidence showed that adult learners required planned, targeted, and on-going professional learning opportunities (DuFour & Fullan, 2013) in order to improve teachers' knowledge and application into daily actionable steps. The information provided in this literature review covered multiple faucets to understanding the complex method of mentoring. First, a conceptual framework provided a way for understanding the problem through an adult learning framework. Using critical thinking and the constructivist approach lead to a reflective approach to capturing whether or not mentoring elicits critical thought. Next, having a general sense of the teaching challenges that novice teachers encounter in diverse, urban communities, especially if the cultures are different from the teacher's own upbringing allows for the necessary background information to understand the larger problem. Along with a high cognitive demand first-year experience, teachers will also begin to see his or her teacher preparation deficiencies. Understanding how mentoring might help teachers overcome these deficiencies will provide insight into the mentoring effectiveness. Teachers work many times in isolation, especially, in a non-collaborative culture. The project gave light into how the mentoring relationship may not provide teachers with the right balance of support. Ultimately, teacher efficacy was the outcome. Mentoring may not change teacher efficacy and subsequently students depend on teachers who possess strong competence in content and the belief that he or she made a difference in a student's life.

In addition, school systems have become high-stakes learning environments that offer an endless number of challenges and opportunities that impact our communities

through effective teaching and student achievement (Department of Education, 2010). The results gathered from this study aligned with the conceptual framework of critical thinking and constructivism provided insight into the components of culturally relevant teaching and the mentoring relationship. Additionally, the case study approach provided an authentic method for collecting first-hand perspectives and analyzing the intricacies of mentoring. Personal interviews and a focus group were the primary data collecting methods for collecting the data. Lastly, the result of this study along with the supporting literature provided dual and necessary steps needed to continue to find solutions to low-performing schools and student drop-out.

Section 2: The Methodology

## Introduction

This project study consisted of an instrumental case study approach used to explore the mentor and mentee's experiences as they engaged in problems of practice through conversation, sharing, and modeling. Understanding the participants' relationship becomes an outcome of understanding the case (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) explained this by stating a case is a singular entity rather than a theme. Additionally, Stake noted, a case study is very personal to the researcher. For example, I am not part of the mentoring program; however, I am an educator interested in improving the system of services to students, so through that lens I am invested in the findings of this study. Although Stake suggested that a case is a unique, special thing to be studied and not seen as a problem, the outcome of understanding the case may result in identifying themes or categories. The outcome of the case study can result in understanding the conditions and problems that lie within the case but are not the case (Stake, 1995). The literature section in this study provided categories for understanding the problem such as teacher challenges or adult learning framework. Additionally, both Stake and Yin (1999) suggested that a case study approach is best when the conditions surrounding the problem of study are unclear and where the problem of study can be changing over the course of the study.

Yin (1999) suggested that data gathering in the qualitative approach is best when gathered from multiple approaches. Therefore, as per Yin and Hancock and Algozzine's (2011) suggested methods, I conducted individual interviews, a focus group interview, and mentor-mentee observations to gather the participants' lived experiences. The

qualitative method approach allowed for individual and small group forums that were conducive for conducting interviews. Ultimately, the priority for using qualitative versus quantitative was to understand the collected data through the participants' perspectives (Merriam, 2009) as well as the uniqueness of the case (Stake, 1995). The case study methodology approach provided a method for gathering data from multiple first-year teachers' perspectives within the context of individual interviews, a focus group, and observations of mentoring sessions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The mentors' perspectives were also gathered and analyzed to better understand the phenomenon from the mentors' and mentees' perspectives.

The deciding factor for using a case study approach was that information gleaned from exploring the mentors and mentees' experiences provided insight into the mentoring relationship, adult learning, and the impact of mentoring on instructional practices related to student learning. Merriam (2009) noted that the priorities for a qualitative approach are to understand how individuals make sense out of their life journey and understand that life is a sequence of interpretations. To achieve the elements conducive to a case study I conducted three parts to the data collection process. The first part consisted of face-to-face, audio-taped interviews of the first-year teachers. Interviews provided the mode of collection that allowed me to collect in-depth experiences from the participants (Merriam, 2009).

The second part consisted of a focus group with the mentors in the program. The focus group format provided for sharing of the mentors' perspectives about their experiences as well as how each mentor felt about the first-year teachers' experiences.

The third part of the study consisted of observing a planning conference between a mentor and mentee. The observation provided insight into the verbal and nonverbal rapport exchanged between the mentor and mentee. The mentor was a peer of the mentee, a teacher on special assessment, but there was a possibility that the experience held by the mentor might be felt by the mentee as higher status and/or intimidating. Therefore, as the researcher, I interviewed the mentees individually to see if these potential feelings surfaced when the mentor was not present. All interviews and observations were recorded, transcribed, and coded for central themes. The mentor and mentees were uniquely special and provided the case of this study; however, the problem was deeply understanding the relationship through defining themes and categories that help build an understanding of the main issues that lie within a mentoring relationship and whether or not those issues impact teaching (Yin, 1999). The following section provides information on the qualitative design, the participants, the setting, data collection components, and how data were collected.

## Research Design and Approach

Creswell (2009) explained that in qualitative research designs a central question guides the exploration of a phenomenon of interest. The project results included both the mentors' and mentees' perspectives on the mentoring relationship and how they perceived the relationship to enhance and/or hinder the first-year teachers' ability to increase student learning through culturally responsive instruction (Lindsey et al., 2007). The constructivist paradigm and critical thinking theory provided a theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of mentors and mentees as a result of engaging in a

mentoring relationship. The mentoring relationship was unique to each participant's perceived value of the shared conversations and the support the mentee felt the mentor provided. Therefore, the mentor and mentee both constructed their own learning and gained knowledge as a result of increased critical thinking that took place because of the mentors' and mentees' interactions. The ability to critically think may or may not translate into more culturally responsive practices. Nuri-Robins et al. (2012) suggested that culturally proficient people engage in a process of life-long learning and not just a one-time certification or event. Understanding the journey in relation to mentoring and culturally responsive teaching provided a deeper understanding necessary for making meaningful changes to future professional development provided to novice teachers.

The project study was bound to participants in the school district and consisted of five individual interviews of mentees, one focus group of five mentors, and two observations of teachers participating in this study's mentoring program (Hatch, 2002). As a bound case study, Hatch (2002) noted that the participants' experiences are constructed as part of the research process. Merriam (2009) supported Hatch that a case study approach provides an in-depth study of a bound system as described in this project of study. Therefore, my accounts include details from the first-year teachers' and mentors' perspectives on the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship gathered from interviews, focus groups, and observations. More specifically, an instrumental case study approach was used in this project. An instrumental project study allowed me to better understand the participants' perspectives by exploring the underpinning connections of themes gathered from the data, which I then analyzed with the underpinning conceptual

frameworks of constructivism and critical thinking (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Stake (1995) shared that an instrumental project allows for an intrinsic process to occur simultaneously while information is shared to multiple audiences. The credibility and accuracy of my accounts became the indicators of a successful case study project (Hatch, 2002). Additionally, there were no singular observable data, and instead the data gathering methods provided me with an opportunity to gather multiple perspectives (Merriam, 2009).

Creswell (2009) noted that in a qualitative design both interviews conducted in a one-to-one and in-person setting as well as focus groups are appropriate methods for data collection. Merriam (2009) noted that interviews are necessary when the researcher's intent is to understand participants' feelings and experiences that occurred in the past. The interview process used in this study supported Merriam's and Creswell's conclusions that an interview is a data collection process that provides a way for better understanding someone's thoughts and feelings that occurred in the past.

The qualitative case study design provided descriptive data versus numbers through the analysis of each transcribed interview. Additionally, limiting the number of interviewees provided an intensive study of each participant's lived experience (Merriam, 2009). Ultimately, the purpose of the case study design was to better understand the participants' psychological experiences through the data collection method of interviews (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

The mentoring program explored, in this case study, was located in a culturally and linguistically diverse suburban school district. In the school district under study, there

were 41 schools and nearly 27,500 students in preschool through 12th grade. The student demographics, as reported by the office of the superintendent of the school district in this study, were as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native .7%, Asian 17.1%, Pacific Islander 2.3%, Asian/Pacific Islander 19.4%, Black 11.9%, Hispanic 19.8%, White 39.5%, two or more races 8.7%. Additionally, there were 138 languages spoken by the students and families. Many urban schools, like the school district in this study, have a growing culturally diverse population of students and families. Therefore, the analysis of this project study may provide useful data to other culturally diverse urban and suburban school districts.

Merriam (2009) noted that in a qualitative study both interviews and focus groups are primary methods for collecting data. In addition, I conducted two observations of the mentor and mentee engaged in a mentoring meeting. Merriam suggested that interviews are the best means of data collection when an intensive understanding is needed. In this study, I heard multiple perspectives on the mentoring relationship in addition to what was gained through observation. I was interested in knowing how the participants felt about the impact mentoring had on his or her learning and ability to teach every student.

In addition to interviews, Merriam (2009) noted that a focus group consists of a group of interviewees that have a shared knowledge base about a certain topic. Focus groups, qualitative in design, enabled me to further understand the mentors' individual and shared beliefs and experiences. The qualitative design and methods allowed me to gather participants' expressed feelings and behaviors, create themes, and then synthesize the findings into a written document to be shared with other learners (Merriam, 2009).

Therefore, due to the nature of the data collection methods, quantitative methods were not appropriate to use in this project since this is an inductive process of understanding the first-year teachers' and mentors' experiences rather than a deductive process (Merriam, 2009). In addition to quantitative, this project was not appropriately studied through the qualitative designs of ethnography or grounded theory.

To further explain, ethnography inquiry provides an opportunity for the researcher to report on the process of gathering the research and producing evidence that supports a deep understanding of the culture of the participants (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the researcher immerses as a participant observer who connected deeply with the participants. In this project, the researcher remained neutral only getting to know the interviewees for the duration of one interview. Like the ethnographic method, the grounded theory methodology approach has the interviewer building a theory throughout the research process (Merriam, 2009). Although grounded theory is similar to the case study approach used in this project with both using an inductive process, the grounded theory is focused on building a theory (Merriam, 2009). Grounded theory looks to understand how things change overtime. This project study did not focus on how participants felt at the beginning of the mentoring relationship compared to the end of the mentoring cycle. Rather, this project explored the participants' perception of the value they place on the professional learning experience and self-efficacy throughout the duration and at any given point during the year-long program. Therefore, using a grounded theory approach was not the best design for this project. Again, the uniqueness of the participants led to using an instrumental case study that focuses on the

understanding the case as a way of coming up with a concluding theory (Stake, 1995). Therefore, although I was interested in understanding the case (intrinsic), I was more engaged in exploring to the potential themes that arose from the data (instrumental) (Stake, 1995).

## Participants

Participants included 5 first-year teachers and 5 mentors that participated in an optional mentoring program in the school district in this study. The first-year teachers are defined as teaching less than 1 year in education. The mentors have a range of teaching experiences with a minimum of 5 years of experience. All participants were employees of the school district during the 2013-2014 school year.

### Criteria for Selecting Participants

Participants were selected using purpose sampling. Merriam (2009) suggested that purposeful sampling was based on the idea that a researcher must identify a sample of participants that the researcher has the strongest potential of learning from. However, Yin (1999) cautioned researchers that there will never be enough time or sample to justify the concept of sampling. Therefore, I chose participants that were currently in the mentoring program for the 2013-2014 school year and that provide the greatest possibility of gleaning information. However, I approached the selection through thinking about each participant as a separate "sub-inquiry" which is the basis of the replication logic model (Yin, 1999, p.1213). The logic model helped guide my thinking as I framed the course of interviewing and observations. The criteria based selection included the following: participants in the mentoring program during the 2013-2014 school year, participants

willing to be interviewed and observed over the summer of 2014, and participants who have attended a minimum of 1 district provided mentoring sessions. Once the participants were selected, I conducted 5 first-year teacher interviews and one focus group of 5 mentors. Merriam shared that selecting a few individuals to interview is acceptable.

The researcher invited and secured all five of the district's mentors to participate in the focus group interview. The criteria-based selection for choosing mentors used was the following: must have mentored first-year teachers in the school district during the 2013-2014 school year and agree to the interview and observations during the summer of 2014.

**Procedure for Gaining Access to Participants and Ethical Protection**

I conducted research upon receiving approval notification from Walden University Internal Review Board (IRB) along with submitting IRB approval documentation from the school district in this study. Once research permission was granted from the IRB (06-20-14-0266083), I contacted the Executive Director of Professional Development to obtain a list of participating first-year teachers who completed the mentor program in August of 2013 school year. Then, I invited potential participants using his or her district email accounts. As part of the participant invitation (Appendix B, Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D, Appendix E), I provided a brief overview of the project study, procedures, voluntary nature of the study, risk and personal benefits, payment, university contact and researcher's information, and procedures for giving his or her consent via email. Participants not selected received an email notification thanking them for their time (Appendix F).

Access to the mentors and mentees was provided by the school district in this study's Executive Director of Professional Development. I solicited participation by emailing participants from my Walden University account. All participants were given a letter of participation describing the timeline for conducting the interviews and expected project completion (Appendix G, Appendix H). Participants were informed that they could leave the study at any time for any reason and that any questions that the participants have can be asked at any time throughout the interview process (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the letter included the procedures of the study and emphasized that all information collected remains confidential (Merriam, 2009).

Participants' names and schools are not used in the reporting of the data rather a pseudonym was assigned to each participant (Merriam, 2009). Interviewees received electronic invitations (Appendix B, Appendix C) inviting each first-year teacher to attend a one-on-one interview or mentor to attend a focus group. Interviews were scheduled before or after the interviewee's scheduled workday. Each interview participant received a confirmation email that reviews the date, time, and location of the interview. Interview participants were also given a contact number to call if he or she could not make the interview at the last minute and needed to cancel. Potential participants not selected for the study received an email notification thanking them for his or her time and consideration. The first-year teacher participants received an interview guide (Appendix I) at the start of the interview. Each first-year teacher interview consisted of interview methods using semi-structured interview questions (Appendix J). Additionally, mentors received an interview guide at the beginning of the focus group (Appendix K). Also,

semi-structured questions were used during the focus group interview (Appendix L). All interviews took place at the interviewee's school or office in a neutral space like the school's conference room (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). At the end of each interview the participant received an electronic copy of their interview transcript to review for accuracy (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Participants were asked to provide any corrections within a week of receiving the transcript. A thank you card was sent to each interview participant after the completion of their interview. Following the interview, the data collected were stored on an external hard drive and password protected (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, any hard copies were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home. Two observations of the coaching mentor-mentee sessions were conducted. An observational guide (Appendix M) and observational protocol (Appendix N) were provided to the participating mentors and mentees.

**Methods for Establishing the Researcher and Participants' Working Relationship**

Developing a rapport and trust requires intentional steps be taken to ensure the human safety and confidentiality associated with any data collection (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). In order to establish a working relationship, I communicated clearly all steps of the interview process so that participants felt well informed. Maintaining a working relationship also means that being intentional with understanding how mentors and mentees make sense of the mentoring experience staying free of my own bias or assumptions (Merriam, 2009). I maintained neutrality at all times including if I disagree with interviewees' statements (Merriam, 2009). As Merriam (2009) suggested, my rapport with each interviewee remained neutral in both my words and my body language.

Therefore, I used several methods to establish appropriate rapport with my participants. The interviewees were given choices for the interview location. One of the five interviews preferred a coffee shop while the other four preferred a school setting. I selected a comfortable location to conduct the interview, provided the interviewee with an outline of the interview, respected the interviewee's time by sticking to an agreed upon start and end time, and maintained a neutral yet warm disposition with the intent to make the interviewee feel safe and heard (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, I recorded and transcribed all interviews and provided the interviewers with a transcription of the interview (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Lastly, a trusting relationship goes beyond the interview and into my commitment to the interviewee that they can trust that my agreements to confidentiality and my methods to maintaining trust is critically important for me to establish and maintain throughout the project study. I will maintain all written and electronic documents for five years and secure all documents in a locked file cabinet in my home. After five years in January, 2019, I will shred and delete all data hard copy and electronic records and notes (Merriam, 2009). I will maintain only my project study drafts. Establishing and maintaining trust and rapport is important the validity of this project and equally important to how I conduct myself as a researcher.

## Data Collection

Merriam (2009) noted that in qualitative research data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. Therefore, although I chose to use purposeful sampling I did not know the final outcome of all the data until I completed ongoing analysis (Merriam, 2009). Merriam suggested that qualitative research is influenced along the way requiring

the researcher to adjust depending on how the process of collecting, transcribing, coding, analysis, and exploratory findings is going. In order to stay focused on collecting the right data, I implemented the following steps: collected data during interviews and observations, took field notes after each interview and thought deeply about each individual interview, wrote comments as I went thinking critically about the data I collected, coded the data collected, and then sorted the data looking for themes (Merriam, 2009). Ultimately, I determined I had collected enough data when there was a saturation of categories and/or themes (Merriam, 2009).

**Instrumentation**

The case study design and the project study (Appendix A) include multiple pieces of data that were collected from individual first-year teacher interviews and one focus group of five mentors. The first method I used was individual participant interviews. Following the IRB approval and signed participant consent form, interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). The semi-structured protocol allowed for the interviewer to use structured questions as well as ask follow-up questions during the interview (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). A basic interview guide gave interviewees a general overview and reminded them that they could stop the questioning at any time (Appendix C). A semi-structured approach allowed for gathering data from each interviewee that was guided by a list of questions (Appendix D). These individual interviews yielded useful information from the first-year teachers' perspectives (Hatch, 2002). All interviews were conducted face-to-face with each

individual first-year teacher. Interviews lasted 35-45 minutes and began and ended on time.

In addition to individual interviews, I conducted one focus group interview consisting of five district assigned mentors. Merriam (2009) noted that a focus interview can yield useful information as participants hear each other's perspectives. A focus group data collection procedure is grounded in the constructivist approach (Merriam, 2009). Participants construct their thinking through the interactions formed during the focus group collective sharing (Merriam, 2009). Hatch (2002) and Merriam both noted that a focus group approach provided the element of group discussion, which added insights perhaps not gleaned from one-to-one interviews. Like the individual interviews, mentor participants received an interview guide (Appendix E). Participants were asked questions from a semi-structured protocol (Appendix F). The interview lasted 60 minutes and began and ended on time.

All individual and focus group interviews were audio recorded along with scripted interview notes taken by me during the interview. All audio recording devices were tested prior to the interviews and back-up by my iPhone and a second audio recorder. Field notes were taken directly after each interview to ensure that I reflected on each interview within 24 hours of the completed interview (Merriam, 2009). The combination of individual interviews and one focus group interview provided 10 participants' perspectives. In order to provide a neutral setting, all interviews took place at a neutral school setting (Merriam, 2009). Lastly, I conducted myself in a professional

manner, as outlined in this study, capturing the teachers' personal journeys in a way that was true to their own words (Glesne, 2011).

**Procedures and Process for Data Collection**

The data collection methods used in this case study approach collected data from face to face audio taped interviews and a focus group discussion. All interviews and the focus group were scheduled with the interviewees immediately following IRB approval and the retrieval from the Executive Director of Professional Development in the school district in this study for names and emails of all participating mentees and mentors. Once participants were chosen, I used purposeful sampling procedures, and then interviews began. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously in order to organize and refine the data as I conducted interviews (Merriam, 2009). As I conducted interviews, I focused on asking good questions, preparing and practicing probing questions and comments, and providing an interview guide (Merriam, 2009).

First, Merriam (2009) suggested that the essential element to getting quality data begins with asking the right types of questions. I began writing the questions through the lens of understanding how the mentees and mentors felt, thought, and what they believed to be true about their experience in the program (Merriam, 2009). I used a semi-structured set of questions that allowed me to ask each participant the same questions as well as provide flexibility to individualize the interview by asking probing questions or comments (Merriam, 2009). I avoided leading questions so that any biases I might have were not revealed to the participants (Merriam, 2009).

Probing questions are nearly impossible to plan ahead of time (Merriam, 2009). However, focusing on probing questions that ask for specificity and clarification are critical to being in rapport with the interviewee (Merriam, 2009). I practiced my probing skills by reviewing each transcription looking for places where I could have asked a probing question (Merriam, 2009). Lastly, I used an interview guide where I keep a list of the structured questions and some additional probing questions and/or comments (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) suggested using this type of guide as a way of increased my interviewing confidence and provided me a structure and flexibility to adjust to the interviewer as needed.

Once I had the questions ready to go and interviews conducted, I began to organize the data. First, the process started by reflecting on my written script and then transcribing the audio recording of each interview. Transcribing each interview took place within a week after each interview was conducted. I organized the data so that the transcribed interviews accurately match the content of the interviewee and so that interviewees had an opportunity to review their words (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). As I read the data, I used a template for note taking to assist with formulating potential themes and to note any exclusionary data that was irrelevant to the study. Any revisions to the transcription only occurred upon the interviewee's request and any corrections, additions, and/or deletions were included in the final transcript (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Each written transcription was assigned a pseudonym (Merriam, 2009).

Additionally, I focused only on data relevant to the study that gives insight into the research efforts in order to help eliminate wasted time and effort (Hancock &

Algozzine, 2011). Once I prepared and organized the written notations, I used text coding techniques to analyze each interview by marking key words and possible themes on the opposite margin. Once codes and notes were taken, I built descriptions that began with a board capturing of the themes and then work to narrow in on key categories (Merriam, 2009). Lastly, all collected data were labeled, electronically and hard copy stored, and organized alphabetically for easy reference during data collection, analysis, and reporting.

## The Role of the Researcher

I am currently a former administrator in the school district in this study and am employed in a neighboring school district. I do partner with the school district in this study on regional projects but not on work related to first-year teachers or the mentoring program. Previously, I was an elementary school principal for seven years, an assistant principal for one year, a junior high instructional coach, and an elementary teacher for four years teaching third, fourth, and sixth graders. My educational experiences have led me to developing a passion and interest for understanding adult learners and especially novice teachers. Additionally, I have completed cognitive coaching advanced training offered by the Center for Cognitive Coaching which has inspired me to study adult learning. In my career, I have had formal and informal mentors that have helped me grow personally and professionally.

I chose to conduct my case study project in the school district in this study for a couple of reasons. First, there are few local districts that provide beginning teachers with a formal mentoring program so choosing the school district in this study works well

within my geographical location. Secondly, this mentor program trains all mentors in cognitive coaching methods which supports the study of a constructivist paradigm and critical thinking theory. Lastly, I work very long days. I am unable to travel long distances to conduct interviews. Although I do not live in the school district in this study, my home is within a 20 minute commute that allows me to gain access to participants and conduct interviews in a timely manner while still maintaining a professional full-time career and duties as a wife and mother.

I followed-up all procedures outlined in this study with securing IRB approval, district consent, and all ethics associated with conducting research. Also, I was intentional at protecting the rights and privacy of all participants (Glesne, 2011). The interview process is critical to deeply understanding the connection between a mentee and a mentor. Thus, capturing the first-year teachers' personal journey in a way that is true to their words and not exploited is critical to maintaining high ethical standards (Glesne, 2011). I was mindful on my verbal and non-verbal interactions with all interviewees. During the interviews, I asked the questions, recorded the interviewees' answers, and scripted the conversation. Following the interview, I transcribed the audio and provided a copy to the interviewees. During the focus group, my role was as facilitator. I asked structured and clarifying questions.

Following the collection and analysis of all data, I presented all findings in verbal and written format to the school district in this study's school board. Ultimately, I am committed to collecting bias free data. Therefore, I conducted peer checking as a part of data collection. I also provided a list of held biases in the final report as evidence of my

transparency of my role and the collection and analysis process used in this case study project.

## Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) noted that conducting data analysis simultaneously with data collection is the preferred procedure in qualitative research. Therefore, I conducted data analysis during and following the data collection phase. However, as Merriam (2009) also suggested, I planned for a more time intensive data analysis process as the study progressed and after all the data collection was complete. The managing of all the data was critical to efficient and accurate data analysis. I also prepared myself emotionally for the ambiguity that comes when analyzing qualitative data (Merriam, 2009).

Merriam (2009) discussed that the end goal is to make sense out of the data and to answer the research question(s). The answers then become the categories or themes that I find from the data analysis process (Merriam, 2009). First, I took the collected written notations and transcriptions and begin to look for a unit of data in which was captured in one to two words or multiple sentences (Merriam, 2009). Then, I compared units of information looking for categories that show a recurring pattern that was found across all the data (Merriam, 2009). I conducted triangulation by comparing data collected from the interviews, focus groups, and observations (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, I found the most supported categories to report out on in the written narrative to the school district in my project (Merriam, 2009).

Once I achieved a saturation level where no more categories were being formed, I transitioned from an inductive process to a deductive process (Merriam, 2009). This

process of going from inductive began when I discovered units and categories all the way up to where I found that all new data fit into existing categories (Merriam, 2009). I stayed focused on making sure the categories were answers to the research questions and encompassed all the relevant data (Merriam, 2009). I used a chart table and taxonomic representation to display the findings so that the categories are all at the same abstraction level and in alignment with my purpose statement (Merriam, 2009). As suggested by Merriam (2009), I aimed for no more than five or six categories but found this limited number to be problematic with the emerging data.

Lastly, I ended the data analysis process articulating in written form how the study is significant and that the themes only tell a part of the mentors' and mentees' journeys. By comparing and thinking about the categories and sub-categories I was able to see an interrelationship (Merriam, 2009). Ultimately, my goal was to make sense out of the data and communicate my findings through narrative written format and visual charting. Given the scope of this project and my digital organizational skills; I did not see a need for a purchased computer program.

**Accuracy and Credibility**

Merriam (2009) noted that in pursuit of the story the researcher will work to maintain internal validity to ensure that the information "matches reality" (p. 213). Therefore, in this case study, I explored the mentees' and mentors' lived experiences they have gained from participating in the school district in this study's mentor program. I used the data collection and analysis to understanding at a deeper level the participants' behaviors and learning as a result of mentoring. Merriam noted that the credibility of the

research findings is when the research matches up the research with reality. Therefore, the procedures for data analysis were reflective of the experiences of the participants and verified for accuracy by each participant.

The primary strategy I used to ensure internal credibility was to conduct member checks (Merriam, 2009). Member checks allowed me to check with participants following their interview to get feedback on my emerging findings. By conducting member checks, Merriam (2009) suggested that this strategy allowed the participants the opportunity to validate my interpretations for accuracy. Merriam further noted that conducting member checks allowed for revisions if the situation had occurred if the participant found discrepancies. Additionally, I had a current professor at the University of Washington and expert in qualitative research review my protocols used for the interviews and focus group. I took the professor's feedback and corrected the protocols prior to interviewing.

In addition to member checks, I engaged in reflexivity. Merriam (2009) suggested that reflexivity is a strategy that the researcher uses to critically reflect on the researcher's biases and assumptions. Therefore, I explained in my project my values and beliefs that might have influenced any findings. Lastly, I used peer examination as a way of gaining insight and clarity from fellow peers that are familiar with first-year teachers and mentoring methods (Merriam, 2009). I was particularly interested in checking with a peer on the raw data to access whether the findings were credible.

Along with internal credibility, I ensured external credibility. Merriam (2009) noted that external credibility is the extent the findings of one study can be applied to

other circumstances. Additionally, Merriam (2009) noted that purposeful sampling is based on the supposition that the researcher intends to explore, understand, and gain knowledge from a sample that provides the most potential. I chose to use purposeful sampling because I wanted to understand mentoring at a deeper level that goes beyond just finding out what is generally true. Therefore, with this deeper understanding and synthesis of multiple data points, the results of this study can inform other people associated with teaching, learning, and mentoring. Specifically, for the school district in this study, the conclusions found in this case study provides information that the district can use to make program evaluation and funding recommendations for future years to come. In addition to reporting, I included with the findings the methods I used to analyze the data, my own reflections on the research, a description of the limitations of the study, and suggested recommendations for future studies.

**Discrepant Cases**

Merriam (2009) noted that an analytic indication occurs with in the process of coding raw data and constructing categories. The formulated explanation of the phenomenon is that mentoring provides authentic learnings for first-year teachers that are applicable to improving culturally responsive teaching. In the case that there is a discrepant case, I reviewed the data looking for trends that disprove the explanation of the findings (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, as part of the inquiry process, I prepared to review the interview results and observational data looking for disconfirming evidence during the data collection as well as when I spent time writing up the results in a thorough and inductive manner (Erickson, 1986).

## Findings

The participating first year teachers taught within a range from first grade to 8th grade. In addition, the five mentor teachers have taught general education in either elementary, middle, or high school as well as served as instructional coaches and/or special education teacher. Two of the mentors hold specialized degrees with one in special education and the other in K-12 music. All the first year teachers that participated in the mentoring program in 2013-2014 and all mentors actively mentoring in 2013-2014 as district mentors were asked to be a part of the study based on selection criteria outlined in this study. The sample consisted of nine females and 1 male participant, five first year teachers, and five mentors. All first-year teachers taught in different schools within the school district in this study.

### Data Collection, Analysis Procedures, and Emerging Themes

All 10 participants received an email describing the purpose of the study and the overall process. Participation was emphasized as voluntary in both written and verbal communication. Once participates agreed to participate, an in-depth interview was conducted one-on-one with each mentor with the goal to explore the mentee's mentoring experience and first-year of teaching journey. The focus group participants, which were the mentors, were also given a written and verbal communication the purpose of the study. One mentor asked me to provide her with more in-depth information on the methodology section of my study. I provided her with a draft of my URR approved methodology approaches. Once all focus group members replied with their consent to participate, I arranged for a group interview. Additionally, I conducted two observations

of a mentor-mentee reflection session using two different mentees and one mentor. These observations took place separately. Following each interview, the focus group, and the two observations each participants could optionally participate in member checking. I received and documented all feedback including spelling corrections, deletions, typos, and elaborations.

The process of data analysis took place simultaneously as interviews over the course of two months. Many significant themes and sub themes began to emerge as data were triangulated. Some themes and subthemes were reinforced as more interview data were coded in addition to new subthemes emerging. Creswell (2007) noted that textural descriptions occur as the researcher attempts to explore possible themes. I used an inductive approach for the first sets of data that focused on the research questions in this study. What I found was that the themes seemed to be interrelated where the mentor was experience something either related to the mentoring relationship, their situation and personal choices, and/or as a bi-product of engaging with predetermined programmatic decisions made by the developers of the district in this study's belief about mentoring and the needs of first-year teachers. The following themes initially emerged:

- Impact of the Mentee's Perceived Success & Relationship with Mentor
- Impact of the Mentee's Perceived Success Unrelated to the Mentor Relationship
- Evidence related to the Mentors' program decisions
- Adult Learning Theory as related to the Mentor Experience
- Mentor Relationship with the Mentee as Perceived by the Mentor

- Determining Lesson Elements and Perceived Success

What I discovered was that descriptor codes emerged multiple times and as I coded the data these six initial themes. As I coded each interview, I was able to see patterns surface and eventually the process became deductive as I looked for the codeable themes. I selected words and/or phrases that captured the essence of the participants' experience and then started keeping a tally chart as way of organizing the number of times a particular code was stated or the essence of a code emerged. Initially, the lived experiences seemed to be related to one another. For example, one participant said in reference to Saturday trainings that the trainings "was really helpful to think about before getting in the classroom but I felt like once I was in the classroom, you know it's one thing to hear about it kind of abstractly, but once you're in the classroom then to be able to do it" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). These pieces of data were coded both for the program decision and the mentees way of engaging in reflective thinking.

Once I completed all the coding of the mentees' interviews, I looked for codes identified or supported through the participants' words that had emerged most often in the in the interviews and in my observation notes. The information gathered was then charted by theme so that I could compare mentee to mentee and then mentee group to the mentor group. I noticed that similar themes from the mentor and mentee's perspectives emerged. Table 1 below depicts the data through a classical content analysis. I took the codes and counted the number of times in all the interviews and observations that the particular code resonated from the participants' conversation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The emerging sub-themes in Table 1 than became more important to understand

than the initial first six themes as I moved into analyzing the Focus Group data. The reason for this shift is that the first six themes were formed within the first two interviews whereas the data in Table 1 displays the emerging themes from the individual interviews and observations. From there, I focused on the top seven sub-themes indicated in the seven highest numbers in Table 1. The chunking of participants' interview words (Table 2) allowed for me to see the top themes emerge into a collection of qualitative evidence in (Table 1). The inductive process of chunking the data led to a deductive approach as the data began to form clusters of themes that eventually led to certain themes rising as the strongest indicators of the mentees' experiences.

Table 1

*The Mentee Experience*

| Code | Number of Times Used |
|---|---|
| Mentees noted the value of master teaching observations | 6 |
| Mentors provided co-teaching experiences | 6 |
| Mentees noted a delay between the mentor observation and debrief | 7 |
| Mentors provided modeled instruction techniques in trainings | 7 |
| Mentees experienced multiple mentors | 7 |
| Mentees believe additional mentors should be hired | 7 |
| Mentors-mentee sessions held at the mentees' schools | 8 |
| Mentees utilize or would like to utilize building specialists for help | 8 |
| Mentors and mentees communicated through various modalities | 9 |
| Mentees expressed emotional connection with mentor | 9 |
| Mentees noted that mentors provided consultation and are seen by the Mentees as knowledgeable | 14 |
| Mentors normalized mentees' experiences and feelings | 14 |
| Mentees valued the mentor-mentee dialogue | 15 |
| Mentors observed specific situations in the classroom | 15 |
| Mentors provided a safe and confidential supports | 17 |
| Mentees felt conversations were focused on the mentees' needs | 17 |
| Mentees stated that mentors listened to the mentees | 17 |
| Mentors provided hope beyond the mentee's current reality | 19 |
| Mentees expressed that through the mentoring relationship they Were able to reflect on their lived experiences | 22 |

Table 2

*Mentees' Emerging Themes: Constant Comparison*

| **Participant** | **Data to Support Emerging Theme: (Reflective Thinking)** |
|---|---|
| Participant 1 | I'm sure you know there's a balance that you have to think about. |
| Participant 2 | So, yeah she was almost a little bit like a counselor. |
| Participant 3 | I could say to her "I don't feel comfortable with this. I think I could do better here." |
| Participant 4 | …But I guess by being able to realize that I had freedom. |
| Participant 5 | I think TPEP helped a lot for me to think about areas where I wanted to improve. |

The mentoring relationship theme was most often described by the mentees in the interviews and the two observations as a method for overcoming challenges. Participant 1 reflected on her experience through the lens that the challenges she encountered has made her a stronger teacher. On the other hand, Participant 2 saw her challenges, one being student behaviors, as limiting and disabled her from being able to teach in the way she had experienced in her student teaching. Participant 3 had high self-expectations which caused her great stress but she found relief in being able to talk and discuss her thoughts with her mentor. Participant 4 noted that she found the observation debriefs between her and her mentor most helpful at enabling her to think about the lesson and how her instruction impacted students but felt like the gap in time between an observation and

reflective feedback conversation was too long. Participant 5 reflected many times both in the interview and the observation that he appreciated thinking through his classroom management strategies and the expertise the mentor offered him. One interviewee shared that her "biggest challenge was classroom management (personal communication, July 23, 2014). While another interviewee felt like his mentor really understood the students he was teaching. He noted that "I really value a second opinion and my mentor was someone who had experience working with a similar demographic (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Another limitations expressed by all mentees was the feeling of isolation from other teachers. The mentees expressed that they had many opportunities to get feedback from their master teachers during student teaching or their university supervisor.

Additionally, all five mentees shared examples that spoke to the mentors' ability to listen and validate the mentees' lived experiences in the classroom and professional environment. Participant 1 shared that her mentor "not only reassured me, but also got me focused on what the steps that I needed to do now" (personal communication, August 3, 2014). This supports the idea that their mentors were available to listen and validate their feelings. Additionally, Participants 3 felt that the mentor had more accurate and credible feedback since the mentor had visited multiple times their classrooms and saw the saw their instruction unlike the mentee's principal. Participant 3 said that having the mentor observe her "really helped have her say this is what I heard, what did you think" (personal communication, August 23, 2014). Participants 3, 4, and 5 described the mentoring relationship as a form of validation. Participant 4 shared about the mentoring

experience was having an “outsiders view was beneficial because I really value a second opinion and my mentor was someone who had experience working with a similar demographic” (personal communication, July 23, 2014). The participants furthered described the relationship as one where the mentor refrained from judgment and acknowledged the mentees’ feelings and struggles. One mentee shared about her mentoring experience was that “it was validating to know that someone who works with first year teachers said you’re a first year teacher, give yourself a break because you’re going to be working on this your whole life career so that was very nice” (personal communication, August 18, 2014).

One of the research questions was to understand the mentee’s experience as a result of the relationship. In addition to feeling that the conversations and dialogue between the mentor and mentee were confidential, the mentees also described a strong sense of security. One mentee described a sense of “safety and security” when talking with their mentor because she knew the mentor would be confidential (personal communication, July 23, 2014). A physical response noted in the observations was that both mentees smiled and quickly became so relaxed with their mentor even though they hadn’t spoken in over a month. Participant 5 said it best “mentor A was always encouraging, and I love that they say what is done in Vegas, stays in Vegas because you need that, especially when you need to figure out what the politics of the school are and what it looks like” (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Participant 4 felt like her mentor would say things that made her feel “normal” (personal communication, August 18, 2014). The mentees used the term validated several times thought the interviews that

described the mentor as acknowledging that the mentee's current reality of stress was justified.

Once the data were analyzed, there were three main themes that that emerged and described by all the mentees as the following ideas:

- Mentees felt safe to talk to the mentors and confident that the information shared was kept confidential
- Mentees felt that the conversations were focused on the mentees' needs, current wonderings or happenings, and done in a way that validated their feelings.
- Mentees engaged in reflective conversation with their mentors in multiple settings (pre/post conversations and training activities)

**Data Analysis: Focus Group**

The mentors expressed in the focus group similar themes as the mentees. The mentor group, I could tell by the mentors' body language, had a comfortable ease about them. The mentors were jovial and upon entering the room were reconnecting and catching up on each other's lives. Once the interview began, the mentors listened to each other and many times would build onto each other's thinking by say statements like "to add onto Mentor A" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). The mentors even referenced one of the other mentor's strategies or experiences when they described what he or she thought about a particular question. Unlike the data gathered from the mentees, the mentors' data were not best captured in a classical content analysis. Rather, the mentors' data were best analyzed through a process called domain analysis (Leech &

Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The domain analysis process allowed for me to connect the mentors experience to the mentoring relationship and the mentees' perceived experiences. What I found was that the focus group might agree with a particular statement another mentor shared but the mentor's agreement was non-verbal, a head nod, or even an "I agree" statement. However, the mentors were a skilled conversationalist group. The mentors were intentional at avoiding repeating items that had already been shared.

I chose to use taxonomic representation as a way of showing the mentors' feelings, opinions, and attitudes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie). Displayed in Table 3 below were the merging themes captured from the focus group and mentee-mentor observations. The taxonomic representation provided an illustration of the different domains broken down by sub-category. The graphic representation provided sub-themes that surfaced as the most critical notations expressed by the group as a whole.

The first explored theme that was derived from the focus group data analysis can be captured in Table 3 under the heading: What Mentors believe about the Mentees. In this theme, the mentors expressed the first-year teachers challenges as multiple district and building initiatives which required the mentee to prioritize what his or her principals were asking them to do, what their experienced colleagues said were important, what they remembered from his or her student teaching experiences and university preparation as priorities for teaching, and what his or her students needed them to be. One mentor described the mentee's experience as "being in a pressure cooker" while another mentor described the mentee as having to "constantly multi-tasking" (personal communication,

July 23, 2014). Another mentor shared that she "had one teacher really struggling and she knew she was really struggling. It was behavioral, it was clarity of instruction, it was planning for her process, and it was a lot of things identifying and using effective strategies for engaging students and creating appropriate routines" (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Classroom management and student behavior were sited, making it the most referenced challenge, by all mentors as a topic of conversation every time they met with their mentee. The mentors did note a few things that I categorized under the heading (In the Mentee's Control) which support the idea that mentees do have choices but just may not be able recognize those opportunities given they are under so much pressure. One of the challenges was the mentors saw the mentees working in isolation. The mentor focus group's data were best represented in a figure rather than a text due to the complexity of visually displaying the shared experiences discussed and coded. The taxonomic representation allows for the data to be viewed in a comprehensive matter showing the relationships between themes rather than a hierarchy of themes.

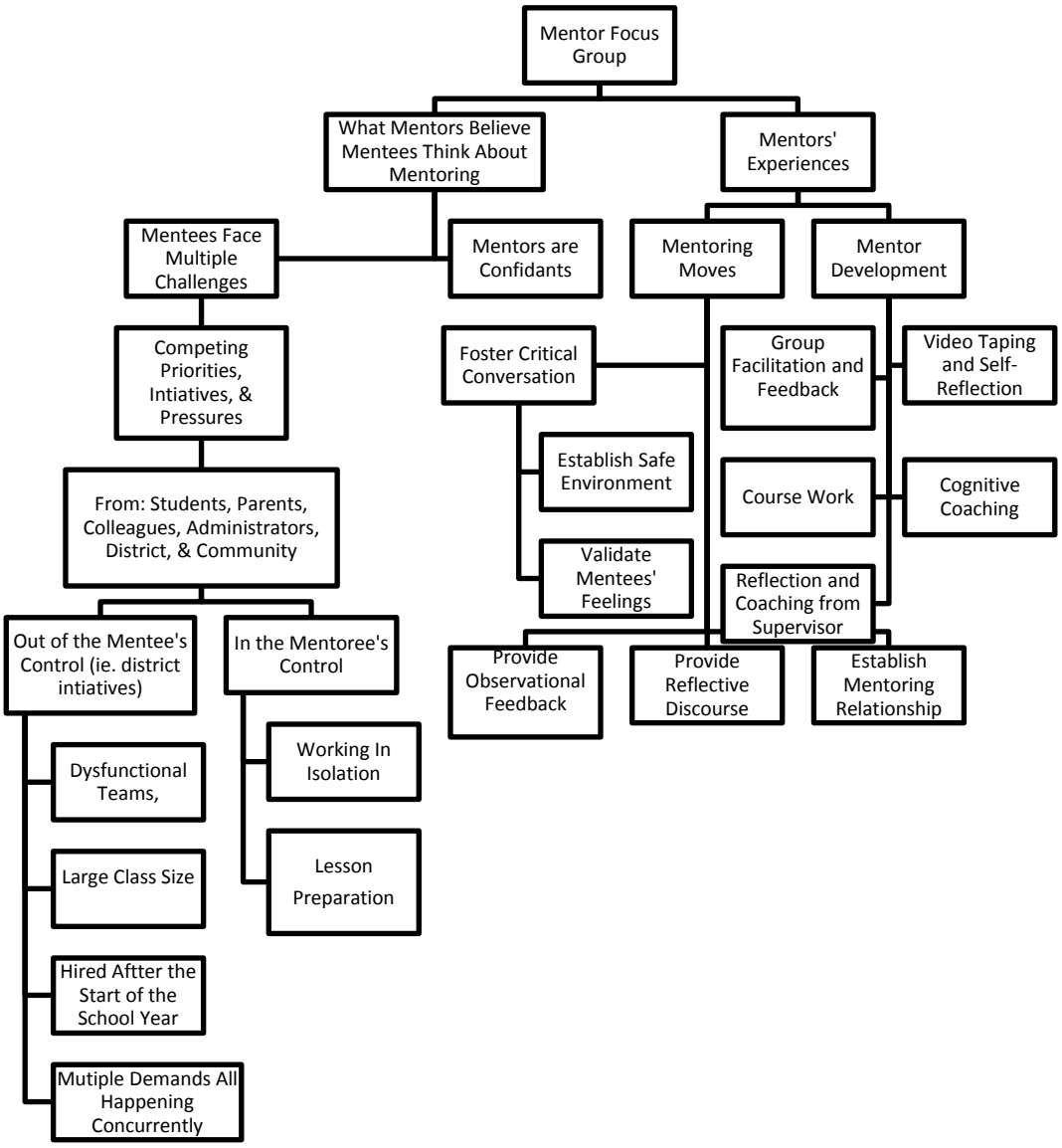


*Figure 1*. Mentor focus group taxonomic representation. Taxonomic representation of the mentors' shared experiences from mentoring first-year teachers.

To some degree, the mentors felt that the mentees could seek out other colleagues rather than wait to be approached. On the other hand, one mentor described collegial support "dysfunctional" and lacking the support first-year teachers' need (personal communication, July 23, 2014). One mentor talked about her own progression of mentoring as "you're focusing more on that classroom management piece and just surviving where you know spring time you're ready to improve instruction and increase student learning, and refine it a little more" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Therefore, she would ask the mentee questions that helped them think about their self-efficacy throughout the year and what the mentee could do as opposed to always reflecting on the challenges and what was "done to them" (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

In the end, there were more examples of challenges that were described by the mentors as being out of the mentees' control. The mentors spoke to the following as the most sited challenges they encountered with their mentee: "dysfunctional teams," "hired late in the year," multiple initiatives imposed either by the principal, district, or their colleagues, and large class sizes along with placing first-year teachers in complex assignments (personal communication, July 23, 2014). For example, one mentor described her mentee's situation as "they are walking into a disaster zone" (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

The focus group data provided insights into their own experiences as mentors as well as the first year teachers they mentored. Exploring the mentors' journey was much like unpacking the mentees' experiences. The mentor felt that they want the mentee to

grow and become a better teacher but that they wanted that for themselves as well. One mentor described her own personal growth as "you can't be the catalyst or the change agent if you don't get some support around building your knowledge and your skills" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Table 3 illustrates the emerging sub-themes listed under the heading Mentors' Experiences. First, the beliefs and modes of operation the mentors lead from and embed in the mentor-mentee relationship are similar to the way they want to grow as learners. The mentors felt strongly that contact time with their mentee gives the mentee "time to reflect, they can think about what they want to build on" (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

Therefore, the mentors noted that pre/post conversations with the mentee and observing the mentee in their classroom instructing were critical and perhaps the most beneficial component to the mentee's experience but it also was the best way for the mentors to try out coaching strategies. One mentor shared on the importance of making sure conversations reflect what is on the mentee's mind with these words "whenever I have a goal or plan for a teacher is never a very good goal or plan, because it's my goal or plan" (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

All the mentors noted that before any observations or feedback cycles, there first must be a strong mentor-mentee relationship built on trust. One mentor noted that you have to have "many conversations" with the mentee but there is no set number of conversations you have to have before trust is built (personal communication, July 23, 2014). Another mentor noted that "availability" is critical to creating a relationship (personal communication, July 23, 2014). One of the mentors said "If the mentee feels

like you are unavailable, the mentor said the mentee will think you don't have time for them" (personal communication, 2014). Two mentors noted the frequency of conversations and making themselves available to mentees will eventually lead to a more "trusting relationships" (personal communication, 2014). Once the relationship is established, the mentors increase critical thinking conversations and engage with mentees through a reflective cycle. A mentor gave an example of "I tried to model my own reflections for them. This is how I think the lesson went and this is where I could have fixed this and what do you think about that" (personal communication, July 23, 2014).

The mentors shared that they intentionally use reflection strategies as a way of mentoring. The mentors noted that they embedded the reflection cycle into all conversations, trainings protocols, and observations. One mentor noted that she did some "co-teaching" as a way to jumpstart the reflection conversation (personal communication, July 23, 2014). She felt like this particular teacher was more open to reflecting on a lesson the mentee had observed first before switching the roles where the mentee teaches and the mentor observes. Once the mentor modeled the process and his or her vulnerability yet openness to the mentee's noticing, then the mentee felt comfortable and safe to reverse the role. Another mentor shared that "I think it's great to go observe, but the debrief is critical so they talk about it, connect the student behaviors, teacher behaviors, investigate something that they saw, a theme, and then we follow up" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). The mentor spent time with the mentee reflecting and conversing on what they saw at the observation and what would be most beneficial to incorporate into the mentee's practice. Another mentor agreed that self-

reflection was noted several times in her "field notes" as the strategy she focused on during the mentor-mentee conversation (personal communication, July 23, 2014). One mentor shared that she "intentionally engaged in self-reflective strategies as way of making sure she was also learning along the way" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). In summary, the mentors suggested the reflection cycle is beneficial for both the mentee and mentor as a form of on-going learning.

All the mentors noted their own need to find value in their work and to be validated. One mentor spoke at great length of the type of district support she received but that she felt that something was missing "you can't be the catalyst or the change agent if you don't get some support around building your knowledge and your skills" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). She shared a desire to want more direct contact with supervisors focused less on the logistics of mentoring and more on helping the mentor learn new strategies and engage in conversation. Another mentor shared that "I just think we can all really benefit from that cognitive coaching and that helps me grow my practice" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). All the mentors have completed the first stage of cognitive coaching and felt that this specific training reinforced their beliefs as mentors that conversation must be mentee focused. The mentee must have a role in deciding what they will discuss. One mentor shared her strategy she got from another mentor of asking ahead of time from the mentee what they feel they want to talk about. While another mentor noted that although she tries to "coach" (let the mentee lead), she sometimes did have to "consult" (lead the mentee) because the mentee would get focused on a "self-defeating mentality" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). The mentor

would engage in consulting to try and provide the mentee with evidence or an alternative perspective in order to assist the mentee at moving forward in their thinking.

In addition to coaching strategies, the mentors appreciated the opportunity to attend trainings that support them with new ideas and mentoring strategies. Along with individual facilitation, they enjoyed group facilitation which they felt supported them learning from and with each other. Lastly, the mentors all positively responded to one mentor who shared one tool they used to improve their own instruction was to "videotaped ourselves giving PD (professional development) and then reflected on it" (personal communication, July 23, 2014). All the mentors agreed with head nods that this form of professional learning was meaningful since they intentionally tried to lead group trainings in a way that modeled the type of teaching the mentees could replicate in their classrooms. The mentor experience, although not as extensively explored as the mentee's individual journeys, noted reflective thinking and discourse, the mentoring relationship requires the mentor to listen and validate the mentees' feelings, and is available to support the mentee yet uses mentoring techniques to help the mentees engage in thinking about their own efficacy rather than getting stuck in the stress and challenges in the profession.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there were significant implications for student learning when teacher instruction does not match the learner's needs (Bergeron, 2008). According to Nuri-Robins et al. (2012), mandating effective teaching does not work rather teachers must seek out ways to improve his or her own learning and increase student achievement.

Teachers must be grounded in a strong sense of purpose and beliefs that every person has culturally defined needs that need to be respected (Nuri-Robins et al.). Therefore, exploring the mentor and mentee's perspectives offered a depth of data collection that cannot be achieved through quantitative methods alone. The research provided a deeper understanding of the individual's journey and the mentors' lived experiences as supported the novice teachers' transitions from being a student of teaching to being an instructor of students. This section provided information on the steps that were used in the data collection and data analysis process. Each element of the research process was necessary to ensure research validity and credibility that was ethical and provided emotional safety for participants. The following Section 3 provides the project plan and implementation used in this study.

# Section 3: The Project

## Description and Goals

The focus of this project study was to explore the lived realities of first-year teachers and their mentors. Interviews and observations were the methods used to gather individual information and explore their collective experiences. The objective of this project is to create school district policy that specifically addresses a commitment to supporting first-year teachers as a strategy for more social justice practices. Specifically, on-going professional learning that combines mentoring and training within the teacher's school building as well as district-provided professional learning support will impact student learning. Additionally, policy and procedures focused on social justice will include required professional learning that incorporates culturally responsive instructional practices

## Project Rationale

As a result of institutionalizing professional development for novice teachers through the adoption of policy, school districts would be required to invest the necessary fiscal and human resources into a long-term commitment to supporting beginning teachers. In theory, supporting beginning teachers would go beyond grant availability and live within the school district's based education funding allocation as a priority and strategy for increasing student achievement. Current research, along with my own case study results, have supported the idea that providing on-going, job-embedded professional develop for teachers leads to more effective teaching and student learning (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2014; Griffin et al., 2014; Matsko & Hammerness, 2014;

Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Schechter & Qadach, 2012; Shockley, Watlington, & Felsher, 2013; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008); Williams, 2009).

## Literature Review

The literature review was guided by the following questions: does policy exist that is directly related to professional development for beginning teachers and what practices support professional development? A traditional approach, as described by Armitage and Keeble-Allen (2008), typically does not locate all relevant literature but continued to gather resources until a saturation of themes emerges. Therefore, the structure of this section consists of the search strategies used, professional learning for novice teachers, and an understanding of institutionalizing professional development.

### Research Strategies

The strategies used to conduct the literature review in this study were conducted in two main categories. The first category was professional development for beginning teachers, for which the keywords for the search in ERIC and SAGE Premier included *teacher professional development, beginning teacher support,* and *university teacher preparation.* The second category focused on policy development in educational institutions, and the databases used were ERIC, SAGE, and Policy Science Complete. The keywords used to search policy consisted of the following: *policy development, policy in education,* and *policy and professional development.* A total of 62 articles were reviewed and 41 articles provided a cross-section of policy development and policy in education. However, only nine articles spoke to policy development directly related to

professional learning. Furthermore, only six of the nine articles spoke to beginning teachers through the lens of instructional coaches and mentoring.

The articles were all peer-reviewed and the search results indicated a gap in the available literature directly related to professional development in school districts that utilize policy as a strategy for supporting beginning teachers. The most referenced journals in this literature review consisted of the following: *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* and the *Journal of Teacher Education*. A sample of journals used as sources were drawn from the *Journal of Public Management and Social Policy*, the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, Education and Urban Society*, the *American Education Research Journal*, and *Urban Education*. A search using the key words *analytic theory* resulted in a book source that provides several bodies of research conducted by theorists and researchers directed to understanding policy through a social justice perspective.

**Professional Learning for Novice Teachers**

Historically, policy writing tends to be guided by an organization's need to create collaborative processes for policy development yet is held to tight timelines that do not always take into consideration the time and a framework necessary to hear all stakeholder voices such as teachers, school administrators, and parents (Muir, 2008). However, the research indicated that planning for effective professional development and policy must consist of a process that incorporates the needs of the beginning teachers and their lived experiences (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010). Understanding the lived experiences of first-year teachers requires the ability to know the first-year teachers' school cultures, the

needs of the students they teach, the teachers' collegial expectations and cultural norms, the strengths and areas of growth of the first-year teacher, and understanding the support or lack of support that first-year teachers have available to them within their school setting (Griffin et al., 2014). Griffin et al. (2014) noted that the approach needed to support each novice teacher is based on the first-year teacher's perceived relationships that the first-year teacher has with his or her colleagues and administrators. Additionally, Palardy and Rumberger (2008) also shared that first-year teachers in their longitudinal study found that teaching practices are more likely to be improved if novice teachers are engaged in professional learning. Furthermore, Palardy and Rumberger noted that the complexity in connecting professional learning for novice teachers with student learning continues to be the unanswered question. Palardy and Rumberger, as well as Griffen et al., agreed that for optimal growth the first-year teachers must find value in the relationship between their learning and the application of the learning that leads to an increased sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, if mentoring is one of the support strategies, then the mentor must have an accurate understanding of each individual teacher's situation. However, in the absence of policy, school districts may or may not commit the necessary funding to maintain a quality mentoring program.

Other solutions for ensuring professional development have been studied. Heineke, Mazza, and Tichnor-Wagner (2013) found that having teachers sign two-commitments did not make a significant difference, but rather the theme of carefully selecting and supporting teachers in the profession through multiple methods emerged as significant themes. However, in the end Heineke et al. found that after the 2 years

teachers who did not get adequate professional support left the district. Therefore, Heineke et al. recommended a stronger long-term approach to professional support. Cochran-Smith and Villegas (2014) noted that policy does exist in the area of professional development but typically falls into teacher preparation requirements and through the lens of teacher evaluation. Whereas, Heineke et al. suggested that a commitment from school district leadership to support teachers entering the profession and beginning years is critical to retaining teachers. Whether for increased retention or for a much greater purpose such as social justices practices, the research results have been clear that school districts must embrace an increased accountability of teacher development.

**Institutionalizing Professional Development**

Institutionalizing the concept of teacher support requires that the organizational leaders engage in understanding the problems that first-year teachers encounter, the research-based practices for supporting beginning teachers, and the belief that indeed professional learning for the adults will lead to student achievement (Schechter & Qadach, 2012). Dill and Zambrana (2009) noted that policy development continues affirm existing institutional practices. Therefore, a policy that achieves increased equitable practices for adult learning as described by Schechter and Qadach (2012) will require the organizational leaders' on-going commit to reviewing institutional practices aimed at improving institutional practices. Additionally, the school board must recognize and seek to understand the analytical and political ramifications of policy making (Feuerstein, 2009). The commitment of the school board, if not committed to analyzing

the complex problems associated with policy development, could result in policy and procedures that do not meet the initial problem but rather create new problems causing barriers to the initial intent of the policy (Feuerstein, 2009). In addition to the school board, the role of the superintendent as an active contributor in the professional development strategy and reorganization to ensure the policy and procedures are enacted with the original intent of the committee members (Honig, 2012). Schechter and Qadach suggested that helping a novice teacher is positively supported if the organization has inclusive practices to create the policy, clear communication to stakeholders, and on-going program evaluation. The novice teachers are more likely to receive needed support if the organization has a clear process for supporting first-year teacher. Furthermore, Schechter and Qadach noted the idea is that organizational support will also leads to a larger collective response to supporting teachers through a collective process of connecting teachers to each other. Whipp (2013) further described that intentional novice teacher professional support, although complicated, is a necessary social justice practice.

Schechter and Qadach (2012) shared that the foundational thinking within organizational learning was that the system must recognize that one approach to adult learning was complicated by the variation of knowledge and abilities new teachers enter with in the profession in addition to their professional preparation. Some might argue that it is not the responsibility of the school district to prepare teachers but that the universities are the ones charged for preparing teachers for the profession (Matsko & Hammerness, 2014). However, Matsko and Hammerness noted that many novice teachers described their college preparation programs as ineffective at preparing them for

the realities of teaching. Matsko and Hammerness (2014) noted that university teacher education programs are usually aimed at preparing future teachers for work in multiple settings rather than focusing program preparation aimed the complexities first-year teachers encounter in diverse, urban schools.

Supporting Matsko and Hammerness is researcher Avraamidou (2014) found that in a longitudinal case study that followed a beginning teacher from the teacher's pre-service training into the teacher's first couple of years teaching noted that the emerging theme was the teacher's identity as related to knowing the teaching content, feeling a sense of belonging within the school personnel, the types of experiences that led to a feeling of success or failure, and even the teacher's perceived identity within their personnel life. Wang et al. (2008) also supported Matsko, Hammerness, and Avraamidou's findings in that the complexities exposed during the transition from college to the teaching profession have a significant impact on the novice teachers but can be mediated when the beginning teacher is paired with a mentor. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of mentoring was most effective when the beginning teachers were part of a community of learners within their school (Wang et al., 2008). The struggle is that high turn-over in schools continues to complicate the essence of a collaborative community as adult learning requires trust and if the team members are constantly changing so is the cycle of trust (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010). Donaldson and Johnson shared that researchers and district administrators continued to attempt to understand the impact of supporting first-year teachers as a strategy for achieving high student achievement.

Williams (2009) shared that policy was technical and required a collaborative approach in policy development in order to ensure implementation. Additionally, Washburn-Moses (2010) supported Williams by noting that a successful policy implementation began with bringing together the key stakeholders. Furthermore, Williams found that mentoring policies were dependent on the school district's allocation to funding the resources (time, money, and personnel) outlined in the policy and procedures. Williams also emphasized that the more successful districts focused on the implementation of the policy in addition to writing the policy. Sun et al. (2014) found that teachers were more likely to teach successfully if they participated in professional development of longer duration. Therefore, these findings along with the outcomes of this case study have led to developing a scope and sequence of policy development aimed at assisting Superintendents and school boards with strategic, long-term plan for beginning teacher professional learning.

Matsumura, Garnier, and Resnick (2010) and Marsh, McCombs, and Martorell (2010) found that years of state and local policy supporting instructional coaches that work directly with classroom teachers and school administrators has resulted in an increase in teacher perceived positively increased performance. The results of Matsumura et al. research confirm the correlation between policy and collaborative process for policy development. Furthermore, Matsumura et al. noted that the teachers and administrators participated in defining the role and instructional approach the coaches would use as they worked with teachers. In addition to teacher and administrator collaboration, parent

participation should also be an essential member of the policy development (Lavery, 2014).

Lavery (2014) noted that the purpose of the role of policy in education can be ambiguous to parents, teachers, and even administrators. Furthermore, policy development collaboration requires intentional knowledge of the purpose, supporting knowledge on the topic, timeline and duration needed to complete the work (Lavery, 2014). Understanding the past practices of instructional coaching policy as a professional development strategy combined with a collaborative policy development framework provided a foundation for the framework suggested in the project in this study. The policy development purposed in this study is designed to utilize teacher leader development and collaboration between various stakeholders coming together to create sustainable, dedicated, and aligned to best practices professional development for beginning teachers (Berg, Carver, & Mangin, 2013).

School districts and policy makers have for over twenty years shared a collective concern for training and retaining educators (DeAngelis et al., 2014). DeAngelis et al. found that the quality and comprehensiveness of early professional learning combined with mentoring was more successful when school districts focused on quality and intentional beginning teacher support rather than random, isolated efforts. Furthermore, Shockley et al. (2013) noted that mentoring alone will not meet the needs of first-year teachers and that mentoring must be combined with a comprehensive support program. Therefore, Shockley et al. noted that first-year teachers require a multi-prong approach that is intentionally planned to reside at the school house level along with district

provided professional development. District leaders needed to focus on supporting novice teachers as beginning teachers build self-efficacy with teaching and also need to recognize that building relationships was a key strategy for understanding the novice teacher's unique needs. School policy development could assist as a supporting component within a comprehensive plan to support beginning teachers.

## Implementation

The implementation of the project spans over the course of 2014-2016 due to the nature of policy development and pacing within school districts. Additionally, the project communication plan requires application submissions that also impact the timing of program implementation. However, the existing infrastructure within a school district has on-going policy development. Professional development is not typically found in policy development so the idea of writing support for teachers through policy maybe a new concept to school leaders the process of policy development should be a normal part of the each district's scope of work. This section outlines resources and existing support, potential barriers, possible time, roles and responsibilities, project evaluation, justification, overall goals, key stakeholders, social change, and local change.

### Potential Resources and Existing Support

The school districts Superintendents will be the first stakeholder to review the purpose of the project (Appendix A) which includes the policy implementation guidelines. Therefore, the Superintendent and/or designees will work with individual divisions within their central office to co-construct the policy with multiple stakeholders. I will approach my current Superintendent and the Superintendent of the district in my

study to assist me with vetting my project proposal before applying to present at local conferences held for Superintendents across our state. During this first meeting with each Superintendent, I will share the project implementation guidelines. I will also seek their endorsement of my presentation as a partnership for helping me share my work with other superintendents.

**Potential Barriers**

There are limited professional conferences available and all require an application process typically 8-12 months prior to the conference. Therefore, I will need to begin with the two Superintendents familiar already with my case study all while staying diligent to the application process for presenting at one of the Superintendent conferences. Additionally, this type of policy is not frequently found in policy work so I predict I will have individuals who continue to believe supporting professional development through policy is not the appropriate or effective. As I encounter those types of individual and/or collective beliefs, I will use my own training in cognitive coaching to guide my interactions.

**Time Line**

The implementation of this project will occur during the 2014-2015 school year and continue into the 2015-2016 school year with presentations at local conferences. The following is an outline of potential milestones:

1. January 2015: Meet individually with my current Superintendent and the Superintendent of the district in this study to present the project.

2. February 2015-March 2015: Apply to present at conferences (local state conference of the district in this study) - Present at the local state conference of the district in this study for district administrators.
3. July 2016: (Pending Approval of Application) – Present at the two local state conferences of the district in this study for district and building administrators.
4. November 2015 and August 2016: Provide follow-up consultation to interested Superintendents and/or their designees

**Roles and Responsibility**

I will be the primary person implementing, coordinating, and further developing the project which primarily will be providing superintendents with the findings in literature, my own case study results, and an implementation guide for getting started on policy work related to supporting beginning teachers through professional learning. Once the superintendent and/or designee takes interest in policy work, I am available to the school district for consultation on the implementation guide and supporting evidence.

**Project Evaluation Plan**

I will provide a participant feedback form included in the project (Appendix A) at the end of each session (conference presentation) that includes information on whether superintendents found the information, insightful, useful, and whether they plan to share the information with district leaders. I will also make my implementation guide available through an email request. By having the conference participant request the guide, I can follow up with them later to see if they ever did anything toward policy development.

**Justification**

The complexity of raising student achievement in urban school districts first begins with ensuring that teachers are able to effectively teach students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, 2001). Additionally, Donaldson and Moore (2010) found that beginning teachers tended to be assigned to more challenging situations that included high teacher turnover in schools with additional challenges that come from families living in poverty. Furthermore, Donaldson and Moore suggested that new thinking about teacher professional support needed to include both the knowledge necessary to meet all students' needs along with variations of the types of learning that facilitate job embedded experiences.

**Overall Goals**

The goal of this project is to provide guaranteed job embedded professional learning opportunities for beginning teachers. With the development of policy, districts would be recognizing the importance of supporting beginning teachers and committing the fiscal resources. Penuel, Frank, Gallagher, and Youngs (2013) discussed the effects of teacher professional development supports some teachers receive once they enter the profession. . Therefore, this project is based on the mindset that it is the school district's responsibility to provide differentiated and guaranteed professional learning. Although using policy to support beginning teachers is a non-traditional approach, the idea of institutionalizing and committing to guaranteed professional development will increase teacher effectiveness and perhaps be a recruitment factor to entice new teachers.

**Key Stakeholders**

The primary stakeholders in this project are the superintendents and their district designees. The implementation or at minimum feedback on the project implementation guidelines is my goal to share with as many superintendents as possible. In addition to the Superintendent are the executive leaders that support the district improvement plan and the Superintendent's vision. Secondary stakeholders are the beginning teachers impacted by the policy development and implementation of procedures.

**Social Change**

Ensuring that students upon graduation have options for career and college begins at the start of their journey in kindergarten. Providing a guaranteed and viable educational experience begins with the teacher creating a learning environment that is responsive to the needs of the students and their families. If superintendents are able to address the concerns associated with beginning teachers and student learning, then through on-going job embedded professional learning these novice teachers will feel valued and supported.

**Local Change**

The implementation of a guaranteed beginning teacher program would provide on-going professional learning that is necessary for novice teachers to transfer their learned pedagogy into practice. Additionally, the fact that most professional development is subject to state funding and/or grant awards supports the need for districts to commit fiscally and personnel to adult learning as a strategy to increase student learning. Additionally, the implementation of a guaranteed program is a selling point to prospective teachers which assists with recruitment and reduces teacher attrition. The end

result is an increase in ensuring all students are engaged in rigorous learning leading to graduation with career and college options.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

## Project Implementation

The policy implementation guideline was designed to assist in teacher program development. Currently, school districts' efforts to provide quality teacher professional learning is inconsistent from district to district and funded either through state-provided federal money or private donors. The fiscal limitations make it challenging for leaders in the district leadership team, whose responsibility it is to create new teacher supports, to meet the teachers' needs in ways the beginning teachers find meaningful. This project addresses the need to prioritize professional learning for beginning teachers through policy development that formalizes a long-term commitment and prioritization of teacher development.

### Project Strengths

The strength of this project study is to provide superintendents a strategy for tackling the issues related to effectively educating students. Additional barriers for school districts are to support beginning teachers in a way that enables them to thrive as a professional while working under multiple conditions such as high-stakes evaluations and student achievement accountability. This project provides districts with a strategic approach to formalizing teacher professional development and ensuring that the superintendent is held accountable for effectively meeting the needs of all teachers. Once the policy is in place, the procedures will need to be formalized through the efforts of all stakeholders and especially the voices of beginning teachers.

## Project Limitations

The limitations for this project are rooted in traditional problems associated with policy development. One of the first barriers is the lack of stakeholder participation. Many times policy is developed in isolation (Washburn-Moses, 2010). My intentions are to address the problem that teaching is a high demand profession that directly impacts student learning and students' emotional well-being. The goal is to provide direct feedback to the district in this study. However, I do believe other superintendents would be interested in possible application of policy development in their districts. The first milestone will be getting my application approved to present at the conferences that support superintendent learning. I will have better odds of getting approved if I have one of the superintendents endorsing my presentation. I do not anticipate a fiscal cost other than my time and effort for sharing the policy implementation. However, if districts continue into policy development there would be costs associated with extra pay for teachers, district leadership time and effort, and the budget associated with the procedures and actual programming the school board approves. The biggest challenge, according to Washburn-Moses, will be the common barrier with policy development with the gap between the intent of the policy and the actual practices in the everyday school implementation.

## Recommendations

The recommendation of this project will require a school district's readiness to benefit. In this case, the district must be willing to invest in teacher professional learning as a strategic approach to increasing student achievement. The first part of this project

requires getting the information to superintendents and creating a learning experience for superintendents that is compelling and motivating. Once I have shared the implementation guideline, superintendents can partner the why and what of my plan to their preexisting process for policy development. Next, I would encourage superintendents to follow Step 1 in the guidelines, which is to conduct an internal needs assessment. This assessment then needs to be shared with those internal personnel that currently support and lead the professional development along with the executive leadership that conduct recommendations to the school board. Communication will be the key to successfully developing a policy that leads to a set of useful procedures that truly support teacher development. The policy guidelines describe the next steps as a collaborative policy building process. Once the policy is crafted, it will be up to the district leaders to create procedures and action steps that are aligned to the policy intent.

**Analysis of Scholarship**

The learning journey associated with understanding the attributes of conducting research far exceeds my expectation for the depth of knowledge I would acquire and the application of my new learning to my current work. As a practitioner, I have conducted informal research as a classroom teacher, principal, and central office executive. I have used quantitative and qualitative approaches when designing school-wide systems of support for students. I used surveys and feedback in many of my major decisions, which match my core belief to involve stakeholders. My transfer of learning has been to apply my new learnings to my current scope of work. Some of the research methods I have adopted into my practices are the following: to increase my familiarity with search

engines, the use of empirical literature in my professional research, the ability to identify the questions I want to know more about, my increased knowledge of reliability and validity issues related to data gathering and analysis, and one outcome I did not predict was my ability to hold a two-way conversation with district data experts on decisions that impact teachers and students. Additionally, I have overcome the challenges associated with conducting research and writing the results. The stamina and resiliency needed to complete each phase of the research along with the academic writing have confirmed I can complete anything I want to accomplish.

**Analysis of Project Development and Evaluation**

The route of a project development blends engaging in research with an application of my learning that aligns more with my beliefs as a practitioner. My current work at the central office requires me continually to refine my skills for system analysis and creation that aligns with our district improvement plan. As a former principal, I used data analysis everyday as I looked at student growth, teacher effectiveness, and system effectiveness. I supported my underpinnings with research mostly found through the works of other school-based practitioners. The project development provided me with an approach associated with conducting a literature review and an opportunity to engage in my experiential learning. The process of conducting interviews gave me a chance to explore someone else's journey without coming up with a solution. As a practitioner, I am engaged in problem solving daily. Someone will tell me their experience, and I have to figure out ways to support them. Conducting interviews for this case study gave me an opportunity to engage as a listener and observer. Upon the completion of the data

collection process, I appreciated the opportunity to apply my learning in an actual project that can be shared with other professionals interested in supporting student learning through teacher development. I gained a deeper understanding of the conditions related to adult learning, the challenges, and possible solutions. The data confirmed that adult learning is complex yet inevitable if educators believe that all students are guaranteed a viable, rigorous education. The teacher is the heart of that instruction and can accelerate or hinder a student's learning experience.

**Analysis of Leadership and Change**

In my current position, I am charged with a high degree of responsibility for making decisions that impact teacher professional development as related to both beginning and experienced teachers. The district I work in lacks a well-defined system of support that bridges the professional learning for first-year teachers. I have begun conversations with my superintendent regarding the possibilities of policy development as a strategy for committing our district allocations to the support of on-going mentoring, beginning teacher trainings and support. With the support of my current superintendent, I have an increased chance of presenting the project implementation guidelines to other superintendents at local conferences. The implications of strategic, well-defined, research-based professional learning will result in more students accessing learning and engaging in ways that optimize their educational experience. My hope is that through my research I will bring awareness to the on-going problem associated with teacher preparation and retention. The research process has changed me as a practitioner. I have

strategies for using empirical research to inform my understanding and more sophisticated skills for conducting qualitative analysis reviews.

## The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

I do believe my efforts have a greater purpose and contribution to my personal commitment that education is a partner in improving the inequities our students face in public education throughout our nation. The most important individual in a student's school life is their classroom teacher. I have witnessed unsatisfactory teachers time and time again be protected by union representation while students suffered at the hands of unprepared and defeated teachers. I also saw that with intentional support, mentoring, and multiple strategies of adult learning beginning teachers created foundational practices that followed them throughout their career. Additionally, I believe as leaders in education, we have a moral obligation to do whatever it takes to increase learning for every student including the use of funds and human resources necessary to keep our teaching techniques current and effective at teaching to today's students for their futures.

## Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

School board policy development and implementation provide a governance process within school districts that assists with prioritizing compliance along with major initiatives that support high student achievement. My project is policy development centered on professional learning support that typically is addressed in school districts outside of the policy development realm. However, the school district in this study has recently begun to use policy development on non-traditional, non-compliance initiatives that address concerns related to student inequities and discriminating practices.

Additional research would need to be addressed in order to assist with the policy development in a large-scale research design like state government. The project guidelines can be used in various settings such as urban, suburban, and rural school districts. The policy implementation guidelines are a way for district leaders to begin the conversation and collaboration necessary for full-scale policy writing.

Additional research is necessary to further understand issues related to the implementation of policy and whether local school district policy design results in an increase in budget allocation necessary to provide on-going mentoring and professional development to beginning teachers. Therefore, in addition to the policy writing and implementation into program development and program evaluation, district leaders need to determine how these steps lead to student academic success. However, we know from the research that one of the strongest correlations of student success is the student's teacher. Lindsey, et al. (2007) noted that student achievement is impacted by high quality teaching. The past, present, and future of each student still continues to be linked to the classroom teacher. Lastly, the district leaders own the responsibility to engage in finding solutions of educating the educators.

## Conclusion

Finding multiple solutions to support first-year teachers continues to be a challenge for district to prioritize with time and money. However, as Ellsasser (2008) noted, teachers are the single most important factor in a student's education. The findings in this study support and subsequent recommendation for policy development support the idea that educational leaders in charge of setting the school district's vision and selecting

supporting initiatives also have a moral imperative to finding multiple ways of ensuring that every school teacher teaches at a distinguished level. This commitment to excellence requires intentional, on-going professional development to all teachers and an increased level of support to those beginning teachers entering the profession. The literature review conducted along with the interview findings in this project provide guiding information that our beginning teachers come with great hope and passion for student learning but find the job expectations to be overwhelming and at times disheartening. Our teachers will have a better chance of meeting every child's needs if they have the support and encouragement necessary to understand the complexity of the instructional skills and professional toughness it takes to endure through the challenges presented by students, parents/guardians, colleagues, and administrators. Lastly, policy development along with the commitment to strategic professional development provides school district leaders with the means of coaching beginning teachers to be of high quality or helping teachers out of the profession. Teachers are the single most important person in a student's school life and the mentors in this study seem to have been, as shared in the mentees' interviews, one of the most important people in their teaching development. Together, district leaders and teachers have a united purpose to preparing every student for a future in our global society.

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Appendix A: The Project Study

# *Superintendent's Report*

Project Study: School District

Walden Doctoral Student: Melanie Strey

*Exploring the Experiences and Relationships of First-Year Teachers and Mentors*

2014

## Abstract

Educators have a moral imperative and job embedded expectation to effectively teach all students. Educators are charged with continuous personal growth and improved instructional practices. Researchers have theorized that adult learning takes place when there are multiple opportunities to engage in critical thought and construct their own understanding. The purpose of this qualitative project study was to explore the lived experiences of first-year teachers and their mentors teaching in a culturally diverse school district. A set of semi-structured interview questions were used to guide conversations held within individual mentee interviews and a mentor focus group.

The interview data were then triangulated with observational data and field notes. The coding process began as an inductive analysis that led to a deductive approach as repetitive themes emerged. The top six themes suggested that through a mentor-mentee relationship, mentees reported feeling valued, safe, supported, trusted, encouraged, and believed. Many of the mentors felt that their efforts did directly impact student learning whether through consulting with a mentee on classroom management or providing the mentee with assistance in dealing with an uncomfortable situation with a teammate. The recommendations include the development of long-term solutions for supporting beginning teachers during the first three years of their profession with mentoring as an essential component. This study informs social change as a tool for understanding the complexity of student achievement and supporting a district commitment that formulizes through policy writing the commitment to professional learning.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative project study was to explore the lived experiences of first-year teachers, teaching in a school district that has a culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse student population, that have chosen to participate in an optional district provided mentoring program. The secondary purpose of this study was to understand the role of the mentor and their lived experiences and beliefs about mentoring.

**Research**

An analysis of research regarding adult learning theories and specific research related to beginning teachers indicates a gap between what is expected from entering teachers and his or her higher education preparation. Additionally, research indicates that there are many challenges presented to beginning teachers who teach in highly diverse and low-socio economic public schools. The support that teacher receive during these beginning years in the professional does impact the teachers' self-efficacy and ability to better meet the needs of all students.

## Background of the Existing Problem and Supporting Literature

The supporting and underpinning research suggested that the conceptual theories of adult learning of critical thinking, reflective thinking, and self-efficacy were all elements of the mentors and mentees' experiences in this district's mentoring program. Additionally, a review of educational policy resulted in limited references directly related to linking policy and beginning teacher professional development. However, the research reviewed indicated that equitable practices happening concurrently with policy development can potentially lead to improved institutional practices. The following researchers provide highlights of theorists and researchers and were taken from empirical studies.

Professional development continues to be a critical component to increasing teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Lindsey, Martinez, and Lindsey (2007) noted that student achievement is impacted by high quality teaching. Furthermore, Lindsey et al. noted that culturally responsive teaching is difficult to achieve if the teacher's core beliefs are not in line with culturally proficient actions. Additionally, the strengths and barriers of teaching in urban schools is what Bergeron (2008) called a "cultural disequilibrium" (p. 5). The challenge comes not from the diversity but from the lack of cultural understanding of cultures that are different from one's self (Zozakiewicz, 2010). Teachers face many challenges through the national movements to improve education through new curriculum, effective classroom management strategies, feedback from their administrators and peers, diverse parent/guardian needs, peer collaboration expectations, school and district politics, working collaboratively with fellow staff, and the learning

styles of students contrary to the first-year teacher's knowledge and preparation (Bergeron, 2008). However, with new challenges and a shift in education to more rigorous and all inclusive educational practices, gaps between teacher preparation and professional demands are more apparent now that states have policy on the use of comprehensive teacher evaluation practices (Chelsey & Jordan, 2012). However, even with policy, there must be a means of helping educators improve their practices. Chesley and Jordan (2012) noted that mentoring helps bridge the gap between teachers' undergraduate teaching preparation and the "realities of 21st century schools" (p. 2) and students. A lack of adequate training and preparation leaves first-year teachers unprepared to teach within in a classroom of diverse learners (Wang & Ha, 2012). Kyriakchides (2008) agreed with Wang & Ha noting that in addition to traditional university preparation, teachers do not develop their skills in a uniformed manner, which complicates providing the right balance of professional development for first-year teachers. Professional development must be a balance of deepening content knowledge on what is being taught and developing stronger instructional pedagogy to engage successfully with all students. Brookfield (2010) noted that participants engage in critical thinking when there is an exchange of learning that creates both cognitive and affective responses.

Policy development could be a potential strategy for improving teacher practice depending on the school district's historical use and intended practices of policy writing in the governance of fiscal and human resources as well as the district's commitment to improving institutional practices to equitable for all students (Whipp, 2013). Policy

written to draw teachers into a cohesive means of support is critical as Menon (2012) noted that many times first-year teachers default to working alone because the novice teachers are placed in schools with challenging student behaviors alongside colleagues that are not interested in helping the first-year teacher be successful. Additionally, policy work through a social justice lens must mandate that all educators have on-going learning that addresses race and poverty in relation to the district's institutional practices (Mitchell, 2008). Mitchell (2008) noted that culturally responsive teachers go beyond teaching with pencil and paper yet throughout their teaching teachers keep the student expectations high and the curriculum rigorous.

Policy work in regards to instructional coaches and provided insight into the potential that policy written for beginning teachers has the potential of becoming an effective strategy for countering the growing problem where the demands in the profession are beyond the scope of teacher preparation happening in teacher development university programs (Whipp, 2013). In addition to instructional coaching, the successes reported through research on mentoring suggest that policy for professional development must include a mentoring component. Ehrich, Hansford, and Tenant (2004) noted from the mentees' perspective a set of four cited outcomes from the mentor-mentee relationship as collaboration, reflective practices, personal satisfaction, and mutual growth.

Cochran-Smith and Villegas (2014) noted that policy does exist in the area of professional development but typically falls into teacher preparation requirements and through the lens of teacher evaluation. However, the gap in research is that after an

extensive search in empirical journals, few articles were found that directly spoke to professional development policy. Additionally, the district in this study does not have any policy related to supporting teachers and para educators. However, the district in this study has recently conducted a collaborative process for identifying parent and family engagement which has resulted in an increase in funding and resources directly related to two-way parent engagement. Whipp (2013) further described that intentional novice teacher professional support, although complicated, is a necessary social justice practice. Therefore, the district school board and superintendent in this study is committed to revising existing policy and writing new policy aimed at improving the educational outcomes for all students. The district has also demonstrated a readiness to benefit from this project as the district committee for parent and family engagement recently successfully used a collaborative framework to create new policy.

**Methods**

- This project study consisted of an instrumental case study approach used to explore the mentor and mentee's experiences as they engaged in problems of practice through conversation, sharing, and modeling.
- The project study was bound to participants in the school district and consisted of 5 individual interviews of mentees, one focus group of 5 mentors, and two observations of teachers participating in this study's mentoring program.
- The criteria-based selection for choosing mentors was the following: must have mentored first-year teachers in the school district during the 2013-2014 school year and agree to the interview and observations during the summer of 2014.

- A semi-structured approach allowed for gathering data from each interviewee that was guided by a list of questions.

**Findings**

*Mentees*

Once the data were analyzed, there were 3 main themes that that emerged and described by all the mentees as the following ideas:

- Mentees felt safe to talk to the mentors and confident that the information shared was kept confidential
- Mentees felt that the conversations were focused on the mentees' needs, current wonderings or happenings, and done in a way that validated their feelings.
- Mentees engaged in reflective conversation with their mentors in multiple settings (pre/post conversations and training activities)

*Mentors*

The mentors expressed similar reflections as the mentees. The following main themes emerged from the focus group analysis:

- Mentors felt that mentees were faced with challenges in the classroom with the students and most of the mentees' initiated conversations were centered on dealing with student behaviors, engaging lesson activities, and figuring out what and how to access learning.
- Mentors believed that through their mentoring relationships that mentees expressed thankfulness for having someone to talk to and to listen to them.

- Mentors also felt that many of the internal school resources for new teachers are inconsistent from building to building but that the buildings with administrators who took the time to work with beginning teachers the novice teachers had a higher degree of self-efficacy.
- The mentors shared that they too want mentoring and on-going support from their supervisors.

**Summary**

Teachers must be grounded in a strong sense of purpose and beliefs that every person has culturally defined needs that need to be respected (Nuri-Robins et al.). Therefore, exploring the mentor and mentee's perspectives offered a depth of data collection that cannot be achieved through quantitative methods alone. The research provided a deeper understanding of the individual's journey and the mentors' lived experiences as supported the novice teachers' transitions from being a student of teaching to being an instructor of students.

**Recommendation**

The institutionalizing of the professional development for novice teachers through the adoption of policy, school districts would require an investment in the necessary resources. In theory, supporting beginning teachers would go beyond grant availability and live within the school district's based education funding allocation as a priority and strategy for increasing student achievement. Current research, along with my own case study results, support the idea that providing on-going, job embedded professional develop for teachers leads to more effective teaching and student learning.

# Supporting New Teachers: Policy Development

**Audience:**

- Superintendent in the school district in this study
- Director of Professional Learning in the school district in this study
- School Board Directors in the school district in this study

**Call to Action:**

Educators have a moral imperative to support incoming teachers to the profession. Our business is to educate all students for their futures. Therefore, superintendents must utilize all resources to ensure the highest quality teaching takes place every day and for every student. Lindsey et al. (2007) noted that student achievement is impacted by high quality teaching. The past, present, and future of each student still continues to be linked to the classroom teacher. Additionally, the graduation rates and student achievement data in this school district support the need to think and do differently as educators.

Palardy and Rumberger (2008) also shared that first-year teachers in their longitudinal study found that teaching practices are more likely to be improved if novice teachers are engaged in professional learning. DeAngelis, Wall, & Che (2014) found that the quality and comprehensiveness of early professional learning combined with mentoring was more successful when school districts focused on quality and intentional beginning teacher support rather than random, isolated efforts.

**Action Steps and Timeline:**

| Policy and Procedures: Supporting Beginning Teachers | |
|---|---|
| January 2015 | Present Project Findings to Superintendent and Director of Professional Learning and Purpose Phase I of Policy Development |
| February 2015 | Submit Superintendent's Report to Board of Directors and ask for 1 year Board Task Force led by the Director of Professional Development to review the current state professional development for beginning teachers and create board recommendations for potential policy and program revisions |
| March-September 2015 | Task Force convened and approved by the School Board |
| October 2015 | Meeting 1: Developing the Purpose: Create milestone indicators and strategies potential barriers |
| November 2015 | Meeting 2: Study Session 1: Review literature related to beginning teachers' challenges (professional demands and university preparation), effective adult learning methods, and policy development as a potential component to continued new teacher support |
| January 2016 | Meeting 3: Study Session 2: Continue literature review and select subcommittees: (policy writing & program reviews) |
| February 2016 | Meeting 4: Sub-committee work sessions<br>Policy Writing: Writing a draft of possible policy language<br>Program Reviews: Review effective program reviews looking for key components of new teacher programs for possible school board recommendation. |
| March 2016 | Meeting 5: Sub-committee work sessions continue |
| April 2016 | Meeting 6: Task Force sub-committees all reconvene to share sub-committees' findings and draft policy |
| May 2016 | Meeting 7: Task Force provides a recommendation to the School Board |
| June 2016 | Meeting 8: School Board makes recommendation to the Superintendent & determines whether to move forward with Task Force recommendations |
| July-August 2016 | Superintendent and Director of Professional Development work with committee to create the procedures and secure funding |
| September 2016 | Implement Policy and Procedures |

| **Conference Application: Provide State Superintendent's with Project Findings** | |
|---|---|
| January 2015 | Apply for Speaking Engagement:<br>• Washington Association of School Administrators |

# Selecting Task Force for Policy and Procedure Development: Supporting Beginning Teachers

| | |
|---|---|
| **Purpose** | The Director of Professional Learning will invite on behalf of the Superintendent and Board of Directors to study the current reality of beginning teachers and the school district's current programming. |
| **Task Force Committee Members Selection: 27** | Beginning Teachers: 3 (representing elementary, middle, & high school)<br>Experienced Teachers: 3 (representing elementary, middle, & high school)<br>Mentor Teachers: 2<br>District Teacher on Special Assignment: 2 (representing ELA and Math)<br>Building Instructional Coach: 3 (representing elementary, middle, & high school)<br>ELL and Special Education Teachers: 3 (representing elementary, middle, & high school)<br>Building Administrators: 3 (representing elementary, middle, & high school)<br>District Administrators: 4 (Director and Assistant Director of Professional Learning, Assistant Director of Standard Based Instruction, Content Coordinator)<br>Community Member: 2 (Representing our Latino and African American Communities)<br>Parent Member: 2 |
| **Next Steps:** | Members will be invited and asked to confirm participation for the duration from June 2015-June 2016 |
| | The Director of Professional Learning will create the following communication tools:<br>• Web Access Site-to house all archived documents<br>• Post Agendas and Meeting Notes<br>• Post References and Articles<br>• Vet and Share Milestones with Executive Cabinet throughout the Year-long Task Force work |

# Board Task Force: Policy and Program Recommendations Meeting Agendas

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Purpose** | Meeting 1: Developing the Purpose: Create milestone indicators and strategies potential barriers | | |
| **Agenda**<br>*Snacks Provided | 5:30-6:30 pm<br>6:30-7:30 pm<br><br><br><br><br>7:30-8:00 pm | Introduction<br>Review Project Study and Supporting Literature<br>Partner Work: Article Reading<br>Whole Group Share Out & Next Steps | Director of Professional Learning |
| **Next Steps** | Individual Task Force Member Article Reading & Meeting Preparation | | |
| | Summary Notes Posted on Task Force Web Page | | |
| | Summary Provide to Superintendent | | |
| **Purpose** | Meeting 2: Study Session 1: Review literature related to beginning teachers' challenges (professional demands and university preparation), effective adult learning methods, and policy development as a potential component to continued new teacher support | | |
| **Agenda**<br>*Snacks Provided | 5:30-6:30 pm<br><br>6:30-7:30 pm<br><br><br>7:30-8:00 pm | Review Previous Meeting<br>Protocol: Create a Common Belief and Set Committee Goals<br>Whole Group Share Out | Director of Professional Learning |
| **Next Steps** | Individual Task Force Member Article Reading & Meeting Preparation | | |
| | Summary Notes Posted on Task Force Web Page | | |
| | Summary Provide to Superintendent | | |
| **Purpose** | Meeting 3: Study Session 2: Continue literature review and select subcommittees: (policy writing & program reviews) | | |
| **Agenda**<br>*Snacks Provided | 5:30-6:30 pm<br><br>6:30-7:30 pm<br><br><br>7:30-8:00 pm | Review Previous Meeting<br>Protocol: Create a Common Belief and Set Committee Goals<br>Agree on Task Force Outcomes | Director of Professional Learning |
| **Next Steps** | Individual Task Force Member Article Reading & Meeting | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Preparation | | |
| | Summary Notes Posted on Task Force Web Page | | |
| | Summary Provide to Superintendent | | |
| **Purpose** | Meeting 4: Sub-committee work sessions<br>Policy Writing: Writing a draft of possible policy language<br>Program Reviews: Review effective program reviews looking for key components of new teacher programs for possible school board recommendation. | | |
| **Agenda**<br>*Snacks Provided | 5:30-6:30 pm<br><br>6:30-7:30 pm<br><br><br><br>7:30-8:00 pm | Review Previous Meeting<br>Sub-Committee: Policy Draft<br>&<br>Program Components<br>Select Additional Sub-Committee Work Sessions | Director of Professional Learning |
| **Next Steps** | Individual Task Force Member Article Reading & Meeting Preparation | | |
| | Summary Notes Posted on Task Force Web Page | | |
| | Summary Provide to Superintendent | | |
| **Purpose** | Meeting 5: Sub-committee work sessions continue | | |
| **Agenda**<br>*Snacks Provided | 5:30-6:30 pm<br><br>6:30-7:30 pm<br><br>7:30-8:00 pm | Review Previous Meeting<br>Continue working in Sub-Committees<br>Whole Group Share Out | Director of Professional Learning |
| **Next Steps** | Continue to Work in Sub-Committees | | |
| | Summary Notes Posted on Task Force Web Page | | |
| | Summary Provide to Superintendent | | |
| **Purpose** | Meeting 6: Task Force sub-committees all reconvene to share sub-committees' findings and draft policy | | |
| **Agenda**<br>*Snacks Provided | 5:30-6:30 pm<br><br>6:30-7:45 pm<br><br><br>7:45-8:00 pm | Review Previous Meeting<br>Whole Group Policy Review & Prioritize Recommendations<br>Select Sub-Committee to create School Board Presentation | Director of Professional Learning |
| **Next Steps** | Sub-Committee Board Presentation | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Summary Notes Posted on Task Force Web Page | | |
| | Summary Provide to Superintendent | | |
| **Purpose** | Meeting 7: Task Force provides a recommendation to the School Board | | |
| **Agenda**<br>*Snacks Provided | 5:00-6:00 pm<br><br><br>6:00-7:00 pm | Board Work Session Presentation with School Board<br>Task Force Celebration (whole group) | Director of Professional Learning |
| **Next Steps** | Task Force work completed | | |
| | Summary Notes Posted on Task Force Web Page | | |
| | Task Force Updated on School Board and Superintendent's Next Steps | | |
| **Purpose** | Meeting 8: School Board makes recommendation to the Superintendent & determines whether to move forward with Task Force recommendations | | |
| **Agenda**<br>*Snacks Provided | 7:00-9:00 pm | School Board Meeting: Board Recommendation | Director of Professional Learning |
| **Next Steps** | Task Force Invited to Attend and Hear the School Board Decision on the Policy | | |
| | Summary Notes Posted on Task Force Web Page | | |
| | Director Communicates Board Decisions to the Teaching Community | | |

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Appendix B: First-Year Teacher Invitation to Participate

June 24, 2014

Dear First-Year Teacher,

My name is Melanie Strey, and I am a researcher with Walden University. I am conducting a research project on exploring the relationships between first-year teachers and their mentors. I am inviting you to consider voluntarily participating in a one-on-one interview. Also, I hope to observe at least two different mentee and mentor in-person mentoring sessions. Mentors will receive an invitation to voluntarily participate so there is a chance your mentor will decline my invitation.

The interview I hope to conduct consists of the following:

- One interview lasting up to 45 minutes
- Occurs during an agreed upon date between you and me taking place sometime between June 2014 and the end of July 2014
- Observation: I will observe at least two different mentors and mentees participating in a mentoring sessions. You can volunteer to be interviewed and observed. However, if you prefer not to be observed, you can volunteer for the interview only. Participants for the observation part will be chosen after all the letters of consent are received and not interviewees will be observed.

I hope to select 7-10 volunteers that represent different teaching levels and contents, gender, and race/ethnicity, if the number of volunteering first-year teachers exceeds 10.

I am a former principal and director in your district prior to February 2014. My current work location is in a neighboring school district as a director of learning and teaching. My role as a researcher is not related to my current professional position but is part of my role as a graduate student with Walden University. If you have questions, you can contact Executive Director of Assessment.

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the district in this study will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. All information is kept anonymous and confidential. All data is secured in a locked location and disposed after 5 years.

Your consideration to participate is greatly appreciated. The results of this study will be shared with your district's leadership team. However, if you decline my invitation to participate or discontinue once the interview process has started, your decision either way will not negatively impact your relationship with your district or myself. Additionally, participation or non-participation in this study does not impact any future mentoring that may or may not be provided by your school district.

If you would like to voluntarily participate in this study, and receive a letter of consent outlining in detail the process please contact me using my University email address: (x) by Friday, June 27th. Thank you in advance for your consideration. If I do not hear back from you by Tuesday, July 1st, then I will assume you are not interested. Again, thank you for taking the time to read my invitation.

Sincerely,
Melanie Strey

Appendix C: Mentor Teacher Invitation to Participate

June 24, 2014

Dear District Mentor,

My name is Melanie Strey, and I am a researcher with Walden University. I am conducting a research project on exploring the relationships between first-year teachers and their mentors. I am inviting you to consider voluntarily participating in a group interview with other district mentors. If no other district mentors volunteer, then the group interview format would convert into an individual interview.

Also, I would also like to invite you to consider allowing me to observe an in-person conversation between you and your mentee. I hope to observe at least to different mentee and mentor in-person conversations. Mentees will receive an invitation to voluntarily participate so there is a chance your mentee will decline my invitation.

The interview I hope to conduct consists of the following:

- One focus group interview lasting up to 60 minutes (all mentors together)
- Occurs during an agreed upon date sometime between June 2014 and the end of July 2014
- Observation: I will observe at least two different mentors and mentees participating in a mentoring sessions. You can volunteer to be interviewed and observed. However, if you prefer not to be observed, you can volunteer for the interview only. Participants for the observation part will be chosen after all the letters of consent are received.

I am a former principal and director in your district prior to February 2014. My current work location is in a neighboring school district as a director of learning and teaching. My role as a researcher is not related to my current professional position but is part of my role as a graduate student with Walden University. If you have questions, you contact the Executive Director.

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the district in this study will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. All information is kept anonymous and confidential. All data is secured in a locked location and disposed after 5 years.

Your consideration to participate is greatly appreciated. The results of this study will be shared with your district's leadership team. However, if you decline my invitation to participate or discontinue once the interview process has started, your decision either way will not negatively impact your relationship with your district or myself. Additionally,

participation or non-participation in this study does not impact any future mentoring that may or may not be provided by your school district.

If you would like to voluntarily participate in this study and receive a letter of consent outlining in detail the process, please contact me using my University email address: (x) by Friday, June 27th. Thank you in advance for your consideration. If I do not hear back from you by Monday, June 30th, then I will assume you are not interested. Again, thank you for taking the time to read my invitation.

Sincerely,
Melanie Strey

Appendix D: First-Year Teacher Consent to Participate

June 24, 2014

Dear Participant,

Thank you for indicating in your email that you would like to participate in my research study that will explore the relationship between first-year teachers and their mentors. Despite the vast amount of research that has been conducted on preparing first-year teachers transitioning from teacher preparation programs to teaching, there is still a gap of understanding on how teachers, in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, continue to develop their skills once they enter the profession.

**Background Information:**
The purpose of this qualitative project study is to explore the lived experiences of first-year teachers, teaching in a school district that has a culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse student population, that have chosen to participate in an optional district provided mentoring program. The secondary purpose of this study is to understand the role of the mentor and their lived experiences and beliefs about mentoring.

**Procedures:**
By agreeing to this letter of consent, you have been asked to consider an in-person interview and observation or interview only. Please note that if more than two mentees volunteer to be observed in a mentoring session, my data collection methods will be to focus on only observing two pairs as more is not necessary at this time.

*Interview:* The interview will take place at your school or a designated room at the district office that provides privacy. The interview will only occur with you and I in the room and will be audio recorded. I will take notes during the interview to assist me later when I reflect and listen to the interview. The interview will be scheduled so that you will not be seen by other interviewers before or after your interview.

*Observation:* The observation consists of me taking notes and audio recording a conversation between you and your mentor so that I can reflect on the information shared. I will not ask any questions and will simply be noting down the verbal and non-verbal exchanges expressed during the mentoring session. Participants for the observation will be chosen after all the letters of consent are received by the researcher. Not all participants will be needed as only two observations are needed. Observations will take place at a location at the district office or the mentee's school.

**Please put in x in the box that best fits how you would like to participation.**

☐ One interview lasting up to 45 minutes (only)

OR

- One interview lasting up to 45 minutes **and** One observation of a face-to-face mentoring conversation with your mentor

Here is a sample question for the interview:

- How would you describe your teaching experience?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the district in this study will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Your consideration to participate is greatly appreciated.

The results of this study will be shared with your district's leadership team. However, if you decline my invitation to participate or discontinue once the interview process has started, your decision either way will not negatively impact your relationship with your district or myself. Additionally, participation or non-participation in this study does not impact any future mentoring that may or may not be provided by your school district. Also, you will be given the opportunity to check the written transcripts of the interview. This is also voluntary and you are still welcome to participate even if you do not want to check the transcripts.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:** Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue or uncomfortableness. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The benefit of participating will be to tell your personal experience that could potentially impact how first-year teachers are supported in future years. Additionally, upon completion of the study, you will receive a written summary of the results of the study.

**Payment:**
Each participant will receive a small token of thank you in the form of a coffee/tea gift card.

**Privacy:**
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by assigning each participant an anonymous pseudonym (Participant 1, Participant 2). All data will be transcribed and kept in a secure, locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**
My role as a researcher is not related to my current professional position in a neighboring school district but is part of my role as a graduate student with Walden University.

You may ask any questions you have now or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone (x) and/or email:(X). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call (X). She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is(X). Walden University's approval number for this study is 06-20-14-0266083and it expires on June 19, 2015.

***Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above. Please remember to indicate your preference for participation as shared in the Procedure section.***

Please keep a copy of this form for you records. After receiving your letter of consent, I will send you a follow up email asking for your preferred dates, time, and location. If I do not receive a returned letter of consent and/or any questions you might have before giving your consent by (date), I will assume you have chosen not to participate.

Again, thank you for your time and have a wonderful rest of the school year

Sincerely,
Melanie Strey

Appendix E: Mentor Teacher Consent to Participate

June 24, 2014

Dear Participant,

Thank you for indicating in your email that you would like to participate in my research study that will explore the relationship between first-year teachers and their mentors. Despite the vast amount of research that has been conducted on preparing first-year teachers transitioning from teacher preparation programs to teaching, there is still a gap of understanding on how teachers, in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, continue to develop their skills once they enter the profession.

**Background Information:**
The purpose of this qualitative project study is to explore the lived experiences of first-year teachers, teaching in a school district that has a culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse student population, that have chosen to participate in an optional district provided mentoring program. The secondary purpose of this study is to understand the role of the mentor and their lived experiences and beliefs about mentoring.

**Procedures:**
By agreeing to this letter of consent, you have been asked to consider an in-person group interview along with other mentors and observation or interview only. Please note that if more than two mentors volunteer to be observed in a mentoring session, my data collection methods will be to focus on only observing two pairs as more is not necessary at this time. Also, if only one mentor volunteers to participate, I will not conduct a focus group but will interview the one mentor one-on-one.

*Focus Group*: This is an interview that takes place with 2 or more mentors. You will be asked the same questions and be given an opportunity to share your thoughts and hear thoughts of other mentors. This will be my preferred method of interviewing mentors unless only one mentor volunteers to participate in which I would use an interview process. The group interview will take place at a designated location (determined by you and the other mentors) at the district office and audio recorded.

*Interview:* The interview will take place at your office or a designated room at the district office that provides privacy. The interview will only occur with you and I in the room and will be audio recorded. I will take notes during the interview to assist me later when I reflect and listen to the interview. The interview will be scheduled so that you will not be seen by other interviewers before or after your interview.
*Observation:* The observation consists of me taking notes and audio recording a conversation between you and your mentor. I will not ask any questions and will simply be noting down the verbal and non-verbal exchanges expressed during the mentoring session. Participants for the observation will be chosen after all the letters of consent are

received by the researcher. Not all participants will be needed as only two observations are needed. Observations will take place at a location at the district office or the mentee's school.

**Please put in x in the box that best fits how you would like to participation.**

- ☐ One group interview (mentors) lasting up to 60 minutes or a one-on-one interview if only one mentor volunteers to participate

OR

- ☐ One group interview (mentors) lasting up to 60 minutes or a one-on-one interview if only one mentor volunteers to participate **and** One observation of a face-to-face mentoring conversation with your mentor

Here is a sample question for the focus group interview.

- How do you determine which elements of teaching you will focus on with your mentees?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the district in this study will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Your consideration to participate is greatly appreciated.

The results of this study will be shared with your district's leadership team. However, if you decline my invitation to participate or discontinue once the interview process has started, your decision either way will not negatively impact your relationship with your district or myself. Additionally, participation or non-participation in this study does not impact any future mentoring that may or may not be provided by your school district. Also, you will be given the opportunity to check the written transcripts of the interview. This is also voluntary and you are still welcome to participate even if you do not want to check the transcripts.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue or uncomfortableness. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The benefit of participating will be to tell your personal experience that could potentially impact how first-year teachers are supported in future years.

**Payment:**

Each participant will receive a small token of thank you in the form of a coffee/tea gift card.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by assigning each participant an anonymous pseudonym (Participant 1, Participant 2). All data will be transcribed and kept in a

secure, locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**
My role as a researcher is not related to my current professional position in a neighboring school district but is part of my role as a graduate student with Walden University.

You may ask any questions you have now or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone (X) and/or email:(X). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call (X) She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is(X). Walden University's approval number for this study is 06-20-14-0266083 and it expires on June 19, 2015.

***Statement of Consent: I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, "I consent", I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above. Please remember to indicate your preference for participation as shared in the Procedure section.***

Please keep a copy of this form for you records. After receiving your letter of consent, I will send you a follow up email asking for your preferred dates, time, and location. If I do not receive a returned letter of consent and/or any questions you might have before giving your consent by July1st, I will assume you have chosen not to participate.
Again, thank you for your time and have a wonderful rest of the school year

Sincerely,

Melanie Strey Melanie.strey@waldenu.edu 253-561-1662 (cell)

Appendix F: First-Year Teacher and Mentor Email Memo for Non-Participants

Date

Dear Participant,
Thank you for your email response to my invitation to participate. I appreciate your response and respect your decision not to participate.
I wish you the very best in your profession.

Sincerely,

Melanie Strey

Or

Date

Dear Participant,
Thank you for your email response to my invitation to participate. I appreciate your willingness to participate. There was a large response of potential participates and at this time you have not be selected to participate. However, I do greatly appreciate the time you took to respond to my request.

I wish you the very best in your profession

Sincerely,

Melanie Strey

# Appendix G: Focus Group Interview Date and Time

Date

Dear (Mentor),

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. I will be conducting the focus group in June of 2014. Please indicate the best day of the week and time that works you. Exact dates and times will be sent to you using your district email or if you prefer I use a different email please send me the additional email address.

The group interview will be take place at the district office. The exact room will be determined after the date and time have been set. Again, thank you in advance for your willingness to participate. I look forward to meeting you and learning from your experiences.

Sincerely,

Melanie Strey

- ☐ Monday
- ☐ Tuesday
- ☐ Wednesday
- ☐ Thursday
- ☐ Friday

During the Week:

- ☐ 7-8 am
- ☐ 12-1 pm
- ☐ 4-5 pm
- ☐ 5-6 pm
- ☐ 7-8 pm
- ☐ Other_____

- ☐ Saturday
  - ☐ 8-9 am
  - ☐ 9-10 am
  - ☐ Other_____

# Appendix H: First-Year Teacher Interview Date and Time

Date

Dear (Mentee),

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research project. I will be conducting the interviews in June of 2014 and/or July 2014. Please indicate the best day of the week and time that works you. Exact dates and times will be sent to you using your district email unless you provide me with an alternate email you would like me to use.

Again, thank you in advance for your willingness to participate. I look forward to meeting you and learning from your experiences.

Sincerely,

Melanie Strey

Please indicate the best day and write in a preferred time.

June:
- ☐ Monday
- ☐ Tuesday
- ☐ Wednesday
- ☐ Thursday
- ☐ Friday
- ☐ Saturday
- ☐ Time_____

July:
- ☐ Monday
- ☐ Tuesday
- ☐ Wednesday
- ☐ Thursday
- ☐ Friday
- ☐ Saturday
- ☐ Time_____

Please indicate the interview location you prefer. Check all that apply to you.
- ☐ *Covington Library*
- ☐ *District Office*
- ☐ *Your classroom if available*
- ☐ *Other*_____

# Appendix I: First-Year Teacher Interview Guide

Date

Dear (Name of Mentee),

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my project study. The purpose of this study is to explore mentoring through the view point of the mentee and mentor. The information gleaned from this project study will be shared with the executive leadership of professional development in your school district. As a reminder, all information shared with me is kept confidential.

Today, you will be asked a series of questions regarding your feeling, thoughts, and ideas as related to the content in the questions. You can ask me to stop at any time for any reason. Again, I thank you in advance for your participation and contributions to this research.

Thank you,

Melanie Strey

- The interview will take no longer than 45 minutes.
- The interview will be taped recorded and transcribed.
- Please let me know at any time during the interview if you have questions and/or need clarification.
- Please let me know if for any reason you need the interview to stop.

# Appendix J: First-Year Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me about yourself.

    Investigating question:

        How long have you been teaching and what grade and/or content?

        Have you taught in any other school district?

        If so, how many districts and how long?

2. How would you describe your teaching experience?

    Investigating question:

        What is one decision you've made about teaching and learning in the past month?

        What would you say were one or two of the main elements you were considering when making that decision?

        How typical is it of your decisions in general that you consider those elements?

3. How would you describe your experience participating in the mentor program?

    Investigating question:

        How satisfied or unsatisfied would you describe your experience participating in the mentor program?

        Which one or two components of the mentoring relationship did you find satisfy or unsatisfying?

4. How do you determine what elements of teaching you will work on?

    Investigating question:

How would you describe the students in your class?

What are some of the challenges you've encountered in your first-year of teaching?

What are one or two factors you consider when choosing an instructional method?

How typical is it in your teaching to consider those factors?

5. Would you comment on how authentic and/or useful or unauthentic and/or not useful participating in the mentor program affects your professional growth, if any?

   Investigating question:

   How much time is devoted to communicating to your mentor (daily, weekly, monthly, never, or it varies)?

   How would you describe the components of the mentoring program?

   What is your philosophy on how adults learn best?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add to understanding your experience participating in the mentor program?

   Investigating question:

   How are some of the components needed when teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students?

   How typical is it that you consider those factors when you decide what you will focus on in your own professional learning?

Closing: I appreciate you taking the time to share your experiences participating in the mentor program during your first-year of teaching. I will email you a written transcription to check for accuracy. Please respond back within a week on any revisions needed. Again, thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me today.

~Melanie

# Appendix K: Focus Group Interview Guide

Date

Dear (Name of Mentor),

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my project study. The purpose of this study is to explore mentoring through the view point of the mentee and mentor. The information gleaned from this project study will be shared with the executive leadership of professional development in your school district. As a reminder, all information shared with me is kept confidential.

Today, you will be asked a series of questions regarding your feeling, thoughts, and ideas as related to the content in the questions. You can ask me to stop at any time for any reason. Again, I thank you in advance for your participation and contributions to this research.

Thank you,

Melanie Strey

- The interview will take no longer than 60 minutes.
- The interview will be taped recorded and transcribed.
- Please let me know at any time during the interview if you have questions and/or need clarification.
- Please let me know if for any reason you need the interview to stop.

# Appendix L: Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been teaching and how long have you been a mentor?
2. How would you describe teaching in today's classroom?

   Investigating Question:

   What is one decision you've made about mentoring in the past month?

   What would you say were one or two of the main elements you were considering when making that decision?

   How typical is it of your decisions in general that you consider those elements?
3. How do you determine which elements of teaching you will focus on with your mentees?

   Investigating Question:

   What are some challenges and/or successes you find first-year teachers encounter?
4. How do first-year teachers respond to mentoring as a form of adult learning?

   Investigating Question:

   Which components of the mentoring program do you feel have the greatest influence on learning?
5. Which elements of your experience have had the greatest or least impact on your learning?

   Investigating Question:

How would you describe your preparation and support you get as a mentor?

6. Is there anything else that you would like to add about being a mentor and mentoring?

Closing: I appreciate you taking the time to share your experiences participating in the mentor program during your first-year of teaching. I will email you a written transcription to check for accuracy. Please respond back within a week on any revisions needed. Again, thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me today.

~Melanie

# Appendix M: Coaching Cycle Observation Guide

Date

Dear (Name of Mentee/Mentor),

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my project study. The purpose of this study is to explore mentoring through the view point of the mentee and mentor. The information gleaned from this project study will be shared with the executive leadership of professional development in your school district. As a reminder, all information shared with me is kept confidential.

Today, I will be observing your coaching cycle. I will not ask you any direct questions and will only be observing your non-verbal communication and transcribing your conversation. You can ask me to stop at any time for any reason. Again, I thank you in advance for your participation and contributions to this research.

Thank you,

Melanie Strey

- The observation will last for the duration of the coaching cycle.
- The observation will be taped recorded and transcribed. I will be taking notes during the observation.
- Please let me know at any time during the observation if you have questions and/or need clarification.
- Please let me know if for any reason you need the observation to stop.

# Appendix N: Coaching Cycle Observation Protocol

1. I will be taking field notes.

   Field notes as related to this observation are described as the following:

   - Verbal notations of the place, the participants, and the coaching cycle
   - Direct quotations or a summary of what participants are saying
   - Comments about what is being observed which helps me move into data analysis

2. I will also be recording the session using my audio pen and the recording device on my phone.
3. I will also transcribe the conversation that takes place and provide each of you with a copy of the transcription as a way for checking for accuracy.
4. Please let me know using a verbal signal when the coaching cycle is complete.

I appreciate you taking the time to share your experiences participating in the mentor program during your first-year of teaching. I will email you a written transcription to check for accuracy. Please respond back within a week on any revisions needed. Again, thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me today.

~Melanie

Curriculum Vitae

**Melanie J. Strey**

**EDUCATION**

Doctoral of Higher Education and Adult Learning — Expected Graduation 2015
Walden University

Masts of Education Administration — 2002
State University

Bachelor of Arts Education, Elementary Education — 1998
Major: K-12 Literacy, Minor: K-12 Spanish
State University

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Director of Elementary Standard Based Instruction & Professional Learning**

X District — March 2014-Present

Oversee all elementary district initiatives for pre-kindergarten through 5th grade. Collaborate with school administrators and teacher leaders to develop district professional learning opportunities, create curriculum guide aligned with Common Core State Standards, and coordinate efforts with the divisions of assessment, special education, and student and family services to align all efforts and scope of work.

- Lead teams of grade level teachers to identify grade level power standards Prek-12.
- Provide consultation to district level committees in regards to curriculum adoptions, policy and procedure reviews, and parent and community partnerships.
- Collaborate with the superintendent's executive cabinet regarding scopes of work in alignment with the district improvement plan.
- Provide regular updates to the school board on elementary initiatives regarding curriculum and resources.
- Coordinate all efforts for Highly Capable qualifications and program development K-8th grade.

**Director of Student and Family Services**
(X District) — October 2012-March 2014

Provide servant leadership to 28,000 students and families that represent 138 languages and cultures. Collaborate with multiple stakeholders to review, change, and create district-wide policies and procedures. Establish pre-kindergarten through post-high school systems of social/emotional support structures that assist students with increased student achievement and increased graduation rates. Live, laugh, and cherish each day in my commitment to servant leadership. Champion student achievement through strategic leadership with students, support staff, administrators, families, and community partners.

- Manage two Bill and Melinda Gate's Foundation grants totaling 250,000 used for piloting and collaborating new learnings with regional parent outreach advocates.
- Partner with state university as part of a case study to understand next practices in parent engagement and create regional parent engagement curriculum.
- Collaborate and supervise all efforts with college bound sign-ups and district wide support efforts.
- Created the first district 9-week parent academy
- Support students district-wide with direct leadership and supervision of all school counselors and nurses.
- Work in partnership with district cabinet members and contribute to a collective decision making process with the superintendent.

**Elementary Principal**
X District July 2006- October 2012

Dedicated all leadership efforts to achieve a safe, nurturing environment that committed all personnel and fiscal resources to increasing students' emotional and academic achievements. Prioritized professional learning and practiced distributed leadership with an emphasis on instructional practices, student engagement, effective social/emotional support systems, and authentic community and family engagement.

- Implemented a school-wide model of core instruction and targeted interventions and enhanced learning opportunities that contributed to incremental increased student achievement over the course of 6 years from 52% to 77% in 6th grade literacy and 52% to 68% in 6th grade mathematics, 39% to 74% in 5th grade science, and 73%-83% in 4th grade writing.
- Facilitated instructional leadership in all academic areas with a specialized focus on integrated special education and ELL systems of student support within the core classroom instruction. Decreased special education minutes and increased more core instruction.
- Created systems of student behavior supports and implemented a school-wide a framework for positive behavior interventions.
- Provided professional development to colleagues on race/cultural awareness issues and cross-cultural strategies for creating positive interactions with families.

## ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCES

- Elementary Vice Principal
- X District July 2005-2006
- Elementary and Secondary Teacher/Coach
- X District September 2002-2005
- X District September 2001-2002
- Elementary School (K-6th),
  X District September 1998-2001

**EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT**

- Extraordinary Leader seminar (conducted two 360 surveys with staff, community, colleagues, and supervisors) 2009, 2010
- University Principal Cohort for Developing Leadership Skills (2 years), 2006-2008
- Cognitive Coaching (10 Day training) and Advanced Coaching, 2010-2011, 2011-2012
- Center for Educational Leadership 5D Instructional Model, 2013
- Teacher Principal Evaluation Project, 2013
- Professional Learning Communities Institute, 2011
- Cultural Competency, 2010-2012

**PROFESSIONAL & CIVIC AFFILIATIONS**

- Community Youth and Family Services Board Member, 2013-Present
- Association of School Administrators, 2012-Present
- National Reading Association, 1998-Present
- Association of School Principals, 1999-Present
- National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2006-2012
- Superintendent's Principal Advisor Board, 2012
- State Organization for Reading Development, 1999-2012
- International Society for Technology Education (ISTE), 2008-2012
- National Council for Teaching Mathematics, 2006-2012

**PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS**

- State Recognition for Family Engagement", 2013
- Trainer for Local Districts on Parent and Family Engagement, 2013
- *Article published in* School Principals Publication, 2010
- Presenter at the International Society for Technology Education. 2009, 2010